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Editorial

Our world seems to value the Shakespearian pound of flesh - for each crime there is a sentence; for each mistake there is shame; for each hurt there is a response. By that, worldly, logic God should never forgive humanity for what we did to his son, Jesus... but that is not God's way - his response is love.

Pope Francis reminds us that mercy, not revenge or anger, is at the heart of God. He once noted, "I am always struck when I reread the parable of the merciful father; it impresses me because it always gives me great hope. Think of that younger son who was in the father's house, who was loved; and yet he wants his part of the inheritance. He goes off, spends everything, hits rock bottom, where he could not be more distant from the father. Yet when he is at his lowest, he misses the warmth of the father's house and he goes back. And the father? Had he forgotten the son? No, never. He is there, he sees the son from afar; he was waiting for him every hour of every day. The son was always in his father's heart, even though he had left him, even though he had squandered his whole inheritance, his freedom". This story, of a father hurt, reminds us that for God each of us, at every moment of our lives, remain at the heart of God... What a wonderful thought as we celebrate Easter.

As part of our Lenten journey the City parishes of our Diocese had a mini-retreat, three nights with Fr Billy Swan of Ferns Diocese on the theme of Faith, Hope and Love and those nights finished with Bishop Niall leading us in a reflection on the mercy of God, a reflection included in these pages. It, and so much more, captures the life of our Diocese at this time - the Adult Faith Development pilgrimage of faith through art in Tuscany, the work we are doing for Christian Unity, our involvement in the St Patrick's Day parade, the newly formed ODPC, Trócaire in Ossory and so much more... As always the pages of the Ossory Times try to capture a small aspect of the life of our Diocese. The people, activities, reflections and articles in this edition show that the faith is very much alive in Ossory as we approach this Easter season.

I am delighted, then, to welcome you 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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The International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission (IARCCUM)

Our Joint Ecumenical Pilgrimage to Rome and Canterbury

Bishop Niall Coll and Bishop Adrian Wilkinson



Bishop Adrian and Niall at Canterbury Cathedral

Both of us, the Anglican and Catholic Bishops of Ossory, attended a recent summit organised by IARCCUM (The International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission). Honouring both traditions the proceeding took place in both Rome and Canterbury, the first IARCCUM gathering since 2016. On this occasion over 50 bishops from 27 different countries, mostly in national pairs, spent January 22-29 together to

listen, pray and discuss how growing together as churches might strengthen our joint Christian witness and mission in the world. Here we reflect together on our shared pilgrimage.

ROME

Visiting holy sites to pray in both Rome and Canterbury was very much part of the process. On 23 January it was moving for us to be part of an Anglican Choral

Evensong being held for only the second time ever in the Choir Chapel of St Peter's Basilica. The meeting coincided in part with the annual Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity which always ends on 25 January when our respective churches mark the Feast of the Conversion of St Paul. Appropriately that evening all the bishops attended Catholic Vespers at the Basilica of St Paul Outside the Walls, where the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury both preached and commissioned the IARCCUM delegates in their pairs for their work. For us and many of those attending the liturgy, it was encouraging to observe church leaders from their respective countries clearly at ease in each other's company and all committed to the goal of working for Christian unity.

Earlier that day the Archbishop of Canterbury had presided at an Anglican Eucharist in the basilica of San Bartolomeo. Before the service he and the participating bishops toured the *Sanctuary of the New Martyrs*, which

is a memorial space in the crypt of this church. Opened last year, this permanent exhibition commemorates the stories of the Christian martyrs of the 20th and 21st centuries. Here the vestments worn by Archbishop (now Saint) Oscar Romero and a book owned by St Maximilian Kolbe were on display. Martyrs from churches other than the Catholic Church are also commemorated in the sanctuary. Among them are the seven martyrs of the Melanesian Brotherhood, an Anglican religious order, who were murdered by rebels in the Solomon Islands in 2003. One of those attending IARCCUM was the Anglican Archbishop Leonard Dawea from the Solomon Islands. As a young man, he spent twelve years as a member of the Melanesian Brotherhood and so knew some of those martyred. At the end of the service, the Archbishop of Canterbury laid a wreath at the chapel where the martyrs of Oceania are commemorated.

On the last day in Rome, the bishops visited the church where in 595 Pope Gregory



Bishop Wilkinson and Bishop Coll pictured with the Irish ambassador to the Holy See, Frances Collins, from Cork.

the Great commissioned St Augustine (the first Archbishop of Canterbury) to convert the Anglo-Saxons. From there we made the same journey he did, albeit using the comfort and speed of Easyjet!

CANTERBURY

The second phase of the summit was based in Canterbury and most of the delegates stayed at Cathedral Lodge in the shadow of the great cathedral. There we had time to reflect on many of the issues discussed in Rome and craft the final document which was issued shortly after our ecumenical pilgrimage ended. Among its highlights are: the concerns of the Brazilian bishops on the need to defend the rights of indigenous people living in the rain forest; the extremely fraught political situation in the Holy Land described by the bishops from the Middle East; the challenge of secularism raised by Western bishops and the challenge of religious fundamentalism underlined by bishops from both Africa and Asia. As the week unfolded, it was obvious that some of our episcopal colleagues were returning to situations of political instability, religious discrimination even persecution, all very far removed from our experience in Ossory.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

For us as bishops from Ireland, the summit's focus on partnership and friendship was best summed up by Cardinal Stephen Chow Sau-yan (Bishop of Hong Kong), who preached at the final Sunday Eucharist at Canterbury Cathedral. He said:

"We Anglicans and Roman Catholics are called to be Jesus partners, individually and collectively. The twelve apostles and disciples were not called to form camps, working for their own missions, or competing against each other. They were called to become an assembly, a community, a communion, praying and discerning, teaching and serving for the mission of our Triune God."

The memory of IARCCUM will live long with us and our hope is that it will be a stimulus for continued fruitful ecumenical engagement, not only between the two of us as friends and fellow bishops, but for the wider diocese and church too.

Bishop Niall Coll of Ossory and Bishop Adrian Wilkinson of the United Dioceses of Cashel, Waterford and Lismore with Ossory, Ferns and Leighlin.



Bishops Adrian and Niall at the Basilica of St Paul Outside the Walls, Rome.

In today's world, our unity and witness to the Gospels are needed more than ever.

"Go and Do Likewise."

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2024

Brian Griffin

Each year, Christians are reminded of Jesus' prayer for his disciples that "they may be one so that the world may believe" (see John 17.21). Christians from all denominations come together to pray for their unity. Congregations and parishes all over the world exchange preachers or arrange special ecumenical celebrations and prayer services. The event that touches off this special experience is the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, held each year at the end of January.

To prepare for this annual celebration, ecumenical partners in a particular region of the world are invited to produce a basic liturgical text on a biblical theme. The materials for the 2024 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity were prepared by an ecumenical team from Burkina Faso, in West Africa. The theme chosen is "You shall love the Lord your God ... and your neighbour as yourself" (Lk 10:27). Representatives from the Catholic Archdiocese, Protestant Churches, ecumenical bodies collaborated generously in drafting the prayers and reflections.

