



Galloway Diocese NEWS

Advent
Edition
December
2021

Mass for Our Common Home

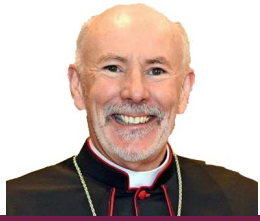


The Bishop's Conference of Scotland, COP26 Delegates Mass was held on Sunday 7th Nov 2021.

The celebrant, Bishop Hugh Gilbert welcomed delegates, visitors and many distinguished guests, including his Excellency Archbishop Gugerotti, the Apostolic Nuncio to Great Britain, John Swinney, the Deputy First Minister and Philip Braat, Lord Provost of Glasgow to the beautiful church of St Aloysius, Garnethill, Glasgow.

The Homily was given by Bishop William Nolan. SCIAF Partners from the Global South and school pupils led the Prayer of the Faithful, some of them in their native tongues.

Photographs by and © of Paul McSherry



The Bishop Writes

While COP was taking place within the Blue Zone, at events in Glasgow many religious leaders from a variety of faiths were reminding us all of the God given responsibility to humanity to care for creation.

For two weeks in November Glasgow, indeed Scotland, was the focus of world attention as COP26 brought 120 world leaders, 25,000 delegates, and countless activists to the city. Only time will tell if the conference has been a success and if the many fine words of concern for the environment that were spoken will be matched by the radical action necessary to ensure that the increase in global warming does not exceed 1.5 degrees.



Outside of the Blue Zone, where the official delegates were meeting, much activity was taking place. For me COP began with an Interfaith Service in George Square. It was an impressive event with religious leaders from a variety of faiths all speaking with the same voice, recognising the responsibility that God has given humanity to care for creation. In this regard Pope Francis had shown the way, since in preparation for COP he had had an interfaith meeting in Rome in October which culminated in a Joint Appeal urging world leaders and politicians to act with urgency and take the steps necessary to deal with the crisis.

While Pope Francis did not come to Glasgow as we had hoped, he was still a presence at COP. At another interfaith event that I attended an Anglican bishop spoke eloquently about Pope Francis' teaching contained in his encyclical, *Laudato Si'*. Something that I discovered was that, though usually papal encyclicals are not read by many people, *Laudato Si'* can be quoted by Catholics, Protestants and indeed people of no faith. Though now six years old

it is a key document for anyone concerned about the care of our common home.

Various Catholic groups organised a 24 hour online Vigil. This brought together people from throughout the world in a period of prayer, meditation and reflection. This highlighted for me another aspect of COP, its international nature. The care of our common home is certainly an issue that unites humanity from every country and continent. Unfortunately it is the people in the poorest countries who are the first to be affected by climate change. They are not the ones causing the problem by polluting the world, but the results of climate change, drought, famine, flood, devastate their way of life. This of course is a cause of migration since many leave home to seek a better life elsewhere.

They say 100,000 took part in the march. I was one of them. One section of the march was for faith groups. The Catholic Church was well represented with Justice and Peace, SCIAF, CAFOD, the Jesuits, the Passionists, and others. But I also found myself walking with Hindus, with Sikhs, and with Muslims. The march was cold, wet and windy, and it did take three hours to travel three miles, but the atmosphere was warm and friendly with many local people hanging out of their windows shouting their support.

The enthusiasm of the activists on the streets of Glasgow was very encouraging and inspiring. However they were outside the Blue Zone. It was the delegates inside the Blue Zone who would determine whether COP was a success, whether governments would face up to the challenge that confronts our planet.

This is the 26th COP. They are annual events. How many more COPs do we need? There was a sense in Glasgow that we have heard all the arguments, we have discussed what needs to be done, we know that time is running out. We know what we have to do – it is time now to do it.



“Among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist”

Jim McKendrick on how he changed his mind about this saint

Originally, I didn't really like John the Baptist too much. He seemed an odd, eccentric and uncouth person whose appearance was unkempt; clothing austere and diet unappealing. When I tried to visualise him, images of Roy Wood from Wizard filled my mind. I used to skip through the Advent readings and fast-forward to Christmas. Gradually I began to wonder, have I got this wrong? Nobody seemed in the least perturbed by his appearance or lifestyle. Luke says that John lived in the desert until the day when he appeared publicly to the people of Israel. Suddenly it all clicked into place. As the historian, Josephus suggested, John had probably lived with an Essene community. The camel hair robe and leather belt; standard dress code and styling for a holy man or prophet. Honey and locusts – a strict interpretation of the Jewish dietary laws. The desert – as Jesus himself said – where else would you go to find a prophet?

During the last few Advents, reading and reflecting on the relevant passages in all four Gospels has allowed me to see John in a different and much more favourable light. He is one of the key figures of Advent and one of those people destined for great things. A relation of Jesus and Mary, his conception is announced to his father, Zechariah, by the angel Gabriel. “Great in the sight of the Lord, he is to be called John.” Zechariah finds this all a bit much to take in, and is struck dumb for his lack of belief. When John's circumcision comes along, his mother, Elisabeth, insists his name is to be John and the family and neighbours turn to his father for confirmation. Still unable to speak Zechariah writes on a tablet “his name is John.” Immediately, he can speak again and realises all that Gabriel told him is true. Praising God, he prophesises that John will be called a prophet of the Most High God and prepare the way of the Lord. Thus, completing the mission of Elijah. Later, in his public ministry, after the

messengers from John the Baptist have left, Jesus tells the crowd that John is a prophet, but more than a prophet; he is the messenger of God, sent to prepare the way of the Lord: the greatest man who has ever lived.

Where does this greatness come from? First of all, John was great because he was the transition from the Old Testament Prophets to the New Testament; from the Old Covenant to the New. He was the bridge that prepared for the new life to come. His unique mission makes him truly great. He knew who Jesus was and pointed him out, thus turning the eyes of his followers from himself to his Lord. “Behold the Lamb of God” – God's sacrificial lamb who takes away the sins of the world. John did his preaching mainly in the desert of Judea. He did not sit on a royal throne or enjoy the honours of the Jewish leaders. Instead, he was poor, simple, prayerful, regularly engaged in penance, remained in the desert and invited many people to come to him. And when they came, he boldly preached a message similar to Jesus.

But John was great not only because of his unique calling, he was also great because of the virtue he had in his life. The particular virtue that John had was that of humility. He saw himself as nothing other than a “voice of one crying out in the desert.” John acknowledged that he was not even worthy to stoop down and untie the sandal straps of Jesus. He was praised by many and followed by many, and yet he continuously said of Jesus that “He must increase and I must decrease.” He knew who Jesus was. He pointed to Jesus and turned the eyes of his followers from himself to his Lord.

We can learn a great deal from John the Baptist. He persevered and fulfilled the mission entrusted to him by God. His message is timeless, still relevant for us today. With deep humility, he deferred to Jesus; always diverting attention to Him and



pointing out to the crowds that it was not him, but Jesus, they were looking for. He showed great courage when he boldly preached his message of repentance and conversion to the crowds; and even greater courage when he spoke out against the impropriety of a king's marriage, even when it cost him his life.

On a personal note, I learned not to judge a book by its cover: what seemed like an itinerant hobo turned out to be a genuine superstar.

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:

Send your contributions before 25th February 2022 for inclusion in the Lent edition to:

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

gdnews@gallowaydiocese.org.uk

*RC Diocese of Galloway, charity number
SC010576*



from around the Diocese

On 3rd September, nine parishioners from St Joseph's, Stranraer, had a wonderful day out at Carfin Grotto, taking part in the National Pilgrimage, this year dedicated to St Joseph. The main Celebrant was Bishop Brian McGee who also gave touching homily on St Joseph. Two of our parishioners, members of UCM, were given the honour of carrying the National Banner. It was a beautiful Service with lovely weather.

Pilgrimage to Carfin

St Joseph's, Stranraer, enjoy fine weather on the pilgrimage



It was a beautiful Service with lovely weather.



St Brigid's in miniature

A fine model in pride of place

Jim Miller, North Ayrshire's 'Matchstick Man', recently presented his latest model to Father Mark and the parishioners of St Brigid's, Kilbirnie; a replica of the church building made entirely of matchsticks. Jim has completed over a hundred models of local churches and other notable buildings during the past 20 years. Mr and Mrs Miller joined the community for morning Mass and a reception afterwards. Thanks to Jim and best wishes for many more happy and healthy years of model-building.



