

Koinōnía

Issue1 2025 €3

Magazine



Mission and Ministry in the Diocese of Cloyne



Faith, Fellowship and Formation

Goache on paper 29 x 19cm

Painting by Aoideen Hickey, an Art and Religious Education teacher at Coláiste an Chraoibhín, Fermoy and a Koinōnía Graduate.

The Koinōnía programme of adult faith formation takes its lead from the “Jerusalem Spring” of the early Church as described in the Acts of the Apostles (2:42–44). Having received the Good News, the first Christians met to pray, to learn the teaching of the apostles and to share their talents. Over time, their generous ‘communion’ (‘koinōnía’) with the Lord and each other, became a sign of hope that many others would follow. The faith, fellowship and formation of that first Christian community inspires the goals of our course:

Faith: participants explore Catholic theology, spirituality and liturgy in a way that is suited to adult learners who may have little previous experience of formally studying the Christian faith.

Fellowship: the programme is guided by the principles of the Synodal Pathway of the Catholic Church. Our group aims to create an atmosphere that is respectful, mutually supportive and committed to the goals of the course.

Formation: the course is intended to develop the participants’ personal faith and enable them to assist the mission of the Church. Among the emerging roles for lay Catholics are the ministries of Lector, Acolyte and Catechist. There are also new responsibilities in parish administration, the pastoral care of the sick and the bereaved, which the programme introduces.

Koinōnía Magazine 2025

Editor: Fr. Gerard Condon

The Letters of Saint Peter were written for Christians of the First Century who were going through a tough time. The apostle encourages them to: “reverence Christ in your heart, and always have an answer ready when someone asks you the reason for your hope.” (1 Peter 3:15) That’s good advice, too, for the members of Christ’s body today. We live in a time of reduced religious practice, some hostility, and much indifference towards a faith-based lifestyle. It can be difficult to keep your religion when others around you are losing theirs.

With the Koinōnía Cloyne programme we are attempting to give adult members of our diocese the opportunity to grow in their understanding of the faith and develop the skills required to communicate the Good News. We do this with the help of lecturers who share their expert knowledge as well as the time we spend in prayer. Among our best “reasons for hope” is the witness we give to each other and the fellowship we find with like-minded Catholics from every part of Cloyne diocese. Strengthened by the circle of our own community, we can take a more active part in the Christian mission today.

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My gratitude to all who contributed to this inaugural edition of the *Koinōnía Magazine*. They are our programme lecturers and retreat directors, as well as members of Koinōnía Cloyne itself. Special thanks goes to Rita Scannell (liturgical artist and a current Koinōnía member, from Killeagh Parish) for its layout and design and to Gillian Groeger (a graduate from Mallow Parish) for editing its content and to John Finn and John Hannon for their photography. I hope you will enjoy reading these pages and that you will uncover some new insight into your faith and the reasons for our hope in

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STUDY

Koinōnía
Magazine
2025

2	Faith, Fellowship and Formation	Aoideen Hickey
2	Editorial	Fr. Gerard Condon
4	A Welcome Letter	+ William Crean
5	The Parish in Bloom	Frances Rowland
6	A Sacrament for the Many?	Mgr. Jim Killeen
7	Finding God in your Day	Sr. Elieen Houlihan
8	Why Belief in God is Reasonable	Dr. Daniel O'Connell
9	After the Night	Lisa Egan
10	Who do you say I Am?	Marian Mortell
11	The Day of the Relics	Fr. Gerard Condon
12	Interview with a Parish Priest	Ann Neville
13	Come and Sit	Sinéad O'Donovan
14	Saint Augustine	Dr. Fiachra Long
15	A Beautiful Destination	Mary Buckley
16	Spioradáltacht don Lae Inniu	Mary Smiddy
17	Koinōnía - a Franciscan perspective	Liam Guilfoil
17	Holy Hour	David Holden
18	The Gospel of Saint Mark	Mgr. Eamonn Goold
19	Proclaiming the Word of God	Fr. Andrew Carvill
20	Caring for the Earth	Janet Twomey
21	At Peace with Nature	Finbarr Horgan
22	Grow in Love in the Classroom	Máiréad O'Sullivan
23	Being a Catechist in a Synodal Church	Dr. Alex O'Hara
24	Children's Liturgy of the Word	Reena O'Sullivan
25	What is a Deacon?	Rev. John Nestor
26	The Mobile Tabernacle	Bill Kelly
27	Music in the Liturgy	Mary Dee
28	If these Walls could Talk	Abbot Columba McCann
30	Remembering Bweeng	Fr. Donagh O'Shea
31	Reflection on Koinōnía	Margaret Heskin
31	Putting Koinōnía into Practice	Gillian Groeger
32	Living the Virtue of Hope	Fr. Gerard Moloney
33	Sacred Spaces	Photos
34	Koinōnía Memories in the Making	Photos
35	Pray without Ceasing	Spoken Prayers

Letter from Bishop William Crean



Dear friends in Christ,

**“The cup of blessing that we bless,
is it not a communion of the blood of Christ?
The bread which we break
is it not a communion of the body of Christ?”**

1 Corinthians 10:16

This verse, from the earliest days of Christianity, makes it clear to all who put their faith in God, through Christ Jesus our Lord, that our communion, our bonds of love, have their roots and life in him. Sacrifice, self-giving, out of love, is the extraordinary grace and blessing of belief and trust in Jesus. However, such faith and trust in the context of the Catholic Church is tried and tested in a new way in Ireland today.

We are well aware of the challenge this poses to the now ‘new minority’ of Catholics who intentionally believe and belong in our parish communities. This erosion of Christian memory diminishes and weakens our parishes. The age profile of our clergy and religious has added to this pastoral decline.

The Church in the Western world, so called, has experienced this evaporation of Christian faith in the throes of seemingly relentless consolidation of a liberal secular society. This tsunami of secularism threatens the elimination of the cultivation and nurturing of the spiritual from the socialisation of new generations. It is not the task of the State to favour one faith over another. Neither is it appropriate for the State to seek to suppress the nurturing of religious faith and the human values it seeks to contribute to the common good of society.

This ‘new reality’ is increasingly the backdrop for parishes and people who seek to sustain the richness of Christian faith and practice. Aware of these challenges, the Church in Ireland and Universally, at the invitation of Pope Francis, began a consultation journey with people across all levels of church life with a view to re-energising Catholic believers in our sharing of faith. This has been referred to as a Synodal Pathway. Over three years now this

conversation has continued across the world, concluding in Rome at the end of October 2024. This will be a component of the Church’s agenda for decades to come. Let me single out one issue from the Irish consultation which is immediately linked with the ‘Koinōnía Cloyne’ initiative. The need for a comprehensive faith formation for adults was identified as a critical need for renewal of the life of the Church. That conclusion has been evident for a long time. The lack of lay leaders in faith has left much of our public life without voices of conviction and courage in social, sporting, commercial and political arenas.

It follows that I am greatly heartened by this new beginning we know as ‘Koinōnía Cloyne’. I commend Fr. Gerard Condon and his team for this groundbreaking initiative. It is truly ‘breaking ground’ to sow seeds of faith, inspiration, insight and leadership in our families and parish communities.

KOINŌNÍA / COMMUNION in Christ is our life, our destiny and our salvation. It is the source of our hope, which in the words of Pope Francis “never disappoints”. He says so in relation to the Jubilee Year of Hope – 2025. We join with the whole Church as we seek to share that profound sense of Christian hope, which a war-weary world desperately desires and needs.

**“May the God of hope fill you with
all joy and peace in believing
so that you may abound in hope
by the power of the Holy Spirit”**

Romans 15:13

Le gach dea ghuí,

William Crean - Bishop of Cloyne



*Frances Rowland
is a Pastoral Development Worker
for the Diocese of Kerry.*

The Parish in Bloom

In the Springtime, my eye is often drawn to the trees, stripped by the autumn shedding, but now daring to hope again. The delicately tinted buds are the fruits of the tree's extensive root system and branches. After endless months, a dun-coloured bud gradually tints, unfurling petals of various hues, lifting our hearts with hope. Recently it struck me that that is what Jesus wants for our parishes, a way of being which help us to be alive and share fullness of life. As the tree needs its roots, a trunk and branches, so too the parish needs to be rooted in the Gospel, with healthy structures to nourish and support its members so that they can blossom as God wants for each of us.

**“I have come that
you might have
life and have it to
the full.”**

John 10:10

In Mark's Gospel, when Jesus calls his disciples, he had seen the people's needs. People came to him looking for healing and hope (Mark 3:7). He acknowledged that, alone, he couldn't respond to every demand and so he called disciples to share in his mission (Mark 3:13). Jesus had two tasks for his disciples – to be with him and to go out to preach, heal, do his work. They were to be a presence with him, and they were to act on his behalf. This is the challenge for us as parishes – to be with him and to go out.

Just as Jesus worked with others to reach the multitudes, so too the flourishing parish of today reaches out to respond to the needs of people. There are four key parish committees that make this happen:

The Parish Pastoral Council

- a leadership group where priest and people working together co-responsibly, further the mission of Christ in their parish by their co-ordination and future planning.

The Parish Liturgy Committee

- supporting the parish prayer life of the parish, from community worship at Sunday Mass to the celebration of the sacraments and cultivating opportunities for personal prayer.

The Parish Finance Committee

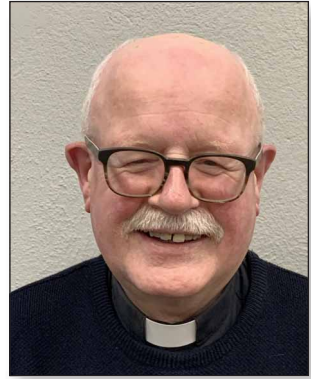
- stewarding parish resources to support and enable the mission.

the Parish Safeguarding Committee

- ensuring ministry is done with due care of people, most especially regarding those who are young or vulnerable.

A parish rooted in Gospel values, with these four groups as a strong trunk, offers great possibilities for flowering. Like the tree crowned by the blossoms, a parish's crowning beauty is its community. Parish ministry is about people; people sharing the Good News of Jesus and responding to the needs of others. The invitation is far-reaching – we are called to respond wherever there is someone hungry or thirsty, naked or isolated, sick or imprisoned (Matthew 25:35-36). As Pope Francis says, “I often say that it is necessary to go out: to go out from the church and the parishes, to go outside and look for people where they live, where they suffer, and where they hope” (*The Name of God is Mercy*). The parish in bloom recognises that the Spirit gives gifts to each person and invites them to use their gifts in service of others. Whether in conversation at the supermarket, teaching English to refugees or taking time to question political leaders, parishioners open their hearts and minds to the needs of others, especially the vulnerable, and respond according to their gifts. As Jesus sent his disciples out to heal in his name, today the parish invites all its members to go out to the world, announcing the Gospel by their lives.

A Sacrament for the Many?



*Mgr. Jim Killeen,
Parish Priest of Midleton
and a Vicar General for Cloyne Diocese.*

A number of years ago a priest in a parish in the UK was approached by an Irish couple seeking a letter to give permission for their baby to be baptized in their native parish in Ireland. "I have no objection to this couple having their baby baptised outside this parish," he wrote, "as I have never seen them before in my life."

Such a scenario is not uncommon in Ireland today, especially in the bigger parishes, and many priests are unsure how to respond to such a situation. There are many reasons why parents bring their child forward to be baptised. Among them are:

- a genuine wish for the child to receive the grace of the sacrament and become part of the Church.
- a feeling that in some way the child will receive a blessing from God.
- tradition.
- vague fear that should the child die, they would be cut off from God.
- pressure from grandparents.
- 'sure it won't do any harm anyway'.
- the desire to have a ritualised "naming ceremony" and a family gathering.



