



# Galloway Diocese NEWS

Advent  
Digital  
Edition  
December  
2020

## Come O divine Messiah!

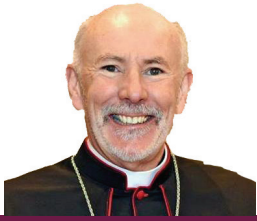


*the world in silence waits the day ...*

**... when hope shall sing its triumph**



**and sadness flee away**



# The Bishop Writes

*This year the weeks before Christmas will not be the usual party time so we might rediscover Advent as a time of preparation for Christ's birth*

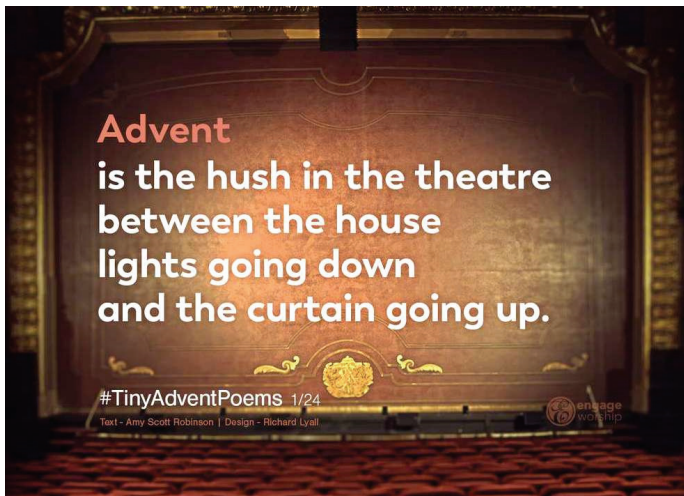


**A**dvent is a strange time. In the Church's eyes it is a time of prayer and preparation as we wait to celebrate the feast of Christ's birth. But for most people Advent really does not exist. Instead the period before Christmas is already seen as part of the Christmas season. That is when all the office Christmas parties take place, and the many Christmas dinners for pensioners. The Christmas lights are lit up in our cities. It is also the time when all the shops play carols and Christmas songs twenty-four seven.

This year much of that activity is going to be curtailed due to the coronavirus: the weeks before Christmas will not be the usual party time.

Perhaps then, this is the year we might rediscover Advent and make preparations so that Christmas is a religious feast and not a secular celebration.

I came across a series of tiny Advent poems which sum up what Advent is all about. Here is one of them:



**T**hat poem catches the heart of Advent. For when the lights in the theatre go down our expectation goes up – we wait expectantly for the show to begin. So the time before Christmas is a time of expectation and of longing. We can see that great sense of expectation in the children – they can't wait for Christmas to come. But wishing it to happen

does not make Christmas come any quicker. We yearn for Christmas. But what we long for, what we look forward to, is still not within our grasp. We have to wait for it to come. Advent is a time of waiting, a time of patience.

We are not very good at waiting. We like things to happen right away. But waiting is good for us. Waiting increases our



expectation. By waiting we ensure that what we are waiting for is not taken for granted.

The image of Advent is not that of a baby in a manger, whose birth has taken place, but of an expectant mother waiting and longing to bring a child into the world.

With so many social events cancelled and unable to take place this year, maybe, as when the theatre lights go down, there may be a hush in our lives. And in that hush of Advent we can reflect on what it really is that we are waiting and longing for? What do we wish that Christmas should bring? The children are longing for presents and parties and food, our longing is surely for something deeper than that.

**W**e adults know that Christmas presents and parties will not fulfil our heart's deepest longings and desires. We yearn not for Christmas day to come but for the meaning of Christmas to be fulfilled. We desire peace and contentment. We crave harmony and happiness. We long for what Christmas celebrates: the coming of God into our world. We long for God to be close to us in our lives.



# Reflection

## What am I waiting for?

*Jim McKendrick reflects on Advent as a time of waiting; but just what is it we are waiting for?*

**D**uring the Advent season, “What am I waiting for?” is something I must focus on. For, as Advent is a time of hopeful expectation, of waiting with longing. I need to stop, from time to time, to ask myself what am I waiting for? I am not waiting in any real sense for the paraphernalia that surrounds Christmas: presents, pantomimes, lights, Secret Santa, Christmas dinner. All these things add colour and increased joy to the celebration and enhance the experience for us all, especially children.

Am I waiting for the birth of a tiny, helpless baby, “asleep on the hay”? It would be foolish to await an event that happened in history 2,000 years ago. But the significance of who the child is and what his birth means for me cannot be overstated. During Advent, I like to read the early chapters of Luke’s Gospel and prepare for the celebration of Christ’s birth through prayer and reflection; I contemplate the meaning of the Birth of Jesus.

He comes to us as a baby every year and I rejoice in his Coming. He is the Messiah, our Saviour; he is Emmanuel, God amongst us. He came once as a human and divine baby, and in his adult ministry he redeemed us and offers us the means of eternal life. This first coming reminds me that he is going to come again and establish his eternal Kingdom. I recognise that, in Jesus, “the Kingdom of God is at hand.” He calls us to conversion and faith, but also



to *watchfulness*. “Stay awake for you know neither the day nor the hour.”

I struggle to comprehend fully the meaning of the coming of Jesus, and find the responses of those closest to the event illuminating. Mary, Elizabeth and Zechariah have concrete ideas of what the coming of the Messiah will mean for them: the hungry fed, the rich left empty-handed, rescue from enemies, life without fear. Elizabeth and Zechariah, Anna and Simeon knew what they were waiting for; and the baby in Mary’s womb was the coming-to-fruiting of everything they’d been waiting all their lives for. No wonder they were so excited!

