



OSSORY ADULT FAITH DEVELOPMENT

December 2020– Issue 25

OSSORY TIMES

Sharing the life of our Diocese



Vocations in Ossory

How do I take a first step on
the road of discovery?

How do I know what life path
I should take?

take a first step
on the journey of
discovery...



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Editorial

Christmas is the search for a God who is already with us. It is an interesting observation in the third of Bishop Dermot's Advent reflections (published in the Kilkenny People and reprinted here). Is it possible that like the Jewish leaders of John's time that, on occasion, we are searching for a God who is right in front of our eyes? The simple "Jewish objection" to our faith is that if Jesus were God the world would be different. How could the Messiah enter the world and not leave it changed. At Christmas we welcome then - a God, as Bishop Dermot reminds us - who is already here. If he is here then our world is different; and it is.

These pages are testimony to some of the ways that the arrival of this infant Lord has changed our world. We - the people of faith in Ossory - are radically changed as a result of his coming to us. Belief in God shapes our lives. This *Ossory Times* - like all others - documents that fact.

We have been knocked, shaken, upset, driven apart by the ongoing pandemic of Covid 19. But our faith matters to us and for that reason we have done amazing things to come together. Parishes have installed webcams as we moved online to allow us to continue to learn about, express and proclaim our faith. I witnessed the simplicity of online prayer groups coming together during these Advent nights; I saw the determination of singers, musicians and Ministers of the Word as they safely recorded carols for the people of our Diocese. I saw our readers come together to learn and reflect on their ministry and to ask how better can we proclaim the message of our faith. I overheard the words of the virtual retreat on the topics of faith, hope and love as hundreds gathered with us. I heard the questions - and asked some - at the reflection on faith and mental health. Rahner called all this the transcendental imperative, our searching for something prompted by the fact we already have experienced it - we know it. Bishop Dermot called it waiting for a God who is already here.

Welcome to the latest edition of the *Ossory Times*. As always I hope you enjoy this publication. Comments, suggestions and contributions are most welcome for future editions. Articles or advertisements for upcoming events or of recent events, can be sent to:

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inthisissue

Editorial.....	1
Bishop Dermot Farrell Advent Reflections	2
Bishop Dermot Farrell Christmas 2020	8
Music in a time of Pandemic.....	10
Keeping Faith Alive in a Pandemic	14
Canon Law Matters	16
The Importance of the Word.....	19
A new way of Journeying in Faith.....	20
Morality Matters	22
St Mary's Cathedral	26
When a door closed, others opened	30
Fr Ned Dowling.....	32
Godly Play.....	34
Quiz Pages	35



Advent Week 1 Reflection Waiting For The Lord Who Is Close



Bishop Dermot Farrell
Diocese of Ossory



Waiting In Challenging Times

There are many ways to wait. We know many people today who are waiting for the arrival of a better world. There are those who are waiting for the result of a Covid test. Some are waiting for their quarantine period to end. Most are eagerly waiting for a Covid-19 vaccine. Others with cancer, or life-threatening diseases, are waiting to depart this life. Yet others are waiting to see if they will get their job back when the economy recovers. On the other hand, the farmer who sows a winter crop must wait patiently throughout the Spring and Summer for the grain to ripen at harvest time. And a woman expecting the birth of her child waits in a vastly different way to any of these: for her it is a time of great longing, a time of hope. Her time of waiting and hoping is realised in the birth of the child and there is great rejoicing. Life teaches the farmer or the expectant parent how to wait. The life of faith also teaches us how to wait: to wait in joyful hope for the coming of Christ, for the coming of God, for the fulfilment of life. Advent—from the Latin for ‘arrival’—is the

time the Church remembers and celebrates that our God comes to us: in the Lord Jesus, in the events of our lives, in the silence of our hearts, and beyond this life—when we see the Lord face-to-face.

The God Who Comes—Every Day

Every year for four weeks leading to Christmas the Church celebrates the season of Advent: a time set aside to draw us into the mystery of Jesus’ coming in the flesh at Bethlehem, and the mystery of his coming at the end of time. However, there is a quiet third coming of Jesus. It is a time when we learn to perceive anew the Lord’s silent coming into our lives and into our world every day. As well as drawing us into the mystery of Christ and putting before us the coming of God at the end of time, Advent alerts us to the presence of Christ who never left us. In these Advent days we look for the signs of where and how God moves in the common occurrences of every day. This is the human face of God whose Kingdom “is present wherever he is loved and wherever his love reaches us” (*Spe salvi*, 31). This is the

God who offers a hope we cannot attain by ourselves. Being attentive to this day-by-day coming of God, we become, like Jesus, bearers of hope for those who find themselves wandering in the desert of disappointment and disillusion.

Stay Awake...Stand Ready For His Arrival

When we pray on a regular basis, we become more and more attentive to the day-by-day coming of God. Our waiting for God in prayer reminds us that we ourselves, including all that we strive to achieve, are not the centre of the universe. The current health crisis has brought home to us the limits of our own abilities. It has reminded us that the perception we built of our modern society—more wealth, better health, longer life, bigger homes, unlimited worldwide travel—is a house built on sand. The effects of the pandemic that we are living through dramatically reminds us we have been standing on ground that can wash away beneath our feet. For many people, this year has been a type of wilderness experience, especially during the lockdowns. But being in the wilderness is also finding ourselves in a place where we have to discover what is essential, where the irrelevant is stripped away and the vital becomes apparent, where the truth in our hearts is revealed. We have the possibility of choosing what is really important, what makes a difference to us and to others.

Prayer Transforms Us Into God-Oriented People

In prayer our attention is turned “away from ourselves, and towards those who have been entrusted to our love and practical care: family, friends, community, and especially those who lack the blessings we have been given so abundantly” (Columba Stewart, OSB).

In prayer our attention is also turned away from ourselves and towards God. In prayer God’s life springs up in us anew. If we attune to God through prayer, God will truly transform our lives and show us how we are to live them well. Prayer is hope in action, and hope that is about more than just getting into Heaven. As Pope Benedict XVI succinctly puts it, prayer is a school of hope which teaches those who

pray to hope in a goodness and a power that transcends their own capabilities.

Real hope, then, is rooted in a faith and trust in God’s promise even when life is difficult. “Faith is not a light which scatters all our darkness, but a lamp which guides our steps in the night and suffices for the journey... God does not provide arguments which explain everything; rather, his response is that of an accompanying presence, a history of goodness which touches every story of suffering and opens up a ray of light” (*Lumen fidei*, 57). Faith shows us a God who always accompanies us; God is the source of our trustworthy hope. Advent—in its prayer and liturgy – brings us along the path of faith, waiting in quiet hope and joyful expectation for the One who can change and transform our lives.

God Is Seen In The Landscape Of Our Lives

In Advent we prepare to celebrate the birth of our Saviour. Born at Bethlehem, Christ never leaves us. In the resurrection Christ is always with us (see Matt 1:23). The risen Christ is the Christ of Bethlehem today! The Feast of Christmas calls us to become more aware of his presence. Christ is present to us not only in Word and Sacrament, but also in the people who surround us. He comes to us in those who are afraid, in those who are isolated and lonely. It was Christ himself who said to us that “I was hungry and you gave me food...” (Matt 25:35-40). The Christ-child lying in a manger is but the beginning of the story. In the face of all the anguish of the last nine months, we see heroism and patience and understanding; we see honesty and the unselfish service of others; we see genuine holiness and fidelity. There are people in the world, in the Church, in our schools, in our estates and in our families who are committed to the care of the sick and elderly. Such lives, marked by a striving to minister to the sick and the dying and to the little ones, testify that Christ and his Kingdom are close to us, and that the Lord has not abandoned his people. In these days of Advent may we never cease to pray that his Kingdom may come, that justice and mercy be done. Come, Lord Jesus! *Maranatha!* Do not delay!

Advent Week 2 Reflection Speak Lord, I Am Listening



Bishop Dermot Farrell
Diocese of Ossory

Can you imagine the chaos of these weeks on that first Christmas? We have sanitised it. We have become accustomed to it; our familiarity with the story has, in some sense, made us numb to actual happenings. These were traumatic weeks and months; it was not an easy path to that first Bethlehem.

Mary, who was herself a young woman, was visited by the angel Gabriel to tell her that she was chosen by God. This visit would hardly reassure. At least, at first can you imagine the trauma of an angel standing before you and then imagine that same scene with that angel carrying a message for you as vast as the one he carried for Mary. Fine that God thinks her able for it - this massive ask — I wonder did she? What were Mary's initial thoughts? How was she to tell her family; how was she to tell her neighbours and friends; how was she to tell Joseph? I cannot begin to imagine the questions that must have occupied her mind in the moments after that visit; and these are questions before even she begins to consider the future that lay in front of her - the mother of God. How do you raise God? How do you carry him into and then through the world? She did not know what lay ahead. All she knew was he who asked.

We have lived through strange times in the past months. We have carried ourselves well - on the surface of it we are all, in the main, doing ok; but there are moments when, like Mary, we might be just smiling on the outside, afraid to think of the vastness of it all. Biting it off one small bit at a time. I can survive this lockdown - its only 2,3,4 more weeks to go....

It is alright to be under pressure on occasion. It is okay to not know. This is part of the human condition - it is part of the condition into which our God was born.

We are waiting now again - not thankfully for an end to lockdown, but for the arrival of Christmas. An uncertain Christmas, one where it might not be possible to do those things we normally do; or with the people we normally do them with. Maybe some are not able to travel home, maybe some are home, but crossing the threshold - that last step - is not possible or simply for now not prudent. Yes, it is different, it might even be difficult. But then so was that first Christmas.

God entering our world as an infant changed everything. It made joy possible in a new way. In fact, "God's sign is His humility. God's sign is that He makes Himself small; He

becomes a child; He lets us touch Him and He asks for our love" Pope Benedict XVI (Homily at Mass for the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord, 24th December 2009). Now the message of a God who loves us so much, that he was to walk among us, was heard. It was heard clearly despite the noise that surrounded that chaotic first Christmas. God spoke quietly and humanity listened. God whispered and Mary heard.