In most cases, there is probably a mix of reasons. The fact remains that most parents requesting baptism are not regular members of our worshipping community.

The Church requests that parents should have their children baptised within a few weeks after they are born. It also states that there must be a realistic hope that the child will be brought up in the Catholic religion, and that the parents, and indeed godparents, should be properly prepared. This last requirement is fulfilled to varying degrees in different parishes, but it now seems urgent that a properly structured preparation is designed and implemented. This will only work if it becomes a requirement at a diocesan level (at least).

Hopefully, such a programme would emphasise the fact that, through baptism, one becomes a member of the Church, and that the responsibilities taken on by parents at the baptism are solemn ones.

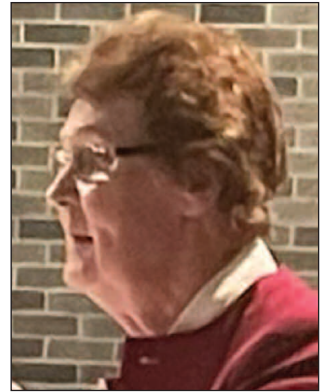
The requirement of a realistic hope that the child will be brought up in the Catholic religion is a difficult one to evaluate primarily because it eludes definition. If the parents are not regular 'practicing Catholics' does that mean that such a hope doesn't exist? How do we deal with parents who are living lifestyles which openly contradict Church teaching, remembering always that the baptism is requested by the parents, but is for the child? We must also bear in mind the fact that refusal to baptise a child will mostly likely lead to a definitive break with the family.

The situation presents many challenges and there is no easy solution. It may, to some extent, sort itself out, as the number of 'cultural Catholics' in Ireland declines, and baptism is no longer requested. We are already seeing a falloff in Church marriages and a growth in non-religious funerals.

But we should always keep in mind that baptism is a gift from God to the child, not a reward for parents' behaviour. It can also, with proper preparation, be an occasion of grace for all the family.

Finding God in your Day

Sr. Eileen Houlihan CHF is the retired director of Pathways, an adult faith formation programme in the Archdiocese of Dublin.



Many of us experience life as very busy. We easily miss the deeper meaning of our days. Saint Ignatius of Loyola found this to be true. Wanting to 'find God in all things', he would take short breaks to help him notice where God was at work in his activity. Today we call this pause the 'Consciousness Examen'. Through it, busy people are enabled to grow in their awareness of God in the bits and pieces of daily life: 'Where was I acting in a spirit of love, and where was I simply doing my own thing?' 'I am meant to be an ambassador of God's good news: was I such today?'

The Five Steps of the Consciousness Examen:

Step 1. Awareness of the presence of God and prayer for enlightenment

I take a few moments to become aware that all this day I have been in the presence of God. Sitting with a lighted candle and attending to my breathing may help me to sense that I am enfolded in God's love. I ask the Holy Spirit to help me as I look back on my day. I ask for insight to see the divine hand at work.

Step 2. Gratitude for all that God has graced me with
Christians are meant to live in gratitude 'always and everywhere'. All I have is gift. In this spirit of thanksgiving, I ask to be shown the blessings of the day, like the replay of a video. Sometimes the gifts will be obvious, other times I may have to rummage for hidden blessings.

Step 3. Review of the day

God was present in each encounter of the day. Did I see others as images of God? What was God saying to me, or asking of me, in each situation? I thank God for the times I responded lovingly. Then I recall times when I responded negatively, failed to act lovingly, didn't ask God's help or perhaps hurt someone. I notice my inner feelings because I need to be honest with myself and with God: *'the truth will set you free'* (John 8:31). These are the areas of my life where I need to grow in love, where I need healing, forgiveness and freedom.

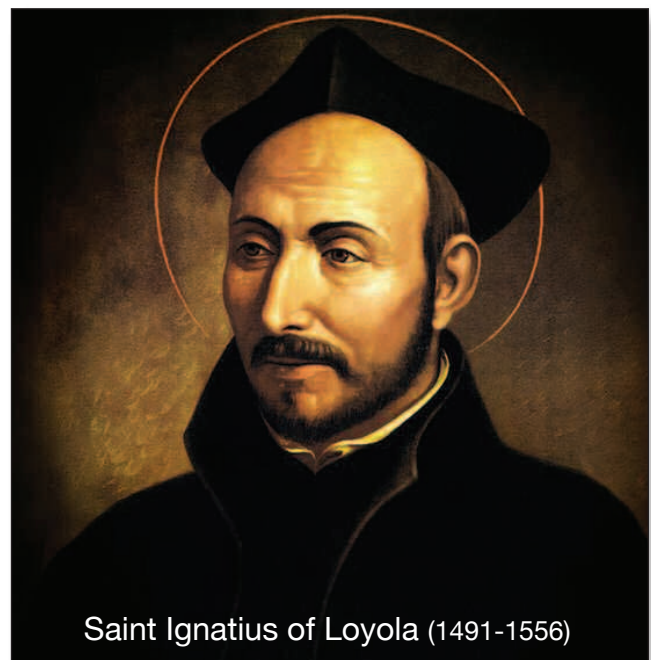
Step 4. Apology and prayer for healing

I express my sorrow and ask God for the grace I need. If someone has hurt me, I talk to God in my own words, or in the words of Jesus: *'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do'* (Luke 23:34). Then I pray for anyone I have hurt and I beg God to mend their wound. Am I called to make some gesture of healing? ...I allow God to surprise me, to remind me that I am loved unconditionally as God's beloved child, and so is the other person.

Step 5. Hope for tomorrow

Here I ask grace to live more consciously aware of God's presence in the coming day. *'Letting go of all fear and discouragement, I look to the future with confidence... placing all my trust in God whose power working within me can do infinitely more than I can ask or imagine'*
(Ephesians 3:20)

As a personal prayer, the Examen takes perhaps 10–15 mins. As a group prayer, it can take longer. It can be a short family prayer around the dinner table. Try it: you will be gladdened by the presence of God in the humblest details of your life!



Saint Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556)



Dr Daniel O'Connell is a lecturer in Religious Education at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.

Why Belief in God is Reasonable

Is it reasonable to believe in God? In an age of technology, AI and scientific developments, can an intelligent, thoughtful person believe in a supernatural presence, for instance one that has created the world out of nothing? Many today claim that without proof or scientific evidence, such belief is preposterous. They infer that since the existence of God cannot be proven, one ought not to believe in such a proposal.

But people believe in all sorts of things that cannot be proven. Alister McGrath (2012) points out that most people believe that life is meaningful, despite an absence of scientific proof. Nevertheless, it is something they hold to be true and it makes a difference to how they live their lives. McGrath goes on to demonstrate that most people believe the core themes of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948). But we can't prove that all people are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Yet this belief makes a big difference to how we live and organise our lives. While these two beliefs are beyond proof, it is possible to give good reasons for believing that these convictions are true. He points out that the deepest truths of life, lie beyond ultimate confirmation. He says 'The simple fact is that none of us, whether religious or secular, can prove any of the great truths we live by. That's just the way life is' (McGrath 2012, p.5). At the same time, the world is studded with clues to the existence of God.

We are told in Paul's letter to the Romans that 'From the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly observed in what he made' (Romans 1:20). The Catechism of the Catholic Church makes the same point. God's existence 'can be known with certainty from the created world by the natural light of human reason' (CCC, #36).

What follows is a very brief listing of three reasons for the plausibility of God's existence.

The First Mover Argument

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) observed that everything is in motion in the world. He reasoned that the motion of one thing is caused by another. Nothing moves or changes without being influenced by something external. I'm typing these keys with my fingers, which are influenced by my hand, my muscles, my arm, my brain, the request to write it from the editor and his interest in a publication and so on. If we trace the cause of movers backwards, we must eventually arrive at a first mover – an unmoved mover, an unenergised energizer in order to explain the actualisations taking place in the world. Aquinas identifies this first mover as God. God is the source of all motion, as an infinite regression is a logical impossibility.

Creation – origin of the universe

Lane Craig (2010) offers the following argument. Premise 1: whatever begins to exist has a cause; Premise 2: the universe began to exist. Conclusion: the universe has a cause. Our everyday experience confirms the first premise. Things don't just appear into existence all of a sudden, like a rabbit out of a hat. A recent scientific theory – the Big Bang discovered with the help of a Jesuit priest Fr. George Lemaître (1894-1966) - proposes that the universe began to exist. Since the universe can't cause itself, it needs an uncaused cause, which many refer to as God.

Fine Tuning – a universe designed for life

The world that came to be is designed for life. There are fundamental constants of nature (gravity, speed of light, etc.) that have values selected to allow for life. If these constants of nature were ever so slightly different, life would not have been possible. For instance, if the gravitational forces were slightly stronger or weaker by an

infinitesimal amount (10 to the power of 60) stars and galaxies might not have formed or they might have collapsed too quickly. Is this just chance? If so, it is one of extraordinary dimensions. The chance of this level of fine tuning happening by accident has been compared to the chances of a hurricane blowing through a scrap yard and assembling a Boeing 747 along its way! And if not by chance, then some suggest, there is a designer called God.

There are other avenues that people use to explain the existence of God, such as one's own desire, described as a homing instinct for God or beauty as something that stimulates our instinct for the transcendent; morality or a longing for justice. Are these simply a product of human convention or for instance, are there some things that are right and wrong irrespective of human convention? If so, and how do we explain them?

None of the reasons given above prove the existence of God but they are good ideas for discussion especially with those who say that there is no God. Next time you find yourself in this type of discussion – ask two questions: why is the universe so finely tuned for life and why is there something rather than nothing?

Further Reading.

Lane Craig, W. (2010) On guard, Defending your faith with reason and precision, Colorado: David C. Cook.
McGrath, A. (2012) Mere apologetics: How to help seekers and skeptics find faith, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

After the night...

**When the darkness envelops
And the night seems unending.
Time stands still,
And the silence is overwhelming.**

**In the depths we find
A glimmer of light,
A flicker of hope.
We are not alone, He is there.**

**Without darkness,
The stars can't shine.
After night comes the dawn,
And rain rainbows.**

**Without the worst of times,
We cannot savour the best of times,
We work hard,
To keep shining.**

Lisa Egan



**Bridgetown Priory, Thirteenth Century
Augustinian Abbey, Castletownroche Parish.**



*Lisa Egan is a Koinōnía graduate
and a member of Kanturk Parish.*



“Who do You say I Am?”

Marian Mortell is a retired Religious Education teacher at Scoil Mhuire gan Smál, Blarney. She coordinates the Cork Scripture Group.

Christology asks the question ‘who is Jesus?’ An examination of some of the titles of Jesus in the Gospels is a good way to explore this question. In an incident that is recounted in all three synoptic Gospels, Jesus puts this very searching question to his disciples. “But you,” he said, “who do you say I am?” Simon Peter’s response, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:15–16) speaks of Jesus both in terms of his humanity and his divinity.

Messiah/Christ

We hear the name Jesus Christ so often that ‘Christ’ could easily be mistaken for Jesus’ surname. The Hebrew ‘Messiah’ and Greek ‘Christ’ both mean ‘anointed one’. In the Old Testament, kings, prophets and priests were all anointed as leaders of the Chosen People. At the time of Jesus, as well as recognising that the Christ / Messiah would be a descendent of King David and born in Bethlehem, it was also believed that he would bring about the redemption of Israel. For some people that meant that the Messiah would restore Israel as a political power and defeat the power of Rome. Because the term had political and revolutionary links, Jesus often made it obvious that he did not wish to be addressed as ‘messiah’. Instead, he preached a transformed society, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free” (Luke 4:17). It was only after the resurrection that the disciples really understood what the term ‘messiah’ meant. In the light of faith, they now had a fuller understanding of who he was. The suffering Christ would bring about a transformed world.