Small is Beautiful

Parishioners of St Luke's and Holy Trinity complete the Shoebox Appeal

After a lot of hard work St Luke's parishioner in Moffat, Moira Doyle, thanked fellow parishioners in St Luke's and Holy Trinity, Lockerbie as well as friends and neighbours for collecting and filling over 40 boxes for the annual Blythwood Care Shoebox appeal. The parcels are now winding their way to children and families in poorer European countries in time for Christmas.



CAMINO To COP

Dumfries was a stepping off point for environmental walkers

The Churches Together in Lockerbie and Moffat hosted approximately 35 environmental walkers heading to Glasgow for the COP26 summit. They set off from London on September 8th and were forming part of the climate change activists attending the environmental conference in Glasgow. As they made their way through the eastern side of the diocese the Christian communities in Lockerbie and Moffat rallied round to support them by offering their halls to sleep in and a chance to pray, share and reflect on the Care of the Earth with moving testimony and talks from the walkers with the Church members. A great effort was made by the hosts to provide vegetarian and vegan meals which everyone agreed were absolutely delicious! You can follow their whole pilgrimage on their website: <https://caminotocop.com/>



Diocese of Galloway Youth Ministry

World Youth Day 2023



The Christian Cross, sign of the infinite love of God for the Human-kind, is the main element, where everything is born from.



The passage of the Visitation is the theme of the WYD Lisbon 2023, and it reveals us that Mary was ready to live according to God's will, being available to serve Elizabeth. This movement underlines the invitation made to the young people to renew their "inner strength", their dreams, the enthusiasm, the hope and the gratitude" (Christus Vivit, 20). Next to the path there is also a shape that evokes the Holy Spirit.

We are working with the other seven diocese in Scotland to produce a programme and schedule for the next international World Youth Day in Portugal from 1st-6th August 2023. We hope to launch that programme soon and look forward to preparing for this wonderful event with young people from across the diocese of Galloway. In the meantime you might wish to familiarise yourself with the theme, logo and its meaning.

Youth for Lourdes

Like the rest of the diocesan Lourdes family we understand completely the good reasons for postponing the next diocesan pilgrimage to Lourdes until 2023. As the YfL group we will depart on Sunday 2nd July and return on Wednesday 12th July 2023. We will begin to recruit for this early in the new year, so watch this space!

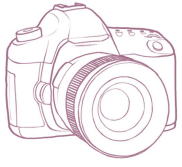


Mary is depicted as a young girl to represent the figure of the Gospel of Saint Luke (Lc. 1, 39) and to enable a resemblance with the youngest. The drawing expresses the juvenility of her age, a characteristic of someone who was not a mother yet, but who is carrying the light of the world inside Her. This figure has a slight inclination, to show the compelled attitude of the Virgin Mary.



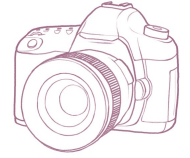
The choice of the rosary celebrates the spirituality of the Portuguese people in their devotion to Our Lady of Fátima. This is placed on the path to recall the pilgrimage experience which is so remarkable in Portugal.





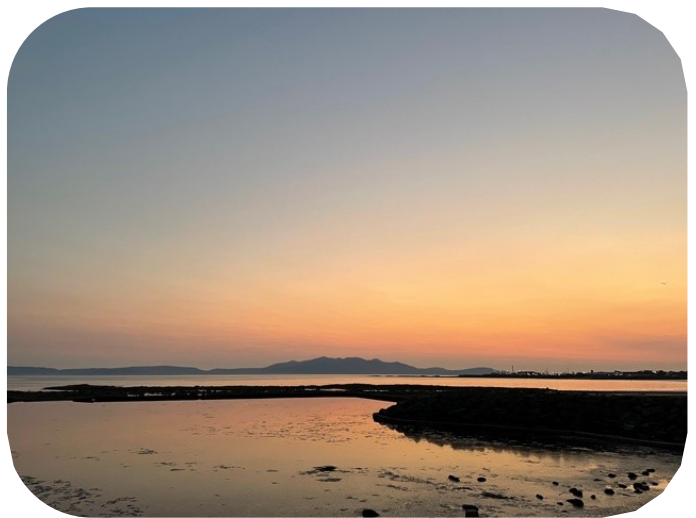
Galloway Glimpses

A selection of seascapes which capture the diverse scenery and beauty of Ayrshire and the Ayrshire coast taken by Cecilia J Morman, a parishioner at St Peter's- in-chains, Church, Ardrossan



(left)
The marina at Ardrossan harbour

(Below)
Saltcoats beach looking over to Arran



(Left)
Sunset over Saltcoats beach

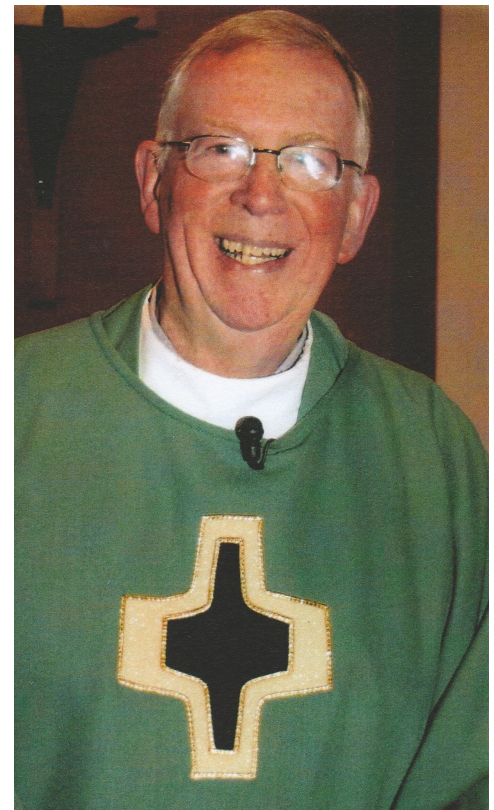
(Below)
A rainbow of hope at Seamills



Father Joseph Holmes

Mill Hill Missionary and Priest of the Diocese of Galloway
27th July 1938 - 30th September 2021

*A tribute by Father Gerald Donnelly, parish priest of St Andrew's,
Dumfries and St Columba's, Annan*



On the 21st of December 1988, Pam Am flight 103 exploded over Lockerbie and in the early hours of the 22nd Tommy Holmes met his brother Joe along with Father Patrick McSorley on the streets of the town. Two men of God wanting to bring comfort and the sacraments to anyone in need. Of that event Father Joe said *“As I stood on what seemed to be a battle-scarred scene on a dark December night and witnessed so much destruction, pain and suffering, I had no idea then I would be returning to the same area and the same people perhaps to heal wounds of a different kind and in a different way.”* In this scene on a cold and wet night we see the three elements that were most important to Joe Holmes; family, the fraternity of the priesthood and Mission and going where God wants and needs you to be.

Joseph Holmes was born on the 27th of July, 1938 in Dumfries. He was baptised on the 7th of August, 1938 in Saint Andrew's Cathedral and here too received the sacrament of Confirmation in 1947. Joe's father, Joseph, was a railwayman, and his mother was Hannah Holmes, nee Lynch. Joe grew up with his family of four brothers and two sisters in Brooke Street, Dumfries; as he put it *“with school to the left of us, Church to the right, there was no doubting the influence the Catholic Faith and the priests of the time had over young people with emerging vocations.”*

Joe attended St Joseph's College in Dumfries. However, feeling a call to the missionary priesthood, he transferred to St Joseph's College, Lochwinnoch, the Mill Hill Junior Seminary in Scotland, to complete his Secondary Education and then to Burn Hall in Durham. Joe then studied philosophy and associated subjects at the Missiehuis in Roosendaal, Holland. To complete his preparation for priesthood, Joe continued his seminary studies at St Joseph's College, Mill Hill, London. He took the Perpetual Oath to God in the Society on the 2nd of May, 1962. Just over a year later, on the 7th of July, 1963 he was ordained a priest in St Joseph's College Chapel. As a first appointment, Joe was asked to follow further studies at St Mary's College, Strawberry Hill, London, where he obtained a Post-Graduate Teacher Training Diploma.

