



## Post Primary Diocesan Advisers News Update

### December 2023

Dear RE Teachers / Chaplains,

It has been a very difficult and challenging time for all faith communities and especially in our schools with a shortage of teachers and the unending demands on our time. I know that the Christmas holidays probably can't come soon enough to allow you to refresh and renew your batteries for the year ahead. Thank you for all you do to enhance the faith of the students in your care.

Advent is a way of preparing ourselves for God coming into our lives each day. During the four weeks of Advent, we try to make room for God; to invite God into our daily lives. It can be easy to overlook this season as we prepare for Christmas and the holidays. With the growth of technology, we no longer must wait ... we can become impatient if our computer takes a few minutes to upload! Advent reminds us of the importance of waiting and the importance of hope. This is the time to remember what Christians really look forward to and the preparations we must make. This season of Advent is a perfect time to help us to prepare not just for the coming of Christ but to become part of the wider family of believers and to bring about change in our lives that will improve how we live in the year ahead.

This month there are a few resources that may help in the planning of your Advent rituals. If you have any items that you wish to share, or suggestions for support that the Diocese could provide please contact us.

We would like to thank all the School Staffs who made us so welcome on our visits this term and we look forward to meeting RE Teams in the new year. As you are aware, each year the Holy Father, Pope Francis asks for our prayers for a specific intention each month. We draw your attention to an invitation from Catholic Education Partnership to prepare for Catholic Schools Week and we ask you to join in the two prayer initiatives "Space for Grace" and "Walking Advent with one Heart and One Soul".

As we begin the new Liturgical Year with our preparation for the birth of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ may the peace and joy of His Coming be your gift this Christmas. We wish you, your families, and your school communities many blessings.

May God bless and keep you safe.

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## December Blog 2023



### Advent Reflection

All of us can be like John the Baptist,  
Preparing the way for Jesus Christ in our families,  
Among friends, in schools and workplaces,  
Preparing a space in our hearts for love.

Allow time these days for prayer, for moments taken in a busy day,  
Like stopping in the heavy traffic,  
And just remembering that Jesus is near.

Take time for friendship, for love, for care,  
For those activities that grow our friendship and love,  
With the people that mean a lot.

Take the time these days for the poor,  
For ensuring that someone's Christmas will be better because of your generosity.

Then the songs will be full,  
And the gifts will be reminders of love,  
And Santa, the friend of children, will be like the Christ-child.  
The love for God and others, will come to birth at Christmas.



## **Archbishop Dermot Farrell**

We cannot continue to prepare for the coming of Jesus if we do not reflect on the events of Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> November on the streets of our Diocese. Archbishop Dermot Farrell issued this statement following the events.

The shocking events on the streets of our city on Thursday afternoon and evening have dismayed us all. We have seen with our own eyes, how violence puts everyone—especially the vulnerable and the innocent—in mortal danger. In places we know first-hand, we have seen its power to draw people in, and consume them in a spiral of hatred and destruction.

That such violence—something we associate with other countries and other situations—would happen on our streets can have an effect in our lives. It can quietly, but very markedly, erode the ethos of peace and safety that usually characterises our lives together. As we gather to celebrate our Eucharist some of us may feel bewildered and anxious. Let us keep our Lord before our eyes. Christ, who lived in a world marked by violence, and whose very death was the epitome of violence and terror—Christ is our peace. The Bread of Life is our food of hope. Let Christ guide our feet on the way of peace, justice, and dignity (see Luke 1:79).

As people of hope we are not helpless in the face of what we have witnessed. In solidarity, we pray for the victims of the horrific assault on Parnell Square, for their families, for the school staff, and the children of Coláiste Mhuire. We give thanks for the courage and decisiveness of those who acted so promptly and with such selflessness, for the skill of the emergency services and Gardaí, and for all who helped restore order.

As well as people of prayer, we are also people of action. Today's Gospel tells us that our actions—especially with regard to the weak and vulnerable—are a key measure of who we truly are. Let us, therefore, not be passive in the face of what we have witnessed. In the first place, let us refuse to allow ourselves to be cowed or intimidated by those who seek to coerce us. We can challenge the misinformation that seeks to sow doubt, suspicion, resentment, and fear. We can challenge the casual remarks that spread cynicism and prejudice.

Above all, we can reach out in solidarity and friendship to those who have made their homes among us, but who are being targeted with words of hate, and gestures that are filled with hostility and derision. Let us not forget the invaluable contribution so many make to our economy and society. Let us not take for granted the vibrant gifts of faith and witness which they bring to our parish communities.

This is a moment of truth for our city, and for Irish society more broadly. As a community of faith we are called to give clear and consistent witness to what our faith proclaims: that we are *all* made in the image and likeness of God, that we are *all* children of the *one* God, the God who seeks out the lost and brings back the stray (see Luke 15:4–6), who bandages the wounded (see *Psalms* 147:3), and strengthens the weak (see *Psalms* 40:29). May we not be found wanting. May Christ and his way take flesh in our lives, in how we live (see John 1:14).

Visit the website of the Dublin Diocese to read more of the Homilies from our Archbishop.

<https://www.dublindiocese.ie>

## Pope Francis' Intention for December

For persons with disabilities

We pray that people living with disabilities may be at the centre of attention in society, and that institutions may offer inclusive programs which value their active participation.

On Sunday last Pope Francis looked ahead to the upcoming COP28 conference on the global response to climate change, beginning next week in Dubai. "In addition to war, our world is threatened by another great danger, climate change, which endangers life on earth, especially future generations," the Pope warned. This, he said, "is contrary to the plan of God, who created everything for life."

Pope Francis will become the first Pope to attend a COP gathering when he arrives in the United Arab Emirates on Friday, 1 December. He expressed his gratitude to "all those who will accompany this trip with their prayers," while also thanking them for "their commitment to take the protection of our common home to heart."