Son of God

While the term ‘messiah’ emphasises Jesus’ humanity, the name ‘Son of God’ focuses on his divinity. In the synoptic Gospels, even though Jesus called God ‘Abba’ or ‘Father’, he seldom called himself ‘Son of God’. In Mark’s Gospel, the unclean spirits recognise that Jesus is the Son of God (Mark 1:24; 3:11; 5:7) as does the high priest during the passion (14: 61) and the Roman centurion at the crucifixion

(15:39). However, the term is never used by his own disciples. It is as if they have not yet come to an understanding of who he is.

By the time John’s Gospel was composed, in the late first century, this understanding had grown, this Gospel has Jesus using the term about himself. Jesus also frequently uses the phrase ‘I am’ (e.g. “I am the way, the truth and the life, the bread of life”, etc) in this Gospel. By doing this, he is using the same terminology that the Old Testament used to designate God.

“I am” was the name revealed to Moses at the burning bush when Moses asked YahWeH to explain who he was (Exodus 3:14). Furthermore, the opening chapter of John’s Gospel, when Jesus is described as ‘the Word’ confirms the divinity of Jesus. He is part of the divine nature, which has existed from the beginning, with God (John 1:1–2).

As we struggle to understand this human and divine Jesus, who do you say he is?

"Ours is not a joy that comes from having many possessions, but it comes from having encountered a person, Jesus, who is among us. Follow Jesus! This is our joy, this is the hope that we must bring to this world of ours."

Pope Francis, Palm Sunday 2013

The Day of the Relics

Fr. Gerard Condon is Parish Priest of Killavullen and Director of Mission and Ministry in Cloyne Diocese.



It was a glorious Sunday, last September, when the relics of Saint Bernadette visited Mallow Parish church. Throughout the day, long queues came up the centre aisle to touch the gilded reliquary. Some left a written intention, others bowed their heads in a moment of silent prayer. Even though Saint Mary's Church was full, there was an atmosphere of hushed reverence, an unspoken solidarity, the kind that comes from shared experience. As I sat there, I imagined that each person had an important story to tell, a reason to be grateful, or worried or mindful of their responsibilities before God. It felt like the Catholic Church of my youth, when, on occasions like Christmas Eve, there would be a packed church and a palpable sense of devotion.

That nostalgia quickly dispelled as I stepped out into the afternoon sunshine. Mallow was bustling that Sunday afternoon. The supermarkets were busy. Some people were enjoying a coffee at one of the new sidewalk cafés, others were coming from the gym. As I sat into my car, I could hear gospel singing from an evangelical congregation, in a warehouse on the edge of town. The rich diversity of the new Ireland came home to me in all its jarring complexity.

The Irish visit of the relics of Saint Bernadette, reminded me of a bygone era, when churches provided the pillars of society. Even Catholics whose personal belief was not strong, felt an affiliation to their Church, because of the central role it played in the community. That kind of national cultural attachment to the faith has largely fallen by the wayside. We live in a time which values human freedom, above all else. Decisions around religious practice have reverted to the family and ultimately, the individual.

Like most people of my generation, I grew up in a family which cherished its religious inheritance. I began to make my own decision to follow Christ after the Irish visit of Saint

John Paul II in 1979. Back then, the pope hailed Ireland as "*semper fidelis*, always faithful". But even then, the Church was feeling the cold winds of change. The clerical abuse crisis, which had been latent for many years, was about to be made manifest.

For all the years I have been a priest, it seems like the Church has been on a trajectory of decay. We have done our best to stem the tide, but the effects of secularisation are overwhelming. The decline of the Church's place in society used to worry me, but nowadays I am coming to the view that attendance at Sunday Mass or the number of religious vocations, need not be the measure of a vibrant Church. Jesus did not ask his disciples to achieve great things, but to do small things consistently well.

He compared God's reign to salt and yeast, items of little consequence in themselves, but invaluable when included in the mix of things (Matthew 5:13; 13:33). In the gospel for Ash Wednesday, he encourages his followers not to be ostentatious about their faith, but instead, to go into their heart room and make acts of prayer, abstinence and charity that only God will notice (Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18).

That hidden way was evident in the life of Saint Bernadette (1844-1879). She avoided the special attention she got following the extraordinary revelations she experienced at Lourdes in 1858. Instead, she joined an enclosed convent over 700 km away and confined herself to the simple, but tough, daily monastic routine. She compared herself to a sweeping brush, useful in its purpose, but then put away behind a door.

I sensed something of that humility before the Lord in the crowds that attended Bernadette's relics. Her day in Mallow was a throwback to the Church of yesteryear, when public displays of religion were the norm. Nowadays, religious faith is rooted in an entirely different context, one that invites our personal decision for Christ.



Interview with a Parish Priest

Ann Neville, a Koinōnía graduate, who has presenting experience at *Youghal Community Radio*, recently interviewed her Parish Priest, Canon William Bermingham.

1. What is it like being the PP in Youghal?

I was first appointed to Youghal as a curate, from 1998 until 2009. This time here is my fourth appointment. I love Youghal and it was a great joy to be appointed PP in October 2019.

2. What changes did you notice in Youghal parish on your return in 2019?

The changes I noticed reflected the changes within parishes across Ireland, especially, the ongoing decline in the practice of the faith. When I left Youghal in 2009, we were at the height of the crisis in the Church regarding child abuse and the handling of it. Fallout from the scandals was disillusioning for many. I believe people are not hostile to the faith itself but rather to the Church. The aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in a further drop in Mass attendance. People have become accustomed to online Mass and don't realise the full value of being present to each other at Sunday Mass.

3. How does your experience as a PP differ from that of a curate? They are very different roles. Whereas all priests are jointly entrusted with the pastoral care of the people of the parish, the PP is also a building and financial manager. The PP in the past would have spent most of his time at his desk. Nowadays much of the administrative work is done by the Parish Secretary.

“Pope Francis is asking for a whole new way of understanding ourselves as parish, one that makes the laity more active in the celebration of their faith and their parishes.”

4. What is the most fulfilling and challenging thing about being a Priest?

Being a priest is what I wanted to be since I was 17 and despite a few knocks along the way, I have never looked back. And the challenges? Nowadays I do spend a lot of time alone, which I increasingly notice. It is not all together to do with celibacy, but I think priests are more isolated from one another than they used to be when there were more priests around and we had more contact with nearby parishes. Now we are more scattered and have less free time, which brings a share of isolation.

5. How do you like preaching and how do you approach your weekly sermon?

Of all the homilies, I find the Sunday homily the most difficult. For a funeral, wedding or special occasion homily, you have a particular focus. On a Sunday morning, the audience is hard to pin down. Sometimes the Gospel is vague and sometimes the Gospel story speaks for itself. I try to let something from the readings hit me. Sometimes it might only be a word. Sometimes when you think you have not done a great job, it is well received and vice versa.

6. What do you see as the role of the laity in the parish?

A lot of the things being put forward by the Synodal Pathway were taught in the seminary over 40 years ago. In Ireland, we still kept the previous structures and adapted rather than reformed. Pope Francis is asking for a whole new way of understanding ourselves as parish, one that makes the laity more active in the celebration of their faith and their parishes.

7. What roles would you like to see people take up?

We already have a Parish Pastoral Council and a Finance Committee. Other groups I'd like to see develop are a Liturgy Group and a Baptismal Team. Religious education in Catholic schools is another area we need to resource. In the past, we relied on Catholic homes to nurture the faith. This seems to be long since gone. Religion teachers in schools should, perhaps, be on the Church, rather than the government, payroll. At the moment 90% of primary schools are Catholic, but this does not represent the general population today. Each town could have a

Catholic school as well as an alternative school, that way that Catholic school's distinctive ethos would be more apparent.

8. What does the future hold for the Church?

Some people get anxious about the future of the Church in Ireland. But we must remember that Christ said, "I am with you till the end of time." We can expect the Church to continue. But if it is to be alive in a vibrant way, we should expect it to inspire others to follow Christ. An outsider should look at a community of Christians and say, "I want to be like that." We should be prepared for practical changes. The number of buildings we had in the past will not be required in the future. When buildings help the mission of the Church, that's good, but they should not be an end in themselves.



Ann Neville and Canon William Bermingham

Prayer for Priests

*Gracious and loving God,
we thank you for the gift of our priests.
Through them, we experience your presence in the
sacraments. Help our priests to be strong in their
vocation. Set their souls on fire with love for your
people. Grant them the wisdom, understanding, and
strength they need to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.
Inspire them with the vision of your Kingdom.
Give them the words they need to spread the Gospel.
Allow them to experience joy in their ministry.
Help them to become instruments of your grace.
We ask this through Jesus Christ, who lives and
reigns as our Eternal Priest. Amen.*

Come and Sit

in the **Presence** of the **Lord...**

recollect and welcome the Lord to begin prayer

Close your eyes and take a deep breath...

Jesus said "When you pray, go into your room,
close the door and pray to your Father."

(Matthew 6:6)

I invite you now to close your eyes...
in doing so, you close the door momentarily
to the busyness of your life.

Behind closed eye lids...
enter into your Inner Room,
your personal Sacred Space
and the beautiful Presence of the Lord.

Bringing your attention to your breath
as you breathe in ...
silently call upon the peace of Jesus, and,
as you breathe out...relax...
and let go of the busyness of your day.

On each inhale ...
silently say the word 'Peace.'

As you exhale ...
let go the busyness of your day.

Be still in the presence of the Lord.



Sinéad O'Donovan is a
Member of Killeagh Parish
and a graduate of the
Koinōnía programme.



Fiachra Long is a retired senior lecturer in Education at University College Cork and is a member of Inniscarra Parish.

Saint Augustine: Conversion to Mission

In the *Confessions*, Saint Augustine of Hippo (354–430AD) mentions that he heard a boy or girl shouting ‘Take up and read’ (‘Tolle, lege’) at a moment of inner turmoil in his life. This telling phrase motivated him to take up the scriptures and, opening it at random, his eyes fell upon a verse from Paul’s Letter to the Romans: “*Not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. Rather put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires*” (Romans 13:13).



Augustine noted the inner calm he felt while reading these words. No more doubt, no more quarrels, a clear path to God had opened before him. His conversion was immediately matched by a sense of mission. Although he did not know it, he was being sent outward to the wider Church. This moment of grace was destined to benefit not only himself but the people at large.

The irony is that a life free of quarrels or strife did not await Augustine when he became Bishop of the Diocese of Hippo, North Africa around 396AD. If we look at his writings, we find that he was to spend his entire life ‘in quarrels and rivalry’ with various groups and ideas. Yet, he never again experienced the inner turmoil he had experienced just prior to his conversion.

For a start, he landed in the middle of a schism among Christians in North Africa. In order to counter this rift, he argued that the Church is One, Holy and Catholic, but he never succeeded in healing a century of ill-feeling separating the local Donatist Christians, who had become a breakaway Church from Rome. The Donatists argued that a Church that had suffered so many martyrs under persecution should be slow to welcome back those who had turned against the faith under persecution. Augustine argued for a spirit of forgiveness. If they wanted to return to the faith, they did not need a second baptism, he argued.

Augustine also found himself caught in a quarrel with the Manichean sect to which he had once belonged. The Manicheans thought that the world was corrupted, even sinful and this view had an influence on Augustine. In opposition, he preached about the goodness of creation (Genesis 1–2) and the goodness of God. Even the smallest creature is part of God’s creation, he contended. He imagined God as a Being, existing outside time, whereas human beings live temporal lives, constantly changing, making mistakes, lurching forward, becoming older certainly, and perhaps more holy as the years advance.

Augustine’s conversion never offered him outer tranquillity and a life spent in peaceful harmony with everyone. However, the encounter with Christ graced him with a certain inner tranquillity. It gave him relief from the self-doubt which afflicted him so badly as a young man. Once converted, his faith was never directed only to himself. His considerable intellect and legal skills were directed outwards in the service of the Church.

