



Archdiocese of Dublin  
Education Secretariat

## Post - Primary Diocesan Advisers R.E. News Blog – January 2024

Dear Chaplain and Teachers,

Christmas comes in the depth of winter for us and goes by very quickly. There is something slightly sad about ending the Christmas season for another year. We look forward to Christmas for so long and then suddenly it is all over. No sooner have the last of the crackers been pulled than the Crib and the decorations seem strangely out of place.

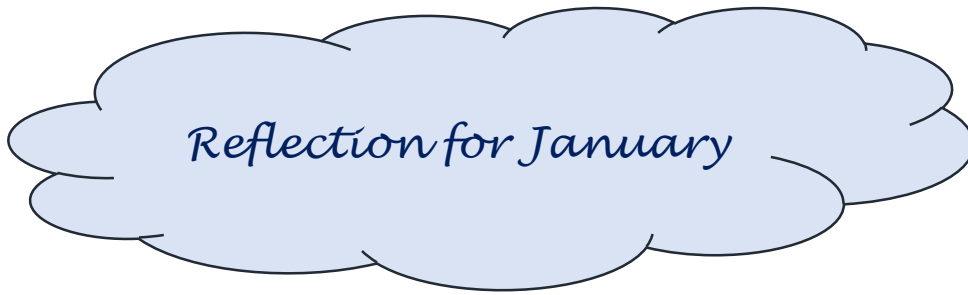
Having just dispensed with the January sales, anticipation of the Easter and summer holidays will be on our minds. The advertisements are now drawing our attention towards planning for summer. We look forward, because today's excitement never quite meets yesterday's expectations. Our hopes are usually bigger than enjoyment can deliver. If so, these disappointments match those of the people who waited for Christ's birth two thousand years ago. They hoped for a political Messiah to drive out occupying forces. The Messiah who came was unrecognisable as such: a baby in a stable. The first Christmas was far from perfect. Mary had just given birth! Joseph was flustered and very tired after the journey. The shepherds came as they were – unprepared. The Wise Men must have looked strange and completely out of place and the animals were... animals, in their natural state. The shepherds and kings, rich and poor, knelt in homage and were changed, while Mary, the young mother of the child, pondered these things in her heart. It was into that very chaotic and imperfect world that God chose to come as one of us.

We all know and hear of people who have been stripped quite suddenly of everything to which we so often look forward - a home, a family, good health, and employment. We all are aware of lives that have been ruined through war and violence. Everything changes; everything passes; everything to which we aspire disappoints us - everything except God's love. Only that love, offered to us when the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us - in the birth of a child - only that remains. Such love never withers or dies and is never overcome. It shines always even in the darkness. Love like this is our strength and our hope. Once we surrender to the possibility of love like this, when we accept the gift which is given to us here and now, then we need not depend on future excitement. Let us not look away from Christmas yet - the child has only just been born for us.

Beannacht De ort,

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## Reflection for January

The month of January is illuminated and warmed by the feast of the Epiphany. We journey with the Wise Men to Bethlehem. We discover Jesus and Mary in the most unexpected of places. With the Wise Men, we offer whatever treasures we bring and we receive in return, the gift of a renewed faith and like them we return, but travel by a different way.

The journey of the Wise Men is one that all seekers after truth can easily identify with. It was a journey fuelled by hope, by promises, by faith and by an ability to read and follow the signs. In many ways this is our journey too.

Like Mary, who pondered all these things in her heart, together with the Wise Men, we might consider how it was that in travelling together and in accompanying each other that the Wise Men succeeded in finding Jesus. This invitation lies at the heart of the recent synod meetings. Even though known routes have served us well so far, we need courage to go new ways which are not quite clear as yet but we know that God will be with us.