These prayers and reflections inspired an Ecumenical Service which was held in St. Edmund's Church, Castletown on Sunday 28th January. Representatives from neighbouring Churches were in attendance. Fr Brian Griffin P.P., Casteltown and Camross, led the ceremony, with the Castletown combined church choir. Rev Victory Fitzpatrick, of the Clonenagh Group of parishes preached at the ceremony. Attendees included Rev Alec Purser, Stradbally, Rev Richard Seymour Whitley, Rathdowney Union, Fr Martin Delaney P.P., Rathdowney, Fr Michael Reddan Adm, Clareen, Fr Joe Brophy P.P., Mountrath & Ballyfin, and Fr Dan Carroll V.G., St John's, Kilkenny.

Beverly Barbour, a lay worker in the Methodist Church wrote a reflection on the biblical theme of the day The Parable of the Good Samaritan:

"The parable of the Good Samaritan is one of the best-known passages of Scripture, it never seems to lose its storytelling ability to powerfully challenge our indifference to suffering and awaken



our interest to inspire community and fellowship together. It is a story about deliberately crossing the boundaries of culture, class, colour, and communities of faith and wake us up to the bonds that connect and unite humanity.

In choosing this passage of Scripture for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the churches of Burkina Faso have invited us to join with them in the process of self-reflection as they ask us to consider what it means to love our neighbour.

Burkina Faso is a landlocked country located in West Africa, below the Sahara Desert bordered by Mali and Niger to the north and Ghana and Nigeria to the South. It is one of the least developed countries with a population of over 22m who are over 64% Muslim and 28%

Christian. It is a member of the United Nations.

We may not experience the extent to which the lives of the people in Burkina Faso may be threatened with terrorism or violence, but for those who seek asylum away from those nightmares, anywhere in the world, we are to follow the scripture in Luke 10 and 'Love Our Neighbour'.

The affirmation that every human being carries the image of God regardless of their race, colour or geographical location is foundational to our Christian understanding of humanity.

The Samaritan could be any one of us who sees our fellow man, beaten, dejected, and robbed of dignity and tries to practically assist despite what the





rules may say. The story told by Jesus, fully aware of the deep hatred between the Jews and the Samaritans and as such would exclude the Samaritan from helping a Jew. Of all the three people who pass the man on the road, according to the Lawyer and the Law, the Samaritan then would have been the least likely to show mercy and grace to this beaten man. Why would a man from a country who has long been at war with the Jews, now help this man.

Jesus shows the three lessons in this story.

1. Using the law (rules and regulations) does not justify behaviour that does not exhibit love, compassion and empathy
2. Our neighbour is anyone of any race, creed, or social background who presents in need
3. Love means acting to meet the person's best interests, even if it costs us

The Samaritan not only binds up his wounds, uses the wine to sterilize the wound and the oil to heal the wounds. He pays money for him to be accommodated and offers to pay the extra costs on his return.

For the Lawyer 'Who is my neighbour?' would mean abiding by the rules of the Torah and not seeing his neighbour as anyone outside his own nation. He could

justify his behaviour according to the law. But this law meant that the priest and the Levite crossed the street rather than help this man.

So let us remember the original question asked by the lawyer 'What must I do to be saved?'

Jesus answers him with the story of the Good Samaritan and entreats us to have mercy and grace to love our neighbour and "Go and do Likewise."

After the church ceremony, the congregation were invited to the adjoining De La Salle Retreat Centre for refreshments. A special thank you to Br Kevin McEvoy for providing the meeting venue and the parishioners who provided and served at the gathering.

This was the first Ecumenical service to be held in Diocese post Covid and one of the first to be held in the Northern Deanery. It was a wonderful opportunity to join with our Christian neighbours and friends in prayer and worship. In today's world, our unity and witness to the Gospels are needed more than ever. As Christians may we always have the determination and courage to continually bear witness and follow the example of the Good Samaritan to 'Go and Do Likewise.'



The Diocese of Ossory's inaugural participation in Kilkenny's St Patrick's Day Parade marked a significant milestone in our community's celebration of our Patron Saint.

Ossory celebrates St Patrick

Sarah Rice

Kilkenny's St Patrick's Day Parade this year saw participation from the Diocese of Ossory for the first time.

At the beginning of March, the Bishop of Ossory Niall Coll together with Fr Willie Purcell, Seán Hickey and Sarah Rice began planning for a new Diocesan initiative involving participation in Kilkenny's parade to honour our patron saint, St Patrick. This chimed with Fr Willie's view quoted in the Kilkenny People saying: "we need to put St Patrick back in St Patrick's Day and celebrate the man who we cheer and sing about."

The 2024 Parade's theme *Kilkenny Cats: Tales and Legends* invited participants to celebrate their history, culture and stories of Kilkenny. There could have been no better theme than this for the Diocese of Ossory's first participation in the Kilkenny Parade!

Bishop Niall wrote to all principals in secondary schools in the Diocese of Ossory to invite student representatives to join the Ossory group for the St Patrick's Day Parade in Kilkenny. The organisers were delighted with the students who answered the Bishop's call to volunteer





to join the Ossory group for the parade. Students came from all our Kilkenny city schools: CBS, Presentation, Loreto, St Kieran's College and the Vocational School and were joined by students from Scoil Abhainn Rí, Callan and Coláiste Mhuire, Johnstown, Co. Kilkenny.

On the morning of the Parade the students met in St John's parish hall to get ready and have a practice run prior to going together to the meeting point for the parade.

Bishop Niall believed that it would be important to have a St Patrick leading our Diocese of Ossory group. St. Patrick was portrayed by Liam Heffernan, who enthusiastically embraced the role, bringing a spirited and engaging depiction of St Patrick to Kilkenny's streets. "St Patrick" met and had photographs taken with many visitors both at the starting point and along the route.

"St Patrick" led sixty students who undertook a variety of roles. Students carried a main banner at the start of our

section, joined at the front by a student wheeling a sound system playing music relating to St Patrick, followed by students carrying forty-two Ossory parish banners and concluding with students holding our large banner describing all the activities of the Diocese bringing up the end of our group. The students represented their families, their schools and the Diocese with utmost respect and pride.

The parade moved along John Street, Rose Inn Street and by the review stand on The Parade before heading through High Street and onto the Market Yard. The Diocese of Ossory was participant number twelve of sixty-one groups.

Our group saw crowds of people, from home and abroad, wearing shamrock-shaped sunglasses, Irish jerseys and leprechaun hats cheering them on as they moved through the route. Bishop Niall was on the review stand and expressed his delight at the participation and contribution by all involved in the Ossory group.

Once our Ossory group reached the end of the parade in the Market Yard they continued together back to St John's parish hall where they were treated to pizzas and soft drinks. There was a lovely celebratory atmosphere in the hall as the students sat together and enjoyed one another's company, basking in the satisfaction of a successful event!

The Diocese of Ossory's inaugural participation in Kilkenny's St Patrick's Day Parade marked a significant milestone in our community's celebration of our Patron Saint. As the day concluded with shared laughter and camaraderie, it was evident that this event had not only honoured St Patrick but also strengthened bonds within our Diocese.

Lá den scoth a bhí ann. Ar scáth a chéile a mhaireann na daoine.





