

The NET

Sharing fruits of faith in Derry Diocese

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“Wishing all a
Happy New Year”

See
inside...



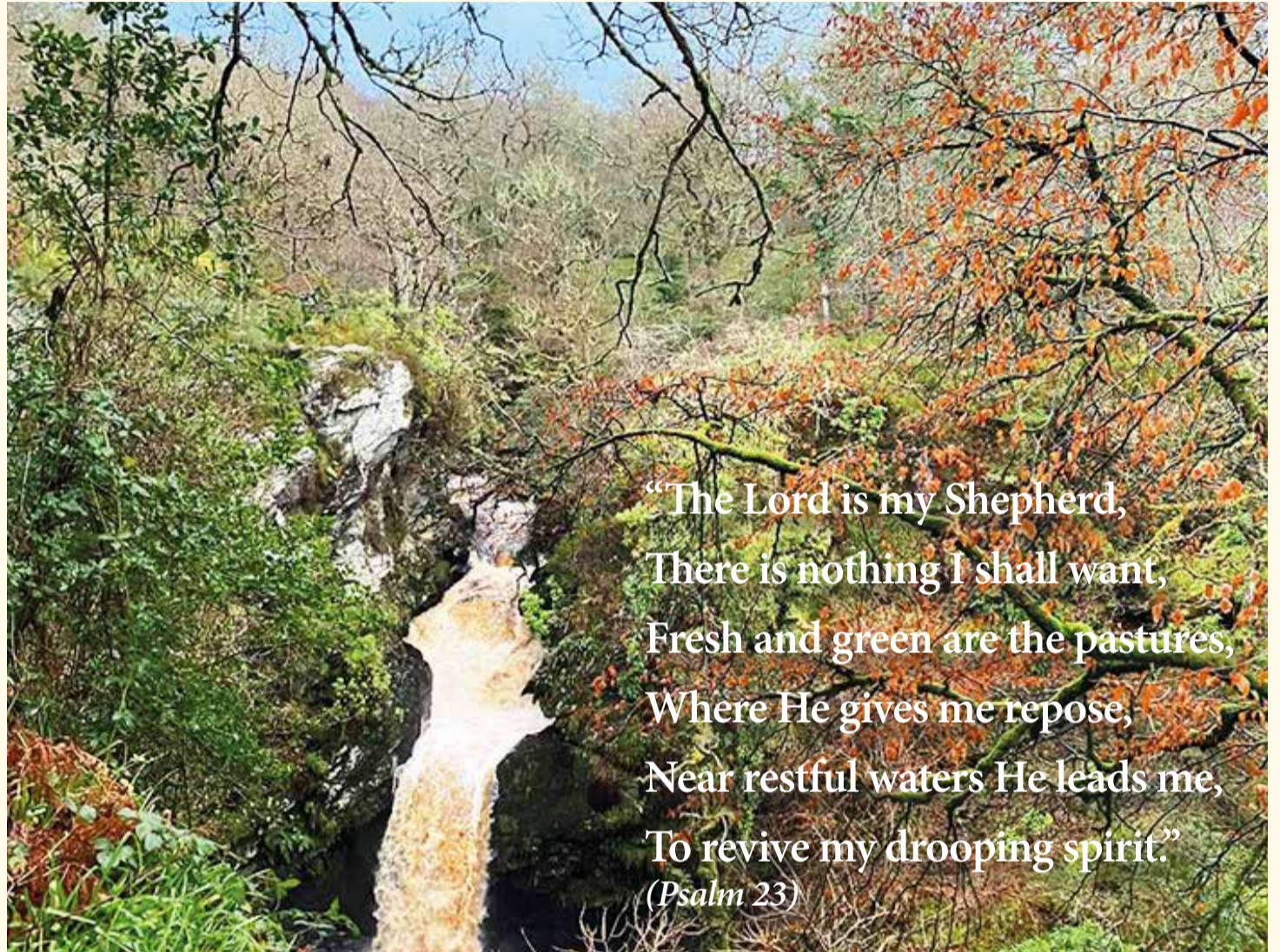
Oratory Blessing - St Joseph's Derry.



Diocesan School Mass - St Eugene's.



Golden Jubilee - St Mary's Melmount.

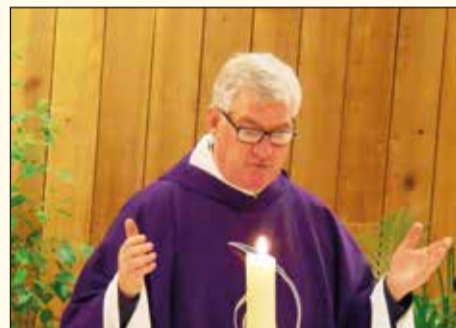


“The Lord is my Shepherd,
There is nothing I shall want,
Fresh and green are the pastures,
Where He gives me repose,
Near restful waters He leads me,
To revive my drooping spirit.”
(Psalm 23)

Ness Woods Waterfall, Co Derry.



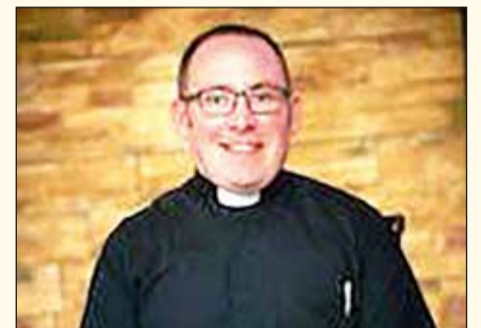
Divine Child Prayer - Termonbacca



Diocesan Lourdes Mass - Steelstown.

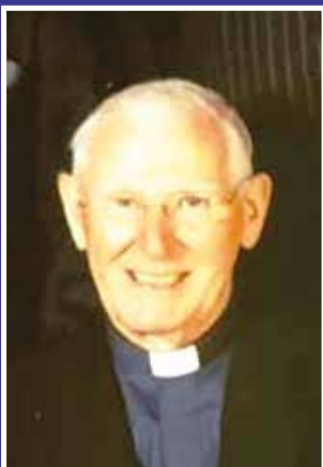


Colmcille 1500 - Long Tower



Vocations - Fr Chris Ferguson

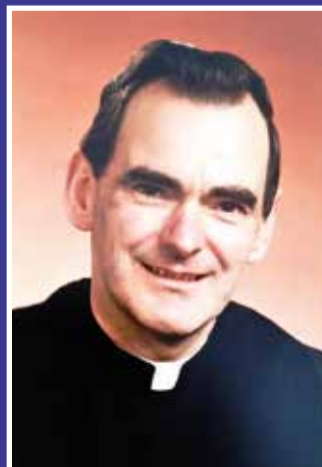
People in focus



Fr Michael Mullan RIP - Ballerin.



Katie Ascough - Called to More.



Fr Patrick McGoldrick RIP - Buncrana.



Mary O'Boyle - RE Advisor.



Anne Friel DPC Chair - Glendermott.

Also featuring: Young writers share thoughts on New Year, St Columba, Role of the young in shaping the world post-Covid, and Pope Francis' moments of solitude; Diocesan Pastoral Council chair reflects on time of change as church; Faithful across the Diocese share hopes for 2021, Irish Page, Children's Catechism Club, Quiz & Features and much more...

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Bishop Donal reflects on the Pope's prayer intention for January 2021 – "Human fraternity...May the Lord give us the grace to live in full fellowship with our brothers and sisters of other religions, praying for one another, open to all".

Pray for the gift of forgiving hearts

THE great document on the Church from the Second Vatican Council, 'Lumen Gentium', includes in its first paragraph a powerful sentence – "the Church is... like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race."

The Bible story had begun with Adam and Eve making a mess of the initial harmony into which they were created. The purpose of the Church is, through the grace of Jesus, to speak about - and model - that vertical relationship with God and the horizontal relationship between people. January is the month when Catholics are asked to celebrate the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Jesus had prayed that His followers would be so united that others would believe in Him (John 17:21). For many outsiders, Christian disunity is a source of scandal and makes Christ's message seem incredible.

Much of the political world in many countries is riven by bitter words and angry leaders. Division by condemnation seems to be the order of the

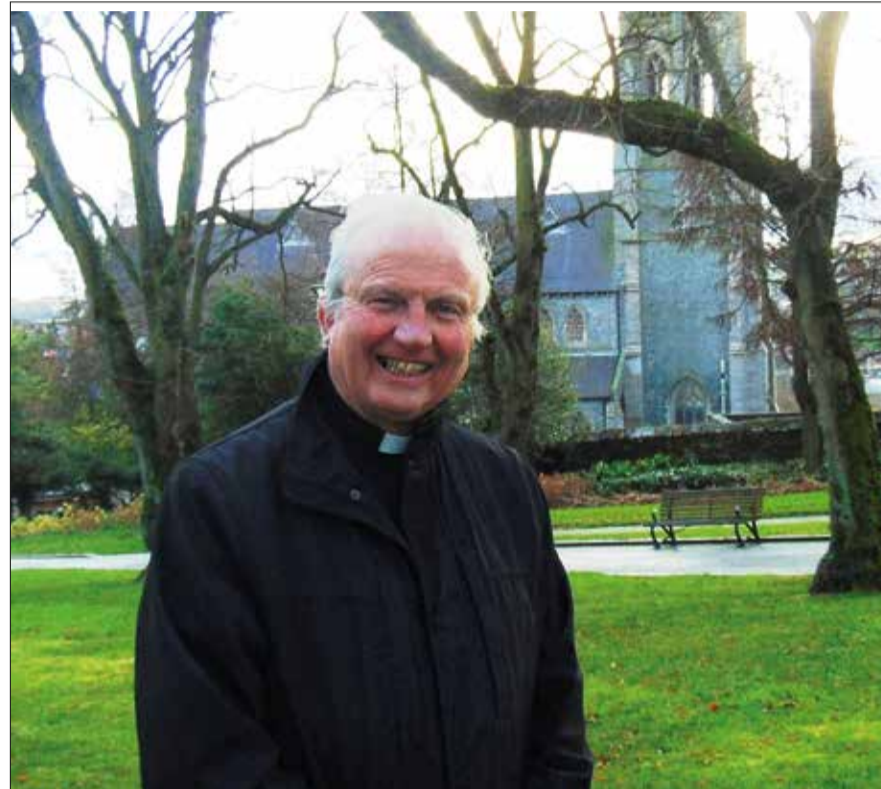
day and a favourite way to power. Indeed, there are those within the Catholic family who have adopted that confrontational approach in church issues.

Pope Francis' call to human fraternity follows on from his document of October 3rd 2020, 'Fratelli Tutti' (FT). His Encyclical Letter begins with an analysis of 'Dark Clouds over a Closed World'. He refers to the 'throwaway' world and 'globalization and progress without a roadmap'. All of this leads, he suggests, to both contempt for others and a widespread self-contempt.

In any crisis, the temptation is strong to build walls to protect ourselves. Inside the walls, those who see themselves as righteous can gather. That was how the Pharisees reacted.

But the Christian response to this reality, Pope Francis proposes, is St Paul's teaching that the greatest danger is failing to love (cf 1 Corinthians 13:1-13). He invites us to prioritise 'thinking and acting in terms of community'. (FT 116)

Loving people is more important than merely championing laws.



Bishop Donal

Communities of the self-righteous can be very cold places, liable to constant fragmentation!

The pandemic has shown us that the real heroes are those who care for others and not those who are famous, just for

being famous!

In a world where it is easy to say that the bad enemy of good us is out there – Russia, China, capitalism, Islam etc – Pope Francis encourages us to be bridge-builders and peacemakers.

We have a lot of work to do in that respect in Ireland. There is a lot of healing to be done and we have to start with our own backyard. Prayer for the gift of forgiving hearts is what we are asked to pray in the first month of 2021.

Reflection on Faith and Life by Mary McMEnamin



Act of Consecration to the Most Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary

Most Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, We consecrate ourselves and our whole families to you. We consecrate to you our very beings and all our lives, all that we have, and all that we love.

To you we give our bodies, our hearts and our souls.

To you we dedicate our homes and our country.

Mindful of this consecration, we now promise you to live the Christian way

by that practice of Christian virtues, without regard for human respect.

O most Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, accept our humble confidence,

and this act of consecration,

by which we entrust ourselves and all our families to you.

In you, we put all our hopes and we shall never be confounded.

Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, Have Mercy on us!

Immaculate Heart of Mary, Be Our Salvation!

AS the New Year 2021 begins, it is a time for reflection, renewal of hope and new resolutions. The first day of January is the feast day of Mary Mother of God, a very special feast. There is no better way to begin the New Year than with Our Lady.

St Pope John Paul II had a great devotion to Mary and demonstrated this throughout his life on earth. When Karol Wojtyla was a young boy of eight, he came home one day from school to hear that his dear mother had died. He ran straight to the local parish church in Wadowice and ran up the aisle of the church, where he knelt in front of the statue of Our Lady. Through tears, he said to her, "I don't know why God took my mother to His home at the time He did, but I do know one thing, you are my mother now!"

From then, he entrusted himself to Our Lady and lived by the motto, 'Totus Tuus' (Totally Yours) throughout his pontificate. Like St Pope John Paul II, we too can consecrate ourselves to Jesus through

Mary as this New Year begins.

I look with sadness on the abortion laws that came into effect in 2019, which is one of most extreme abortion laws seen anywhere in the world. Human life has been devalued here in Ireland by our governments and the womb has now become one of the most dangerous places for a baby to be. The job of our government should be to protect the most vulnerable in our society, but unfortunately that is not the case today.

We, as Christians, have an important role to play in these troubled times. What can we do, you may ask. To put it simply, we can pray!

The Rosary is a powerful weapon against evil. During each apparition at Fatima, Our Lady asked the children to pray the Rosary every day. She also asked that we practice the five First Saturdays in reparation to God for the sins committed against her Immaculate Heart.

Our own Archbishop Eamon Martin has also asked that all parishes in Ireland do the five First Saturdays, along with the 'Act of Consecration to the

Most Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary' in our homes.

Mary mother of God pray for us!

We pray that 2021 will bring everyone peace, joy, good health and, most of all, faith!



Mary McMEnamin.

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

 **The NET**

Sharing the fruits of the faith in the Derry Diocese

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Celebrating 50 years of St Mary's Church Melmount, Strabane, parish priest, Fr Michael Doherty tells parishioners...

Thank you for being the Church of Melmount *by Hollie Frystal*



ON Sunday, December 13, we celebrated the 50th anniversary of St Mary's Church, in Melmount Parish, Strabane. In 1970, the chapel today replaced the previous St Mary's Church, which was located across the road, where the old cemetery is presently situated. Within this period of time, our Parish has had 7,700 Baptisms, 1,560 weddings and 2,430 funerals.

As a result of an increasing population, St Mary's Church had to be expanded. At that time, there was a significant change in Church buildings regarding architectural developments, and the changes made in Vatican II.

Melmount Parish goes as far back as the penal times, through the old parish of Urney, to the time of the early Irish Church and its prominent figures, such as St Colman, who Bishop Neil Farren dedicated the old St Colman's Secondary School to in 1958, that preceded the present Holy Cross College.

We marked our 50th anniversary with Sunday morning Mass concelebrated by Bishop Donal McKeown, and our parish priest, Fr Michael Doherty. It was the third week of Advent, when the pink candle was lit for 'Gaudete Sunday', which is the Latin for 'rejoice'. December 13 was certainly a day of utmost joy, as the Parish of Melmount once again came together to celebrate the sacrifice of the Holy Mass on its anniversary.

We also remembered those who had gone before us and who had such a great impact on the life of Melmount Parish in the past. We continue to pray for the future of Melmount and its leaders.

Regarding leadership, Bishop McKeown referred, in his homily, to John the Baptist preparing the way for the 'coming' of Christ. The Bishop said: "The heart of John's message is - in every generation - 'prepared to be shocked' by God's anointed one."

Mirroring Pope Francis' words in 'Christus Vivit', Melmount Parish and its leaders share a mission to pave the way and make room for the young Church. Our excellent achievement of 50 years as a strong Parish is a motivation that spurs us on to aim to achieve further by its 100th birthday.

The Holy Father speaks of intergenerational relationships, as he expresses the importance of youth being attached to their roots by having a relationship with their elders.

"Helping the young to discover the living richness of the past, to treasure its memory and to make use of it for their choices and opportunities, is a genuine act of love towards them, for the sake of their growth and the decisions they are called to make," said Pope Francis (Christus Vivit).

Cherish

I suppose, looking back to the early Christian Church, we see

that storytelling and recalling past events and memories was common. It was also known as Christian oral tradition. As traditional Irish people, we are very good at reminiscing about the past and we naturally like to talk to people and get to know them. For instance, in my own family, we love to tell stories and to speak of those who have gone before us. It brings real comfort and joy, and I have learnt so much from my parents, grandparents, uncles, and aunts. We must cherish our memories and stories, and listen to the wisdom given to us by our elders so that we can go forth with support.

Fr Michael, the longest serving Parish Priest in the Diocese with 32 years' service, concluded the anniversary Mass with a word of thanks to all involved, and referred to the first baptism, wedding and funeral that took place in Melmount.

Thankfully, the married couple, the first baptized parishioner and the children and grandchildren of the first ever deceased member of our Parish are still with us, to celebrate 50 years of Melmount Parish. This further reflects the generational aspect and impact of the Church.

Fr Michael also reflected on the number of baptisms, weddings and funerals that had taken place within this period. These are extraordinary and encouraging statistics - especially the number of christenings, reflecting the high level of faith that is still present in the Parish.

Our priest-in-residence, Fr John Doherty, who celebrated the 12.30 pm Mass afterwards, came to Melmount Parish about a year after its opening and served there for many years. He said that he had many happy memories of Melmount.

Speaking at the end of the 10.30 am Mass, Fr Michael said: "Thank you for being the Church of Melmount". In turn, we thank both Fr Michael and Fr John for being such inspirational role models, who are absolutely fantastic and

are committed leaders. We are forever grateful to have them.

The big question: What does the next 50 years hold for the Parish of Melmount? And further, across the Diocese of Derry? We reflected on this question, at Mass, by looking back at how far we have come until now. No one could have ever anticipated the Covid-19 pandemic and its huge impact.

As Fr Michael said - "We place ourselves in God's hands". In other words, we must trust in God and in ourselves - in our ability to go forward with God's help and guide, with the strength to face whatever lies ahead as a Church community.

I am a 17-year-old parishioner of St Mary's, Melmount. I have been baptized, had my first Confession, received my First Holy Communion, and was confirmed in this Church. I cannot express enough how proud I am to be a parishioner of Melmount, and I am extremely grateful for the opportunities I am given in the parish. Long after finishing the Pope John Paul II Award, I am still reading and being entrusted with delivering the Word of God on the altar. I would not change it for the world.

I would like to extend an invitation - peer to peer - to young people out there, to take time to acknowledge their responsibility in their parishes, and that they are valued both in the present as well as for the future of the Church.

Thank you to all of our clergy and parishioners of Melmount, and across the whole Diocese of Derry. I look forward with hope and excitement to the next 50 years to come and more!

I'll finish with the words of a previous parish priest of Melmount, Fr Anthony Mulvey, at the opening of the Melmount Centre in 1985: "Christ is present in the simple, sincere, natural goodness of people, holy and happy. The people in the parish are the Body of Christ. They are all Christ's, the people of God, showing God to the world and to one another"



Danny Blee, assistant sacristan St Mary's, Melmount



Dedication of Oratory another landmark day in history of St Joseph's School



ON the day that Pope Francis proclaimed a special 'Year of St Joseph', December 8, 2020 to December 8, 2021, a very special event was happening in the life of the family of St Joseph's Boys' School in Derry, with the dedication and blessing of their new oratory dedicated to their Patron Saint.

Bishop Donal was joined by priests from the parishes of St Eugene's and St Mary's Creggan for the Mass of Dedication and blessing ceremony, and he paid tribute to those who had "worked hard to ensure that St Joseph's has an oratory".

In a message for the pupils, Bishop Donal said: "The school staff and governors want to offer you the very best formation and opportunities that they can. The oratory is part of what they believe can help you to blossom and to deal with the problems that you already face and may well have to deal with in the future".

Noting that St Joseph "was a strong man who took his responsibilities in life seriously", he added: "I hope that you will look back on your days in St Joseph's

and remember adults who took you seriously, wherever you are on your journey. And I hope that you will remember the oratory as a place where you found wisdom and support, silence and peace".

Remarking that some might ask why waste money on an oratory at a time when money is in short supply for families, government and schools, Bishop Donal went on to say: "This prayer room in the heart of the school says that education is not just about cramming into young heads and then asking you to spew it out on the exam paper again. That is not education.

"This school wants to offer a way of looking at life that makes sense of all the subjects you study. It wants to give you a meaning for which to live and not just means by which to live. It proposes an understanding of the human person which says that each person is of eternal beauty and value. That rebels against the message that life is only a joke and that growing up and maturing are a bit of a mug's game".

He added: "The cultural message that it's all about me has led to

a lot of irresponsible behaviour and self-harm. It is remarkable that only a few of the modern sporting and music stars have shown themselves as generous and idealistic.

"Religious faith offers us the belief that life is precious, that forgiveness, generosity and a fresh start are available. It offers you role models of great and heroic saints. Many young people feel let down by some adults in their lives. Jesus wants you to mature as wonderful adults that will inspire the next generation. This oratory is part of that rich message that we want to offer to young people".

Bishop Donal also pointed out that the oratory was meant to be a quiet room: "Life is full of noise. Silence is supposed to be a bad thing. You are all bombarded by words and music all day long. Some people actually fear being still and quiet. This oratory says that it is possible to find a quiet space in the midst of all the rush of life – and that we all need quiet time to listen to ourselves and to hear what is going on in our hearts.

Quiet

"Sometimes we may find that uncomfortable. But it is only by hearing our dreams and our worries that we can start dealing with them. Prayer is not merely about saying holy words. Prayer is being real about who you are with the God of the universe who knows and loves you – a God who wants nothing but the best for you. This oratory is a place where you – whether you are a pupil or a member of staff - can be quiet before the Cross, where everything can find its meaning".

Highlighting that the oratory was a place too, where the pupils and staff members could come together to pray, the Bishop remarked: "We journey in life with friends and with others with whom we have things in common. Catholics believe that we meet Jesus in a special way in the Word of God and in Holy Communion. The oratory provides space where you can grow in faith together with others in your year group and your school. Belonging is an important part of believing".

Describing the occasion as "another landmark day in the history of St Joseph's Boys' School", the principal, Mrs Martina McCarron said: "St Joseph's Oratory represents who we are and what we do as a school. It is an embodiment of our Catholic ethos and tradition. The Oratory will provide an explicit space where all of our pupils, staff and the wider community can have a sense of nearness and closeness to God, and an awareness of our faith and what it means to be part of the Catholic

and Christian community that is St Joseph's Boys' School".

She added: "The Oratory has been much needed to support faith promotion, prayer, liturgical events, quiet reflection, and a sanctuary for all in our school. For this great gift, we wish to acknowledge the generous support that we have received to make this St Joseph's Oratory a reality, after all the planning and development over a number of years.

"We would particularly like to acknowledge the contribution of the former St Peter's High School and the work and achievements of the Christian Brothers, lay staff and pupils, as a school in the Creggan community and beyond, and the resulting gift to St Joseph's from the Creggan Parish."

Mrs McCarron went on to point out that one of the new stain glass windows paid tribute to St Peter's High School, with an illustration of the ancient Broighter boat used as a symbol by the school to represent St Peter, the Fisherman.

The school also received a gift from the Sisters of Mercy of a beautiful stain glass window depicting St Joseph; the work of Harry Clarke (1889 to 1931), whom Mrs McCarron described as "undoubtedly Ireland's greatest stained glass artist".

Another special gift the school community feel honoured to have received for the Oratory is the altar and tabernacle used by the late Bishop Edward Daly, which were originally made by pupils in St Joseph's.

Acknowledging the pupils and their contribution, now woven into the fabric of the oratory, the principal pointed out that their designs had been used to create the new stain glass windows with symbols representing what St Joseph's and their community meant to them – workers tools, the oak leaf and the dove of peace.

Expressing sincere thanks to all who had been involved in supporting, creating and developing the beautiful oratory, including the parishes and communities of St Eugene's and St Marys, the Contractors Stewart and McConnell, O'Neill's Joinery, Alpha Glass, and architect, Eoghan Devery, Mrs McCarron said: "We look forward to sharing this beautiful space with our pupils, staff and our local communities".

Disappointed that they had been unable to celebrate the completion of the Oratory as originally planned last March, with their local and wider community and friends, due to Covid-19 restrictions, the school recorded the Mass of Dedication and it can be viewed online on the St Joseph's Boys' School Facebook page.



Bishop Donal pays tribute to schools for creativity in challenging times

THE end of yet another challenging term for school communities around the Diocese, due to the ongoing concerns surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic, saw pupils and school staff gather around screens in their classrooms and assembly halls to join Bishop Donal online for the celebration of Mass in St Eugene's Cathedral, to mark the occasion.

As the second school term closed amid the countdown to Christmas, Bishop Donal remarked how, in normal circumstances, people would be preparing to travel home to celebrate with their families, but that this may not be possible for many this year.

"I have nephews and nieces in England who will not be home

for Christmas," he said, before going on to relate the travelling theme to the journeys mentioned in the Scripture accounts of the Christmas story, undertaken by Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, and the Magi.

Acknowledging that school communities had had a long, stressful journey this year, with lockdowns, e-learning, and class bubbles, and were facing uncertainty about what lay ahead, Bishop Donal went on to point out that the theme for Catholic Schools' Week, 24-31 January, was "communities of resilience".

Commending the resilience shown particularly this year, he said: "Schools have shown great generosity and creativity in their

response to this challenging time. You have been prepared to journey.

"It has been difficult for parents and young people, some of whom are facing examinations. We are not sure what is going to face us in January or in 2021, but it is important to face these realities."

Returning to the journeys of the Christmas story, Bishop Donal noted: "The difference in our journey and that in the Bible is that it was undertaken with confidence; they knew they were going somewhere."

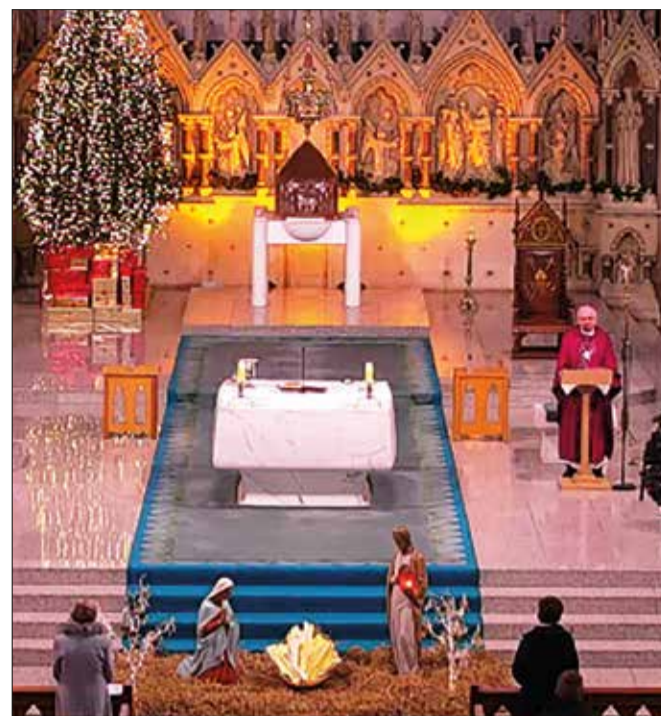
Highlighting the importance of being aware of how difficult this time has been for many, especially those who have lost loved ones, those in hospital and prison, he added: "Those who journey in

hope, searching for the truth, will find it, probably in unexpected places.

"Like the Magi, after this pandemic, we will be going back home by a different way, having learnt new lessons."

He continued: "This is a tough journey but it will end, and Christ will be there and will have travelled with us."

The ceremony concluded with Bishop Donal reading some of the kindness prayers that had been written by pupils in schools around the Diocese for the occasion, and placed in the manger in the nativity scene at the front of the sanctuary.



Thanking staff and students for the commitment, enthusiasm and resilience shown in 2020, and offering encouragement for the days ahead, Diocesan Post Primary RE advisor, Mary O'Boyle writes...

It is with a faith full of hope that we place our trust in God



Mary O'Boyle, Derry Diocesan Post Primary advisor

AS I prepare, and the schools prepare for the new term of 2021, I cannot help but take a few moments to reflect on the year past. It was a year like no other; a year where normal routines were abandoned, schools closed, lessons cancelled, and religious liturgies moved online to be celebrated virtually.

Added to this, schools also had to cope with the wearing of masks, constant sanitising, and the need to maintain social distance. Rituals which once seemed strange now have the aura of normality! Many people, I am sure, breathed a sigh of relief at midnight on New Year's Eve.

Good-bye to the pain, suffering and loss that was 2020 and yet...

I am mindful of the fact that God was in 2020, just as He is with us as we journey into 2021. Henri Nouwen reminds us that we should not be "afraid to look at everything that has brought us to where we are now and trust that we will soon see in it the guiding hand of a loving God".

For throughout 2020, God was near, close at hand, walking with us as we battled coronavirus and the effect of its impact on the lives of those we love. Indeed, we have a lot to be grateful for! Nouwen says that it is easy to be grateful for the "good things that happen in our lives", but being grateful for the bad moments, the failures and the rejections - that requires effort and "hard spiritual work".

And so, I take this opportunity to say thank you to the schools and their staff who day and daily, despite hardship, nurtured the students in their care: who made sure that educational opportunities were available, who embraced each student and welcomed them into a loving and

caring community, which had at its core the belief that every child is loved by God and deserves to be cherished.

Moving into 2021, we rely once again on the commitment, enthusiasm and resilience of staff and students to ensure that schools will continue to be centres of learning and of faith. I have no fears in this regard. I am filled with Hope, a Hope that relies on Jesus and his message "I will be with you always; to the end of the age." (Matt 28: 20) A Hope that sees God's guiding hand in everything. A Hope that does not see success as the yardstick of achievement but a Hope that relies rather "on the ability to work for something because it is good..." (Havel)

It is Hope that will see us through - a Hope that gives us the strength to adapt to changing teaching situations, to continue preparing for remote learning, to support the vulnerable, to battle through restrictions and to continually try new and creative ways to serve those we teach.

We are driven not by regulations and school contracts but by a

faith, a hope, a belief in a world, a person outside and beyond our immediate environments. So, it is with a faith full of hope that we place our trust in God.

"I alone know the plans I have for you, plans to bring prosperity and not disaster, plans to bring about the future you hope for". (Jer 29:1)

(References: Good News Bible; Nouwen, H (1997) 'Bread for the Journey' Harper Collins; Havel V.(1936-2011) Hope is a state of mind, not of the world. Hope, i... quote by Vaclav Havel (meaningin.com); Pope Francis New Year's Eve Homily 2020.)

Catholic Schools' Week launch by Therese Ferry

CATHOLIC Schools' Week 2021 will be celebrated from January 24-30, with this year's theme being 'Catholic Schools - Communities of Faith and Resilience'.

A Mass to launch the celebration of our Catholic Schools will be



celebrated by Bishop Donal in St Eugene's Cathedral on Thursday, January 21 at 10 am.

This Mass can be viewed via the Cathedral webcam and on St Eugene's Facebook Live page.

National resources for use by

schools, parishes and families will be available for downloading from The Catholic Schools Partnership website, <https://www.catholicsschools.ie/>

Carmelite Novena to The Child Jesus a humbling and touching time of prayer

THE Novena to The Child Jesus brought comfort to many in Derry and beyond in the days leading up to Christmas, filling hearts and minds with peace and hope in the midst of ever growing concerns about the spread of Covid-19, and keeping a welcome focus on God's gift to the world through the birth of Our Saviour.

And many responded to the Termonbacca Carmelite Fathers' promotion of an old Christian tradition to welcome the Holy Infant, by placing a lighted candle in the window of their homes for the nine nights of the Novena, and erecting their cribs in prominent positions.

Each night had a different theme: The Journey to the Child, Divine Preparations for the Child, John the Baptist and the Child, Annunciation, St Joseph and the Child, Blessed Virgin and the Child, The Visitation, The Finding in the Temple, and The Child Jesus and the Catholic Family, which the Carmelite Fathers, Fr Stephen, Fr Michael and Fr Ted, took turns to speak on during the live streamed Novena Masses celebrated each night in the monastery.