**International Day of Persons with Disabilities** (IDPD) is a UN day that is celebrated every year on 3 December.

The day is about promoting the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities at every level of society and development, and to raise awareness of the situation of persons with disabilities in all aspects of political, social, economic, and cultural life. WHO joins the UN in observing this day each year, reinforcing the importance of securing the rights of people with disabilities, so they can participate fully, equally and effectively in society with others, and face no barriers in all aspects of their lives.

<https://www.who.int/campaigns/international-day-of-persons-with-disabilities/2023>

## World Youth Day 2023 Matthew's Reflection

I am writing on behalf of a group of students from St Paul's College Raheny, St. Mary's Holy Faith Glasnevin, and Holy Faith Clontarf, about our experience participating in the International Gathering of Young Vincentians in Felgueiras, in the Northern region of Portugal, and then World Youth Day 2023 in Lisbon.

Our pilgrimage began in earnest in Dublin Airport on the 28th of July, where we all met and looked forward to the journey we were about to embark on together. Now things didn't get off to a great start with our flight being delayed four hours. However, I see this as a positive thing as our time in the airport really brought us closer together as a group and is where I really began to see my fellow pilgrims as my friends rather than people I will be spending the next 12 days with.

When we finally arrived in Porto, after a long day of travelling, everyone involved would agree that they couldn't wait to get into a nice comfortable bed! However, we were extremely humbled by the gym floor we were greeted with. After a few hours' sleep on the floor, we made the short journey to the school where the International Gathering of Young Vincentians was taking place and were greeted by the lovely staff as we checked in. The Opening Ceremony began with Flag Ceremony, where every country – some 59 in total! – had one representative bear their country's flag as an amazing band of drum players performed. This wonderful ceremony was followed by the formal opening at which the representatives of the Vincentian Marian Youth, the Society of St Vincent de Paul, the Daughters of Charity, the Vincentian Fathers and Fr Tomaž Mavrič, CM, Superior General welcomed us. After our evening meal we participated in a concert where each country gave their own performance, Ireland gave a very sleep deprived rendition of The Dubliner's 'Grace.'

The next morning, after another lovely sleep on the floor, this time in the school gym, the Opening Mass was celebrated, led by Fr Tomaž and with St. Vincent DePaul himself attending. Now I know you are wondering how St Vincent DePaul attended our opening Mass. Someone was dressed up as St Vincent DePaul and we were all invited to take photos with him afterwards. Following the opening Mass, we all took part in workshops on topics such as Availability; Our Home, Our Responsibility: Empowering Vincentian Leadership in Environmental Stewardship; Reborn to Hope and the 13 Houses Campaign. These workshops were held simultaneously in four different languages. That night there was another concert this time in the town centre, where amazing artists from around the globe performed. The next day's Mass was followed by more workshops, and we concluded the day with a moving vigil where all attending the Gathering walked together as one in a candlelight procession. This evening candle vigil was the standout moment for me during our time in Felgueiras.

Our time in Felgueiras then ended, and we embarked on our journey to Lisbon for World Youth Day 2023. Our accommodation in Lisbon was a significant improvement from Felgueiras, now instead of a school gym floor; we had our very own classroom floor!

The following day we had two Irish Gatherings where our group of pilgrims led the choir, and the Rise Up, on Integral Ecology. After the Rise Up we gathered at the corner of the road, excitedly anticipating Pope Frances, or Papa Francesco as he is known as in Portugal, to drive past us.

The next day we had another Irish Gathering in the morning, when we again led the choir and the Rise Up on Social Friendship and then travelled to the centre of Lisbon for the Welcome Ceremony presided over by Pope Francis.

The next day we attended a Christian Rock Concert in Benfica Stadium, where for some reason they took our water from us in 40-degree weather. The concert was an amazing experience and was thoroughly enjoyed by us all.

The next day, and my personal favourite experience of the pilgrimage, was the Evening Procession, where we walked for 12 kilometres, with 2.2 million other pilgrims and we all gathered at the vigil site, where we all spent the night asleep under the stars on the amazing rocky ground, and made me say words I never thought I would say, 'I miss the school floor'!

We were wakened the next morning by a DJ Priest who performed a variety of songs from different artists, including Avicii. Pope Francis then presided over the final, Missioning Mass of World Youth Day 2023 and revealed to us that the next World Youth Day will take place in South Korea, thus concluding World Youth Day 2023.

We spent the next two days with well-deserved down-time where we went to the beach and had a chance to do some shopping before heading home.

Those 12 days I spent in Portugal are 12 days I will never forget and will forever be a highlight of my life, as I made so many friends and got the chance to meet so many wonderful people from around the globe and if I had the chance to go back and experience it again, I wouldn't hesitate to do it.

I would also like to thank the amazing staff members who made this trip possible - Ciaran Coll, Sr. Éibhlís, Serena O'Connor and Sinead Mullally.

Matthew Lee, 6<sup>th</sup> Year Student in St Paul's College Raheny





## *The late Sister Eileen Randles IBVM. Lecture Theatre Naming Ceremony*



*Mgr Dan O'Connor, Episcopal Vicar for Education, Sister Barbara Murphy IBVM, Province Leader of the Loreto Sisters, and Archbishop Dermot Farrell in DCU on Tuesday Nov 7th, at a lecture theatre naming event. The lecture theatre was named after the late Sister Eileen Randles IBVM. Sister Eileen, who died in 2015, held several leadership roles, including head of the diocesan Education Secretariat, general secretary of the Catholic Primary School Management Association and president of the Mater Dei Institute of Education. Sister Eileen was known and loved for her commitment to education and justice and for her deep faith.*

## **Catholic Schools Week 2024 – Communities of Service**



Catholic Schools Week will take place from **Sunday 21 to Saturday 27 January 2024** on the theme of Catholic Schools as Communities of Service.