I am reminded of the words of Minnie Louise Haskins quoted by King George 6<sup>th</sup> in his Christmas broadcast of 1939 in the middle of World War 11:

*I said to the man who stood at the Gate of the Year,  
"Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown  
And He replied  
"Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God."*

**Wise Men as Men of Faith  
An Invitation to us.....**

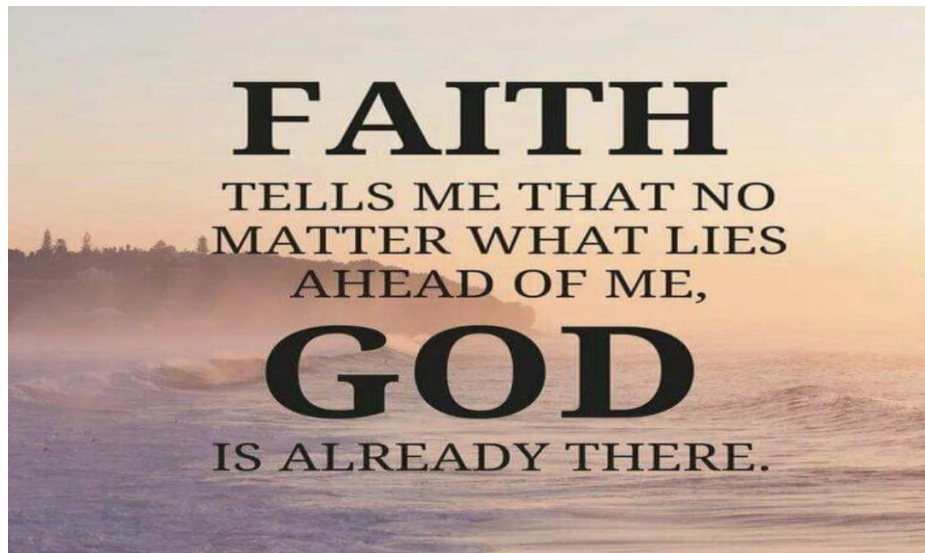
The Church has long held that the visit of the Wise Men to Bethlehem tells us that Jesus came not just for the Chosen People but for every one of every race, colour and background. He came for shepherds and kings, for rich and for poor, for young and for old, for you and for me. In order to find Jesus we must set out as the Wise Men did. It means a willingness to put doubts and fears aside. It asks us to seek and to trust..... in short to be people of faith.

At the start of a New Year, I invite you to reflect on how we can grow in wisdom day by day and what it means to be a person of faith in 2024.

I have experienced and observed that people of real faith seem able to hold increasing amounts of uncertainty and chaos in their lives. Faith seems to enable people to be non-controlling and full of awareness of self and others. Faith is the capacity within people to

approach all things as sacred, to hold onto nothing, to be fearless and non-judgemental. Faith filled people find it unnecessary to be tied down to a place or an attitude because they are secure at a deeper level. There is room for *Another* in that spacious place deep within their hearts.

*“Faith is the ability to look beyond what you’re seeing with a perspective that things will change, and that will give you the space to also live in the present.”* **Cardinal Pizzaballa, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem**



Faith, driven by love, enables us to give up our need to understand everything. It allows us to let go, and for *Someone* else to hold us together. It is not a giving up as much as it is an opening up.

**Our faith needs to be nurtured. We are invited to respond to the gift of faith with prayer, scripture reading, attendance at Mass and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. God meets us where we are at. We must listen to Him and trust Him.**

***The “door of faith” is always open for us, ushering us into the life of communion with God and offering entry into his Church. To enter through that door is to set out on a journey that lasts a lifetime. Pope Benedict XV1 - excerpt***

We now find ourselves engaged in culture wars on almost every personal and social issue. Most of us are beyond being shocked by anything. We are often sad, discouraged, even alienated. We long for people who can hold the chaos together within themselves - and give us the courage to do the same. We also yearn for people like the Wise Men who know how to travel together and discover the Divine in unexpected places, meet the Divine and have the courage and be willing to travel by a different route.