This was the first year of The Child Jesus Novena and the general consensus is that it should become an annual occurrence, so special and meaningful was the time of prayer, particularly for those who had been honoured to receive The Divine Child statue into their homes during it.

This was a unique aspect to the Novena, prompted by the Carmelite tradition of housing the image of the Child Jesus in a nun or monk's cell prior to it being installed in the crib.

The image of the infant Child Jesus was carried to nine homes, in nine different local areas, by an escort of volunteers, who prayed as they carried their precious load from one part of the city to another, in a way symbolic of Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem and the subsequent search for somewhere to stay.

At each of the homes, starting in Nixon's Corner, Killea, on night one, and moving to Creggan, Rosemount, Ballymagroarty, Galliagh, Skeoge, Shantallow, Waterside and Southway, before returning to the crib in Termonbacca, on Christmas Eve, the bearers of the Child Jesus statue received a warm welcome when they knocked on the doors.

The honoured householders stood with a lighted candle and Holy Water, to be sprinkled on the image of the Child Jesus as it was blessed and handed over to its temporary guardians. A booklet containing private novena prayers to say inside the home was also provided, and included a prayer of Consecration of the Home

to the Divine Child, a Prayer of Intercession, a Prayer for During Difficult Times, a Child's Prayer to The Infant Jesus, and a Family Prayer.

There was great excitement in the Kelly Young home at Ballymagowan Avenue, in Creggan, when the Divine Child image arrived. Amanda told 'The Net' that she, her husband, Nic, and children, Jordan and Faye felt it was "an amazing privilege to be able to be part of this experience".

"When Fr Stephen contacted us to ask if we would like to have the Child Jesus in our home," recalled Amanda, "we were thrilled. We loved the idea of the Novena and what it represented, and we gladly accepted.

"Although we knew about this, the knowing didn't in the least indicate how beautiful this would be. On the day the Baby Jesus was arriving the entire family was excited. We prepared the children and told them all about it. Our eight-year-old daughter, Faye kept watching the window and saying 'is he here, is he here', and she was telling everyone about baby Jesus coming to our house".

She added: "The anticipation and excitement was powerful in the house and when the time arrived we all rushed to the door. It may have physically been a statue we opened the door to, but there was no doubt we were welcoming Baby Jesus to come into our home.

"The team were amazing as they led Baby Jesus to our door. It was a beautiful moment, as my friend's daughter, Erin was part of the prayer team. Erin is the same age as our oldest boy, Jordan, and when she carried Jesus to the door, Jordan received him from her and lifted him into our house.

"The joy and the peace that was flowing was amazing, it was such a beautiful experience. We shared in scripture and prayer as Jesus came into our home. We all prayed together; the prayer team and all our family, and while we prayed Faye sprinkled the Holy Water on the Baby Jesus, and we blessed him and our home."

After the prayer team left, we placed Jesus in a nice place and joined in online with Fr Stephen Quinn for the Mass and novena prayers.

Commenting on the strong sense of a baby being in the house, Amanda said: "At bedtime, I said to Nic, 'I feel terrible leaving him downstairs alone'. So, we got a chair, placed it along my side of the bed and placed Jesus on the chair. He was beside us all through the night.

Amazing

"Next morning, Faye was excited to check Jesus was still with us and helped bring Him downstairs. It





really was amazing”.

With the Baby Jesus image due to be moved on to the next home before the children got home from school, Amanda and Nic decided to do the Novena prayers before they left, with Faye leading the children's prayer and the family prayer.

“We are so thankful for the experience and loved every minute of it,” said Amanda, adding: “We offered all the prayers for everyone in our city, all our families, our friends and those who asked directly for prayer, and we want to thank everyone involved for allowing us the opportunity to experience this as a family”.

Carmel and Don Moore also had the privilege of welcoming the Divine Child statue into their Rosemount home. En route from the Kelly Young home, the holy procession was met by Bishop Donal, who gave a blessing and helped to carry the statue in its special box.

Deeply moved by the experience, Carmel told ‘The Net’ how, in ‘normal times’, she would have had “the whole street invited round for the occasion”.

“I told everyone that we would offer prayers for their intentions and many asked us to pray for them,” said Carmel, adding: “It was an absolute privilege to have had the Divine Child Jesus statue in our home. I could sense a lovely peace. Don and I said the Rosary and the prayers that we were given.”

“We placed the image in the living room and I spent most of the time there praying. It was just such a lovely time and I was sad when it was leaving again the next day”.

Betty and George Fitzpatrick were also delighted to welcome the statue into their Ballymagroarty home.

“It was just a fantastic experience,”

said Betty, remarking that it had a special effect on her husband, George, who has Alzheimer's and Parkinson's.

“George doesn't sleep well, and sometimes I give him a sleeping tablet but I didn't the night we had the Baby Jesus statue in our home. I brought it into our bedroom and placed it beside the night light on the dressing table. George loved it that much he kept looking over at it and he was so peaceful throughout the night.

“He can't remember the words of the Angel Guardian prayer but he was able to say that whole prayer when we prayed it during the visit of the Child Jesus statue. He also asked me for his Rosary beads and he didn't leave them out of his hands during that time, but he hasn't asked me for them since. He just seemed to sense something very special while the statue was in our home.

“It was really a lovely time and when the statue was leaving again, it was like the coffin of a loved one being taken out of the house; that's how special the experience was. There was also something very comforting in knowing that the people carrying it from Rosemount to our home were praying for us. It was just a lovely thing to do and I hope they do this every year, so that more and more people can get to experience how special it is”.

When Mandy Bradley was asked if she would like the Child Jesus statue to visit the Galliagh home she shares with her mother, Dolly, she welcomed it as one of the many blessings she has received through all the prayers offered for her since she was diagnosed with cancer last May.

“It was such a special time for my mother and I, and we sat up to 3am praying and reflecting,” said Mandy, “I look on it as another blessing, like the blessing it is to have all the online Masses and prayer to tune into during this period, when I have to shield because of the cancer. The blessings have been unbelievable and through them God is giving me the strength to take one day at a time.

“And it is so comforting to think of all the prayer that is being said by the volunteers as they carry the Child Jesus statue from house to house. I just think it is amazing

that people gave up their time to do this. It was a real community effort”.

Saying that she and her mother had prepared their home as they would if anyone was coming to stay with them, Mandy added: “We wanted everything to be just right for Him coming into our home. It was a beautiful experience and the whole Novena was a lovely way to prepare for Christmas, helping us to focus more on faith than shopping”.

Having the statue of the Divine Child in their Glenabbey home, at Skeoge, led to a special time of prayer and conversation for Martin and Kathleen Gallagher, and their children, Dean and Gemma.

Together

Martin loved how the Divine Child image was being carried around areas in the City, especially in the midst of this challenging period with the coronavirus: “It gave a real sense of how we are all in this together. I just thought that was beautiful.

“As a family, we talked about the hardships people experience and what it must have been like for Mary and Joseph going to Bethlehem and having difficulty finding somewhere to stay. It so happened that, the next day, the Bishop talked about people in society who were isolated; who didn't fit in. So, the experience helped to open our eyes up to all that we have. It was an awakening to our own blessings.”

Kathleen found that looking upon the Divine Child image stirred her maternal instincts: “It was a very emotional experience for me, especially as a mother. I spent a lot of time on my own with him, and it really made me sit back and think as a mother.

“I thought about how blessed we were that our son survived a difficult birth, and what Mary must have gone through to see her son suffer and die the way He did. This made me feel very grateful and also humbled. I just think this Novena was a brilliant idea, especially with all that is going on with the virus and abortion”.

May Cairns and her family also found it very special to have the Divine Child image in their Shantallow home: “It was a privilege to have the Child Jesus statue in our home and we decided to try and do a 24-hour vigil of

prayer with it. So, we took different time slots between us and said the prayers in our own homes, and even the grandchildren spent time in prayer too.

“It was a beautiful experience. We loved every minute of it and actually missed having the statue in our home after it had left. We felt very honoured, especially when it arrived on the day when the Christmas Star was going to be visible in the sky; something that only apparently happens every 800 years.”

As it made its way back towards Termonbacca, Charlie and Louise McMonagle were delighted to receive it in their Southway home. Charlie recalled sitting up until after three o'clock in the morning, enjoying sitting and praying in the presence of the Child Jesus image.

“I prayed for all my family and friends, and people who have died over the years,” said Charlie, “and, as I looked at it, memories came back of Nativity plays I had been in when I was younger.

“We have a statue of the Sleeping St Joseph on our cupboard, and as I was looking at it, during the time the Divine Child statue was in our home, I wondered what his thoughts had been when the Baby Jesus was born. So, it was a very prayerful and reflective time.

Feeling vexed after the Divine Child left their home, Louise told ‘The Net’: “No money could buy the beautiful experience we had. I love the Baby Jesus and Our Lady, and I have a great devotion to St Joseph. I feel that he is with me all the time and I talk to him. St Joseph has done a lot for me over the years and for others too, especially those looking for jobs. He is a very quick intercessor and doesn't want a lot of glory; he just stays in the background”.

One of the volunteers who accompanied the Child Jesus statue on most of the journeys between houses during the Novena was Sean Gallagher, a member of the Creggan-based Divine Mercy Prayer Group.

Describing the whole experience as “very humbling,” Sean recalled some moments that particularly stood out for him: “Every night, we prayed from the minute we lifted the statue until we left it at the home receiving it, and on the first night, as we walked out to Nixon's Corner, it just felt surreal that

something so holy was happening along this route on which a lot of bad things had happened during The Troubles. So that was very special and it was the same when we walked to the Creggan along the back road and recalled the soldiers being at Piggery Ridge, as we prayed.

“The longest walks were from Shantallow to Top of the Hill, in the Waterside, which took one-and-a-half hours, and then from there to Southway the following night, but neither walk seemed that long. We stopped and said a special prayer for those who had

lost their lives jumping from that bridge.

“There were great blessings from being involved as a volunteer and saying so much prayer. People stopped us en route to ask what we were doing and then they would bless themselves and say that it was a lovely thing to do, and it was also very touching to see the excitement, reverence and real appreciation of the people who opened their doors to receive the Child Jesus statue; some were moved to tears. It was just a beautiful experience for all involved and a wonderful preparation for Christmas.”



New online faith formation apostolate welcomed by Bishop Donal as...

Derry youth impressed by Dublin couple's focus on 'Called to More'

YOUNG Dublin journalist, Katie Ascough, who connected live with young people in the Diocese via the Derry Youth Instagram to talk about the recently launched Catholic apostolate, 'Called to More', has shared the story of her faith journey with 'The Net', and how she hopes to spend the rest of her days answering the call to help others know their faith as a way of life.

The 24-year-old and her husband, Edward Barrett-Shortt, who just got married back in July, felt drawn towards helping form young people, in particular, in their faith following the Referendum on the Eighth Amendment, in which 87 per cent of young people had voted for abortion, and through prayer and discernment, 'Called to More' evolved.

They were greatly encouraged by the support of the lay-people, priests and bishops they spoke to before launching the apostolate in February of this year, and one of those they spoke to was youth champion, Bishop Donal, who is chair of the Commission for Worship, Pastoral Renewal and Faith Development at national level; which includes the Council for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development, of which he is also chair and which includes youth ministry. In addition, he is a Board Member of Catholic Youth Ministry Ireland (CYMI), as liaison bishop between CYMI and the Bishops' Conference, and was one of the two Irish Bishops' delegates at the 2018 Synod of Bishops on Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment.

Commenting on 'Called to More', Bishop Donal recalled hearing, during the 2018 Synod on Young People and Faith, about "allowing the new generation to lead the Church forward".

He added: "One of the great features of the lockdown has been the creativity that young people of faith have shown. They have come to the fore in using the new technologies, not merely as consumers but as creators."

"Katie Ascough is a young married woman. She and her husband, Edward, have taken on the ministry of providing faith formation materials for young adults with the powerful message of www.CalledtoMore.org. They are convinced that Jesus is calling us to greatness. I have met with them and am very happy to promote their work."

Reflecting on her own faith formation and the development of her relationship with God, Katie describes herself as "a cradle Catholic; born and raised in a very Catholic home".

The oldest of 10 children born to Tom and Jacki Ascough, three of whom are in Heaven, Katie feels blessed to have had the opportunity to know her faith very well from a young age, and for that she is thankful to her father, a self-employed engineer, and her mother, who is also a journalist and a neo-family practitioner, helping couples with natural family planning.

"My mother is amazing and does many different things," remarked Katie, adding: "In the last two years, she was Ireland's

first home schooling consultant. She does this through the Mother of Divine Grace School, which is based in California but is online, so it is international. She has also appeared on television many times to talk about home schooling and the Catholic faith, and is very good at standing up for what she believes in".

Home-schooled, Katie acknowledges the "real sacrifice" that was for her parents: "I am very grateful to have been home-educated, it was really good for my whole education and I hope to do the same for my family. We used a Catholic curriculum, so I got to learn about my faith very well from a young age. Faith and reason really did go hand in hand for me."

"I was quite a motivated and determined student, so home education enabled me to spend more time on subjects that I loved, such as English, Latin and Science. I got to delve deeper into these, which wouldn't have happened with a public school".

With regards to her faith growing up, Katie remarked: "As is the case for everyone, there comes a point in your life, usually in teenage years, when you have to choose your faith for yourself, rather than being trailed along to Mass, etc, by your parents. For me, it started when I was 14, when I went to my first Youth 2000 retreat in Clonmacnoise."

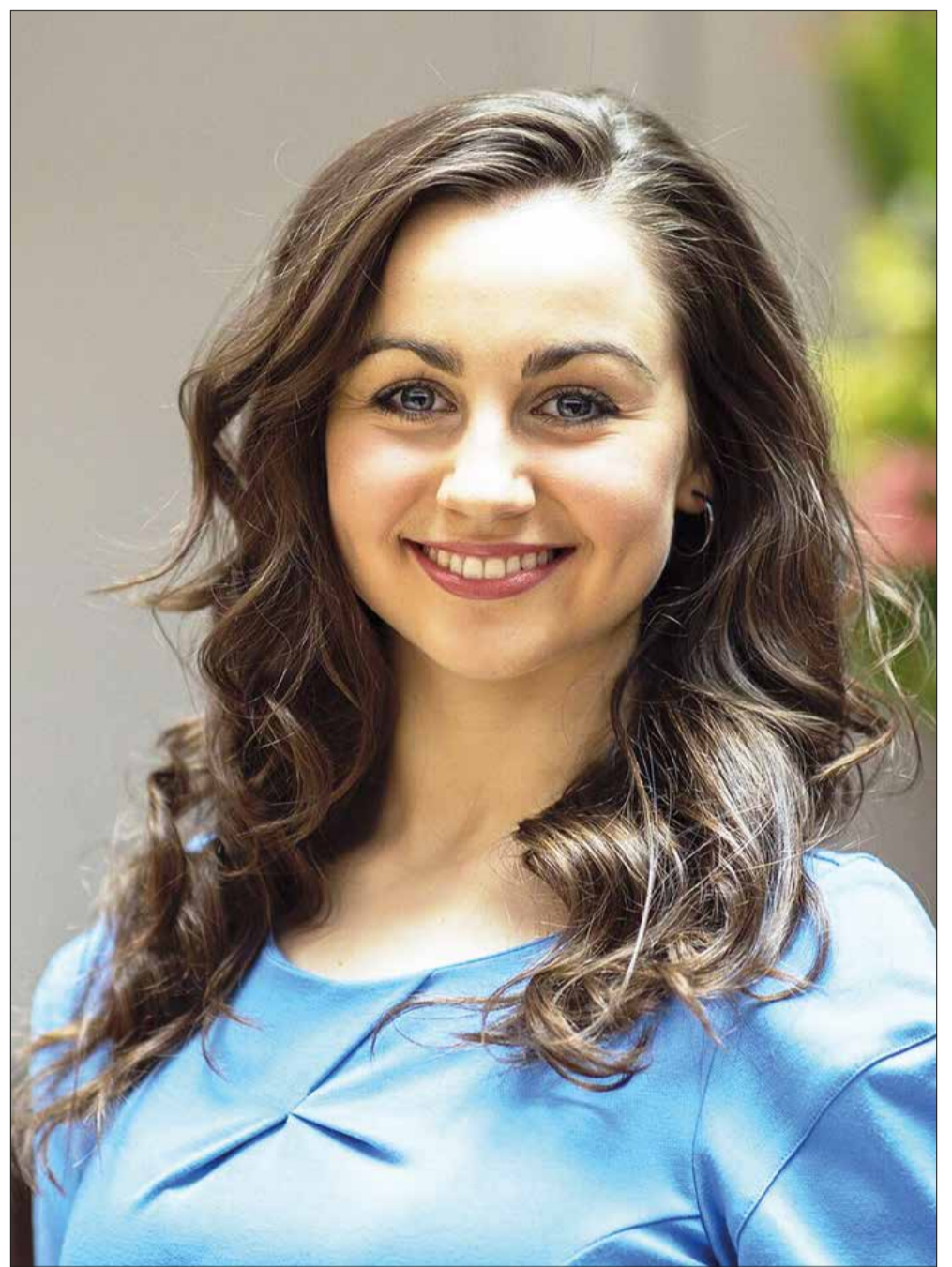
"My uncle, Sean used to be the national director of Youth 2000, so I had been on their hikes and would have been at retreats when I was younger, with my parents. Going to this retreat was a huge moment for me. Before that, my faith would have been very much based on what I lived with my family, but when I went to this retreat I saw a lot of young people on fire for their faith, and I was becoming on fire with mine but not just there yet".

She continued: "It was an emotional and a social encounter with my faith, but I still had a journey to go on in my relationship with God, in a deeper sense, especially through prayer and understanding what it meant to be Catholic as a young adult."

"There were a couple of years, between the ages of 14 and 21, where I was a retreat junkie. I went to a lot of Youth 2000 retreats but I didn't do too much in between these. However, when I was 17, I started going to daily Mass for about a year, on and off".

Writing

Having always wanted to be a journalist, Katie began writing part-time when she was 18 years-old and at college: "I started with Spirit Radio when I was 18 years old and then with the 'Alive' newspaper; neither was paid but I did it for the experience not the money. I was writing for 'Alive' every month for about two-and-a-



Katie Ascough

half years.

"While I always wanted to be a journalist, I was advised not to study journalism but a subject I was interested in, so I studied Medicinal Chemistry with Chemical Biology at UCD. This would have taken me into a job working in a lab somewhere. I like science; it is good for your brain, and I feel that my degree can be applied to lots of different things. However, I wanted to be a journalist in the area of pro-life and defending the Catholic teaching, especially on bio-ethical issues and pro-life, and I have been able to use my knowledge in this way".

Thankful for the Catholic faith during her time at university, Katie recalled that it was a time when she really needed God and started to go to daily Mass: "During the first three years, I wrestled on and off with how much I should be drinking and partying. Then, during the fourth year, I went to my first FOCUS (Fellowship of Catholic University Students) Conference in Chicago and received a lot of answers to very practical questions about how to live my faith in a college setting."

"I was a bit conflicted about fitting in and going to parties but still being true to my Catholic faith. I was living a bit of a double life for the first three years of College but that changed after the FOCUS conference, having listened to talks about sobriety, chastity and prayer life. They all made so much sense."

"One theme that I found repeated during the conference was 'What if you gave God everything?' That was a really important self-reflection question for me. I knew I could give Him more but I didn't have the guts to do that".

Katie travelled with about 20 other Irish students to the conference, which was attended by around 13,000 young people, mostly aged 18-22 with FOCUS being a campus ministry. And, while she was there, she applied to be a FOCUS missionary.

"I had previously missed the deadline to apply as a missionary, but they offered me an opportunity to apply while I was at the conference", she explained, adding that two weeks later she received news that she had been accepted and six months after that she was off to America for training.

"That was a huge moment of me

saying 'yes' to God in a bigger way than I ever had before," remarked Katie, who had just started dating her future husband, Edward, three weeks before she left for America.

"I was on a flight to America the day after the Referendum result to repeal the Eighth Amendment, which I had been hugely involved in campaigning against through pro-life," she said, adding: "I was going out there with the intention of staying one-to-two years, but I came back after an academic year, in May 2019, because I missed my boyfriend and felt called to start mission in Ireland as soon as possible."

"That year with FOCUS in Stillwater, Oklahoma, really opened my eyes to the model of evangelisation that works and works really well. One of the reasons I wanted to spend that time with FOCUS was because I admired what they did, and I wanted to learn it so that I could do what I wanted most, formation and evangelisation".

Disappointed at the Referendum result, Katie recalled discussions with her boyfriend, Edward, who had also been part of the pro-life campaign, as to what the next steps



Katie and Edward on their wedding day

continued from page 8

were in helping Ireland.

"With 87 per cent of young people having voted for abortion," she said, "we felt that it was time for us to invest in the formation of young Catholics in the faith. Knowing that there is a crisis in the Catholic Church, especially with regards to catechesis and in people knowing their faith, for which the Church gets a lot of criticism, we considered where we could go from here and have a bigger impact.

"We felt that we wanted to use our skills. Edward has a background in branding and marketing, while mine is journalism, and we had a vague idea that we wanted to do something online regarding faith formation in Ireland. So, when I came back from America, we got the ball rolling. We really started from scratch. We had to pray about it and trust that God was calling us to do this".

During almost a year of planning, they met with some bishops, priests and lay people who they felt would be able to offer guidance and spread the word, and they managed to raise 17,000 Euros to cover Katie's salary for a year, as well as equipment and software, amongst other needs to get started

"We approached people that we knew and they referred us to others who they thought would help," said Katie, adding: "We got

donations from anyone who liked the idea of what we wanted to do. It was a leap of faith for them as we hadn't launched, and, thankfully, some continue to fund us".

As well as Katie working full-time with the 'Called to More' ministry and Edward dedicating his spare time to it, there are about a dozen people who give freely of their time to help, and amongst them are three priests from different religious orders, a seminarian based in Meath, three Catholic journalists, a mother, a catechist and a film-maker.

In the process of fundraising for next year, they have already raised two-thirds of the 30,000 Euros they need to continue the mission and ramp up content production for 2021.

Prayer

The website currently has a very strong read section, with around 40 articles released since the February launch, including some on Advent and Christmas. In addition, a Prayer Series is being launched, while plans for podcasts are currently on hold due to the pandemic, and the virtual videos series, 'Colloquy' is going strong, with plans for two more video series underway for next year.

Greatly encouraged by the response in the nine months since 'Called to More' was launched, Katie noted that their Colloquy, a series of conversations with

leading Catholic speakers such as Dr Scott Hahn, Fr Mike Schmitz and Fr Columba Jordan CFR, has had over 100,000 views, with the website getting 2,500 visits monthly.

"Overall, our main audience is 16-24 year olds, with 75 per cent from Ireland, so we are reaching the people we are intending to," remarked Katie.

Planning to include more content next year, they aim to launch a new video series for personal use and group discussion, as well as providing associated leader and discussion guides.

Much of the content reflects the three pillars that are central to the ministry of 'Called to More'; helping young people know their faith better, helping them grow deeper in their relationship with God, and helping them be equipped and confident to share their faith with others.

Katie also spoke about four key values of the ministry: "Our content is free. You don't have to pay for it, which is very important. We feel that there is enough goodwill in Ireland to not have to charge our users.

"High quality is another value, where we make sure that everything we do is of a certain standard, as is the fact that we are authentically Catholic. We are always in line with the teaching



of the Catholic Church, and have three priests and a seminarian on our team to refer to, if we ever have a question about theology.

"The fourth key is that 'Called to More' is Irish based. While it's great to have international guests sometimes, our intention is to have Irish accents and make cultural references, and we have had feedback that people care about that. A man in Belfast messaged to say that he was coming into the Church in November and had come upon 'Called to More'. He had been using a lot of stuff from

America and said that he was delighted to find something that was Irish. Other people have also mentioned that it's great to have something home-grown. I think it is important to our identity as Irish people".

During the pandemic, Katie has received plenty of online opportunities to promote the ministry, including doing a Youth 2000 workshop during the summer E-Festival, speaking at the Ignite Conference organised online by the Cork-based Dominicans, and giving a talk in-person at another Ignite Conference in UCD. Queens University Chaplaincy also organised an online talk and discussion with Katie and its Fiat group, which led to a great open discussion, such as how to have difficult conversations with family and friends about faith.

Going forward, they are planning to host a talk in January 2021 for university chaplaincies, for which they will invite a guest speaker to talk about formation and evangelisation on campus.

'Called to More' is also available to give talks at parish and Diocesan level, either in person or online, depending on the circumstances.

Looking to the future, Katie said that she and Edward are planning to work at 'Called to More' for the rest of their lives: "While we think it is crucial now to speak to young people, we eventually want to expand. The end goal is to have online content for all ages and all stages of faith. So, down the line, we will have formation content for pre-school, primary school and secondary school, and then RCIA classes, sacramental preparation and parish resources.

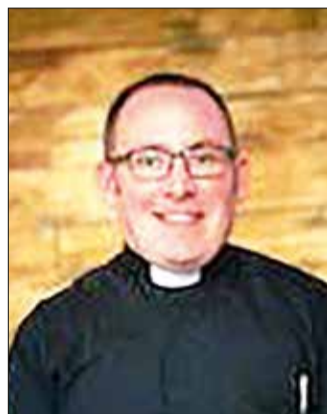
"We want to have a suite of resources for lots of different age-groups and stages of faith, so there is a life-time of work in formation in that".

While the 'Called to More' website is the hub for all the content, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram (@ctmcatholic) are also used as different ways of reaching people. Further information can be obtained by contacting Katie@calledtomore.org

A reflection by Fr Chris Ferguson - Diocesan Vocations' Director

Our vocation is a gift

...to give thanks to God means becoming the person He created us to be



Fr Chris Ferguson

DAVID Foster Wallace, described the vocation of a writer as helping their readers to find a path in a modern world, which is characterised by much confusion and lostness, a darkness caused by being adrift. The writer's responsibility is to show a way forward, to offer a vision of hopeful possibilities available in the modern world. Where do we discover those voices in the modern world, who offer a light in times of such despair and darkness? Those who go beyond dramatizing how dark and stupid everything is, and find a way to depict this world and to illuminate the possibilities of being alive

and human in it. Who are the people, the voices providing light and hope? (Hubert Dreyfus & Sean Dorrance Kelly, 'All Things Shining')

The French writer, Charles Péguy, goes one step further by claiming the poet must be a prophet. Hope, for Péguy is a mystery of God's love. God's signature is the surprise of a loving, relentless pursuit, which we are never able to elude or escape.

Yet, we have to witness to this relentless love; we have to be prophets of God's love and mercy, amid the flesh and blood of life. According to Péguy, you cannot be a true Christian and disdain the everyday world, the physical, the natural, and the historical nature of the lives of all men and women. As prophets and witnesses to the reign of God, we have been called upon to be salt of the earth, a light in the world.

Charles Péguy warns against over spiritualising our lives and seeking to flee the world, to cut ourselves off from our neighbour and their problems. There is a temptation in thinking we are spiritual, when in reality, we are a very modern caricature of what it means to be a Christian. We can be blind to the individualism, which concentrates only on my relationship with God,

a God I want to control and tame.

Péguy rallies against these false notions when he denounces those who think they are too good for the world around them "because they have not the strength and the grace to be one with nature, because they have not got the courage to engage with the everyday, they believe themselves to have entered upon the eternal. Lacking the courage to be in the world, they believe they are of God...because they love no one, they believe they love God."

In light of these sentiments, we return to Christ's words in the Gospel of Matthew, "as long as you did it to the least of my sisters and brothers, you did it to me".

Can you and I claim to have witnessed to Jesus' presence in the midst of the world's joys and pains? From the moment of baptism, we have been called, through the flesh and blood of our lives, to build up God's Kingdom. We have been called and commissioned together as one people, to continue Christ's mission of gathering the nations. How have we responded to this calling? How have we used our gifts, talents, personality and the circumstances of our lives to fulfil our vocation, to witness to being made in the image and likeness of God?

You, me, every one of us, have been called, chosen, and commissioned to share in Christ's saving mission. We can't absolve ourselves of this responsibility; we all have a part to play. All of our lives are meaningful, because God has chosen and sent us out into His world, His creation. Our vocation is a gift, and to give thanks to God means becoming the person He created us to be.

Part of this dynamic of being called is to share in the responsibility of being a member of the people of God. We all have a unique contribution to make, a role, which only we can fulfil by using our talents and personality. Part of this God-given responsibility is the need to help one another understand our vocation. Are we willing to take an interest in the lives of others? Have we hearts big enough to offer encouragement, guidance and support to the next generation?

Ultimately, how have we contributed to passing on the gift of faith, ensuring the light of Christ, the shepherd King, continues to shine in His disciples? How do we ensure young women and men will continue to answer the call to build up the kingdom of God?

Holy Hours for Vocations

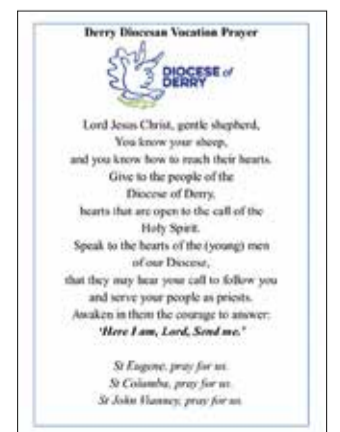
A series of monthly 'Holy Hours' has been organised by the Diocesan Vocations Team as part of the Columban Year of celebrations in the Diocese.

Focusing on the example of men and women who have lived their lives by faithfully answering God's call, like St Columba, the time of reflection and prayer will encourage awareness of Jesus knocking on the door of our hearts.

The Holy Hours will take place on the second Thursday of each month, at 8 pm, from churches throughout the Diocese, with the first to be led by Fr Pat O'Hagan, PP Merville, from St Pius X Church, on Thursday, January 14.

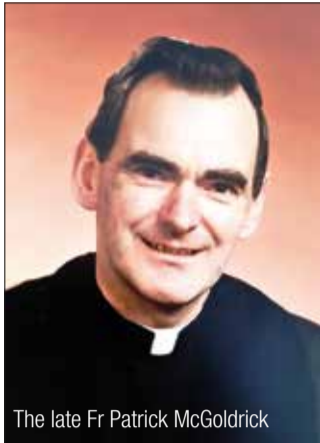
Fr Pat will focus on the life and vocation of Blessed Carlo Acutis,

the Italian teenager who was beatified on October 10, 2020, by Cardinal Agostino Vallini, on behalf of Pope Francis, in the Basilica of St Francis of Assisi, Italy. His feast day is on October 12.



Fr Patrick McGoldrick came to Moville as curate in the late 1990s. For the next 22 years, he was a source of spiritual guidance, friendship and support to many. He is remembered with fondest gratitude...writes Rose Ann O'Donnell

From seminary to parish life



The late Fr Patrick McGoldrick

FR Patrick McGoldrick came to Moville as curate in 1998 from Maynooth, where he had been Professor of Sacred Liturgy for more than 30 years. He might have been forgiven for finding parish life difficult; having spent so many years in the confines of the National Seminary, surrounded by students and his fellow academics, but parish life seemed to suit him.

Fr McGoldrick walked the shore path every morning, making the most of his scenic surroundings. He walked to the local shops for his paper and groceries. He drank tea at wakes and officiated at weddings. He served his time on Boards of Management and the Parish Pastoral Council. Most importantly, he celebrated the Holy Mass with reverence and administered the Sacrament of Reconciliation with gentleness and insight. He visited the sick, comforted the lonely, gave counsel to the troubled and encouraged the low in spirit.

It might have been expected that a man of letters, who had attended academic gatherings in the major cities of Europe, would prefer to withdraw from the duties of parish life, conserving his energies for theological studies or lengthy

retreats. On the contrary, however, the new curate seemed to thrive on parish ministry. He appeared to be most content when serving others, and he had the humility to take on any role or task required of him and to carry it out with good humour and grace.

The title of 'Doctor' was never used when referring to Fr McGoldrick in the parish. Indeed, many of us were unaware of his claim on such a title. His learned writings, Doctorates and other academic achievements were unknown to most of us. Instead, it was his kindness, his gentleness and his humble willingness to serve that earned him the affection and respect of the parish community.