**S**o, during Advent in the Roman Catholic Church I am waiting; we are all waiting for Jesus. He comes to us as a baby every year to remind us of our vulnerability, our uniqueness and our humanity. As we mention at every Mass, He will come again and invite us to the Wedding Feast of the Lamb, His eternal kingdom. Yes, Jesus is Human and Divine. What a special gift for this and every Christmas!

## Galloway Glimpses

Cecilia J Morman, a parishioner of St Peter-in-Chains, took this picture looking from Saltcoats prom towards St Peter’s church in Ardrossan and the Canon Hill overlooking the church.

Celia says, “I liked the varying colours.”

*Another photo from Cecilia on page 10.*





## *An Advent Calendar*

*Without the chocolate!*



In preparation for Christmas this year, St Columba's Primary School, Annan, is taking part in a Reverse Advent Calendar. During Advent families within our school community will be asked to send in non-perishable foods and toiletries which will be collected and sent to families in need within the community. This is our second year of running the collection; the collection in 2019 was a great success and went

to a local community organisation, Kate's Kitchen, to prepare Christmas packs for people in need within our town. This year, we will prepare packs for some of our school community and then send the remainder to the community kitchen. It is hoped that this year's collection is of help in these challenging times.

## *Blessing of the Badges*

*by Joseph Davidson, S3 pupil at St Joseph's Academy, Kilmarnock*



On the 20th of October, St Joseph's Academy's newly appointed Junior and Senior leadership teams gathered together at Mass in the school oratory. At the Mass, the pupils received their badges from Father Martin Chambers, who blessed the badges. The 'Blessing of the Badges' was also attended by Head Teacher Mr Kane and Depute Head Teachers Mrs Shearer, Miss Quigley and Mr Boyle. In Father Martin's homily, he encouraged pupils to "shine as leaders in our school community". We also took part in some prayer meditation and S3 pupil Caleb Lincoln did a reading.



## *First Holy Communion*

*Just a little different this year*

We offer our love and congratulations to all the children of our diocese who received Holy Communion for the first time in October and November. Although the celebrations were very different from normal all of the children celebrated with family and their parish communities in a special way. Thank you to all the teachers, catechists and parents who helped to prepare the children and organise the times at which they would receive the Sacrament. May God bless them on their continuing journey of faith.

*This is what the pupils of one school had to say:*

Over the last few weeks primary 5 pupils of Mount Carmel Primary School, Kilmarnock, have received the sacrament of Holy Communion. Although a little different this year the children have all embraced the experience and shared the celebration with their closest family members. We at Mount Carmel Primary are very proud of them all. We have shared photographs with our class community and have supported each other; some pupils have even accessed the Mass online to see their friends special day!



*And a word from one of the teachers:*

Given the restrictions, Holy Communion preparations and celebrations have been somewhat different this year but no less special and it was a real honour to have the time to prepare and support the children of St Andrews Primary, Dumfries. Although our children were unable to celebrate together as a group, we are grateful to our parish priest Father Gerald Donnelly and the families for celebrating one family at a time over several weeks. I know the parishioners and school staff have been so proud of the children for the reverence and dedication shown in preparing for this special sacrament.



# Safeguarding In Galloway Diocese

## Volunteering during a pandemic

by Geraldine Butcher, a parishioner of St Peter in Chains, Ardrossan, who has professional experience working with vulnerable groups and has recently joined the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Group



Have you ever thought about the number of volunteers who keep our churches running, and the range of ministries they work within? We take these things for granted, and seldom stop to think about it. When the Church is working normally we rely on volunteers in so many ways: readers; cantors; welcomers; Eucharistic Ministers; SVDP; SPRED; and many more.

Why be a volunteer? In many years of going to church, I never really thought about it. I assumed people took up these ministries out of special interest and that there were enough volunteers without me being involved. It's easy to think of dozens of reasons not to volunteer so why did I become a volunteer? Well, my grandson was approaching the age to start attending the Children's Liturgy and as children grow up and mothers who have volunteered move on the Liturgy was at risk of closing due to lack of volunteers, I offered to help. Application submitted, PVG done and Part One Safeguarding training completed, so I was added to the rota and enjoyed it.

After attending the revised Part One Safeguarding training in 2018 I offered to become a Safeguarding trainer. The

protection of vulnerable people, including children was key to my Children's Liturgy role, and to me professionally as a midwife, so it seemed an obvious second ministry. Safeguarding is everyone's business and now I have a far better sense of not only what our diocese is doing in relation to Safeguarding, but also just how active the diocesan team is in strengthening our approach in line with the Bishops' Conference of Scotland Safeguarding Instruction, *In God's Image*.

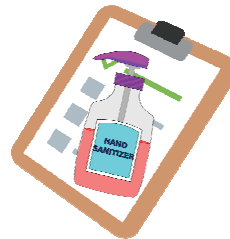
At last, after many weeks of no Mass, then online Mass, we can now attend in person. There is of course a range of restrictions aimed at keeping us safe. But in order to open churches, it was clear that there had to be some way of ensuring it could be done safely. Practical help was needed to ensure face masks are worn, hand gel applied, contact details recorded and safe distances maintained. This became the role of the newest volunteer ministry, 'the steward'.