Christian service puts faith into action. In Catholic schools, as we study and look to Jesus Christ as our role model and Teacher, we come to a greater understanding of the depth of Christian service. Jesus served every person regardless of creed, background, faith, social status, or age. He put faith into action by showing all those around him how our Heavenly Father is compassionate, courageous, and forgiving. Jesus didn't just talk about His faith; He lived it.

We are called by faith to go into the world to share the love of God with all those we meet. Each person, at every age, is called to become Christ for another by serving every person with a humble heart and with a generous spirit.

For Catholic Schools Week, we will contemplate our schools as communities of service under the following themes:

- Service in Our Community of Friends
- Service in Our School Community
- Service in Our Family Community
- Service in Our Local Community
- Service in Our Faith Community

The resources will reflect on these features within the overarching theme and will make use of scriptural reflection on prayer, action, student voice, and concern for our common home.

[Catholic Schools Week 2024 – Communities of Service | Catholic Education Partnership](#)

## **December 1<sup>st</sup>**

### **Blessed Charles de Foucauld**

Blessed Charles Eugène de Foucauld was a French Catholic religious and priest living among the Tuareg in the Sahara in Algeria at the turn of the 20th century. He was assassinated in 1916 outside the door of the fort he built for the protection of the Tuareg and is considered by the Catholic Church to be a martyr. His inspiration and writings led to the founding of the Little Brothers of Jesus among other religious congregations. He was beatified on November 13, 2005, by Pope Benedict XVI.

### **December 3<sup>rd</sup> First Sunday of Advent**

The first day of Advent heralds the beginning of the Catholic Church's new year. Advent (from 'ad-venire' in Latin or "to come to") is the Church season encompassing the four Sundays and weekdays leading up to the celebration of Christmas. Advent is a time of spiritual preparation for the Lord's coming at Christmas. Advent also prepares us for the second coming of Christ at the end of time. Resources for Advent were shared with you by email to all Principals in early November.



## Resources for use during the Advent Season

Attached are some of the initiatives you might like to become involved in with your Students and Colleagues.



Advent Space for  
Grace 2023.pdf



Advent Kindness  
Challenge.pdf



Walking Advent with  
one heart and one soul  
for Advent 2023 - Boc



Something Different

- **Advent Space for Grace** – Hosted by Loreto, Le Chéile, Marino Institute of Education, CEIST, SET & The Dublin Diocese, – The theme this year is **'Pilgrims with Hope'** – so share/extend the invite to classes, students, staff, etc. to tune in on **Wednesdays Dec 6th, 13th & 20th 2023**. Time: **13:20-13:40**, Zoom link for each of the weeks – <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86486806836>
- **Walking Advent with one heart and one Soul** -SET has produced a 1 page "Scripture a day calendar for Advent" based on the readings of the day accompanied by a short reflection/focus – working with schools with some of the joint Trustees (Le Chéile, Loreto & Dublin Diocese) To accompany this, short video inputs from pupils, teachers, associates, clergy, religious, etc each day of Advent. The videos will go out at 12:30pm, each day, throughout Advent and will be made available for any School, Community, parish or Church to use and share through the SET Facebook page – <https://www.facebook.com/SpiritanEducationTrust/>

The schools representing the Dublin Diocese are:

- Ardscoil na Tríonoide,
- Killinarden Community School,
- St Aidan's Community College,
- St Laurence's College
- St Mark's Community School

## **A Prayer for Poverty**

Lord, every day in our city these words are spoken:

I was hungry and my hunger was used to bribe you into eating your dinner.

I was in juvenile care, which was right because I broke the law, but at the same time

People you know ignored speed regulation, double yellow lines and dates for their tax returns.

I was cold without a coat in the middle of winter, and those you know

Dismissed me as another fashion crazy irresponsible teenager.

I was sick and you presumed it was drug abuse and thought with relief that you weren't an addict. What about all the booze you drink at the weekends?

I was homeless and your parents passed me deciding the fault was mine.

What can you do with teenagers who don't stay in their homes?

I was lonely, and you left me alone while you juggled the demands of homework, sports practice, and socialising.

So, Lord help me respond to hunger, sickness, cold fear, aloneness and isolation through our actions and prayers for justice for all.

Amen.



## HAND MEDITATION

Eyes closed, hands resting in lap, palms up, tune into your breathing, relax tension points, and go into your center.

Become aware of the air at your fingertips, between your fingers, on the palm of your hand. Experience the fullness, strength, and maturity of your hands. Think of your hands, think of the most unforgettable

hands you have known-the hands of your father, your mother, your grandparents. Remember the oldest hands that have rested in your hands. Think of the hands of a newborn child, your nephew or niece - of the incredible beauty, perfection, delicacy in the hands of a child. Once upon a time your hands were the same size.

Think of all that your hands have done since then. Almost all that you have learned has been through your hands - turning yourself over, crawling and creeping, walking, and balancing yourself; learning to hold something for the first time; feeding yourself, washing and bathing, dressing yourself. At one time your greatest accomplishment was tying your own shoes.