As we journey towards this Christmas might we, amid all that is going on, slow ourselves to hear. To hear the whisper of God for us - for each of us. God did not enter the world as an infant on that first Christmas because he loved humanity - as if it was some concept or corporate reality - no he entered the world because he loved you and me. His message then in our world today is not to be spoken in some disconnected way - it is to be whispered to you and me, as it was to Mary. The challenge is, then, not that it will not be spoken, but rather it is that we can, amid the noise and chaos of our pandemic times, still ourselves enough to hear. Like Mary can we listen. Like Mary can our questions be put aside. Like Mary can we too say "Yes Lord", even with our doubts. Like Mary can we bring God into and then, by our actions, through our world.

As we approach Christmas, I invite you to visit your local church, still yourself and say, "Lord it is chaos, but speak and I will hear."



Advent Week 3 Reflection

Waiting for a God already here



Bishop Dermot Farrell
Diocese of Ossory

On that first Christmas people awaited the arrival of their king. They knew the Saviour was to come to them. There was a feeling of expectancy as it was to unfold now for them. They were ready for it. The Prophet Isaiah had foretold it when he said, "the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will call him Immanuel" (Is 7:14) - a name which means God is with us. They awaited, they hoped, they dreamed, they believed... and yet what they received was not what they expected. A stable, a baby - born to a poor family in a part of the world largely unseen. Were they not ready? Could they not hear? Was it not what they wanted? Could they not see?

God arrived. He came into our world without fanfare, without procession - small and unseen - but he arrived; and to a people "ready" to receive him.

Yet, we know well the story of John the Baptist whose life work was to proclaim the arrival of him who came. John stood before the Jewish leaders and was questioned by them, "are you Elijah?", "are you the prophet?", and had to reply "among you stands one you do not know." The God whom they awaited was already there. Among them, one of them - small and unseen our God walked. By then he had lived among them for many years. God in the midst of a people expecting him. God in the midst of a people ready for him. God in the midst of a people wanting him, and yet he remained a God unseen.

Advent 2020: We are surely ready for

God. We need him. These have been difficult months for us as the pandemic has changed how we live. Some unseen thing has defined how we interact. We are apart when we need to be together. We face a Christmas like none other. We would not choose to celebrate this wonderful journey of Advent in the midst of a pandemic - after months of compromises; sufferings; losses and hardships. As one famous theologian, however, reminded his students - and us - "this very moment, with all its imperfection and frustration, because of its imperfection and frustration, is pregnant with possibilities, pregnant with the future, pregnant with Christ." We are asked, then, to live with and into all the possibilities the struggles open up for us.

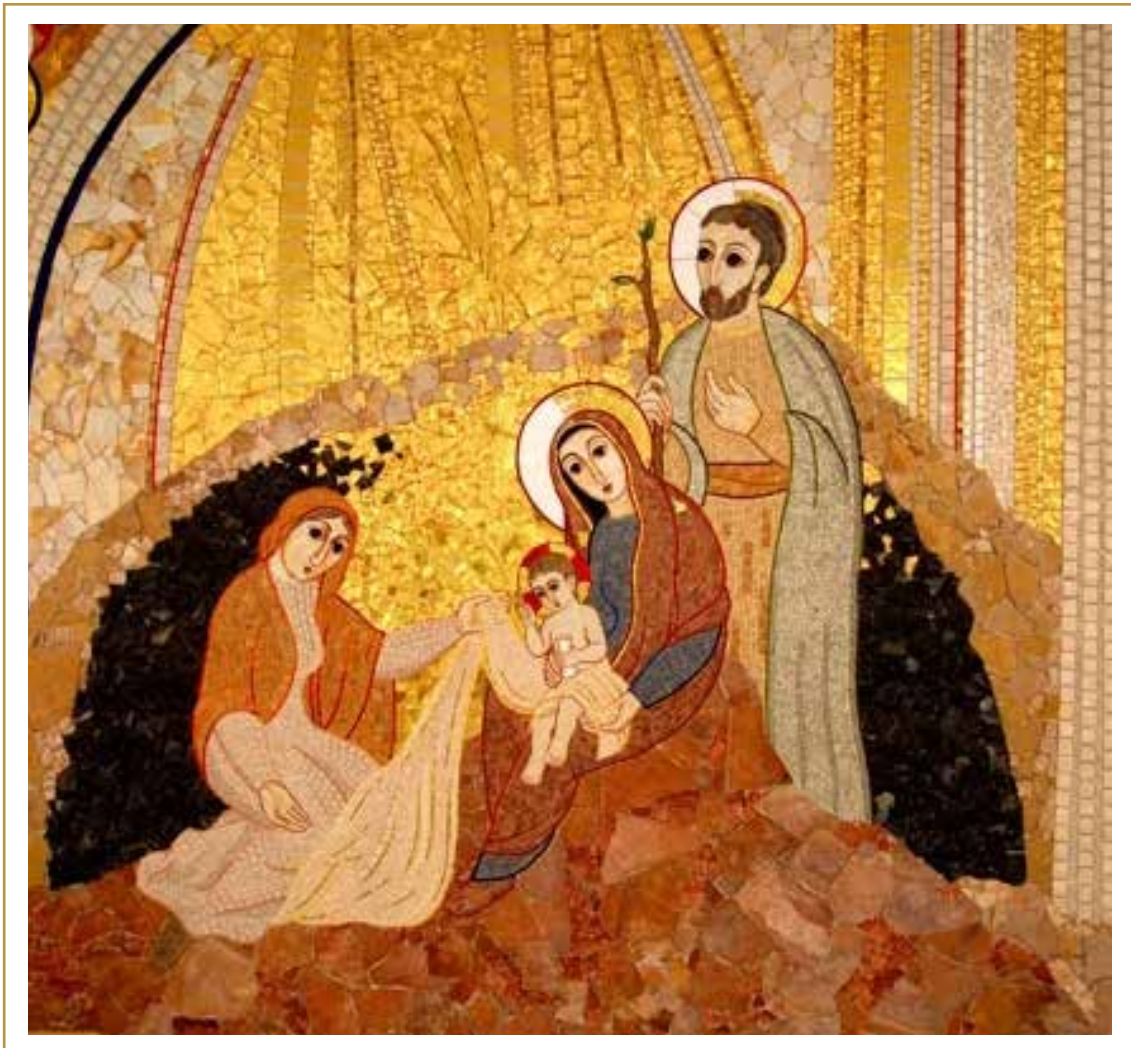
Ours is a time of hurting; a time of suffering; a time of trial and we too are a people somewhat broken. We need God then, we need the message of hope that he brings, we need this Christmas. And yet, like those in John's days our Christmas is not celebrating a God who is yet to come - it is our recognising and welcoming a God who is already here. But, "if we want Advent to transform us—our homes and hearts, and even nations—then the great question for us is whether we will come out of the convulsions of our time with this determination: Yes, arise! It is time to awaken from sleep. A waking up must begin somewhere. ... It is time for each of us to go to work—certain that the Lord will come—to set our life in God's order wherever we can. Where God's word is heard, he will not cheat us

of the truth. Alfred Delp SJ (+1945) "The Shaking Reality of Advent" [written in prison before his execution].

Think of the many ways our lives are shaped not by the thing unseen, but by the one unseen. We know the message he brought and how it shapes our lives. As Pope Francis observes "so great was His love for us that He became one of us, so that we in turn might become one with Him" (Blessing of the Bambinelli 3rd Sunday of Advent 2019). We have become one with him in so many ways. Think of the many ways we have been with each other in these past months. The small gestures, those largely unseen - that have made all the difference. Zoom calls; visits to care homes through windows; letters; phone calls; shopping left at someone's

door, even the distanced smiles of reassurance which we share when we pass. Our Christianity permeates our daily lives - it shapes who we are. It has taught us how to be in pandemic times and in ordinary times. It has guided us. It is who we are. We have heard the message and learned the lessons. Our God is with us, and although still unseen in our world and often unrecognised, he is shaping how we are. We have, then, already welcomed him. He walks among us as one that we know.

This Advent we prepare to welcome again the one who guides our lives - this Advent we prepare to welcome again the message of hope - this Advent we prepare to welcome again a God who is already with us.



Christmas 2020 The Warmth of Our God



Bishop Dermot Farrell Diocese of Ossory

Like most things in 2020, this will be a Christmas unlike any other in our lifetime with socially distanced celebrations and uncertainties hanging over our hopes. Since last March we have had to re-think our way of living and the way we engage with each other. We have learned that we are vulnerable. Despite all our medical and technological advances, we can be, and have been, wounded by the Coronavirus.

Life has been disrupted because of the worldwide pandemic. Some have talked about postponing or cancelling Christmas. Yet others have talked about "a meaningful celebration of Christmas." However, the birth of Christ, which the Feast of Christmas celebrates, cannot be "cancelled."

With the birth of his Son, God joins us definitively in human history—a story that nativity plays in our schools depict every year. As the Gospel tells us, Jesus of Nazareth was born in the days of Augustus Caesar, "while Quirinius was still governor of Syria." The story of Jesus of Nazareth, therefore, is not a charming fable that takes place once upon a time, set apart from its time and the concerns of its day. No, Jesus is born in the historical setting of Bethlehem—effectively, a village, with distinct limitations and definite possibilities: a place where political and social unrest was common, in an era in which brutality and violence were endemic, where people's lives were marked by struggle and impoverishment. In Jesus God was working in and through human history, and we should not doubt that he is able to do so today. This year, more than ever, we need to hold onto the central hope of the

Feast of Christmas that God joined us in the form of a child, and is still with us, bringing us renewed courage and consolation in a time of great uncertainty. The birth of the Christ-child invites us to look to the future with hope. But not a naive hope that next year will be necessarily better than the last. With the Incarnation the life of God is stretched open to welcome all that we are. Christ opens us to the future, not a future of our own making—the fragility of which we increasingly appreciate—but the future which is God's future for us.