**Homily of Bishop Niall Coll
Penitential Service Lent 2024**

It's all God's work: The Sacrament of Confession

Ten years ago, or more, I took part in a radio discussion about Confession on BBC Radio Ulster. One of the other three panellists was withering in her comments about the sacrament. She revealed that she had given up both on it and on going to church in general many years earlier when she was 19. Her memories of the sacrament seemed telescoped to the time of her first Confession, and it wasn't clear to me if she had much experience of the sacrament after that. Not averse to garnering a few laughs - she is a comedian by profession - she recalled how she had had to 'invent' a sin - stealing an apple - so that she had something to tell on the occasion of her first Confession. Once the laughter had subsided, she then used a memorable term to express her main objection to the sacrament: why should I have to tell my sins to a 'wee man' in a box? And in the course of the discussion, she repeated that point a couple of times.

I have often found myself in the years since recalling her words, expressed as they were in the distinctive idiom of the Belfast vernacular with its fondness for the term 'wee'. Needless to say, I know as a confessor that Confession doesn't always take place in a box, and my fine girth, if not stature, mean that I can't easily be

considered 'wee'. Nonetheless, it's only fair to take such points seriously and to see them as expressions of misunderstanding, disappointment and perhaps openness for discussion.

Without doubt, this radio panellist was on to a point when she associated the sacrament so overwhelmingly with childhood. For too many of us formation in our faith and knowledge of the faith are corralled into our school going years. The way a child of seven or eight confesses, is not the way an adult of 20, 50, 80 or more should confess. As we develop and mature so too should our understanding of faith, and with that the content and experience of Confession. What's important is that we come to the sacrament as we are and as who we are, whether we're 20, 50, 80 or more.

The Sacrament of Penance exists to continue the healing ministry of Jesus that the New Testament so powerfully speaks of. As St Paul so beautifully puts it (2 Cor 5: 18-19): 'It is all God's work; he reconciled us to himself through Christ and he gave us the ministry of reconciliation. I mean, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not holding anyone's faults against them, but entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.'

When we come to Confession, to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we come to open our hearts to the Lord and to invite his healing grace into the brokenness and incompleteness of our lives. We ask for the Lord's forgiveness, his blessing, his help in those dimensions of life where we are incomplete. We know well those other words of St Paul (Rom 12:9): 'Do not let your love be a pretence'.

A proven method is to confess from three viewpoints: my relationship to the Lord; my relationship to myself and my relationship to my neighbour. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is truly a healthy and restorative process offered to us by God. It is an opportunity for us to talk about our lives, hopes, worries, guilt and associated emotions, as we wish and need. It is also an opportunity for us to know that our sin is forgiven. It is an invitation to a new way of thinking, to a new way of looking at things, to an and alteration and improvement of behaviour. Of course, I'm not going to change my skin. Having confessed we will still have to go on living with our problems and everyday faults. But Confession is a stimulus to begin again and to live more thoughtfully and responsibly.

The 'wee man', the priest, is merely the instrument, the minister, through whom Christ works. That's our Catholic sacramental economy. Christ, in the power of the Spirit, comes to us through the ordinary things of this world – bread, wine, water, people, the ministry of the ordained confessor – these are the stuff of sacrament. Confession is about the Lord reaching out to us in love and forgiveness, and that saving presence is embodied in the Church, in the person of the priest. So, when you go to Confession, let the Lord touch your heart anew as you unburden yourself; and having confessed go home liberated and truly reconciled in the way the Lord intends.

The Prayer of Absolution

God, the Father
of mercies,
through the
death and the
resurrection
of His Son has
reconciled
the world to
Himself and sent
the Holy Spirit
among us for
the forgiveness
of sins; through
the ministry of
the Church may
God give you
pardon and
peace, and I
absolve you
from your sins in
the name of the
Father, and of
the Son and of
the Holy Spirit.



What people think they know about her has, for centuries, overshadowed who she really is.

Gemma Mulligan

Mary Magdalene

"But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her. "(John 20:11–18)



Mary Magdalene has attracted considerable attention as she is a biblical figure with a certain prominence in all four Gospels. Mary is mentioned in all the accounts of the women at the crucifixion of Jesus and at the empty tomb accounts. In the Gospel of John, she is said to have been the first to witness the resurrection of Jesus and she was the one who announced the resurrection to the disciples: "I have seen the Lord" (John 20:18). "Mary Magdalene is one of the most popular women in the New Testament and she supports Jesus on many levels. For example, she, along with other wealthy women, help to fund Jesus' mission; she is consistently presented as a trusted friend and companion; she remains with him during his crucifixion and is the first witness to the resurrection in John." For centuries, Mary Magdalene one of the most well-known women in the Bible, the most important of Jesus's female disciples, has generally been misunderstood and misrepresented. "One of the strongest women in the Christian Scripture is caught in an aura of confusion. What people think they know about her has, for centuries, overshadowed who she really is. What people expect to see when they look at her, in other words, is what keeps her from being fully seen for what she was in herself then, and what she means to us today."

The image of Mary Magdalene handed down through the ages depicted her as a reformed sinner and a prostitute from whom Jesus cast out seven demons. The confusion around Mary Magdalene is attributed to the sixth-century pope Gregory the Great who delivered a sermon which confused the stories of three unrelated biblical women. Mary Magdalene; Mary, the sister of Martha and an unnamed woman in the Gospel of Luke. Through biblical illiteracy "Mary's tarnished image was perpetuated through the ages." Mary's most important role in the Gospels comes during Jesus' arrest, crucifixion and resurrection. The gospels give different accounts of the events but all agree that Mary Magdalene was there. She was a close, trusted friend of Jesus, an apostle, a leader, who bears witness to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, which places her as a central figure in the Jesus movement and ultimately in the beginning of Christianity.

The real Mary Magdalene serves as a role model for men and women alike. "Her courage, unflinching friendship, and steadfast belief in Jesus offers us hope in this precarious and uncertain world."

1 Wray, T. J.. *Good Girls, Bad Girls of the New Testament : Their Enduring Lessons*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2016.)

2 Chittister, Joan. *A Passion For Life. Fragments of the face of God*. (Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books 1996.)

3 Chittister, Joan. *A Passion For Life. Fragments of the face of God*. (Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books 1996.)

4 Chittister, Joan. *A Passion For Life. Fragments of the face of God*. (Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books 1996.)





Art has the power to place before us, in ways that words fail, the beauty of God...