He kept open his desire to learn and ploughed new ground in theology, Church politics and scripture. Over his lifetime, he experienced the Christian life as an outsider and then as an influential insider. His questioning was anything but conservative. Perhaps this self-confidence stemmed from trust in a God who rescued him from self-doubt and revealed to him a life of mission and service. Augustine died in 430AD, as the Vandals besieged the city of Hippo. He was declared a Doctor of the Church by Pope Boniface VIII in 1298.

A Beautiful Destination

Mary Buckley is a member of Mourne Abbey Parish who graduated from the Koinōnía programme last May.



On completion of the Koinōnía Programme 2022–2024, our class was invited to participate in a retreat at Mount Melleray Abbey.

Mount Melleray Abbey is home to a community of Cistercian monks and is located on the slopes of the Knockmealdown Mountains in County Waterford. The Cistercian monks came here from Melleray, in Brittany, France, soon after 1832. Their abbey in Ireland was the first monastery to be founded in Ireland following the Reformation.

Monasteries were the hostels of early medieval Europe, and the monastic tradition of hospitality goes all the way back to Saint Benedict (480–547). Our group stayed at Mount Melleray guesthouse where we were warmly welcomed by Brother Séamus, the Guest Master. I found that the Abbey's atmosphere of peace and quiet greatly facilitated prayer, reflection, rest and renewal.

In recent years, the monks have worked with the Friends of Mount Melleray, Sports Ireland and other bodies to develop pilgrim walking trails. These pilgrim paths are steeped in tradition and cover over 30 km of track in the Knockmealdown Mountains. I really loved the pilgrim walks during our visit, I felt very near to God and there was a very warm feeling of friendship with my fellow Koinōnía students as we rambled along.

During our 3-day stay (some members made a 1-day visit), we were invited, to participate in the monastic liturgy. Monks gather to pray and chant eight times daily: Vigils (4.30am), Lauds (7.00am), Mass (7.45am), Terce (9.30am), Sext (12.15pm), None (2.15pm), Vespers (5.45pm) and Compline (8.00pm). You can experience the ethereal beauty of beautiful chants sung by the soulful voices of the monks throughout a visit to Mount Melleray.

During our stay we attended two presentations. Abbot Richard Purcell spoke on the origins of the Gregorian chant and on the power of moments of silence in the liturgy. Father Denis Luke guided us on a tour of the abbey

church, which includes a Cliona Cussen statue of the Madonna and the Child Jesus. As we sat in the beautiful wooden pews where the monks pray, Father Denis Luke also spoke about the practice of prayer, Lectio Divina and work in the Cistercian community. All Cistercian houses are dedicated to the Virgin Mary and throughout their history the Cistercians have been identified by their devotion to Mary. The Assumption of Our Lady is depicted in the Harry Clarke stained-glass window, the outstanding artwork of the abbey church.

In January 2025, the Cistercian Community at Mount Melleray joined with those at Mellifont and Roscrea Abbeys to form the new Abbey of Our Lady of Silence. Roscrea will be the location of the 2025 Koinōnía Cloyne monastic experience retreat.





Spioradáltacht don Lae Inniu

Mary Smiddy previously taught at Carrignafoey Community College, Cobh and now assists as a children's catechist in Killeagh Parish.

"Is mór idir inné agus inniu!" Nach minic a chloisimid sin agus daoine ag caint faoi chúrsaí eaglaise nó spioradálta agus an chuid is mó den am ní rud dearfach atá igceist. Cloistear faoi uimhreacha a fhreastalaíonn ar Aifreann ag laghdú; níos lú sagairt ná riamh, srl. Cinnte tá na rudaí seo ag titim amach, ach is iomaí dea-rud atá ag tarlú freisin.

Tógaimís an cúrsa Koinōnía mar shampla. Le dhá bhliain anuas tá tuairim is tríocha duine ag freastal ar an gcúrsa gach Máirt ó Mhéan Fómhair go Bealtaine agus sinn ag fáil amach faoi bhunchlocha an chreidimh. Ní amháin go bhfaighimid seans cur lenár gcuid eolais, ach bíonn deis againn cúrsaí spioradálta a phlé. Bíonn eispeiréas a fháil a mhéadaíonn ár bhféinmhuinín mar dhaoine atá sásta cur le saol spioradálta inár bparóistí féin.

Ceann de na mórathraithe atá tar éis titim amach ná tá ról i bhfad Éireann níos tábhachtaí agus níos mó ag gnáthdaoine ina bparóistí féin. Tuigeanann a lán daoine anois nach mbraitheann gach rud ar an sagart nó ar an gcléir amháin. Is léir dóibh go bhfuil freagracht ar gach duine de bharr a mbaisteadh. I mo pharóiste, Cill Iath, tá lear mór daoine a dhéanann jabanna éagsúla de réir a suime. Tá daoine ann mar léachtóirí, chúntóirí Eocairiste, bhailitheoirí airgid, áiritheoirí airgid, ghlantóirí, dhaoine a ghlacann páirt i ngrúpaí éagsúla a bhaineann le cúrsaí liotúirge, cosaint leanaí, cúrsaí airgid, comhairle paróiste, srl.

Ina theannta sin tá cúig chór againn cé gur paróiste beag tuaithe é. Anuas air sin tá clár againn do lucht a gcéad comaoine nuair a bhailíonn tuismitheoirí le chéile agus eagraíonn siad, agus glacann said páirt in Aifreann ocht nuair i rith na scoilbhliana. Tá clár eile againn do na páistí a théann faoi lámha an easpaig agus i mbliana tá ceithre thuismitheoir déag i bhfeighil sé ghrúpa (63 dalta) a bhuaileann le chéile ceithre uair roimh an lá mór ag caint faoin gCré – faoin Athair, Mac, Spiorad Naofa agus an eaglais. De bharr seo bíonn tuiscint agus léargas níos mó ag na páistí (agus ag a dtuismitheoirí gan dabht).

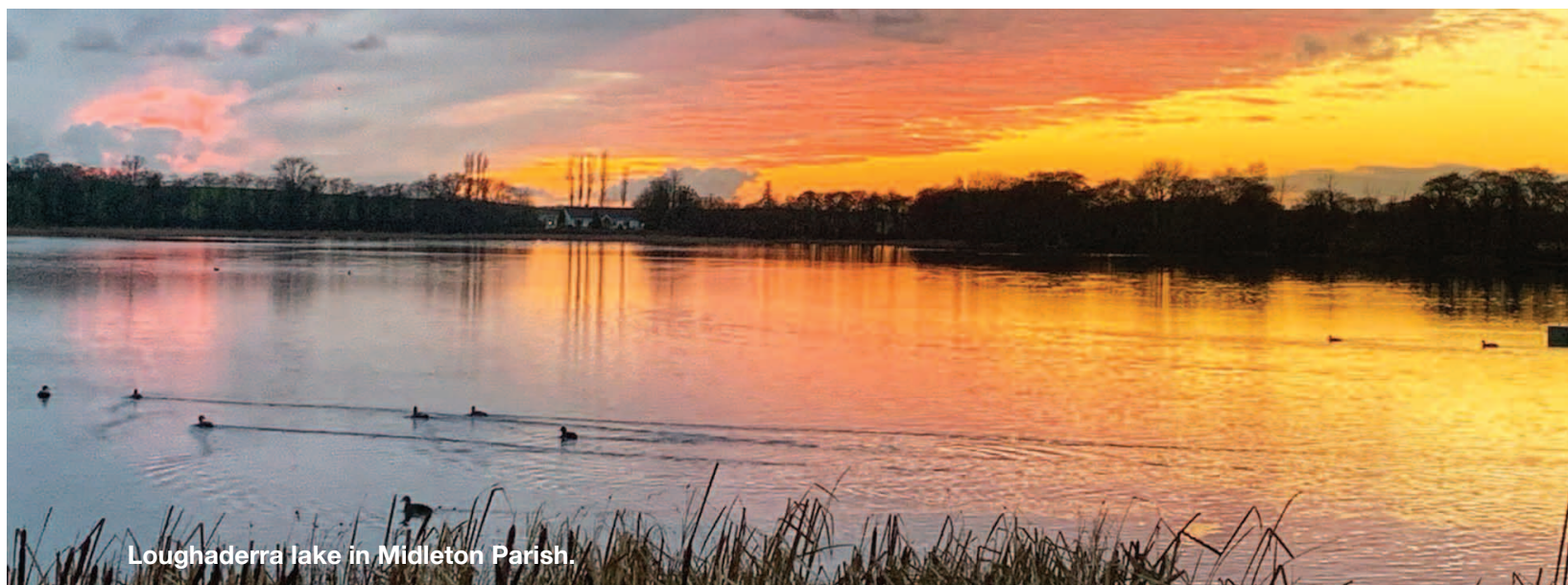
Rud eile, tá i bhfad níos mó béime ar ghrá Dé agus ar an gaol idir Íosa agus an cine daonna – gaol pearsanta a thagann thar gach gné den saol. Uair dá raibh, bhí eagla, rialacha, nósanna agus foirmlí chun tosaigh agus ní raibh le déanamh ag na tuataí ach freastal ar na sacramaintí agus ligint do sagart gach rud a riaradh agus a dhéanamh.

"Is ag Dia amháin atá an t-eolas agus an chumhacht agus, má chreidímíd sin, beidh linn!"

Cinnte tá i bhfad níos mó daoine ag ceistiú agus ag cíoradh a gcreideamh ach is rud maith é sin. Teastaíonn tuiscint aibí uathu agus nuair a thagann an tuiscint sin bíonn spioradáltacht réalaíoch doimhin acu.

D'fhreastail mé ar Aifreann na Criosme anuraidh. Labhair ár n-easpag faoi ról an tsagairt i saol an lae inniu. Dúirt sé go raibh an saol ag athrú agus go raibh sé tábhachtach obair leis an sochaí mar atá sé, feidhmiú laistigh den saol sin, ag tacaíocht agus ag siúl taobh le taobh leis na daoine, ag taispeáint grá agus tuiscint Dé dóibh.

"Is mór idir inné agus inniu" gan dabht ach táim lánchinnte go bhfuil cúrsaí i bhfad níos fearr ná a deirtear uaireanta. Is ag Dia amháin atá an t-eolas agus an chumhacht agus, má chreidímíd sin, beidh linn!



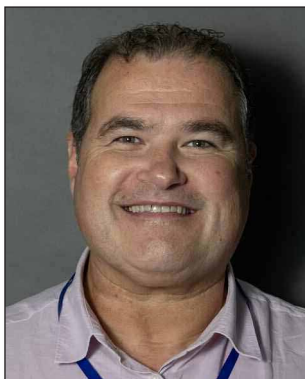
Loughaderra lake in Midleton Parish.

Koinōnía a Franciscan Lens

Being part of the lay Franciscan order, helps me to see all of creation as a cherished gift from God. Since coming here from the United States, over 15 years ago, I have gradually found experiences of fraternity with other branches of the Franciscan Order in Ireland, including the Poor Clares, Franciscan Friars (OFMs), Capuchins, as well as other secular Franciscans.

I now find myself in a new community of fraternity called Koinōnía. Travelling from Cloyne parish to Mallow each Tuesday evening, I am blessed with the company of three kind companions. For me, it gives some tiny glimpse of how Jesus' early followers may have felt as they tried to find the holy man from Nazareth that was transforming people's lives. Like them, we try to find the meaning in Christ's teachings. The coursework, lecturers and speakers are truly excellent. Equally moving are the communal prayer services. The small group discussions that follow our classes place us on what I believe is truly sacred ground. The spirit of warmth and Christian love is made manifest in our willingness to share our faith, hopes, joys, and even our brokenness. We accept each other as fellow pilgrims on a journey that need each other. As we journey home every Tuesday night in our carpool group,

we often share our experiences. We ponder all we have been given by trusting in God and through the Holy Spirit, by trusting in each other.