At Christmas we are not just celebrating the birth of a famous child. The birth of every child is a hope-filled event. But, if we are celebrating nothing more than a romanticised birth, eventually we will be overcome by discouragement. The child of Bethlehem grew up. He experienced the sorrow of human life: seeing the death of family members and friends, suffering illness and pondering over the seeming arbitrariness of earthly life. Jesus of Nazareth understood what it meant to suffer and, perhaps more sadly, understood what it meant to see others suffer and die. That is why it is crucial to realise that something much more than the birth of a child has happened in Bethlehem: the Word became flesh. God came to dwell among his people. He has united himself to humanity—to us—so inseparably that he is genuinely "God from God, and Light from Light," truly God while remaining truly human.

Since March not a day has passed without reminders of the tragedy that has come upon us. Sickness and suffering, loss and

mourning remain part of our national consciousness, like a dull ache that will not go away. Christmas and the coming of a new year, the first without lost loved ones, will be a time of deep emotion for bereaved families. We find ourselves in a dark time, a long winter. But winter passes, as the motto of St Kieran's College, Kilkenny reminds us—quoting the Bible—*hiems transiit*, winter has passed; this dark time will also come to an end. When Christ appeared, as the warmth of God in the winter night our faith received a new dimension. He taught us a new way of living and loving in this world. In Christ, God truly become, and remains “Emmanuel, God with us.”

The Good News of Christmas does not begin on Christmas night to end on Good Friday. To Christians, the joy of Christmas is not limited to Christ's birth. Neither is it limited to his death. It is his death and resurrection that give meaning to his birth. The Good News of his birth has not faded after 2,000 years. And why? Because Christ has not died. He is risen, he is alive, and so his Spirit continues to reach us, to well up in our hearts, and particularly so at Christmastime when the Good News is made visible in such a vulnerable way.

Today's crib cradles today's Christ. Let the child abandoned in the streets, the old abandoned in homes and institutions,

the child workers who rarely see the light of day, those made redundant because their companies have been asset stripped to generate dividends for shareholders, the violence done to our sisters and brothers by the rape of nature and the exploitation of an earth God meant for all, the refugees denied the opportunity to work or the migrants housed ten to a room by unscrupulous landlords, let them not wait in vain this Christmas to know the warmth of God that is given to all (see Pope Francis, *Let Us Dream*, p.116).

We need hope more than ever at this time. While we wait for that day when a vaccine becomes widely available to end this global pandemic, let us continue to allow “the light of faith to shine through our deeds” (2nd Mass of Christmas). As we continue to navigate this pandemic and other disorders, may we remember God's tenderness and closeness in the presence of God's beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

Lord, we trust you are with us in these days. Whisper your word of comfort, encouragement, and hope to all who need it now. Be present with all who are unwell and all those whose health is endangered because they care for them. Make us bearers of the light that comes from Bethlehem.



Many churches have used the time to be creative as the virtual parish became a very important reality.



Liam Lawton

Music in a time of Pandemic



This time last year we were busy preparing for Carols Services, Christmas Concerts and, of course, our Christmas liturgies. None of us knew that in a few short months we would be in the middle of a Pandemic, as new words, unheard before, entered our vocabulary. Words such as - social distancing, flattening the curve and lockdown became part and parcel of daily life, as we became au fait with the workings of NPHET and many more previously unseen groups.

So, as I write this, the pandemic is still raging and on the increase throughout the world, but also there is now 'Hope' on the horizon ~ in the shape of a Vaccine. Hopefully, next Christmas we can go back to our Carol Services, Concerts and have Choirs sing at our Liturgies with full congregations.

So how have we managed? How have we done?

I believe the Church as a whole has done remarkably well in adapting to the situation. This is done by the excellent service of so many volunteers ~ women and men who have kept our Church buildings safe and well managed throughout this pandemic. They have been there at every moment to Steward, Sanitise and help in the various Ministries and without fail, and we owe them much.

Many churches have used the time to be creative as the virtual parish became a very important reality. Churches that had never used 'webcams' are now using them without fuss as it helps them to keep in touch with their people. Now also carol services, school events and other such occasions are broadcast on line so

that people are kept au fait with what's happening in their locality. Funerals and weddings are on line too, as people can keep in touch with family and friends near and far. The webcam has proved an invaluable source of connection with people especially when our parishes had to go into lockdown.

However, there is one group that have sorely missed out in their ministry during these times, and we have missed them too ~ I speak of our choirs, musicians and singers who cannot sing for the liturgies, in groups, or come together as they would like to to practice. People have had to adapt to the situation in which we find ourselves. Some people who are more vulnerable than others may not feel secure in coming into our places of worship and so we have to reach out to them.

There is a limited amount of singing that can be done, respecting the Guidelines and protecting everyone, even as we enter one of the busiest times of the year for choirs. Not being able to sing with the choir this year ~ not being able to sing the Christmas carols in church together, is very difficult, but standing back from it all this year might help us to appreciate more, the honour and privilege that we have been given ie ~ to use our gifts and talents in music and song for the service

of others. Hopefully, it will make others too appreciate what people do for them in the service that they offer through their ministry.

We are blessed, to be well served in the Dioceses of Ossory and Kildare & Leighlin by the great number of people ~ volunteers who make our liturgies life giving and hopeful. For those who haven't the webcam resource there is Mass each week on KCLR allowing so many people of faith the ability to connect with each other and with the universal Church. This year we are also having a joint carol service with Bishop Dermot Farrell and Bishop Denis Nulty, which will be broadcast on Sunday 20th December at 8.00 pm. This will help people to get into the spirit of Christmas ~ the real reason why we celebrate this season ~ and pray that the Christ child to come to be with us all and our loved ones, especially this year. Even our putting this together was strange and involved many obstacles - work that was, however, surely worthwhile.

As the New Year dawns, we can begin to hope again ~ that our Churches will filled with people singing and praising God and that no one will feel left behind or lonely. The only thing that we can leave behind is Covid 19 for good !



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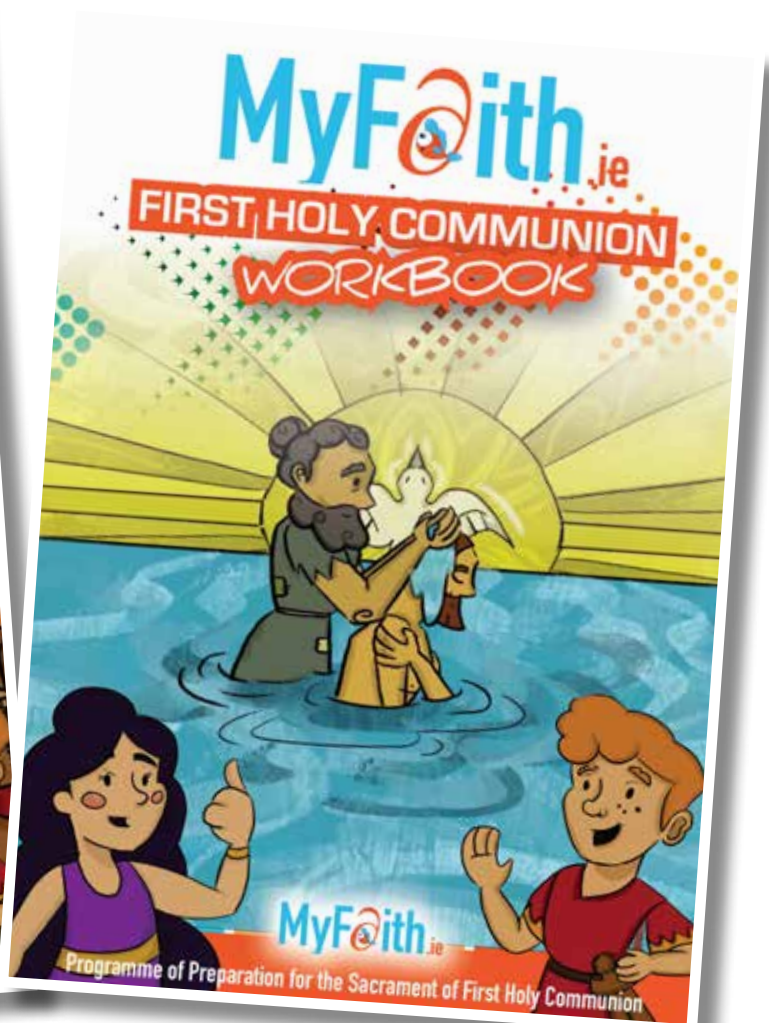
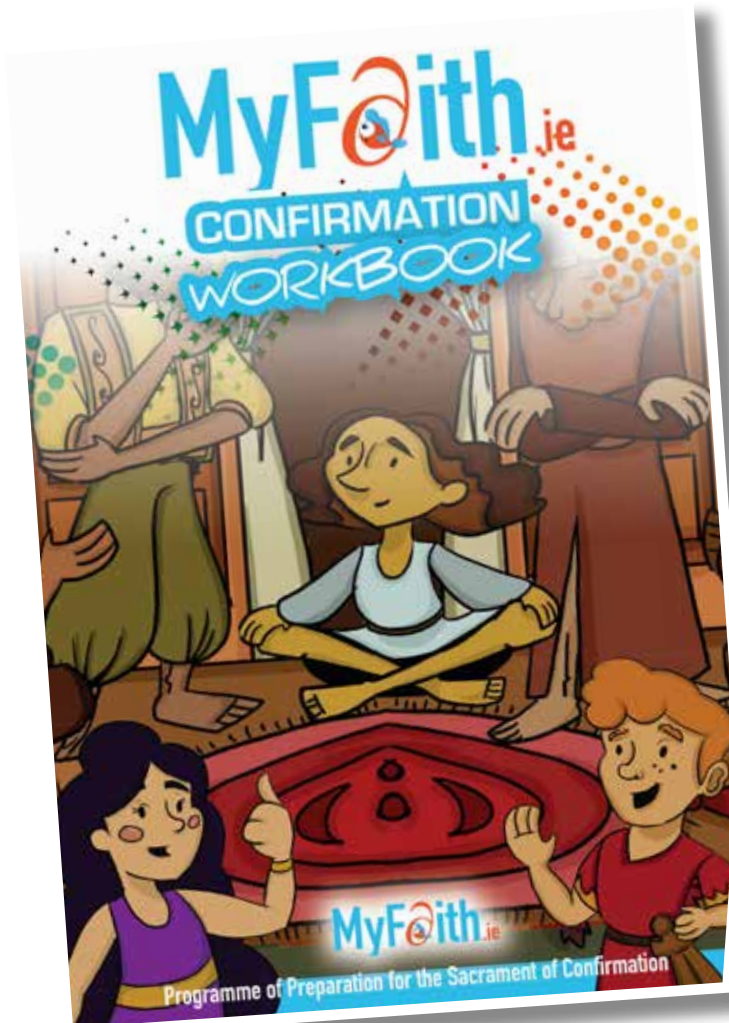


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... in an Advent like no other - there is still
so much for which to be grateful.