This is a very different form of safeguarding, but no less important. We don't like to associate coming to Mass with scrutiny at the door to ensure we are

wearing a mask and applying hand gel; however any one of us can have moments of forgetfulness. We try to check names on our booking sheet as quickly as we can and we try to maintain social distancing during Communion. One lovely thing that has resulted from stewarding is that everyone is now greeted by name as they enter the church, and I have learned the names of many people I recognise in church but never properly met.

Let us not forget also the volunteers who clean and sanitise the church after every service – they too are often overlooked but without them the church could not open to parishioners.

Whatever parish you attend, I hope you can give your stewards and cleaners your patience and understanding as they try and keep you safe in these Covid times. It is our fervent hope that the need to have them will disappear soon; no-one thought that the situation would persist for so long so perhaps you can consider offering to volunteer in your parish. Have a word with your parish priest and volunteer your services. You may just find you love it!



**If your parish requires online Safeguarding training or any other support during this time, please contact the Diocesan Safeguarding Team on 01292 266 750 or [safeguarding.officer@gallowaydiocese.org.uk](mailto:safeguarding.officer@gallowaydiocese.org.uk)**

## What will happen at Christmas?

At the time of writing Scotland, and the Galloway Diocese, is still divided into levels, with East and South Ayrshire in the highest level 4 and North Ayrshire and Dumfries and Galloway in the less restricted level 2. The next review by the Scottish Government is due on 11th December, after which, no doubt, the Bishops' Conference will be in a position to advise parishes on the way forward.

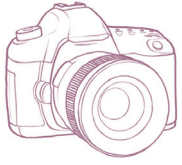
All information will be posted on the Galloway Diocese website and, in some form, on parish websites and Facebook pages and these, and times of Masses, will be announced in parishes so keep an eye and ear out for that. It is fair to say that restrictions on numbers are likely to continue in some form and Christmas services and Masses will not be the same as we are used to.

Thank you for your continued cooperation in managing the restrictions; phoning for a seat at Mass, wearing face coverings and the use of the ubiquitous hand sanitizers are a small price we pay for having the churches open for worship. Please support your parish priest in his efforts to keep things going; social distancing and the ever changing parameters are a logistical nightmare! Thank you also to the small army of volunteers – stewards, cleaners and others – who have played an essential part in keeping the churches open and safe.

These are difficult times but there is light at the end of the tunnel with better treatments for the effects of Covid-19 and, God willing, vaccines on the way. Pray for the scientists, technicians, laboratory personnel and research and medical staff who have worked so hard to produce vaccines which will change our lives.

*We hope you have a happy Christmas, keep safe, keep well and be kind to everyone.*

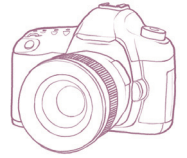




# Golden Galloway Glimpses

*Autumn this year has been a riot of colour.*

*The beautiful photographs on this page were taken by Rebecca Crosbie in Threave Gardens and Annette Barnett around Dumfries.*





# The Littlest angel



## A story for children - of all ages

**T**he littlest angel was feeling a little bit left out. School was finished for the day and his friends had all rushed outside to play football but as usual no one asked him to be in their team. Well, they had once but he was so little that he could not keep up with the other angels and his team lost - by a lot. When he tried to join the junior celestial choir the singing teacher had described his voice as sounding like a strangled cat. And as for playing the harp - who knew twanging strings could sound so loud.

No one in heaven was unkind of course, and everyone loved the littlest angel but he just did not seem to fit any of the usual angel activities. The older angels in particular loved him; he was always happy to run errands for them, to help brush their wings, make a cup of tea, He always remembered who took sugar and whether they preferred angel cake or chocolate fingers.

Recently all the junior angels had noticed that there seemed to be a lot of excitement in heaven. The choirs were heard practicing at all hours, angels with clipboards were rushing about; everyone seemed busy, busy, busy. There was no doubt that 'Something Big' was about to happen.



Anyway, as he was cleaning the whiteboard in class a messenger angel suddenly appeared.

"You are wanted at head office" he told the littlest angel, "you had better be quick, it seems important." The littlest angel was a bit afraid; no one was asked to head office for nothing. He tried to think what had he done wrong; had he offended one of the seniors, did his teacher think he was stupid ...

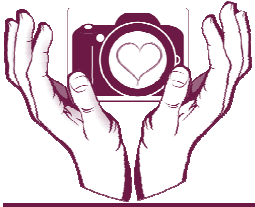
When he arrived he was astonished to find that it was Gabriel himself who was waiting for him. The littlest angel gulped, and his wings sagged - this must be serious - and Gabriel was holding a school report card. 'This student cannot sing, or dance, or play the harp', he read and raised an eyebrow, 'this student is kind, thoughtful, helpful, generous, practical and always cheerful.' Gabriel looked up and smiled. "We have been watching you" he said, "and we have a very Special Assignment for you. Would you like to be a Guardian Angel?"

"Oh, wow, oh fantastic, oh WOW", the littlest angel jumped up and down. "Oh yes, please, when do I start?" Gabriel smiled and clicked his fingers.

**In** a blink of an eye the littlest angel was perched on the corner of a manger. In a stable. In Bethlehem.

No one could see him of course, not the young woman sitting in the straw, or the man standing by her side. Not the animals (although a couple of the cats twitched their whiskers) but the baby in the manger stirred in his sleep. And smiled.





## Close to my heart A new feature

Do you have a cherished place of special, spiritual significance? It could be a church, a ruined abbey, a place of retreat, a landscape, a statue, painting or mosaic, it doesn't matter. The place can be anywhere at all, in the diocese, in Britain, or abroad. Many of us now take high quality photographs on phones as well as on cameras, so there is an enormous wealth of material.