His unwavering service to the sick is probably the best-remembered and most warmly appreciated aspect of Fr McGoldrick's parish ministry. Having, himself, undergone heart surgery while still in his 40s, and having undergone further procedures and attended numerous medical appointments in later years, he was no stranger to physical illness and debility. However, he rarely spoke of himself and he seemed to accept it all without complaint. If he did, occasionally, speak of his own condition, it was generally in response to a genuine enquiry. Even then, he kept his answers brief and free of self-pity.

It may have been this long-standing relationship with physical illness - or it may have been his innate desire to serve - that drew Fr McGoldrick to the service of the sick. Whatever the inspiration, he was unquestionably a friend to the sick and the dying. I have heard, many times, that Fr McGoldrick arrived unsummoned at a hospital bedside or that he visited, quietly and on an almost daily basis, the

home of someone whose life was in its closing days.

Another of Fr McGoldrick's much-appreciated qualities was his ability to 'talk to anybody'. I often heard this said of him while he was still living in the parish and it is a quality that earned him much respect and endeared him to many.

With his academic background and his natural sensibility, he might have been expected to find it difficult to converse routinely on everyday matters. However, that same sensibility, far from being problematic, seemed to act as a kind of antenna which enabled him to find the best wavelength on which to communicate with everyone he met.

It was my personal experience that he was sincere and perceptive, with a deep understanding of the human mind and heart and a warm sympathy with every human emotion.

His sense of humour is another of Fr McGoldrick's qualities that is fondly remembered by many who knew him. His wit was always wholesome, never unkind and, like his conversation, an easy fit for the person with whom he shared it.

Listening

Fr McGoldrick had a gift for listening. He always appeared to be genuinely interested in what the speaker had to say and his responses were generally measured, honest and helpful. If he found that he did not have the solution to a problem or difficulty, he would say so, but his calm, kind act of listening was often the only remedy needed. He rarely, if ever, gave the impression of being in a hurry and nothing was too trivial to be taken seriously and responded to with kindness.

I have no desire to confer on Fr McGoldrick the kind of unofficial

'canonisation' bestowed on many a well-regarded person, in the weeks after their death. Indeed, Fr McGoldrick would be the first to repudiate any such attempt. With a smile and a shake of the head, he would remind me that there is no saint who never had to fight human weakness, and that no-one can claim credit for his own virtues. However, it would be remiss not to attempt to describe, even in some small way, the ministry of one who has left behind a legacy of loving service.

Fr McGoldrick lived life to the full, in the true Christian sense. He used wisely the talents gifted to him by the Lord, not only his gifts of intellect and academic ability, but the humble gifts of service, kindness and gentleness. He gave to the last drop and left us only when circumstances compelled him to do so; leaving Moville in mid-March, intending to return. It is fitting to remember his life as an example to be followed.

Several years ago, I attended Mass in Moville celebrated by Fr McGoldrick on the Feast of St Vincent de Paul. In his homily, he spoke of the saint's virtues. While I listened, it occurred to me that he could have been describing himself, although I imagine that he, himself, was unaware of the comparison.

It was typical of Fr McGoldrick that he did not want to talk about himself, nor about his academic background. There were times when he would let slip a sliver of Latin or Greek, or a few lines from a poem, but never as a show of superiority. Instead, he seemed to take delight in the music of the words and to take pleasure in sharing them for the sake of giving joy to the listener.

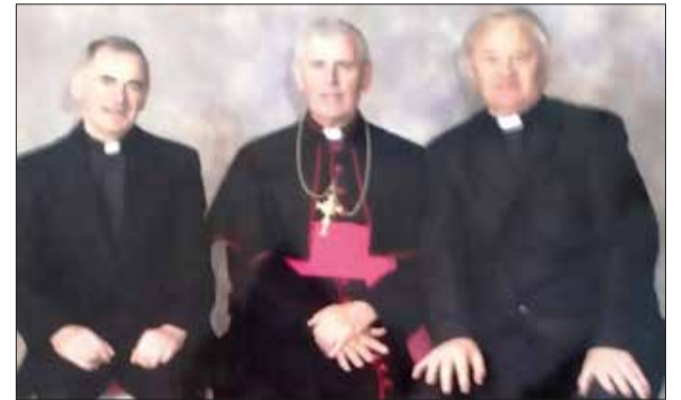
In the days after his death, books

of condolence were available in St Pius X Church in Moville. The messages written in those books reflect the affection and gratitude of the people of the parish. Those who wrote the messages remember Fr McGoldrick as one who served the sick with kind and loving devotion. The words 'gentle' and 'gentleness' appear repeatedly, as do references to Fr McGoldrick's humility. The comments also recall his gentle smile and his holiness. He is remembered for his friendship in difficult times

and in good. He is thanked for his faithfulness and for his excellent example of prayerfulness and faithfulness to God.

In short, the people of the parish remember Fr McGoldrick with holy affection, deep respect and warmest gratitude. May he remember us always, in the House of the Heavenly Father, and may we meet again, rejoicing, in the peace and the rest of Heaven.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis



Fr Patrick and Bishop Francis Lagan, after a Confirmation ceremony in Moville, with Fr Paddy O'Kane, who was parish priest there at the time.



The late Fr Patrick McGoldrick, back, third from left, after the conferring of the BA Degree in Maynooth in 1958, with (back l-r) Ciaran Devlin and Cathal Logue, and (front l-r) Michael McEidowney, John Hume and Brendan Doherty.

Moville will miss the brilliant mind and ministry of Fr Patrick McGoldrick

BORN on August 12, 1937, into a family and a time of strong faith, Fr Patrick was the eldest of Liam and Kathleen McGoldrick's three sons who all joined the priesthood. They were following in the footsteps of their mother's uncle, Bishop Neil Farren, and their father's brother, Fr Colm McGoldrick.

Educated in Bunrana, Derry, Maynooth and Paris, Fr Patrick was ordained in 1962 and spent the first 36 years of his priesthood studying and teaching, with 33 of those years as Professor of Sacred Liturgy in Maynooth.

He spent summers teaching at the Institut Catholique in Paris, attending conferences and talks all over the world, and later working to develop the Theology programme at the Maryvale Institute in Birmingham. In 1999, he was awarded an honorary Doctorate from Maryvale in recognition of

the work he had done there while he was Dean of the Faculty of Theology in Maynooth. He had already been awarded a Doctorate in Theology from Maynooth, back in the 60s.

He also served 10 years as editor of the Irish Theological Quarterly, and worked to implement in Ireland the renewals introduced in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, which opened in the year he was ordained. He published books and other texts, and was involved in the Commission for the use of English in our liturgies.

Celebrating the Covid-restricted Requiem Mass in St Pius X Church, Moville, the only parish in which Fr Patrick had served in the Derry Diocese and did so faithfully as curate for 22 years, Fr Pat O'Hagan spoke of how he had come to know his former teacher and colleague better as a friend

and fount of knowledge, since his arrival as parish priest 11 years ago.

Fr Pat, who concelebrated the Mass along with Fr Patrick's brothers, Fr Brian and Fr Neil, with Bishop Donal presiding, remarked: "He had a brilliant mind, sharp and incisive, with a breadth of knowledge that left the rest of us mere mortals breathless."

Speaking highly of how Fr Patrick had totally dedicated himself to pastoral ministry amongst the people of Moville, Fr Pat said: "He had a particular ministry to the sick and the dying. He was nothing but gracious, kind and generous to everyone who called the house or called at the door, no matter how many times he'd have to go up and down the stairs to greet and meet them."

He went on to note that, on moving temporarily to his Bunrana home in March, Fr

Patrick hadn't been idle: "He wrote a series of articles on the Eucharist, of which only one, as far as I know, has so far been published. He almost got the series completed, and he was somewhat upset that he didn't have the energy to put the final touches to the last one."

Having had the privilege to read these, Fr Pat described the writings as "the most marvellous teaching on the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and what it means for God's people, for the Church", and expressed the hope that they will be published.

Buried in his homesoil of Bunrana, Fr Patrick is survived by his brothers, Fr Brian and Fr Neil, and younger sister, Caitriona.

(Thanks to Fr Pat O'Hagan PP, Moville, for the inclusion of extracts from his Requiem Mass homily)



True to his prayerful upbringing in the Mullan family home in Ballerin...

The late Fr Michael Mullan remained steadfast in prayer during his long life



The late Fr Michael Mullan

WHEN Ballerin native, Fr Michael Francis Mullan died during the Christmas period, after 91 years of life, his family and friends found comfort in his passing away on such a special occasion as Christmas Day, and his Requiem Mass celebrated on the Feast of the Holy Family.

Fr Michael was the second eldest in a family of eight born to the late Bernard and Susan Mullan, and grew up in their devout Catholic farming family home in the townland of Tyberan, five miles from Garvagh and eight from Limavady.

His early education began at St Columba's Primary school, Ballerin, which had been built in 1908. He would have walked the five-mile round trip daily. Later, he was educated at Limavady Convent, run by The Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions.

His father, Barney, was very much involved in parish life and was a long time St Vincent de Paul committee member. As a contractor, any work at church grounds was carried out at a minimum price. And his mother, Susan always had a warm welcome

for visitors, quickly having tea on the boil, and was a daily Mass attendee, when able.

On finishing primary school, the young Michael became a boarder in St Columba's Derry and then went on to Maynooth. All this time, he had a passion for Gaelic football where, with his height and athleticism, he excelled at midfield. The Ballerin Club first took to the field in 1945 and two years later, in the year of 'the big snow', he was a key figure when his Club won the Derry minor championship.

His ordination on June 19, 1955, along with Mgr Iggy McQuillan, the same year as Fr Art O'Reilly and Mgr Brendan Devlin, was a huge event in the Ballerin end of Errigal Parish. A marquee was erected at the family home when he was welcomed home after his ordination in St Columba's College, in 1955, beginning an amazing 65 years in the priesthood.

Two years after ordination, Fr Michael lined out at midfield with the Ballerin team that won the county senior title. He did not stand in for the team photo as priests playing football was frowned upon, or even forbidden, then. In the penal days they said Mass in secret, and some played football in secret! This did not stop him from turning out for Derry in the first Gaelic football played in Wembley Stadium. The opposition was Galway and over 50,000 exiles attended.

His priestly vocation took him to parishes all over the Diocese, in Donegal, Tyrone and Derry. His first call was CC in Fahan in 1955/56. His next was Sessiaghoneill (Ballybofey) until 1958. He then had a five-year stay as curate in Glendermott, before moving to his first rural Derry posting as CC in Lavey, from 1966

to 1975. This was followed by 11 years in Craighane (1966-75), where he assisted in the reforming of the GAA club there in 1972.

Next up was a posting a lot nearer home, to the parish of Kilrea, where Fr Michael ministered until 1986, when he was appointed Parish Priest of Ardstraw East for the next nine years. There he did sterling work on improvements in the parish. With the St Eugene's Church in steady decline, he had made advanced plans for a new church when he was replaced by the now deceased, Fr Stephen Kearney, who completed the task.

On retirement as a PP, he took up the role of CC in Knockmoyle. His last call was in Drumsurn, where he remained until declining health caused his retirement. His family gave him comfort until his final days, when he passed away in the Royal Victoria Hospital on Christmas Day.

No matter where he ministered, Fr Michael made many friends who kept in touch. Outside of his priestly duties the golf course was his sanctuary and, like his early sporting career, he hit the ball well.

As his lifelong friend and former Ballerin team mate, Fr Seamus O'Connell said at his Requiem Mass, "Died on Christmas day and buried on the Feast of The Holy Family. Good timing Mick!"

Effective

Celebrating the Covid-restricted funeral Mass in Christ The King Church, in Limavady, which was broadcast via the church webcam, Fr Seamus described Fr Michael as "a quiet man, but very effective priest".

"One of his handicaps," he noted, "was that he was deaf to a great degree and had found it difficult to get involved in conversation.

He bore his deafness with great manliness and acted as if he weren't deaf, though it reduced him to quietness."

Knowing Fr Michael for over 70 years, Fr Seamus recalled their football days with Ballerin, the fun of travelling around the carnivals during the summer to watch matches, and the great occasion of his friend's ordination.

The two got to know each other better when Fr Michael was appointed as curate to Sessiaghoneill and his mother, Susan, worried that he would be lonely so far from home, asked the young Seamus, who had just completed two years in Maynooth, to stay with him for a while.

"It was a great experience for me," recalled Fr Seamus: "He was a great teacher. He didn't set out to teach, but he was a great example, and I enjoyed my time visiting him there in Sessiaghoneill and fishing in The Finn. Fr Michael happened to be there the day I caught my first salmon."

"He lived a very long life and he enjoyed it, and spent it well," remarked Fr Seamus, before going on to recall a time of great sadness in his life, when his younger brother, Colum P, who had been a student at Maynooth, was caught up in an accident with an express bus along with three other students, that left him paralysed for the last 33 years of his life.

Presiding at the Requiem Mass, Bishop Donal spoke on behalf of the priests who would have been in attendance but for the restrictions due to Covid-19.

Noting that Fr Michael had lived through times of great change, such as Vatican II and the Troubles, "when many old certainties were stripped away", Bishop Donal remarked: "We have come from a

time when it was highly regarded to have a priest in the family to a time when social pressures would discourage such a choice".

He continued: "Just as Fr Michael took on the task of ministering as well as he knew in the times when he lived, there is need for others to minister the same divine love and mercy in a different time and a different place, because, without those who proclaim love and mercy as the key virtues, we become a harsh society".

Fr Michael's youngest sister, Anne, who also followed a religious vocation as a Loreto Sister, was only seven when he went off to the seminary in Maynooth, and she remembers the great fuss that was made of him by their mother when he came home to visit. She also recalled a special memory of him accompanying her mother and father on the day she entered the convent in Rathfarnham, Dublin.

"Our mother and father were good Christians," said Sr Anne, "and there was lots of prayer in our home; the Rosary was the beat of the house."

With the retreat centre she runs in Llandudno, Wales, closed due to the Covid-19 lockdowns, Sr Anne is thankful that she was able to come home to look after Fr Michael in Limavady, when he became ill.

"It was great to have him at home," she said, "and it was so beautiful for him to begin eternal life on Christmas Day, and that his burial was on the Feast of the Holy Family. I am so glad for him".

Fr Michael's brother, Sean recalled fond memories of his ordination in St Columba's College and the great celebration afterwards, with a band meeting him on his arrival in their home parish, and of time spent with his

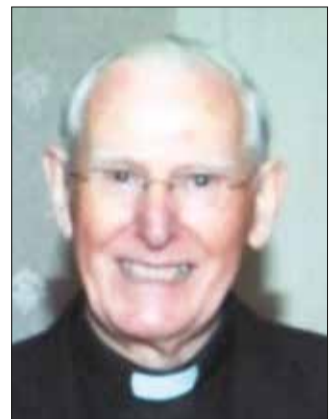
older sibling during free days as a boarder at St Columba's College, when Fr Michael was based as curate in the Waterside.

While golf and Man United stood out as two of Fr Michael's passions, Sean also noted his brother's love for his Catholic faith: "When he was sick it always bothered him that he couldn't read his breviary. Fellow priests would tell him that he didn't have to do it, but he did all that he could to catch up with his reading, so we thought it fitting to put his breviary into the coffin with him."

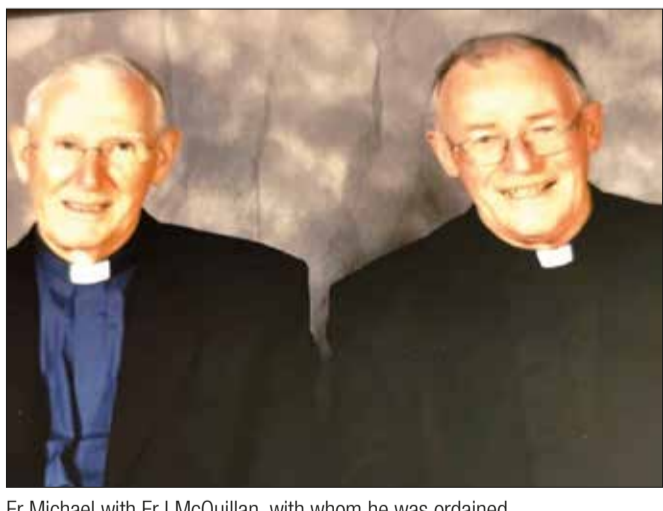
On behalf of the family, Sean expressed gratitude to Dr McConville and Dr Healey, and the nurses who cared so well for Fr Michael while he was in Waterside Hospital, and those who cared for him in Altnagelvin Hospital and the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast, where he passed away peacefully.

Buried in St Mary's Cemetery, Ballerin, Fr Michael is survived by his siblings, Mary Teresa (Lagan), Brian, Bridie (Gormley), Sr Anne and Sean. He was predeceased by his brothers, Patsy and Colum P.

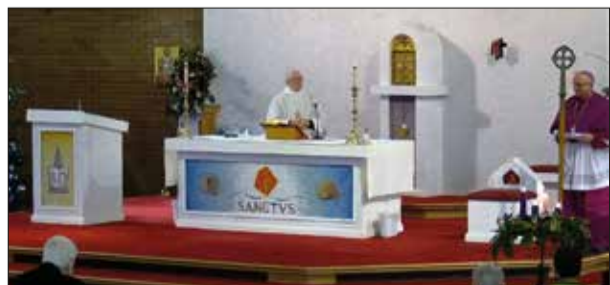
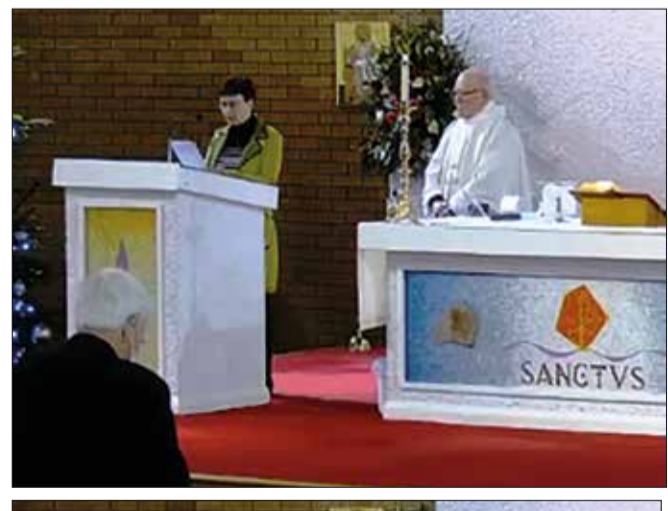
(Thanks to Bernie Mullan, friend of the Mullan family, for his contribution to this tribute to Fr Michael)



The late Fr Michael Mullan with his family on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of his ordination.



Fr Michael with Fr I McQuillan, with whom he was ordained.



Fr Seamus O'Connell celebrated the Requiem Mass for the late Fr Michael Mullan, with Bishop Donal presiding.



THIS month, Hollie, Peter, Oisin, Gemma, Zara and John, 'The Net' youth contributors from the Co Tyrone, Inishowen, Co Derry and Derry City Deaneries, share their thoughts about the year ahead in the aftermath of 2020, and their hopes for more opportunities to live and share their faith at parish and Diocesan level, as well as in their schools, especially in this year when the Diocese will celebrate the 1,500th anniversary of St Columba's birth.

Passionate about caring for the environment, Zara looks at the example of St Columba for people today in his respect for nature, and John writes about his discovery of the Epiphany House Blessing, suggesting that this may be a good year to dedicate our homes and families to Jesus.

Hollie and Peter reflect on a talk about the role of the young in shaping the world post-Covid and giving a voice to the voiceless, while Oisin comments on Pope Francis' sharing of key times of solitude in his life.

Hollie reflects on 2020 and shares her hopes for 2021... "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light" (Isaiah 9:2)

REFLECTING on the strange year of 2020, there has been much devastation, fear, anxiety, stress, loneliness, and disappointment. However, we cannot overlook the blessings and the positive things we received last year also, even though they may be overshadowed by the current crisis.

The year of 2020 has proven to us that we do not know what lies ahead of us, therefore, we must place our trust in God's hands. I remember on New Year's Eve 2019, my whole family came together to celebrate the end to 2019 and the beginning of 2020. I remember the excitement of everyone, the conversations, the craic and, most of all, when the clock struck midnight, there was song, dance, and big hugs between everyone.

Little did we know what 2020 was going to behold! I see this memory as a blessing; that God brought us together in celebration of life and having that time with one another before this tragedy unfolded. We got the chance to get together before the new rules of 'social distancing' and keeping within our 'bubbles' were implemented. It is a lesson that teaches us to appreciate everyone and everything we have got, and to take nothing for granted.

Recalling the Scripture readings that we heard during the season of Advent, we reflected on the words of the prophet Isaiah, "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light..." We have experienced dark days in 2020, more than in so called 'normal' years, but with the hope of a successful vaccination we are those people journeying towards light and peace. Therefore, we must have hope and trust in God.

For young people, we know that the coronavirus pandemic has had an effect on their mental health and wellbeing, due to months of absence regarding school, attendance to Mass, hobbies, and simply not being able to meet up with extended family and friends. We have now become

more appreciative of the human connection, which has put the obsession of technology into perspective, although, technology has been a great alternative for when the idealistic way of doing things could not be done.

As a young person, and a student in upper sixth, I have become increasingly involved in my Parish and Diocese throughout the past year. During the big lockdown which happened after St Patrick's Day, in March, I found it incredibly difficult to sit in the house and do nothing, until the Derry Youth Ministry took to online. Since then, I have been involved in the online Instagram channel, undertaken the Alpha program, became a member of the Derry Youth Scholarship, and I am now also a youth contributor from the Tyrone Deanery for 'The Net'.

I see these opportunities as blessings that I have obtained from 2020 that have strengthened my relationship with the Church and that have also kept me going throughout the worst of lockdown. I am really doing things that I love and I can see myself being involved in my Parish and Diocese forever. I would not change it for the world, as I am forever grateful.

Hence, I do not think there is anything in particular I would want changed in my Parish or Diocese, as the enthusiasm and commitment of youth leaders is so strong. I have no doubt that great things will come from that. For instance, the new online youth ministry that was proposed this year has proven very successful; therefore, I would love to see this remain in a post-Covid world.

School

Regarding school, I would like to see more happening in the educational environment. Although we all have our annual school Masses and Carol Services, I feel that if it were not for the Pope John Paul II Award, many schools would not address faith as often.

The primary difference and aim of a Catholic school, as opposed



Hollie reading at the 50th anniversary celebration of her parish Church in Melmount, Strabane.

to a diverse school, is that we have the responsibility of guiding young Catholics in their vocational journeys, and to help them realize that they are valued and that they belong to, and are expected to take over the leadership of, the Church someday.

Throughout 2020, I have increasingly felt a sense of belonging in my Parish and Diocese, and my responsibility in the Church has become more apparent to me. My hope for 2021 is that fellow young people will discover their calling and respond to it wholeheartedly, without hesitation, whilst keeping in mind the words of St Bonaventure, "Voluntas Dei Pax Nostra" - "The will of God is our peace."

Ways in which we can encourage faith development and formation may consist of schools considering vocation talks as well as career talks. Another idea maybe taking part in the Year of St Colmcille and the mini missions planned out for this year - as I know many YR14s are studying St Colmcille in RE A-Level.

Another idea is maybe deciding to take part in an annual charity sleep-out or going on pilgrimage. There are so many things that we can get involved in, both individually and communally.

To conclude, even though I am happy to see the back of 2020, I have to admit that it has been a wonderful year for me in terms of a growing youth ministry, and Parish and Diocesan involvement.

My mummy and I were reflecting on the year of 2020 coming to an end, and we noticed that the absence of sacramental

ceremonies and services brought out people's distress in not being able to have their child baptized, confirmed, or receive their First Holy Communion. Couples who had planned to get married had to postpone their wedding, congregations could not gather for Mass and receive Holy Communion for a very long time, Confessions were not available, and the Sacrament of the Sick was difficult to administer due to the dangers of transmitting potential infection. This seems to suggest that people did not realize their faith meant so much to them, and that in fact it was sorely missed.

Regarding faith in schools, Pope Francis states in his encyclical, 'Fratelli Tutti', that teachers "should be conscious that their responsibility extends also to the moral, spiritual and social aspects of life".

School is where young people mostly be throughout their childhood/teenage lives and it is a wonderful environment where they discover who they are, grow and express themselves. In addition to this, it is more than important that each and every young person is supported and guided in their faith journey through the shining example of their leaders.

Finally, I would like to thank all our leaders who have been an absolute inspiration. Their courage, dedication and their good will has been much appreciated and looked up to. I extend a very 'Happy and Blessed New Year!' to you all.



Hollie Frystal, Co Tyrone Deanery.



Oisin Mulhern, Co Derry Deanery.



Peter Grant, Inishowen Deanery.



Gemma Gallagher, Derry City Deanery



John Augustine Joseph, Derry City Deanery.



Zara Schlindwein, Derry City Deanery.

Gemma has many hopes for the New Year



I have many hopes for the New Year and I'm imagining it to be way better than last year.

I've decided to leave 2020 in the past and look forward to what 2021 is going to bring me and how it will help me to achieve my goals.

I plan to work hard in school now in this new term to get all my GCSEs and to get into a good career.

I'm looking forward to 2021 and to see what it brings me as a person and what it will provide for not only me but for others as well.

And I will keep praying and trusting that God is taking care of everything.

Maybe it is time for us to be like the Magi and follow the star to Christ by John Augustine Joseph

ONE of the most under-rated feasts in the Church's calendar year is the Feast of the Visitation of the Magi, better known as Epiphany.

The thing to be understood about this Feast is this: Christ is introduced not only to the nation of Israel but to all of mankind.

The adoration of the Three Kings from the East, who came to the little town of Bethlehem, is a recognition of Jesus' position as

King of the Universe...coincidentally, a feast that we celebrate right before the end of the church's calendar year.

Beyond the simple theological points that can be made about this little feast are the traditions that surround it. I remember a particular image that I have of the City of Mainz, in Germany, when I visited there last January. Just opposite the millennia-old

cathedral was a little shop, with the chalk engraving 20+C+M+B+20.

When I first saw it, I was confused by what it meant, but a Google search was to reveal something pretty interesting. The letters have a two-fold meaning: they represent the initials of the Three Kings, Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar.

They also abbreviate the Latin phrase, Christus mansionem

benedicat, 'May Christ bless this house.' The crosses stand for Christ and the numbers at the beginning and the end stand for the year. They began the New Year with a blessing from Christ.

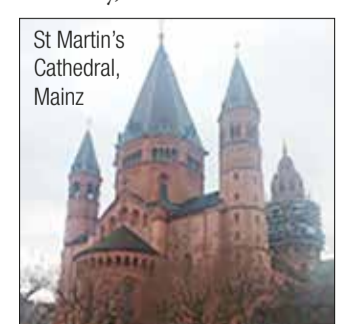
The start of this New Year has certainly not been easy for many of us. With all the buzz and trouble that seems to surround daily life each day, it may be time for us to be like the Magi and follow the star

to Christ.

After being confined to our homes for most of last year, we should take this New Year as an opportunity to dedicate our houses and families to Jesus. A nice way to do this may be the custom of chalking the door, as I mentioned.

Above all, I hope that we are able to go beyond the divisions and problems that surround us, so that we can unite as one people of God,

one family, one Church.



Recalling Jesus' words as recorded in Mark's Gospel, "All things are possible for one who believes" (Mark 9:23), Peter writes...

We should all believe that we can get through this together in 2021

THE parishes in our Diocese were hit badly during the year 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, with periods of either no public celebration of Mass or congregation numbers limited, and virtually no other parish activities. But there was an upside to that problem people faced, as some could access daily Mass online through smartphones and laptops at home, though there were some who could not.

Priests in our diocese also suffered, as many could not visit the vulnerable and sick due to government guidelines, and most of them led daily prayer and celebrated Mass for a significant time in an empty church or cathedral.

Schools in our parishes, both primary and secondary, were also affected from March as Covid-19 came, and exam years had a huge disadvantage as they were expected to undertake their exams in a couple months' time and most were not prepared, due to the pandemic and lockdown. Instead, students had to rely on

the predicted grades schemem which depended on their points or grades in further education.

So, you could say 2020 was an awful year which had its surprises too, but at least we can look forward with some positives and, hopefully, steps back to normality.

This year's Pope John Paul II Award students have to complete activities mostly online by tuning into the Derry Diocesan Youth Group Instagram weekly, to undertake tasks given to them. The Papal Cross Students have to undergo projects online in their parish also.

Personally, I would love the Pope John Paul II Award students to experience some of the events I did whenever I was undertaking it, before Covid; like the annual Sleep-Out for the Homeless and the trip to Knock, which would give them a wonderful experience of what the Award is about.

I was supposed to go on the Diocesan Youth Pilgrimage to Medugorje in the summer of last year. Covid prevented that from happening but I still have high

hopes that we can make that trip in the future and, you never know, it could be late this year!

I would encourage all the parishes in the Diocese to keep in touch with others online and also having an online Rosary every week to try and build up on a sense of normality, socially distanced.

I do feel bad for the students and teachers attending school during the uncertain times ahead, and also regarding having to do online learning in their homes instead of in a school environment. I wish all the best to teachers and students, especially exam year students in the future. We all must continue to work hard, even though we are not

in school learning.

The Derry Diocese is doing a great job in supporting the churches and priests in our parishes, and the youth as well, especially the Derry Youth Group in helping the Pope John Paul Award students to complete the Award during the pandemic, and for giving us a chance to pray together online as well, spreading the good news of the Lord and sharing our ideas with one another.

As Jesus once said, "All things are possible for one who believes" (Mark 9:23). We should all believe that we can get through this together in 2021; a new year, a new start.



Let 2021 be a new era in which we value each other, our health and our world *by Zara Schlindwein*

THE year 2020 was most definitely a year to remember, though not for the best reasons. However, that does not mean that we dismiss 2020 as a mistaken series of events. I believe that it allowed us time to reflect and reinvent our ideas about our lives and what we value most.

Many of us place our materialistic consumerism above the true elements that combine to provide happiness, and the worrying fact is that so many continue to do so, without change or consequence. Perhaps that is why we have had such a dramatic year.

Despite that, countless heroes have risen to the challenge and fought to sustain our healthcare service. Yet, their work has

been cancelled by the extreme cowardice of other individuals who see themselves above everyone else.

We have hope on the horizon, but I hope that once this is all over, we do not forget what everyone has gone through, brush it off and continue as we did before.

We, as a population, have learned to adapt to the struggles we face and that has made us stronger. Our world was struggling before this pandemic, yet we only began to notice and care when our lives became impacted.

So, my hope for the coming year is that we begin to nourish the wonderful world in which we live. We must realise the damage that we cause to the earth and correct it before it is too late. This is our

sign, and we cannot ignore it.

We have already been given plenty of time to re-evaluate our lives, but as we hope to come out of this pandemic and restore our own health, we must fight for the health of our world.

I would like to see a more ecological approach taken by our schools, parishes and the diocese overall. It is what most young people want to see, as we worry deeply about the effect we have on the climate. We shouldn't wait on government instruction; we should make the changes now and lead by example.

With a new year just underway, let it be a new era in which we value each other, our health and our world.

Looking forward to a more enjoyable year in 2021, Oisín writes of his hope that...

With great vision and hard work the future of the church could be very bright

LEAVING 2020 behind us and moving into a hopefully happier and enjoyable 2021 has made me think about what I personally hope we see more of in all areas of this New Year. While we all would like to see the end of problems relating to the pandemic, I have other hopes as well.

One area that comes to mind is the parish. I would love to see a greater focus on including younger people in the parish in different ways. This could be anything from holding more Masses aimed at a younger congregation or holding events that could get children involved with their faith.

A further way that a parish could include young people would be allowing them to be involved in certain ceremonies, such as reading at Mass or creating a children and young people's choir.

On a diocesan level, for the most part, I would not change very much as there are many ways that younger people are involved, such as this very publication, which encourages young people to speak about certain issues in our own diocese.

Furthermore, in the Derry Diocese, there is a youth ministry which constantly tries to further connect the youth of the diocese with other faith aspects. I would

like to see more of these types of youth ministry groups rolled out within different parishes, so that other young people have the same available to them as there is in the city. Perhaps each parish should have a youth council, if viable, and this would enable young people to have a greater link to the church.