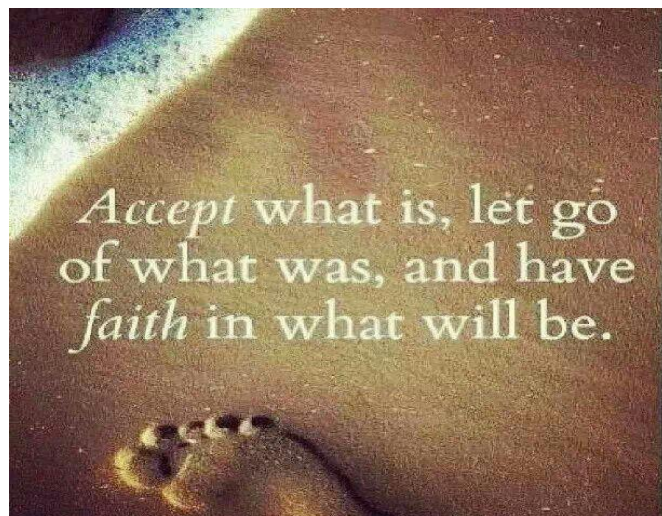
Following the promptings of the Spirit who speaks in our hearts, I believe that very many of our chaplains and teachers are such wisdom figures. Wisdom is not about knowing facts about our world. It is about knowing how to make our way through the world. Facts can be studied.

Wisdom must be learned. We may wish it were not so but wisdom is more often acquired through setbacks rather than through success. While wisdom emerges from dialogue with others, it takes root in silence. In the Wizard of Oz, Dorothy and the Tin Man complete a journey.

They learn much about the topography of the Land of Oz, but they become wise only when they recognise who their friends are.

I believe that all of us know such people in our lives and I pray that we be granted such people on the world platform. I am confident such people have gone before and paved the way for us - the mystics and saints of all genders, cultures, and faith traditions, those both known and unknown.

### Feeling Lost on Our Journey



One of the characteristics of adolescence and of our youth today is a sense of feeling lost. Young people look for relief, for meaning in drugs, in alcohol and sometimes in the thrill of extreme behaviour. How can we help them to discover that feeling lost is part of the human experience? Jesus said that he comes precisely for the lost ones. His message is about lost sheep, lost coins, lost sons.....

*“Christ comes to offer us a new beginning. Not a beginning in a vacuum, not a beginning as if we had no past, but a beginning out of where we are. We all need this beginning. Every person—at some point in their lives—needs to embrace that new start.”*

*“Let us not forget that important things can happen in the lives of the young. These are different important things to the important things that happen to us when we’re in our 60s and 70s, but they are important nonetheless. Young adults, in their idealism and energy, need to hear the gospel in its freshness and in its radicalness. And they need people who embody the freshness and power of the gospel in healthy ways.”*

**Archbishop Dermot Farrell**

**Address to mark the 800th anniversary of the confirmation of the Franciscan Rule  
College Chapel, Maynooth College, November 26, 2023**

The Wise Men must certainly have lost their way on their long cold journey with no google maps but only a star to guide them. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could reassure our young people that there is no such thing as being completely lost, no matter where or in what state we find ourselves? We are safe in God's hands and in His care...

The poem by David Whyte puts this beautifully... "The forest knows where you are, you must let the forest find you...."

### *"Lost" - by David Whyte*

*Stand still.*

*The trees ahead and the bushes beside you Are not lost.*

*Wherever you are is called Here,*

*And you must treat it as a powerful stranger,*

*Must ask permission to know it and be known.*

*The forest breathes. Listen. It answers,*

*I have made this place around you,*

*If you leave it you may come back again, saying Here.*

*No two trees are the same to Raven.*

*No two branches are the same to Wren.*

*If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you,*

*You are surely lost. Stand still.*

*The forest knows Where you are.*

*You must let it find you."*

### **Videos of Poem by David Whyte**

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=lost+poem+by+david+Whyte&qpv=lost+poem+by+david+Whyte&FORM=VDRE>





## BISHOPS' WINTER MEETING

Members of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference gathered in St Patrick's College, Maynooth, for the Winter 2023 General Meeting. The President of the Conference is Archbishop Eamon Martin of Armagh and the Vice-President is Archbishop Dermot Farrell of Dublin. During their meeting, bishops celebrated Mass in the College Chapel and prayers were offered for peace, respect for the dignity of human life, and for climate justice throughout the world.