Keeping Faith Alive in a Pandemic

Jimmie Connolly



Our faith is our lifeline. If we keep our faith alive, then the chaos in the world around us cannot overcome. Faith goes to our core. As St Augustine reminded us "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you".

Like hope, faith has proven to be even more essential to us in a time when our world has been turned upside down. None of us have lived through a pandemic. None of us have had to work, school, play, connect with family all forced to do this from home. We are all merely figuring this out as we go along and our faith hopefully is a place that we can touch, come back to, get centred around, when we feel the chaos and exhaustion creeping in.

This faith then doesn't merely happen. It needs tending. It is a relationship with God, it is lived in community, through hope and Love.

In response to this need, and to help us tend our faith, the Adult Faith Development group facilitated a virtual Advent retreat on 1st, 2nd and 3rd of December by means of Zoom, exploring the theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Love. The three evenings of retreat were led by Fr Billy Swan, Priest of the Diocese of Ferns and a former Director of Seminary Formation at the Pontifical Irish College, Rome.

I joined more than three hundred fellow travellers on these nights for the journey of faith on this mini Advent retreat. Family, friends and strangers - all experienced a real sense of connection and community from the comfort of our own sitting room chairs!

Fr Billy's own deep faith, humility and vast life and educational experience made the one-hour session each night both informative and prayerful. It was good

to come together - it helped with the essential tasks of tending to our faith.

Fr Billy talked on that first evening of a faith "born from above", a "faith that grows" and a "faith that draws us into relationship". It is then no wonder that Augustine reminded us "you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you".

On the second of the three nights, we took time to reflect and pray about hope. A hope that is born of faith. Fr Billy shared thoughts on what hope is and what hope is not! Our evening included reflections on the challenges to Hope that exist today in the Irish Church. We considered how the Church is not dying but changing and how we can meet the challenge by starting afresh from Christ with new hope. We explored how we must avoid fatalism and allow ourselves to be inspired by the "witnesses to hope" from Church history and from people of heroic faith that we know in life. Hope was presented to us as a balm for humanity.

On our final evening, Fr Billy asked us to listen to the Saints and what they have to say about Love.

"We become what we love and who we love shapes what we become. If we love

nothing, we become nothing - St Clare of Assisi,

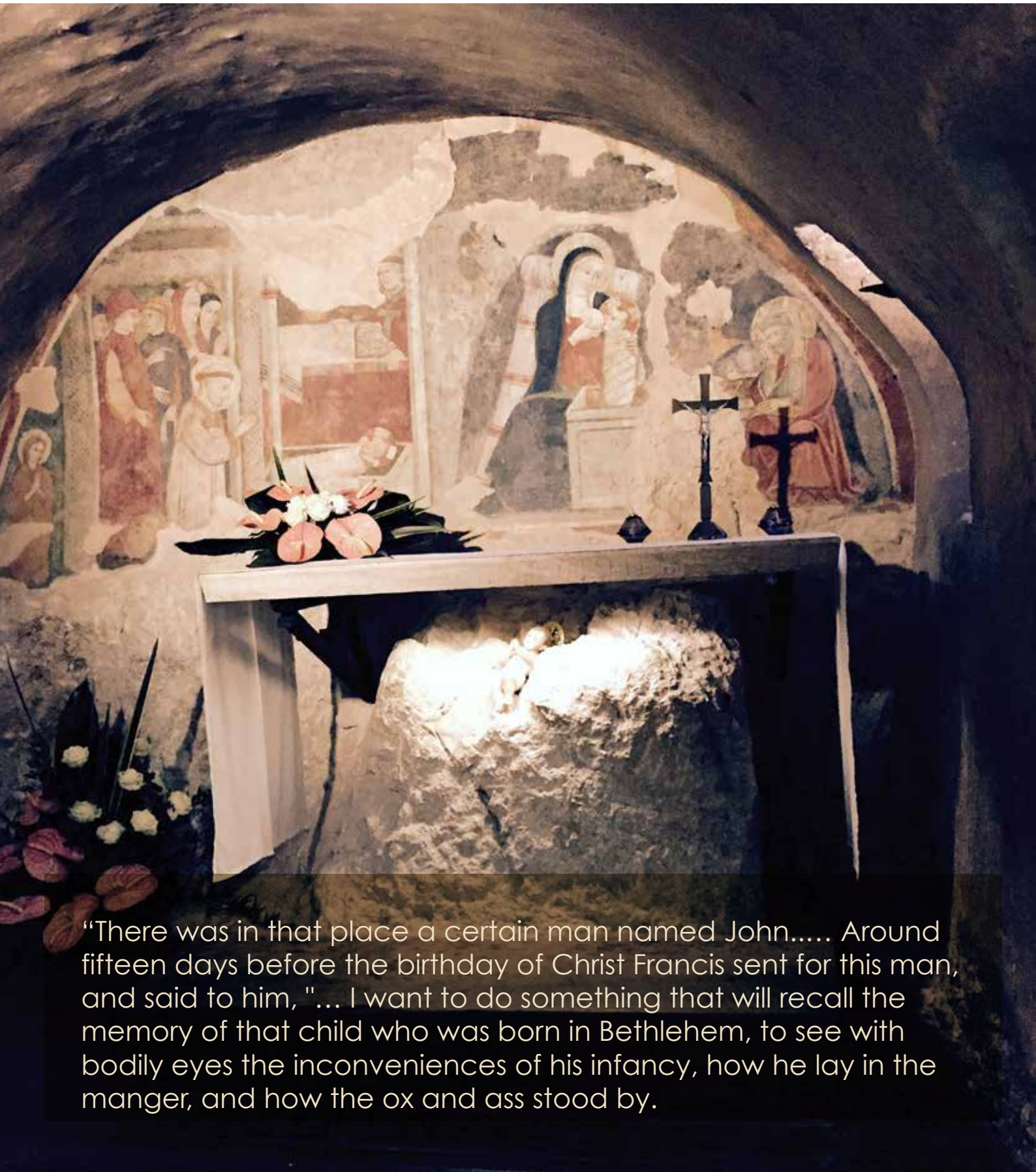
"The things we Love tell us what we are"- St. Thomas Aquinas, "Let us not tire of preaching love; it is the force that will overcome the world. Love must win out. It is the only thing that can" St Oscar Romero, and many, many more.

We reflected on how we must return time and again to the source of love, Jesus, to let ourselves be loved by him. Faith grows when love is received.

We reflected on how it is that emptiness can often lead to addictions and to a world fruitlessly seeking happiness and wholeness without God. Our night explored how it is that nothing can replace God's words of love spoken for us. Nothing can substitute for his love within us and that is why prayer is the place where we return time and time again to hear the words of Christ "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Remain in my Love" (John 15:9)

These three nights of prayer and reflection reminded all who gathered - in these dark December days, in an Advent like no other - there is still so much for which to be grateful.





"There was in that place a certain man named John..... Around fifteen days before the birthday of Christ Francis sent for this man, and said to him, "... I want to do something that will recall the memory of that child who was born in Bethlehem, to see with bodily eyes the inconveniences of his infancy, how he lay in the manger, and how the ox and ass stood by.



CANON LAW MATTERS

The First Christmas Crib

Fr Albert McDonnell,

resides in Kildysert, Radharc na nOileán Pastoral Area

The crib is a much loved symbol of Christmas. Families enjoy visiting and praying at the recreation of Christ's birth. Children in particular love seeing the animals, the angels, the shepherds, Mary and Joseph and most of all the baby Jesus. People take home little bits of straw as a symbol of blessing at this sacred time.

Where did this beautiful idea come from? Perhaps, we have become so used to the tradition of placing cribs in our churches, homes, schools and hospitals that we take it for granted and almost forget that somebody must have created the first crib.

It goes back to St Francis of Assisi in the year 1223. The first place outside of his native Assisi where Francis brought his new way of being Christian was the Rieti valley in the Italian heartland. It was here that Francis wrote the canticle of creation and where the original tau cross can be seen. One of the shrines in the Rieti valley is the hill-town of Greccio which is bordered by forest on one side and on the other affords a stunning view of the valley below. There are caves close by and it was here that Francis created the first crib.

One of the first Franciscans, Thomas of Celano, has left us a description of that Christmas night:

"There was in that place a certain man named John..... Around fifteen days before the birthday of Christ Francis sent for this man, and said to him, "... I want to do something that will recall the memory of that child who was born in Bethlehem, to see with bodily eyes the inconveniences of his infancy, how he lay in the manger, and how the ox and ass stood by.