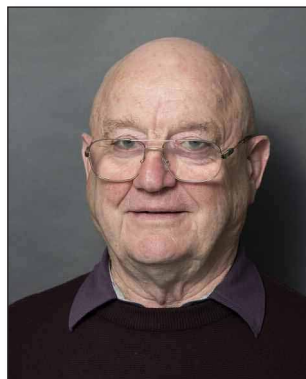
Liam Guilfoil from Cloyne Parish is in First Year of the Koinōnía Programme.

Holy Hour

Every community has been impacted by the decline in the numbers attending the Church and entering the priesthood. Along with my sense of grief and disappointment over the decline of religious practice I have found a new sense of personal responsibility.

I had the idea of beginning a Holy Hour of Eucharistic Adoration specifically for vocations to the priesthood. I approached our Parish Priest and our wonderful Missionaries of Charity in Blarney and received their fulsome support.

We hold the Holy Hour on the third Sunday of the month, from 4.00 to 5.00pm at Blarney Parish church. From the outset, we decided on a silent Holy Hour but begin each hour by singing "O Sacrament Most Holy!" and ending with the Divine Praises. The hour is an oasis of time just watching with the Lord. At the start of the Adoration, we voice our gratitude for our priests who have guided us through our lives, and we pray for those young men who will enter the priesthood.



David Holden from Blarney Parish is a Koinōnía graduate.

The Gospel of Mark



Mgr. Éamonn Goold PE is the retired Parish Priest of Midleton, and formerly lecturer in biblical studies at UCC.

There were a number of factors which helped the spread of the Christian message after the resurrection of Jesus. The presence of so many Jews in Egypt, Syria, Galatia (Turkey) and Rome in the time before Christ, facilitated the sharing of the Gospel, among those with a background similar to that of Jesus, all around the Mediterranean world. The conversion of Saint Paul and his many missionary journeys were also crucial to the spread of the Gospel among those communities of the Jewish diaspora. The earliest Gospel, that of Mark, was (probably) written in Rome amid a group of Christian converts from Judaism about forty years after the resurrection. While Jesus of Nazareth spoke Aramaic, the Gospel of Mark was written in Greek.

Mark arranged his Gospel in terms of a journey by Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem. All that happened in Galilee, occurred at the beginning of the Gospel; what happened in Samaria was in the middle and what happened in Judea was at the conclusion. Jesus visited Jerusalem only once in this arrangement and that was for the events surrounding his death. The opening line, “*the beginning of the good news about Jesus, Christ, the son of God*”, gives an outline of the entire Gospel. The first eight chapters concern Jesus as the Christ, that is, the Messiah. They contain several miracles and a few parables. Some of the miracles resonate with the indelible mark of authenticity:

- the lowering on a stretcher of a paralytic through a roof;
- the healing of the daughter of Jairus (‘talitha kum’);
- the healing of the deaf man (‘ephphatha’).

Having witnessed these miracles, Peter proclaims his faith in Jesus as the Christ at Caesarea Philippi. This is at the end of chapter 8, thus completing the first half of the Gospel.

At the beginning of chapter 9, Jesus predicts his Passion. This makes no sense to Peter. In another effort, Jesus take Peter, James and John up a mountain and is transfigured. Peter is impressed at this revelation of Jesus’ divine nature, but still doesn’t understand the prediction of Jesus concerning the Passion. Neither do the other disciples. They argue among themselves about who is the greatest. James and John want preferential treatment. All this, despite the continued emphasis of Jesus on his impending self-sacrifice.

**“the beginning
of the good news
about Jesus, Christ,
the son of God”**

They share the Last Supper with him. He asks for help in the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus is arrested; the trials begin; Peter denies Jesus. Various forms of torture follow. Ultimately, Jesus is crucified. At his death on the cross, a Roman centurion, proclaims him as the Son of God, thereby completing Mark’s opening line of the Gospel. It was a pagan who testified to Jesus as the revelation of the Father’s love. A few days after his death, the women discovered that his tomb was empty. The resurrection appearances confirmed what they dared not believe, that the salvation won by Jesus overcomes death and destroys fear.

Proclaiming the Word of God

“The Word of God is alive and active” (Hebrews 4:12). Its power to heal and guide are best realised when it is proclaimed in a careful, worthy and dignified manner.

Ministering as a Reader of God's word at Mass or other liturgical celebrations requires a twofold preparation. Firstly, the spiritual preparation of the minister, in which we ask God to help us minister worthily. Secondly, there is practical preparation by which we perform the ministry as best we possibly can. In the ministry of the word, this means doing all we can to be both heard and understood by all who are listening. The following is a point-by-point list of practical guidelines, that may be of use to ministers of the word and to those involved in their training and formation.

When you start out as a reader, or are called on to read at an unfamiliar church:

- Get to know where the reader sits and the usual route to the ambo.
- Get to know the sound system of the church, the on-off switch, the microphone sensitivity, and the acoustics of the building.
- If at all possible, it's a very good idea to test out your own voice projection, from the ambo during a quiet time of day.
- If you can, have another person there to listen to you from three-quarters way down the church and report honestly on how clearly they can or cannot hear you.

Each time, before you proclaim God's word:

- Go over the readings at home, reflecting on and praying with them. There are many aids, both printed and online, to help with such reflection and prayer.
- Arrive early to Mass.
- Check the liturgical book (the lectionary) before Mass (i.e. is it open at the right page?).
- Check the microphone before Mass.
- Ask any questions you may have to the presiding celebrant.

While reading, be aware of your:

- Voice projection: remember you are reading to all, including the people three-quarters way down the church.
- Voice moderation: use 'restrained emphasis', a tone that is neither 'flat' nor 'theatrical'.
- Pacing: be slow and clear – 'The larger the building the slower the pacing'.
- Pauses: include brief pauses (1 breath) between sentences, longer pauses (2 breaths) between 'a reading

from the letter of.....' and the start of the reading, and between the end of reading and saying 'The word of the Lord' and short silences after each reading.

Common mistakes to avoid:

•Reading from a missalette or a sheet of paper.

It looks unprofessional and it fails to give due respect to the lectionary. Also the lectionary has much larger and clearer type than a missalette. A minister should use a missalette only for preparation.

- “Response!” after each verse of the responsorial psalm. Pause and look up instead (the congregation shouldn't be treated like people being forced to respond).

•“Please stand for the Gospel acclamation” at regular Sunday/weekday Mass.

(However, on certain occasions this instruction may be necessary, for example when congregation members may be unfamiliar with the liturgical celebration, such as at some weddings and funerals).

- Rushed or muffled reading**, which are usually due to nervousness or unpreparedness.

- Losing track of the flow of longer sentences**, which usually happens if you are unfamiliar with the reading before Mass.

•Making 'plosive' sounds on the microphone

on the letters 'P' or 'F'. This may require experimenting and becoming familiar with the microphone outside of Mass time.

•Being too far from the microphone.

Adjust it if necessary, before Mass begins.



Fr. Andrew Carvill is the Administrator of Mourneabbey Parish.



Janet Twomey is an Education Officer with Trócaire, based in Cork

Caring for the Earth

‘Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience.’ (*Laudato Sí*, par. 217)

In the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2, the name Eve or Havah means ‘life-giver’ or ‘life’. The name for Adam comes from Adamah, which literally means the ‘soil’ or the ‘earth’. Their names intertwine and suggest a special unity: one cannot exist without the other. Eve was created by God from the rib of Adam to be his companion and helper in the Garden of Eden. Some may interpret this as diminishing, likening women to a mere ‘spare rib’ of man. However, a more accurate translation is ‘from the heart’. Together the combination of Adam and Eve mean soil and life, meaning that all of life is associated with the soil, the earth.

When I ponder modern-day equivalents to Adam and Eve, I think of Donatire and Noah from Rwanda, a country I visited some years ago. Rwanda is in the middle of the African continent and is known for its green and lush hills. The consequences of environmental destruction caused by climate change are felt very strongly in Rwanda. Donatire and Noah have dedicated themselves to education on safeguarding the forests and land within their community of Nyungwe National Park. Donatire serves as a biodiversity community facilitator at BIOCOOR, a partner organisation that Trócaire supports in its work on environmental and community health initiatives. Witnessing the detrimental effects of widespread tree-cutting for firewood, she embarked on life-skills training to provide her community members with alternative sources of income and in turn, she is playing a significant role in protecting the natural world. Donatire explains, “When there is climate change, I feel angry with it. Then I think about how to get a solution for it. Our work is good because we are part of biodiversity as human beings. If I do conservation work, that is taking care of myself”.

It may seem like small steps are happening in Rwanda.

However, around our world, from there are many people like Donatire and Noah, working tirelessly to combat the impacts of environmental degradation caused by climate change and creating hope in their communities. Each of us needs to see this hope in action particularly when there is an obvious global injustice. Those who have contributed least to cause the climate crisis, are the ones suffering most from its impacts.

In his most recent exhortation on the environment, *Laudate Deum* (2023), Pope Francis calls on all people to renew their interconnectedness with the world of nature, to rethink their over-consumption and to keep the pressure on our local and international leaders to phase out the use of damaging fossil fuels.

Laudato Sí action platform laudatosiactionplatform.org offers tools for the journey towards total sustainability and continuing care of our common home. Just as Adam and Eve were tasked with tilling and keeping the garden of the Lord, we too are called to care more deeply for creation. “The world sings of an infinite Love: how can we fail to care for it?” (*Laudate Deum*, par. 65).



Donatire Uwiringiyamana and Noah Nwanyonize both work to protect Nyungwe Forest in Southern Rwanda.

Photo: Muiro Mbutia/Trócaire

At Peace with Nature



*Finbarr Horgan, Rathcormac Parish,
is in First Year of Koinōnía.*

In his 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis draws our attention to the effects of modern society on the environment and its impacts for the world's poor. He highlights the example of Saint Francis of Assisi (1181–1226)



The River Bride at Rathcormac

as a model for Christians to develop a new relationship with creation. He calls on our society to undergo an “ecological conversion”, whereby the effects of our encounter with Christ become evident in our relationship with the world around us. As Christians who cherish and respect every gift of life – and particularly every gift of human life – we bring an essential light to the global environmental movement.

The need for ecological conversion is something relatively new in the Christian story. It derives from a recent realisation of our impacts on the planet – a comprehensive scientifically-based knowledge of the consequences of our lifestyles that requires an ethical response. Pope Francis doesn't tell us much about the path to ecological conversion. What is important is the direction (our focus on Christ) and the active movement (our willingness to change). This process is expressed by the Spanish poet Antonio Machado – “traveller, there is no path, by walking you make the path”. Although we have our individual paths, in groups like Koinōnía, we can journey together and support each other in the work of ongoing conversion.

We may gain some beautiful insights into the nature of ecological conversion through our reading of the life of Saint Francis of Assisi, who recognised the oneness of all creation that originates from God, and the imprints of His fingers in its beauty. We might praise the Creator by seeing every living thing as a reflection of His love and perfection. Our change of heart can start very simply – as when beside the River Blackwater or the Bride, we might simply close our eyes, listen to the gentle trickling of the water, and thank God for our beautiful planetary home.



The Blackwater at Killavullen



Máiréad O'Sullivan teaches at Freemount National School and is a member of the current Koinōnía Programme.

Grow in Love in the Classroom

"You forgot to get the green cloth". The bright eyes of a five year old looked up at me, as I stood next to the Sacred Space in my infant classroom. I teach Junior and Senior Infants in Freemount National School. The liturgical season of Easter had just ended, and I had mentioned to my infant class the day before that the cloth on our altar should be changed to green for Ordinary time, instead of celebratory white for Eastertide.