Finally on a school level, whilst we learn a great deal through Religion class, I feel that there could be greater links with priests within the parish. People need to see that priests are human like the rest of us. I also feel that, in some cases, more could be done to demonstrate what our religion actually means.

Preaching at Mass is preaching

to the converted, however, at the present time many have fallen away. Much greater work is needed to build and foster links with the community and the young and this could be done through school settings. Perhaps allowing the young to share their views and make suggestions on what they would like to see, could help pave a path back to faith for many.

In conclusion, although I am content and have a deep faith, I feel that much more could be done to involve the young people of the diocese. With great vision, hard work and determination, the future of the church could be very bright.



St Columba is a brilliant role model for young people today

by Hollie Frystal

THIS year, all Christian churches throughout Derry and Donegal will commemorate and celebrate the life and legacy of St Columba to mark the 1500th anniversary of his birth.

Also known as St Colmcille, Columba departed from Ireland around 563 and landed on the Western coast of what is now Scotland. He was to labour there for about 34 years of his life.

St Columba's missionary work is associated with the foundation of Iona which was split between the Christian Scots of Argyll and the Pagan Picts, therefore, his mission involved facing both religious and political dilemmas.

Like most peregrini, Columba had mixed motives for wanting to leave Ireland and to travel to Iona, however, it is worth noting that when Columba had settled on this island, he never attempted to travel further afield into Europe or beyond, unlike his fellow monks, which was quite unique.

Columba is recognized for his outstanding skills, persistence, faith, and discipline in his monasteries. He demonstrated a great deal of courage and penance. For example, Iona was an isolated place off the coast of Scotland, with vulnerable borders. It suffered brutal weather of heavy rain and high gales, which meant that living there was a challenge.

Although there were many

challenges that Columba had to face, he succeeded in building a strong monastery and bridged the divide between the Christians and the Pagans. He is known to have converted pagans to Christianity in Iona, and the surrounding areas, through his dedicated and inspiring missionary work.

I am a student in upper sixth and, this year, we are studying the mission of St Columba and fellow missionaries such as Aidan, Colmán, Columbanus, etc. What struck me about St Columba was the practice of stark asceticism, which was a popular religious 'way of life' back in the early Irish Church.

According to St Columba's hagiographer, Adomnán, "He could not pass the space of even a single hour without applying himself either to prayer, or reading, or writing, or else to some manual work...He endured hardships of fasting and vigils without intermission by day and night; the burden of a single one of his labours would seem beyond the powers of man" (Adomnán, 7th century).

Adomnán also tells us that Columba used a stone for a pillow, which clearly gives evidence of the living out of a very strict-disciplined life.

In June 2019, I went on the Diocesan pilgrimage to Lough Derg. Throughout my study of

Celtic monasticism in the past two years, I have been able to relate it to my experience of the 5th century ancient pilgrimage site of Lough Derg, which has helped me to imagine what life was like not only for St Patrick, but also St Columba and his fellow missionaries.

Furthermore, the fact that Lough Derg or, as it is very well known, 'Purgatorium Sancti Patricii', still attracts a great number of pilgrims who undertake these penitential practices in renewal of their hearts and faith.

Connects

I feel that retreats, like that on Lough Derg, connects us more closely with the earliest figures of the Celtic Church, and as we are brought more closely to them through these still very popular practices.

For young people, I reiterate Pope Francis' emphasis on staying connected to our roots. This is rich, inclusive, and unifying history that we share with all Christians in Ireland, Scotland, etc, which we should reflect more on and be proud of.

Politically, St Columba also demonstrated the ability to make difficult Christian decisions in secular situations, and the impact of his decisions had proven to be miraculous. For instance, whilst the Christians were suffering persecution from the

neighbouring Pagan Picts, in the kingdom of the Dál Riata, he felt obliged to protect his people, and so, when he went to visit King Bruide of the Pagan Picts, it was acknowledged that this was the first step in improving relations between these two groups.

Columba's visit had a long-lasting impact as it brought peace, improved conditions for his own people and, by creating a friendship with the king, the lines of communication remained open. Throughout his mission, it is said that there was a strong possibility that he had converted the king to Christianity and so was given the permission to evangelize throughout his kingdom.

First of all, St Columba mirrors Old Testament prophets such as Moses, who was another religious figure who had a profound impact on politics. St Columba's faith shines through his courage in speaking up against social injustice, which reflects so many of our modern-day campaigners who are seeking justice and peace in today's world.

His example proves that faith does have an influence in decision making, and that religion does have a place in society, with the aim to protect all people's rights, values, and lives. For young people, we learn from St. Columba to be the "voice for the voiceless" (St Oscar Romero), and to not be afraid to do what is right, noting that his peaceful negotiation



without violence had proven very successful.

Finally, St Columba is an absolute inspiration and a brilliant role model for young people today. A brief analysis of his ministry and mission shows that the issues which he had to face, all those centuries ago in Ireland and nearby, are very similar to what we encounter in today's world, for instance, the persecution of foreign missionaries, immigration, the poor, etc.

Following the example of St Columba, we must try to share a genuine concern for the welfare of others and make it our problem as well by tackling those issues that affect our brothers and sisters in Christ.

St Columba's ascetic life has shown his wonderful devotion and commitment to his faith and calling, which serves as an

invitation for all young people to reflect on where God is calling them to be.

Today, there are still many people who enter strict religious life, and ancient retreat and pilgrimage sites are still very popular today, which connects us with the marvellous figures in the early Irish Church such as St. Columba.

In this special year, we, in the Derry Youth Scholarship, have dedicated our scholarship prayer to St Columba, the Patron of Derry, and we look to him for guidance and blessings in all the work that we hope to do.

I hope that you can join us in the celebration of our Columban year, and that you also look out for the 2021 'Colmcille School Project', which invites all schools in the Derry Diocese and the Raphoe Diocese to explore the 'life and legacy of St Colmcille/Columba.

As a young person of faith, I wish I had St Columba's determination to act how God wants me to

by Oisin Mulhern

RECENTLY, I was told by Bishop Donal that he had launched the Columban Year of celebration to commemorate the birth of St Columba. Before I was told this, I will admit that my knowledge about St Columba was quite sparse, with me only recognizing his name, but, as I read up about him, I discovered how influential a figure he was.

St Columba was an Irish abbot and missionary and was born on December 7, 521, making this year, 2021, the 1500th anniversary of his birth. He is primarily credited with spreading Christianity in what would become present-day Scotland and is the Patron Saint of my home Diocese of Derry. Finally, he also set up an important abbey on Iona that became a prominent religious and political area in Scotland for many years.

When talking about Columba's life before all of these important achievements, it is equally as storied. For example, he was taught by some of the most prominent church figures, such as

Finnian of Clonard, in Ireland, and even set up several monasteries in Ireland before venturing off later to Scotland, after being excommunicated for unfortunate reasons.

When I look at this man's journey and all that he achieved, I must say that not only am I impressed but also it speaks a great deal about him as a person. It shows an unwavering determination to spread the message of God among people who, at the time, may have been very resistant to change.

In many ways, as a young person of faith, I wish I could achieve this level of determination as well, to properly represent my faith and act as how God would want me to act, without giving in to certain vices that are common at my age.

This is coupled with an appreciation for God which is evident in Latin hymns that are attributed to Columba, where he consistently calls God a helper, ruler and guard. He sees God in a very caring light, showing him as a loving figure who is there to help

us and guide us like a ruler would.

I feel like we can all learn from this description of God, as He is first and foremost there for us in many different ways. These could include giving us help in many different endeavours, such as school or work, or even protecting us from many different dangers and illnesses.



St Columba's respect for nature should be applied to our faith lives today

by Zara Schlindwein

THE name of our city in Irish is 'Doire Colmcille' and is derived from the native oak trees and the association with St Columba, Derry's Patron Saint, who was an Irish abbot and missionary evangelist.

Columba was born in Co Donegal in 521 and, as a boy, he was so often found praying in the town church that his friends called him Colm Cille, which translates to 'Dove of the Church'. After Columba was ordained, he founded his first monastery in Derry.

The church which he built there came to be known as the Dubh Regles and was long believed to have stood somewhere in the precincts of the present Long Tower Church. Because of his love of nature, Columba refused to build the church facing east, as was the custom; he wanted to spare the lives of as many oak trees as he could.

I think that his respect for nature should be applied to our faith today. Columba didn't see himself above biodiversity but was willing to let it thrive, whilst still completing his missionary work. That is truly inspiring for young people now, as it shows us that no matter how important our own agendas are, we should never sacrifice the natural world. Columba was aware of this 1,500

years ago and now, more than ever, we should follow in his footsteps.

Columba founded around 30 monasteries in 10 years, which showed tenacity and perseverance. However, his strong personality and forceful preaching aroused considerable antagonism. In 563, he was accused of starting a war between two Irish tribes and was sentenced by the high king never to see Ireland again and to spend the rest of his life in exile. With 12 companions, he sailed from the shores he loved and settled on the island of Iona, off the coast of Scotland. He taught the pagan and war-like people of Scotland about Jesus even though it was dangerous, highlighting his devoted promise to spread the good news about God.

He settled in and continued to fulfil his mission. His unwillingness to give up displays how strong his faith was, with his determination resulting in the spreading of Christianity. Despite his trials, Columba remained confident in himself and his relationship with God. Although he made mistakes, he continued to try and make things right. That act depicts Columba's humility and allows us to relate to his story, whilst encouraging us to do good in our own lives, no matter what may have happened in the past.

Columba helped to establish

many monastic settlements in Iona and around Scotland, but in 575, he was persuaded to return to Ireland to mediate a dispute between the high king and the league of poets.

Insisting on remaining faithful to the terms of his exile, that he never see Ireland again, he travelled blindfolded. Whilst visiting, he realised that his reputation was respected by everyone, despite his allegiance lying with the unpopular poets. He spoke to the assembled nobles and clergy with such force and authority that the king was persuaded to reverse his original decree, and the hostility between the two parties was calmed.

Columba was so self-assured that he wasn't afraid to go against what everyone else was saying, and that sent a message to others to always stand up for what you believe in. That message should be reciprocated today. With so much uncertainty in the world, everyone should be content with their own ideas and not be frightened of possible deviation or tension.

After his visit, Columba returned to Iona and spent the rest of his life there. He was regarded as a saint by his fellow monks and became a beloved figure in Ireland and Scotland. We remember Saint Columba for his great faith and fortitude and hope to continue to live by his message today.

Youth called to solidarity in welcoming the marginalized!

by Hollie Frystal

“The ones who have a voice must speak for those who are voiceless” (St Oscar Romero)

THE undersecretary of the Vatican's Migrants and Refugees department, Cardinal Czerny, has spoken of young people being at the core of shaping society, especially in a post-Covid world.

Speaking an online seminar for Sophia University, Tokyo, the Cardinal held that we can only emerge greater from the effects of this pandemic if we concentrate on overcoming 'individualism' and instead focus on the marginalized, rejected, and neglected people living on the edge of society, like the blind beggar, Bartimaeus, who was cast aside and unacknowledged by his community until Jesus came, welcomed, and loved him. Jesus welcomed the outcast.

In chapter three of Pope Francis' Encyclical, 'Fratelli tutti', the Holy Father writes: "Individualism does not make us more free, more equal, more fraternal. The mere sum of individual interests is not capable of generating a better world for the whole human family... Radical individualism is a virus... it makes us believe that everything consists in giving free rein to our own ambitions, as if by pursuing ever greater ambitions and creating safety nets we would somehow be serving the common good."

Basically, we are called to step outside our comfort zone and welcome the foreigner.

There are a few common issues that both migrants and young people share, although at different levels. Both groups may suffer a

degree of rejection and feel a lack of self-worth. As Christians, we are called to welcome, include and love those who are living on the margins of society, simply through the example of Jesus.

Vatican News covers the themes that were discussed in the online seminar, one of which is the recent and an ongoing problem of the effect the coronavirus has on migrants. We have consistently heard people labelling our latest 'way of living' as the 'new normal', but what struck me in this article, regarding migrants, is that it points out that even 'normal' times are not normal for them. This is a very sad reality in which many of our brothers and sisters are suffering.

Consider the closure of the borders – acknowledging that some people already have so little to survive on, their resources are again reduced and transportation of these goods are blocked due to the closure of borders. As well, this prevents migrants returning to their country of origin and possibly losing their jobs. Vatican News makes an interesting point, that some communities live in very poor conditions and have no room to move about, therefore, the inability to social distance is a danger.

Although, the coronavirus is dangerous, Cardinal Czerny addresses a long and reoccurring 'virus' which has always been present, known as 'social injustice'. Migrants commonly

face inequality of opportunity, marginalization, discrimination, prejudice, and lack of protection.

As Christians, we are invited to follow the example of St Oscar Romero regarding social injustice. He said: "The ones who have a voice must speak for those who are voiceless." In other words, our voices are the best tool to use when raising awareness and trying to achieve justice peacefully. Often the voices of the poor are ignored, therefore, it is up to us who are in a stable, comfortable, and secure position, to use our strong and respected platforms to make sure the voices of the poor are heard.

Speak up

In some countries, people are afraid to use their voice due to potential punishment and silencing, therefore, we must speak up for the underprivileged in our society, from the safety of our own homes, livelihoods, democracies, and support.

In connecting migrants with youth, Pope Francis speaks of 'the value of solidarity'. His Holiness said, "Families are the first place where the values of love and fraternity, togetherness and sharing, concern and care for others are lived out and handed on" ('Fratelli Tutti').

As the Holy Father mentioned, our parents are our first teachers and it is usually the primary environment in which the gift of faith is introduced, shared, and is

practiced together. Pope Francis continued by adding: "Teachers, who have the challenging task of training children and youth in schools... should be conscious that their responsibility extends also to the moral, spiritual and social aspects of life... Communicators also have a responsibility for education and formation, especially, nowadays, when the means of information and communication are so widespread" (Fratelli Tutti).

Families have the natural duty to ensure that their young people grow up without being prejudicial, and instead pass on the values of love, compassion, and respect – in order for them to be inclusive, welcoming, and forgiving, to create and maintain a peaceful world. Teachers have a vital influence on youth, as young people spend a great amount of time in school and they are in a diverse environment, where they face people of different backgrounds.

This is a challenge, as teachers must be neutral and show wide inclusivity, and simply be a shining example for the relationships between youth for the future. The educational environment also offers chances to unite in charity, such as the annual "Trocaire Lenten Appeal, and to invite young people to explore global issues through school lessons, such as ethics. Communicators like clergy and journalists, although everyone can be a communicator in some



way or another, must avail of the technology that we have in order to raise awareness, and to be the 'voice for the voiceless'.

Referring back to Cardinal Czerny's point, that youth are central to shaping society for the future, this reflects the importance of teaching youth and passing down the vital moral values to help them to understand and accept others.

As Pope Francis has expressed in 'Christus Vivit' and has reiterated in 'Fratelli Tutti' – it is important for youth to be attached to their roots and to reflect, respect and appreciate their history. We will never move forward together unless we understand one another and learn from our mistakes. The pandemic has had a profound impact on the lives of so many, and for youth it has taken its toll

educationally, religiously, and mentally.

The absence of school, Mass and face-to-face communication for months has had a sore impact on people, which they would rather not look back on. However, this experience has strengthened our appreciation of each other, the Eucharist and the Liturgy, and the gift of education.

The pandemic is an example of how young people will be able to look back and acknowledge that this period is a time of an 'awakening of reality'; where our eyes have been opened to the hungers of the world in which the pandemic has helped to expose.

We are living through an exceptional time, where we have gained a unique experience and learnt lessons which we should never forget

Pope Francis – Moments of Solitude

by Oisín Mulhern

IN a book released by Pope Francis and British journalist and author, Austen Ivereigh, entitled "Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future, the Holy Father has detailed moments in his life where he has dealt with intense solitude, which he called his 'Covid' moments.

Pope Francis repeatedly talks about how each experience taught him many different things and changed his thoughts as well.

Illness at young age

The first major 'Covid' Pope Francis faced was when he was struck down with a lung infection at the age of 21, while studying in a seminary at Buenos Aires. Some of the lessons this experience taught him included how he saw life, and that cheap consolations should be avoided. He was also helped greatly by two separate nurses, one who saved his life by upping a dosage of medication and the other who eased him when he was in intense pain with the use of painkillers.

When the Pope talks about

avoiding cheap consolations, he refers to many people offering him cheap promises of a good recovery, even those usually made with good intentions. This, and his experience with a nun who taught him as a child, made him realize that many people when they are ill do not want cheap consolations but simply a friendly presence and a few well chosen words. This is why he speaks little to the sick he visits and hopes to be a calming presence to them.

Personally, this moment of solitude resonates deeply with me and provides a valuable lesson for all. There are many times were sick people, and those who are deathly ill, do not want cheap promises that they themselves know might not happen, but instead they may only want a calming and familiar presence around them that is there to reassure and speak a select few words with them at any given time.

Solitude of non-belonging

This next solitude is one many people can relate to and it is the solitude of not belonging. In Pope

Francis's case it arose when he was spending time in Germany in 1986, away from his home of Argentina.

He talks about finding a vantage point in the cemetery of Frankfurt and watching planes pass by, and his wanting to go back to Argentina, and about Argentina winning the World Cup during his time there and him being unable to celebrate with others.

When I look at this story from Pope Francis, I feel a deep connection as there have been many times where I, and many others, have been in the situation where we are in a new place and know nobody there. For many, this can be very daunting.

However, on the other hand, we must know that God is always there with us and we should not be too worried, as we will eventually acclimatize to these new situations.

Self-imposed lockdown

The third and final solitude Pope Francis experienced was what he calls his "Self-imposed Lockdown". This occurred when

he was in a Jesuit residence in Cordoba, Argentina, and spent one year, 10 months and 13 days without ever leaving the residence. He states that this helped in a wide variety of ways; giving him more understanding, empathy and improving his ability to forgive and his patience.

He tells us in the book that three main things stuck out for him at this time; those being his capacity for prayers, temptations he faced and how inspired he was to read about the history of the popes. This all helped him become a better Pontiff, as he was well aware of the storied history of many different popes.

When looking at what the Pope learned from this experience, you cannot help but be amazed at how a situation that could be described as a negative in some aspects, turned into such a large positive overall.

I, personally, think that it is very amazing and it makes me look on Pope Francis as a great role model, as we can see that even though he was tempted in many ways, he still followed God properly and fully.

In closing, I believe that Pope Francis' story can be a great example to us all. It shows us that although negative situations do arise, sometimes, if you let them, they can change you for the better and help you improve yourself.

The role of young people shaping the world post-Covid

by Peter Grant

RECENTLY, I read Cardinal Michael Czerny's speech from his online conference at the Catholic Jesuit Centre of Sophia University, in Tokyo, and which was later reported on by Vatican News, in which he talked about the role of young people shaping the world post-Covid.

Cardinal Czerny, who is the undersecretary of the Migrants and Refugees Section of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, was highlighting the issue of migrants, refugees, and victims of human trafficking, and how they are affected during this global pandemic, and the need for their safety to be prioritised.

During this time, we might not think about migrants or refugees, as we don't hear much on the news or social media, but we should consider that they are still suffering in poverty and travelling for miles to different countries to find work and a home.

Cardinal Czerny commented that even "normal" times were not normal for refugees, who can't go back to their countries and can't migrate to other developed countries either because of restricted travel across the world during the pandemic, so they have to survive for themselves and their families.

He also pointed out the extent of social injustice and the lack of protection for the weakest in our world today.

Cardinal Czerny suggested that some ancient Christian teachings, as mentioned in the Pope's third encyclical, 'Fratelli tutti', on fraternity and social friendship, could hold the answer to the current crisis.

The Cardinal called for the right of equality for everyone and that people should not be forced out of their countries of origin because of hunger or war or climate change.

Sometimes we don't know how lucky we are. We take everything for granted in our world today, that migrants or refugees can't access.

Cardinal Czerny sees young people in the role of creating a culture of fraternity and solidarity in the world we live in. I believe that these are the stepping stones to achieving this goal in the future, helping refugees and migrants live a good life of peace and freedom.

We must help and support migrants and refugees during this time, as they are vulnerable. Just as Cardinal Czerny says, the youth of today must come together across the globe and change the world for the good in the future,

Bishop Donal launches year of celebration for 1500th anniversary of St Columba's birth

LAUNCHING a special Columban Year to mark the 1500th anniversary of St Columba's birth, Bishop Donal celebrated Mass in the Long Tower Church dedicated to the saint before an online congregation, due to Covid-19 restrictions.

The Mass on December 7 marked the traditional birthday of Derry's Patron Saint and the launch of a year-long celebration lasting until December 7, 2021, with a series of events planned to commemorate the life of the Donegal-born Columba.

Thanking those involved in the planning of events for this anniversary year in such difficult circumstances, Bishop Donal expressed the hope that "as we celebrate in our present day this moment of our past rooted in our faith and our city, we will walk ever more confidently into our future filled with the faith of our ancestors."

He went on to remark that not only had the saint's rich legacy shaped the language, culture and history of Ireland, Scotland and the north of England, but continued "to transcend borders and inspire cooperation, not least in the Gaelic traditions of Scotland, Ireland and the Isle of Man".

Considering the relevance of Columba today, particularly in these tough times experienced by so many, the Bishop noted that the saint had lived a tough, disciplined life: "Columba was a man who grappled with the realities of life – the cold winds of winter and the harsh words of others, friends and enemies, faith and doubt".

"He had many challenges to face," he pointed out, adding: "Life was not easy, and disease was widespread. There were lots of little local wars between families and clans. We understand that he got involved in a conflict over a book and that others were killed. "Columba did not live in a cosy

bubble. He lived and worked with imperfect people – and he knew that he, too, was flawed. Can we remember Columba as a real human being who grappled with the human problems of his day and would challenge us to do the same in this generation?"

Bishop Donal went on to talk about how St Columba had taken "responsibility for the past and sought to give his life and talents in the service of building a better future".

"His strength of character brought him across the sea to Iona," he relayed: "There he built up a community of others who dedicated their lives to study and to bringing good news of mercy to the people of Scotland. That will not have been easy. Living with others in community is always a challenge. Living with the truth about yourself can be very demanding.

"Columba grew in his belief that he was loved by God and that forgiveness was always available for our mistakes. That enabled him to go out to the Scots, talking about both forgiveness from God and reconciliation between people, no matter how painful the past was.

"There is a lot of that healing work to be done today in a time when there is much pain and fear. Real saints get their hands dirty".

Highlighting that this Columban Year was not just a Catholic celebration, Bishop Donal explained that the main Christian churches in Derry and Donegal were working together "so that we can remember one who is part of our shared history".

He added: "Our past contains more than wars, death and division. It also contains stories of great saints and wonderful people of learning. This is a civic celebration involving both those who are believers and those for whom faith means comparatively little. Columba is part of the history

of this city and its surrounding areas.

"A community that is honest about the faults and proud of the good things in its past is able to move forward. We have many stories of pain and loss from the past. But we also have memories of great people who created beauty and offered great example. Some of them are remembered. Many are forgotten but their legacy lives on in our faith communities and other institutions".

Celtic spirituality

Expressing the hope that, in this year of Columba, "people of faith can rediscover his call to heroism and to leaving the world a better place because of his life", Bishop Donal said: "This is a chance to reconnect with the Celtic spirituality that left an indelible mark on Europe.

"And I hope that all of us in society can celebrate the rich traditions that we belong to and can find ways to build bridges that will offer hope to our young people. And when we get to this date next year, we will not just look back and be glad of a rest but will look further forward because we are inspired by the past that we have celebrated. And it will be with pride that, from his place in heaven, St Columba will look down".

Speaking afterwards, Long Tower parishioner and local historian, Ivor Doherty expressed sadness that the Mass launching the 1500th anniversary of Columba's birth ended up being celebrated virtually in the midst of a two-week lockdown due to the

Covid-19 pandemic.

"I can only imagine what that morning would have been like had there been no Covid 19 virus," said Ivor.

He added: "There has always been a great loyalty in the Derry area for the memory of Columba and I feel that there would have been a large crowd assembled in the church for the occasion. Many of the school children would have been brought to the event by their teachers.

"The beautiful music and singing were provided by Ann Marie Hickey and Aidan Watkins, and there is nothing more moving to me than when, at the end of these occasions, the congregation joins in the singing of the age old hymn to St Columba, which was composed by Mr Edward Conaghan for the 1897 celebrations".

A digital launch also took place, with leaders of the Catholic, Protestant, Presbyterian and Methodist Churches in the counties of Derry and Donegal featuring in a short film, which can be viewed at Longtower.com.

Commissioned by The Churches Trust to celebrate the 1500th anniversary, Geraldine O'Connor described the film as "a powerful expression of hope for a community that has many reasons to work together and to celebrate its future."

In the film, the church leaders discussed the importance of Columba 1500 years on, why he is still relevant today and why we should celebrate him. The production of this film was made possible with funding.

Link for film: www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvvXBGuXUy8&feature=youtu.be
Link to download: https://mega.nz/file/dMdSBDiZ#4So7w8MsmE8FTw08eH7_HStSgJuHsryEPvdIY5jNAPe

A number of other events were held too, across the North West, including an all-night vigil of prayer in St Canice's Oratory in the Columba Community Celtic Prayer Garden, at the IOSAS Centre, Muff, Co Donegal, as well as prayer services in the Raphoe Diocese.



Charlie Glenn, Diocesan Lourdes Pilgrimage director.

Fr Colm O'Doherty, spiritual director Diocesan Lourdes Pilgrimage.

Julia McIvor, Diocesan Lourdes Pilgrimage secretary.

Diocesan Lourdes Mass of Remembrance...

Giving thanks for life and for hope

OUR Lady of Lourdes Church, in Steelstown, Derry, was the setting for the Diocesan Mass for deceased Lourdes pilgrims celebrated by Fr Colm O'Doherty, pilgrimage spiritual director.

The Mass was celebrated during November, the month dedicated to praying for the Holy Souls.

In his homily, Fr Colm noted that deceased pilgrims and their families were usually prayed for at one of the Masses celebrated during the Diocesan pilgrimage to Lourdes, however, the annual pilgrimage did not take place in 2020, like many other events, because of Covid-19.

He went on to recall one of the

features of the Lourdes pilgrimage – the High Stations, which is a one-mile long path tracing the Stations of the Cross that winds its way up a wooded hill overlooking the town. The Twelfth Station – The Crucifixion – is at the highest point of the path, before it slopes downward to the last Station and the caves.

"There is this great sense of going up the Hill of Calvary and weeping at the tomb, and then you come down the hill to realise that the story is not over, but that life continues," said Fr Colm, adding: "That is what our pilgrimage to Lourdes is about; thanksgiving for life. It is to give us encouragement

and hope, maybe at times when hope has disappeared.

"This is one of those times to have hope for better days ahead and we have to remember to support each other. What a pilgrim must do is be a pilgrim to others."

He continued: "At this Mass of Remembrance and offering up of prayers for deceased Diocesan Lourdes pilgrims, we give thanks for life and for hope".

Describing the annual Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes as "a high point of the year for many hundreds of people", Bishop Donal commented on how it generated great memories of the ceremonies, the young people who work so

hard and the sense of the Derry Diocese as a family on pilgrimage.

He added: "We do not know when largish, organised pilgrimages will be able to return to Lourdes, however, the Mass for deceased pilgrims gave an opportunity to remember those who have travelled with us and who have journeyed on beyond death to Resurrection.

"It was a chance to remember pilgrims, staff and the many sick that have been able to travel because of the great organisational experience that the Derry Diocese has collected over the years.

"May the dead rest in peace while we journey on as a pilgrim people".



High Stations



Eangach

Ár nDúchas

Páis Chríost

Féach coróin na ndealg maol;
Féach mar a chlaon a cheann san gcroich;
Féach fós áladh ina thaobh;
Féach Longínus, féach an tsleá.

Féach an dealg ina dhá chois;
Féach cló na mbos mín;
Féach dúnadh na rosc;
Féach an fhuil ag teacht ón spín.

Féach ríoghadh an dá lámh;
Féach an beol do bhí ina thocht;
Féach mar ceangladh é go cruu;
Féach an uaigh ar cuireadh a chorp.

Féach mar théacht an purpar mín
Lena chréachta den taoibh istigh;
Féach mar tarraingeadh í go teann,
Óna cheann go n-uige a throigh.

Féach mar teannadh an chnáib;
Féach an fhonóid do rinneadh faoi;
Féach mar d'iompair an chroich;
Féach an domlas do íbh an Rí.

Féach an tiomna do rinne an Rí;
Féach mar ghoir Eli san gcroich;
Féach gadaí na láimhe clí;
Mar nár adhair an Rí go maith.

(Séamus Dall Mac Cuarta.)

Ár nDúchas Spioradálta Oilibhéar Ó Croiligh



Donnchadh Ó Floinn

Chuaigh mé go Maigh Nuad mí Mheán Fómhair 1958. Ní rabhamar i bhfad i gColáiste Phádraig mar ábhair sagart nuair a fuair an Pápa bás—an Pápa Pius XII. Ina dhiaidh tháinig an Pápa Eoin XXIII, agus níorbh fhada gur ghlaigh sé easpaig an domhain le chéile sa Róimh le haghaidh Dhara Comhairle na Vatacáine. Mhair an Chomhairle le linn na mblianta nuair a bhíomar ag déanamh ár gcúrsa diagachta, agus bhí fuinneamh agus inspioráid ar leith ag baint le gach gné den Eaglais ag an am. Sular thosaigh mé ar an diagacht, bhí céim sa Léann Ceilteach bainte amach agam, agus bhí an tAthair Donnchadh Ó Floinn mar ollamh le Nua-Ghaeilge againn. Bhí bá faoi leith ag an Athair Donnchadh le luachanna agus inspioráid na luatheaglaise in Éirinn, agus d'aithin mé ar fhís na hEaglaise i ndoiciméid Chomhairle na Vatacáine na comharthaí sóirt céanna a bhí luaite ag an Athair Donnchadh go minic. Chuir sé cuid dá thuairimí ar an luatheaglais in Éirinn ar pár in alt dár teideal: The Integral Irish Tradition, a

ath-fhoilsíodh ag Cumann na Sagart sa bhliain 2006. Luaigh sé trí chomhartha a bhí le sonrú in oidhreacht na hEaglaise in Éirinn:

Bhí ómós ar leith ag ár muintir don Scriptor agus do Thraidisiún na hEaglaise.

Bhí tuiscint dhomhain ag ár muintir ar Chomaoin na Naomh agus ar an dlúth-cheangal idir baill na hEaglaise agus iad ag urnaí.

Bhí tuiscint acu ar an stair leanúnach a bhí taobh thiar de shaol na hEaglaise, gur chuid de shlabhradh gan briseadh iad: bhí ard-mheas acu ar chomharthaí ghrásta Dé sna céadta bliain a chuaigh thart, agus dóchas acu go mbeadh a leithéid arís ann. As sin a tháinig an spiorad iontach misinéireachta a bhí iontu.