" With glad hearts, the men and women of that place prepared, according to their means, candles and torches to light up that night which has illuminated all the days and years with its glittering star. The manger is ready, hay is brought, the ox and ass are led in. Simplicity is honoured there, poverty is exalted, humility is commended and a new Bethlehem, as it were, is made from Greccio.

"Night is illuminated like the day, delighting men and beasts. The people come and joyfully celebrate

the new mystery..... The holy man of God stands before the manger full of sighs, consumed by devotion and filled with a marvellous joy. The solemnities of the Mass are performed over the manger and the priest experiences a new consolation. The holy man of God [Francis] wears a deacon's vestments.... and he sings the holy gospel with a sonorous voice. ... Then he preaches melliflously to the people standing about, telling them about the birth of the poor king and the little city of Bethlehem".

I have always loved that account especially the description of the valley filling with light. It reminds me of growing up in Kilmaley and seeing the countryside transformed on Christmas Eve as families placed a candle in each window of their homes to light the path of Mary and Joseph.

St Francis communicated the story of Christ's birth to a largely illiterate people by recreating Bethlehem. It is believed that he had been to the Holy Land a few years previously and wanted to share that experience. Francis' idea worked because the visual is powerful. He brought Bethlehem to Greccio and the men, women and children of that place experienced the sacred birth of Christ like

never before. In our own very different world, the practice of erecting Christmas cribs has kept the memory of Christ alive even for people who do not take an active part in any faith community.

The genius of Francis was to find a symbol that spoke to people everywhere and always. During the 797 Christmases that have come and gone since that Christmas night in Greccio the wonder of the crib continues to inspire awe and to lead us into the sacred. That is the mission of people of faith in every age. We need to find new ways of expressing the mystery and love of Christ that speak to people. I imagine that many thought that Francis was mad as he assembled cattle, donkey and sheep to imitate what he read in the gospel. Yet another example of the crazy things that Francis had spent his life doing.

The saint was approaching death when he created the first crib. By the time he came to Greccio Francis was in poor health and almost blind. Yet, he gave us the expression of the Gospel that has reached more people than any other. We all can make a difference.

This Christmas we pray that *'Night is illuminated like the day, delighting men and beasts'*.



Mairin Bergin

We are tasked then with an important role at the liturgies in our parishes.

The Importance of the Word

Aine Buckley

As a Minister of the Word our role, we are told, is not to read the scriptures for people but to proclaim it. There is - if you stop for a moment - a vast difference. One, reading is somewhat passive; the other proclaiming is very active. We are tasked then with an important role at the liturgies in our parishes.

Each year during Advent the Adult Faith Development Group has arranged some nights to support and educate the Ministers of the Word in our Diocese and this year was no different. In the latter weeks of Advent then, in a virtual way, we came together for two nights to explore our important ministry.

On the first night Fr Dan Bollard reminded us of the importance of preparation. Noting that he himself starts to read the Sunday Gospel on the previous Wednesday to allow it settle with him - he wondered what publications and resources we were using to help us get behind the scriptures. A lively discussion threw up many suggestions - its seems the resources are as varied as were

were participants. Fr Dan noting that the task of reflecting on the scriptures is done in phases - with out first reading the scriptures, then re-reading reflecting on it and then finally we pray with the scriptures. It is this latter action of praying the scriptures which then allows those words to shape our lives.

On the second night Fr Jim Murphy shared insights into his now well worn bible and the journeys it has been on with him as well as the many places it has taken him in prayer. He shared insights he has learned from others including the importance of our venerating the Bible and treating it as the sacred text that it is. The Bible he reminded us was written for us and not for us to keep but for us to share with others. In music, thoughts, stories and memories Fr Jim took us around the room - literally - as from his kitchen he brought the Bible to life.

Our is then an important task - one we enjoy. It was good to come together with others who carry out this ministry, hearing their thoughts helped us too.

The many virtual gatherings offered in the Diocese of Ossory throughout Advent were positive experiences and a way for people to come together albeit at a distance

A new way of journeying in Faith to adapt to our times

Eilís Costello

Every year the Ossory Adult Faith Development group offer courses throughout the Diocese on various topics of our faith. This year, however, presented a particular challenge for all people of faith as Government restrictions prevented our gathering. Undeterred the AFD offered many courses and opportunities online.

Fr Billy Swan of Ferns Diocese was one of these opportunities as he presented a series of reflections over number of nights during Advent, to more than 300 people gathered virtually through the magic of Zoom.

One of these 'gatherings' was entitled 'An Exploration of the Impact of Faith on Mental Health'. The importance of our mental health has been highlighted in recent years; and possibly none more so than in 2020. Professional voices chiefly from the field of medicine have stressed the need for essential structures to support people with mental health problems. According to Fr Billy the Church has yet to find its voice in this area. This is regrettable as the Gospel and the church tradition

have much wisdom and light to shed on the topic of mental health.

Advent occurs at the very darkest time of the Irish year. We journey this dark way hoping that the Light of the Christ Child will shine in our hearts. Even though this journey is in darkness we hold the image of the open cave and manger where all are welcomed regardless of their circumstances. Here we receive the love so generously and unconditionally, lavished on us by God. A love that brings light to every darkness.

What then sustains us on this Advent journey?

We look to others of faith for support particularly if we are feeling empty within ourselves. Fr Billy offered us a pathway through which our Christian faith can contribute to our mental health and wellbeing.

• God loves just as we are. He accepts our shortcomings and our inadequacies simply because He made us for Himself, in His own image and likeness.

· He became one of us -the Word made flesh - to redeem us and help us to live fulfilled lives. In taking on the human form He experienced the whole range of emotions thereby understanding how each one of us feel in 'the bits and pieces of everyday life'.

· With faith in Christ comes the gift of forgiveness i.e. the power to forgive ourselves and others. This enables us to shed the burdens which weigh us down and thus prevent us from being fully in communion with others and all of creation.

· When we are drawn into the faith community we feel supported. We share in each other's burdens and pray as one. This universality of shared feeling offers us the great truth that we are not alone but sustained in our need. A reality made real for us as we gathered virtually many times during Advent.

· Inherent in the Church tradition are the rituals which we so richly treasure,

particularly prayer and the Sacraments. This is particularly true this year when the rituals around Mass and funerals are so limited by the restrictions. It was evident that many people's spirits were uplifted by the opening again of the Churches.

The many virtual gatherings offered in the Diocese of Ossory throughout Advent were positive experiences and a way for people to come together albeit at a distance, from their homes or wherever they find themselves. Without the use of modern technology these 'gatherings' of, on occasion, more than 300 people would not have been possible. Because we are Church we can pray, reflect and support each other even when we are kept apart physically. It is truly wonderful that the Church is alive and active, supporting communities in these challenging Covid times. Many thanks then to all who helped by sustaining our faith and providing us with very rich experiences during Advent as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Saviour.





Give me a crash course in ... COVID Vaccination

Michael Shortall

2020 has been such a challenging year.

Especially for the vulnerable, whether it be physical, mentally or financially.

At last there is light at the end of the tunnel.

Yes, there are a number of vaccines to be rolled out early in the new year. It has already begun in some countries.

Such welcome news! It's an extraordinary feat to be able to find a vaccine and to be able to roll out so quickly.

It can take many years to develop and test the safety of a vaccine. Science has developed so much that with the right resources and determination, so much is possible. For example, many of the vaccines are using what is called mRNA technology.

What is that?

Traditional vaccines work by providing small doses of a virus into a body. It tricks the body into creating antibodies that will protect against the actual virus. On the other hand, mRNA vaccines, tells the body to create the antibodies, without the small dose of the virus, by sending it messages. These are the first vaccines to use this technology. While it is very expensive now, what science has learned now will allow it to move quicker in the future.

Although the science can create the vaccine, people must be willing to take it.

True. We should not be sceptical about science, which is the fruit of God's gift of reason and creativity. The Irish bishops are encouraging Catholics to support a programme of vaccination. While it protects each individual, it also protects of life and the health of those who are vulnerable and for the common good of humanity. The American Bishops put it this way:

"Receiving the COVID-19 vaccine ought to be understood as an act of charity toward the other members of our community ... being vaccinated safely against COVID-19 should be considered an act of love of our neighbour and part of our moral responsibility for the common good."

But there are some concerns?

Yes. We might say that there are two issues. The first is that some vaccines have been developed using a cell-line that originated in sample tissue from an abortion.

I can understand why some might be sensitive on this issue.

Indeed. It is important to continue to affirm that abortion is gravely immoral. But it is not the case that taking a vaccine associated with tainted cell lines is automatically immoral.

How is this so?

The Catholic moral tradition has developed principles to help work through issues like this. One important distinction is between formal, or deliberate, cooperation in an immoral act and material cooperation, which is incidental and remote. In this case the immoral act of abortion is very remote. The making of these vaccines do not involve cells taken directly. Instead, the cells were taken from tissue samples in the 1960s and replicated in a laboratory to produce two cell lines that can be reproduced again and again, indefinitely.

So it's not as if the vaccine required ever more cells from ever more abortions.

Exactly. Also in this situation it is a question of prudence. There are few readily available alternatives. In this case, it is morally permissible for Catholics to

accept a vaccine which involves the use of foetal cell-lines, where there is a great risk to life or health, especially to the most vulnerable, as in the case of a pandemic. This does not mean the acceptance of abortion.

I get it! The connection is so remote and the public health situation is too grave to reject the vaccines. You mentioned that there is a second concern?

The second concerns the ethical distribution of the vaccines. It is vital that the vaccines get to the most vulnerable first, and then to those who care for them. Access to the resources of healthcare is a basic right. It means that allocation must be according to greatest need rather than any other reason, such as ability to pay. This also means that patents owned by private companies cannot prevent poorer countries access to the vaccines that their people need.

It is a matter of social justice, then.