Since the introduction of the *Grow in Love* programme in 2015, children in infant classes are introduced to the colours of the Church's liturgical seasons as one small aspect of the programme content. Consequently, the classroom Sacred Space, as well as being a focal point for prayer, has been a valuable teaching tool.

The Primary Religious Education Curriculum (Veritas: 2015), on which *Grow in Love* is based, is divided into four interrelated strands: Christian Faith; the Word of God; Liturgy and Prayer; and Christian Morality. The curriculum outlines goals in religious literacy from preschool up to sixth class. The programme places the person of Jesus Christ and Sacred Scripture centre stage. For infant classes, it means children are made familiar with the daily life of little boy Jesus of Nazareth. They are introduced to new vocabulary such as 'created/creation', 'temple', 'Passover', and 'baptismal font'. The miracles of Jesus, such as the calming of the storm are included. These leave the children wide-eyed. Through prayer, the children become aware that Jesus is not just a character in a story but a living reality. They learn that the Son of God loves each of them equally.

The children learn how to say their prayers. Vocal prayers in the Infants programme include: Morning prayer, Night prayer, Grace before and after meals, the Prayer to their

Guardian Angel, and the 'Wow' prayer – Glory be to the Father. Children are also led through meditative prayer and reminded to pray for others using simple responses like "We pray for them" or "Thanks be to God".

The *Grow in Love* programme is enhanced through its website which includes: photos of the beauty of creation, video clips of children visiting the church, slideshows of Bible stories, and attractive audio recordings of hymns and songs. The children move in time to catchy tunes and learn to sing traditional hymns such as 'Away in a manger' and 'When creation was begun'.

'Wellbeing' is the buzz-word of the moment. The greatest sense of wellbeing is experienced when children come to learn that God knows them personally, loves them and listens to them. Through faith, they can come to know that they are God's masterpiece.



The Many Ways of being a Catechist in a Synodal Church

As we all know, the Universal Church and the Church in Ireland is currently undergoing a synodal process. As a Church we are learning to walk together as the People of God. Part of this process of becoming a Synodal Church is the awareness that we are all called to be missionary disciples of Jesus by virtue of our common baptism.

Through our baptism we are all called to communion, participation, and mission in building up the kingdom of God. Through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit we received at our baptism and at our confirmation we are all endowed by particular charisms which we are given by the Holy Spirit for the building up of the Church.

We each have a unique contribution to bring due to the diversity of gifts and talents that we have been given. These are not for ourselves alone, but are to be used in the service of others. To paraphrase Saint Teresa of Avila, Christ has no body and hands on earth but yours.

In recognition of this diversity of gifts, Pope Francis has instituted a number of new lay ministries. Among these is the instituted ministry of Catechist. This is a vocational lay ministry for those who feel called to offer their gifts of being a Catechist in their diocese.

There are many ways of being a catechist in the Church without feeling called to the instituted ministry of Catechist. You might lead children in sacramental preparation in your parish, be involved in youth ministry, be part of an RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults) team, or organise events in your parish such as local pilgrimages or an Alpha course. These are all forms of catechesis where you accompany and teach others on their journey of faith.

The instituted ministry of Catechist is a stable lay ministry for those who feel a vocational call to serve under their diocesan bishop at a diocesan level. Those who feel called to this ministry should talk to the Diocesan Vocations Director or write in the first instance to their bishop requesting information about the ministry of Catechist.

Following a period of discernment by the candidate and the diocese, the candidate undertakes a formal formation programme with the support of their diocese. On the successful completion of their period of formation they are formally instituted in the ministry of Catechist by their bishop.

As the chief catechist in his diocese the bishop is responsible for giving a formal ecclesial mandate to the instituted Catechist for a specific period of time and for discerning where in the diocese the Catechist can best serve. The instituted ministry is for life, but the Catechists are called to serve under the bishop at a diocesan level for a defined specific period that can be renewed.

Depending on the diocese, the role could be paid or voluntary. It is envisaged that instituted Catechists could become Directors of Faith Formation at diocesan level and be part of co-ordinating teams of voluntary catechists throughout the diocese. The recommendations and guidelines in *Share the Good News: The National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland* (Irish Episcopal Conference, 2010) can serve to direct some of the catechetical initiatives that they could lead, working with their bishop and clergy.

For further information, see:

<https://religiouseducation.ie/the-ministry-of-catechist/>

The National Guidelines on the instituted ministry of Catechist, *Fan into a Flame: The Ministry of Catechist in the Catholic Church in Ireland* has just been published by the Irish Bishops' Conference. The discernment period and formation programme for the ministry will be rolled out nationally upon final approval by the Irish Bishops' Conference. The institution of this formal ministry by Pope Francis is a recognition of the need for lay catechetical leaders in the Church who can work with ordained ministers as co-partners in the Gospel. Instituted Catechists will be key agents of evangelisation in the emerging Synodal Church and new heralds of the Holy Spirit. I encourage you to explore your calling if you feel you might wish to serve in this important ministry.



Dr Alexander O'Hara is National Director for Catechetics and Executive Secretary to the Council for Catechetics of the Irish Episcopal Conference.

Children's Liturgy of the Word



Reena O'Sullivan, a member of Killavullen Parish, is a retired primary school teacher and a graduate of Koinōnía.

What could I do to play a more active role in the mission of my parish? Last October I became involved with the *Children's Liturgy of the Word*. I was certainly apprehensive about this role. How worthy was I to celebrate the Word of God in a way that children might make part of their lives?

“Children are our best hope for the future”

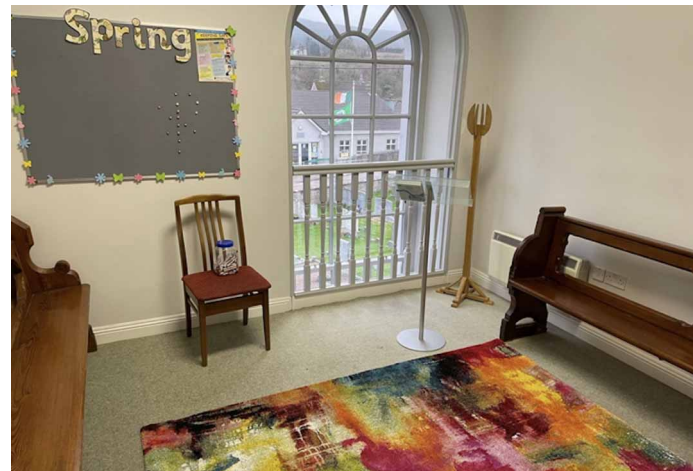
The Koinōnía Programme helped me to gain a deeper understanding of my own faith. Taking part in the course gave me confidence to assume a ministry role in my parish. Choosing to become involved with the Children's Liturgy was an opportunity to put my own learning into practice and help somebody else, in some small way, along their faith journey.

In Killavullen parish, we currently have a team of six adult leaders involved with the Children's Liturgy of the Word. By way of preparation, we are forwarded child-friendly resources for the Sunday Mass via a WhatsApp group. There are hard copies of these resources ready for us when we assemble prior to Mass.

Immediately after the Opening Rite of the Mass, children (age 7–12) are invited to go to the church meeting room, accompanied by two adult leaders who leave their pews and come forward. We begin the Children's Liturgy with a

simple Penitential Rite and then the adult leaders proclaim the Word of God for that Sunday, using the Columba Press children's edition of the Lectionary. We then conduct a discussion with the children, to tease out the meaning of the readings. In light of the readings, we encourage the children to make up their own Prayer of the Faithful, giving them an opportunity to pray for the Church, their families, their community, as well as for issues of local and world significance. If there is time, the children begin to fill in a worksheet for that Sunday, which they take home to complete and discuss with their families.

The Children rejoin their family for the Lord's Prayer and the Communion Rite. We hope that in some small way we are helping to improve the children's experience of going to Mass. It certainly has enriched my experience. I now take the time to prepare for the Liturgy of the Word and as a result, I frequently ask myself, 'What does God ask of me in this Sunday's readings?' I am very impressed by the children's faith: they are always really enthusiastic. I leave that meeting room with a smile on my face. Children are our best hope for the future. Their unquestioning faith and humility never ceases to amaze me. Is it any wonder then that Jesus commissions each of us to be like a child? (Matthew 18:2–5).



Children's Liturgy of the Word room in Killavullen Church.



Rev. John Nestor is a Permanent Deacon who ministers in Youghal Parish.

What is a Deacon?

The beginnings of the Diaconate are described in chapter 6 of the Acts of the Apostles. “Seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom” were selected and ordained by the apostles. These included Saint Stephen, who later would be the first martyr of the Church. Another of the seven, Saint Philip proved to be a great evangelist.

These deacons were selected to provide a ministry of service. Because the early followers of Jesus were increasing every day, the apostles saw the need to have a separate ministry of service towards widows and the poor. This would allow the Twelve to concentrate chiefly on proclaiming the Gospel message.

Deacons were quite common in the Church from its early days up to the Middle Ages. For example, Saint Francis of Assisi (1181–1226) was a deacon; he never felt the calling to be a priest. As the importance of the diaconate receded, it was assumed that every deacon was going on towards the priesthood. In the Twentieth Century, theologians and others in the Catholic Church began to talk about restoring the diaconate, as part of the general move towards returning to the early life of the Church. During the Second Vatican Council, it was decided to revitalise the ministry, restoring the permanent diaconate, alongside the transitional diaconate for men preparing for the priesthood.

I am an ordained permanent deacon for the Diocese of Cloyne. I’m married to Catherine for 27 years, and we have two adult children. I was ordained in 2017 and while I live in Castlemartyr, I am assigned to ministry in Youghal parish.

The pillars of the ministry of the deacon are the Altar, the Word, and Charity. These are at the heart of the diaconate. The altar is the place where the deacon assists the priest at Mass, as well as other liturgical ceremonies. The deacon is a minister of the word, especially in the proclamation of the Gospel. Deacons can preach, following the proclamation of the Gospel and they also share the Word of God at other moments, such as prayer services. As a minister for charity, the deacon should

always be willing to help the marginalised and the poor. A deacon can also baptise, witness wedding vows in the Church and preside at funerals. Deacons can lead liturgical prayers and devotions like the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. Not being priests, they cannot celebrate Mass or hear confession.



In the gospels we see how the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth was characterised by humble service. He called his disciples to imitate him. At the Last Supper, after he washed the feet of his Apostles, Jesus said: “I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you.” (John 13:15)

The diaconate is a voluntary ministry. We have regular jobs, and are husbands and fathers, but we are always deacons. It is not a pastime or something we simply do in our spare time – it is an important ministry to help everyone. We are obligated to pray the breviary, especially morning and evening prayer, every day.

The permanent diaconate is a new ministry in the Irish Church. Currently there are about 100 permanent deacons in the Ireland. We are not half a priest or a ‘priest-lite’; we have a separate ministry, that highlights and complements other roles and ministries in the Church today.

For more information on the permanent diaconate in the Diocese of Cloyne, contact Canon William Bermingham at 024 - 91717.

The Mobile Tabernacle



A Pyx is used to bring Holy Communion to those who are home or hospital bound, our brothers and sisters at the margins of Church or society, to give them the consolation of sharing in the divine life, sustaining their union with Christ and His Church. Bringing Communion to those unable to attend Mass embodies the great commission (Matthew 28:18–20; Luke 24:44–49); it is one way of comforting and showing our brothers and sisters that ‘... our Lord has not forgotten you; He has not forgotten where you are, nor is He indifferent to the circumstances of your life’ – it is one way of demonstrating to the sick and housebound, ‘...you are close to Christ’s heart...’.