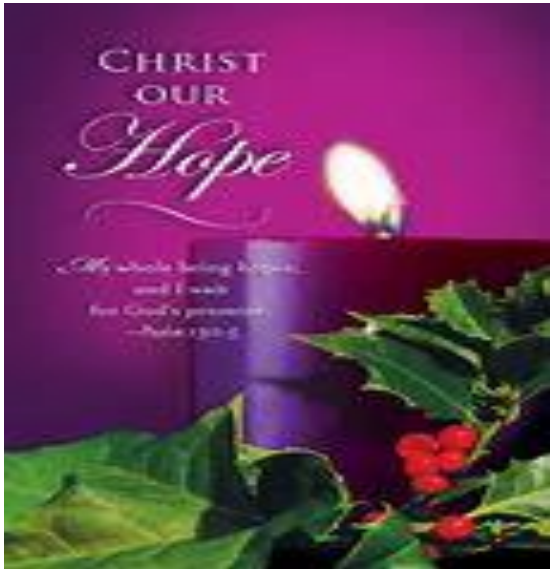
Think of all the learning your hands have done and how many activities they have mastered; the things they have done. Remember the day you could write your own name. Our hands were not just for ourselves but for others. How often they were given to help another? Remember all the kinds of work they have done, the tiredness and aching they have known, the cold and the heat, the soreness, and the bruises. Remember the tears they have wiped away, our own or another's, the blood they have bled, the healing they have experienced. How much hurt, anger and even violence they have expressed, and how much gentleness, tenderness and love they have given.

How often they have moved in prayer, a sign both of their powerlessness and of their power. Our father and mother guided these hands in the great symbolic language of our hands - the sign of the cross, the striking of our breast, the handshake, the wave of the hand in "hello" or "goodbye." There is a mystery which we discover in the hand of a woman or the hand of a man that we love. There are the hands of a doctor, a nurse, an artist, a conductor, a priest, hands which you can never forget.

Now raise your right hand slowly and gently place it over your heart. Press more firmly until your hand picks up the beat of your heart, that, most mysterious of all human sounds, one's own heartbeat, a rhythm learned in the womb from the heartbeat of one's mother. Press more firmly for a moment and then release your hand and hold it just a fraction from your clothing.

Experience the warmth between your hand and your heart. Now lower your hand to your lap very carefully as if it were carrying your heart. For it does. When you extend your hand to another, it is not just bone and skin, it is your heart. A handshake is the real heart transplant. Think of all the hands that have left their imprint on you. Fingerprints and handprints are heart-prints that can never be erased. The hand has its own memory. Think of all the places that people carry your handprints and all the people who bear your heart-print. They are indelible and will last forever.

**Now begin to write out of your stream of consciousness**



#### **Prayer for Hope:**

*Loving God, as we light the first Advent candle of hope, we ask for your presence to fill our hearts and homes. May the hope of Christ's coming bring light to our darkness and renew our spirits. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

#### **December 6<sup>th</sup> St. Nicholas of Myra**

Not much is known about this 4th century bishop, but that does not diminish his popularity around the world, both in the East and West. It is known that Nicholas was born in Lycia in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) and died in 352 A.D. as the Bishop of Myra. All other stories that surround Nicholas illustrate that he practised both the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. He was generous, strove to help the poor and disadvantaged, and worked tirelessly to defend the faith. St. Nicholas provided for the poor and sick and is the basis for the popular character of Santa Claus. Saint Nicholas, bishop of Myra, is undoubtedly one of the most popular saints honoured in the Western world. He is primarily considered as the patron saint of children.

#### **December 7<sup>th</sup> St. Ambrose**

St. Ambrose (340-397) was born at Treves in Gaul, a territory which embraced modern France, Britain, Spain, and part of Africa. He studied in Rome and later became governor of Liguria and Aemelia with residence at Milan. While supervising the election of a new bishop of Milan in 374, he himself was suddenly acclaimed the bishop. He was only a catechumen at the time and was ordained a priest and consecrated a bishop on December 7. He wrote much on the Scriptures and Fathers, preached a homily every Sunday, resisted the interference of the secular powers with the rights of the Church, opposed the heretics, and was instrumental in bringing about the conversion of St. Augustine. He composed many hymns, promoted sacred chant, and took a great interest in the Liturgy.

Ambrose exemplifies for us the truly catholic character of Christianity. He is a man steeped in the learning, law, and culture of the ancients and of his contemporaries. Yet, in the midst of active involvement in this world, this thought runs through Ambrose's life and preaching: ***The hidden meaning of the Scriptures calls our spirit to rise to another world.***

For more information click [HERE](#)

#### **Interesting Fact:**

***Ambrose is the patron Saint of beekeepers, and I came across a lovely little video of the Saint which would be ideal for 1<sup>st</sup> years as it is animated and provides a little insight into why he is patron Saint of beekeepers! Click [HERE](#)***

December 8<sup>th</sup>

## Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception



The Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary is celebrated today and is a holy day of obligation. The Immaculate Conception means is that God filled Mary with grace and preserved her free from all stain of original sin. Many people believe that the feast celebrates Jesus' conception, but in fact it celebrates **Mary's Immaculate Conception**; the fact that Mary was, from the very first moment of her existence (her conception), without sin, and chosen to be the Mother of Jesus.

### 8 Things to Know About the Immaculate Conception

#### 1. Who does the Immaculate Conception refer to?

There's a popular idea that it refers to Jesus' conception by the Virgin Mary. It doesn't. Instead, it refers to the special way in which the Virgin Mary herself was conceived. This conception was not virginal. (That is, she had a human father as well as a human mother.) But it was special and unique in another way. . .

#### 2. What is the Immaculate Conception?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains it this way: 490 To become the mother of the Saviour, Mary “was enriched by God with gifts appropriate to such a role.” The angel Gabriel at the moment of the annunciation salutes her as “full of grace”. In fact, for Mary to be able to give the free assent of her faith to the announcement of her vocation, it was necessary that she be wholly borne by God's grace. 491 Through the centuries the Church has become ever more aware that Mary, “full of grace” through God, was redeemed from the moment of her conception. That is what the dogma of the Immaculate Conception confesses, as Pope Pius IX proclaimed in 1854:

**The most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God and by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, Saviour of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin.**

### 3. Does this mean Mary never sinned?

Yes. Because of the way redemption was applied to Mary at the moment of her conception, she not only was protected from contracting original sin but also personal sin. The Catechism explains: 493 The Fathers of the Eastern tradition call the Mother of God “the All-Holy” (*Panagia*), and celebrate her as “free from any stain of sin, as though fashioned by the Holy Spirit and formed as a new creature”. **By the grace of God Mary remained free of every personal sin her whole life long.** “Let it be done to me according to your word. . .”