Without doubt. May I use this opportunity to wish all the readers of the *Ossory Times* a very happy, holy and healthy Christmas. Please keep each other safe.

1 Irish Catholic Bishops, December 9th 2020.

2 Bishop Rhoades (South bend) and Bishop Naumann (Kansas City), December 14th 2020.

3 Many of the vaccines currently being developed do not depend for their design or production on foetal cell lines. See: "An Ethics Assessment of COVID-19 Vaccine Programs" from <https://lozierinstitute.org/an-ethics-assessment-of-covid-19-vaccine-programs/> sourced on 19th Nov. 2020.

4 See: *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Dignitas Personae* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2008), paras 34-35, and *Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance to Healthcare Workers, New Charter for Healthcare Workers* (Philadelphia: NCBC 2017), paras 69-70.



Aghaviller Parish Crib



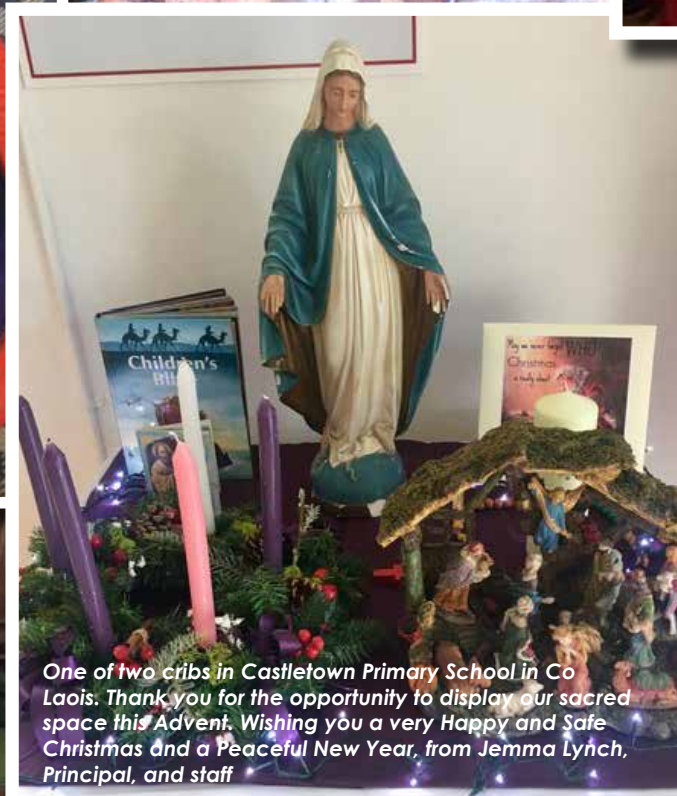
Crib at St Bennett's Church, Bennettsbridge.
Joan Cleere



Pauline Lucey



Made in Peru, the size of half
an apple. Ann Marie Hogan



One of two cribs in Castletown Primary School in Co Laois. Thank you for the opportunity to display our sacred space this Advent. Wishing you a very Happy and Safe Christmas and a Peaceful New Year, from Jemma Lynch, Principal, and staff



Crib in Convent Chapel, Callan
Hannah Frisby



Mairin Bergin



School crib from Our Lady of Good Counsel GNS. The backdrop was designed by Mia (Rang II), the crib was constructed by our caretaker and the figurines are from South Africa, a gift from our Secretary, Catriona O'Reilly, Principal, Our Lady of Good Counsel GNS, Ferrybank, Waterford



Parishioners Home, St Patrick's Parish, Kilkenny
Paula Walsh



Home Crib, Anne O'Brien



Crib in front hall window, Convent of Mercy, Callan



The Cathedral, by definition, is the Seat of the Bishop and the Cathedra is an essential part of the building.

St Mary's Cathedral, what a gift we have received from previous generations?

Richard Scriven

The Foundation Stone was laid in 1843 by Bishop William Kinsella, the new cathedral was consecrated in 1857 Bishop Edward Walsh. It was restored in the 1890s by Bishop Abraham Brownrigg and beautifully adorned with mosaics in the 1930s by Bishop Patrick Collier. The building was re-ordered in 1977 by Bishop Peter Birch and the sanctuary beautifully restored in 2011 by Bishop Seamus Freeman. Every generation has cared for the central church of our diocese.

While no substantial work has been carried out in recent years neither have things come to a standstill. A detailed digital survey of the building was undertaken in 2019. The detail of these drawings is incredible and their availability invaluable as we move forward.

The digital drawings have enabled the re-organising of the seating and the definition of the central aisle. (The church benches and much of the church furniture were made by the D'Arcy family of John's Bridge; it is said that it took the firm one week to make a bench.)

Attention is now focused on the furnishings in the sanctuary. A different style of ambo and altar have been placed in

the sanctuary in December. Discussions, concepts, possibilities, feedback and the experience of using the sanctuary are all now part of the process towards a final arrangement. Nothing is written in stone while stone will be the final medium.

In the last few weeks the carpet at the front of the church has been removed and slowly (and painstakingly) the levelling compound which was placed on the tiles in recent years has been removed. This has been a slow task – a slow process using a hammer and a chisel and with great care not to damage the tiles which are at least 130 years in place. Some tiles have been damaged and will need to be replaced. The finished effect will be that, from the back door, the eye of the beholder will be swept through the cathedral to the altar and place of reservation.

The Cathedral, by definition, is the Seat of the Bishop and the Cathedra is an essential part of the building. The large pillars of the cathedral pose a challenge. Originally the chair was placed in the apse of the Church on the left-hand side. In the re-ordering in 1977 Bishop Birch situated it towards the front on the left and more recently it was brought back





towards the Apse, again on the left. The present location, in the centre behind the altar, gives the optimum view for both the celebrant and the congregation.

The Chair has an interesting history. It was made by Messers Earley and Powell of Dublin and a comprehensive description was given in the Kilkenny Journal in March 1867 when it was first installed.

"The seat or cathedra is designed in the 15th century Gothic. It consists of four flank octagonal pilasters, which form the framework and support the arms of the seat. There are richly carved capitals on the top of each pilaster, the space between being divided in a series of geometrical panels deeply moulded and carved. On the back of the seat there is an arched panel filled in with most elaborate carving."

Messers Earley and Powell also were the artisans who created the window in the North Transept donated to the Cathedral by the Cullen Family.

The heating of the cathedral continues to be a concern and discussions are ongoing. Ironically, in these Covid 19 days we are strongly encouraged to have good ventilation; this is certainly not a problem in the Cathedral! This is a work in progress and we look forward to a solution. In the meantime, come prepared!

In this coming year we hope to turn our attention to the two side chapels. St Joseph has always had a place of prominence in our cathedral. There a beautiful statue of St Joseph made by Pietro Lazzerini. He was a well known Italian sculptor whose work adorns many

churches and cathedrals in Ireland: the statue of Archbishop Leahy outside Thurles Cathedral is his work as are the statues upon the façade of Monaghan Cathedral.

The side chapel of St Joseph dates to the 1890s and was completed in the works that Bishop Brownrigg undertook between 1893 and 1899. The familiar altar of St Victoria was originally in this space but was relocated by Bishop Brownrigg in the work of the 1890s to the south transept. The altar of St Joseph was the gift of Ms Ann Cody to the Cathedral (she also donated the money for the Stations of the Cross). The altar depicts the death of St Joseph as he lies in the arms of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Jesus. Pope Francis in his Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde* has invited the whole church to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the declaration of St Joseph as Patron of the Universal Church. We will use this Year of St Joseph to turn our attention to this corner of the Cathedral. The reredos will be restored and some lighting added to highlight the space.

The Diocesan Draw

The Diocesan Draw continues to be a great success. Now in its sixth year it continues to be very well supported throughout the diocese. Fr Pat Dalton and his team show great dedication and continue to garner support year in year out. At the December Draw, which also incorporated the November Draw, Fr Dalton commented that it was great to see that the numbers had remained consistently around the 1000. It is a great commitment to the diocese by so many and is greatly appreciated. Bishop Farrell wished all well over the Christmas period and hoped that we would all be safe in these Covid 19 days. He thanked the commitment of Fr Dalton and Shiela Walsh for their continued work and dedication to the draw. While the December Draw often has a festive mood this year's was slightly more subdued though there were Santa hats to be seen. Congrats

to the winners of both November and December Draw and we look forward to 2021 and the January Draw. Remember, if you're not in, you can't win.

The Power of Social Media – St Mary's Cathedral and Facebook

St Mary's Cathedral Book & Gift Shop has an active Facebook account with 219 followers simply called St Mary's Cathedral Book & Gift Shop. Recently a post was boosted to advertise the Christmas products available in the shop. The ad ran for 10 days and the cost was a modest €16 but with great results.

The post resulted in 3754 people being reached with 421 engaging with the post and viewing the photographs. This is an engagement rate of 11.2% at a cost of 0.04cent. Over 95% of the audience was female and whilst the age profile had a good spread the most common groups were 35-44 and 45-54. These two groups accounted for over 50% of engagements. Nearly 98% of people viewed on the Mobile App News Feed. The page received over 50 new followers.

As a result of the post being shared 20 times it had an overall reach of 8544 with an engagement total of 2427. This is an amazing marketing tool for a business with a low profile. The shop has low footfall and only a limited number of Kilkenny residents are aware of its existence. Facebook has become a valuable resource to assist in getting a message to a wider audience.

St Mary's Parish also has a very active Facebook page simply called St Marys Parish. With over 1100 friends it is a wonderful, regularly updated platform that reaches so many people. With news from our part of the city it covers the arts, religion, poetry, birthdays, deaths...in general all aspects of life of where we live. Well worth a visit with a wonderful range of photographs. If you are a Facebook user don't miss it. Tell your friends.

... what so many of us began to realise that the life of the church does not only revolve around the church building. The church is much more than this ...