The Bishops' Conference noted the announcement by the Government to hold two referendums in March 2024 concerning Article 41 of Bunreacht na hÉireann, and will study the related legislation when it is published. Topics discussed during the meeting included the accommodation shortage and meagre State income facing asylum seekers in Ireland, and the UN COP28, meeting in Dubai, seeking agreement on policies aimed at limiting the rise in global temperature and dealing with the impacts associated with climate change.

### The subjects discussed included:

- **Honouring Sunday and the centrality of the Eucharist**

Bishops stated, "The Sunday Mass is at the very heartbeat of the Church and of our personal faith. To assist the faithful, in 2024 we will publish a Pastoral Letter and accompanying resources, to help achieve a greater appreciation of Sunday, knowing that the Eucharist is the source and summit of our spiritual and pastoral life."

- **Presenting to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Assisted Dying**

#### **Bishops: invest in palliative care and reject assisted suicide law**

*"Our Christian faith, which is shared by a significant proportion of the Irish people, teaches us that life is a gift which we hold in trust. The life and death of each of us has its impact on others and there is no such thing as a life without meaning or value."* **Excerpt – Irish Bishops' Conference**

Presentation on the position of the Catholic Church on assisted suicide on behalf of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference by Ms Petra Conroy and Dr Margaret Naughton

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- **Conflict in the Holy Land and the human impact on children**

Bishops stated, “We echo the words of Pope Francis, as we hope and pray ‘that all those involved can reach a permanent ceasefire agreement as soon as possible and find solutions other than arms, trying to take courageous paths to peace.’ From our own experience in Ireland, we know that all conflict and war must end in dialogue. While recognising that there are diverging political views on the issues involved, we are confident that peacebuilding and a commitment to sustained hope and settlement must be the political response to this.”

- **Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 18-25 January 2024**

Bishops received a report from the Council for Ecumenism on the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity which will place 18-15 January 2024, on the theme, ‘You shall love the Lord your God... and your neighbour as yourself’ (Lk 10:27). Resources for the Week of Prayer have been compiled by the Holy See Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity and ecumenical bodies in Burkina Faso. These resources are being forwarded to dioceses and parishes and they are also available on [ctbi.org.uk](http://ctbi.org.uk). Bishops encourage dioceses and parish communities to participate in this Week of Prayer.

- **Update on the Universal Synod and the Irish Synodal Pathway**

**The Synod’s steering committee has told the Irish Bishops Conference that the Irish Synodal Pathway needs to be “much longer” than the five years initially proposed.**

***“I would envisage a perpetual way of decision making in the Church in Ireland being, that we would journey as people of God on issues, listening, discerning, making decisions and putting those into action.”*** Julieann Moran - Secretary of the Synodal Pathway in Ireland

The first stage of the Synodal Pathway of the Catholic Church in Ireland is now complete.

This two-year stage, interwoven with the universal synodal process, concluded with two significant and complementary reports from the National Steering Committee, both now available on [synod.ie](http://synod.ie):

Research for the Development of a Facilitative Leadership Training Programme Prepared for the Synodal Pathway of the Catholic Church in Ireland; and, What does God want from the Church in Ireland at this time?

**Report from the Steering Committee for the Synodal Pathway of the Catholic Church in Ireland.**

An interim committee for the Irish Synodal Pathway has now been formed by the Bishops’ Conference in order to implement some of the immediate proposals from the National Steering Committee’s report.

**These include:**

The formation or renewal of Diocesan Synodal Teams. The success of the Irish Synodal Pathway requires continued engagement in the parishes across the 26 dioceses on the island

of Ireland, as well as engagement by religious communities, ecclesial movements and associations of lay faithful;

The hosting of regional meetings in January 2024 with Diocesan Synodal Teams and representatives from the groups and associations to provide guidance and resources for both the Irish Synodal Pathway and the Universal Synod;

The roll-out of a facilitative leadership training programme (based on the needs analysis in the research report above) throughout the spring of 2024;

In the longer term, the interim committee will also assist the Bishops' Conference in the establishment of a national team for the remainder of the Synodal Pathway of the Catholic Church in Ireland. It will also assist in a process of discernment for the first theme/s of a National Synodal Assembly.