Rinne Michael Paul Gallagher S.J. taighde ar bhuaire an chreidimh nó ar a dhíomúine i gCeanada na Fraincise. Mar chuid de chúrsa ar chomhairlí tréadacha, chuir an tAthair Johnny Doherty CSSR taighde Michael Paul Gallagher i láthair mar léarscáil aibíochta sa



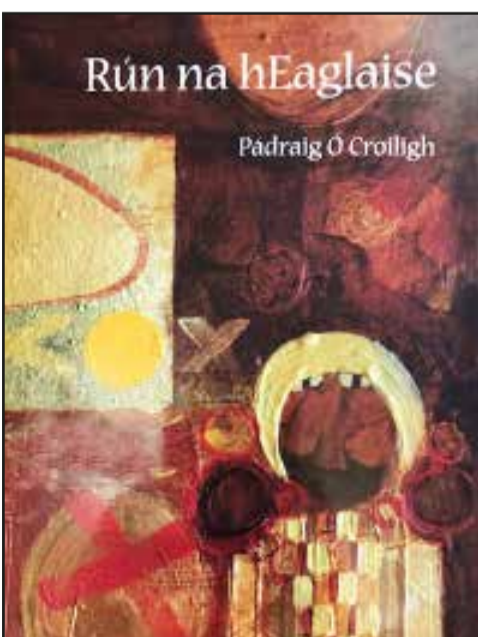
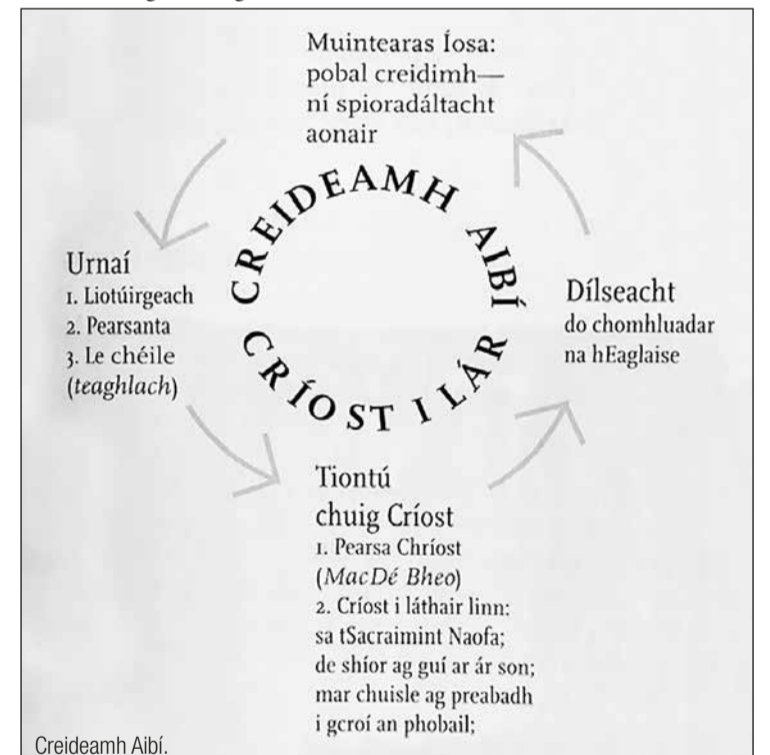
Aspail, Maoin Cholm Cille.



Pobal Dé. Tamhlacht Uí Chroiligh

chreideamh. Bhí Íosa lárnach, é i láthair i gcumhacht, ag slánú, ag leigheas, ag tabhairt maithiúnais dúinn, ár scaoileadh saor chun creidimh agus chun dóchais. Agus thart ar Chríost bhí an pobal dílis cruinnithe, ag urnaí i gcomhlúadar

an liotúirge agus sa teaghlach, agus oscailte, tuisceanach do riachtanais na ndaoine mórtimpeall, sa pharóiste, sa phobal áitiúil, sa deoise, san Eaglais dhomhanda agus i saol ár linne.



Focal agus Gníomh

Is sacraimint simplí go leor é an Cóineartú. Urnaí agus séalú le criosma, focal agus gníomh. Ach is iontach go deo an rud a tharlaíonn faoi ghné an tsearmanais. Bronntar an Spiorad Naomh ar na daoine óga, agus déantar baill iomlána de chlann Dé san Eaglais dóibh. Tá cuid mhór le ceiliúradh ag paróiste ar bith, nó is ócáid í a bhfuil tábhacht ar leith aici don pharóiste uile, agus don Eaglais ar fad. Is iontach an rud é nuair is féidir an tsacraimint seo a cheiliúradh ar an Domhnach agus pobal uile an pharóiste i láthair.

Agus cuimhnigh nach bronntanas aonarach don duine féin amháin é an Cóineartú, ach bronntanas don phobal agus don Eaglais ar fad. Nuair a thagann an Spiorad Naomh anuas ar an duine óg, is ar mhaithe leis an phobal ar fad é, agus tagann dualgas in éineacht leis, go gcaithfidh sé saibhreas an ghrásta agus saibhreas na hEaglaise a roinnt leis na daoine eile. Agus tá dualgas ar phobal na hEaglaise úsáid a bhaint as an ghrásta sin le pobal na hEaglaise a fhorbairt agus a neartú.

Ó aimsir Dara Comhairle na

Vatacáine ar aghaidh tá ceannairí na hEaglaise ag maíomh faoin tábhacht atá le saol na dtuataí san Eaglais. Tá dualgas ar gach Caitliceach óna Bhaisteadh agus óna Chóineartú a bheith ag feidhmiú i measc a phobail féin, agus istigh ina pharóiste féin le hobair Chríost a chur i gcrích. Tá dualgas ag dul leis an Chóineartú, dualgas a bheith ag cuidiú le daoine agus ag tógáil pobail, dualgas fosta taobh istigh de theach an phobail, a bheith sásta páirt a ghlacadh i gceiliúradh na sacraimintí agus i ndeabhóidí na hEaglaise.

Ní féidir leanúint leis an tuairim gur sin obair an tsagairt amháin. Tagann dualgas leis an Bhaisteadh agus leis an Chóineartú, agus is den dualgas sin a bheith ag cuidiú leis an phobal agus leis an Eaglais sa pharóiste. Agus caithfidh an sagart an scil a fhorbairt ann féin le bheith ábalta buanna a aithint i measc an phobail, buanna an Spioraid Naomh, agus dul ionsorthu agus cuireadh a thabhairt dóibh a bheith páirteach i ngnéithe éagsúla de shaol an pharóiste.

(Buíochas le Foilseacháin Ábhair Spioradálta)

This is a time of change for all of us as Church

As chair of the Diocesan Pastoral Council, Anne Friel shares her thoughts on the way forward with the Pastoral Plan – considering where we are at, what we have come through, and how the creativity shown at parish and Diocesan level can be used as a springboard to progress with the Diocesan Pastoral Plan as we, hopefully, emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic.



Anne Friel is Chair of the Derry Diocesan Pastoral Council. She lives in the Waterside in Derry, within the Parishes of Glendermott and Strathfoyle, and has been a member of her Parish Pastoral Council since 2011, as both Chair and Vice-Chair. Anne works as a hospital pharmacist in Derry.

In 2019, Bishop Donal invited 15 people from across the Diocese to form a Diocesan Pastoral Council. He defined our purpose as assisting him in: implementing the Diocesan Pastoral Plan; preparing for a Diocesan Assembly in 2021; and addressing the pressing pastoral challenges facing the diocese. These three things are interlinked.

In his introduction to the Diocesan Pastoral Plan, Bishop Donal asks us to “take responsibility both individually and collectively, for making our parishes places of welcome; where those who feel excluded or far from Christ’s love, can begin to feel the genuine love and warmth of our parish communities. As disciples of Christ, we must prayerfully seek the grace to reach out in love to all, and by doing this, even imperfectly, we can make Jesus known and loved” (“God is Love” page 1)

This statement along with the three pastoral themes of the Diocesan Pastoral Plan, provide a focus for each of us. It is good to make them explicit in a formal plan. However, when I think about formal plans in other walks of life, it would be easy to leave the Diocesan Pastoral Plan on a shelf to gather dust. Or we could use it as a check list of actions against which we are being held to account, for example, ‘organise at least one Parish Mission,’ no later than 2021 – tick/done.

The members of the new Diocesan Pastoral Council talked about how little we knew about the Plan before we came together. However, in all of our conversations as a Council, the themes we were discussing always seem to be reflected in the Plan – a good test of its validity!

Where are we at with the Diocesan Pastoral Plan?

Parishes have progressed with a number of different parts of the Plan. Parish surveys have been undertaken. In my own parish, we have identified one global social cause to address each year – we have built wells in Africa and supported the work of the Good Shepherd Sisters working with young people of different faiths in Beirut.

There is a wealth of knowledge and experience within our parishes of establishing different ministries such as bereavement, baptism and liturgy groups. We need to share these experiences, making the information available to other parishes – not solely on a website but through creating opportunities to talk through the practicalities of how these ministries work. These supportive conversations between parishes will build networks and give each other confidence in taking things forward and sustaining them.

Each parish should follow its own path through the Diocesan Plan, taking into account different, individual parish needs.

Pope Francis speaks of a church where all of the People of God play an active part regardless of their background or age, and where each one of us has a voice. This ‘synodality’ asks us to ‘walk together’ as a pilgrim church. Central to this is a ‘mutual listening,’ where everyone is listening to the Holy Spirit and has something to learn. We each need to work to make Jesus known and loved. The Diocesan Plan asks us to “spread the message of the Gospel into all areas of human life and, in doing so, our actions should be characterised by sensitivity, compassion, mercy and joy.”

To take any plan or change forward, we will need a structure in each parish to help us, as well as resources. In my experience, establishing both of these can be challenging and sustaining them almost impossible, despite everyone’s best endeavours.

Parish Pastoral Councils (or their equivalents) are the structures that have been put in place in two thirds of the parishes of the Derry Diocese. We need to learn quickly about what makes them work well or not and share this learning. It can be hard to be a member of such a pastoral group – easier to discuss tangible things such as budgets, statues and the layout of the bulletin.

Encouraging prayerful conversations that are led by the Holy Spirit, discernment, is something new to us. How do we do this in a 90 minute meeting, with a structure/agenda with 12

or so people all coming from the worries of their everyday lives?

As a Diocesan Pastoral Council, we have discussed how Parish Pastoral Councils (or their equivalents) should:

- Collaborate in planning the way forward for a parish in light of the circumstances of the parish.
- Work in the context of the Gospel, the teaching of the Church, the ‘signs of the times’ and the reflections of the members of the community.

We need to continue to develop parish communities where individuals pray together and continue to support each other in growing in faith and love of God. We need to be mindful of encouraging current communities to continue to develop their sense of local identity and self-worth.

Our Parish Pastoral Councils (PPCs) are learning how to involve others, how to go out and ask people to give of their ideas, gifts and time. This can be a hard and thankless task. It says as much about how we live and work in our parishes, with individuals not being able to input due to other commitments. We must learn how to do this, maybe taking smaller steps, asking people to become involved with single pieces of work that they are passionate about, knowing that they have not signed up for life!

We should not make things hard for ourselves. A number of Parish Pastoral Councils (within Deaneries or across the Diocese) should meet together at least twice a year to provide mutual support and share good practice. They can also discuss what hasn’t worked and identify what support and development they need in moving forward with the Diocesan Plan. This may help to develop self-sustaining networks of people, who can support each other in trying new things.

We can also learn from individuals who have worked as missionaries and who can bring

their knowledge and experience of going out and bringing God’s word to others.

We need to ask challenging questions – What is the vision for the future of the Diocese, within the context of the Pastoral Plan, the need for restructuring? What would be different in 10 years’ time? What would we hear people saying that they are not saying now? What would we be doing that we are not doing now? How can we have a fresh and different conversation with people, meeting them at their point of need, involving them in determining the vision?

What we have come through

Over the last few months, we have experienced loss in many ways: loss of the usual patterns of our daily life, loss of income, loss of loved ones, loss of being able to do what we want when we want to.

It has been an unimaginable time. We haven’t been able to visit friends, hug and be hugged, offer sympathy by shaking hands, attend funerals and wakes, the Mass and sacraments. Some have been traumatised at work – trying to do a good job in very difficult circumstances. In health, looking after a dying patient in a dignified manner when loved ones cannot be there. Some of the things that we have had to do have been counter-intuitive. There is a greater need than ever to reach out and build welcoming and inclusive communities.

These last months have made me think about what parish life means to me. I was baptised in and have lived in my parish nearly all of my life. I have a strong sense of my grandparents and great grandparents having prayed in our parish church and that gives me a huge sense of belonging. Parish is important to me. Being able to attend Mass on YouTube continued to give me an experience of the familiar but I missed seeing people, catching up.

This was a time of opportunity, a time to try new ways of reaching out, using social media. Although we need to recognise that not everyone uses a computer or mobile phone. Some of us were paralysed and needed a little extra help, some were overwhelmed with work and anxiety, some tried new things. We need to learn from all of this.

Lockdown creativity a springboard to progress Diocesan Plan

During COVID, our increased use of social media has helped make known the creative initiatives in parishes and at Diocesan level. Bishop Donal has been very visible and has been a focal point of support for all. His on-line work, such as the Lough Derg Pilgrimages and sharing personal reflections, for example, using the windows in St Eugene’s Cathedral, have been talked about across the Diocese and have been unifying.

The Diocese has helped some parishes to have an on-line presence. The Diocesan Youth programme has been very visible with large numbers of young people linking in to on-line discussions and activities.

On Holy Wells Sunday, Noel Bradley, from the Diocesan Laudato Si Group, shared a meditation on, ‘Water the Source of Life’ – encouraging us to let our imaginations soar with the imagery.

Learning by doing

I have learnt that sometimes I find it easier to read, research and put together plans than to actually do things. This gives me a sense of achievement but it doesn’t make a timely difference. During COVID there was a sense of immediacy to our work, for example in the health service, when we had to do things right away literally to save lives.

It would be good to hold on to that ability of being able to act in

the moment to put our plans and ideas into action, and then to learn and adapt as we move forward.

Members of the Diocesan Pastoral Council plan to meet with Parish Priests and members of Parish Pastoral Councils from January. We will listen to their experience of Church, hear their ideas, what they can share, and determine what support they need to move forward with the Diocesan Plan. We can start to help with this. We need to ask individuals and groups how we can work together to discover God’s way forward for the Diocese of Derry. We will learn and adapt with each meeting.

Reaching out

O’Hanlon (2018), in his book ‘The Quiet Revolution of Pope Francis – A Synodal Catholic Church in Ireland?’, highlights that in its Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, ‘Gaudium et Spes’, the Second Vatican Council “declares that the Church hopes to teach and help, but also to learn from and be helped, by the world”.

During the early months of the pandemic, this was visible in the Church reaching out, for example, to discuss the use of personal protective equipment and infection prevention and control. I believe that we, as Church, need to continue to reach out, to go to where people are at, to have conversations outside our church buildings.

The Diocesan Pastoral Plan asks us to consult and involve parishioners in decision-making. We have used parish surveys to ask perhaps more practical questions, but we need to build on this by talking and listening to our parishioners in small groups, by having an ongoing dialogue.

How do we reach out to those who feel excluded? How do we make all feel welcome and at home in our churches and in our communities? How do we identify those who could do with some



Glendermott & Strathfoyle Parish Water Project.



Glendermott & Strathfoyle Parish Water Project.

more help and support – our time, our energy, our money or our prayer - and how do we give it?

We need to recognise that each one of us is continuously learning and not exclude those who are not up-to-date, for example, with the changes to the Mass.

Communication

These last months have really highlighted the importance of being able to communicate with each other. Social media has supported getting messages and new ideas out to many people and we are learning how to use Zoom! I believe we are not good communicators - we are an introverted Church.

We need to continue to learn to talk with each other, be respectful, listen and reflect. We need to be positive and enthused as we move forward with the Diocesan Pastoral Plan and collaborative

ministry. This starts with knowing and talking about what is happening within the parish openly and regularly when people assemble, and encouraging people to get involved.

Parish groups should be encouraged to speak about their work proactively and to encourage new members. We need to physically display who we are and take time to talk about what is happening in our parish. This can be difficult to do.

Prayer

All that we do must be supported within a community of prayer. I would welcome further support to grow further in my own personal prayer life. During these last months, the Diocese has helped to develop and promote new prayer resources each month as part of the Northern Pastoral Network. This work will grow and

will act as a resource for parish teams.

What can we learn from the history of the pilgrim nature of the Catholic Church in Ireland? In this centenary year of the birth of St Columba (521), what can we draw from Celtic Spirituality in taking forward the Plan, in our faith formation?

I believe we need to help individuals to set up small, local, contemplative prayer groups that continue to build and strengthen our parish communities. COVID may have provided a chance to experience desert and contemplative prayer. It may have encouraged more of us to walk and experience nature. We also can look at how we build on our culture of poetry, art and music to grow as parish communities.

Formation and Training

Formation and training are further practical tools that we need to help us take the Plan forward.

O' Hanlon quotes theologian, Eugene Duffy, who has likened Karl Rahner's assessment of the German Church in 1971 as being similar to the Church in Ireland today. Rahner said that the Church's public life can be "...dominated by a boring and resigned spiritual mediocrity continuing along familiar lines".

I believe that if COVID has any positive outcomes, it is in challenging each of us on how we

live in parish community, how we support each other in the small things, how we pray together and for each other.

Then, how do we raise our game, learn more about our faith and not be afraid to take on new challenges. This can be frightening and difficult to sustain. We can be enthusiastic but not have the energy or time to continue to grow. That is why we need ongoing formation for clergy, religious and laity, and structures to learn and support us on the journey.

"We must renew our efforts for a formation which is more attentive and focused on the vision of the Church and this should be both on the part of priests as well as of religious and lay people to understand even better what this church is, this People of God in the Body of Christ". (Opening of the pastoral convention of the Diocese of Rome on the theme: 'Church Membership and Pastoral Co-responsibility'. Pope Benedict XVI, 26 May 2009.)

Learning and ongoing development is needed in any walk-of-life, especially when taking on a new role or changing our practice. It is good to get help to take things forward, and introducing coaching for leaders in different organisations has been shown to be beneficial, for example, the Connect Cross-border coaching network set up in health in the border counties.

The Diocese could develop a network of coaches and mentors to support us in taking forward different parts of the Plan.

There is a need for initial and ongoing formation for current and new PPC members. At first, this would look at the role of Parish Pastoral Councils within the current Diocesan context. Ongoing formation could include knowledge of scripture and theology, as well as skills such as change management and effective communication.

Training methods should foster collaborative working and discernment, so that PPC members become skilled in working together. This would result in a body of people within each parish who are equipped and informed to take on new roles, and who have been part of a parish dialogue on what change is needed.

This work will take longer than the three years of the current Diocesan Pastoral Plan. It would be good to take stock of where we are at on the journey of the Plan and refocus for the next 3-5 years.

A Diocesan Assembly in 2021 (COVID-permitting) may be seen as a milestone along the way. We must be clear about its purpose and how we can use it as a spring-board into the next part of the journey. With the 2021 focus on the centenary of the birth of St Columba, we may use his work and spirituality as a

guide to designing the path to the Diocesan Assembly and beyond.

Resources

We need resources to help us to move forward, to implement the Diocesan Plan. There is a balance to be achieved between asking people in each parish to share their expertise, skills and time, and employing an individual parish worker. We cannot do this work by relying on goodwill alone.

We could think of other innovative approaches, such as setting up programmes to facilitate experienced individuals to give of their knowledge and time over a six-month period. This would build up capacity across the Diocese in a network of skilled individuals, who could support each other moving forward.

Most of all, we need to progress with the Diocesan Pastoral Plan. We need to be clear that this is a time of change for all of us as Church – an exciting time. Learning to live outside our comfort zones during COVID may have helped us and given us that push to continue to do so as we reach out to others, implementing the Diocesan Pastoral Plan.

Reference: O Hanlon, G (2018), *The Quiet Revolution of Pope Francis. A Synodal Catholic Church in Ireland? Messenger Publications, Dublin.*



One of three Finn Valley Pastoral Area Gatherings held pre-COVID, involving the parishioners of Clonleigh, Urney & Castlefin, and Donaghmore.

Reflecting on the Diocesan Pastoral Plan, 'God is Love', and his hopes for open hearts, honest conversations, ongoing formation and much prayer, Bishop Donal writes...

We face many challenges...but I believe that the Lord will build up the Diocese



Bishop Donal

IT was on January 16, 2016 that the first meeting of our Interim Diocesan Pastoral Council took place. And the first agenda item was "What is a Diocesan Pastoral Council?"

Five years on, that is still a question for many people!

Firstly, it is a diocesan body. Parishes may have their own priorities and there are many varied spiritual apostolates in the diocese. But the Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPC) is made up of 14 laity, clergy and religious who look at the strategic direction of the Diocese as a whole. It takes

time for members to look beyond their local sense of parish identity and develop a sense of diocese.

Secondly, it deals with pastoral issues. It is not a finance body or a personnel organisation. It seeks to look at the pastoral needs and opportunities of the Diocese in a time of rapid change.

And thirdly, it is a Council. It is there to offer 'counsel' to the Bishop in his role. Thus, it is not a diocesan 'parliament' with legislative power. But it is an important place for the bishop to hear and benefit from the wisdom of baptised Catholics in the diocese.

And, of course, the DPC had to work at seeing where its work fitted in with the other diocesan bodies. That meant an ongoing conversation with the Council of Priests to ensure cohesive thinking across the diocese.

Pastoral Plan

The principal matter that the Interim DPC had to engage with was the development of a Diocesan Pastoral Plan. Parishes can do their own planning. But a

diocesan plan would have

- a vision about what we wanted the diocese to be;
- a strategy for how we would start moving from where we are; and
- tactics for what steps we would take.

We spent well over two years wrestling with these issues and produced the plan in June 2018. The three-year life of that plan was intended to prepare parishes for some sort of Diocesan Assembly in the centenary year of St Columba's birth 2021. And the new Diocesan Pastoral Council began its work of implementation in the spring of 2019.

But something else called a 'pandemic' intervened!

However, as we note the fifth anniversary of the DPC project, a few things strike me.

Firstly, even though the pandemic has changed many things, the core vision of the Plan remains valid.

- Building welcoming and inclusive communities. The on-line presence has been vital in

supporting this.

- Growing in faith together. There has been a considerable amount of faith formation during the pandemic and its lockdowns.

- Making Jesus known and loved. For us as a missionary church, this is always our priority.

Secondly, many parishes have discovered just how vital and wise the lay voice has been in facing the new challenges. The result has been impressive in very many cases.

Thirdly, beginning with the 2018 Synod of Bishops on young people, there is now a much more church-wide emphasis on synodality or co-responsibility in the life of the Church. The DPC has been part of that growing role in our local context. The Irish

Bishops, in the context of the 2022 Synod on Synodality, are working on a process of promoting synodality across the national church.

The DPC is not merely a strategy for changing times but a core part of a changed model of being church in the 21st century. Thus, I am immensely grateful for the energy that has gone into the Interim DPC and the current one, chaired by Anne Friel.

We face many challenges, as the Church has done right from the time of Jesus. But with open hearts, honest conversations, ongoing formation and much prayer, I believe that the Lord will build up the Diocese.

There is a huge need for mercy, healing and hope in our current

society. We want to be able to offer that in Jesus' name, when we are open to journeying together in faith, because that is the meaning of the word syn-odos!

Diocesan Pastoral Council

JOINING Bishop Donal and chairperson, Anne Friel, on the Diocesan Pastoral Council are Nathan Adam, Mark Holloway, Rory McGilligan, Jack McLaughlin, Noel Bradley, Geraldine Conwell, Michelle Toner, Marguerite Hamilton, Teresa McMenamin, Sr Johanna Horgan, Fr Francis Bradley PP, Fr Kevin McElhennon, PP VE, and Fionnuala Brogan as secretary.

St Columba Prayer

Almighty God, Who filled the heart of your abbot Columba with the joy of the Spirit and with deep love for those in his care, grant, through his intercession, that your pilgrim people may follow him, strong in faith, sustained by hope, and one in the love that binds us to you.

Through Christ Our Lord.

Amen.



Looking forward to the blessings of 2021 with hopeful hearts

AS we look forward with hopeful hearts to the blessings of this New Year, a number of people from around the Diocese have taken up the invitation to share their thoughts about the extraordinary year just past and 2021, when we will celebrate the 1500th anniversary of St Columba's birth and a year dedicated to 'Family #Amoris Laetitia' by Pope Francis, with a special focus on St Joseph.



New Year Blessing

God bless the corners of your house
and all the lintels blessed.
And bless the hearth and bless the
board and bless each place of rest,
And bless each door that opens wide
to strangers as to kin,
And bless each crystal window pane
that lets the starlight in,
And bless the rooftop overhead and
every sturdy wall.
The peace of God.
With peace and love for all.

@catholicbishops

The Spirit of God alive in you and me could make this a better year by Fr Francesco Gavazzi, CFR

WHAT could make this year better than last year? The end of Covid-19? No more lockdowns? Financial security? Good health? The freedom to travel and visit with friends and family? As good as they all are, if any of these answers are true, then we would have to say that a better year is contingent upon better circumstances... 'if it all comes together', 'if things go well', 'if the situation improves', etc.

But what if, this year, the circumstances get worse? I sure hope and pray they don't! But what if they do? Less financial security, more lockdowns, even food shortages, bad weather and sickness, etc. Could this year still be better than last year? Not easy, maybe even more difficult, but better? I believe so. How? By discovering and living a simple truth: True joy (and a better year) does not depend on favourable circumstances but on the Holy Spirit who makes you and I fully alive – rain, hail or shine.

The Holy Spirit

I certainly want to see the end of Covid-19 and lockdowns and financial hardships and sickness. But I also know that we could see an end to all these things and never know true joy - Holy Spirit joy. And it's this joy that our heart longs for. It's this joy that Jesus came for: "that your joy may be full". (John 16:24)

Without Holy Spirit joy, you could be in an earthly paradise but

be the most miserable of people. With Holy Spirit joy, you could be in an earthly hell, and sing the praises of God like St Maximilian Kolbe did in a starvation bunker at Auschwitz during WWII, or the Carmelite nuns of Compiègne, who went to the guillotine singing God's praises during the French Revolution.

That is why there is something even better than seeing an end to all of these hardships. Better because our joy will no longer be dictated by what happens 'out there'. It will be something we possess within, a flame that can never be extinguished, no matter the circumstances. We will be able to say with St Paul: "I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want". (Phil 4:12)

Jesus did not promise to spare us from hardship, "In the world you have tribulation". But He did tell us to be joyful, "...but be of good cheer", and He gives us the reason why, "...I have overcome the world". (John 16:33)

We overcome the same way He overcame. How? Remember when He read from Isaiah in the synagogue at Nazareth, "The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me" (Luke 4:18)? He said that about Himself. This is what He says about you and I through St Paul: "the Spirit of God dwells in you"

Sharing his New Year thoughts, Bishop Donal highlights the first words of Jesus in Mark's Gospel as being the most important New Year message for us to hear... "The time has come, and the Kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent and believe the Good News." (Mark 1:15)

WE will all have specific memories of 2020. We have come through what we would never have imagined was possible. For many families it has been a time of pain and loss.

But my thoughts this year go, not to January 1, 2021, but to November 29, 2020, the First Sunday of Advent. As people of faith, we are not tied to the 'calendar year' but to the Liturgical Year that starts nearly four weeks before Christmas. That is our journey. That is what nourishes us as we deal with the different seasons of the heart through the celebration of our core beliefs.

I have found these last months to be very rich, especially when seen through the eyes of the Sunday scripture readings. They have helped me to reflect prayerfully on our current realities and on who we are as Church. In the midst of all sorts of shrill politicised calls, I have tried to let the words and actions of Jesus be a measure for what the Church needs to do and say as we move towards the end of this Covid experience.

Firstly, the journey will entail, not just getting people 'back to Mass', but beginning again to engage them in the life-long journey of

(Rom 8:9). The same Spirit that anointed Jesus, now dwells in us.

When we were baptized, the Holy Spirit came to dwell in us. That's why St Paul calls us "temples of God" (1 Cor 3:16). But for most of us, this happens on an unconscious level as babies. If it doesn't become a reality on the conscious level, it can be like a fire that cools to a few glowing embers. But it's meant to be a fire! So St Paul tell us to "fan into flame the gift of God" (2 Tim 1:6). How? Ask. It's that simple. "How much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" (Luke 11:13).

The saints are our greatest guides and the real 'superstars'. Take, for example, St Philip Neri. A normal guy like you and me. He asked and he received...in abundance! And do you know what he is best known for? Joy. In fact, he is the patron saint of laughter, humour and joy! In 1544 he was 29 years old, and this is what a friend of his tells us:

"Every day Philip used to pray to the Holy Spirit with all the ardour at his disposal, to endow him with His holy gifts. No day passed without calling on the Spirit's aid. And this was not without result... yet a layman (only later was he ordained a priest), and not 30 years old... (on the vigil of Pentecost at

discipleship. Attending Sunday Mass is part of that journey – but not all of it. We have to lay the foundations for a new way of being Church, if we are to be fit for purpose in a very changed environment.

Secondly, in that process, we have learned many new ways of communicating with people, active parishioners and searchers. We have been up-skilled in how to reach schools and parishioners. Many priests and parishes have been amazing in their creativity. Some of those were developed to reach out during lockdown. But many of them will have to continue. And we know that being together physically is part of being Church.

Thirdly, I have been struck by how some of our young people have come to the fore. They have become very active through engagement with our Instagram presence, the on-line Alpha courses, the Youth Scholarship programme and the impressive articles and on-line interviews for 'The Net'.

This has been a very difficult time for young people. Life pressures were already causing considerable stress for them. Because of the

like wealth and riches, does the soul no good and brings no happiness. He tried to keep people from putting him on a pedestal by dressing in comical outfits, putting on outlandish disguises, going around with only one side of his face shaved, and doing practical jokes. This joyful saint was filled with the Holy Spirit. But remember that before he was filled, he asked, persistently and perseveringly and with great desire.

Better than better circumstances, greater than the greatest circumstances, the Holy Spirit alive in you and I will change the world from the inside out. It happened in 16th century Rome, beginning with the heart of St Philip Neri. It can happen right here in Derry, beginning with your heart. Without knowing it, you will become a man or woman of renewal. Why? Because you will be moved by the Spirit of Him who "makes all things new" (Rev 21:5).

Will we struggle this year? Undoubtedly. Will we suffer? Most likely. More than last year? It's possible. Remember St Paul – beatings, a stoning, shipwrecks, imprisonments, sleepless nights, hunger and thirst and all that (see 2 Cor 11:24 ff). And yet, this year could still be better than last year? Yes. How? The Spirit of God alive in you and me. Like Paul and

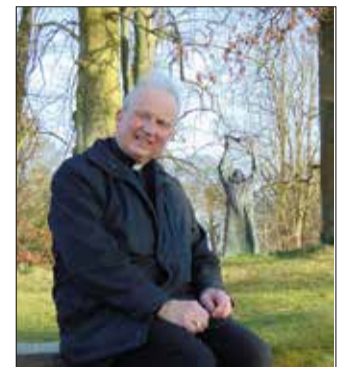
pandemic, their studies have been interrupted, their job prospects put in question, and their social interaction curtailed. It is young people who can best engage with their peers.

Fourthly, we all know that many people will be facing unemployment and serious financial pressures. The parish communities will have to be very aware of those who are suffering in their midst – and find ways of reaching out to them. Our concern for 'the least of my brothers and sisters' will be a critical measure of how much we are disciples of Jesus.

Fifthly, parishes have discovered that, where active, generous lay involvement is promoted, great things can be done. I hope that one fruit of the pandemic will be growing 'co-responsibility' of clergy and laity as we venture into the new circumstances.

There is great talent and much goodwill in our active parishes. There will be much planning to be done by our Parish Pastoral Councils. For Jesus' disciples, going back is never the way forward!

Finally, it has become clear that parish finances may well be



Bishop Donal.

under pressure. This creates the context for parishes to reconsider what their pastoral priorities are. Buildings are important only insofar as they support the mission of 'making Jesus known and loved'.

This Liturgical year we will journey with the Gospel of St Mark. The first words of Jesus in that short Gospel are, 'The time has come, and the Kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent and believe the Good News.' (Mark 1:15)

That is the most important New Year message for us to hear. My wish for 2021 is that we can all hear those words loud and clear – and be blessed as we travel with Jesus.

Philip and Patrick and Columba and Brigid and Clare and Francis.

Here are some prayers. They're simple and to the point.

"Come Holy Spirit, in a new and wonderful way", or "Come Holy Spirit, come through Mary", or simply "Come Holy Spirit", or "Father, in Jesus' name, fill me with Your Spirit", or "Spirit of Jesus give me a heart to love".

Id also recommend the ancient hymn, "Veni, Creator Spiritus" ("Come, Creator Spirit").

How often should we pray this way? Until He comes! Remember the witness of St Philip Neri: "I used to pray to the Holy Spirit, AS FERVENTLY AS I COULD, to come to my aid, and to fill my soul with His gifts. One day, when I was praying like this, he answered my prayers."

One day. And Rome was never the same. One day. And Derry will never be the same.



Fr Francesco Gavazzi, Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, Galliagh

“What’s another year?” by Gráinne Doherty



Gráinne Doherty, Moville

AT the beginning of every year when I was younger, I would - with great enthusiasm and commitment! - draw up a list of resolutions that I planned to follow fastidiously during the months ahead. After several years of doing so, however, I began to notice a similar pattern unfold: the resolutions which I thought about with such diligence were inevitably broken within a few days, and abandoned in their entirety within a few months, only to be resurrected again at the beginning of the following year with equal fervour and good intention! Obviously, I had never listened to the saying: “the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, but expecting different results!”