Pyxes are like us. They vary in shape and size; many are plain looking and have become worn through the touching of many hands over many years. But, inside they hold a treasure (2 Corinthians 4:7), and share in the sacred purpose we were given at Baptism, to bring Christ to others. So, having received the Most Blessed Sacrament, the Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion becomes a ‘mobile tabernacle’, a ‘dwelling place’ for His presence, the purpose of which is to bring, and to be, His presence to the world, especially to those at the margins.



Bill Kelly from Macroom Parish is in the First Year of Koinōnía



A Sharing Group at a Tuesday evening Koinōnía meeting.



Summer monastic retreat at Mount Melleray.



Mary White, a teacher at Coláiste Muire, Cobh is a guest lecturer who specialises in Ignatian Spirituality.

Music in the Liturgy



Mary Dee is Secretary of the Irish Church Music Association

“Sing a song to the Lord’s holy name” Psalm 95

The Church has woven together a rich tapestry of scriptural and liturgical texts, and many of these have been set to liturgical music. For any liturgical celebration, the pastoral musicians need to choose not only what to sing, but also, how much to sing. Preference should be given to the pieces of greatest importance.

“The Liturgy calls for the ‘full, conscious and active participation’”

Sacrosanctum Concilium 14

In the Mass, the ‘source and summit’ of the Christian life, the first order of importance is given to the sung dialogues between people and priest: the Gospel Alleluia, the Sanctus, the Acclamation of Faith, and the Great Amen. Written texts meant to be sung are the Gloria and the Responsorial Psalm. The singing of the entrance hymn, Kyrie, offertory hymn, Agnus Dei, and communion hymn are desirable but not essential. On solemn occasions, presidential prayers such as the Collect, the prayer over the offerings, the Gospel, and the Lord’s prayer may be sung according to pastoral judgement. The Recessional Song may also be included if so desired, but it is not necessary.

It is important to give space for silence in the Mass, at moments such as the Opening Prayer, following the Liturgy of the Word and after Communion. The Liturgy calls for the ‘full, conscious and active participation’ (*Sacrosanctum Concilium 14*) of the entire congregation, in those moments of silence, in spoken prayer, and certainly in singing. The promotion of congregational singing can be a tall order, but there are **a few pointers** that will help to grow this principle in parishes:

- Keep in mind that people sing short refrains easier than long verses.
- Some music will need to be repeated from week to week so that it will become familiar to those in attendance, aiding the congregation to sing.
- Mass settings are available for the more important chants of the Mass as listed by priority above. Begin with just one or two and choose an easy setting.
- People are more inclined to sing if they have a Cantor to lead them.
- Provide the lyrics for pieces that are not well known. If people don’t know the words, they can’t join in!
- If you are using a leaflet, the parts to be sung by everyone should be clearly marked. Words like ‘all sing’ are very helpful when encouraging the congregation to join in the singing.

We have a long tradition of people not singing in the Catholic Church in Ireland. There may be slow progress in the project of improving congregational singing, but don’t be discouraged. In time, when people become familiar with the tune they are hearing, they gradually join in.

Music is an integral part of our Liturgy and adds greatly to the pastoral effectiveness of our celebrations.

If Walls could Talk

a Visit to your Local Church

Columba McCann OSB is the Abbot of Glenstal Abbey, County Limerick.



If walls could talk, they might reveal many a secret conversation, a hidden deed, an unknown move. Not only do the walls of our Church buildings talk, the whole building talks about the greatest mystery of all: God among us. Some time, at your leisure, why not wander into your parish church, and listen to what the building says?

Where were you baptised? This is the place where an indelible imprint was made on your soul, uniting you to Christ forever as a son or daughter of God. Getting back to the place where you were baptised is not always easy. Instead we can dip our hands generously into **the holy water font** as we enter a church. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, and the prayer of the Church, this puts us into real contact with the grace of our baptism. It brings us back to the waters that gave birth to our Christ-identity.

You can also visit the font of your parish church and pray for all who were baptised there.

We can think of all the baptised who gather in this place. Together we form members of one body, the Body of Christ. A well-designed church building speaks of unity, of gathering. Where two or three people are gathered in his name, Christ is there.

A very human sign of our gathering in the name of Christ is the priest who presides at the liturgy. Have a look at **the chair** kept for him. It's not a throne, but still substantial enough to suggest that he gathers us together in Christ's name.

We can lift our eyes up to **the sanctuary cross** – a sign of love in the midst of evil and violence, a sign of the triumph of life over death – the dying and rising of Christ. 'We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.'

The death and resurrection of Jesus are so big that we really cannot get our minds around it. In the days, weeks,

months and years after this great event, the first disciples of Jesus came to appreciate the wonder of what had happened by looking to the scriptures for inspiration. If you turn your gaze towards **the ambo**, the lectern from which the scriptures are proclaimed, you could recall that, every Sunday, Christ is present there, addressing his people through the scriptures. The ambo should be truly worthy of its role: beautiful, conspicuous, a shrine of God's proclaimed word, and not used for anything else.

People sometimes head off on pilgrimage to holy places, but the holiest place on earth is **the altar** of your own parish church. This is the table where Christ's gift of himself in life and death becomes present and tangible for our benefit. While this happens, it is truly the centre of the world, of the universe indeed. This is why the priest kisses it at the beginning of Mass, why it is sometimes incensed and why we bow profoundly to it when we pass in front of it.

Nothing else should encroach upon, or visually distract from, the ambo or the altar as places where Christ's presence unfolds. Decorations, banners and depictions of saints, of the Christmas crib, of other mysteries of our faith all have their place, but they are secondary to the altar and ambo.

There is another most holy place, built for what happens after Mass: the Holy Eucharist is reserved in **the tabernacle** for communion of the sick and also a place of prayer and adoration. The Eucharistic sacrifice continues to shed its light upon the world from this place.

Because of what happens in this building when God's people gather we can truly say: *"How holy is this place! Truly it is the house of God. It is the gate of heaven"* (Genesis 28:17).

Opposite: Photography of liturgical furniture is by Paul O'Flynn from Newmarket Parish.



Killavullen - Ambo



Dromina - Presider's Chair



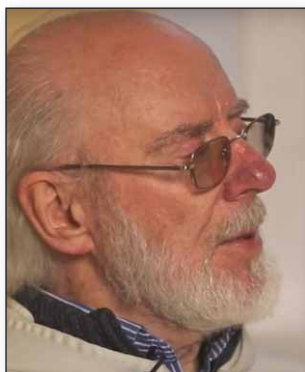
Castlemagner - Baptismal Font



Freemount - Altar



Ballyhea - Tabernacle



Remembering Bweeng

Fr Donagh O'Shea OP is the Director of the Dominican Retreat Centre, Tallaght, County Dublin and originally from Glantane Parish.

Fifty-six years ago, I said my first Mass in Bweeng (then spelt 'Beeing'), my native village. The little church was full of family, relatives, friends, neighbours... I knew them all by name. I knew their stories, their sayings, their mannerisms, even the way individuals walked. I was familiar with every family tree, because that was the older people's favourite subject of conversation in the long evenings. In a sense, all of them were family.

Last year I said Mass in Bweeng once again, and all those people were still there. My parents and grandparents were there, Con and Bridgie Healy were there, along with most of their family, the Lehanes were there, Molly Looney was there, and Ned... Yes, you guessed right: the Mass was in the cemetery. It was a strange feeling to know very few of the living people present, while knowing most of the dead. Those dead people seemed as real and present as the living.

But it is more than seeming. The Christian faith sees them as really real and present. They are alive in God; God is their address. God is present everywhere, and therefore so are they. They are present to us, just as God is present. Looking across that cemetery, you see them as members of the congregation still.

The family, the village, the parish... these are far wider realities than they seem. They include all the people who went before us – all the dead generations. In the porch of the church in Bweeng there is a framed picture that tells the story of the Great Famine in the parish. The population was reduced from 9,348 to 5,437; the number of inhabited windowless mud cabins fell from 735 to 98; the dead were buried from hinge coffins in trench graves at Abbey's Well and Newberry cemeteries, though some were buried in Lackendarra and Dromore. My great-grandparents lived through the Famine. Baptismal records show that they had six children, but we only heard of two, one of them being my grandfather. The others, obviously, had died in infancy or childhood. We don't know where those great-grandparents are buried, but we know with absolute certainty that if they had weakened and given up in

despair, we of the present generation would not exist. Every living person in Bweeng, and in every part of the parish, and in every parish in the country, can say the same. Our ancestors are not only real in themselves; they are real in us. Their life's struggle was for their children and for us. Their hands were calloused for us; for us they struggled to stay above despair. If you want to touch their hands, touch your own: they are right there.

'Remember, Lord, those who have died...' But God does not forget, we do. Modern life, with its relentless emphasis on new things, makes it easy to forget. Day and night a tsunami of sights and sounds washes over us – much of it, routinely, advertising and disinformation (and these overlap). We become detached from our reality, we forget the past, and so our life is in danger of becoming a shallow two-dimensional thing.

It may seem contradictory, but it is important for our life to remember our dead. Without them we would not exist; when we forget them, we no longer know who we are. Were all of them saints? Hardly, if by a 'saint' you mean someone who was beatified or canonised, or who led a flawless life. But this was not the way Saint Paul used the word 'saint'. In one of his letters, he referred to "*the saints at Jerusalem*" (Romans 15:26). He was referring to the whole Christian community there, who were, like every group of people in the world, a mixed bag. They were 'saints' in the sense that they were followers of Jesus. He could have said 'Christians', a name that began to be used in Ephesus (Acts 11:26), but he used the more common term. So yes, we could talk about 'the saints in Bweeng!'

I mentioned earlier that modern life tends to detach us from our reality, making our life a shallow two-dimensional thing. But in St Paul's telling of it, our faith enables us to recover our full dimensions:

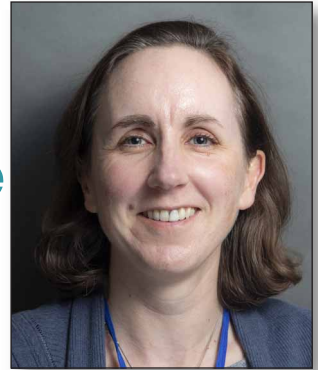
"With all the saints, we are given the power to grasp the breadth and the length, the height and the depth of Christ's love, which is beyond all telling"

Ephesians 3:18



Koinōnía

Reflection and Practice



*Left: Margaret Heskin from Kilworth Parish; Right: Gillian Groeger from Mallow Parish.
Both are Koinōnía graduates.*

Reflection

The two years I spent as a member of the Koinōnía programme have been a personal faith journey. The programme has given me a better understanding of theology and helped me to develop a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. I particularly enjoyed learning about the structure and formation of the Bible; the role of Mary in Catholic spirituality; social justice issues; the liturgical year and the role of art and music in the liturgy. During the past two years, we practiced praying with the Psalms, and became familiar with Ignatian spirituality, which included the role of discernment and spiritual direction in our lives.

Each week, following the lecture by the guest speaker, we formed small groups for discussion of that week's topic. Participating in the discussion groups and listening to the life and faith experiences of others enriched my own faith. This was followed by a break for refreshment, a question and answer time with the guest speaker and night prayer. Following each meeting, we received an email from the course director with links to further resources. I now read the Bible in a more meditative manner and appreciate the relevance of the Word of God to my spiritual life.

Margaret Heskin

Practice

How can you measure the impact of a 2-year course on faith, fellowship and formation in the months following its completion? Answering the question may seem impossible if taken on a big scale, but the Koinōnía course taught me to pay attention to the little things.

To some lay Catholic people, spiritual discernment may seem to be a fancy term and only relevant for priests and religious, but through the course I discovered otherwise. Looking out for moments, things, events and memories that either brought me joy and a step closer to God (consolation) or sadness and a step away from Him (desolation) has helped me to figure out what to do next with all that the course taught me.