The Bishops' Conference plan to hold this first synodal assembly, in a series of assemblies, during the Autumn of 2025. This will coincide with Pope Francis' designation of 2025 as a holy, Jubilee Year, with the theme 'Pilgrims of Hope.'

- **'Take the Risk for Christ' – promoting vocations to diocesan priesthood**

**Bishops** prayerfully commended to God's grace the fifteen new seminarians who have recently started their studies for the priesthood for Irish dioceses, and reflected on **this Year for Vocation to the Diocesan Priesthood which is themed:** 'Take the Risk for Christ'. Bishops encouraged families and parishes to pray continually for vocations to the priesthood.

The National Office for Vocations reported that one of the key initiatives for 2024 will be to work in a more strategic way with Vocations Directors, and this will include a gathering in January to continue the momentum for the Year for Vocation. For discussion will be how best to sustain the good news of vocations to the diocesan priesthood.

**One day during Catholic Schools week at the end of January will focus on priesthood and vocations.**

- **Catholic School Week 2024 – 'Communities of Service'**

Bishops commended the theme 'Communities of Service' for Catholic Schools Week 2024, which will be celebrated across the Island of Ireland between Sunday 21 January and Saturday 27 January next.

The theme of 'Communities of Service' is dedicated to celebrating the gift of Catholic education and recognising the love and generosity of the entire school community, community of friends, family community, local community and faith community.

- For the full report, visit <https://www.catholicbishops.ie/2023/12/06/winter-2023-general-meeting-of-the-irish-catholic-bishops-conference/>.



## ***Useful Information and Websites to Explore...***

### **The Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice**

The following website has some excellent research and action plans for many of society's problems that we all face.

#### **Mission**

The mission of the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice is to promote justice for all through social analysis, theological reflection, action, education, and advocacy.

<https://www.jcfj.ie/who-we-are/about-jcj/>

"The Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice (JCFJ) was established in 1980 by the Irish Jesuit Province, in response to the employment crisis of that era.

Today, it works to promote justice in Irish society through social analysis, theological reflection, action, education, and advocacy.

Its research areas have widened to correlate with the contemporary issues which are the cause of inequality and injustice, and it is now a leading policy think-tank in the areas Economic Ethics, Penal Policy, Housing and Homelessness and Environmental Justice".

"The societal issues that the Centre focuses on are complex and require thorough research and well considered plans for action. Rather than offering short-term solutions, we conduct independent analysis and reflection in order to tackle structural injustice. The Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice has developed a reputation for credibility, competence and compassion in several key areas of public policy. The policy focus of our work shifts organically over time, as it is a priority of the Centre to respond in a relevant way to the changing needs of society. All of our work is grounded on [Theological Reflection](#) informed by Ignatian Spirituality and Catholic Social Teaching."

***"A river of poverty flows through our cities and gets bigger and bigger until it overflows; that river seems to overwhelm us, so much so that the cry of the brothers and sisters asking for help, support, and solidarity is growing louder and louder."*** Pope Francis

#### ***Totus Tuus***

Totus Tuus Magazine is a Catholic magazine, full of articles from Irish priests and laity, which aims to highlight the beauty and joy of our faith. It is going into its 7th year and is run by donations. If you haven't come across Totus Tuus Magazine and would like a free copy please contact Fiona Kiely on 086 8760058.