As I write this, we are already a few days into 2021. While now thankfully free from trying unsuccessfully to following resolutions that I believed would of course result in a ‘me’ who was magically super organised and wonderfully productive - as well as being instantaneously slimmer and healthier! - I still take time, like most people, to reflect on how the year ahead might unfold for me, and for the world generally. While such reflection does not have to be limited to this time of year, there are certain times that lend themselves to such

introspection and re-evaluating of who we are and who we want to be. Leaving one year behind and facing into a new one opening up is one of those natural times.

The ancient Greeks had two words for time which are used in different ways throughout the scriptures: ‘Chronos’, which refers to chronological, sequential time (clock-time), and ‘Kairos’, which refers to times in the life of an individual, of a community, or of the whole world, which call for transformation and new direction.

We have all had ‘Kairos’ times in our lives or, if not, we will have at some stage; the death of a loved one, serious illness, the failure of an important relationship or business, some big disappointment or hurt, the loss of a job. ‘Kairos’ times are times when I am forced to re-examine what is important to me, what my core values are, how I want to live my life, rather than drifting along day to day and doing things because ‘that’s the way I’ve always done them!’

The Covid pandemic that continues to rage through the entire world - and which has deeply affected each one of us in a variety of ways over the past year - has thrust us into a ‘Kairos’ time.

Pope Francis says that “this is a moment to dream big, to re-think our priorities - what we value, what we want, what we seek - and to commit to act in our daily life on what we have dreamed of.”

While we talk of and long for a return to ‘normal’, we have to ask ourselves if this is actually possible, and re-think what ‘normal’ might mean after our experiences over the past year. We fool ourselves if we believe that ‘going back to the way things were’ is a realistic option. With this pandemic, everyone has had some experience that has changed them; the world itself has been changed.

Many people who commit their lives to working for social justice and for climate change remind us that similar catastrophes are happening all the time, but we are

not paying any attention. Pope Francis says that we haven’t paid attention because we think these other catastrophes don’t affect us. He suggests that the reason that the coronavirus crisis may seem frightening and challenging, and such a unique experience, is because it affects all of us, not just people on the margins of society - the people whom we usually fail to see.

While the virus itself may be invisible, its effects are very visible and, as a result, we have taken it seriously. Pope Francis points out that there are a thousand other crises that are just as dire, but because their effects are not immediately felt by us, particularly in the wealthier parts of the world, we can act as if they don’t exist. Most of the time, we can turn a blind eye to the hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing poverty, hunger, and lack of opportunity in life, or those who are caught up in the many wars in different parts of the world, or the aggressive destruction of our planet through climate change. Like the Covid-19 crisis, these crises affect the lives of each one of us and the very life of our planet, but we fail to be moved to change our ways as they often seem at a distance from us.

We have discovered that we can act with incredible urgency and radically transform how we live when we feel threatened but, in the year ahead, will we be energised to respond to what Pope Francis calls “the hidden pandemics” of the world - the pandemics of hunger and violence and climate change? He says that unless we keep focussing on these other pandemics and unless we keep remembering the most vulnerable, the silenced and invisible in our society, both now and as we look beyond Covid-19, we may be struck by a worse virus - the virus of what he calls “selfish indifference”, and which, he says is “spread by the thought that life is better if it is better for me, and

that everything will be fine if it is fine for me.”

Shaken

Every part of our very being has been shaken by the Covid-19 pandemic. We struggle emotionally, physically, economically, spiritually. On a daily basis, we dig deeply and courageously into our inner resources to be a source of hope for both ourselves and for others. We see the exhaustion of health workers, the loneliness of those cut off from their families and neighbours, the hidden pain and grief of those denied the possibility of being with their loved ones through illness, death, and bereavement, the anxiety and stress of parents concerned about their children, their jobs, their homes. We are moved by the emotional images of family members trying to communicate with loved ones through the windows and doors of nursing homes; we worry about the unknown and silenced suffering of those behind closed doors in abusive relationships; and think of those who are already invisible in our society as their already meagre supports of care and assistance disappear. The list is, sadly, endless.

Despite all of this pain and sadness, I struggle with the narrative that surrounded much of our New Year celebrations - the wish to fully forget the past year and firmly close the door on it, so that we can return to the way things were. The Christian message is a radical one and contradicts the myth that we can have life without pain or struggle. It instead holds together the two ongoing realities of life - the powerlessness and pain of the cross, and the uncontained joy and new life of the resurrection. The message of Christmas is one that tells us that the Incarnation, the divine, resides in places we least expect, and reminds us that enduring strength and leadership resides in the vulnerability of a baby in a manger!

When we wish to forget 2020 in its entirety, we risk going back to living out another pandemic - a pandemic when the earth itself and all of its creation struggles to breathe; a pandemic wherein the most vulnerable and invisible continue to be denied the fullness of life promised by the gospel.

When we wish to forget 2020, we forget the countless acts of kindness and love lived out in our community - the ‘shop and drop’ runs for the housebound, the creative fund-raising challenges, socially-distanced community initiatives organised by volunteers, the attempts to stay in contact through phone-calls, postal deliveries, and the inevitable Zoom calls that became the new norm for many.

When we wish to forget 2020, we also forget the overwhelming generosity and commitment of those working in a myriad of essential services who have kept not only the health service functioning, but also the whole of society.

Rather than forget 2020, we must take what we have learned from the year and let it guide us as we begin to discern what kind of family, society, and Church we wish to have post-Covid. As human beings, we all share the same sorrows, the same hopes, the same potential. The Covid-19 pandemic has helped us remember how interdependent we are - what happens to one person can soon affect many others, even on the far side of our planet.

The pandemic has reminded us that despite our valuing our independence, we are fundamentally relational beings, wanting and needing the company of others. It has shown that people are predisposed in the main, to act out of love and compassion, and look after one another. It has demonstrated to us that we can live a lot more simply than we have been doing prior to 2020, thus reminding us that we must ‘live simply so that others may simply

live.’

The pandemic has revealed anew the power of prayer and showed us that, in the same way as Jesus appeared to the disciples who had locked themselves into the upper room in that first Easter because of their fears and an uncertain future, God has also been journeying with us and has been present with us in our homes when restrictions forced us to self-isolate and cocoon.

So, in light of my own ‘Kairos’ moment at the beginning of this new year, my resolutions for 2021, formed in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, are very simple. The annual aspirations to exercise more, to lose weight, and to become more organized, are of course still faithfully present, but they are secondary to my resolve to live out the following:

- To not take the company of family and friends for granted but to appreciate each person’s unique gift in my life.

- To more consciously and deliberately take time each day to notice and give thanks for the many simple instances of the goodness and generosity that happen in my life on a daily basis.

- To pay attention to the beauty of the world around me. Even in these early days of January, the increasing volume of birdsong and the opening up of spring flowers is amazing and uplifting! In his wonderful encyclical on ecology, ‘Laudato Si’, Pope Francis tells us that each part of creation is a unique ‘caress of God’ - a comforting substitute at a time when we are unable to hug others!

And on that note, as I enter 2021, I wait in hope and belief, for that time when we can hug our loved ones again without having to think twice. And I root myself in God’s word to each one of us and to the world:

“For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.” (Jer. 29:11)

Hanging on to HOPE in 2021 by Fr Peter McCawille SMA

ON several occasions over the past year, during my days in self-imposed exile in Abuja, Nigeria, while Covid-19 was just beginning to display its ugly fangs, I was transported back 60 years in time to my second week at the Christian Brothers’ School in Omagh. We were still trying to find our faltering feet in a new world, when we were ushered one afternoon into a senior classroom to witness an annual debate. As youngsters we were the last to be brought into the arena when the scene was already set. Written on the blackboard in big letters were the words ‘The world is unfortunate in its heroes’ and underneath were the names of the four speakers who were preparing to lock verbal horns.

Blessed today with many caring heroes

Today, I recall those fairly insignificant moments from my early days in secondary school to simply illustrate how acutely conscious I have become of how truly fortunate we are, in having in our midst such a marvellous group of heroes who have encouraged us to renew our confidence in the sheer goodness of the many young men and women, who have embraced different aspects of the caring professions as a vocation.

It is the one vocation that resonates deeply with me personally, mainly because my mother often told me that she would dearly have loved to be a nurse and I know she would have

been a wonderful nurse. In many parts of Africa, I have for long admired the dedication of local nurses, working as they often do in abjectly inadequate surroundings!

When we first heard of the coronavirus in Lagos, our spirits were deflated until we heard more comforting reports locally from those in the caring professions, who gave us a much-needed boost at a time when all we could hear from near and far were words of gloom and doom. For too long, the work of those in the caring professions everywhere has been hidden; consequently often taken for granted and not fully recognised in terms of adequate remuneration. Only the doctors and their colleagues, the patients

and their close family members knew long before Covid-19 sprung into our midst like a thief in the night, or even during the day, how genuinely sensitive, caring, courteous and committed they were, in patiently responding in the face of often overwhelming odds.

Celebrating St Joseph - a respectful and sensitive man

I am convinced that it is uncannily appropriate at such a crucial time in our history that, throughout the world for the coming year, we are being called to mark the 150th anniversary of St Joseph being declared patron of the Universal Church.

By way of marking the

Anniversary, Pope Francis proclaimed a year-long celebration, beginning on December 8, 2020, dedicated to the foster father of Jesus. In an Apostolic Letter titled, ‘Patris Corde’ (translated as ‘With a father’s heart’), Pope Francis said Christians can discover in St Joseph, someone who usually goes unnoticed as, “an intercessor, a support and a guide in times of trouble.” No better man than this genial, self-effacing caring father, to remind us that “those who appear hidden or in the shadows can still play an incomparable role in the history of salvation. A word of recognition and of gratitude is due to them all”.

Pope Francis surely had in mind how fortunate we are in having,



Fr Peter McCawille SMA.

in these perilous times, such huge numbers of heroes who have joined the caring professions to put to good use their caring natures in furthering the healing

continued from page 21

ministry, particularly at a time when Covid-19 was causing such devastation throughout the world.

Pope Francis went on to say that St Joseph's unconditional acceptance of Mary and his decision to protect "her good name, her dignity and her life", also serves as an encouragement to the rest of us, including those who are serving as missionaries in Africa and other parts of the world, to step back from being judgmental and dismissive when we are asked to deal with difficult issues being experienced in our own, or in other families!

In this 150th anniversary year, we thank God for all the caring people in our world who identify more wholeheartedly with "the figure of a respectful and sensitive man" like St Joseph, who reminds us that being 'respectful and sensitive' is a sign of great strength and conviction, not a sign of weakness.

Unsung public and private carers

I am even more conscious today of the selfless commitment of family members, leaving Covid-19 aside for a moment, in thousands of homes throughout the world who are so consumed by the almost excruciating, and often without any opportunity for respite care, demands on their time and energy as they lovingly look after sick parents, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters; conscious at times that they are often left on

their own to shoulder the almost intolerable burden by themselves.

From time to time, I listen to the radio to their plaintive pleas as, often at their tether's end, it is evident in their voices that they have been forced to pick up a phone to find anyone who might listen to their story (we thank God for Joe Duffy). We also know that those who can summon up the courage to pick up the phone are only a fraction of the many thousands whose overwhelmed voices remain unheard.

The need to be more aware of our neighbours

As 2021 begins to unfold, Covid-19 must also have taught us how important it is to focus our attention more on the members of our local communities. We are told that all politics is local and the same must be even more applicable to the living out in our estates and townlands of our Christian obligations towards the hungry, the sick, the lonely, the imprisoned, the naked.

Isn't it reassuring to know, in the immediate aftermath of Covid-19, that families, friends and neighbours, with a little encouragement, have decided to come out of their shells and make themselves available to assist each other at any time of the day or night. Further welcome evidence that when faced by a challenge, or a crisis, people's better nature becomes evident!

Here, in Nigeria, I am always

greatly edified when I witness how hope-filled and comfortable the people always are when they have to deal with a crisis. A few years ago they coped with a much more contagious epidemic called 'Ebola'. In the face of the breaking news about Covid-19, they never resorted to self-pity or despair at the appearance of yet another 'thorn in their flesh'. They rallied round immediately, drawing from resources built up since the day they were born for when the family experienced different forms of adversity and, more particularly, as they experienced as parents and adults the crippling demands of inadequate health facilities, a lack of water and electricity, an inability to adequately clothe their children or meet up with school fees where there were schools, a lack of employment and a myriad of other emergencies that we can never imagine.

The resilience of the people in Nigeria

Only someone in the neighbourhood who has completed the full honours course in insularity could fail to be moved by the need to do something to help such people. More particularly, when the double whammy appeared with the introduction of the lockdown here, in Nigeria, in mid-March, the parishioners rallied round without me saying a word to them. I was blessed in being able to offer them some help which came my way

through regular funds donated by a dedicated group of volunteers, and their supporters, in the Third World Shop, in Maghera, Co Derry, plus contributions from individual donors, North and South.

I, long ago, learnt that the people here are at their most resilient when they listen to the Good Friday story, which is one of fear, isolation, betrayal, abandonment and a lonely death; a reality which they have been coping with for many years. Good Friday teaches us that even in our darkest moments, as Covid-19 attempts, with what is now referred to as the Variant or the Second Wave, to wreak even more havoc, there remains a well-established hope that offers us the promise of a new and better way of living, when we begin to appreciate that our future lies in working more closely at the local community level, with our family, our friends and our neighbours.

In conclusion, I feel guilty now, but I freely admit that I began 2020 with two objectives in mind: my first home leave in Dregish in three years and a plan to take my first Sabbatical, a year of study possibly even in Dregish and the surrounding area, in 44 years.

Today, I thank Covid-19 but only for helping me to realise that there are a lot more important things in life than my annual leave and my Sabbatical.

Let's continue newfound respect for those who, through doing ordinary things, become extraordinary people

by Roisin Rice



Roisin Rice

delivery drivers, the mechanics, and the electricians, etc, not the highly paid celebrities and Instagram influencers, who saved the day.

There was no one more 'ordinary', and yet 'extraordinary', than both of my grannies. My father died suddenly when I was little and I remember going to stay with my granny, his mum, who lived in another town in the summer after his death. She had a great devotion to St Joseph and when I was leaving to return home one of her parting gifts to me was the novena prayer to St Joseph, which I have said frequently throughout my life. She loved St Joseph, his gentle tenderness, his caring and compassionate love for the child Jesus, and that is one of the reasons why she named her son, my father, Patrick Joseph.

2020 was the year that ordinary people did extraordinary things and I believe that this is one of the reasons why Pope Francis announced in his letter, 'Patris Cordé' ('With a Father's Heart') that 2021 is dedicated to Saint Joseph.

Pope Francis states: "We clearly see the importance of ordinary people, who though far from the limelight, exercise patience and offer hope every day."

The year 2021 is dedicated to the humble father, the person who worked tirelessly to support the people in his care, the guardian of Jesus and Mary. A key figure in the life of Jesus, who has none of his words recorded in the Scriptures.

One of the cornerstones of Christianity is living a life in service of others. At times, we can forget that to serve is all in the little acts, the quiet and humble actions that come from love and kindness, that we can have most impact.

I am reminded of the famous quote of Saint Mother Theresa of Calcutta: "In this life we cannot do great things. We can only do small things with great love."

In 2020 there were many little acts of great love carried out by thousands of people around the globe amid so much death, pain, and suffering. It could have been easy to turn inwards, into our "bubbles", yet so many did not. Instead, they reached out to the vulnerable in society in so many ways. Pope Francis acknowledged those "who, without making any noise, have tried to make the burden of the trial more bearable".

2020 was full of ordinary people who carried out little acts, silently with great love, just like St Joseph.

As we look forward to brighter times in 2021, we should continue this newfound appreciation and respect for those who do not seek the spotlight but who, through doing ordinary things, become extraordinary people.

Novena Prayer

"O Saint Joseph, whose protection is so great, so strong, so prompt before the throne of God, I place in you all my interests and desires.

"O Saint Joseph, do assist me by your powerful intercession, and obtain for me from your Divine Son all spiritual blessings, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, so that, having engaged here below your heavenly power, I may offer my thanksgiving and homage to the most Loving of Fathers.

"O Saint Joseph, I never weary contemplating you and Jesus asleep in your arms; I dare not approach while He reposes near your heart. Press Him in my name and kiss His fine head for me and ask Him to return the Kiss when I draw my dying breath.

"Saint Joseph, patron of departed souls - pray for me. (Mention your intention) Amen."

This New Year I find myself returning to childhood values, where family matters most!

by Jean Doherty



Jean Doherty

I don't remember what toys I got for Christmas when I was two, four, six or eight, but I do remember the excitement in our home on Christmas Eve.

I remember my mother busy in the kitchen and the smell of home-made soup and jelly and mince pies.

I remember the fun putting up the Christmas tree and ceiling decorations, and our father swearing every time the fairy lights went out just when the tree was finished.

I remember the joy of shopping for new clothes and shoes.

I remember going to the chapel to see the Crib and altar decorated with holly and candles.

I remember standing outside Austin's windows just looking at the beautiful decorations and Christmas display.

I remember visiting family and friends with my aunt to deliver Christmas cake and puddings, and coming home with my pocket

jingling.

I remember going to six o'clock Mass on Christmas morning and my mother crying for lost children and loved ones when the choir sang 'Silent Night' and 'O Holy Night'.

I remember going for a cooked breakfast to my grannies after Mass and feeling really happy.

I remember visiting Santa's Grotto in Austin's and standing for ages in the queue, as the excitement of meeting him mounted.

I remember going to the cemetery and placing holly wreaths on our loved ones' graves.

I remember the lovely dinner on Christmas Day and opening the tins of biscuits and selection boxes after, whilst playing box games on the floor.

I remember watching 'It's A Wonderful Life' in black and white and everyone crying.

I remember playing Monopoly and my daddy cheating.

What I don't remember is what toys I got on Christmas morning. Gifts don't matter. Memories do.

Now that I am no longer a child, my wishes and priorities have changed, but this New Year, in particular, I find myself returning to those values of my childhood.

Family is what matters most in life, along with good health. And, in 2021, I hope and pray that my family and circle of friends will enjoy good health and remain safe from Covid, and continue to enjoy the magnificent gift of life, which is God-given, to the full.

In this Year of St Joseph, let us open our hearts more to God's plan for us

by Marguerite Hamilton



Marguerite Hamilton, Columba Community

I have to admit that of all the characters in my crib scene, St Joseph gets the least attention. The focus is rightly on the infant born to redeem the world. I reflect

with awe on the choice God made - the humble stable, signalling from the beginning His concern and love for the poor. I look at Mary and wonder as she gazed at her child was she thinking of the angel's message, "Rejoice so highly favoured...you will bear a son ... he will rule over the House of Jacob forever?"

I have always loved the contrasts of this momentous, life changing event happening at a specific point in human history and yet the ordinary things of life are going on around it; shepherds are watching sheep and, no doubt, the townspeople were going about their business.

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As a child, I was captivated by the visit of the wise men, following the star, travelling all that way to meet Jesus. Of course, I had no idea what all that way meant. The symbolism in every action of every person in the scene is a lifetime's reflection as we journey to know God, but what of Saint Joseph?

This year, I was given a beautiful statue of 'Sleeping St Joseph', with a card that contains a very personal sharing by Pope Francis. He writes that when he encounters a problem or difficulty, he writes a little note and puts it underneath his statue of St Joseph so that he can dream about it. He says, "in other words I tell him: pray for this problem." The Pope has declared a 'Year of Saint Joseph', leading us to December 8, 2021.

What do we know of Joseph from the scriptures? He is a silent man, not one word of his is recorded in the Gospels. Matthew's Gospel presents him as a listener, like Mary, who was open to the promptings of God. When the angel came to him in a dream and said, "Do not be afraid, take Mary home as your wife," he acted in obedience and trust and did what he had been asked to do. He believed the message of the angel, "He is the one who is to save Israel from their sins."

Again, in Matthew, he is the obedient listener, following the direction of the angel and taking his family to safety in Egypt, and staying there until he was told to bring them back to their own land. He was surely a man of prayer and

a man of faith in God's will and plan for his life. His life of prayer and silent listening prompted him to act. He was decisive and courageous when he knew what God was asking him to do.

Joseph was a righteous man who followed the law, taking Jesus to be presented to the Lord in the temple, and giving the offering of the poor, two turtle doves.

While little is written of the hidden years in Nazareth, we know Joseph worked as a carpenter to provide for his family, living an ordinary life which, because of his love, faith and obedience, God was able to make it an extraordinary, powerful life. The name of Joseph is known down through the generations. He generously gave love and security to Jesus and Mary, and showed an acceptance of his role in life that is born out of wisdom and deep trust in the One who is ever faithful.

God had a plan for this simple carpenter. He has a plan for our lives too. Let us live mindful of who we are as children of the Father, children of light.

Perhaps in this year dedicated to Saint Joseph, we will pray through the intercession of this silent listener, this man of courageous action that we, living our ordinary lives, will increasingly open our hearts to God's plan for us. Let us be seekers of His will, obedient to His promptings, dreaming like Joseph and serving others in whatever way God will lead us to do. Every blessing for the year ahead.

Let's pray that we will be inspired to 'run the race' set before us and become a light for others to follow

by Rhonda McColgan



Rhonda McColgan, Iskaheen, Co Donegal.

IN this New Year of 2021, we can almost hear the echo of a united prayer throughout the world pleading with God to make this year a better one. With all the "Happy New Year" wishes received, they are almost always followed by, "And let's hope this year will be a better one!"

Well, it is true that we never know what lies ahead but for people of faith there is always that light of hope. Of course, it is understandable how some people may find it difficult to share in this enthusiasm, especially during

this past year of pandemic, with sadness due to bereavement, social isolation, restricted movements, job losses, business closures and financial burdens. The list just goes on.

People often ask the question, "Where is God in all of this?" As I ponder this question, I am reminded of a scripture in the book of Amos, "Though I withheld rain from you when the harvest was still three months away, though I sent rain upon one town and withheld it from another, though people staggered from town to town and found no water to quench their thirst, yet you never returned to me, says Yahweh" (Amos 4:7-8).

Amos, a prophet of social justice, points out that these trials give us a chance to reflect. This does not mean that we have an unkind or unloving God, but quite the opposite in fact. Jesus tells us in John's Gospel that He wants us all home on the last day, "This is the will of the Father that whoever sees the Son and believes in Him shall

May this be a year of blessing and renewal through the intercession of St Joseph and St Columba

by Patricia Casey



Patricia Casey, Kilrea.

I look forward to this New Year with a hopeful heart. 2020 was a very challenging year with the global pandemic but it was also a year with many beautiful blessings.

One of those blessings was my wee niece, Lucia Pearl, who was born on the Feast Day of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

I recently saw a lovely and practical suggestion made by Pope Francis, when he said, "Here are three short phrases, 'please,' 'thank you,' 'I am sorry'...if in a family, these three words are used, the family is fine." I thought that would be a good New Year resolution, so I'll use that throughout 2021.

The New Year has already begun with hope, as Our Holy Father, Pope Francis has designated it as a special year for The Family, honouring St Joseph in particular, while our Bishop has recently launched a Columban year of celebration to mark the 1,500th anniversary of the birth of Derry's

Patron Saint.

Pope Francis will open the 'Amoris Laetitia' Family Year on March 19, 2021, which is also the Feast Day of St Joseph, and I'm looking forward to what good God is going bring in this special year.

Families need every grace and blessing from heaven for these very difficult and challenging times in which we live. Family life is a vocation and there are hundreds, if not thousands, of opportunities to be sanctified and made holy.

There is a lot of virtue to practice in family life. Family is the foundation of society and, with the many graces that God will give in 2021, we could see a renewal in the Church and the world around us.

I loved this short paragraph from the recent Apostolic Letter, 'Patris

Corde', by Pope Francis, "Each of us can discover in Joseph - the man who goes unnoticed, daily, discreet and hidden presence - an intercessor, a support guide in times of trouble."

My advice if you are struggling this year is to go to St Joseph; he is our spiritual father and, with his tender loving care, all will be well.

There is also a book written by American priest, Fr Donald Calloway, called 'Consecration to St Joseph: The Wonders of Our Spiritual Father'. I got it for my dad as a Christmas present and he was excited to begin it.

May 2021 be a year of blessing and renewal through the intercession of St Joseph and St Columba.

In this Year of St Joseph, perhaps 2021 is a year for more action and less words!

by Stephen Ward



Stephen Ward

AS 2021 gets underway, I look forward with anticipation and hope as to what will become of this New Year, not to mention the ways and means in which the Lord continues to remain with us; He who remains faithful to us as we continue to embark upon our pilgrim journey of faith towards our heavenly homeland.

What is abundantly clear is that 2020 was an unprecedented year not just for our island, but for the whole world in coming to terms with the coronavirus pandemic and the impact it has had on us as faithful Christians, our families and our communities.

live eternal life; And I will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:40).

So, in this time of darkness, that light of hope is the Good News of our Saviour calling us to return to Him. Aristotle said that it is during the darkness that we must focus to see the light. St Augustine, a great theologian, said that he began to understand that happiness is found in search of truth and not in the desires of the flesh.

It is true that this turning towards the Lord and making a choice to follow Him places us on the right path to salvation. We know that this is the narrow path and not always the easy option. However,

Particularly evident is the impact it has had on how we continue to practice the faith, and frequent the Sacraments. Also, on how we are able to interact with one another in ways we wouldn't normally be accustomed to, with technology such as Zoom!

Personally, I found what may be considered to be two extremes in how society has come to terms with the circumstances in which we find ourselves as the virus continues to be in our midst.

One position is that where people have shut themselves away from the world and from society. This is completely understandable for people who are elderly and/or who have issues with their health which leaves them vulnerable to infection. Thus, it is a prudential judgement that one has to make in order to attempt to live their lives. It is those who are vulnerable in our society whom we are called to pay attention to in acts of charity and almsgiving at this time.

Another position that appears to be taken by some, and it is certainly apparent in the realm of social media, is that where there

appears to be a complete denial of the situation in which we find ourselves.

Observing both perspectives, I see perhaps another virus...that of fear. It is important that we have hope and trust in the Lord, who is faithful to His promises and His steadfast love for us. This will give us a middle way through both perspectives that is grounded in faith and reason.

It is no coincidence that, on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, Pope Francis promulgated his apostolic letter 'Patris Corde' (With a Father's heart), which focuses on St Joseph as a model of fatherhood and how we might live as Christians in a time of pandemic, uncertainty, fear and doubt.

Some aspects of this reflection from Pope Francis I have found to be beneficial, and that is the history of salvation is worked out "in hope against hope" (Romans 4:18) through our weaknesses. The Pope invites us to look upon our weaknesses with tender mercy.

In the face of the current pandemic, we might seem to

be vulnerable. However, it is recognizing our vulnerability that causes us to look towards the Lord and His mercy, so that we may cling to Him as He remains with us through difficult times. It is this mercy that we should seek to look at society with, and on ourselves.

Another relevant point the Pope makes, which applies to us today, is that St Joseph, in the face of adversity, set aside his own ideas and accepted the course of events, embracing them. In embracing society and the circumstances we find ourselves in at this time, we will begin to recognize the presence of the Lord in our midst, in the bits and pieces of our everyday lives.

It is in this that the Lord gives us the strength and graces we need to continue in faith and trust.

In terms of a plan of action for this year, I am reminded of what is evident from Sacred Scripture, in relation to St Joseph - that there are no particular words attributed him. However, what is demonstrated are his actions.

Perhaps 2021 is a year for more action and less words!

This is good news for us. In fact, it is great news, this message of a loving Father that transforms His children through love. It reminds me of a flower that blooms as it turns towards the morning sun and, therefore, revealing its true beauty.

So, let us pray that this year, through the intercession of St Joseph and St Columba, that we too may be inspired to "run the race" set before us in Christ and that we, in turn, may become that light for others to follow.

May the good Lord protect us, keep us safe on our journey and send comfort to all those in need.

anniversary of the birth of Derry's own patron, St Columba.

These great saints are a wonderful reminder of how a life lived in union with God transforms us into our full potential of becoming saints. They are true beacons of hope lighting the path and pointing the way forward towards a God that calls us His children - "But to all who received Him, He empowers to become children of God" (John 1:12)

This loving union with God allows Him to do that work in us - "My grace is enough for you; my great strength is revealed in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9).

St Joseph was a decent man

by Noel Bradley



Noel Bradley, Buncrana, with his family.

DURING the Christmas season we, especially Christians, would have heard as usual a lot of things about Mary, how she bravely consented, after questioning, to become the mother of Christ, how she conceived outside marriage and gave birth in a stable.

We hear that “her man Joseph, because he was a just man, and reluctant to make an example of her, wanted to let her go secretly” (Matt 1:20). We hear that he gets guidance in dreams four times; to take Mary as his wife, to flee into Egypt with his family because King Herod wanted to kill him, later to come back to Israel and, later again, not to go to Judaea but to go to Galilee. Then he goes off stage and we hear nothing more about him.

So, all we know from Scripture is that he had guiding dreams and that he was a ‘just man.’ Some translations have ‘righteous’ or ‘a man of honour’ or ‘upright’, but the original Greek word ‘dikaios’, which comes from the word for justice, seems to me the best word

to describe his character. He was a JUST man. We might say in this part of the country that he was a ‘dacent’ (decent) man.

Pope Francis has designated this year for the family and for honouring St Joseph. In the light of what I said, we can only imagine what St Joseph was like. What might a just or decent man be like? We are free to imagine and, in fact, we are encouraged to do so in contemplating Scripture passages in our prayer. This was a method dear to St Ignatius, who, in fact, was building on those who went before him.

When I tried to do this before Christmas, three episodes from the play ‘The Steward of Christendom’, by Sebastian Barry, came to mind. I think they might connect with your own experience in some way and fit St Joseph very well.

A little space of clarity and light

In the play, the man is old and in a home, and he is recalling the birth of his third child.

“Candlelight...I walked out

through the grounds of Loreto College as far as the sea. The midwife had bade me go. I was a man of fifty...And I thought I would do anything for that woman of mine behind me in the house, where we had done all our talking and laughing and quarrelling. But my mind was in a peculiar state... I thought of how much her daughter and her son loved her, and depended on her. How she made the world possible and hopeful for his son and the two girls. I started to tremble, it was a moment in your life when daily things pass away from you, when all your concerns seem to vanish, and you are allowed by God to see a little space of clarity and grace.

When you see that God is in your wife and in your children, and they hold in trust for you your own measure of goodness. And in the manner of your treatment of them lies your own salvation. I went back to the house with a lighter heart, a simpler man than the one who set out.”

And that moment led him to commit himself, to ‘pledge’ himself: “...The house was quiet. It was as if it were asleep, the very bricks, living and asleep with a quiet heartbeat. Suddenly, I was terribly afraid that my new child was dead, I don’t know why. You expect its cries, you long for its cries. I pushed open my front door and hurried down into the back room. The midwife was over by the window, with a little bundle. And Cissy (the wife) was lying quiet, still, at ease. The midwife came over immediately and placed her bundle in my arms. It was like holding a three-pound bag of loose corn. And there was a little face in the midst of the linen, a little wrinkled face, with red skin,

and two big round eyes seeming to look up at me. I pledged all my heart and life to that face, all the usefulness of my days to that face. And that was Dolly. And that was just as the candlelight fails, and the early riser needs no candle for his task.”

Unconditional love

The third episode is in the conclusion of the play, when the old man is recalling his childhood. Knowing that his father will ‘put down’ the family dog who has killed a sheep, the little boy runs away with the dog and stays out all night in the snow. He returns at dawn to meet his father.

“It was as if I had never seen him before...never looked in his entirety, from head to toe. And I knew that the dog and me were for the slaughter. My feet carried me on to where he stood, immortal you would say, in the door. And he put his right hand on the back of my head, and pulled me to him so that my cheek rested against the buckle of his belt. And he raised his own face to the brightening sky and praised someone, in a crushed voice, God maybe, for my safety, and stroked my hair. And the dog’s crime was never spoken of, but that he lived till he died. And I would call that the mercy of fathers, when the love that lies in them deeply like a glittering face of a well is betrayed by an emergency, and the child sees at last that he is loved, loved and needed and not to be lived without, and greatly.”