When a door closed, others opened

Paschal Kennedy, Sacristan Ferrybank



Our preparations for the celebration of Christmas 2020 comes after a very challenging and strange year. I remember clearly the day last March when we closed our church here in Ferrybank for Masses.

It was a sad day especially for those who came weekend after weekend and for whom the celebration of the Mass was such an important part of their lives.

Funerals that were now conducted under the Covid - 19 restrictions initially became very difficult and sad occasions. First Communion, Confirmation & Cemetery Mass postponed. As Sacristan you are privileged to have a ring side seat when people gather for some of the happiest and saddest moment of their lives.

It struck me that being sacristan is not just about getting everything ready for Mass and other celebrations or opening and closing the Church it is also a ministry providing help and assistance to all who come to the Church for whatever reason.

Even though those early days of lockdown were painful for everyone some positives started to emerge. I became conscious of the amount of people who came to the Church daily to pray quietly.

Not just the usual visitors but many people who would not be regulars. I truly believe that during lock down many people discovered a side of themselves that perhaps they hadn't thought of for quite a while. In some way the doors that were closed to people for Mass allowed them to open up new ways of celebrating their faith and renewing their relationship with God at home and in the quiet empty space our church had become.

Shrine candles are a very important aspect of the life of every sacristan! During the pandemic there was certainly no drop off in the amount of candles lit. This fact gives me great hope.

Despite the darkness that accompanied the pandemic; the restrictions, the

isolation, the loss of loved ones, people kept the light burning within them and through that simple act of lighting a candle for themselves and others they celebrated the light of hope for their families, friends and wider community .

Celebrating Easter behind closed doors was very different. Such a great feast, the most important of the Christian year. None of the usual busyness or organising the various parts of the ceremonies. It was so surreal. Yet the celebration of Easter was not cancelled, it was merely postponed. To see the joy in peoples faces as we reopened back in June and July was certainly an Easter moment. It was as if people were keeping vigil waiting for the new day.

The rescheduled celebration of First Communion and Confirmation was so meaningful too. Everyone rallied and the involvement of so many people in safely nursing our church celebrations back to life was truly remarkable. It also reminded me powerfully that even though doors were closed people were very much open to faith, to seeing God at work in their daily lives, and God working through them in so many acts of kindness and care for others.

Many people have remarked that it was terrible to see our Churches closed but in some way that fails to take into account what so many of us began to realise that the life of the church does not only revolve around the church building. The church is much more than this. The temptation for those of us who are sacristans is especially strong in this regard.

We spend so much time looking after the sanctuary we could easily be very narrow in our understanding of Church.

The Covid Pandemic has shown me that the Church which is the People needs much more care and attention than the building. The door to that church is always open. Let us never be afraid to enter it.



Fr Ned Dowling, who was chaplain to the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers.

On this Remembrance Sunday I wanted to tell you about Father Ned Dowling. To us he was Uncle Ned, though he was infact our mother's uncle, our grand-uncle. As kids we were taken to see him on Sundays in summer, a long drive in an Austin A40. He was parish priest in Camross, Co Laois, where he served for 18 years.

Afflicted by bouts of dizziness, he collapsed while saying Mass in June 1960 and died from the head injuries sustained in the fall. He was 74. There was so little we knew about Uncle Ned because, back then, anything that related to family members who'd served in the First World War wasn't spoken about. You may think it ludicrous now, but until not so long ago a dim view was taken in Ireland of those men and women who joined the British Army.

Ned Dowling was ordained in 1908 and was a professor at St Kieran's College, Kilkenny, when enlisting as a military chaplain in the autumn of 1914. He was

Fr Ned Dowling

David Walsh, The Sunday Times, November 2020

immediately sent to Ploegsteert, south of Ypres, where he began his duties as chaplain to the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers.

As well as witnessing too much of the horrors, he was present for the temporary truce and one of the impromptu football games supposed to have taken place between German and Allied troops on that Christmas Day, 1914. There is still much debate about the games, whether or not they actually took place. They are not mentioned in any German account of the temporary cessation of hostilities during that festive season.

Uncle Ned saw what he saw and kept a diary detailing his experiences as chaplain to the Dublin Fusiliers. After his death in 1960, Canon Sean O'Doherty found the diary in the parochial house at Camross. And on this Remembrance Sunday, let Uncle Ned take you back to those times.

He wrote of a battle near Ypres in 1915: "Shrapnel crashed down on the wounded, walking and lying, crashed into the swollen corpses of men and horses, and letting loose odours before which the other horrors of war took a back seat. The wounded were in a pitiable state. It seemed to them their cup of bitterness was still filling. The ambulances, working at full pressure, could not get even the lying cases away."

He wrote of a soldier he'd hoped the

doctor would send from the front to receive medical care: "In one of the cow stables Maunsell was lying, down and out with overwork and nerves. He had been holding the place with great pluck for about 36 hours and it had been too much for him. I implored the doctor to send him down. But the doctor gave it as his opinion that we were all in the same boat and had got to stick it. He was right in a way. The fortunate devil who got wounded, got out of it; the poor fellow - in those days - who had been rattled and jangled and shocked out of all semblance to himself was supposed to have only a touch of nerves, and to damn well carry on."

It is hard to read these accounts dispassionately, especially this description of farmyard straw that moved like waves of the sea: "When I reached the farm, I saw a strange sight, a great farmyard in the misty moonlight, covered with straw that moved up and down like the waves of the sea. It was uncanny. I wondered if I was quite well. Diffidently I remarked it to a stretcher-bearer. He was one of ours. 'The wounded are under it, Father. We put the straw out of the barns under them, but with the pain they turn and twist until the straw is all over them and you can't see one of them now at all.' "

And that Christmas truce, the singing of carols, the exchange of presents, the football game? What did Uncle Ned see?

"When on Christmas Eve, an hour or so before our relief (and what it meant to be relieved, the Germans knew quite well), the enemy came out from his lair and sung out to us, while our fellows were not behindhand in showing the same friendly spirit. It didn't mean that they wouldn't cheerfully have bayoneted the lot in a charge, it only meant that as there was seemingly no immediate prospect of killing any large number of Germans according to the rules of the game, they were quite ready and curious to approach them in a spirit of temporary and strictly limited goodwill.

"Many a little souvenir changed hands in these days, buttons, electric torches, cigarettes and cigars. I was very pleased to smoke their cigars, and was very sad when a box bearing on the lid the Weihnachtsgrüße (Christmas greetings) of the Stadt of Leipzig had shed its last fragrance on the Flanders air. The football match, by the way, was a washout as the guns had orders to fire some rounds. Someone was sent out to tell the Germans so. He did so with many apologies, stating, that of course they had nothing to do with it.

"The enemy politely cut him short, explaining that they knew what selfish beasts gunners were, leading a soft life at least a thousand yards from the firing line, and shelling poor helpless devils of infantrymen. There was mutual understanding and sympathy expressed. An hour later a few rounds were fired at nothing in particular and peace reigned once more. Not a rifle shot was heard for several days."

So, in Uncle Ned's part of Flanders, the football game never happened.

He stayed in the army until 1920 before returning to Ireland, serving in a number of parishes and finally ending up in Camross. Within the family it was believed that the bishop didn't look favourably on his time as a chaplain in the British Army and that our Uncle Ned didn't have the ecclesiastical career he should have had. The people of Camross loved him though, knowing him only as "the Colonel", his rank on leaving the army. We wondered if the dizziness that caused his fall and death was a result of traumas suffered in the Great War. We knew, too, that Remembrance Day was important to him. And lonely.

He lived in a country that at the time didn't want to know about the horrors and wasn't interested in remembering those who'd given up their lives. It's hard to imagine how difficult that must have been for those who were there.



During this time we are all on the way to Bethlehem, we are all making the journey.

Godly Play

Gemma Mullogan

Godly Play is a gentle way for children to engage with the Bible and Christianity and to explore its meaning for their lives. It creates the space and tells the stories in such a way that children can listen deeply, wonder and respond.

Godly Play storytelling combines words with careful movement of story materials and leads into open-ended exploration and creative response. Children have an innate sense of the presence of God.

The Godly Play approach helps them to explore their faith through story, to gain religious language and to enhance their spiritual experience through wonder and play.