After some years teaching in Lochwinnoch and then in Burn Hall, to Joe's delight, in 1969, he was appointed to the Diocese of Kisumu in Kenya, for initially for four years, returning in December 1980, this time to work in the new Diocese of Kakamega, which he described as *“a mind-blowing experience; a beautiful way of life but not for the faint-hearted.”*

The construction of Our Lady of the Assumption in Kisumu, Kenya was a personal achievement for Joe but came at a price of exhaustion and a period of ill health. We can look to the example of Father Joe and see what Missionary really means; men and women leaving their families and homelands

to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Of course it brings tremendous reward but sometimes at a high cost.

After twelve years serving mostly in Mukumu Parish, Joe returned home where, in April 1997 he

accepted an appointment as Administrator in St Joseph's House, Cardonald.

In 2003 when celebrating his 40th anniversary in the Priesthood, he saw that a certain Father John Cunningham, whom he had known in the past, had been appointed Bishop of Galloway. He got a phone call ... *“Would I go to a place called Annan?”* As parish priest of St Columba's, Annan, Joe also served Lockerbie, Moffat and at that time Langholm too. As with everything else Joe gave it all he could and loved the parish communities. St Columba's held a particularly important place in Joe's heart and he lived out the last years of his life there. In retirement he continued to be an invaluable help to the parish whom he loved, and was loved by all.

Family was immensely important to Joe. It was to his family he returned on breaks from the mission field and Uncle Joe's return was a source of great excitement to all his extended family. The social life was important and there would be gatherings for meals in the house at St Columba's. Food and drink featured highly in the family's recollections, soup and Ferrero Rocher chocolates specifically mentioned.

After a period of ill health and a number of visits to hospital Joe returned to the care of the Mill Hill Fathers at Herbert House in Formby. This turned out to be shorter than anticipated. In the very last days again it was family who were with him, his brother Denis and Jen and Jim.

His return home was via the parish of St Columba's then to St Andrew's. *“In the waters of baptism Joe died with Christ and rose with him to new life; may he now share with him eternal glory.”* In that church and at that font, in the Cathedral of Galloway, Joseph Holmes was baptised. This parish nurtured his Missionary vocation and from this church we commend him to God.

May he rest in peace and rise on glory.

Whithorn ReBuild

By Julia Muir Watt, Development Manager of the Whithorn Trust

This autumn, the Whithorn Trust's activities have all related to young people, whether assisting with raising scientific attainment and ambition in the local primary school, or investing in the training of young people in construction skills which relate to Whithorn's past.

It can be forgotten that Whithorn's name, famously originating in the Anglo-Saxon translation of the Latin "Candida Casa", refers to the building materials used, according to tradition, by masons building the first church in Scotland at Whithorn – the bright white lime mortar which covered its stone walls, in a fashion so unlike the native wooden buildings, as Bede tells us. According to the 13th Century life of St Ninian by Ailred of Rievaulx, the masons came from France. Much later in Whithorn's development, the cathedral was regularly enlarged and transformed, reflecting changing liturgical practices and, especially, the need to accommodate growing numbers of pilgrims. We know that there were expansions to the chapels in the 14th and 15th centuries, and, in the 16th, James IV's Treasurer's Accounts record that the King, Whithorn's most assiduous Royal pilgrim, gave "drinksilver to the masons."

Archaeologists have found evidence of this constant building activity in Whithorn's several campaigns of excavation, ranging from nails and shingles from the Northumbrian Church of the 8th Century, pieces and shavings of sandstone in the later mediaeval period, and even light coloured mortar and clay bonding found in earliest layers, which led Raleigh Radford to conclude he had found the remains of Candida Casa in the 1950s, at the east end of the Cathedral. We have even found doodles and "apprentice pieces" on stone, indicating that a beginner was practicing making compass-drawn circles which form the basis of a marigold cross.

Like many museums, we have focused in the past on the preservation and display of this amazing record, but in many ways we have not fully appreciated the skills that led to these artefacts and traces in the archaeological record or looked closely at the craftsmen who made them. In the post-pandemic world, the Whithorn Trust has undertaken a new project, Whithorn ReBuild, which links young people of today, suffering a variety of barriers to employment, with the rich skill tradition of the mediaeval past. As unemployment skyrocketed among young people in Dumfries and Galloway by over 400% as a result of the pandemic, the Trust took on six young people, as part of a pilot project, to train, under a skilled supervisor, in the construction crafts which are in evidence at Whithorn: woodworking, masonry, blacksmithing and stained glass. Whithorn, for instance, has some of the

earliest known stained glass in the country, from a window in its Northumbrian minster.

The project began in May 2021 at a former joiner's workshop behind the Whithorn Trust's premises. Under the careful guidance of Shaun, a 30-year time-served joiner and fire crew leader from Newcastle, the trainees, who were not required to have any previous experience or knowledge but simply enthusiasm for working with their hands, began working with hand tools which are not very different from those used in mediaeval times. Chisels, axes and adzes, drawknives and hammers were the only tools allowed them in a rigorous introduction to the techniques of handling tools and materials. A number of experts came to give tuition in other subjects, ranging from a blacksmith to a stonemason, green woodworking experts and a stained glass artist.

The first full-scale project for the ReBuild team was the construction of a prehistoric logboat, which was carved out of a giant Redwood, growing near Kirkcowan. This gave the team plenty of experience in building up hewing techniques and an insight into prehistoric carpentry. They also



learnt basic forestry techniques including ropework and harness, and tried a day of modern chainsawing. They have built drystone dykes and learned to mix that essential Whithorn ingredient – lime mortar – for building walls: this will be put to the test when they renovate an old smiddy in Whithorn, once used by legendary local blacksmith, Ben Wilma. The stained glass

work proved more engrossing than the team anticipated: Lorrie Kyle from Dumfriesshire gave them an intensive class and each participant made his own panel. They are now planning more stained glass work – one project is to create panels featuring poppies for the Remembrance Sunday display in Whithorn and to create glass artefacts for a Christmas pop-up shop to raise funds for their project. Members of the community have also benefited by joining in these very popular glass classes, which many have found therapeutic after lockdown.

By autumn, the team's profile had been raised in the community and commissions from local groups began to come in: the St Ninian's Priory Church of Scotland requested help with modification of pews to create a flexible space in the church, and part of the benefit to the trainees, apart from the in-work training, was to be given some of the magnificent



Charity in Action Friendly Fresh Start

Janice Grant is the secretary of an organisation which, with the support of the churches, supplies people with the essentials of living.

Can you help?

They are always grateful for non-perishable food, toiletries, especially men's essentials, any unwanted cutlery, crockery, pots and pans, cleaning items, such as surface cleaner, sponges, washing up liquid, duvets and pillows and duvet covers (we have plenty sheets) and even strong carrier bags. Volunteers are always useful too.

Unfortunately we are unable to accept electrical items, unless they are new.

Friendly Fresh Start is a starter packs project. EACHa had to suspend its Community Friends drop-in afternoons in March 2020 when Covid-19 restrictions were put in place. They looked for another way to support those in our community most vulnerable due to homelessness, poverty or broken relationships and learned that there was an increased number of people presenting as homeless, and in time moving out of temporary furnished accommodation to a tenancy. While most new tenants have savings or family support to assist settling in to their new home, others do not. New tenancies are supplied with white goods, carpets and basic furniture. We learned that people were entering their new home without essentials such as kettle, cutlery or cup and saucer. Friendly Fresh Start seeks to help fill the gaps, with the aim of helping people settle, and avoid repeat homelessness.



The packs supplied vary according to the client's needs, and may include: cleaning pack, pack of toiletries, food parcel, pots and pans, cutlery, crockery, kettle, toaster, bedding. Clients are referred by services including: Women's Aid, housing and social care support workers and community connectors. Donations to assist making up the packs are received from members of local churches and the local community. All referrals are supplied in full, as we purchase any items we do not have in stock.

Donations for the household packs can be delivered to our premises at 32b Grange Street, Kilmarnock, opposite the Job Centre, on Mondays and Wednesdays between 9 am and 12 noon.

Whithorn ReBuild, continued

century-old pine to be used for their own carpentry projects. They constructed a swing for a local disabled adult and came to the rescue of the Community Council's pedestrian bridge – the contractor was short of workers and the team assisted in putting together the kit for the bridge which spans the Ket and now forms a popular new stretch of the Whithorn Way pilgrimage route to the Isle of Whithorn. Their current project is to repair the shingled roof of the Primary School's outdoor classroom which had become dilapidated: the Parent Council had failed to find a contractor and the ReBuild team stepped in. This project has particular historical resonances as we know the Northumbrian Minster was shingled and this is a valuable historical skill for the trainees, given the Trust's future ambitions for re-creating the buildings of the past.