<https://www.bing.com/ck/a?!&&p=21439ff2d495c7dcJmltdHM9MTcwMTk5MzYwMCZpZ3VpZD0zODJlZTk5NS1jNm11LTYSOTEtM2ZlOC1mYjk3Yzc0YTY4ZWEmYW5zaWQ9NTlOMQ&ptn=3&ver=2&hsh=3&fclid=382ee925-c635-6991-3fe8-fb97c74a68ea&psq=totus+tuus&u=a1aHR0cHM6Ly90b3R1c3R1dXMuaWUvYWJvdXQv&ntb=1>

## 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).

## Bereavement Support

The Irish Hospice Foundation provides a free Bereavement Support Line. This National Freephone Service is available from 10am to 1pm, Monday to Friday, by calling 1800 807077. Visit [www.hospicefoundation.ie](http://www.hospicefoundation.ie) for more information.

## AWARE – Support and Self Care Groups

If you or those with whom you work wish to connect with people in relation to your mental wellbeing, consider using Aware's phone-in and Zoom support and self-care groups, support line or support mail. For more information, visit [www.aware.ie](http://www.aware.ie).

## Young Adult Camino 2024

We are delighted to launch our Young Adult trip to the Camino June 2024. Completing the last 110km of the Camino from Sarria to Santiago, this is a pilgrimage not to miss! Places are limited and all details, including preparation days, can be found in the poster. If you wish to book, please fill out the form in the link: <https://forms.office.com/e/1GBviSd72R/>. All queries can be sent to [natalie.doherty@dublindiocese.ie](mailto:natalie.doherty@dublindiocese.ie)

## Sycamore

Sycamore is a book that goes through 20 key aspects from the Catechism in a gentle conversation style allowing young people to engage and explore their faith in a new way. A gathering based on exploring Sycamore together will take place every Tuesday evening on Zoom, beginning **January 16**. Two in-person retreat/gathering days will take place over the course of reading the book. To find out more and to sign up, fill in your details here: <https://forms.office.com/e/knBdvbepAn>


**AKBSE!** EXPLORE YOUR FAITH  
Take time every week to explore and discuss your faith with like-minded young adults.

**SYCAMORE**  
THE CATHOLIC FAITH EXPLAINED  
Fr Stephen Wang

Every **Tuesday** on Zoom  
Beginning **January 16th**  
**7:30pm - 9 pm**  
In-person retreat days included

TO SIGN UP EMAIL:  
NATALIE.DOHERTY@DUBLINDIOCESE.IE

# Youth-led Holy Hour with Prayer & Music



**Every Tuesday  
7.30pm–8.30pm**

**Mary Immaculate  
Refuge of  
Sinners,  
Rathmines  
All Are Welcome**

**Catechetical Institute  
Franciscan University**

FRANCISCAN AT HOME  
*Forming those who form others*

Franciscan University has produced an amount of material over the years to help catechists - videos, audio clips, magazines, books, brochures, and other resources produced by the University faculty, conference speakers, and an array of collaborators. Much of it is available for free, with a handful of items requiring a subscription or purchase.

<https://www.bing.com/ck/a?!&&p=acffb2539bacc9eeJmltdHM9MTcwMzExNjgwMCZpZ3VpZD0xZGVlODkyMS1iOGY0LTZhNDItM WJmYy05YWMSYjlmNDZiNjYmaW5zaWQ9NTIxMA&ptn=3&ver=2&hsh=3&fclid=1deb8921-b8f4-6a42-1bfc-9ac9b9f46b66&psq=Franciscan+at+home&u=a1aHR0cHM6Ly9mcmFuY2lzY2FuYXRob21lLmNvbS8&ntb=1>

## Is Faith Good for your Health? Dr. Lydia Mannion

New research into the relationship between Irish adolescent students and religion suggests that religion has the potential to positively or negatively influence students' mental wellbeing – depending on how it is used by the adolescent.

The research conducted by **Dr. Lydia Mannion (Lecturer / Educational and Child Psychologist - Mary Immaculate College - Limerick)** investigated the correlation between mental wellbeing and religion. The research indicates that those with more positive mental wellbeing lean on more positive religious coping methods whereas those with lower levels of mental wellbeing may interpret difficulties as being divinely attributed or may hold negative feelings towards God.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bNPycjWHWr8>

These surveys measured students' psychological wellbeing, religiousness, and how they use religion to cope in their day-to-day lives.