If you would like to share your special place please email a photograph and include a few words of what it shows and why it is special.



*Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace;  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
Where there is injury, pardon;  
Where there is doubt, faith;  
Where there is despair, hope;  
Where there is darkness, light;  
And where there is sadness, joy.  
O Divine Master,  
Grant that I may not so much seek  
To be consoled as to console;  
To be understood, as to understand;  
To be loved, as to love;  
For it is in giving that we receive,  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
And it is in dying that we are born  
to Eternal Life.*

**The first photograph and memory is from Deacon Bill Corbett who writes:**

“I have for a long time had a great affinity with St Francis of Assisi. When visiting the Basilica I found it to be the most peaceful and tranquil place I have ever been. When visiting his tomb in the crypt the air was physically electric. I also used the Prayer of St Francis at my ordination to the permanent diaconate. Francis was also a deacon.”



**Deacon Bob Simpson sent this photograph** of a detail from the interior of Hagia Sophia (Holy Wisdom) in Istanbul which was built in the years 532-537. It was the largest church in the eastern empire. From 1204 to 1261 it served as the Roman Catholic Cathedral for the city. After the fall of Constantinople in 1453 it became a mosque. In 1935 it became a museum and paintings, and some smallish mosaics, were progressively uncovered. In 2020 it became a mosque again and so the art work will now be covered up again.







# Chaos reversed at Christmas

*Michael Kearns, back in the Scots College in Rome after the lockdown of the spring and summer, reflects on study, tourists and community and looks forward to the words of the angel at Christmas –*

*“do not be afraid”*

I have often remarked over the past two years that, if you pass by early enough in the morning, you can catch the small piazza in front of the Trevi fountain eerily quiet. Soon after breakfast, however, the great hordes of selfie-stick wielding tourists arrive, to stay until late at night. The area is often so busy it can be difficult to jostle through. But not this year. The Trevi fountain, like Rome’s other landmarks, is as deserted at lunchtime as it is at 7am. A few weeks ago I wandered around a vast, empty St Peter’s basilica one sunny afternoon. For the first time ever, I noticed no one



at the tomb of St John Paul II. Normally, you can’t get near it for the crowds of, usually Polish, pilgrims. Rome without visitors is quiet; the only thing that doesn’t appear to have quietened is the traffic, for which Romans themselves are responsible.

There are still some foreigners in the eternal city, however. I’m one of them. At the Pontifical universities, life goes on – even if many classes are being held online. And despite travel restrictions, they remain a hive of international activity. At a new university and studying a new course, I, once again, have classmates from every continent. Someone wished me a happy Feast of St Michael the other day. ‘Strange’, I thought, ‘his feast was ages ago, in September.’ Not in the Armenian Catholic calendar.

The Church’s great strength, as is obvious when you study in Rome, is its universality. That’s why we are the ‘Catholic’ Church. It’s the only religion in the history of humanity to touch every country and every culture. True globalism isn’t economic, but the building of a worldwide community of faith.

And yet 2020 has been the least communal and most lonely year in memory. We feel isolated, separated, and if you watch the news, many countries seem divided. Does the Bible have anything to say about this? Well, having just started to study theology, I can only comment so far on the first few chapters! But in Genesis there is an event which provides food for thought. People tried to build a tower, at Babel, which they thought would take them anywhere they wanted to reach. They would do this themselves, they didn’t need God. It was the latest in a string of serious early sins. As a result, the tower

fell. The community was scattered, broken, divided. They would never understand each other, or speak the same language, again.

Every sin has the effect of causing disharmony, destroying community, staining the Church, and even damaging the whole of creation itself. It’s easy to see this with major public wrongs, such as war, scandals affecting the Church, or powerful Catholic politicians who boast of their support for abortion. But small, ‘minor’, personal sins have the same effect. An exchange of gossip, an unkind jibe, a refusal to help a homeless person in need. Every sin hurts every thing.

But we must never forget the words of St Paul! “Where sin abounded, grace abounded all the more.” The grace of Jesus undoes, and reverses the effects of, every sin. Not only when he walked the earth, but to this very day too. Present in the world and in the Church, especially in the sacraments, Jesus heals old wounds, repairs broken bonds, and restores lost dignity. Calvary undoes, and reverses Babel. With Jesus, and above all with Jesus in the Eucharist, we become a community once again. It’s why we call the Eucharist ‘Communion’. And as I can see from looking around my classroom, we are a global community, who may speak different languages from our mouths, but share the common language of faith in our hearts.

Christmas, of course, is the great arrival of that grace. Incarnate as an unborn child in the womb, and then born in Bethlehem, the Son of God comes to bring people back together again. This Christmas, we may still be physically apart. But in faith we remain united. And whether we can get to Mass, or just watch online, we will be united above all in Jesus’ body, the Eucharist. So in continued difficult and uncertain times, let’s heed the advice the angel gave to those shepherds that wonderful night in Bethlehem: “Do not be afraid!”

## A landmark for Kevin Rennie

Kevin received Candidacy at the Scots College on Sunday 4th October prior to commencing his sixth year of studies in Rome. At this Mass, he made promises to continue his preparations for Ordination, and the Church gave her assent, accepting him as a Candidate for Ordination after five years of studies in Philosophy and Theology.



Kevin is currently continuing his studies in Rome, starting licence studies for a Licence in Moral Theology at the Pontifical University of St Thomas Aquinas. God willing he will be ordained a Deacon in Rome in May of next year.