Like many museums, the Trust is moving towards a more active role within its community, assisting actively by deploying Whithorn's amazing heritage to benefit local young people through fostering a new generation of master craftsmen and women, trained in scarce and endangered skills which have been practiced in Whithorn for much more than a millennium.



SPRED Galloway *Joy! Gaudete Sunday bears out its name*

SPRED Galloway is going to be rejoicing on the 12th of December at 2 pm in St Margaret's Cathedral. Why? We're filled with joy because we are coming together for a SPRED Family Mass. Who's invited? Anyone who would like to come along!

It is quite some time since we were able to meet in this way, so many thanks to the kindness of Father David Borland who offered to celebrate with us in St Margaret's Cathedral. Don't be shy! Come and add to our rejoicing on the Third Sunday of Advent – the rose candle Sunday – a time of joyful celebration anticipating the coming of Jesus.





Spotlight on Education

Saint Matthew's Academy

"The vision of Saint Matthew's Academy is one of a community of faith where all are committed to learning and where young people strive to reach their full potential, academically and spiritually."

The session is one of renewal and recovery for the school community. The challenges all have faced over the past 18 months are still present but we are working hard to move forward with a more settled approach for our young people. Father Mark has been able to offer weekly Mass in our Auditorium rather than the Oratory and our S6 have signed up in good numbers for our Caritas programme.

Despite the challenges we have faced, the past year has seen notable success with Saint Matthew's Academy achieving Rights Respecting School Silver, the Digital Schools Award and SCQF Ambassador School status. Our academic attainment was very strong with more pupils than ever before achieving 5+ Higher/SCQF6 awards.

The pandemic has meant that we have been unable to organise assemblies or year group Masses but we are hopeful that this may change in the near future. We are committed to providing opportunities for young people to put Faith into Action. To this end pupils and students are invited to join various groups within the school which compliment our Catholic Ethos.

We are fortunate to benefit from strong links with our local SSVP groups and have been able to support families in most need over the past year. Our own SSVP group has been working on a variety of projects throughout the year designed to support those in our communities who are most in need. The group is currently organising our food parcel programme over Advent, which leads to foodstuffs being distributed to all of our parishes through their SSVP groups. Last year over 100kg of provisions were donated to those in most need.

Over sixty of our young people are currently participating in the Caritas programme and we hope they will receive their award at the SECC at the end of May. By participating in the programme, they witness to their faith through their involvement in the spiritual life of the school. They also show tremendous commitment to their local parishes by supporting SSVP, SPRED and HCTP.

In keeping with the teachings of Laudato Si', many of our young people are members of our Eco Committee which promotes learning for sustainability and pupils have been participating in lessons class relating to COP26. The school



has now achieved five Green Flags over the past decade and we are working towards our sixth.

Over £250 was raised by S5 students for Woman's Aid charities during October in honour of the Holy Mother, Mary. For example, S5 pupils organised a bake sale; one of the first examples of a return to normality and the positive atmosphere this activity created was a welcome return for our ethos.



Throughout this challenging period our young people have conducted themselves with great dignity and care for others. Our pupils and students have followed the Covid-19 requirements which have been placed upon them because they realise the importance of keeping us all safe and, in the words of Pope Francis, see this as an "act of love" for each other.

It has been a challenging time for all associated with our community. Our young people and staff have had a disjointed school experience for the past eighteen months but we are hopeful that we can look forward to a return to more familiar learning and teaching encounters. It is essential that our young people have the opportunities to participate fully in the life of the school, as this is a core aspect of our work.

As a Catholic school, please be assured that Saint Matthew's Academy will always seek to recognise and encourage activities which help pupils and students to become aware not only of their academic learning but also their development as a whole person (moral, physical, spiritual) and their responsibility to work for the common good.





Saint Anthony's Primary School, Saltcoats

"We pride ourselves on being a beacon of light in our community, working together for excellence where children's rights permeates all that we do."

Our large school shares supportive relationships with the Legion of Mary, Saint Vincent De Paul, Church community members and the Wayside Club, amongst many others. Canon Martin Poland provides invaluable spiritual support and leads us on our faith journey. Sister Marie-Monique and Sister Ursula add further to the Catholic ethos of our school through regular visits when restrictions permitted. We look forward to welcoming them in the future.

Class Masses and community Masses frequently featured in our calendar and we cannot wait to come together as a community in the near future. During lockdown, we attended Mass weekly via video link.

Our senior pupils begin a two year journey to attain the Pope Francis Faith Award in Primary 6. This year, Canon Martin led an intimate Service of Presentation with Primary 6 pupils who received a memento to mark this special occasion.

As a community, our whole school strives to build upon the eco-conscious approach we have created in ascertaining and sustaining our Eco-Schools Scotland Green Flag Award for over 10 years. We are recognised as a Laudato Si' school which goes hand in hand with our eco mission. We answer the call to be stewards of God's creation.



Saint Mary's Primary School, Largs

"St Mary's is a proud Catholic Primary School with strong links to our local parish Church, St Mary's Star of the Sea."

When we moved building into a community campus comprising two primary schools, a secondary school and a nursery in 2017, the church requested that we commission a stained glass window. In partnership with our church community, we raised the required funds and got to work designing. After some inevitable delays due to Covid, we are delighted to present our new stained glass window designed by glass artist Eilidh Mackenzie.

The window is in the form of a triptych and incorporates pupil designs as well as many religious symbols and Icons. It is bordered by a representation of rosary beads, comprising blue glass, interrupted by amber faceted jewels (representing the 'Hail Mary') and green roundels (representing the Lord's Prayer). A large cross in the third panel depicts the Apostles' Creed. The Holy Trinity is represented by images of God's hand, the baby Jesus and the Holy Spirit as a white dove

The theme of education permeates the design, starting with our school badge. In addition, an image of Mary as Mother

with the Baby Jesus and reference to Jesus as the Son of God reinforce the theme of paternal teaching relationships. The presence of the rainbow, often associated with a pot of gold at the end, symbolises that children are our gift to nurture and educate. Finally, Jesus is shown in the third panel preaching from a boat to a group of children. This image is a copy of the new Icon commissioned by the Catholic Church to represent one hundred years of education in the Catholic Church.

The other over-arching theme is that of Our Lady, in honour of whom we are named. Blue glass and many beautiful flowers represent her. The white ('Madonna') lilies symbolise purity, innocence, fertility and connection to the divine. The pink roses symbolise femininity and elegance. The purple violets represent humility, specifically Mary's humility in accepting the motherhood of God. Our Church, St Mary's Star of the Sea is depicted by the Cross, stars and the sea.

We look forward to having a proper unveiling with invited guests when restrictions allow.





Celebrating the Sacrament of Confirmation September/October 2021



St Andrew's, Dumfries, 21st September

with children from St Teresa's, Dumfries, St Andrew's, Dumfries, St Columba's, Annan,
Holy Trinity, Lockerbie and St Luke's, Moffat



St Joseph's, Kilmarnock, 23rd September

with children from Our Lady of Mount Carmel, St Joseph's, St Matthew's, Kilmarnock
and St Paul's, Hurlford, St Sophia's, Galston, St John's, Cumnock,
Our Lady & St Patrick's, Auchinleck and St Thomas', Muirkirk



St Peter-in-Chains, Ardrossan, 27th September



with children from
St Peter-in-Chains, Ardrossan,
St Bridget's, Kilbirnie,
St Palladius', Dalry,
Our Lady of Perpetual Succour,
Beith



St Mary's, Saltcoats, 28th September



with children from
St John's, Stevenston and
St Mary's, Saltcoats



St Margaret's Cathedral, Ayr, 30th September

with children from St Margaret's Cathedral, Ayr, St Paul's, Ayr, Our Lady & St Cuthbert's, Maybole
and Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, Girvan



St Mary's Irvine, 4th October



with children from
St Mary's and St John Ogilvie's
parishes



St Winin's, Kilwinning, 5th October

With children from
St Luke's Primary School
and St Winning's Primary
School, Kilwinning



St Quivox's Prestwick, 7th October



with children from
St Quivox's, Prestwick,
Our Lady of the
Assumption
and St Meddan's, Troon





Becoming a Catholic Teacher

In this series, Amélie Davidson (a Primary Education student at the University of Glasgow) writes about her journey to becoming a Catholic teacher. In the third part of the series, Amélie describes her placement with Primary 1/2 at St Sophia's Primary, Galston

On the 25th of October, I began my five week teaching placement. I was delighted to be placed in St Sophia's Primary School, with Miss O'Connell and Mrs Tait in Primary 1/2. On the night before placement, I barely slept at all. I was very excited but also very nervous as it was my first ever teaching placement. What if I sleep in and I'm late? What if I can't remember the children's names? What if I am standing in front of the class and I forget what to say?