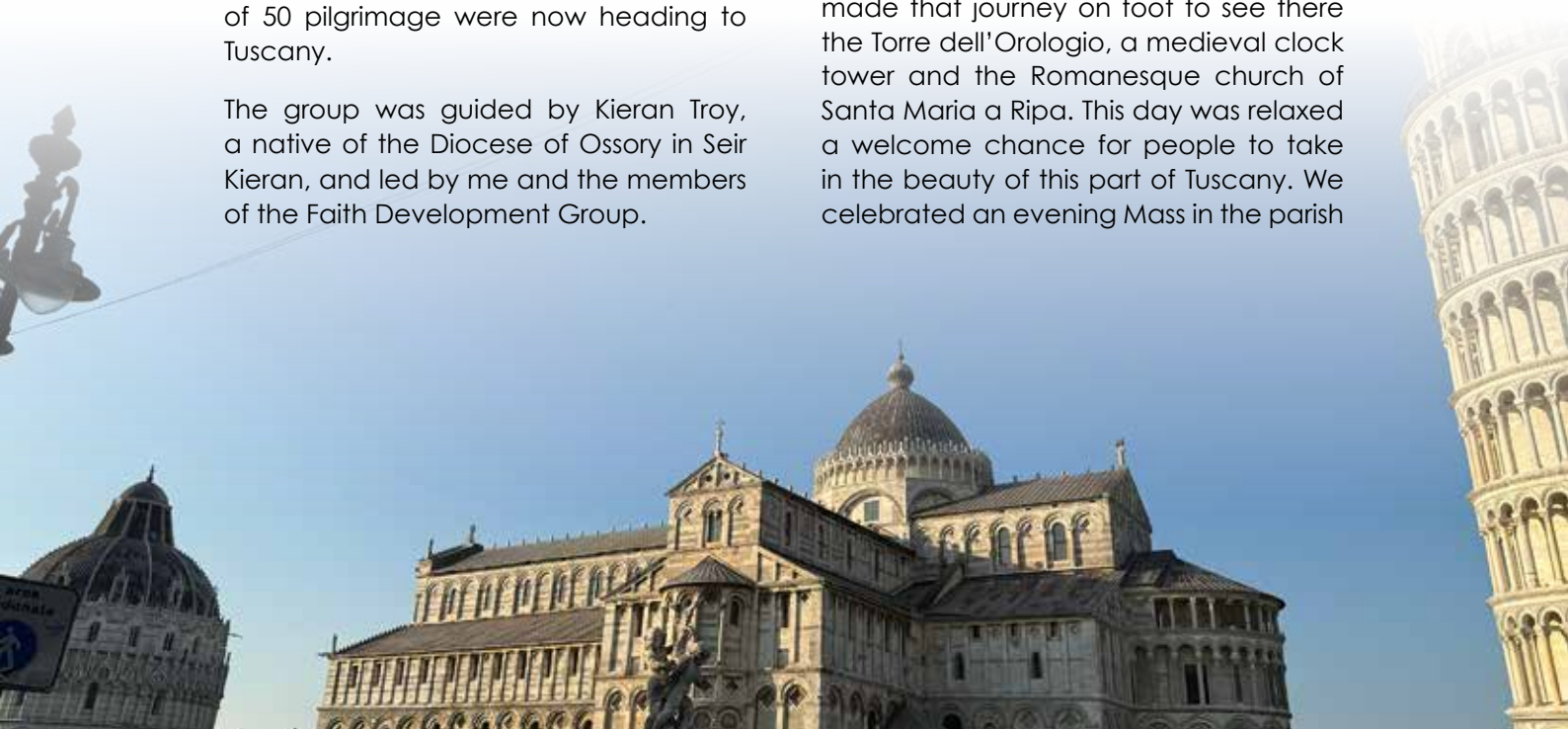
A Pilgrimage: Faith Through Art

Dermot Ryan

Recently the Adult Faith Development Group led a pilgrimage of Faith Through Art in the most beautiful surroundings of Tuscany in Italy. Many of this group had originally intended to travel to the Holy Land in what was to be, for many, a once in a lifetime experience to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. Sadly, however, the horrific events still unfolding there made that trip impossible. As people were committed, the offer was made to transfer to this new pilgrimage or receive a full refund. Many opted for the former and the remaining spaces for this new pilgrimage were filled in days. A full bus of 50 pilgrims were now heading to Tuscany.

The group was guided by Kieran Troy, a native of the Diocese of Ossory in Seir Kieran, and led by me and the members of the Faith Development Group.

The pilgrims made the beautiful town of Montecatini Terme their base for the seven nights, staying in the same hotel that housed the composer Verdi towards the end of his life. It was from there that the expeditions took place each day. On the first morning the group explored the riches of this beautiful town and notably the art nouveau Parco delle Terme spa complex which still has running fountains of hot and cold waters each laden with different properties known to cure various ailments. A funicular normally climbs to the Montecatini Alto village which lies above but as this was stopped for repairs many made that journey on foot to see there the Torre dell'Orologio, a medieval clock tower and the Romanesque church of Santa Maria a Ripa. This day was relaxed a welcome chance for people to take in the beauty of this part of Tuscany. We celebrated an evening Mass in the parish





church of the Assumption declared a Basilica in 1988 by Pope John Paul II, and while there we took time to appreciate the wonderful windows of the famed painter Giorgio Scalco.

On Sunday we travelled to Florence and started our day by joining for the 9am Mass in the Duomo. This was a great way for us to get to the heart of this ancient city, to see the beauty of the Duomo which stands under the largest brick dome in the world - and many learned that it is not from this that the Italian word for Cathedral "Duomo" comes! After Mass we took in the beauty of the baptistry doors. The Baptistery is one of the oldest buildings in this wonderful city, constructed between 1059 and 1128 in the beautiful Florentine Romanesque manner. Of particular note were the East doors better known as the Gates of Paradise - the work of Ghiberti. Work on these doors took 27 years but their beauty is a testimony to that time.

From there we visited the Uffizi Gallery, a visit for which we had prepared the evening before by identifying some 10 works that were to be the focus of people's time there. Among them Botticelli's Allegory of Spring; his Birth of Venus; Michelangelo's Doni Tondo; Caravaggio's Sacrifice of Isaac; the dramatic Gentileschi's Judith and so much more... Following this, and so as to lead the head and heart process what we had seen, we took time to enjoy the city - visiting the famous outdoor sculptures in front of the Old Palace and the Ponte Vecchio.

In Pisa we visited the Field of Dreams, housing the main monuments of the city, seeing the well-known Leaning Tower before appreciating the Cathedral and Baptistery. We marvelled at Nicola Pisano's pulpit in the Baptistery showing him to be one of the most important precursors of Italian Renaissance sculpture. We then stood before the enormous mosaic, the work of the great Cimabue, in the apse of the Cathedral

depicting Christ enthroned between the Virgin and Saint John (1302).

We also had the opportunity during the week to visit Lucca, the medieval town with such well-preserved ancient walls (walls many of our group walked around!). The Basilica of San Frediano was built in the Middle Ages by an Irish monk who became bishop of the city and we took time to visit there to see, among other works, the stunning 15th-century masterpiece of the Virgin and Child by Jacopo della Quercia. Nearby, in the church of San Michele in Foro, we stood before the beautiful Mother and Child, the work of Andrea della Robbia. Most striking of this visit was the time we spent in the church dedicated to Saint Gemma Galgani (the flower of Lucca), time spent in prayer there was special as was our visit to the small museum of this most interesting, much loved local, Italian saint.

The group also got to visit San Gimignano, the small hilltown still encircled by its 13th century walls and famous for its many towers where, in the Collegiata church, we got to explore the stunning frescos that brought the grace of the message of the Gospel to life. Described to us by the local Parraccio as the poor man's Bible this stunning array of frescos left many stand in silence.

Lest the reader think it was all prayer and art it was not. We took time to lunch in a vineyard close to the Montecarlo area famous for its link to Carlo Collodi author of Pinocchio, and many noses would grow we claimed that it was a lenten fast. Art has the power to place before us, in ways that words fail, the beauty of God, the wonder of the world and the amazing skilled potential of our human condition. To appreciate it is a joy, to allow it to speak to you an education, to simply rest your eyes, mind or heart upon it, often soul changing... We were fortunate in days together to get to do all that - to see glimpses of the ineffable beauty of God manifest before our eyes.