In the light of this, I would like to be more sensitive and loving as a father towards my wife and children. That would also be my prayer for all fathers. May St Joseph help us. Amen.



Martin Harran and his wife, Carmel, in a pre-Covid gathering with their grandchildren.

Focusing on parish-as-family could really turn 2021 into special year

Pope has called for
by Martin Harran

DESPITE all the misgivings coming up to Christmas, we ended up having a lovely one. I think what made it very special was that it was very focused on family, rather than the usual razzmatazz that has been increasingly associated with Christmas.

In our own case, we have five children and 11 grandchildren, and over the two days of Christmas we were able to interact with all of them either physically or online. Up until this year, many people were very negatively disposed towards social media and the damage it was doing to society, but thank God for it this year.

I think that one of the few good things that have come out of the Covid pandemic has been an increasing awareness of how important our social contacts are in general, with a particular focus on family.

Again, in our own case, I am one of a family of 13, with 12 of us still surviving. Earlier this year, we set up a family group on Messenger, where we chat about life in general, sometimes by text, sometimes by video, often reflecting back on times past and how different life was growing up in Ireland in the 1950s and 1960s. The sort of things that families chat about when they occasionally get together, but using social media has allowed us to engage on a regular basis instead of, like most large families, ending up depending on weddings and funerals!

It is not, however, just our immediate families or our extended families. As Catholics, we are part of a much larger church family and especially our local parish family. Again, the importance of that family has been reinforced during lockdowns, with the very high numbers of people who have engaged with Mass and other parish services online. Again, thank God for things like Facebook and YouTube!

So what can we learn from all this?

I suspect that many parishes were taken aback by the level of

demand for tickets for Christmas Masses this year – and a special word of thanks and appreciation is due to the priests who worked so hard at providing extra Masses, along with all those who put so much effort into making sure that everyone could attend in a safe environment.

What the demand showed is that people’s needs far exceed sitting watching Mass on Facebook or YouTube. There is an unrelenting desire for people to gather as a family in the presence of the Lord.

Pope Francis has declared 2021 as a special year for family, and I think within our parishes, and especially through our Pastoral Councils, we need to look at ways in which we can recapture some of the aspects of the parish-as-family that we may have lost in recent years.

It looks like on-and-off lockdowns are a feature of our lives for some time ahead and, even when the lockdowns eventually do end, it is likely that elderly and vulnerable people may be reluctant to physically return to Mass.

Providing online Mass through webcams or Facebook or YouTube has been wonderful in enabling people to participate in some limited way, but I think we should use our imagination to explore how we can extend this further.

Schools, especially third level, have developed ways of delivering education online; many businesses are now largely operating with staff based at home using online communication. Is there any reason why we, as a church, cannot make more use of this approach in various ways?

Adult faith formation is one obvious candidate where existing materials could possibly be tweaked for delivery to a home base, just as has happened in education.

There are other less formal areas that can be considered. We have been exploring this in my own parish of Urney & Castlefinn. We set up an online facility similar to Zoom and other conferencing software, but operating within a

My wish for 2021 is that we continue to trust in God to guide us daily

by Briège O’Neill



Briège O’Neill, Banagher.

NEW Year’s Eve invites us to look back to what has gone and look forward to what is to come. Each New Year is like a blank

book and it is our chance to write another chapter in the story of our lives and, perhaps, in the life story of those we love as well.

“Do not lose courage in considering your own imperfections but instantly set about remedying them.” (St Francis de Sales)

Since I was able to write, I would always jot down a few New Year resolutions, goals, aspirations... whatever you want to call them... every January. I would consider what changes I could make in various parts of my life. The now “more mature me” has discovered that, in reality, God knows the plans He has for us and how He wants to bless us and bring us true happiness.

So for me, the wish for 2021 is that we continue to have renewed faith and trust in God to guide us daily in His works.

Pope Francis has proclaimed that 2021 be the Year of St Joseph. Within the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic and the immense role that ordinary people played in supporting their neighbours, doing so quietly and discreetly, St Joseph is a good role model for us all, as he supported Our Lady and Jesus in a like-wise fashion.

COVID-19 certainly demonstrated the importance of family, if we didn’t already realise this. I feel I am truly blessed with the strong family bonds that I already have, and so, in 2021, will

find some more ways to show my appreciation. From my dad, Gerry, 92 years young and such an inspiration to us all with his resilience, gratitude and faithful, prayerful life, I can continue to learn a lot.

As we continue to be affected by numerous COVID-19 restrictions for the foreseeable future, I tend to look for the good rather than the bad in these. I see the bright side not the dark side and I strive for hope rather than despair.

I intend to continue to be thankful and grateful for the many blessings of good health and abundance of fresh air and countryside we have in the Parish of Banagher.

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religious environment rather than a secular one. We successfully used it for a small group who prayed the Rosary daily during October, and we also used it to enable a number of people to contribute from home to the Remembrance of the Dead and Prayer for the Bereaved service in November. The Legion of Mary has also used it for their weekly meetings during lockdown. This year, we would like to look at ways of extending that further.

Webcams or Facebook or YouTube can never replace the wonder of physically being present at Mass and receiving Christ into

our hearts and souls through the Eucharist. Physical attendance must always be our ultimate target, but that should not stop us exploring ways we can supplement that.

By focusing on parish-as-family and working on a range of ways to achieve that, I think we really can turn 2021 into the special year for family that Pope Francis has called for.

(Anyone who would like to know more about online prayer is welcome to contact Martin by email - martinharran@gmail.com)

One of the things we absolutely owe to our merciful Lord is to never be afraid by Annie Mullan



Annie Mullan, Claudy.

WHAT a year 2020 has been, a challenge for the entire world, but what a gift we have in God. What God is there like our God? Like the psalmist, we too want to tell the whole world of His mighty deeds, of His mighty arm at work.

And we are glad at every opportunity to proclaim His greatness. The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want, and so nothing else on earth compares to the gift of faith in Jesus; this super abundance of love, like a rushing stream when the water is in full flow.

When the Good Shepherd becomes our personal God, we long to praise and bless His holy name. We say, "You are there with your crook and your staff. With these You give me comfort". My personal God. My saviour. My protector. My rock. My home. My everything.

And so, the Good Shepherd becomes my personal saviour. He desires to be in a personal relationship with everyone; no one is excluded. Yes, Jesus is

everything; Jesus is the master of the impossible. Jesus I trust in you.

One of the things we absolutely owe to our merciful Lord is to never be afraid. He has gifted us with His Holy Spirit. Neither need we fear for the Church, Christ's living body on earth, to which His sheep belong.

Making Peter the first Pope, He said, "You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church and the gates of the underworld can never overpower it".

The Good Shepherd promised He would be with us until the end of time. Let us enter 2021 with joy in our hearts and love for our neighbour, with faith and hope in the arms of our Blessed Mother, and the invocation of God's glorious Saints.

Thanks to Pope Francis, the shepherd of the flock on Earth. He has granted this the year of St Joseph; Joseph, whom God entrusted to look after His Son and His Blessed Mother. Surely, He will look after all that belongs to Jesus and Mary.

And let's check out our wonderful St Columba on this the 1500th anniversary of his birth; he who worked tirelessly for God. With Columba, let us pray his prayer:

Be a bright flame before me, O God, a guiding star above me, Be a smooth path below me, a kindly shepherd behind me, Today, tonight and forever, Alone with none but you, My God, I journey on my way, What need I fear when You are near, O Lord of night and day."

Thank you Lord for your merciful love. To God be the Glory.

Enjoy this New Year with those you love

by Kathleen Clifford

THE year 2020, it would be fair to say, has been a year like no other. I know it was difficult and very different, especially for the old and vulnerable, yet there are many wonderful, happy things to remember, like how humanity clearly showed its strengths by caring for each other like never before; providing food, hot dinners and daily checking on the well-being of the older and more vulnerable in our communities.

Great support was given to all our doctors, nurses and front-line workers. Our Churches also looked after our spiritual needs, with daily online Masses and Rosaries, which we will continue to have until such times as those of us in the high-risk category are able to attend in person. So there is a lot to thank God for, as I really appreciate all that.

How do we feel about entering a new phase of our journey through life? Are we in an expectant and hopeful mood or are we apathetic or despondent?

I welcome 2021 with faith and hope, also realising that the first three or more months will be uncertain due to the coronavirus. If the majority choose to have the vaccine, I sincerely pray that we will have a normal way of life again.

How great it will be to meet family and friends, to give and receive hugs from our grandchildren, and freely go to Mass and again be part of community. These are the things I most want this year, and good health to do these things.



Kathleen Clifford, Carnhill, Three Patrons.

The past year has made me more aware of the importance of family, friends and neighbours; how much we need each other. It sure places material things to the bottom of my list.

This New Year has been designated by Pope Francis as a special year for the family and, in particular, St Joseph, and he has shared a very personal story of his love for St Joseph. He describes him as a man of silence and strength.

Pope Francis has told us that he has a statue of the sleeping St Joseph and, if he has a problem or difficulty, he writes it down and places it under the statue, asking St Joseph to pray for his problem.

I was given this statue of the Sleeping St Joseph for Christmas, no doubt he will be receiving many notes from me throughout the year!

I love this Sleeping St Joseph prayer:

"O Saint Joseph, you are a man greatly favoured by the Most High. The angel of the Lord appeared to



you in dreams, while you slept, to warn you and guide you as you cared for the Holy Family.

You were both silent and strong, a loyal and courageous protector.

Dear St Joseph, as you rest in the Lord, confident of His absolute power and goodness, look upon me. Please take my need into your heart, dream of it and present it to your 'Son'.

(Mention your request)

Help me then, good St Joseph, to hear the voice of God, to arise and act with love.

I praise and thank God with joy. St Joseph, I love you, Amen".

This year, also, plans are being put in place to mark the 1500th anniversary of the birth of St Colmcille, our very own Patron

Saint here in Derry.

St Columba / Colmcille's connection with Derry and Donegal is evident from the many landmarks, churches and schools which have adopted his name.

This will be a great occasion and something to look forward to, though I don't know yet what has been organised.

Many people of my vintage, 73, will have received some, if not all, of their sacraments in the beautiful Church of St Columba, in the Long Tower, as I myself have done. I expect that a lot of events will be taking place there.

Enjoy this New Year with those you love. May the Lord bless you all with health, love, peace and joy in abundance.

May we dream dreams and celebrate all the tiny treasures of the everyday by Sr Rosemary Gallagher

WAS there ever a year when 'family' took on a new dimension in our consciousness as in 2020. Experiences have been so diverse... separation from loved ones, remote or limited visiting to the most vulnerable, children often needing more care and understanding as parents had to take on the task of home schooling and, to add to this, the worry, tension, grief associated with the pain of bereavement, job loss, the shattering of hopes and plans, and the uncertainty about the future on a variety of levels.

But, even in the midst of all this, the human spirit can dream of a better future. That is why, at the beginning of 2021, we need St Joseph, that man of dreams...that "just man, that wise and faithful servant whom you placed at the head of your family". (Preface for the Feast of St Joseph)

Joseph experienced doubt, anxiety...that state of mind so aptly described as "greatly troubled"... and, in each crisis, Joseph received a reassuring dream (Matt 1:20, 2:13, 2:19) that pointed to a route, a new path, an unexpected turn of

events. Who amongst us has not been like Joseph, "deeply troubled" by the myriad of events that marked 2020?

There are two very striking images of Joseph. One by the artist, Seiger Koder depicting the annunciation to Joseph as he lies asleep, carrying the anxiety about Mary's pregnancy in his heart and is reassured by the Angel of the Lord that this pregnancy was, indeed, like no other. The other image is the beautiful statue of St Joseph in the Apparition Chapel in Knock, where we see the strong, gentle, reverent presence of a person of Emmanuel - God with us.

With 2021 underway, we look forward to the vision of a post-Covid Church. Let us, with St Joseph, dare to 'dream dreams'. Peter, on Pentecost Day, saw this new beginning, this birth of the Christian Community as a fulfilment of Joel's prophecy - "your young men will see visions, your old men dream dreams..."

May we dream dreams of a new beginning, a new energy, a



Sr Rosemary Gallagher, Loreto.

profound deepening of all it means to be disciples. May we dream dreams and may we celebrate in gratitude all the tiny treasures of the everyday and make our own the prayer of Alexis Valdes:

"When the storm passes I ask you Lord, in shame That you return to us better, as you once dreamed us".

Sharing the mood amongst our little group of Loreto Sisters, I look to an expression Bishop Alan McGuckian often uses when leading the Ignatius Examen at night..."Exercise those gratitude muscles!"

We are very grateful. Grateful for so much kindness, concern, even laughter shared among us and

from wonderful friends. Grateful for all the little things which we never noticed because we were so 'busy', often about nothing!

And we look forward with hope...doesn't the God of the Exodus always bring order out of chaos?

There is a certain excitement among us also because the two branches of the Order, the CJs and ourselves, the Irish branch, are moving closer to amalgamation, and also a wee glimmer of hope that, perhaps, the Venerable Mary Ward may be officially declared a saint.

Seeds of hope, seeds of gratitude, moving towards fruits of love and joy.

One word that comes to mind to sum up 2020 is 'gratitude'

by Cara McLaughlin



Cara McLaughlin, Derry.

REFLECTING upon the past year, one word that comes to mind to sum up my year is 'gratitude'.

Within 2020, I achieved more than I have ever dreamt of in becoming a primary school teacher, taking the leap to move to England, and having my first ever class of beautiful, little three and

four year olds, who I hope to teach that anything is possible if they put their mind to it.

Despite the pandemic affecting many areas of our lives, such as, in my own situation, not being allowed to finish my final placement, not having a graduation and struggling for months looking for a job, it really helped open up my eyes to the things unseen and how God's plan was intended to unfold for me.

I cannot take away that 2020 was in some ways difficult, but it gave me a new spark of self-confidence, and it gave me time to really enjoy being home with my family and loved ones. That would not have happened if I had still been away from home, and it was time that God knew I needed before going to complete the rest of His plan for me away working in England.

Therefore, for whatever happened during last year, be thankful for where it brought you. Where you are is where God wants you to be.

I look forward to the days ahead in 2021 with great hope and joy

by Martine Mulhern

IN looking forward to 2021 unfolding, I reflect on all that happened in 2020. It undoubtedly was a traumatic year where we had to learn to keep our distance, cover our faces, and many of us really struggled with anxiety.

Yet 2020 also provided an opportunity for us all, in many ways, to recognise and to reconnect with the core elements of our lives – family and faith. We took the time to be really present with family – walking together, playing together, talking and listening to each other, and praying together.

In contrast to dubious 'leadership' from the 'powers that be', I have witnessed exceptional leadership, humanity, faith and kindness from the old and young, rich and poor in our communities. I have been truly humbled by it.

I am in awe of the resilience of our young people, who adapted so quickly to our 'new normal' – without complaint. I have felt such pride in the staff in all of our schools who have shown such professionalism, love and care to all of our children, whether they have been in school or at home.

I have been so blessed to witness our young people continue to

experience the joy of learning and watch them simply having fun – albeit in their 'bubbles'. They continued to make me laugh every single day!

Like many others, I have learned a lot about myself as I have developed new skills. I've taken to baking and have had more disasters than successes but I've loved failing and learning!

I have watched our wee school in Creggan claim the title: UK Secondary School of the Year and realised that in doing the ordinary with love and faith we can be extraordinary!

I, therefore, look forward to the days ahead in 2021 with great hope and joy. Pope Francis has designated 2021 as a special year for 'Family'. I have not seen two of my own children for a year, as they work for the NHS in Scotland and Wales, so I really look forward to being with them and to once again go to Mass as a family. I hope I remember what a privilege it is to be able to do so!

I look forward to all of the seeds of faith, kindness and community spirit that I saw multiply exponentially throughout our communities, during 2020, taking

Hope is what sustains us as we persevere

by Joemon Joseph



Joemon Joseph, Cappagh, Omagh.

AS usual and customary, I too received many Christmas and New Year messages in WhatsApp and many other social media platforms. One of the messages did catch my attention in particular and I saved it for future reflections. I thought it appropriate to mention it here. Perhaps you have also received the same, as many of us keep sharing the same messages to our friends and family.

*"Sunshine is not Cancelled
Love is not Cancelled
Relationships are not Cancelled
Reading is not Cancelled
Naps are not Cancelled
Going for a walk is not Cancelled
Kindness is not Cancelled
Imagination is not Cancelled
Conversations are not Cancelled
HOPE is not Cancelled."*

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1)

We all need hope. In the past couple of years, we have heard from people and media that many are going through divorces, people have lost their jobs and many are struggling with illnesses.

root and growing strong and tall throughout 2021.

Never again do I want our young people described as the 'snowflake' generation. They are resilient, respectful and faithful and, when their time comes, will lead our world with passion, faith and justice.

It took a pandemic for many of us to recognise and truly value the incredible work done by all of our key workers. Please God, we will never forget to celebrate them and to value their work.

2021 marks the 1500th anniversary of the Patron Saint of Derry, St Columba and, as we embrace this New Year with hope in our hearts, I leave you with his prayer:

*"Be a bright flame before me, O God a guiding star above me.
Be a smooth path below me,
a kindly shepherd behind me
today, tonight, and for ever.
Alone with none but you, my God*

One thing that almost all of them have in common is that they are grasping for something to give them hope. Hope that things will get better. Hope for healing. Hope that God will be with them while they are going through turbulent times.

The immediate after effect of all these troubles, especially due to this pandemic of COVID-19, is suffering in our family. Many of our loved ones have fallen to this deadly virus and been taken away from our lives. Many have lost their livelihood. Businesses are permanently closed.

When everything around us gives the impression of gloomy and doomed times ahead, let's not give up and instead believe and hope that there is light at the end of the tunnel. To see the light, we must trust and believe that nothing happens in our life without the knowledge of God Almighty, and He is capable of putting our life back in order and leading us in the right path.

Hope is what sustains us as we persevere; remaining steadfast in times of trial and discouragement. We should live hopeful lives.

As families have been affected the most by all these troubles, we must be grateful to our Holy Father, Pope Francis, who has announced a special year dedicated to the family, marking the fifth anniversary of the publication of his apostolic exhortation, 'Amoris Laetitia'.

In his Angelus address on the Feast of the Holy family, the Pope noted that March 19, 2021, would mark five years since the signing of 'Amoris Laetitia', following synods on the family in 2014 and 2015.

The Feast of Holy Family reminds us of the example of evangelising with the family, proposing to us, once again, the ideal of conjugal and family love,

as underlined in the apostolic exhortation introduced to us five years ago on March 19, 2015.

The proclaimed year will be known officially as the year 'Amoris Laetitia Family'. The pandemic experience has highlighted the central role of the family as the domestic church, and has shown the importance of community ties between families, which make the church an authentic family of families.

Recently, I had an opportunity to meet Bishop McKeown at his residence to discuss about the Media Ministry I work for, Shalom World, and how best the Shalom Media Ministry and its resources can be best used in the Diocese. Thankfully, he was kind enough to add a direct Shalom Media Gallery link in the diocesan website, which is a great resource for our parishes and schools to link in their own websites.

We talked about the pandemic, and the crisis for families and church in particular, the long spell of lockdown and keeping the church doors closed for long periods, affecting the families, made him and other leaders of the church reflect on the consequences and how to overcome this kind of situation. It made them realise that, until now, the church and its activities were fully focused on direct church services. However, now the bishops and leaders acknowledge the need of reaching out to families, bringing more family-oriented programs and services tailored to our homes. He acknowledged the importance of the involvement of laities in church activities.

I am sure the diocesan family will acknowledge, like me, our Bishop's great initiatives for the diocese, especially to interact with our youth and younger generation. I came out from his residence with a

great feeling of a new Pentecost for the diocese, as well for the church in Ireland. We need faith-filled and evangelised members to join leaders of the church in rekindling the families in strong faith and hope, to lead a life pleasing to the Lord Jesus.

St Joseph, being the heavenly patron and protector of families, let us entrust our family with families all over the world, to the Holy Family of Nazareth, in particular to St Joseph, the devoted spouse and father.

A year dedicated to St Joseph, which began on December 8, 2020 and will conclude on December 8, 2021, is truly a blessing and gift from Pope Francis.

Also, for families in Ireland, and in particular for people in Donegal and Derry, a year-long celebration of the life and legacy of St Columba is a great opportunity to learn and know more about his life.

As Bishop McKeown mentioned in his homily, Columba was a man who grappled with the realities of life; the cold winds of winter and the harsh words of others, friends and enemies, faith and doubts. Let's seek the help of St Columba to help us sail through this difficult time and ask St Joseph to protect our family.

This pandemic situation did lots of harm to families and people around the world, but let's not forget that it helped us to understand the importance of love and mutual respect within the family and brought back the family prayer space in the house, which was, to some extent, lost in the influx of social media and secular media's negative propaganda on churches and faith.

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful." (Hebrews 10:23)

In these strange times the joy of our faith gives hope

by Myra McLaughlin

MY thoughts on the past year bring the words sadness, strength, trust and hope to mind. Having started the year 2020 in ill health, which continued for a few months, I found my strength and inner peace could only be found in prayer.

I spent time praying at the start of each day with a grateful heart. Each new day is a new beginning; a fresh start. Try your very best to start your day this way, and if at times you find you can't, don't see it as failure but rather as being human, and just start again.

The year 2021 being devoted to

St Joseph by Pope Francis is such a blessing to us all for the protection of our families. For me, the Rosary is the weapon against all evil to be prayed daily, and I ask you all to pray it, especially for families. I keep my Rosary with me and my St Benedict Cross. No problem is too difficult for Our Lady to resolve through interceding on our behalf, and with St Joseph by her side we are doubly blessed.

To begin this New Year, my husband and I went to Doon Well in Donegal, where there is a tradition of pilgrims praying the Rosary and taking Holy

*I journey on my way;
what need I fear when you are near,
O Lord of night and day?
More secure am I within your hand
than if a multitude did round me
stand.
Amen."*



Martine Mulhern, Principal of St Cecilia's, Derry.

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Water from the Well back to their families.

I felt a lovely peace there; a sense of a holy place. While we felt the chill in the air, there were children walking barefoot around the blessed tree. Seeing this made it easier to brave the cold as we prayed, and we both felt very blessed to be there.

In these strange times, the joy of our faith gives us hope. God never leaves us alone. He is always with us. Just like in the poem about footprints in the sand, He is there to carry us when needed.

I try not to look to the future but to live in the present moment,

taking one day at a time. The message, "Be not afraid" is found in the bible 365 times, and remembering this can help when we feel anxious. When in doubt, worried or afraid, let Jesus take over; surrender all to Him, who loves us all unconditionally.

Doon Well is a wonderful gift to have on our doorstep and, when it is safe again to do so, I would encourage you to go there on pilgrimage. Leave any worries you have there and when you return home you will feel lighter and happier.

Remember...all will be well... nothing before prayer. God bless.



Myra at Doon Well on New Year's Day.

Caring St Joseph, pray for us by Catherine Sharkey

O St Joseph whose protection is so great. When we lose a father what better substitute than St Joseph. He was there for Jesus, for all His needs and he is there for us too.

St Joseph, we are told, was a quiet and gentle family man who is waiting for us to ask for his intercession for our family and for all our needs.

He wants to be part of our family, that is his desire, to be in every family however large or small.

So this year, 2021, may we make

haste in asking for the intercession of St Joseph in all we do, in all we say and in all we are.

Caring St Joseph, pray for us.



Catherine Sharkey.

Please God, we can come together as parish in 2021 and continue our journey with HOPE by Leo McCloskey



Leo McCloskey

HOPE is the key word for me this year regarding many things, including our parish HOPE Camp here in Limavady, and in the parishes of Claudy and Banagher, the latter of which was to hold its first HOPE camp last summer but couldn't because of Covid.

And, the hope is that there will be two more parishes launching their HOPE Camp this summer as well.

HOPE stands for Help Our Parish Evolve and is all about the

family, and so it would be great to be able to run the camp and the community fundraising events in the lead-up to it in this Year of the Family, as it will have even more significance for parish families.

At this time of year, we are usually planning fundraising ideas and thinking about the camp programme. In Limavady, we try to involve as many people in the community as possible and one event that is proving very popular for people to get involved in some way is our pantomime, which is just a bit of banter and reaches out to all ages, while the Claudy parish usually run a big family fun day.

It's all about bringing the families of the parish together to give them a sense of being one big parish family, and help build community

spirit.

There is to be a particular emphasis in the Church this year on St Joseph. In the seven years of the Limavady Hope Camp, we found that most of our volunteers were female in the early stages, but in the last three or four years we have had more dads getting involved, and so we will have a focus on St Joseph to celebrate that.

It's great to have men involved as they are brilliant at helping with anything that needs to be built and lifting heavy equipment, etc, and the young boys really look up to them. These men are setting good witness.

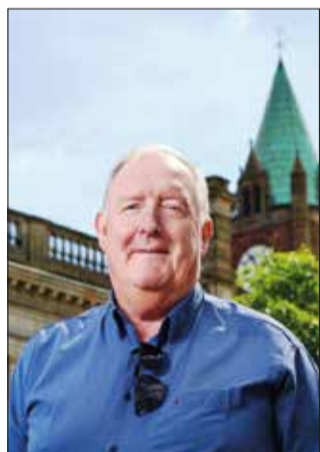
The HOPE camps promote faith, fun and friendship, and has a daily faith element built into the programme. So, we will be

including reference to this being a special year focusing on the family and St Joseph, and also, here in Derry, we are celebrating the 1500th anniversary of St Columba's birth.

All being well, it will be great to run HOPE camp and the fundraisers this year, and I think, after all we have been through, that people will welcome the opportunity to get out and get involved, if not in the week of the camp itself then in helping in other ways, such as with the fundraising events. HOPE is not just about one week of camp, it is part of parish life 52 weeks of the year.

Please God, we will be able to come together as a parish in 2021 in faith, fun and friendship, and continue our journey with HOPE.

We hope and pray 2021 will see us cherish more quality time with those we love most by Pat Ramsey



Pat Ramsey

to let go of grudges and bitterness that eats away at us.

Clearly top of everyone's list is for an end to the coronavirus Covid-19, to be able to return to some normality that will mean visiting family and loved ones.

All countries, cities, communities and families have experienced the awfulness of this deadly virus. All Christian churches have been united like never before in prayer for an end to this pandemic and for everyone to have access to the vaccinations, which scientists have worked wonders, if not a miracle, to fast track. We, certainly in the North West, have suffered and seen at first hand the high volume of people becoming ill and, sadly, many others losing their lives.

Many of my own neighbours passed on after being proven positive for Covid, and we have experienced the trauma of not being able to have an open wake that helps families come to terms with the death of a loved one. At the beginning of the pandemic, Requiem Masses could not be held for fear of the unknown. In fact, some families still have not been able to have a Mass for a dead relative, which in itself helps with the mourning.

For many wrong reasons, 2020 was a tough year for all families,

so we hope and pray that 2021 is going to be all about cherishing more quality time with the people we love most.

Year of the Virtual Communion

We have already traded TV and internet binges for FaceTime, Zoom, and WhatsApp online to speak to parents, grandparents, sons and daughters, as we could not make personal contact due to the levels of lockdown.

We watched Church Masses and services online and live on Facebook, in particular with the serious reduction of mourners not being able to attend all churches. Who would have thought or imagined receiving online communion, but many of us were glad to receive a Virtual Eucharist in our own homes:

"My Jesus, I believe that You are in the Blessed Sacrament. I love You above all things, and I long for You in my soul. Since I cannot now receive You sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. As though You have already come, I embrace You and unite myself entirely to You; never permit me to be separated from You."

Family

Pope Francis has proclaimed 2021 as a year dedicated to the

family and family life, to begin on March 19, the fifth anniversary of his document, "The Joy of Love". In making the announcement, the Pope offered some friendly papal advice to bickering families, reminding them to say 'pardon me', 'thank you' and 'sorry', and to never end the day without making peace.

The importance of family starts at birth and baptism, and stays constant throughout life. As children grow into their teens and early adulthood, families can be a bedrock of support during times of change.

Families should be a source of unconditional love and a resource for all of us to weather life's changes and challenges. In healthy families, children can learn what it means to be a happily married woman or man, along with the qualities of a good father or mother. Most people would also agree on the importance of Christian values in families and in the home, in creating healthy individuals and strong communities.

In today's hyper-connected world, it's easy to get over-exposed to unhealthy ideas and images. However, a close family with strong values can help young family members avoid or resist negative influences. Without

strong Christian and family values, young people can succumb to peer pressure and stumble upon unwanted consequences, including substance or alcohol abuse and various forms of addiction.

It's best to start embodying good values when your kids are young. That way, as your children encounter critical decisions, they are already prepared to make good choices.

Colm Cille 2021

December 7 marked the traditional birthday of the City's Patron Saint and the start of a year of celebration to mark the 1500th anniversary of the birth of Colm Cille, until December 7, 2021. Events have also been planned to take place in Inishowen and at St Columba's birthplace in Gartan, Co Donegal.

Bishop Donal McKeown launched a year-long series of events to mark the 1500th birthday of St Columba with Mass in the Long Tower Chapel. St Columba's Church is also the setting for the traditional celebration of Mass on June 9, the Feast of St Columba, with a very special event at St Columba's Wells afterwards, during which the Well is opened and the water is blessed and distributed

to many from right across the City and further afield. This is a significant event in the Derry Diocesan Calendar.

Alongside these celebrations, Derry City and Strabane District Council have been working closely with Donegal County Council, Foras na Gaeilge and the Heritage Council in the production of the Columban Heritage Audit, as a precursor to establishing a shared programme of works and events in 2020/21 to celebrate one of the most influential figures in Irish and British history. The specially commissioned audit was carried out by Abartha Heritage and also helps to identify key opportunities for upcoming commemorations.

St Colmcille, also known as St Columba, is one of Ireland's patron saints; a distinction he shares with St Patrick and St Bridget. Born in Gartan, County Donegal in 520 (or 521), there are many sites associated with the life of the inspirational 'Colmcille' and also dedicated to him throughout Derry and Donegal. In 545, he founded his first monastery in Derry/Doire Cholm Cille - and in 563 set sail with twelve monks from Derry to the island of Iona, in Scotland, where he died in 597.

So, all being well, there is much to look forward to in 2021.

Teach me to Pray! St Therese of Lisieux *by Fr Stephen Quinn OCD*

DISCALCED Carmelite life rests firmly on the foundation that each day the friar or nun spends two hours in personal prayer and meditation. From the 10 years I have lived this life, I can personally testify to the fact that the practice is the most precious moments of the day; yet in equal measure those very same moments are the most difficult and taxing that anyone could imagine.

I must confess to you that there is a sadistic portion to my character. There is a little bit of me that wants to see the saints suffer, that loves to discover their struggles, that desires to feel their humanity, and I want to know that they struggle every bit as much as I do. It comforts me, for some reason, to feel that I am not on my own.

So, when I open St Therese's book the first thing I turn to is to try to find her dirty washing. What I love about Therese is that she does not disappoint me. Therese is wonderfully frank about everything, particularly about her struggles; she does not attempt to butter them up and hide them in any way. She is so utterly human and wants anyone who turns to her to know her humanness.

When it comes to describing what she did when she prayed, she does not change her method. She gives the whole picture, blemishes and all. Therese is frank enough to share with us what went on in her hour of prayer. In the moment when she should have been giving her whole attention to a Divine Someone else, Therese tells us that after some moments she would just nod off to sleep. To fall asleep in prayer, you might well observe, is something that is so easily done. How simple it would be to start saying to ourselves, in a self-justifying manner, that "everyone does it" and really it is of "no matter."

For all the commentary that you could put upon that sleep, one reality remains indisputable; that while you slept you never paid attention to the One who was there all the time. Therese's problems did not exhaust themselves with forty winks in the chapel. Then there was the whole business of what to say whenever she was finally able to stay conscious.

There is a sad lacking in our education. No one has taken their time to really train us on the appropriate words that you address the Divine Word of God, Jesus. Where do you go to find such words? Well, Therese did exactly what we all attempt at one time or other; she went and got a hold of novenas, prayer cards, and prayer books. These are filled with beautifully formulated sentiments and manicured words that we think are suitable enough to speak to the Divine Word. You just have to look around the monastery's

repository to find just how many formulas there are to use and buy.