He thanks all in the diocese for their prayers and support, and assures you all of his continued prayers



# SPRED Galloway

SPRED has been working in the diocese for over twenty years working with people with disabilities, helping them to participate in the liturgies and take a full part in their parish community. Janette Douglas, the coordinator, explains how they have managed with the present restrictions.

**L**ike many organisations within the Diocese, SPRED Galloway felt the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic with the cancellation of our Group Masses, Services of Reconciliation, all our group sessions and the closure of the SPRED Office.

However the SPRED Galloway community did not give up. We kept in contact from very early on in the period of lockdown. We used the telephone, snail mail (regular post) and email to keep in touch with our friends and their families and carers, and our volunteers. Keeping in contact proved to be very important as a couple of our friends suffered family bereavements and, sadly, the SPRED Community lost a beautiful and caring friend.

Karen was a friend for many years and losing her caused much sadness within that group and the whole of the SPRED Community. Her legacy will never be forgotten and our thoughts and prayers are with Karen's mum, family and friends.

One other piece of sad news was the closure of the SPRED Group in Girvan. The closure was not taken lightly and it was made with a very heavy heart. Our thanks to Sister Ruth, Sister Catherine, Anne, Jean, Margaret, and Rosemary for their time, commitment dedication and support; you are all in our thoughts and prayers.

When it became apparent that SPRED Galloway group sessions would not be viable for some considerable time, alternative ways of delivering the SPRED Fellowship became an important focus.

We miss the actual physical presence of our friends and volunteers and, fundamental to each group is the deep friendships between our members but meeting in person is not possible just now. However, the heart of SPRED Groups is the sharing and joyful exploration of God's Word in symbolic catechesis, prayer and song and we could not let the pandemic defeat us.

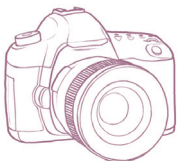
Could we follow the example of others and have on-line versions of SPRED sessions? We have had several attempts with Zoom, which were good natured but not necessarily technologically competent. All we can say is that we have approached this with our usual spirit of determination and

resilience and have not been beaten. Frustrated, exasperated, annoyed perhaps but we have not given up! In the end, we decided to have a two pronged approach in delivering our SPRED Galloway fellowship. We would persist with on-line SPRED Sessions but we would also produce the sessions on our very own DVDs to be delivered regularly to all our members who preferred not to use Zoom.

We felt it was important in our commitment to our parish communities to plan our group sessions in line with the Church's liturgical calendar. Thanks to the assistance of Deacon Robert Mackie, we are using the text "Living Liturgy, Spirituality, Celebration, and Catechesis for Sundays and Solemnities" as our guide.

We started our 2020 term in September with a CD "Songs of Joy" that was produced and delivered to each friend within the SPRED Galloway Fellowship. This was followed by the first of two on-line group sessions. It was a joy to see so many of our friends and volunteers participating in the sessions.

SPRED Galloway would not be the organisation it is without the friends and volunteers who bring so much joy to everyone associated with us. If you would like to learn more about SPRED or become a volunteer, or would like to make a contribution of music or readings for the DVDs, or you know someone who would benefit from becoming a friend member of the SPRED Galloway Fellowship, please do not hesitate to contact [info@spredgalloway.org.uk](mailto:info@spredgalloway.org.uk).



## Galloway Glimpses (2)

Cecilia J Morman says: this is St Mary's church, Largs. You can see a faint outline of a rainbow just over the roof. I thought it was a rainbow of hope as it was only right above the church.



# The Teaching of Pope Francis

by Father William McFadden

*Pope Francis commemorated the anniversary of the death of St Jerome, and asks that we place the prayerful reading of the bible as a central feature of our lives.*



It is likely that among the teachings of Pope Francis which he has presented over recent months, the document which will have the longest lasting impact is his social encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti*. This significant text looks at how all people can contribute to making our world a more just and peaceful place, and it encourages us to learn from the example of the Good Samaritan in St Luke’s Gospel, and to care in a particular way for the excluded. The pope is exhorting us to act in a way that enhances the common good, and to make decisions which promote human development in an integrated manner.

While recognising the importance of *Fratelli Tutti*, it would be a pity to neglect another document offered by the pope just before the publication of the encyclical. This was an Apostolic Letter dedicated to Sacred Scripture, *Scripturae Sacrae Affectus*, in which Francis encourages a renewed love for, and devotion to, the Scriptures.

The pope chose to commemorate the 1600th anniversary of the death of St Jerome by issuing this letter which Francis says is “a summons to love what Jerome loved, to rediscover his writings and to let ourselves be touched by his robust spirituality, which can be described in essence as a restless and impassioned desire for a greater knowledge of the God who chose to reveal himself.”

St Jerome is recognised as a wonderful example of a man devoted to encountering God in the Sacred Scriptures, and who Francis quotes as someone who unceasingly advised his contemporaries to “read the divine Scriptures constantly; never let the sacred volume fall from your hand.”

In *Scripturae Sacrae Affectus* Pope Francis reminds us that St Jerome’s life was rooted in his love for the Scriptures. He highlights that his impressive work of translating the Old Testament from Hebrew, as well as his commentaries on the psalms and on the Letters of St Paul, remain for us today sources of great inspiration and encouragement.



In identifying Jerome’s scholarly activities as being “an enterprise carried out within the community and at the service of the community,” the pope presents him as an example for today in how we too might work together more harmoniously for the greater good: “for no genuine and integral human development can occur without a body of knowledge that is the fruit of cooperation and leads to greater cooperation,” which was a direct quote from a speech Francis gave in 2019 to the Pontifical Academies.