My worries were soon put to ease and I had a wonderful five weeks of placement. I had lots of opportunities to teach – as well as lots of opportunities to learn! I have spent the last two years of university over Zoom which can be difficult and demotivating, staring at a laptop screen all day. However, the time that I spent with Primary 1/2 reminded me why I chose to become a teacher and I am looking forward to my next placement already



All Saints' Day

For All Saints' Day, Primary 1/2 enjoyed learning about what a saint is and what characteristics a saint has. We learned about four Saints; St Sophia, St Andrew, St Margaret and St Patrick. The pupils turned into these saints by making face masks! We spoke about how a saint is a person who tries to live like God and so we can all try to be like saints. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI, "A good school provides a rounded education for the whole person. And a good Catholic school, over and above this, should help all its students to become saints."



Month of Holy Souls

In Religious Education, Primary 1/2 learned what the Month of Holy Souls is. We prayed for our loved ones in Heaven and wrote their names in the school Remembrance Book. Then, we made candles which sat on our class sacred space. The class enjoyed watching the All Saints' Day Mass on YouTube that was live-streamed from St Joseph's Church, Kilmarnock. Whilst watching it, we discussed what bidding prayers are and what the role of an altar server.



COP26

Primary 1/2 enjoyed learning about what COP26 is. The class explored what climate change is and how we can all work together to save the world, gifted to us by God, in areas such as recycling and saving electricity. Then, we spoke about how incredible it is that God made all of these beautiful things in the world and we shared what our favourite things about the world are; flowers, animals, the sun, the sea.



Scottish Catholic Education Week

Scottish Catholic Education Week 2021 was from the 16th to the 30th November. This year's theme was 'Celebrating and Worshipping' which recognised the strong bonds between schools, parishes and dioceses. To mark the unique contribution that Catholic Education makes to our local communities, each class in St Sophia's Primary created a display which were then exhibited in St Sophia's Church. On the left is a Primary 1/2 display.



The Teaching of Pope Francis – Synodality

by Father William McFadden

Pope Francis understands that “synodality” is the most genuine expression of the Church’s Tradition and applies to every single diocese worldwide.

If it were at all possible to sum up Pope Francis’ vision for the Church in one word, then it may well be “synodality.” With his decision to hold the next Synod of Bishops on the theme of “Towards a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission,” it is pretty clear that synodality is something fundamental to the pope’s thinking. Indeed, the pope explicitly developed the theme of “synodality” in an address to the Faithful of the Diocese of Rome on 18th September 2021, and a closer look at this talk might help us to clarify what Pope Francis wants us to be aware of when he speaks of this concept.

From the outset, Pope Francis sets “synodality” in a very broad context: “synodality is not a chapter in an ecclesiology textbook, much less a fad or a slogan to be bandied about in our meetings. Synodality is an expression of the Church’s nature, her form, style and mission. We can talk about the Church as being “synodal”, without reducing that word to yet another description or definition of the Church.” For the pope, therefore, “synodality” encompasses all that it is to be Church today.

For Francis, the core of “synodality” is listening, and as always the pope stresses that the most important people to be heard are those on the margins: “you may say to me: “Father, what do you mean? Are the poor, the beggars, young drug addicts, all those people that society discards, part of the Synod too?” Yes, dear friends. It is not me who is saying this, but the Lord. They too are part of the Church, and you will not properly celebrate the Synod unless you somehow make them part of it (in a way to be determined), or spend time with them, not only listening to what they have to say, but also feeling what they feel, listening to them even if they may insult you. The Synod is for everyone, and it is meant to include everyone.” “Synodality” therefore requires a mindset of “inclusivity”, and unless we genuinely take account of the often ignored voices, then our consultation will simply be a deception, and ultimately prove worthless.

The pope understands that “synodality” is the most genuine expression of the Church’s Tradition. In order to help us grasp this he quotes the musician Mahler: “Gustav Mahler – as I have said on other occasions – once stated that fidelity to tradition does not consist in worshiping ashes but in keeping a fire burning. As you begin this synodal journey, I ask you: what are you more inclined to do: guard the ashes



of the Church, in other words, your association or group, or keep the fire burning? Are you more inclined to worship what you cherish, and which keep you self-enclosed – “I belong to Peter, I belong to Paul, I belong to this association, you to that one, I am a priest, I am a bishop...” – or do you feel called to keep the fire of the Spirit burning? Mahler was a great composer, but those words showed that he was also a teacher of wisdom.” With this text the pope is stressing that authentic “synodality” must be led by the Spirit, not

by any preconceived ideas we may have or wish to hold onto.

As he continues to develop what “synodality” means, Pope Francis returns to a recurrent theme in his addresses: clericalism: “Journeying together tends to be more horizontal than vertical; a synodal Church clears the horizon where Christ, our sun, rises, while erecting monuments to hierarchy covers it. Shepherds walk with their people: we shepherds walk with our people, at times in front, at times in the middle, at times behind. A good shepherd should move that way: in front to lead, in the middle to encourage and preserve the smell of the flock, and behind, since the people too have their own “sense of smell.” They have a nose for finding new paths for the journey, or for finding the road when the way is lost. I want to emphasise this, also for the bishops and priests of the diocese. In this synodal process, they should ask: “Am I capable of walking, of moving, in front, in between and behind, or do I remain seated in my chair, with mitre and crozier?” Shepherds in the midst of the flock, yet remaining shepherds, not the flock. The flock knows we are shepherds, the flock knows the difference. In front to show the way, in the middle to sense how people feel, behind to help the stragglers, letting the people sniff out where the best pastures are found.”

This talk was given to the Diocese of Rome, but its teaching applies to every single diocese worldwide. Its conclusion encourages participation, dialogue and discernment: “I came here to encourage you to take this synodal process seriously and to tell you that the Holy Spirit needs you. It is true: the Holy Spirit needs us. Listen to him by listening to each other. Leave no one behind or excluded.” We are at a very special time within the history of the Church. With Pope Francis’ words and vision on “synodality” to point us in the right direction, we can indeed allow the Holy Spirit to guide and lead us.

For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission

*Helena Rameckers, the Diocesan Synodal Coordinator,
explains how parishes and parishioners can be involved in the process of synodality.*



By now you will have heard that the entire Catholic Church is in the midst of a Synod – that is, a prayerful process of discerning God’s Will by listening to one another without prejudice. Officially launched by Pope Francis on 10th October 2021, the Synod will last for two years, culminating with a Synod of Bishops in October 2023. We may be at the start of the process, but these next few months present a unique and important invitation to us all.

From October until August, we are in the first phase of the synod – the diocesan phase. This is our opportunity to come together as a diocese, speaking out and listening to one another as we prayerfully reflect on ten themes which have been proposed by the Vatican. As we journey together in synodality through these coming months, we will grow in our understanding of what the theme of this Synod – *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission* – truly means for us here in the Diocese of Galloway.

The *Vademecum* – that is, the handbook – for the Synod describes *Communion* (communal worship and living together as People of God), *Participation* (using our natural and supernatural gifts to serve one another) and *Mission* (being living witnesses to the love of God) as being the three “vital pillars of a Synodal Church” (n. 1.4). Like a three-legged stool, if one of these pillars is wobbly, damaged, or missing, the entire apparatus is compromised. Essentially, then, as we journey together in synodality through the coming months, we are being asked to reflect on how we are currently functioning as a synodal Church, and what steps the Holy Spirit is inviting us to take in order to grow as a synodal Church.

Pope Francis wants all baptised people to take part, reminding us that we have all “received the Holy Spirit in baptism and confirmation and are endowed with diverse gifts and charisms for the renewal and building up of the Church, as members of the Body of Christ” (*Vademecum*, n. 1.3). His vision is unambiguous: “The purpose of this Synod is not to produce more documents. Rather, it is intended to inspire people to dream about the Church we are called to be” (n. 1.3).