... we are getting a chance to invite people from all around Ireland into our beautiful Cathedral Parish for two most holy and sacred celebrations ...

RTE Televised Easter Celebrations

It is easy to say yes... but often after the yes the work begins. This year the celebration of the Passion of the Lord on Good Friday and the celebration of the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday night were both to be televised live on RTE from St Mary's Cathedral.





It was after the initial 'yes' to say that we were willing to make them welcome that the work in earnest started. Sean O'Neill and Joy Bibby began immediately with the Cathedral Choir, and a few male voices that were added to their ranks, to choose music for the two celebrations. Choosing the music was only the beginning - from then countless hours of practice were needed to ensure the choir were, as they always are, in such fine voice adding wonderfully to this celebration as they do to all celebrations in St Mary's. Each piece of music had then to be timed so as to ensure that a detailed running order for each celebration could be planned.

The liturgies themselves had then to be scripted. Each word that was to be spoken had to be written and, like the music timed. All those who would fulfil the various ministries at these celebrations had to be chosen and undertake practices, and then there was visits from various technicians and the crews who would be filming it, a day of pre-recorded shots and audio for the opening credits and all of this in the midst of the normal Lenten activities that are part of the life of the Cathedral and Diocese.

All of this was enjoyable, and worthwhile - after all we are getting a chance to invite people from all around Ireland into our beautiful Cathedral Parish for two most holy and sacred celebrations, for the second of which St Canice's Parish are also taking part. It is a chance to bring Christ to those who will follow on TV or Radio in those days. We are called to proclaim Christ so why would we say anything but yes to this opportunity and this great experience.

The work was wonderfully guided by Finbarr Treacy of Kairos Communication and his experience of guiding these celebrations meant that nothing was left unchecked. As I write this we have yet to go live with the days themselves. If it goes well, it is the fruit of all the work - if it does not we will blame something else..



Venice where the relics of St Mark
are preserved.

Photo: Albert McDonnell



Each Gospel writer emphasised those aspects of Jesus' life and teaching that they believed would be of greatest help to their own particular community.



BIBLICAL MATTERS

Mark – The Winged Lion

Albert McDonnell

One of the many wonderful blessings that flowed from the Second Vatican Council is our renewed appreciation for the Word of God. We are a people of Word and of Sacrament. Our celebration of Sunday Mass brings both gifts together. We hear virtually all of the four gospels at Sunday Mass over a three-year cycle. During 2024 we read from the Gospel according to Mark. Last year we read St Matthew and next year it will be the turn of St Luke. The fourth Gospel, that written by St John, occurs, as various times throughout the year.

Mark was a common name and the author of the Gospel tells us nothing about himself. He doesn't say that he personally witnessed any of the events that he describes. The name Mark was only given to the author of this Gospel a century after its composition. There are a number of

men named Mark mentioned in the New Testament, but scripture scholars are not confident that any of them wrote this Gospel. However, there is an ancient tradition that describes Mark as 'the interpreter of Peter' which many find convincing. So, it is possible that Mark's Gospel records St Peter's memories of Jesus.

Mark's written record of Jesus' life and ministry was the first Gospel to be written and is also the shortest. Much of what is recorded by Mark is elaborated on by Matthew and Luke in their Gospels. John's Gospel is different to the other four. It tends to be reflective rather than descriptive. Mark, Luke and Matthew place the emphasis on what Jesus did and said while John takes a step back and tells us what it means.

We don't read from Mark's Gospel at Christmas simply because he doesn't

include information about the birth of Christ. His account of Christ's life begins with the Baptism of Jesus by his cousin John in the waters of the Jordan. Mark then proceeds to explain to us who Jesus was and what his message was. Jesus was the son of God and his message was the good news of the Kingdom of God. Mark talks to us about the calling of the disciples, the preaching of Jesus, the people he healed, the signs and miracles that he performed and finally his arrest, crucifixion, death and resurrection.

Each Gospel writer emphasised those aspects of Jesus' life and teaching that they believed would be of greatest help to their own particular community. Scholars believe that the community for whom Mark wrote was probably the first century Christian community in Rome. The first people to hear the message of Jesus were Jews but most Christians in Rome came from other traditions. When Mark wrote his Gospel the Roman Christian community was in great need of encouragement.

The city of Rome was devastated by fire in the year 64 and the emperor Nero sought to exonerate himself by placing the blame on the Christians. Nero unleashed waves of persecution against the Christians community which resulted in arrests, torture, imprisonment and martyrdom. Among those who were executed were the apostles Peter and Paul. This suffering had a devastating impact on the small Roman Christian community which resulted in family members betraying each other and a great deal of division. It was around this time that Mark wrote his account of Christ's life.

Mark encourages and challenges his readers to reflect on our own lives in the light of the story of Jesus. The cross is the centre of his account of Christ's life and preaching. Persecution and betrayal are prominent in Mark. These themes resonated with the lives of his readers in first century Rome. Encouragement is found in Christ's assurance that he will always remain with his followers until the end of time and in the resilience of Peter and the early disciples.

Each evangelist has his own symbol which is used to depict them in art. Mark's symbol is that of the winged lion. The choice of this symbol was prompted by his description of John the Baptist as 'a voice crying in the desert'.

The relics of Mark may be venerated in the magnificent basilica dedicated to him in Venice and we celebrate his feast on 25th April each year. It is also notable that the Coptic Christian Church, the dominant Christian presence in Egypt, revere Mark as their founder and regard their spiritual leader as his successor.

We conclude with some of Christ's words as recorded by Mark which may serve to encourage Christians today:

The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed which at the time of its sowing in the soil is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, yet once it is sown it grows into the biggest shrub of them all and puts out big branches so that the birds of the air can shelter in its shade.

We are, then, synodal in Ossory - the question, then, is how can we do more to reach out and beyond to the other...

Synodal Conversations

Helen Maher

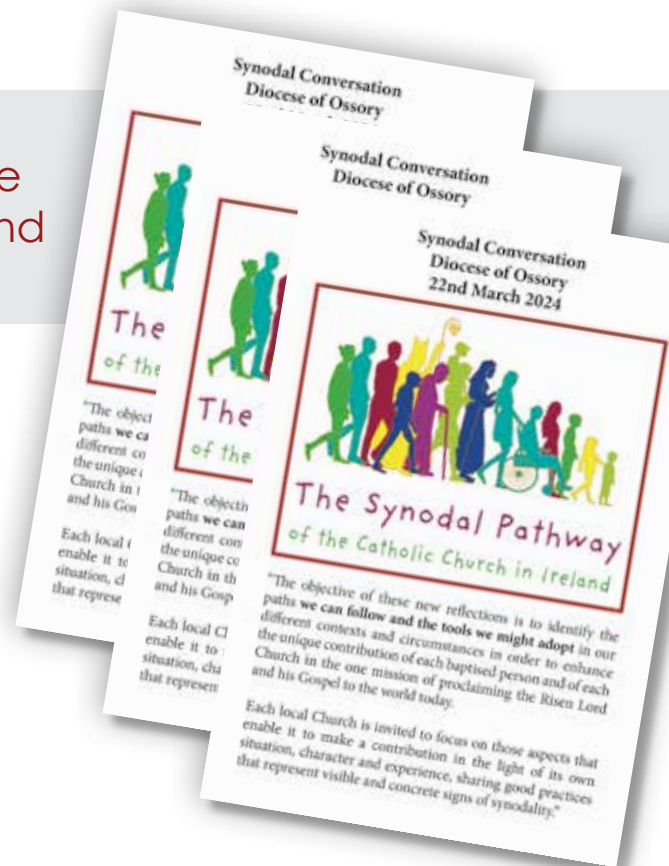
On Friday evening 22nd March the next phase of the Diocesan synodal conversation took place at St Kieran's College. In advance of this Bishop Niall had recently appointed a number of people - lay, religious and priests - to the core team to lead the Diocesan synodal conversations and they arranged this gathering wherein members of the Diocese were invited to reflect on the question - How can we imagine the life of the Church in Ireland where people are co-responsible for the Church's mission in different ways?