### 4. Does this mean Mary didn't need Jesus to die on the Cross for her?

No. What we've already quoted states that Mary was immaculately conceived as part of her being “full of **grace**” and thus “**redeemed** from the moment of her conception” by “a singular **grace** and privilege of almighty God and **by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ**, Saviour of the human race.” The Catechism goes on to state: 492 The “splendour of an entirely unique holiness” by which Mary is “enriched from the first instant of her conception” **comes wholly from Christ: she is “redeemed, in a more exalted fashion, by reason of the merits of her Son”**. The Father blessed Mary more than any other created person “in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” and chose her “in Christ before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless before him in love”. 508 From among the descendants of Eve, God chose the Virgin Mary to be the mother of his Son. “Full of grace”, Mary is “**the most excellent fruit of redemption**” (SC 103): from the first instant of her conception, she was totally preserved from the stain of original sin, and she remained pure from all personal sin throughout her life.



## 5. How does this make Mary a parallel of Eve?

Adam and Eve were both created immaculate, without original sin or its stain. They fell from grace, and through them mankind was bound to sin. Christ and Mary were also conceived immaculate. They remained faithful, and through them mankind was redeemed from sin. Christ is thus the New Adam, and Mary the New Eve.

## 6. How does this make Mary an icon of our own destiny?

Those who die in God's friendship and thus go to heaven will be freed from all sin and stain of sin. We will thus all be rendered "immaculate" (Latin, *immaculatus* = "stainless") if we remain faithful to God. Even in this life, God purifies us and trains us in holiness and, if we die in his friendship but imperfectly purified, he will purify us in purgatory and render us immaculate. By giving Mary this grace from the first moment of her conception, God showed us an image of our own destiny. He shows us that this is possible for humans by his grace.

St John Paul II noted: In contemplating this mystery in a Marian perspective, we can say that "Mary, at the side of her Son, is the most perfect image of freedom and of the liberation of humanity and of the universe. It is to her as Mother and Model that the Church must look to understand in its completeness the meaning of her own mission".

## 7. Was it necessary for God to make Mary immaculate at her conception so that she could be Jesus' mother?

No. The Church only speaks of the Immaculate Conception as something that was "fitting," something that made Mary a "fit habitation" (i.e., suitable dwelling) for the Son of God, not something that was *necessary*. Thus, in preparing to define the dogma, Pope Pius IX stated:

And hence they [the Church Fathers] affirmed that the Blessed Virgin was, through grace, entirely free from every stain of sin, and from all corruption of body, soul and mind; that she was always united with God and joined to him by an eternal covenant; that she was never in

darkness but always in light; and that, therefore, she was entirely **a fit habitation for Christ**, not because of the state of her body, but because of her original grace. . . .

### 8. How do we celebrate the Immaculate Conception today?

In the Latin rite of the Catholic Church, December 8th is the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. Here in Ireland, it is a holy day of obligation.

Would you consider praying a decade of the Rosary with your class to honour Mary and pray for peace through her intercession?

### December 10<sup>th</sup> Second Sunday of Advent

The Second Sunday of Advent is traditionally associated with the theme of peace and is symbolised by the lighting of the Bethlehem candle.

Here is a prayer for peace that you can use on the second Sunday of Advent:

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, who came to bring peace to the world. As we light the Bethlehem Candle, we are reminded of the peace that Christ brought to mankind with His birth and incarnation. We pray that you would fill our hearts with your peace, which surpasses all understanding, and that you would help us to be peacemakers in our families, communities, and the world. We ask that you bless us with your presence and your peace this Advent season and always. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

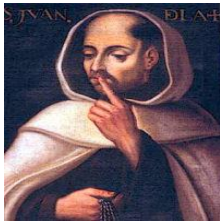


### December 12<sup>th</sup>: Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

In 1910 Our Lady of Guadalupe was declared Patroness of Latin America, and in 1945 Pope Pius XII declared her to be the Empress of all the Americas. She appeared to an Indian convert named Juan Diego on December 9, 1531. She left a marvellous portrait of herself on the mantle of Juan Diego. This is such an incredible story as a lot of scientific research has been recorded in relation to the mantle.

This miraculous image has proved to be ageless and is kept in the shrine built in her honour, the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe. In these days when we hear so much about God's preferential option for the poor, Our Lady of Guadalupe cries out to us that God's love for and identification with the poor is an age-old truth that stems from the Gospel itself.

## December 14<sup>th</sup>: Feast of St. John of the Cross



St. John of the Cross (1542-1591) was born and died in Spain. In 1563 he offered himself as a lay brother to the Carmelite friars, who, however, perceiving his unusual talents, had him ordained a priest. When he was about to join the more severe Order of the Carthusians, the saintly Teresa persuaded him to remain and help her in the reform of the Carmelite Order. This reform of his order caused him such sufferings and brought him many trials. However, his sufferings served only to detach him from creatures. He had a great devotion to Our Lord's Passion and voluntarily sought out humiliations. When Our Lord asked him, what reward he would ask for his labours, John answered: ***"To suffer and to be despised for Thee."*** He died of a cruel disease, embracing the crucifix. Because of his profound treatises on mystical theology Pope Pius XI proclaimed him Doctor of the Church.