To this end, a diocesan team has been formed to lead the diocese through the next few months in a range of synodal encounters to which everyone is invited. We are cautioned not to fixate on problems, which “will only lead us to be overwhelmed, discouraged and cynical” (*Vademecum*, n. 2.4), but to seek the light instead of focusing on the darkness. Equally, we are encouraged not only to seek the views of

“those who are already involved in Church activities... (which) ultimately ignores a significant proportion of the People of God” (n. 2.4). Pope Francis’ intention is clear – he invites each and every baptised person to participate in this Synod on Synodality.

There are many ways in which you can take part. Your parish is likely to run at least one synodal encounter; look out for the invitation to attend, and know that you will be welcome. Look out for bulletin entries and fliers in your church. Follow the dedicated Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/gallowaysynod> or regularly check the diocesan page www.gallowaydiocese.org.uk/synod. Email the synodal team at synod@gallowaydiocese.org.uk. The ten themes are being introduced in parish bulletins, with links to short, reflective videos – discuss these with family members, especially those who do not attend church, and share your reflections with the synodal team or your parish facilitator, if you have one.

Above all, please pray for the synodal team, parish facilitators, and for all those taking part; may we be guided by the Holy Spirit so that, in the words of the synodal prayer *Adsumus Spiritus Sanctus*, we do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path, nor partiality influence our actions.



Adsumus Sancte Spiritus. Prayer for the Synod

*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*



Diocese of Galloway Synodal Team

Helena Rameckers

Hilary McKenzie

David Priest

Maure Priest

Fr. Stephen McGrattan



Padre Pio, a Saint for the Modern Day

Kevin Rennie recently travelled to San Giovanni Rotondo where he visited the museum of Padre Pio

Padre Pio is arguably one of the most well-known modern day saints; he was a Capuchin friar, born in Pietrelcina in Italy in 1887. He spent much of ministry as a Capuchin in San Giovanni Rotondo on the east coast of Italy at the Capuchin Friary of Our Lady of Grace, entering there in 1916, and remaining there until his death in 1968. In 2002, he was Canonised by Pope Saint John Paul II.

During his ministry as a priest in San Giovanni Rotondo he grew in renown particularly as a confessor, spending much of his day after the celebration of Holy Mass hearing confessions. He was a priest who suffered with Christ through the stigmata, but who also received many heavenly graces for the salvation of souls – not least, the gift of knowing hearts – that is he was able to see into the hearts of confessors to know them as Christ knew them and as they knew themselves. It was for this reason, that people travelled from all over to have their confession heard by him.

I recently had the privilege of travelling as part of a group from the College, on pilgrimage to San Giovanni Rotondo, as



well as the nearby Monte Sant'Angelo, where Saint Michael the Archangel has appeared on several occasions; and Ortona, where the tomb of Saint Thomas the Apostle

is. At each of these, we had the opportunity to offer Mass, and to spend time in prayer – as well as visiting the museum of Padre Pio in San Giovanni Rotondo.

I had the privilege of preaching at the Mass in the old Church of Saint Mary of Grace, the Church in which Padre Pio would have offered Mass and where his confessional is preserved to this day, (pictured on page 19). The tomb of Padre Pio is underneath the new Basilica. Padre Pio is a Saint who can offer us all a great example of what it means to die to self in order to follow Christ, regardless of our own personal vocation in life. Padre Pio's twofold devotion to the Holy Eucharist and to the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) can be a great example to us all.

In the Holy Eucharist, Christ offers us an unquenchable fount of Grace through which he seeks to sustain us on the journey of life, giving us those graces which are necessary to sustain us in times of

challenge and difficulty, and to aid us in other times to grow closer to him in love. In the Eucharist, Christ gives himself completely to us and invites us to do likewise and to give ourselves completely to him. We are however fallen in nature, and so limited in how well we can respond to his invitation – through sin, our ability to see God and to know and to love him more perfectly is impeded as we seek base or worldly goods instead of the true good which he alone offers, and which is in fact him alone.

In order to overcome our fallen nature, and so to see and to know God more clearly, we must seek him in love through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In this most wonderful of sacraments we are able to encounter Christ and to receive forgiveness for our sins – in the same way that we seek to make amends to those we hurt directly in our lives, so too, should we seek to make amends and seek to restore our relationship with Christ. When we sin, we distort and damage this relationship, we become more distant from him as we get distracted with worldly rather than heavenly goods. As people of God, we are intrinsically ordered towards Christ as our ultimate end and true good, but in practice, we often fall, seeking other things which are good for us, but which are not of God and so do not order us towards God. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we admit to God those times when we have not sought him in our lives, in our relationships with others, and therefore seek to restore our relationship with him.

Outside of Padre Pio's sacramental ministry, he also sought to help the poor and those most in need, something which we are all called to do as we journey together as one people of God. With the support of benefactors, he was able to

open a hospital for the sick. Whilst we are not all able to do the same, we are all called similarly to support the poor and destitute according to our own means.

We can see in Padre Pio, someone who gave his life entirely to Christ and lived for Christ. Through the sacraments, he was sustained, and then throughout his life he lived out his love for Christ by always seeking to help others, and to lead them closer to Christ. We can all learn something from Padre Pio's life and witness, regardless of our own state in life and our own vocation – his love of Christ, the Eucharist, Confession, and his love



preaching at the Mass in the old Church of Saint Mary of Grace



Safeguarding In Galloway Diocese

What does it mean to support survivors of abuse within our Parishes?

By Frances Gunn, Safeguarding Support Officer.



I was privileged to analyse the evaluations of the National Safeguarding Webinar earlier this year, and by far the strongest theme from participants was a desire for more information on ‘supporting survivors of abuse’. This prompted me to reflect on what it means to support survivors of abuse within the Catholic Church in Scotland and specifically within our parishes here in the Diocese of Galloway.

My understanding is that a parish is primarily a community where faithful gather to worship, receive the gift of sacraments and seek spiritual care if needed. In her collection, ‘Trauma and grace: Theology in a ruptured world’, (2019) Serene Jones writes beautifully about the interconnected relationship between trauma and the power of healing Grace but cautions that ‘it’s hard to feel divine love when your capacity to feel anything at all has been shut down’: the evidence around trauma confirms that numbness is a common response to trauma which increases vulnerability as healing is sought.

Father Richard Rohr in ‘Gazing on the Crucified Jesus,’ suggests that ‘those who gaze upon the crucified Jesus long enough with contemplative eyes are always healed at deep levels of pain’, therefore it seems reasonable to assume that churches and parishes might be a starting point for some people to attempt to work through trauma, either by seeking spiritual care or by simply using the environment to reflect and pray for comfort. The need therefore for parishes to be genuinely safe spaces is fundamentally important as all people no matter what their vulnerability or pain, must be welcomed, accepted and crucially, be safe at all times to seek the healing and Grace that God provides, should they wish to do so.

While there is correctly a focus within the Catholic Church in Scotland on learning at strategic level from survivors of sexual abuse, I would respectfully suggest that by placing so much focus at parish level on survivors of sexual abuse we risk inadvertently creating a culture of othering. The definition of ‘othering’ is ‘to view or treat a group of people, as intrinsically different from oneself’. Survivors of sexual abuse are not a distinct group of people different from the rest of society, simply individuals created

and loved by God, who have been subject to abuse.

Furthermore, we must acknowledge that sexual abuse is far from the only trauma that people in our parishes will have experienced. The 2019 Scottish Health Survey suggests that 71% of adults report being subject to at least one episode of trauma, while 15% have been subject to four or more different types of trauma. Sexual abuse was an uncommon form of trauma noted with 7% of participants disclosing this compared to physical abuse (28%) and domestic abuse (24%). This highlights that the majority of people within our communities are impacted by trauma, therefore rather than ‘othering’ survivors of abuse we should focus more on acceptance and oneness. The concept of oneness is noted in John 17:21: ‘I want all of them to be one with each other, just as I am one with you and you are one with me’ and it is in this oneness that spiritual healing from trauma and abuse may begin.

Nothing within this reflection aims to encompass the perspectives of, or downplay the experiences of those who have been subject to sexual abuse, rather to reinforce the sentiment that the safeguarding focus at individual parish level should be working towards ensuring they are welcoming, safe spaces for ALL people at ALL times as this will ensure a nurturing environment to support parish communities grow in faith together as one, thereby enabling an environment promoting healing to all those who seek it, without any need to disclose specific hurt or trauma.