A relatively small number of people came to the gathering but the conversation did not reflect that fact. Led by Gemma Mulligan, the Diocesan Pastoral Coordinator, those in attendance broke into groups to pray, discuss and then feedback on the question that was asked. Some wonderful, and some challenging, ideas were shared in this truly synodal gathering: Is our Church missionary enough - what are we doing to win a new continent for Christ? Are we positive enough? Do we offer enough faith formation? Do we listen? What are we doing we regard to the four areas of adult faith development, an outreach to people, liturgy and parish councils? Could we offer experiences of prayer or reflection to the younger members of our diocese - those doing the Leaving Cert? What is actually coming from this

Synod? Why are people not being informed more of where it is going?

Pope Francis has invited the Church on this journey and while we are following it there is a recognition that we are unsure of its destination. But that is possibly the very point of synodality - a willingness to be led by the Holy Spirit to a destination that is yet unknown.

Those gathered recognised that much is going on in our parishes and they welcomed the fact that Bishop Niall is supporting synodality and leading our conversations to ensure that the voice of all is heard in Ossory. The recent work of reforming the Ossory Diocesan Pastoral Council, and the work of first establishing it, was identified as a truly synodal act here in the Diocese. An act undertaken by many, at the request of Bishop Niall, and one that also first started in 2004, long before synodality was a term with which we were familiar. We are, then, synodal in Ossory - the question, then, is how can we do more to reach out and beyond to the other... the other that is beside us in our parish churches and the other that are not...



These heroes are standing up for the natural world and for exploited and impoverished communities...

Trócaire visits Ossory

Catholicnews.ie

Speaking of her experience, Jane Mellett, Trócaire's Church Manager, reflected on her team's weekend in the Diocese, "On Friday evening we participated in a beautiful Taizé prayer service for young people, led by Diocesan Pastoral

Worker, Gemma Mulligan, and shared on reflections from *Laudato Si* – Pope Francis' encyclical on Caring for Our Common Home. The next day we had a fantastic coffee morning, in the Cathedral Chapter House hosted by Fr Dermot



Ryan, Adm., and parishioners of the Cathedral Parish, in aid of Trócaire and the launch of the Care for Our Common Home Photographic Exhibition, which will remain on display in the Cathedral parish for the next few weeks."

Ms Mellett continued, "this exhibition features portraits of some of the brave women and men with whom Trócaire works, who are standing up for environmental justice. These heroes are standing up for the natural world and for exploited and impoverished communities, saying 'no' to activities that often destroy lives, damage the environment, violate human rights and trap people into poverty. It also includes images of activists from across the island of Ireland, who are advocating for a safer, more sustainable and just world."

"As we continue our Lenten journey, we especially remember Malita and her family, who feature on this year's Trócaire box. In the Machinga district in Malawi, Malita is a strong and resilient woman, despite the challenges that she faces. She works tirelessly in her community to improve the life of all its members. Like all mothers, she prays for the best for her children, she wants them to have an education and opportunities for a better life. Trócaire and its local partners are working with women like Malita to build a more just world." Ms Mellett concluded.

To find out more about the Lenten appeal or make a donation visit Trócaire.org or by phone 1800 408 408 (RoI) and 0800 912 1200 (NI).





PEACE MATTERS

Will the result be conflict or social friendship? We all part of that answer.

Give me a crash course in... Conflict and Pope Francis

Michael Shortall

Easter is here early this year.

In our liturgy, prayer, and imaginations we turn to the death and resurrection of Jesus, and, in a way we also turn again to the Holy Land.

It is awful what is happening there, now. The terrorist attacks on Israel by Hamas were horrific, and the war in Gaza is causing terrible killing and displacement of people.

It's a complex situation with deep historical roots and many humanitarian challenges.

Yes, it's not easy to understand what's happening.

In some ways, it might be the most difficult topic on which to give "a crash course." Both Israel and Palestine claim that Jerusalem and the land commonly call the Holy Land is their home. Old hatreds have grown over the past 70 years or so for lots of reasons.

What led to what is happening now?

The Gaza Strip is a small region near the Mediterranean Sea, between Israel and Egypt. Over two million Palestinians live there. It has been governed by an organisation called Hamas since 2007, who is intent on the destruction of Israel. It led to a blockade, that created a humanitarian crisis for many years. Hamas has attacked Israel before, but on 7th October 2023, it launched a horrific assault, including killing over 1,000 civilians and taking hundreds of hostages.

And so, Israel responded by sending the army.

Fighting a war in an area where so many people live is almost impossible. It has led to very high casualties, the displacement of people from their homes, destruction of hospitals and near famine conditions.

What can be done?

It has proven very difficult to restrain both sides. Violence is leading to more

violence, and so it worsens. Only a few years ago, Pope Francis warned:

Our own days, however, seem to be showing signs of a certain regression. Ancient conflicts thought long buried are breaking out anew ...

With war in the Ukraine beginning in 2022, it looks he was right.

He said that in a letter called *Fratelli Tutti* in paragraph 11, written in October, 2020. They were words used by St Francis of Assisi and could be translated as "All are Brothers and Sisters." In a world that is breaking down, he is urging dialogue, understanding, and social love – especially between peoples and religions.

But how to do that when people are caught in a cycle of violence?

He admits how impossible it can seem. Living together is not simply about denying conflict but about trying to address it different ways. He says, "Authentic reconciliation does not flee from conflict, but is achieved in conflict, resolving it through dialogue and open, honest and patient negotiation." (*Fratelli Tutti*, para 244). But he persists in saying that, in the end, this is the only way. At times, it means that some accuse him of not standing up enough against the attackers and warmongers.

Is that fair?

Personally, I don't think so. In the face of violence and power, peacemakers like the Pope can look very naïve. But the Catholic tradition never said that

true peace is just the lack of violence. In the words of *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "Peace is not merely the absence of war, and it is not limited to maintaining a balance of powers between adversaries." True peace involves the wholeness and well-being of all individuals, which is only possible through respect for human dignity and rights. And so it concludes: "Peace is the work of justice and the effect of charity" (CCC, paragraph 2304).

So, what are we to do, who are so far away?