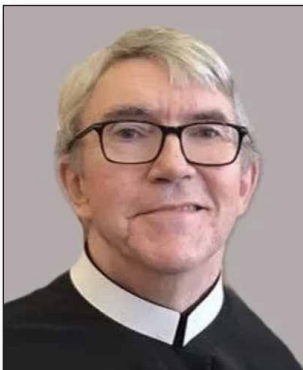
Every Tuesday evening, I loved listening to people's stories. Seeing people light up as they shared something important to them helped my own faith to shine that bit more brightly. Being around people in person (rather than virtually) brought the concept of full presence clearly into focus for me. Putting both of these things together, along with a chance phone call, resulted in me volunteering for a pastoral care support role at a nursing home.

So far, I've met interesting people, listened to their stories and came to understand them (as well as myself and God) a bit more. Volunteering for this role was a bit daunting to begin, just like starting the Koinōnía course, but with time, it has become clear to me that God wants me to do this. All this has happened through being alert to the little things, like leaving the course each Tuesday evening feeling that bit more energised, even though I was tired as I entered the doorway a couple of hours earlier. God rarely speaks to us in big ways – even with one of his most famous prophets, Elijah, Yahweh was in the gentle breeze and not the mighty wind (1 Kings 19:11–14). Through the course, I learned the importance of having some daily quiet time, to help me figure out what God was trying to teach me in the little things and my reactions to them.

The Koinōnía course covered many topics and some other aspects will have resonated more with other people, but God made us all unique, with a particular set of gifts. The course helped me to develop some of mine and now I'm taking them into the wider parish, to those who need a listening ear.

In answer to my opening question, the impact of this course will never be fully measurable, as it helps each of us to take our unique gift set into our wider communities. With such a diverse and wonderful group of people, there will be numerous benefits to our parishes and diocese overall.

Gillian Groeger



Fr. Gerard Moloney is a Redemptorist priest at Mount Alphonsus, Limerick.

Living the Virtue of Hope

My favourite film is 'The Shawshank Redemption'. Regarded as one of the best ever films, it tells the story of Andy Dufresne, imprisoned for a crime he didn't commit, and the friendship he forms with another inmate called Red. Though it takes place inside a brutal prison, it's a beautiful story about redemption through holding onto hope even in a dark place.

Andy enters Shawshank with a life sentence, but he clings to the hope he'll make it beyond those walls. The reason he seems like such an unusual creature to Red and others is that hope isn't something often seen in Shawshank.

Though they become great buddies, Andy and Red are very different in how they see time in prison. From the moment Andy is inside, he's thinking that one day he'll be free. Red pushes against this. "Let me tell you something," he lectures Andy, "hope is a dangerous thing. Hope can drive a man insane."

According to Red, the more a prisoner thinks about life on the outside, the more life inside becomes unbearable. Andy disagrees. "Remember, Red," he says, "hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies."

Andy's hopeful dream has to do with the Pacific, having his own boat and a life free from past memories. His dream comes true. In an extraordinary twist, Andy makes it to the Pacific and hopes his friend will join him there one day, which happens when Red finally gains parole. The film ends with Red on a bus, heading south to meet Andy, anxious with anticipation.

"I find I'm so excited," he says, "I can barely sit still or hold a thought in my head. I think it's the excitement only a free man can feel, a free man at the start of a long journey, whose conclusion is uncertain. I hope I can make it across the border. I hope to see my friend and shake his hand. I

hope the Pacific is as blue as it has been in my dreams. I hope."

It's no surprise people weep at the film's end. Sometimes, I watch the ending just to give myself a little shot of hope. We all need an injection of hope occasionally – I certainly do. I have chronic back pain, which often gets me down. I live in a religious community whose members are getting

older, and I worry about the future, my future. Around us, there's so much darkness: recent years have been so bloody, so divisive, so fraught, a world and a climate paralysed, in crisis.

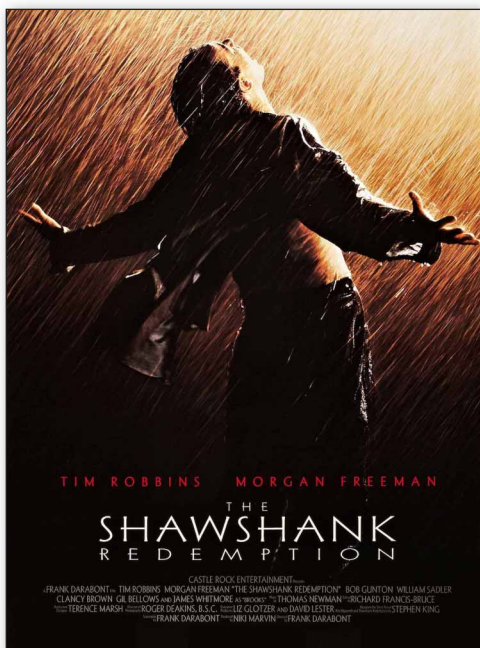
And yet... and yet, we are Christians, and hope is what we're about. We know we are redeemed. We know our hope has come. Our hope was born in a stable, sealed with Mary's kiss. Our faith tells us the child who came to earth in Bethlehem comes now to our hearts, tells us He will come again to take us to Himself forever. Hope will have the last word.

This knowledge demands two things of us. First, to be people of hope. Saint

Paul says the three great Christian virtues are faith, hope and love, and we need all three. Scholar Tom Wright says hope isn't a feeling but a virtue. You've got to practise it, like a difficult piece on the piano or a tricky shot in golf. You practise hope through prayer, through reading and reimagining the scriptures, through holding the unknown future within the unshakeable divine promises.

Hope isn't just a Christian virtue, but an essential human requirement. Without it, we are lost. Hope isn't giving up in the face of adversity but meeting it, knowing God is with me. And with God by my side, there is no pain, no hurt, no disappointment, I cannot handle.

Second, we must be agents of hope, hopeful people who bring hope to others, by what we say, what we do, the example we give, the love we show. Some years ago, aware of the impact of bad news stories on readers, *The*



New York Times introduced a feature called ‘*The Week in Good News.*’ It was intended to send readers away with a smile or at a lighter heart.

We also are good news sharers, except our good news is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The very first verse of Mark’s Gospel states it boldly: “The beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1).

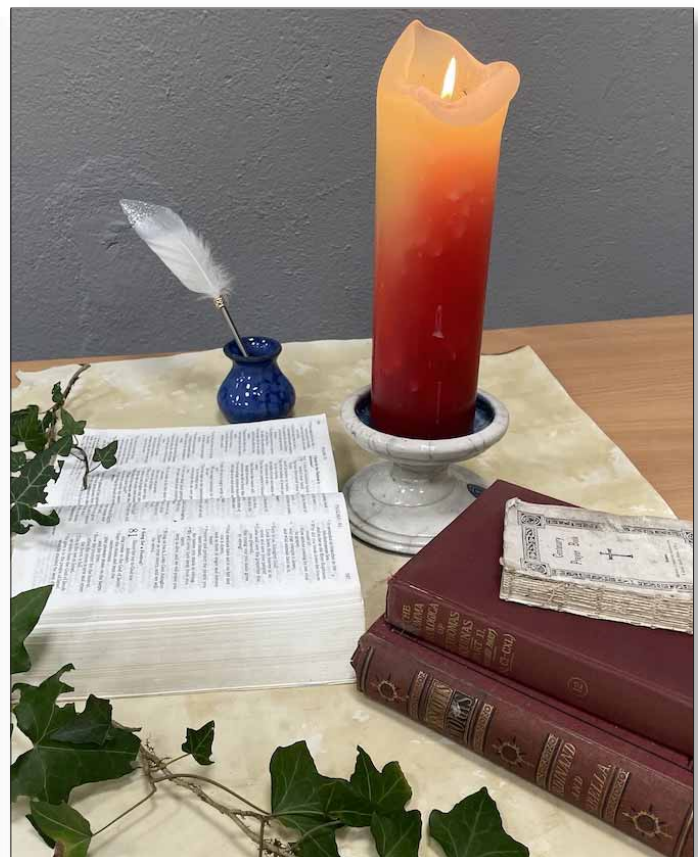
Mark wanted to make it clear that the Gospel is good news for all who hear it. We believe the good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We believe that no matter what bad news is out there, no matter how painful the human condition, God is with us, as God promised. All our hope has been fulfilled in Jesus.

Christian hope urges us to lives of love and service: to see suffering and try to ease it, injustice and try to end it, hunger and try to feed it, brokenness and try to heal it, war and try to stop it, see the example of Jesus and try to follow it, see any situation where hope is lacking and try to fill it.

**That’s how we preach good news.
That’s how we become hope-filled hope-bearers.**



*At each Koinōnía meeting,
a participant sets up a sacred space,
relevant to the theme of that gathering.
Examples above and below.*





Pray without Ceasing...

1 Thessalonians 5:17

Traditional Irish Prayer

Lord Jesus,
You are the peace of all things calm,
You are the place to hide from harm,
You are the light that shines in dark,
You are the heart's eternal spark,
You are the door that's open wide,
You are the guest who waits inside,
You are the stranger at the door,
You are the calling of the poor,
You are my Lord and with me still,
You are my love: keep me from ill,
You are the light, the truth, the way,
You are my saviour this very day.
Amen.

Pentecost

Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
Enlighten our mind to perceive
the mysteries of the universe in relation to eternity.
Spirit of right judgement and courage
Guide us, and make us firm in our baptismal decision
to follow Jesus' way of love.
Spirit of knowledge and reverence,
Help us to see the lasting value of justice and mercy
in our everyday dealings with one another.
May we respect life as we work to solve problems
of family and nation, economy and ecology.
Spirit of God, spark our faith, hope and love
into new action each day.
Fill our lives with wonder and awe in your presence
which penetrates all creation. Amen.

Clifton Catholic Diocese

A Summer Blessing

Walk beside me, Jesus,
as I begin the months of summer,
As I work, play, enjoy family time and friendships,
May I hear your voice within me,
Guiding me toward all that is good and right.
Give me faith in your presence
Knowing that you are with me in everything I do.
Gracious and loving Jesus,
Thank you for the gift of Summer.
May the warmth of its sun; and the beauty of its light
Remind me daily of your love. Amen.

Prayer for Others

Lord, you give us others,
Who watch, when we sleep,
Who believe, when we doubt,
And keep praying,
when we are reduced to silence.
You give us others,
Who walk with us,
who hope and fear with us;
To whom we can turn,
With our cares and our needs.
You give us others
Who stand with us before you
And are always ready to serve you.
You give us others, and entrust them to us.
We do not love you without them.
Let us be a blessing to one another
on our way to you. Amen.

YouCat Youth Prayer Book

Paidir na Maidine

Eirím suas le Dia, go n-éirí Dia liom,
Lámh Dé im' thimpeall,
Im' shuí, im' luí, is ag éirí dom.
Áiméan.

An Easter Prayer

Blessed are you, Lord, our God
Creator of the universe,
and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ:
You have sent your Son
to be the light of the world
and to call us to be your people of light.
We thank you and we praise you
for giving us Jesus as our Saviour,
and celebrate his rising
from death to new life.
Let this Easter season remind us
that through the waters of baptism
You have raised us to new life with Jesus.
Help us to carry his light in the world.
Make us holy as we follow him in love,
and fill us with your Spirit,
So that we may give you glory
all the days of our life. Amen.

Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops



Saint Colman's Cathedral, Cobh, from Benedictine Priory Bible Garden.

"They were talking together about all that had happened, when Jesus came up and walked by their side, but something prevented them from recognising Him. ... Then they said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us as He talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures?' *Luke 24:15 - 16; 32.*