*Scripturae Sacrae Affectus* acknowledges that in our present situation many people fail to appreciate the wealth and wisdom of the bible, “as if it were written in an unknown alphabet and an esoteric tongue.” Much remains to be done therefore to continue the work of St Jerome, and this particular contribution of Pope Francis’ teaching promotes further translation and study in order to help our understanding and insight of God’s revelation taking place today.

In commemorating the anniversary of the death of St Jerome, and in giving particular emphasis to the Scriptures, Pope Francis is asking that we place the prayerful reading of the bible as a central feature of our lives. It is a simple request but one from which we would all benefit were we to respond to in a positive way.



## Your Galloway Diocese News

At the Galloway News we want to hear from you, the priests and parishioners of the diocese. You can send items to the editor at any time or look out for the ‘email hotline’ and ‘reply’ to the reminder email: we will do the work for you. Don’t forget your photographs for ‘Galloway Glimpses’ and ‘Close to my Heart’.

Send your contributions before **5th February 2021** for inclusion in the Lent edition to:

**The Editor The Galloway Diocese News,  
Candida Casa,  
8 Corsehill Road, Ayr, KA7 2ST.**

Email: [gdn@gallowaydiocese.org.uk](mailto:gdn@gallowaydiocese.org.uk)

RC Diocese of Galloway, charity number SC010576



# A View from Westminster

*Dr Philippa Whitford, MP, looks forward to*

## *A very different Christmas*

**E**ven though we had not even made it past the interim hurdles of Hallowe'en and Guy Fawkes, conversations in October were already dominated by what Christmas would be like in this strange year we are living through. Sadly, there will be many families in mourning who have lost someone to Covid and are looking back on the devastating change in their lives since last year. Those of us, lucky enough to be untouched by such tragedy, will hopefully be thinking of our family with fondness and thanksgiving.

Covid will be with us for some considerable time and we need to learn to live with it while reducing the risk of catching it ourselves or spreading it to others. As Scotland, the UK and Europe are now in the grip of a second wave of Covid, there is no doubt that this Christmas will be different but has our more recent model of Christmas really been anything to celebrate? Advent and the run up to Christmas often seems to be dominated by two major activities – firstly, exhausting and stressful Christmas shopping and, secondly, relentless moaning about how exhausting and stressful Christmas shopping is! Instead of using Advent to prepare for the birth of Christ, the entire month is focused on a spending splurge; often incurring unaffordable debt in the process. Trudging round busy shops and worrying about the resilience of our credit cards sucks the joy out of Christmas for many people, and that was before the health and economic crisis caused by Covid.

This year it will not be easy to visit large cities for department store shopping but, rather than resort to buying vast quantities of goods online, maybe we could support our local economies and workers by visiting the shops in our local towns. Alternatively, we could search for small but lovely gifts created by crafts-people who are currently unable to sell their wares at the Craft Fairs that are normally held at this time.

As my husband, Hans, is German, we celebrate Christmas by combining the best of both our worlds. This includes celebrating Heiliger Abend or Holy Night, on the 24th of December and then getting up the next morning to do it all over again. This means we need to find lots of little presents for each other rather than one large expensive one. When we have been in Germany at this time, which is sadly not possible this year, I have always loved visiting the German Christmas markets. The experience of shopping for small, handmade gifts in

the frosty air, while listening to a brass band and clutching a glass of mulled wine, has always felt more of a pleasure than a chore. Maybe this year, we should try to focus on the pleasure of finding just the 'right' present for our loved ones, rather than the most expensive, or perhaps even make them ourselves. Taking a lot of time to choose or make a gift is more precious and more generous than just whipping out the cheque book!



Lockdown has made people focus more on their homes and how to make them comfortable. For those lucky enough to be in secure jobs or work from home, many have invested in extensive home improvements, to the extent it is almost impossible to find a tradesperson with any free time. However, it isn't necessary to carry out major renovations to improve our homes – often we just need to spend a little time and effort to prepare for the dark winter months. In the Spring, we saw rainbows in people's windows to thank those working in the NHS, Social Care and other frontline services. There is a similar proposal from 'Shine Bright Scotland', (<https://www.facebook.com/shinebrightscotland20/>) to put a small lamp in our windows or put garden lights up early, to brighten up our streets, make people smile and show support for those working to keep the rest of us safe.

**I**n Germany, rather than premature Christmas trees indoors, most houses boast an Advent Ring and are filled with the resinous smell of fir branches and the warm glow of candlelight. Like their Nordic cousins, Germans revel in making their homes 'gemütlich', from November through to February. The closest translation would be 'cosy' and, indeed many northern cultures mark the dark times of the year with a focus on home, family and community rather than formal events, parties or razzmatazz. This year, due to Covid-19, there will simply be no choice and the sooner we accept that, the better we can prepare to make a very different Christmas and New Year still feel special.

I feel sorry for those who normally gather their extended family and squeeze



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# Profile

In this occasional series we bring you news of newcomers who enrich the life of our diocese.

*Benjamin Bem Mkeri CSSp is a member of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (Holy Ghost Fathers) otherwise known as Spiritians.*

**F**ather Benjamin writes: I was born in Nigeria, West Africa, on 20th October, 1975 to a protestant family. After my philosophical and theological studies I was ordained on 8th July 2006 and exactly eight weeks later I left Nigeria for my missionary enterprise in the Philippines where I worked for fourteen years until 2020.