As Catholics, we are called to contribute to this journey of peace in whatever way we can, be it through prayer, raising awareness, or supporting humanitarian efforts. It is impossible to summarise the problems in the Holy Land. Be sure to learn what you can.

It's about doing what we can?

Yes, especially, knowing that conflict is not always in faraway lands. There are people who would like to make their home with us. Will the result be conflict or social friendship? We all part of that answer.

At Easter, we celebrate the heart of our faith. The death and resurrection of Jesus brought about reconciliation between God and humanity. It is a message of hope. One of the biggest things Catholics can do is not to become cynical and lose hope that peace is possible.

Happy Easter to all the readers of *The Ossory Times*.

Bishop Niall Coll pointed out the importance of developing the full participation of the people in the life of the Church...

Ossory Diocesan Pastoral Council (ODPC)



From the beginning of his ministry in Ossory Bishop Niall Coll pointed out the importance of developing the full participation of the people in the life of the Church. He met the members of the out-going Ossory Diocesan Pastoral Council (ODPC) in March 2023 to acknowledge their work. In July 2023 Bishop Niall established a working group consisting of priests, religious and lay members to consult widely and make recommendations about the formation of a new Ossory Diocesan Pastoral Council. In August 2023 the working group presented their report to the bishop. Following this process of consultation, the members of the new Ossory Diocesan Pastoral Council were appointed by the bishop.

The new Ossory Diocesan Pastoral Council had its first meeting of their four-year term

on 19th January 2024. The members of the ODPC are:

- Bishop Niall Coll, President
- Ms Sarah Rice, Laity Representative and Chairperson
- Mr John Shortall, Laity Representative and Secretary
- Fr Dan Carroll, Priest Representative and Vicar General
- Fr Martin Delaney, Priest Representative
- Fr Dan Bollard, Priest Representative
- Sr Helen Maher, Religious Representative and Forum Coordinator
- Ms Gemma Mulligan, Pastoral Coordinator
- Ms Ann Daly, Laity Representative
- Ms Bríd Duffy, Laity Representative
- Mr Diarmuid Healy, Laity Representative

Going forward there will be a possibility, as needs arise, of co-opting additional members, whilst maintaining a balance of priests and lay people, women and men.

At our first meeting in January Bishop Niall outlined that The Ossory Diocesan Pastoral Council is a consultative group with whom the Bishop explores and discusses pastoral matters. The Ossory Diocesan Pastoral Council will promote, support, and coordinate the work of the Parish Pastoral Councils and the Pastoral Area Councils in the context of the Ossory Diocesan Plan. It will model synodality, collaboration and co-responsibility for the life of the diocese between the bishop, priests, and laity. Finally, the Ossory Diocesan Pastoral Council will invite, receive and consider reports from the various areas of life in which the diocese is engaged.

The Ossory Diocesan Pastoral Council has planned a schedule of monthly meetings across 2024 (including taking a break during the summer months of July and August). Included in these meetings is a training session facilitated by Fr Eugene Duffy on Saturday 27th April 2024. The aim of this day, which will be rooted in contemplative prayer, is to foster a deeper understanding and commitment to the ODPC's collaborative decision-making, thus furthering the mission of the Church in Ossory and enriching the spiritual journey of its members.

As in the case of Parish Pastoral Councils, there will be many challenges in working as a Diocesan Pastoral Council. These will include adequately communicating what we are doing, drawing on the gifts of volunteers who are often busy people and trusting that we will recognise where the Holy Spirit is leading us. These are the realities we live in.

Over Easter, please pray for the work of the Ossory Diocesan Pastoral Council in the year ahead. Using the email address chairodpc@ossory.ie or diocesanforum@ossory.ie you can contact Ossory Diocesan Pastoral Council.

Prayer to the Holy Spirit

We stand before You, Holy Spirit,
as we gather together in Your
name.

With You alone to guide us,
make Yourself at home in our
hearts;

Teach us the way we must go
and how we are to pursue it.

We are weak and sinful;
do not let us promote disorder.

Do not let ignorance lead us
down the wrong path
nor partiality influence our
actions.

Let us find in You our unity
so that we may journey together
to eternal life

and not stray from the way of
truth

and what is right.

All this we ask of You,
who are at work in every place
and time,
in the communion of the Father
and the Son,
forever and ever.

Amen.



We call the outing, a retreat. Looking at the term it smacks of withdrawal. It is withdrawal only so that we get the chance of going forward on our return to our parishes.

Priests' Retreat 2024

Dan Bollard

Jesus, we read a few weeks ago at Mass (Mark 9:2-10) led Peter and James and John up a high mountain where they could be alone by themselves. This was to allow them to catch up with themselves, and also to prepare them for the days ahead. We, the priests of Ossory, go to the seaside for a similar reason.

We call the outing, a retreat. Looking at the term it smacks of withdrawal. It is withdrawal only so that we get the chance of going forward on our return to our parishes. I recall the late Mgr. Tommy Maher, when he was President of St Kieran's College, way back in the early 'eighties, remarking wryly that for all the retreats the staff went on, he didn't see any difference in us on our return. Hopefully our parishioners do detect a renewed focus for ministry, and hopefully we experience a renewal of each of us at the core of our beings.

This year, in January, as in other years, twenty three of us went to Ballyvaloo in County Wexford. We were joined by Fr David Murphy, a priest of the Diocese of

Ferns, who currently serves as Chaplain at Stephen's Barracks in Kilkenny.

We availed of the hospitality of the Sisters of St John of God. They have built a Retreat and Conference Centre there. The Centre is near Curracloe, and the place is enhanced by the fact that it is only a few hundred yards from a wonderful beach which stretches for about 7 kilometres. I'm thinking of all the great walks in the afternoons, when we surmised on starting if we wanted to face the wind on the way out or as we returned.

Each year someone is invited to lead the Retreat. This year Bishop Michael Router, the auxiliary Bishop in the Archdiocese of Armagh, was the chosen one. Before he became Bishop he was a priest of the Diocese of Kilmore. Drawing on his experiences of leading pastoral renewal in Kilmore and in the Archdiocese, he spoke with us about Synodality – a theme which is so central to Church life these times.



We were blest this year to have Bishop Niall with us – last year he was preparing for his Ordination as Bishop and didn't join us. He was, perhaps, struggling, like Jephthah's daughter (Judges 11) with what lay ahead.