***“One of the key findings was that a student’s religion can either positively or negatively impact on their mental wellbeing, depending on the way they actually use their religion to cope with life. For example, the use of positive religious coping methods by a young person might look like reading scripture for strength, partaking in a religious youth group, or practising personal prayer. These methods are generally associated with more positive psychological wellbeing, and in particular, a greater sense of purpose in life.***

***On the other hand, the use of negative religious coping by a young person would appear quite differently. For example, a young person might believe that negative events in their life are caused by divine punishment, may feel abandoned by God or their faith community, or hold feelings of anger or frustration towards God.***

***These coping strategies are considered unhealthy and our research shows that they contribute to lower overall psychological wellbeing for young people.”***

**Dr. Lydia Mannion**

Dr. Mannion says it is important to emphasise that a young person's religion can be a useful tool to harness in helping them to deal with challenges.

Students who took part in the research were also surveyed on their religious beliefs, and were asked to indicate whether or not they were affiliated with particular denominations.

***“One of the most fascinating findings of the study was that while 80 out of the students who completed the surveys self-identified as Catholic, only 55 of these students then said that they believe in God.”*** Dr. Lydia Mannion

Dr. Mannion remarked, ***“many of these students would have attended Catholic Primary Schools, and are currently attending Catholic Post-Primary. These findings show us that there needs to be a wider conversation about what it actually means for young people to identify as Catholic in Ireland today.”***

## Catechism of the Catholic Church - ADULT STUDIES

[www.catechism.ie](http://www.catechism.ie)

*“Guarding the deposit of faith is the mission which the Lord has entrusted to His Church and which she fulfils in every age.”*

**Fidei Depositum**  
**Pope St. John Paul 11**

“The Catechism, when studied and unpacked, can invigorate all those involved in faith development processes, giving them new momentum. Catechetical programmes for adults, as well as children, for home as well as parish, depend for their direction on the universal Catechism of the Catholic Church in the first place...”

Share the Good News: National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland (Irish Episcopal Conference), 74

### Why study the Catechism?

- It teaches the Faith clearly, unambiguously and fully.
  - It leads us to Christ and life in Him.
- It is a serious presentation for adults of a living faith for today.

The study of the Catechism consists of daily reflection/study and a weekly group meeting with a Spiritual Director and a facilitator.

### YEAR 1 THE PROFESSION OF FAITH

### YEAR 2 CELEBRATION OF THE CHRISTIAN MYSTERY; LIFE IN CHRIST (1)

### YEAR 3 LIFE IN CHRIST (11); CHRISTIAN PRAYER

*“A group that gathers to reflect and study the Catechism gathers in faith; they gather because they are first gathered by the Holy Spirit... Yes, the study of the catechism gives us an anchor in a world where everything is questioned and where there is no agreement about the fundamental principles or standards. The Catechism Studies equips people with a language that enables them to engage confidently with others in discussion of matters of faith and its dimensions. That is a very beautiful task that you have – to facilitate, to make easy, the action of the Holy Spirit in the life of another.”*

**Bishop Brendan Kelly**  
**Bishop Emeritus of Galway**



***Laudate Deum is an urgent call to tackle the climate crisis, recognising that time is running out.***

The Vatican released the new Apostolic Exhortation by Pope Francis, *Laudate Deum*, to all people of good will on the climate crisis, on 4 October 2023. It is a document intended to follow up on his 2015 encyclical, *Laudate Si'*, On Care for Our Common Home.

**APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *LAUDATE DEUM* OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS  
TO ALL PEOPLE OF GOOD WILL ON THE CLIMATE CRISIS**

2. Eight years have passed since I published the Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*, when I wanted to share with all of you, my brothers and sisters of our suffering planet, my heartfelt concerns about the care of our common home. Yet, with the passage of time, I have realized that our responses have not been adequate, while the world in which we live is collapsing and may be nearing the breaking point. In addition to this possibility, it is indubitable that the impact of climate change will increasingly prejudice the lives and families of many persons. We will feel its effects in the areas of healthcare, sources of employment, access to resources, housing, forced migrations, etc.