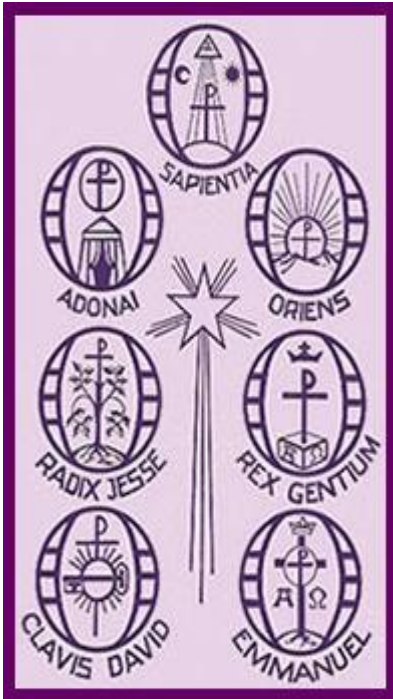
## December 17<sup>th</sup> Third Sunday of Advent



### Prayer for Joy:

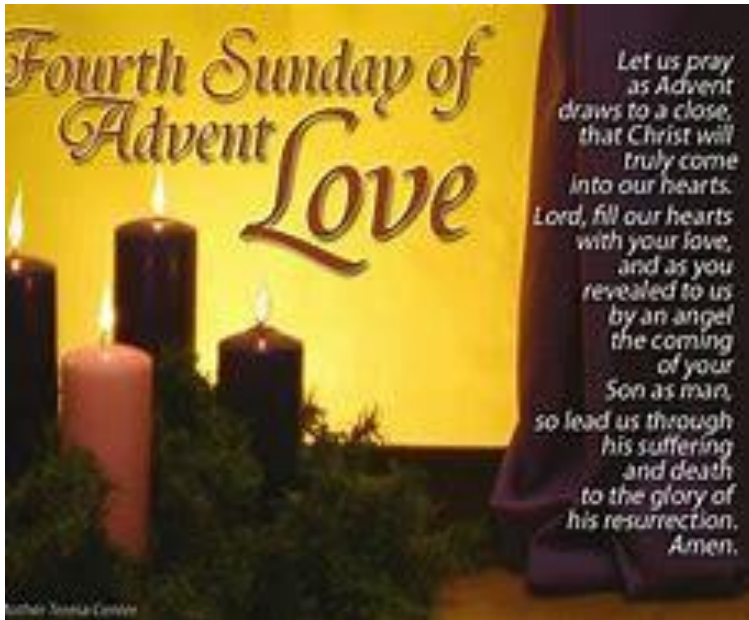
*Gracious God, as we light the third Advent candle of joy, may the joy of your salvation fill us with gladness. Help us to share this joy with others, especially those in need. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

Rejoice: the Lord is nigh." As Christmas draws near, the Church emphasizes the joy which should be in our hearts over all that the birth of our Savior means for us. The great joy of Christians is to see the day drawing nigh when the Lord will come again in His glory to lead them into His kingdom. The oft-repeated *Veni* ("Come") of Advent is an echo not only of the prophets but also of the conclusion of the Apocalypse of St. John: "Come, Lord Jesus," the last words of the New Testament. Today is known as *Gaudete* Sunday. The term *Gaudete* refers to the first word of the Entrance Antiphon, "Rejoice". Rose vestments are worn to emphasize our joy that Christmas is near, and we also light the rose candle on our Advent wreath.



December 17 marks the beginning of the **O Antiphons**, the seven jewels of our liturgy, dating back to the fourth century, one for each day until Christmas Eve. These antiphons address Christ with seven magnificent Messianic titles, based on the Old Testament prophecies and types of Christ. The Church in these following Golden Nights travels through the centuries recalling the longing for the Redeemer. Today begins with **O Wisdom (O Sapiaentia)**.

#### December 24<sup>th</sup> Fourth Sunday of Advent



#### Prayer for Love:

*Heavenly Father, as we light the fourth Advent candle of love, may your love inspire us to love one another as you have loved us. Let your love guide our actions and words. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

## Reflection **What are you expecting for Christmas this year?**

What are you expecting for Christmas this year? Snow, trees bedecked with soft coloured lights, the sound of bells and carols. Children hanging up their stockings on the mantle, or if the gifts are too plentiful laying them by the hearth in anticipation.

It is easy to think of Christmas images, is it not, as there is no season of the year so full of nostalgia and ripe with expectation. But I wonder have you ever been disappointed by Christmas? Did you expect something for Christmas that did not materialise? Maybe you were expecting somebody home who didn't arrive anticipating something, a mood, or a feeling, that never quite came to you. Maybe you didn't receive the present you were looking for – the doll you had seen in the toy shop, or the drum set that would have driven everyone crazy....

We can build up such impossible hopes and dreams that can't possibly be fulfilled. That is one reason why people often feel depressed when Christmas is over. They have lived for days in a state of perpetual excitement, expecting something to happen, and when it doesn't they feel sad and let down.

YOU know what the real message of Christmas is about. It is about what we don't expect. That's right. Christmas isn't about what we expect; it's about what we don't expect.

Think about it. Zechariah and Elizabeth didn't expect to have a baby in their old age. Mary didn't expect to become the mother of the Son of God. She couldn't believe it when the angel told her. "Why I am not even married," she said. Joseph didn't expect his young bride to be pregnant. Herod didn't expect to be disturbed by word of the Child. The shepherds didn't expect to see angels in their fields. The Magi didn't expect to find the Saviour of the world born in a manger in a poor little country village like Bethlehem. The whole thing was a surprise. God surprised everybody that first Christmas.

And when you think about Jesus' teachings, you realise that that surprise is in the nature of who God is. God is full of surprises.

Jesus promised the meek shall inherit the earth. Think about that. What a surprise... when you look around and see the people who shove and push and talk the loudest getting ahead of everyone else, you wonder about the meek.