Their very beauty and common supply of perfectly manicured words was little or no use to St Therese. They did not so much improve her praying as give her a "headache." Each prayer wordier and more beautiful than the next, it just left her more distracted and still without the words by which she could directly address the Almighty. And if that were not enough, even the Rosary caused her some difficulties. She had a deep devotion to the Blessed Mother that should be true of every member of an order devoted to the Lady of Mount Carmel. But every time she would go for the beads when she was on her own, she was struck with a sense of emptiness and a real impression that things were not happening.

The Rosary, that form of prayer that seems so familiar and so straightforward, for St Therese became a bitter trial, a hard penance to go on saying. She found it so dry to simply repeat words and, even more than all these things, she had to force herself to meditate on the Mysteries, while all the time she just could not fix her mind on anything. She was stuck between the devil and the deep blue sea.

"For a long time, I was desolate about this lack of devotion that astonished me, for I love the Blessed Virgin so much that it should be easy for me to recite, in her honour, prayers which are so pleasing to her."

One can well imagine the feelings that this evoked in Therese; frustration, distress, darkness, and emptiness. And we all know from our own experience that so many use feelings as the barometer to measure how well their prayer went. When we feel consoled then everything seems to be at rights with the world, but when we feel desolation then, somehow, God has left us behind.

So, Therese, in the midst of these trials, decided that she was not going to be guided on her feelings in prayer. In so doing, Therese was teaching herself and others not to let how we feel determine how she prayed, whether she prayed, or her sense of the value of each prayer that ran over her lips.

In prayer, we are dealing with soul and spirit not with emotion. If you have continued to pray in spite of your feelings, is that not of

greater significance than when it was easy, are you not saying much more to the one you truly address? Does it not mean much more to God? Does it not mean that you have truly loved the Other because you have been prepared to push through all the difficulties? Are you not saying so much more this way to that person?

Relationship

In these reflections on prayer, Therese opens up for us new territory for our consideration. There is always more to her prayer than her many failures; her sleep, the words that she repeats, or the feelings that she gets when she practises prayer. Prayer is essentially about relationship with another person. For a relationship to have any kind of real authenticity then we have to be concerned about the other person rather than ourselves.

Most of my parents' grandchildren have been born in America, so our family has not had any real close contact with new-borns. Last year, my sister gave birth to a baby girl. Since the birth of this precious baby girl, we have been party to some truly beautiful moments. It is quite amazing to ponder a mother and a new-born child in action together.

When this girl, and I presume any child, is in its mother's arms, it is as if there is some kind of telepathy going on between them. It really seems that they can read each other's minds. As the mother cradles her child there is a real communication going on that no one else can read or decode. In addition, this communication does not need words. This communication is not merely emotion, feeling or just sentiment, but is rather merely the silent language of love. Their interaction has a power all its very own. The scriptures themselves are well aware of that power and point to it as a mysterious sign of the relationship between God and Israel, God and the Church, and God and the individual soul.

The Psalmist, in Psalm 130, wrote: "O Lord, my heart is not proud nor haughty is my heart; I have not gone after things too great nor marvels beyond me. Truly I have set my soul in silence and peace. As a child has rest in its mother's arms even so is my soul."

The Psalmist is crystal clear that each one of us lives our whole life in this mystical context of God as Father. A father who has his two arms wrapped around his child, and all the time never takes his eyes away from his precious child. That is the mystical context in which every single prayer is made.

Prayer is exactly that wordless communication that passes between the human person and the person of God; the human person in the role of the child or infant and the person of God

always acting as Father/Mother.

Therese put her finger exactly on this point when she talked about what she had newly discovered about prayer. In the silence of prayerful communication, "prayer is an aspiration of the heart, it is a simple glance directed to heaven, it is a cry of gratitude and love in the midst of trial as well as joy; finally, it is something great, supernatural, which expands my soul and unites me to Jesus."

So often when it comes to prayer, we are thinking in terms of moving beads, reading prayers, and meditating on the Scriptures. Therese shows that to pray is always and everywhere a way of being with God. The Scriptures taught Therese the true mystical context for every single prayer. Many times in prayer, both she and most other people have been working on the basis of a mistaken notion that prayer is some activity we have to do ourselves. It involves such activities as reading, speaking, and meditating.

Our compass is often not quite working to the optimum, we are turned around and looking in the wrong direction at our own self, our attention is on what we are thinking or saying. Why are we looking there? It is such a waste of our time and effort! While we are at that futile activity all the time the one, who is love itself, has not for one moment taken those eyes of us, every moment that gaze communicates the intensity of his love for each one without a word. The Divine Love beams like rays of the sun, radiating down perpetually upon hearts, souls and bodies, warming our souls with presence and lightening our darkness.

The Psalmist again advises us on the true nature of prayer: "No speech, no word, no voice is heard but their span extends through all the earth. All that truly matters is to pay attention to the Divine Son.

As Therese so eloquently observed when she had come to her insight into prayer: "This is my prayer; I ask Jesus to draw me into the flames of His love, to unite me so closely to Him that He lives and acts in me. I feel that the more the fire of love burns within my heart, the more I shall say, 'Draw me after yourself.'"

Therese encourages us to make our prayer as simple and direct as can be. To refine our prayer into being "an aspiration of the heart, a simple glance directed to heaven, a cry of gratitude and love in the midst of trial as well as joys."

There you have it! Therese has explored and discovered the truth of prayer. No matter the prayer, we always begin with a simple look of a child looking into the face of its parent. In your prayer keep looking at Him. Regard his person. Be overwhelmed by his love. His face is your light. He is the devotion that you truly need.



St Therese of Lisieux.



Pope's monthly intention

The Holy Father has asked for prayer during January for:

Human fraternity:
May the Lord give us the grace to live in full fellowship with our brothers and sisters of other religions, praying for one another, open to all.

Prayer for Priests

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

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

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

Bless, in a special way,
Your servant

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

Remember in prayer:

Fr Alex Anderson (Jan 1st)
Fr Patrick Arkinson (2nd)
Fr Patrick Baker (3rd)
Fr Declan Boland (4th)
Fr Eugene Boland (5th)
Fr Francis Bradley (6th)
Fr Manus Bradley (7th)
All Priests (8th)
Fr Brian Brady (9th)
All Priests (10th)
Fr Thomas Canning (11th)
Fr Michael Canny (12th)
Fr John Cargan (13th)
Fr Neal Carlin (14th)
Fr James Devine (15th)
Fr Colum Clerkin (16th)
Fr Roland Colhoun (17th)
Fr Michael Collins (18th)
Fr Oliver Crilly (19th)
Fr Patrick Crilly (20th)
Fr Brendan Crowley (21st)
All Priests (22nd)
All Priests (23rd)
All Priests (24th)
Mgr Brendan Devlin (25th)
All priests (26th)
Fr Peter Devlin (27th)
Fr Fintan Diggin (28th)
Fr Brendan Doherty (29th)
All Priests (30th)
All priests (31st)

A Word of God for your Family Life **Our hidden God** by Fr Johnny Doherty, CSsR

THE great effort of every human person is to search for more. Most people would not identify this with a search for God, yet that is precisely what it is. The human heart cannot be satisfied except by God and God's love. And yet God remains hidden from us. Even for people of faith, God is not seen most of the time. Faith does not give us a vision of God but rather a direction in which to look, so that we can catch glimpses of the God who loves us so much.

Hidden in Mary's womb

During the four weeks of Advent, we celebrated our God hidden in Mary's womb. Pregnancy is a wonderful, mysterious, awesome event in human life. It is a silent event, and it is into that silence of Mary's womb that God enters. It is there that He is still to be found – in all the silent, mysterious things of life. Advent was a time of waiting, a time of listening for that God who is so close to us and yet not seen.

Hidden in Bethlehem

Our hidden God reveals himself to us in the most unexpected way – as a baby born in total poverty, in a place where no one should ever have heard about it and

yet everyone has heard of it. We celebrate this extraordinary love of God now, not just as a past event but as happening among us, in the ways God is still being born in us and among us. In Christ, God is still sending His angels, He is still gathering us to rejoice like the shepherds, He is still prompting people to search for Him and find Him, like the Magi did, in spite of so much turmoil in the world.

First Sunday of January

"The Word was made flesh, He lived among us, and we saw His glory." These words from the Gospel of the first Sunday in January remind us that we are still very much in the Christmas season, as we continue to reflect on the wonderful mystery of Bethlehem.

It is said that the "glory of God is humanity fully alive". That is our challenge for the week and, indeed, for the whole journey of faith as followers of Christ. At this time of New Year's resolutions, it would be to the glory of God and the good of all if we were to make the health and well-being of marriage and family life our main concern this year, as couples, as families and as parish communities.

Hidden among others

Jesus' mission in the world was to reveal our hidden God as the God who loves us with an infinite love. Jesus was anointed with this mission at his Baptism by John in the River Jordan.

The family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were like every other family around them. Jesus was like every other young boy in their community. But He was destined to be known as the Son of God, the Messiah, the One who would bring the world to a knowledge of the wonders of God's love through His three years of ministry and through His death and resurrection.

It is only in Christ that we can know the hidden God and enter into His hiding place. We celebrate our faith in Him. We also begin again taking on our mission as the Church, which is the same mission as that of Jesus – to bring the world into the hiding places of God, and in there, in our own hearts, to know His wonderful love.

Second Sunday of January

On the second Sunday of January, the Gospel for the Feast of the Baptism of Christ tells us of a voice from Heaven saying:

"You are my Son, the beloved, my favour rests on you." With this, the Christmas season ends and the new season of mission begins. Jesus is declared our hope and our salvation by the Spirit of God.

The wonderful thing is that God's Spirit speaks those words to each of us also because of our Baptism into Christ. Just listen to God speak those words from His heart into your heart: "You are my daughter, my son, my beloved, my favour rests on you". It is almost unbelievable and yet it is true. Our major task is to live out the truth of those words so that others may come to know the truth of them for themselves.

Third Sunday of January...

...Hidden in our committed relationships

In the Gospel on this Sunday, the disciples ask Jesus: "Where do you live?" and He replies: "Come and see". In another part of the Gospels Jesus tells us: "Where two or three are gathered in my name I am there with them."

Jesus lives in our community with one another. He lives in every married couple because of the sacrament they share. He lives in every family because of the love that bonds them together as

parents with children, as sisters and brothers. And the parish community is not just a place where we worship together but is a real presence of Christ in the world. We will discover Christ in all these places, in so far as we answer His call to love God with our whole heart and to love one another as He loves us.

Fourth Sunday of January...

...Reveal the hidden presence of God

"Follow me, and I will make you into fishers of people". These words from the Gospel of this Sunday are addressed to us as they were to the disciples of the early Church. In His great letter, 'The Joy of Love', Pope Francis speaks about every family as a missionary family.

As they grow in their love for one another they become aware of the presence of Christ among them. But this cannot remain there. Each family of faith has a mission of helping to reveal this same presence in every family, so that each one can know their greatest dignity and worth.

We do this by witness and not so much by preaching! The deepest truth of every person, and every family, is that we are all standing on holy ground in the presence of



our God, who loves us and who wants us to know how precious we are in His sight.

Conclusion

The Sunday Eucharist, week after week, is core to our growth in our faith as individuals, as couples, as families, and as a faith community. What happens at the Eucharist on Sunday depends very much on how we bring it into our family and community lives Monday to Saturday.

As we travel the journey of faith with one another, let the Word of God form us in our love and enthuse us about our privilege of being the bearers of good news to the world in which we live – to the glory of God.

Marriage and the Family

by Tom & Madeline McCully



POPE Francis has declared a special year dedicated to the Family 'Amoris Laetitia', which will be inaugurated on the Feast of St Joseph, March 19, 2021, and will honour St Joseph in particular.

This is timely because there are increasing changes in social patterns that can place stress on married couples and consequently on their families. One particular change is less support within the extended family which, in the past, provided so much for parents and children.

During the pandemic, this lack of support has manifested itself in new ways, particularly in the area of mental health, in the feelings of loneliness, inadequacy, and hopelessness. The effect of this is that many grandparents have been isolated from their children and grandchildren. Every person has a need to belong and, more than ever before, the Church is rising to the call to be more compassionate

and empathetic to the needs of her flock.

Pope Francis, in 'Amoris Laetitia' (287), says: "...couples and parents should be properly appreciated as active agents in catechesis..."

We see that the strength of Domestic Church, the family with the couple at its heart, is relevant to the strength of the Church as a whole.

This quotation from 'Gaudium et Spes' (p.13-14) is very central then to developing the richness of our Catholic doctrine: "The Christian family, which springs from marriage as a reflection of the loving covenant between Christ and the Church and as a participation in that covenant, will manifest to all the Saviour's living presence in the world and the genuine nature of the Church. This the family will do by the mutual love of the spouses, by their generous fruitfulness. And by the loving way in which all members of the family work together".

Throughout the above document, parenthood is spoken of as if it were the most important call of the couple, whereas their love for one another as husband and wife is what is most essential. No wonder then that many couples who are infertile believe that they are somehow failures or not as 'good' as those who have children. We once heard a priest who was officiating at a marriage, state very clearly that once the

couple exchanged their vows, they became a family. It would be helpful to couples in that position (around 10%) to know that they, husband and wife, are a family.

"It follows that Spouses to whom God has not granted children can have a conjugal life full of meaning in both human and Christian terms." (Amoris Laetitia 80)

Each member of the family, husband, wife, child or single adult, is, by the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Matrimony or Priesthood, called to evangelize.

They may express their spirituality differently but to the same end. The married couple cannot live a monastic spirituality but is called to live a matrimonial spirituality, where each expression of love and care for each other is prayerful.

The words of Pope Francis in his address to the judges and staff of the Roman Rota on January 25, 2020, (as reported by the Catholic News Service on 27/01/20) seem apt: "I marvel at the fact that for centuries, the Church ignored the example of Aquila and Priscilla, the married couple described in several parts of the New Testament as evangelising with St Paul.

"Evangelising spouses are what our parishes need, especially in urban areas where the pastor and his priest collaborators will never have the time and energy to reach all the faithful who, while calling themselves Christian, do not

frequent the sacraments and lack or almost lack — knowledge of Christ.

"Christian spouses should learn from Aquila and Priscilla how to fall in love with Christ and become neighbours to families deprived of the light of faith, not through their own fault but because they were left at the margins of our pastoral work — a pastoral work for the elite that forgets people.

"How I long for this message not to remain just a symphony of words, but to push priests, bishops and pastors to try, like the Apostle Paul did, to love married couples as humble missionaries ready to reach those squares and buildings of our cities where the light of the Gospel and the voice of Jesus don't reach and don't penetrate."

Every person is part of a family and each has a charisma that he or she brings to the Church family.

"All of us should be able to say, thanks to our experience of life in the family: 'We come to believe in the love that God has for us' (1 Jn 4:16)" (Amoris Laetitia – 290)

A Marriage Encounter Weekend offers a unique enrichment experience for married couples to learn new techniques of communication which enables them to build and enjoy a deeper, richer relationship. It is a technique that they can continue to use at home to benefit themselves and their families.

However, during this pandemic,



Tom and Madeline McCully

the usual residential weekends cannot take place. Instead, Marriage Encounter recognises that couples and their families can be under greater pressure and that better communication could help couples and families cope better at this time.

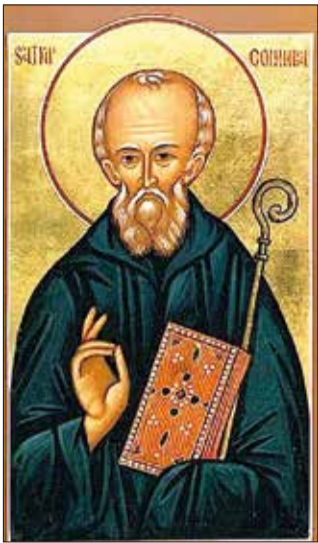
To this end, a free virtual weekend, which couples can attend online, will take place on

St Valentines Weekend, February 12-14.

For those couples intending to marry in 2021, Engaged Encounter will present an online Pre-Marriage Course on March 27-28 for a nominal cost.

For more information, or to book either of the above, visit the website www.marriageencounter.ie

Evergreen treasures *by Vera McFadden*



THERE were always many musical families in Derry, and our family was one of them. There was always singing in our house, sometimes folk songs and sometimes hymns. Some of these were gems.

Yes, among Irish cultural treasures are its sacred music, hymns, prayers, and poems. Some of these are centuries old, still being sung, and still loved, evergreen treasures written by scholars and saints.

St Patrick's biographer, Secundinus, wrote of him, "Hymns and the Apocalypse and psalms he sings and explains them for the edification of God's people".

Of course, St Patrick was not a native of this country, but he spent the years here, and later his vocation was to bring Christianity to the true God, the Trinity. We all have times of struggle and pain in our lives and, at the times, God reveals His comforting presence to us. This is what happened to Patrick in his captivity. As he watched animals on Slemish Mountain in all weathers, he realised that God was there and he began to pray many times, day and night. We know this because in later life

he wrote "Confessio"; the story of some parts of his life and how they affected him.

There is a very ancient prayer hymn called 'St Patrick's Breastplate', or 'The Lorica'. It is also known as 'The Deer's Cry', because there is a legend which tells of Patrick and some friends walking across an area which was being watched by the king's soldiers who were waiting to capture them. In answer to this prayer said by Patrick, all that the soldiers saw was a herd of deer. So, the prayer is connected with the saint in name and in legend.

This prayer hymn is about the unity of God's Creation and is a thought provoking one for our present time, when there is much disregard and consideration for the protection and care of our environment and of the entire ecosystem.

Some linguists point out that, in places, the language dates to the eighth century, others say that there are also very ancient parts that go back to the time of Patrick, and so it is agreed that it could very well have been written by our national saint.

It certainly seems to have the same spirituality as the 'Confessio'. It has been translated several times and set to music by a number of composers. Some of its translators were Cecil Frances Alexander, Kuno Meyer and Fr Noel Dermot O'Donoghue.

My brother, Seamus had great devotion to St Patrick and he said this prayer every day. Once he sang it for us. I wanted to learn the words, which are a translation from the original, old Gaelic and short Latin ending, and my granddaughter gave me a CD, so now I often sing it as I work in the kitchen.

Another legend about St Patrick tells that when he was in the Belfast Lough District he heard lovely music coming from

its South Shore. A few centuries later, Bangor Monastery was on that site, and it had a strong musical reputation.

Two greats then at Bangor were St Comgall, its founder, and St Columbanus, who was taught by him. Later, Columbanus became the principal teacher of monastic lifestyle and part of his work was to instruct the choir. He was very strict with himself and others, and so the monks who sang during the day and night had to maintain their posture, no matter how tired they were.

Chant

The oldest Eucharistic hymn in Europe was written in Bangor. It was chanted by priests as they approached the altar for Holy Communion. It is dated to the seventh century, but some believe that it may belong to the sixth century. I wonder if it was sung by the monks in the time of Columbanus. My brother, Seamus knew this chant too.

Columbanus left Bangor, in 591, with some companions to go on missionary work in Europe. He founded several monasteries there, the most famous being Luxeuil, known for its music and choirs. The last monastery that Columbanus founded was at Bobbio. Several years ago, I visited the village and prayed at his tomb. The journey took us across lowland, up mountain roads, and past forested hills, with glacier covered peaks towering above them.

When Columbanus went on his missionary journey, he sailed across to the continent, along rugged ground, up and down hills, sailed across lakes and along rivers. He preached and converted as he went along. Our work can give glory to God, and, as they moved across water, he encouraged the monks as they rowed, telling them to keep their minds on Jesus.

Later, he made a song about this. It is now called 'The Boat Song' and it was translated by Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich. Two of my brothers, Anthony and Seamus, enjoyed singing it and seemed to put extra energy into the part where the monks were encouraged to 'Heave!' They were probably picturing the strong efforts of the monks as they pulled at the oars.

An eighth century anonymous Gaelic prayer was translated by Eleonor Hill and when a melody was added it became a favourite hymn, entitled 'Be Thou my vision'. It is one of the songs that I taught to the children in St Patrick's Girls' Primary School. Eleonora Hill did not know the identity of its author.

When William Carmichael was collecting old Gaelic prayers and hymns in the highlands and lowlands, on the shores and islands of



St. Patrick

Scotland, he found that the name of the authors were unknown and decided that they may have been written in a monastic cell in Iona or Derry.

We sang the 'Deus Meus' often in St Patrick's Church choir. It was written by Maol Iosa

Ó Brolcháin (Bradley), from Inishowen, in the 11th century. At a very early age, he went to the monastic school in Both Chonais, at Carrowmore. He was a very holy man and very diligent, and he wrote a lot. The 'Deus Meus' was written in Latin and Gaelic, with half of each verse in each of these languages.

There is a sense of wonder that these hymns are all over a thousand years old. Of course, the monks who wrote them transcribed sacred Scripture too, including the Psalms. They also chanted the Psalms at the hours. The Psalms are part of the Old Testament and were there before Jesus was born. They are still prayed and sung today. That is the wonderful inheritance of Christianity – the Old and New Testament.

And today, God continues to gift us. Each generation has its own creative people and some of the works of Fr Liam Lawton, John Michael Talbot and many others, will become evergreen gems as well.

I sang a passage from Scripture, "If you seek me, you will find me", at my granddaughter's wedding. I had learnt it from a music tape. These people – the writers, composers, singers – use their gifts to uplift our spirits, to bring us the word of God.

Every song or hymn has its own story. One about the 'Sancti Venite' claims that angels sang it to a holy man before it was ever written down in Bangor. When

St Columba went to the nearby island of Hinba to pray, the monks on Iona saw lights above it. When he returned, he told them that he had been given great insights into some passages of Scripture, and had heard music and singing of

a kind never heard before. Was it the music of the future, even of today? The musical instruments were different in those days and so was the way music was written down.

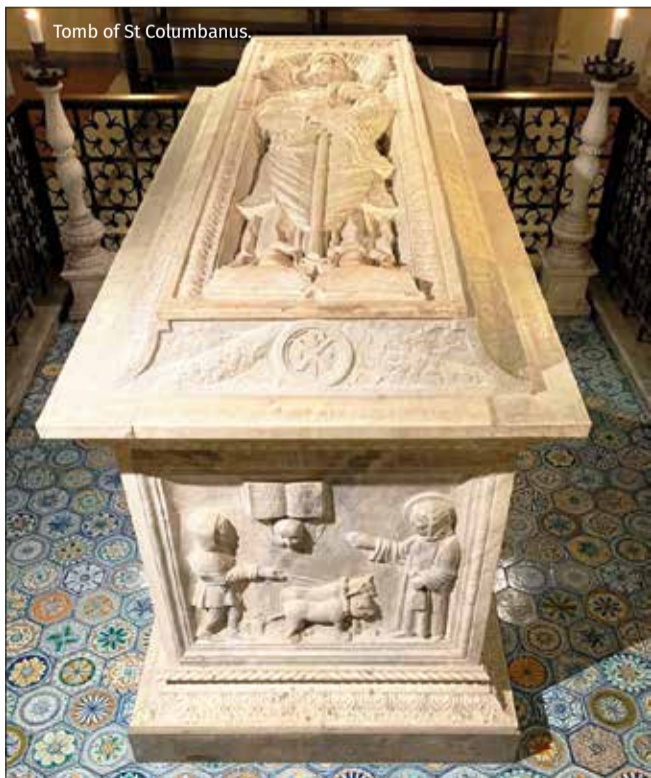
Glory and praise to God for ever.



St Columbanus



The River Rhine, Germany, that is associated with 'The Boat Song'.



Tomb of St Columbanus.

Children's Catechism Club - C3

by Veronica Harley

Hello children. C3 wishes you all a very happy New Year! Welcome to the month of January. The first day of January is very special. We begin a new year and we look ahead to new beginnings and hopes for the future. But it is also the day that we celebrate the wonderful feast of our Blessed Mother Mary, the Holy Mother of God (CCC 493). Mary received the Word of God in her heart as well as in her body and gave life to the Saviour of the world. We treasure and honour Mary on this day as a faithful servant of God and truly the Mother of Jesus.

The Holy Name of Jesus - January 3

This month is dedicated to The Holy Childhood and Name of Jesus. We remember the years that Jesus spent growing up with Mary and Saint Joseph. We celebrate the special feast, The Holy Name of Jesus on January 3. On this day we honour the powerful name of Jesus. The name 'Jesus' (CCC 430), which was commanded by God to be given to the Child, is a Hebrew word Yeshua, which means 'salvation'.

'In the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth and under the earth' (Philippians 2:10).

Epiphany - January 6

The feast of the Epiphany (CCC 528) is on the 12th day of Christmas and is sometimes referred to as 'Little Christmas'. The word Epiphany comes from a Greek word which means 'appearance' or 'to show oneself'. We celebrate this day in remembrance of how the three wise kings visited Jesus and recognized Him as the Saviour the world had been waiting on.

Traditionally, the kings are known as Balthazar, Casper and Melchoir, and it is believed they were very clever men who probably studied mathematics and astronomy (the stars). They knew about the prophecies of the birth of God's Son and how He would bring salvation to the whole world. They looked for a sign in the stars for the birth of the baby. When a very bright star appeared in the sky, they knew that if they followed it, they would be led to where the baby had been born.



The bright star guided the kings to the stable where Jesus had been born. They brought with them special gifts of frankincense, gold and myrrh. On the day of Epiphany we give thanks to God for the gift of His Son and for all the other gifts and talents which we have received.



Tradition - Epiphany Chalk House Blessing

An ancient Catholic tradition on the feast of the Epiphany is to bless the home using blessed chalk. Blessed chalk is taken by a family member and used to write across the lintel of the front door 20+C+M+B+ _____. The last space is filled in with the numbers which make up the last half of the new year.

20+C+M+B+21

Christus Mansionem Benedicat

This is what the chalked markings on the door mean: The 20 is for the first two numbers of the year, the three letters are the first Initial of each of the kings (Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar) and the last two numbers are the last half of the year. The C, M, B also stands for the Latin blessing Christus Mansionem Benedicat which means 'May Christ Bless this House'.

Chalking the lintel of the door is a way to celebrate and mark the occasion of the Epiphany and God's blessing of our lives and home. In time, the chalk will fade but we hope that the meaning of the symbols



written above the door will sink into the depths of our heart and be visible through our words and actions. Remember the Latin words, Christus mansionem benedicat, "May Christ bless the house."

Saints of the Month

January 2 - St Basil
& St Gregory Nazianzen
January 17 - St Anthony of Egypt
January 24 - St Francis de Sales
January 28 - St Thomas Aquinas

Baptism of Jesus

And when Jesus had been baptized, just as He came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and a voice from heaven said,

"This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:16-17).

The Baptism of Jesus (CCC 535) is celebrated each year on the Sunday following the Feast of the Epiphany. This feast day brings the Christmas



season to a close. The Church recalls on this day how Jesus went down into the River Jordan and

was baptised by John the Baptist. The baptism which John the Baptist offered moved people to confess their sins and repent. Jesus, however, was sinless and therefore did not need this baptism. But He did not hesitate to identify himself with humanity and our struggles and accepted the baptism from John. The baptism of Jesus marks the beginning of His public ministry. Many of the aspects of Jesus' baptism happen at baptism today. The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in the form of a dove; likewise, at our baptism the Trinity comes to live in our soul. At His baptism, Jesus was proclaimed Son of God; likewise, at our baptism we are called to be the adopted sons of God. The heavens opened at Jesus' baptism and through our baptism heaven is open to us. Jesus prayed at His baptism and we, too, are called to that special relationship of prayer which leads us to God.

Everything that happened to Christ lets us know that, after the bath of water, the Holy Spirit swoops down upon us from high heaven and that, adopted by the Father's voice, we become sons of God.

Pope Francis has proclaimed a year dedicated to St Joseph

On December 8, 1870, Pope Pius IX declared St Joseph Patron of the universal Church. To mark the 150th anniversary, Pope Francis has announced a year-long celebration dedicated to the foster father of Jesus. In an apostolic letter 'Patris Corde' ('With a father's heart'), published on December 8, 2020, Pope Francis said Christians can discover St Joseph who often goes unnoticed, "an intercessor, a support and a guide in times of trouble".

Pius IX wrote in 1870, "As almighty God appointed Joseph, son of the patriarch Jacob, over all the land of Egypt to save grain for the people, so

when the fullness of time had come and He was about to send to earth His only-begotten Son, the Saviour of the world, He chose another Joseph, of whom the first had been the type, and He made him the lord and chief of His household and possessions, the guardian of His choicest treasures". (Quaemadmodum Deus).

God trusted Joseph to be the foster father of Jesus, and because God gave this magnificent duty to him, the Church has always honoured and praised St Joseph, next to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and asked for his intercession. St Joseph's paternal protection of Jesus continues from Heaven, as he watches over Christ's Mystical Body, the Church on earth. God the Father is our Father in the most perfect sense. But even Jesus, Son of the heavenly Father was obedient and entered the care of St Joseph. As members of Christ's body, the Church, we too enter to the care of St. Joseph, who still acts as a "faithful and wise servant" over his Master's household.

St Joseph, Patron of the Universal Church, pray for us.

*Saint Joseph,
watch over me
and care for me
just as you cared for
the Child Jesus;
and by your help,
may I come to know
your Son,
and so grow in strength
and wisdom
and the favour of God.
Amen.*



Quiz Time with Lawrence

- Who played the character 'Manuel' in 'Fawlty Towers'?
- Which is Europe's longest river?
- What number is directly opposite 6 on a dartboard?
- Which famous sportsman was 'elevated' to the UK House of Lords in October 2020?
- By what name was Oliver Hardy affectionately known throughout his acting career?
- Who was lead singer with British rock band 'Dire Straits'?
- In which country would you find the Bridge over the River Kwai?
- Which football club plays its home games at the Priestfield Stadium?
- Which TV presenter published his memoirs, entitled 'Life's What You Make It', at the end of last year?
- What is the name given to the area where the batter stands in Baseball?
- The opening of which William Shakespeare play includes the line... "If music be the food of life, play on...?"
- In which South American country would you find the Magellan Straits waterway?

- Which Bruce Springsteen song includes the lyrics... "Cos down the shore everything is alright. You and your baby on a Saturday night...?"
- What was the fictional name of the block of flats where Del and Rodney Trotter lived?
- How many Brontë sisters were there?
- Which company produces the electronic game console 'Playstation'?
- Who played the role of Irene in the 2000 movie, "Me, myself and Irene"?
- Of which country is Orange Free State a Province?
- A dodecagon denotes a shape of how many sides?
- Who currently hosts the USA's 'Tonight Show'?
- In horseracing, what is the minimum distance for a National Hunt race?
- What nationality is violinist and conductor, André Rieu?
- Of the UK's five busiest airports, four are in London. Where is the other?
- Anastasia and Drizella are characters in which epic fairytale?
- What date represents exactly half way through the calendar year?

Quiz Answers: 1, Andrew Sachs. 2, The Volga. 3, Eleven. 4, Ian Botham. 5, 'Babe'. 6, Mark Knopfler. 7, Thailand. 8, Gillingham. 9, Philip Schofield. 10, The Plate. 11, Twelfth Night. 12, Chile. 13, Jersey Girl. 14, Nelson Mandela House. 15, Five. 16, Sony. 17, Ren e Zellweger. 18, South Africa. 19, Twelve. 20, Jimmy Fallon. 21, Two miles. 22, Dutch. 23, Manchester. 24, Cinderella. 25, 2 July.

Aghyaran, Ardmore, Ardstraw West & Castlederg, Ballinascreen, Ballymagroarty, Banagher, Bellaghy, Buncrana, Carndonagh, Claudy,

Let Your Light Shine!

Clonmany, Coleraine, Creggan, Culladuff, Culmore, Desertmartin, Donnyloop, Drumquin, Dunamansha, Dungiven, Fahan, Faughanvale, Garvagh, Gortin, Greencastle,

Moville, Newtownstewart, Omagh, Plumbridge, Strabane, Swatragh, Templemore - Long Tower and St Eugene's, Three Patrons, Waterside



Divine Child Jesus, Bless and Protect Us.



Greenlough, Iskaheen, Killyclogher, Killygordon, Kilrea, Lavey, Leckpatrick, Lifford, Limavady, Maghera, Magilligan, Malin, Melmount,