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

Padre Pio, continued

of others. These are all aspects of life which we are all called to, and indeed when I was preaching, the Gospel that day was of the scribe who asked Christ “Which is the first of all the commandments” (Mark 12: 28 - 34) and Christ replied “This is the first: Listen, Israel, the Lord our God is the one Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: You must love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.”

And so, I would encourage us all to look to Padre Pio as a wonderful example, of how we can personally fulfil the first commandment, and in so doing, seek to fulfil the second to lead others on the journey towards Christ.





A View from Westminster

Dr Philippa Whitford, MP, on

COP, Climate and Christmas

The Westminster Parliament has faced considerable turmoil over recent months but MPs were thrown into a state of shock by the tragic and brutal murder of Sir David Amess in October. While Sir David and I had almost diametrically opposed political views on everything from Social Security to Brexit, he was always kind and welcoming to new MPs of all parties. We worked together on the Fire Safety All-Party Group, which he chaired, for two years after the terrible Grenfell Tower disaster and, as he was a devout Catholic, I often met him at the weekly Mass in the House of Commons Chapel of St Mary Undercroft.

His tragic and violent death brought back memories of the murders of MP Jo Cox in 2016 and Parliamentary Police Constable Keith Palmer in 2017. MPs from all parties joined in the tributes to Sir David and called for those in the political sphere, and across wider society, to be more tolerant and respectful of the views of each other. Regardless of party affiliation or viewpoint – Brexiteer or Remainer, supporting Scottish Independence or the Union – all those taking part in public debate will have experienced vitriolic comments from their opponents and sometimes these cross the line into direct threats of physical violence. It is in the nature of human beings to have strong opinions and therefore disagreements are inevitable but we all need to learn to debate and disagree with each other with less aggression and anger.

The biggest event of the autumn was, of course, the holding of COP26 in Glasgow over the first two weeks in November. While Pope Francis did not attend, his call in the Encyclical Letter ‘Laudato Si’ is clear – to protect the common home we share. I was delighted to attend two days of the conference – one focusing on the voices of Youth and the other on Women.



The Youth day included the presentation of the policy statement on climate change from the ‘Conference of Youth’, which was saved from cancellation when the Scottish Government stepped in with funding. While we are already seeing the ravages of climate change in floods, droughts and wild fires, there is no doubt that it will be our grandchildren, and their grandchildren, who bear the brunt if we fail to take meaningful action. Tackling the climate crisis also requires that we take action as individuals and set ourselves the challenge of being good ancestors to those who will follow after us.

The session on women and climate change was very powerful with all speakers arguing for a greater recognition of the disproportionate impact of climate change on women and the need to involve women more directly in finding the solutions. The First Minister chaired a discussion panel, including women from Africa and South America, who highlighted the fact that in the global south most farmers are



women who are therefore directly affected by climate disruption in the form of droughts and floods. Along with these powerful activist voices we heard from Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the UK House of Representatives, on America’s new commitment to limiting climate damage through both legislation and funding.

As I write this, the conference is not yet over so we must wait to judge any Glasgow Agreement. However, the key will not be the commitments made in writing but the actions taken by governments across the world – including the challenge of influencing those major polluting powers, such as China, Russia and Brazil, who didn’t take part in COP26.

All of us have been impacted by the Covid pandemic and hopefully this shocking experience, of loss or isolation, has helped us reset our values with regards what is important in life. Last Christmas, due to lockdown and travel restrictions, it wasn’t even possible to be with our extended families. This Christmas it is hoped Covid restrictions will not be so prohibitive but the pandemic is far from over, with cases across Europe rising and those in the UK at a similar level to the peaks of the autumn wave. Thankfully, due to vaccination, the proportion of infected people developing serious or life-threatening illness has fallen significantly but the number of Covid admissions is putting a huge strain on the National Health Services of all four UK Nations as they try to also deal with urgent non-Covid work.

Talking to colleagues in the NHS, it is going to be a very difficult winter ahead so we all need to play our part by doing what we can to protect ourselves from Covid and other winter illnesses. We can do this by taking up the flu vaccine and Covid booster, when invited to do so, as well as following the basic precautions such as mask-wearing, hand-washing and social-distancing. This winter also presents a real challenge to the most vulnerable in our society as the furlough scheme ends and Universal Credit is cut by over £1,000 a year at a

Doctor Philippa Whitford is a parishioner of Our Lady of the Assumption and St Meddan in Troon. She is the MP for Central Ayrshire and SNP Health Spokesperson at Westminster. In these articles she hopes to convey how her faith informs and impacts her politics. The views expressed in these articles are those of the author.

SYCAMORE

Over the past few weeks we have seen the Sycamore Course begin in parishes throughout the diocese. This opportunity to meet together to watch a video presentation focusing on various aspects of our faith journey, followed by relaxed sharing and informal discussion, has given to those who responded to the invitation a privileged time for thinking and reflection. After the restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic, the chance to meet physically, rather than virtually, has proved to be an attractive proposition.

The flexibility which Sycamore affords to each group has meant that different parishes have chosen different pathways to follow. Each group has settled on an assortment of video presentations, which has led them to considering questions of faith which they deem appropriate for their own particular pastoral context. Participants have responded to some challenging questions with honesty and truth, with the result being authentic and genuine sharing.

The Sycamore Course is being offered to parishes to help them kick start some sort of pastoral activity following the many months of inaction brought on by the Coronavirus. It is of course only one possible means among many, but is a proven and helpful resource which has shown itself to be energising and thought provoking. Hopefully, it will lead to an even greater and more varied commitment to evangelisation across the diocese, and to an increase in parishes willing to engage in adult faith formation.

Following the initial six weeks of the programme, parishes will be invited to decide whether they wish to continue to engage with Sycamore, and to return to reflect on further Pathways at a later date. That so many people have already experienced the programme, and that it has been led and directed by so many capable and gifted lay leaders in our parishes, is incredibly positive and encouraging.

The Church post-Covid can no longer be as it was. We must look ahead and respond to the new situations which we now face. Sycamore is one model which might just be pointing us in the right direction.



Along with many parishes in the diocese the diocesan Youth Ministry Office Team have been meeting to enjoy the Sycamore Course. The meetings have taken place in St Margaret's Cathedral Hall, Ayr, on Sunday evenings during this first season of Sycamore. We invite all our young people to come along to the remaining meetings. See our Facebook page for information.



Diocese of Galloway, Youth Ministry Office (YMO)
Director: Father Jim Hayes
Office Contact:
St Teresa's, Glasgow Street, Dumfries. DG2 9DE.
Tel: 01387 252603



Galloway Youth Ministry Office

time when fuel bills are expected to soar and supply chain shortages are driving up food prices. It is likely that many of us will not be returning to a December whirlwind of big social events and long days of Christmas shopping, so maybe we can carry forward some of the personal resolutions we may have made for COP26 – to be less materialistic and wasteful this Christmas. Instead we could look around to see how we can support those in our community who need a wee hand, whether that is donating shopping to a food bank, delivering it to an elderly neighbour or just having a chat with someone who lives alone. Hopefully the pandemic has taught us to treasure and cherish our loved ones and friends and share with them that most precious commodity – our time.

Our experience of Mass has also varied dramatically over the last two years, from complete absence, to live-streamed services and finally a cautious return to church. Many of us have felt the loss of being separated from our parish community, both in our social interactions and our devotions: sharing in the liturgy of the Mass with others is an important aspect of our faith and, just as a coal burns hotter in a fire, taking part in communal worship strengthens us all.

Whatever way you get to experience the liturgy of the Nativity during our second Covid winter, I wish you and your families a peaceful and joyous Christmas.



Praying with The Saints

Saint John of the Cross

Father Martin Chambers reflects on the life and influence of this great Spanish saint, friend of Saint Teresa of Avila and reformer of the Carmelite Order.

Earlier this year I wrote an article for the Galloway Newsletter about Saint Teresa of Avila, the great Spanish mystic of the 16th Century. One of her great companions in the faith was the subject for today, Saint John of the Cross who, with Saint Teresa, helped to reform the Carmelite order in the 16th century. Of course, as well as helping to reform that order and indeed Church life, Saint John of the Cross left us some great spiritual writings which can help us even now, in these difficult Covid times, in our own spirituality and prayer life.