My apostolate ranges from parish, prison and school and during that time I worked as parish priest in various parishes including the Resurrection of the Lord, which us a Chinese-Filipino parish, Our Lady of Fatima Parish and Our Lady of Miraculous Medal quasi Parish. My work in school chaplaincies took me to Iligan Capitol College and the Lyceum of Iligan Foundation and I also served as a chaplain in a youth centre known as Catholic Centre Campus Ministry. My involvement in school ministry offered me opportunities to teach, which I grasped eagerly, and I taught as a part time instructor in the three schools.

Furthermore, I had the honour and privilege of serving as chaplain of the diocesan prison ministry for seven years as



well as diocesan spiritual director of the World Apostolate of Fatima.

To facilitate my work as a prison minister, given the many challenges which necessarily calls for professional touch, I took a Master's degree in guidance and counselling. The quest for updating landed me into a doctorate programme and in 2019 I successfully graduated.

On March 4th 2020, I arrived in the UK and after some days in Manchester, I left for the Spiritan house in Carfin. On 13th March I arrived in the prestigious diocese of

Galloway and was immediately caught up with lockdown at St Sophia Parish, Galston, till the end of July when I left for St Andrews, Dumfries, where I assisted Father Gerard Donnelly. In the middle of November I was asked by Bishop Nolan to go to the parishes of St John's, Stevenston and St Mary's, Saltcoats. Thus far my stay in Galloway has been great and inspiring and I am looking forward to the rest of my time here.

My hobbies include gardening, playing badminton, taking a walk and reading, all of which I hope to pursue with the good people of Galloway Diocese.

## *A very different Christmas, continued from previous page*

them round the table for a huge Christmas dinner, with children of various ages perched on a variety of pouffes, stools and other objects passing themselves off as dining chairs. I fondly remember Christmas night gatherings at my Auntie Eileen's when I was a child growing up in Belfast. With 45 first cousins on that side of my family, I've never been clear how we even fitted into her small council house. All the children played upstairs with their favourite new toy and just slept where they nodded off, lulled by the buzz of chat and laughter from the adults below.

But what about all those who aren't lucky enough to have an extended family, or indeed any family at all? Or those who don't even have a home to shelter in? Maybe we could donate some of the money we are not spending on big nights out to support our local food bank or homeless shelter or, again, donate that most precious commodity – our time.

For all the isolation of lockdown in the spring, there will have been many elderly people who actually had more contact with others than usual, as neighbours or local authority staff

phoned to check on those who were shielding and local volunteers popped round to deliver shopping.

Let's ensure that none of our neighbours are left alone this Christmas. We could phone someone for a blether or, if it isn't typical wet Scottish weather, chat over the hedge just to say hello and Happy Christmas. We could think of a little treat to deliver to someone who lives alone or, if we haven't already formed a 'bubble' with an elderly relative, consider including a neighbour in our extended family so as to include them in our Christmas dinner plans.

**A**s this Christmas is unlikely to see the usual shopping, eating and entertainment frenzy, perhaps we could take the opportunity to stop and think about what is really important at this time. For people of all faiths and none, Christmas is a time of kindness; helping each other through the dark, cold winter months. For us as Christians, the birth of Christ brings hope and comfort to our lives, especially in this most difficult of years.

This strange and challenging year provides a chance to change the focus of our celebrations and, you never know, we might even find that we prefer a simpler Christmas!





# Praying with The Saints – Saint Augustine

By Father Martin Chambers

*Over the next few articles on Prayer, I thought I would turn towards the lives of the Saints. Different Saints have had an impact on us at different times in our lives. They can all teach us something about prayer and how to come close to God ...*

I did my training for the Priesthood at the Royal Scots College in Valladolid, Spain. Before the College moved to Salamanca in 1988, we studied philosophy and theology at the Augustinian College in the centre of that Castilian city. For six years we attended lectures and seminars in that imposing building and I remember being struck, even as an 18 year old, by the impressive artwork and paintings on display all along the corridors. In particular, one painting sticks in my mind. It depicts the Conversion of Saint Augustine – along with the Latin words “*Tolle et Lege/Take and Read*” – an invitation to pick up, read and pray the Scriptures. From that moment, the life of Saint Augustine had an impact on my life. Even back then I asked myself: “*maybe St. Augustine could teach me how to pray?*”

Augustine was born in 354 in what is modern-day Algeria. His mother was Saint Monica, a devout Christian and his father, Patricius, was a pagan who converted to Christianity on his deathbed. Augustine himself was not baptised as a child. He had a happy upbringing and at the age of 17 went off to Carthage to continue his studies. It was at this time that Augustine, much to the worry and concern of his mother, began to adopt a very worldly and hedonistic lifestyle which stayed with him until he was in his early thirties. St Monica spent the rest of her life praying that her son would turn towards a Christian life and virtues. At the same time, he was advancing in his studies and eventually became a teacher, teaching at Thagaste, then at Carthage and on to Rome and Milan. It was there he met St Ambrose and, to the delight of his praying mother, began to settle down and put aside the wilder lifestyle to which he had grown accustomed. In late August of 386, at the age of 31, having been influenced by the lives of St Ambrose and others, Augustine converted to Christianity. As Augustine later told us, his conversion was prompted by hearing a child’s voice say “*take up and read*”. In his later work called “*Confessions*” he would write these words about how he felt on his conversion to Christ:

*Late have I loved you, beauty so old and so new:  
late have I loved you.  
Lo, you were within and I was without – in the external world  
I sought you there, and in my*