God is a God of surprises. He may have some surprise in store for us this Christmas. He may not come in the old familiar ways. God may speak to us in some new event, in some place where we least expect it.

The surprises of God! We never know where they are or when they are coming. But the word of the Gospel is that they are and that they do come. And this is what Christmas is all about. Be open this Christmas to whatever comes.

## **A CHRISTMAS PRAYER**

“May the forgiving spirit of Him  
to whom we dedicate this season  
prevail again on earth.

May hunger disappear  
and terrorists cease their senseless acts.

May people live in freedom,  
worshipping as they see fit,  
loving others.

May the sanctity of the home  
Be ever preserved.

May peace, everlasting peace,  
reign supreme.”

Amen

**December 25<sup>th</sup> Nativity of the Lord**





### **December 26<sup>th</sup> Feast of St Stephen**

St Stephen is known as the protomartyr. He was the first Christian to die for his faith. He was noted for the strength of his Christian faith and was the first to be chosen of the original seven deacons of the early Church. Falling foul of the Greek -speaking, Hellenistic Jews of Jerusalem because of his missionary work, he was brought before the Sanhedrin on a charge of blasphemy and was condemned to death by stoning. Saul of Tarsus, later St Paul, not only approved of the execution but held the garments of those stoning Stephen.

### **December 27<sup>th</sup> Feast of St John the Evangelist**

John the Evangelist, also known as John the Apostle and the Beloved Disciple, was a disciple of John the Baptist with his brother James t, before becoming an apostle of Jesus Christ . He is one of the sons of Zebedee and Salome . John had the distinction of being a beloved friend of Jesus Christ, writer of five books of the New Testament, and a pillar in the early Christian church . The Gospel of John, which he authored, is one of the four canonical gospels in the New Testament .The identity of the Beloved Disciple is not explicitly stated in the Gospel of John, but it is widely believed to be John himself .

### **December 28<sup>th</sup> Feast of the Holy Innocents**

The Holy Innocents were the Bethlehem children under two years of age who were massacred by Herod the Great in his fear that he would have his title of King of the Jews taken away by the newborn Child of whom the Magi had told him.



## December 31<sup>st</sup> Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary & Joseph

What a beautiful feast on which to end the year!

The first Sunday after Christmas celebrated as the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. In the liturgical calendar it says *“The Holy Family is seen as the model for the human family, the religious community, and the Church itself. The celebration of the Incarnation has brought us to see God’s closeness. In the Holy Family we see the ordinariness of the life of Jesus, the simple acceptance by Mary and Joseph of the marvels of God. In the daily life of family and community we can touch the divine, we can come close to God. But we must learn to live centred on God with respect and love for each other”.*



### WEEKLY EZINE

*Sharing the Good News* is the newsletter of the Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference. If you would like receive this weekly ezine, you can do so at <https://catholicnews.ie/newsletter/>. You are encouraged to invite others to do so too. Send articles and photographs for use in *Sharing the Good News* to [info@catholicbishops.ie](mailto:info@catholicbishops.ie).



# Join the School Chaplains' Association

The School Chaplains' Association of Ireland is a national voluntary organisation that endeavours to assist Post-Primary School Chaplains in their ministry.

## Mission Statement



**The mission of the School Chaplains' Association of Ireland is to assist its members in carrying out their ministry, based on Gospel values and best practice.**

**“Ní neart go cur le chéile”**

The aims of the association are as follows:

- To provide mutual support for Post-Primary School Chaplains.
- To promote the cause of Post-Primary School Chaplaincy and of Post-Primary School Chaplains through dialogue with other bodies.
- The association is divided into geographical regions called 'Cluster Groups' which enable Chaplains to come together to support each other and share resources on a regular basis.
- The highlight of the year for the School Chaplains' Association is the annual 2-day conference held every October. During this conference Chaplains get to meet one another and share resources. The conference is also an opportunity for in-service for Chaplains and in doing so gives them the necessary tools and resources to help them carry out their ministry.

Membership of the School Chaplains' Association offers you:

- The opportunity to attend our Annual Conference in October to undertake professional development and receive personal and spiritual nourishment and support.
- The opportunity to attend our online Mid-Year Conference on a theme relevant to our work as chaplains.
- A yearly diary sent out every August which can be used for planning and note taking.
- Annual subscription to our newsletter Chaplain Today which comes packed with resources for the liturgical year and information relating to chaplaincy.

- Access to our new members only portal on our website which contains extensive resources relating to pastoral care, prayer and liturgy and lots of other useful information related to the role of the Chaplain.
- Support and advice from our Executive Committee of experienced Chaplains.

To become a member of the SCA, go to our website (<https://www.schoolchaplaincy.ie>) and submit or download a membership form.

Our membership fees are:

€65 for full time chaplains

€40 for associate members (student chaplains, retired chaplains, RE teachers with some chaplaincy hours or priests in a parish who work in the local school)

## The Pioneer Total Abstinence Association



Many people in Ireland offer spiritual support to a relation who is struggling because of alcohol or an addiction problem. ***“Offering it up for the Holy Souls”*** or ***“off the drink for Lent”*** are expressions which remind us that *“the bonds of friendship and affection do not unravel with death” ... or with addiction or sickness.*

Prayer and penance have been part of the response by many Irish families to the challenges which they have met across the centuries. This tradition is also part of the journey of Lent or of Advent. Pilgrimages to Lough Derg, Croagh Patrick and other holy sites allowed people to “carry the intentions” of their family in prayer.

Many families choose to abstain from alcohol in order to support a relation who is making their way through the 12 steps of the AA programme. During the past year, Pioneers have been growing familiar with these 12 steps through the pages of the Pioneer calendar.