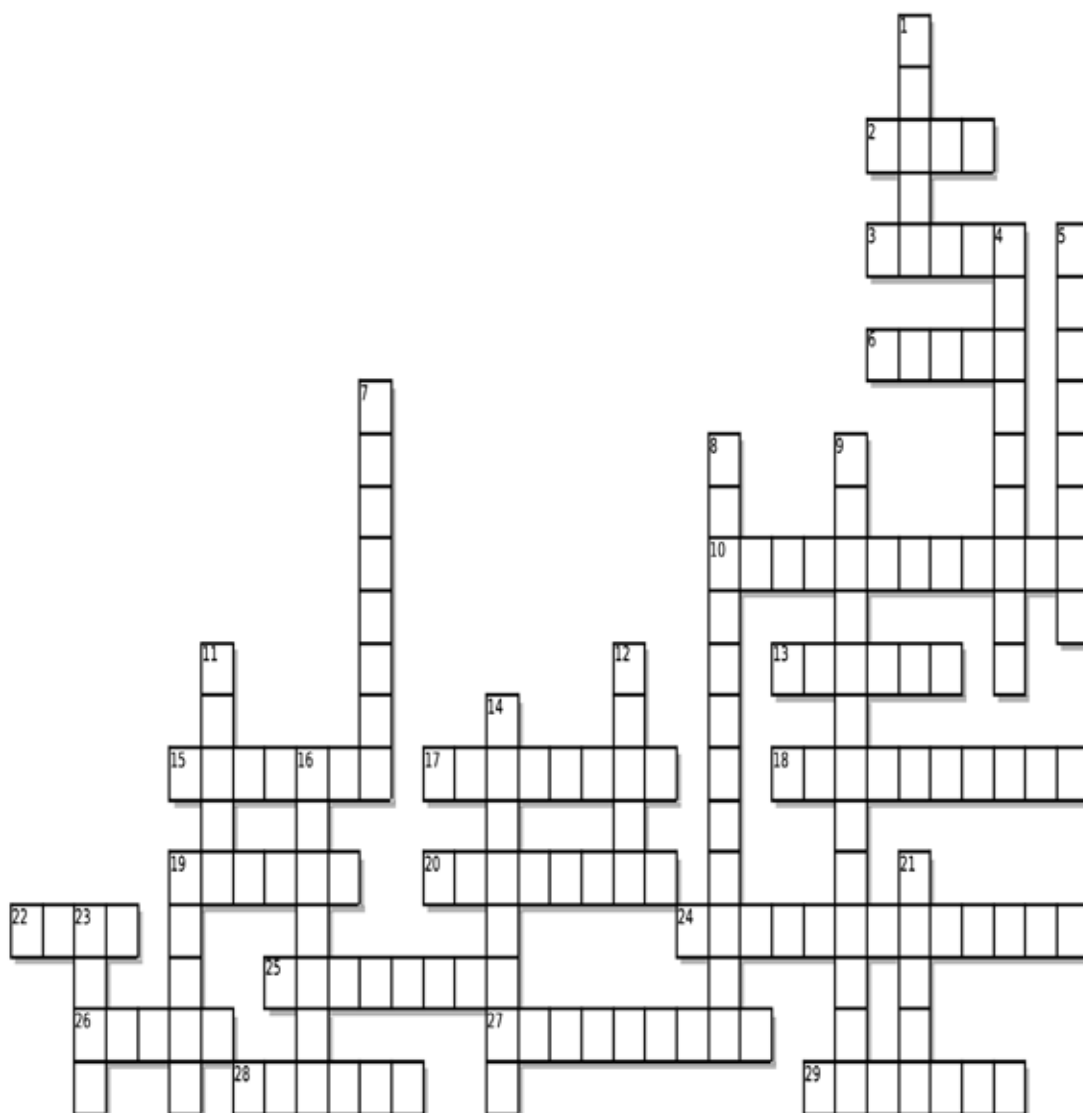
We were blest too by the fact of being together. Apart from the priests living at St John's in Kilkenny, we all live alone. Now, between ourselves, that can be comforting after a busy day. However, it is good to get together for a few days at least. Over meals, with a chat at nighttimes, with our prayer together and with the walks on the beach we are enriched.

And the quiet times time for quiet prayer ... Isaiah chapter 30, verse 30 says

'Yahweh is waiting to be gracious to you, to rise and take pity on you, for Yahweh is a just God; happy are all who hope in him'. That has to be one of the secrets of a retreat – not so much what we do, save make ourselves available – but what Jesus may be waiting to say to us.

Working with seminarians at St Kieran's College in the 'eighties, I often asked them how their retreat went. Regularly their response was that the retreat director was good, bad, or sometimes indifferent. However, that wasn't really the issue. The real issue was what was happening in their own hearts. We'd need to apply the same principle to ourselves after our few days in Ballyvaloo. I hope we all came home enriched by our time away.

CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 2 Paul travelled here
 3 Liturgy of the
 6 A patriarch
 10 Statue of David
 13 This ancient kingdom
 15 Saint of Lucca
 17 A grace
 18 His taking of the Christ
 19 Saint of Avila
 20 Our schools
 22 Peter did this after he denied Jesus
 24 One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit
 25 Parish Council
 26 Medieval concept that was never a Church teaching
 27 Thanksgiving

- 28 Not mortal
 29 Church topper

DOWN

- 1 Italian reference for Cathedral
 4 God attaches his grace
 5 Certain sin
 7 23rd
 8 Given to Moses
 9 Winter has passed
 11 Blessing before meal
 12 Commandment mount
 14 Paul apostle to the
 16 Fast and
 19 Judah, for example
 21 _ Coeur
 23 Deborah sat under this tree in Judges

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 22nd June 2024 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 33 competitions:*

Adult Crossword:
 Peggy Fitzgerald

**Children's Wordsearch,
 age 8-13:**
 Tomás Fitzgerald

**Children's Colouring,
 age 5-8:**
 Maria Mahon

Colouring Competition



For ages 5-8



Wordsearch Competition



For ages 8-13

Twelve Disciples

P	R	E	A	C	H	I	N	G	R	J	N	E	E
R	F	O	L	L	O	W	O	C	E	O	H	H	A
F	W	R	S	M	N	O	M	I	S	A	C	R	H
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S	H	P	S	S	H	A	N	A	E	G	E	N	E
H	T	F	R	E	R	S	R	F	N	A	T	G	M
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E	N	R	T	S	M	J	R	C	N	E	D	H	H
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T	O	N	S	S	E	M	A	J	N	I	S	M	R
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S	T	F	C	H	N	D	C	T	F	R	R	S	B

PRAYER

PREACHING

PETER

FISHERMEN

GALILEE

ANDREW

TEACH

BARTHOLOMEW

JOHN

JUDAS

SIMON

JAMES

BOAT

PHILIP

NETS

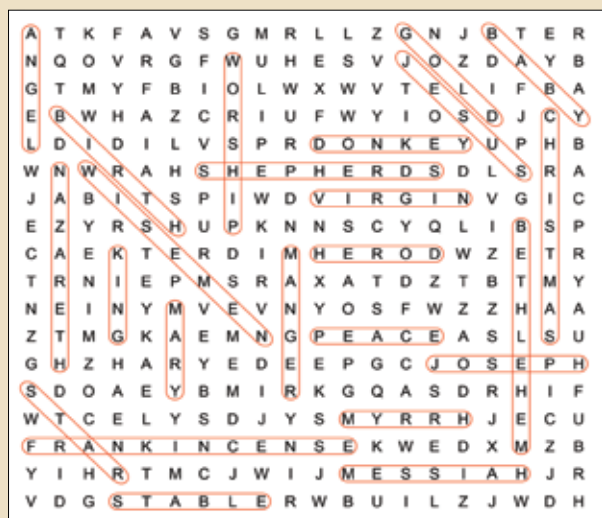
FOLLOW

MATTHEW

DISCIPLES

THOMAS

Answers to Ossory Times Issue 34



Answers to Ossory Times Issue 34



ST MARY'S CATHEDRAL RESTORATION FUND DRAW 2023/2024



12 MONTHLY DRAWS

September 2023 to August 2024

MONTHLY PRIZES

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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

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