*unlovely state*

*I plunged into those lovely created things which you made  
You were with me, and I was not with you.*

He was baptised by St Ambrose at the Easter Vigil in Milan in 387. He then went on to study for the priesthood and was ordained in 391. Shortly after becoming a priest, he wrote to his bishop asking for a period to go off and pray saying “*I can’t do this. I don’t know Scripture.*” He was given a year to go off to pray and study with the Scriptures that had been central to his original calling. This proved to be a key turning point in his life. He became a famous preacher and then was noted for combating some of the heresies and worldly practices to which he had formerly adhered. In 395, he was made coadjutor Bishop of Hippo and became diocesan bishop a short while after, hence the name “*Augustine of Hippo.*” It was once he became a bishop that he began writing some of his most prolific works, including his autobiographical work “*Confessions*” and his work “*City of God*” which deals with the place of the Church in the world.

Saint Augustine I feel can teach us a lot about prayer and, indeed, about how to approach life in these uncertain Covid-19 times. Let me look at Augustine through a few headings:

## *Scripture*

It was the Bible that initially attracted St Augustine to the Christian life. It was in the pages of the Bible that he found a relationship with God. Maybe God could be speaking to you, perhaps even today, through the pages of the Bible. St Augustine invites you, as he did, to “*take up and read*” the Bible.

## *Prayer*

Augustine’s first major work “*Confessions*” is like an autobiography of his early life and is, in fact, a prayer in itself, perhaps even the longest prayer ever written. It reads like a hymn of praise for all that God has done in his life. Augustine teaches us that prayer is not just words but rather a relationship with God. We might use words in prayer but we are called to see our prayer life as if we were talking to a friend. How can we praise God, he asks, if we don’t know him as a friend and a close companion in life? One of the first passages of Scripture that



## St Augustine, continued

Augustine looked at was Romans 5:5 *“God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”*

Saint Augustine teaches you and me that our prayer life is primarily a conversation with the God who has loved us since before we were born. In these uncertain times, St Augustine invites us to deepen our prayerful conversation with God.

### Community

When Saint Augustine became a bishop, one of his great tasks was to promote unity since there was great opposition to the Christian way of life. He called on his people to support one another because all people, he taught, are on their way to God. Looking out for the needs of other people leads to hospitality but also leads everyone ultimately to God.

This, of course, is a message that has been ringing out clear for you and me during these difficult Covid-19 days. Although people may look for different solutions to the Covid challenges, St Augustine reminds us that, if we promote unity within the community, if we support the weakest and neediest within society, it will benefit ALL people. There will be greater love within the community and, through this, we will be led to God.

## Humility

According to St Augustine, the Christian life is firstly humility, secondly humility and thirdly humility. Not in the sense that we have to put ourselves down but rather to realise that all our wisdom, all our strength and all our capabilities come from God. The only love we have is the love that has been given us by God. That is what St Augustine recognised when he uttered the prayer: *“Late have I loved you, beauty so old and so new.”*

In these strange Covid days, society has been reminded that the central values of love, hope and peace are more important than material wealth and power. St Augustine reminds you and me to focus our attention on these values which come to us from God.

From my heady days in the seminary, I knew from the life of St Augustine that God can do great things in people’s lives. Taking up and reading the Scripture were important for St Augustine, it has been important for me and is central to all our prayer lives. God changed St Augustine from a materialistic and worldly life to a life where, through his preaching, he influenced many people about the values of humility and unity. Through his preaching he encouraged people to see prayer as a relationship with a God who showers us with his love. For he said: *“God loves each one of us as if there were only one of us.”*



### Praying the Rosary

**A**t a recent General Audience Pope Francis encouraged Catholics to pray the Rosary, amid the “looming threats” our world is facing.

*“In her apparitions, Our Lady often exhorted the recitation of the rosary, especially in the face of looming threats to the world. Even today, in this time of the pandemic, it is necessary to hold the rosary in our hands and pray for us, our loved ones and all people,”* he said.

*The Holy Father prayed that through the intercession of Our Lady of the Rosary, the Lord might make “our life, in the midst of this time of the pandemic, a loving service to all our brothers and sisters, especially those who feel abandoned and unprotected.”*

*He invited us to pray the rosary and carry it in our hands or pockets. The rosary, is the most beautiful prayer that we can offer to the Virgin Mary. “It is a contemplation of the stages of the life of Jesus the Saviour with his Mother Mary and it is a weapon that protects us from evil and temptation.” The rosary is a “contemplative prayer,” saying that, in meditating on the mysteries of salvation, “the loving face of God Himself, whom we are called to contemplate in eternity, is increasingly revealed to us.”*

### Prayer for our priests and deacons



*Sacred Heart of Jesus, whose Heart constantly burns with love for us, hear our prayers today for our priests and deacons.*

*We ask you to bless and keep close to your loving heart our parish priest; In flame him with a love for you and all people so that he may increasingly become a shepherd after your own heart.*

*Watch over and encourage all our priests as they work hard to keep the Word and the Eucharist alive in the hearts of their people in these difficult times.*

*Consecrate to your heart all the priests and deacons of our diocese, those still working in parishes and those who are retired.*

*Through your great mercy bring our priests who have served us but have since died into the glory of heaven.*

*Amen*



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***“May the star guide you through these difficult times to the shining light in the stable in Bethlehem”***

The team at Galloway Diocese News wish all our readers a happy and holy Christmas and a peaceful and healthy New Year