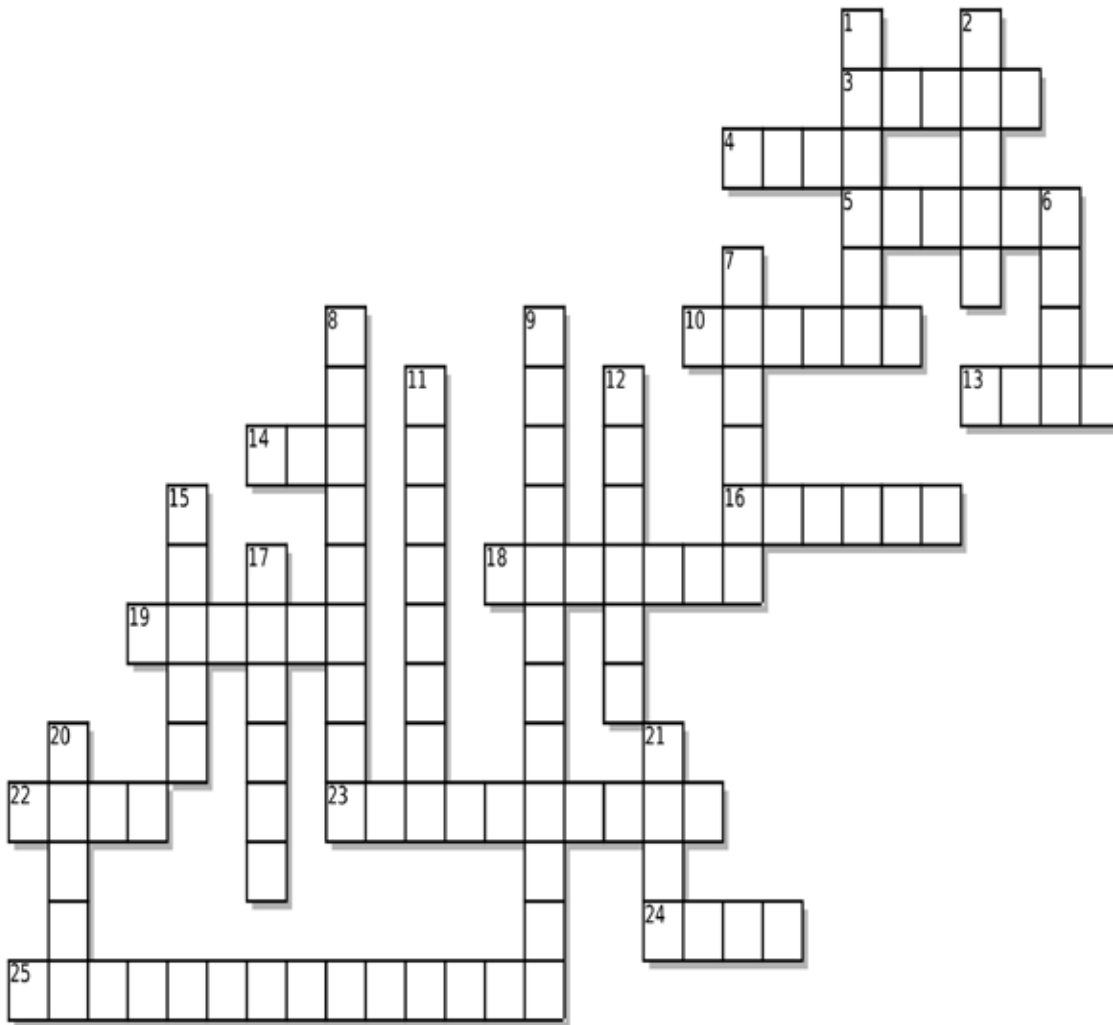
Godly Play can be used in schools, parishes, hospitals and at home. It is used in play and pray groups, holiday and afterschool clubs, school retreats, as part of religious education programmes, for family worship and for sacramental preparation. It can be adapted for use in children's liturgies. Although it has been developed for children, it works well with adults too, and is used in retreats and in care homes.

This year because of coronavirus, Godly Play storytelling took place sadly, without the community of children present. Usually when the stories are told we gather in a circle, build the circle, get ready, listen to the story, wonder, respond, share a feast and pray. This wasn't possible to do this Advent but it was possible to share the Advent story by recording it and making it available on the diocesan website. In this way children were able to listen to the Godly Play stories at home with their families and in school with their friends.

During this time we are all on the way to Bethlehem, we are all making the journey. We are all getting ready to enter the mystery of Christmas. So let's go with the prophets, the Holy family, the shepherd, the angels and the Magi and all the rest to make the journey that was not just back then, it is also now.

To see a Godly Play Story of 'The Great Family' or 'Advent' visit www.ossory.ie for information contact Gemma Mulligan, Diocesan Pastoral Coordinator gemmamulligan@ossory.ie or www.godlyplayfoundation.org

CHRISTMAS CROSSWORD 2020



ACROSS

- 3 Declare a marriage invalid
- 4 Convent dwellers
- 5 Paul's home town
- 10 ___ Advocate
- 13 Lenten foliage
- 14 Peter cast it
- 16 Christmas songs
- 18 Little of the poor
- 19 Sometimes its up and sometimes its down
- 22 Eucharistic element
- 23 Led the Maccabees
- 24 "Hot Diggity" Catholic singer
- 25 Sacrament of healing

DOWN

- 1 Gandolfo
- 2 Judas was in charge of this
- 6 character in the book of Samuel
- 7 Holy objects
- 8 It started here
- 9 Third Sacrament of Initiation
- 11 Monte Casino
- 12 Carlow Church musician of note
- 15 Man of the _____
- 17 Ancient Palestine
- 20 In biblical times it was often paid in commodities
- 21 Chagall

Send your entries, with your name, address, email and mobile number, to:

"Ossory Times Competition",
Ossory Adult Faith
Development,
St Kieran's College,
College Road,
Kilkenny,

by 15th March 2021 first
correct entry from the hat wins!

Prize for age 5-8

**Colouring
Competition**

€20 Voucher
Gift Voucher
for Toy Shop

Prize for age 8-13

**Wordsearch
Competition**

€30 Voucher
Gift Voucher
for Toy Shop

**Prize for Adult
Crossword
Competition**

€50 Voucher
Gift Voucher
**for Chapter House
Bookshop**

**Congrats to the winners
from the Ossory Times
Issue 24 competitions:**

Adult Crossword:
Mary McSweeney

**Children's Wordsearch,
age 8-13:**
Martin Mullany

**Children's Colouring,
age 5-8:**
Rachel Smith

Colouring Competition



For ages 5-8



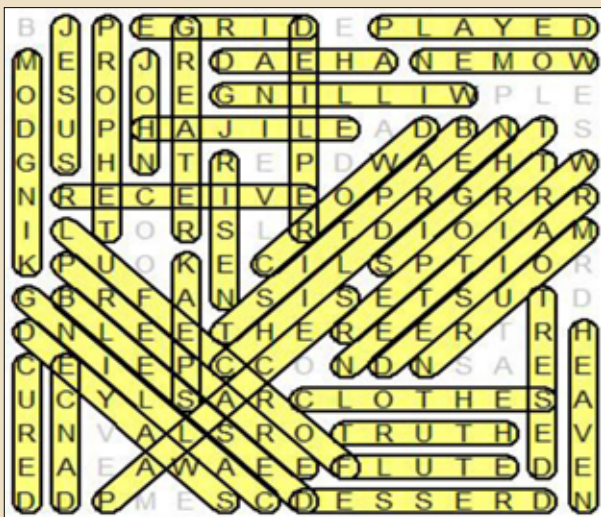
Wordsearch Competition



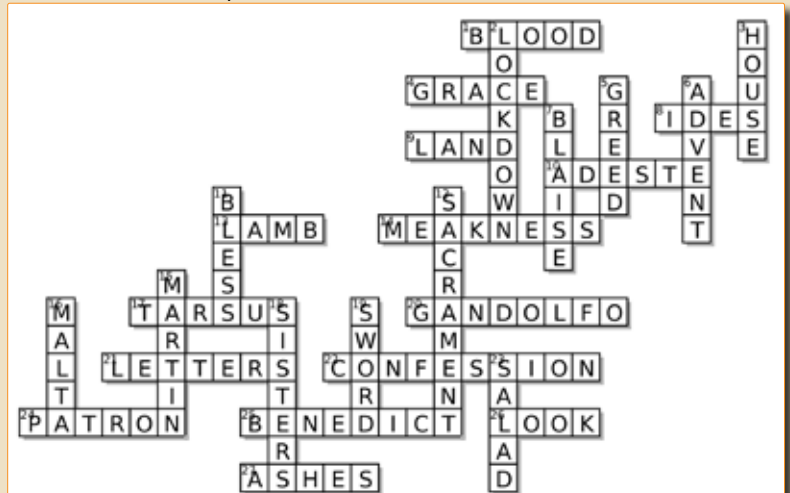
For ages 8-13

S	H	R	R	Y	M	G	Z	S	B	Z	S	D
L	H	T	R	I	B	H	T	B	Z	E	G	T
E	H	S	C	M	G	A	J	A	J	S	N	H
M	Z	Y	A	L	R	A	J	D	M	N	I	R
A	O	R	T	L	U	E	M	V	I	E	S	E
C	Y	H	W	I	S	E	M	E	N	C	S	E
E	J	Y	P	U	V	T	K	N	F	N	E	K
L	P	E	S	E	R	I	K	T	A	I	L	I
C	W	D	M	E	S	B	T	P	N	K	B	N
A	L	E	G	N	A	O	L	A	T	N	A	G
R	H	N	N	S	T	X	J	Z	N	A	T	S
I	A	R	E	J	O	I	C	E	M	R	S	J
M	B	E	T	H	L	E	H	E	M	F	X	S

ADVENT	INFANT	MYRRH
ANGEL	JESUS	NATIVITY
BETHLEHEM	JOSEPH	REJOICE
BIRTH	MAGI	STABLE
BLESSINGS	MANGER	STAR
CAMELS	MARY	THREE KINGS
FRANKINCENSE	MIRACLE	WISE MEN



Answers to Ossory Times Issue 24



DIOCESE OF OSSORY
ST MARY'S CATHEDRAL
RESTORATION FUND DRAW
2020/2021

12 MONTHLY DRAWS

March 2020 to February 2021

MONTHLY PRIZES

1st Prize	€2,000
2nd Prize	€1,000
3rd Prize	€500
4th Prize	€300
5th Prize	€300
6th Prize	€200
7th Prize	€200
8th Prize	€100
9th Prize	€100
10th Prize	€100

Promoters' Prize

€100 1st Prize Winner Promoter
€100 2nd Prize Winner Promoter

Subscription €10 per month. Draw will be held at 8pm on the last Wednesday of each month in the Chapter Room, St Mary's Cathedral, James's Street, Kilkenny. All are welcome to attend.

For further information contact Ossory Diocesan Office, James's Street, Kilkenny. Tel: 056 7762448

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

PARISH-BASED PROGRAMME OF PREPARATION

Reconciliation

First Holy Communion

Confirmation

This parish-based programme will offer **module-by-module preparation** on the journey towards the celebration of the Sacraments

- Teacher-led online interactive classes with Ich Thus, your animated companion for learning
- Build module-by-module online – a new module every 2 weeks on the journey to being fully prepared in the company of your family
- Age appropriate online interactive games/challenges/quizzes for each module to reinforce learning
- Moments of Prayer on each module
- Log out/Log in and pick up from where you left off
- Downloadable worksheets
- Certificate of completion at the end of the Course

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