We will be glad to provide you with our newsletter or other resources which will support your journey. We will pray for you and for the person whom you are “carrying in prayer” at this time.

[We are a spiritual association • Pioneer Total Abstinence Association of the Sacred Heart \(pioneers.ie\)](https://www.pioneers.ie)

## Pope John Paul Award Recipients



*Congratulations to John Paul II Award recipients Liv Hamilton (Gold Award) and Jennifer Dowling (Bronze Award) from Cross and Passion College, Kilcullen. Liv and Jennifer are pictured at Sacred Heart and St Brigid Church, Kilcullen, after receiving their awards with parish priest Fr Gary Darby and award leader Louise Whyte. May they continue to show leadership and commitment in their community.*

## UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC CHAPLAINCY

Fr Vasyl Kornitsky is Chaplain to the Ukrainian community and curate in Donnycarney Parish. He can be contacted at 086 2359561 or [ugccie@gmail.com](mailto:ugccie@gmail.com). Ukrainian Mass (Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom, Byzantine rite) is held every Sunday at 1pm in Our Lady of Consolation Church, Donnycarney.

### For the Board of Management Meeting if you are invited to lead the Prayer

**Welcome** Before we proceed with the business of our meeting let us open our hearts and minds to God as he speaks to us in prayer.

**Opening Prayer** Lord, in the quiet of Advent, we prepare our hearts. May we be inspired and moved by your spirit in all our decisions and discussions together. As we await the coming of your Son, we pray that we be Christ-like, that our thoughts, words and deeds may glorify your name. Amen.

### A reading from St Paul's letter to the Corinthians 4:1–2, 5

Brothers and sisters: People must think of us as Christ's servants, stewards entrusted with the mysteries of God. What is expected of stewards is that each one should be found worthy of his trust. There must be no passing of premature judgement. Leave that until the Lord comes; he will light up all that is hidden in the dark and reveal the secret intentions of men's hearts. Then will be the time for each one to have whatever praise he deserves, from God.

### The Word of the Lord.

### Reflection

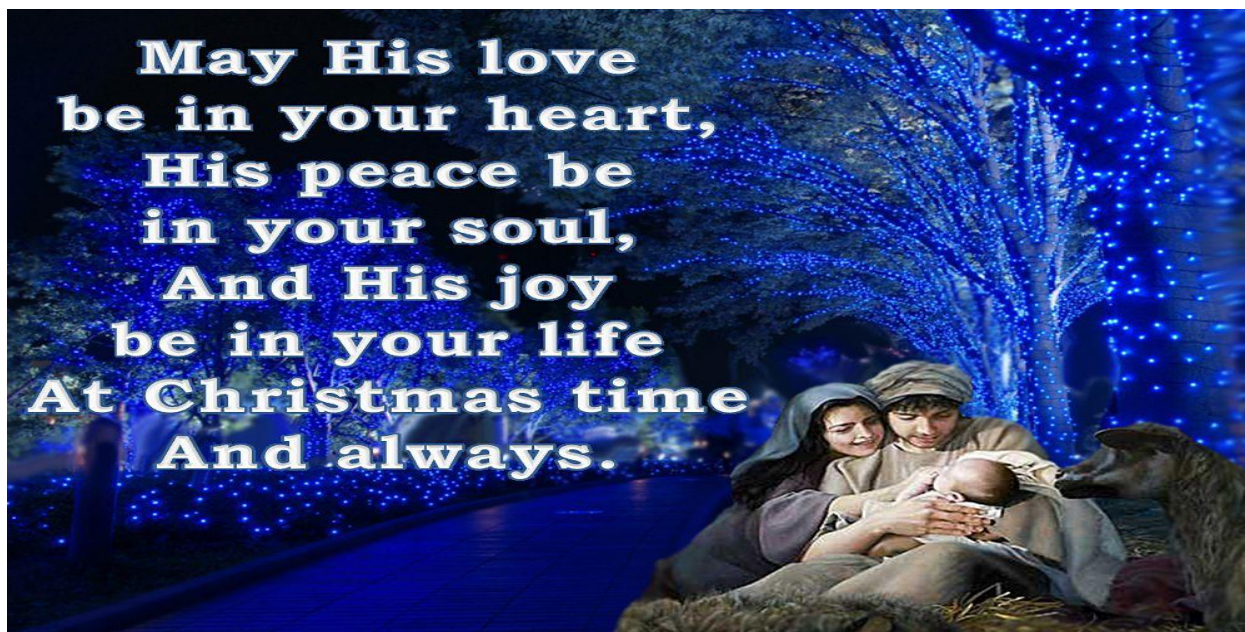
In this passage, St Paul mentions how we should be regarded in our lives – as servants of Christ. Our work in schools as elsewhere, particularly in this season, can be busy and relentless. We can easily become consumed by the hustle and bustle. How are we demonstrating the Christ-like servant leadership and management that we are called to? In what ways can we make Christ's love evident in our vocation as leaders and management? This season offers us the opportunity to focus on our capacity to be Christ-like instead of servants to the money, wealth, power, overindulgence, and so on, and to support and lead the faith development of the school community.



### Closing Prayer

God our Father, through this Advent season, we are inclined to hurry through our days, preparing for Christmas in our homes and schools – forgetting to prepare our hearts too. Teach us to wait patiently, taking time to pause, to restore ourselves in quiet and prayer. Teach us to open our hearts to your voice, waiting for your word that we may meaningfully welcome your coming into our lives.  
**Amen.**

**As we come to the end of 2023 let us together promise to pray for each other and to know that no matter where we are, or who we are with, the Lord is there and will hear our prayers.**



*May we take this opportunity to wish you and your families a joyful, safe, and restful Christmas and a New Year filled with God's enlivening Spirit of Love.*