I am sure that many of you, like me, will have visited the Kelvingrove Art Gallery in Glasgow where you will have seen the famous painting by Dali of 'Christ of St John'. It is a large striking painting that Dali painted taking as his inspiration the famous sketch that Saint John of the Cross himself drew. It led me over the years to look a little more into who Saint John of the Cross was, not least when I was able to visit some of the towns and cities in Spain where the Saint lived his life.



Who was Saint John of the Cross?

He was born 'Juan de Yepes y Alvarez' in the town of Fontiveros, near the city of Avila in 1542. His father and brother died while he was still very young and his mother was forced to move from town to town looking for work. Eventually his mother raised enough money to send him to school where his basic education centred around the Christian doctrine. Indeed Church life was important and, in the local church, he served as an altar server, became more and more involved in church life and, at the age of twenty-one entered the Carmelite order, with the name of 'John of Matthias'. He studied in various schools, colleges and at the University of Salamanca and then, at the age of 25, was ordained a priest. This was to prove a crucial year in his life for it was also in that year that he met Saint Teresa of Avila who had already set about reforming the Carmelite order. Together they encouraged their reformed order to strict silence, a rigid prayer schedule and, as a sign of poverty to go barefoot, thus giving them the name of the 'Discalced (shoeless) Carmelites'.

For many years, there was great tension over the Carmelite reforms and, at one time, Saint John of the Cross was imprisoned and tortured. After being freed, he

spent the remaining years of his life founding new convents according to the reformed Carmelite order. He died at the relatively young age of 49 and is entombed in the Carmelite Monastery in Segovia where he had worked.

Prayer Lessons from St John of the Cross

The first classical work that I heard of was his '*Dark Night of the Soul*' which was probably written by him reflecting on his years of solitary confinement and imprisonment. It talks about the struggle that each of us has to go in life and our desire always to find union with God.

However, when thinking about how Saint John of the Cross can help us in our prayer life, I'd like to focus on another of his classic works, the '*Spiritual Canticle*'. In this the saint takes us from our daily needs and invites us to see them not as inconveniences but rather as opportunities for finding a deeper trust in the God of Love. For Saint John, naming our human needs and presenting them to God is itself an act of love on our part where we are invited simply to hold our pleading hands open to God so that God might bless our struggles and needs. The saint says that this form of prayer teaches us several important things about God: firstly that God knows what is suitable for us more than we do; secondly this form of prayer unites God's great Love with our own love of Him; and thirdly, by focusing on God, we are more able to steer clear of worldly distractions.

Let's look at those points in turn to see how our prayer lives can be enhanced through the saint.

God knows what is best for us

Saint John says that our needs fall into two basic categories: the things we truly need and the things we want but don't actually need. What we are invited to do through Saint John of the Cross is start a conversation with God to ask – in intercession – not just a list of things we may need or want but rather simply open our hands to God asking for his blessing. This, the saint says, is an act of humility before God; when we do this in prayer, God brings us to see our need of Him.

In Prayer we engage God's Compassion

Saint John of the Cross once wrote that God 'has more compassion when he beholds the need and resignation of a soul that loves him'. Basically he is saying that prayer should be an opening of the heart in love to God, that when we raise our loving hearts to God, it engages God's own love and a fountain of God's compassion. Here Saint John points to the Wedding Feast at Cana, to the wedding where Jesus and Mary were present. When the wine runs



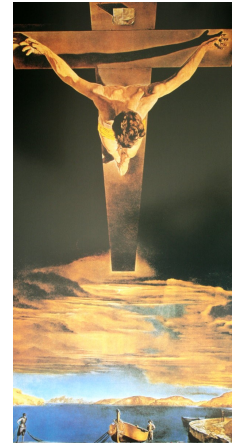
Convent in Segovia where Saint John of the Cross is entombed

out, Mary sees the anxiety and responds by quietly pointing out to her Son ‘they have no wine’. Mary simply holds the need up to her Son – Saint John says we should do the same in prayer, simply hold out our needs before God and do so with a full and open heart.

In Prayer we stand in Weakness before God

Saint John says that so often in prayer we are used to telling God what we want, telling God what the solution to our problems is. He points to two examples of ‘bad prayer’ from the Gospels: when Jesus enters the house of Martha and Mary, Martha says to Jesus ‘tell my sister to help me’; or in the Passion scene where the second thief says to Jesus ‘save yourself and us as well’. Instead Saint John says we should simply approach God in prayer telling Him of our weakness, stand before God in our need and ask for light or guidance or hope through the darkness of our night.

There are, therefore, at least three ways of learning from this great Spanish Saint how we can pray with more faith and with more earnestness: believing that God knows what is best for us; to simply present our needs before God with an open hand; and to acknowledge our weakness before God and therefore God’s strength and guidance.



Saint John of the Cross, pray for us San Juan de la Cruz, ruega por nosotros.

Let me finish with one short prayer from Saint John of the Cross:
*O Blessed Jesus,
 give me stillness of soul in You.
 Let Your mighty calmness reign in me.
 Rule me, O King of Gentleness,
 King of Peace.*

THE SCOTTISH CATHOLIC

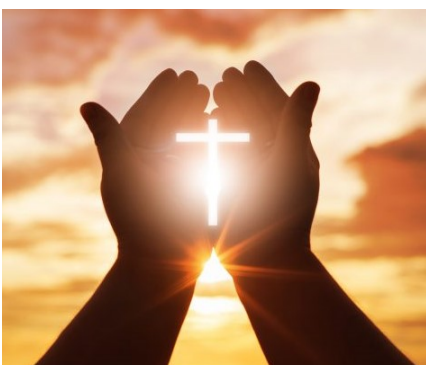
Scotland’s new magazine

Scotland’s new Catholic magazine launched in October. Coming out every two weeks it is a faithful and feisty look at what it means to a Catholic in Scotland now, the stories that matter and the Catholics who care.

Since the start of Lockdown, Catholics in Scotland have been without a national publication and managing editor, Ian Dunn, said he and co-owners, Mary McGinty and Dan McGinty, believed there was a real hunger for a dedicated Catholic publication in Scotland. Ian said “the closure of the Scottish Catholic Observer left a void because our community needs a voice that cuts through the gossip and the arguments so we can speak to one another and understand what we as Catholics are living through.. The pandemic has shown that there is a real hunger among Scottish Catholics to engage with their faith in new ways, and this magazine will do that.”

The magazine, which will have print and digital editions, is independent of the Church but has the full support of the Bishops Conference of Scotland which welcomed the launch of the magazine and wished its founders every success in their mission to create a place where the voice of the Catholic community in Scotland can be heard.

The first edition of The Scottish Catholic was available in parishes all over Scotland for free with a regular price of £2 an edition. Subscriptions are available through the website at www.ScottishCatholic.com.



You can also read the magazine on line on the website and if you ‘like’ and ‘follow’ them on Facebook www.facebook.com/ScottishCatholic you will always be up to date.

They have also launched the Catholic App which was developed in Scotland and tells users Mass and Confession times at nearby churches. It covers every Scottish church. The app allows users to search for nearby churches and is available in eight languages, including Polish and Italian. Parishes can register to control their profile on the app through the Catholic App website. It is available to download on both Apple and Android devices. Churches and dioceses can register their church at: <https://www.thecatholicapp.com/#Register>.





SCIAF
Uniting to end poverty
Caritas Scotland

Real Gifts

“We want a world without poverty, where the poorest can survive and thrive.”

Real Gifts are a brilliant way to give an ethical gift that makes a difference in the world. When you buy a Real Gift for a loved one, you're providing something vital to our sisters and brothers in Africa, Asia and Latin America and also giving a thoughtful gift to someone in your life.

How does it work?

- ◆ Choose your gifts from the online store.
- ◆ For each gift you will receive a beautiful card and fridge magnet. *They'll arrive by post but at this time, they may take a little longer than usual to arrive; usually within 7-10 working days.*
- ◆ You can pass the cards and fridge magnet to your friends and family, there is space on each card to write a personal message.
- ◆ Your charity gift helps to change lives in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East.

**Go to www.sciaf.org.uk and choose your real gift now.
Help make someone's Christmas better.**



Eco stove for £6



Covid Emergency Pack
for £12



A vegetable garden for
£25



Warm blankets for £18

Lots more examples of Real Gifts at the website



“May the peace of the Christ Child come into your homes and hearts now and throughout the year”

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