**Explore some of the content and the key messages of the document:**

 [cafod.org.uk](https://cafod.org.uk)

<https://cafod.org.uk/pray/laudate-deum-explained>

## OUR HOUSE IS ON FIRE:

Sadly, the “cry of the earth and cry of the poor” cannot wait. As *Laudate Deum* recently reminded us, the urgency could not be greater. From wildfires, hurricanes, and heat waves to food scarcity, extinction, the spread of diseases, and much more are the sad symptoms of the climate and environmental crises – and just the tip of the iceberg of what’s yet to come.

**“For we know that things can change.”**

**Pope Francis, *Laudate Si*, 13**

*“Contemplation is the antidote against misuse of our common home... Those who contemplate in this way experience wonder not only at what they see, but also because they feel they are an integral part of this beauty; and they also feel called to guard it and to protect it.”*

<https://vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-09/pope-francis-become-guardians-of-life-and-earth-by-contemplatio.html>

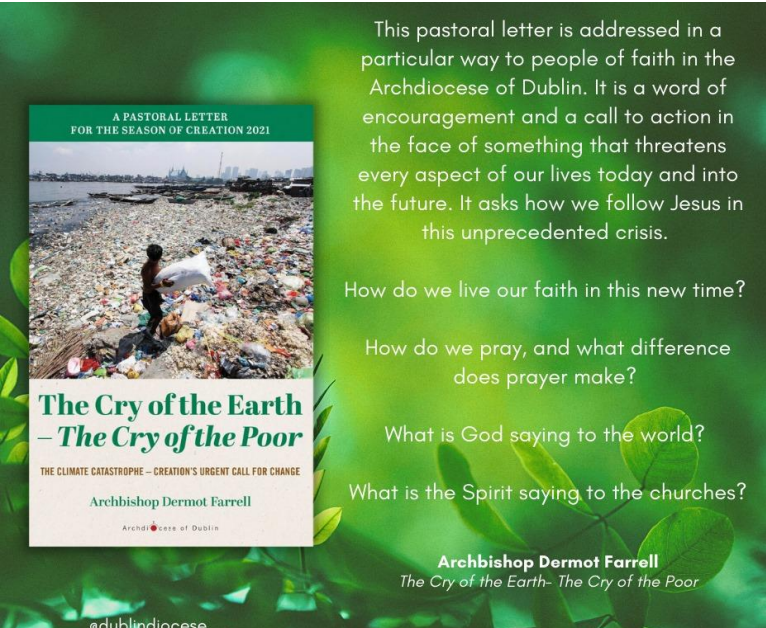
**Pope Francis, General Audience, September 16, 2020**

The practice of *Lectio* with Nature is rooted in the tradition of the Church and in the life of St. Francis of Assisi. The term *Sensio Divina* is a way to describe *Lectio Divina with Nature*. We contemplate God’s presence in nature, and enter into a deeper relationship with God. We are called at this time to listen to the cry of the earth.

<http://www.mysticchrit.co.uk/blog/post/sesio-divina>

## The Cry of the Earth - The Cry of the Poor - Pastoral Letter

**Archbishop Dermot Farrell**



This pastoral letter is addressed in a particular way to people of faith in the Archdiocese of Dublin. It is a word of encouragement and a call to action in the face of something that threatens every aspect of our lives today and into the future. It asks how we follow Jesus in this unprecedented crisis.

How do we live our faith in this new time?

How do we pray, and what difference does prayer make?

What is God saying to the world?

What is the Spirit saying to the churches?

**Archbishop Dermot Farrell**  
*The Cry of the Earth- The Cry of the Poor*

### Appendix 1:

**Passages from the Bible for Prayer ....59**

### Appendix 2:

**Poems for Reflection and Prayer .....62**

## PRAYER FOR OUR EARTH

*All-powerful God,*

*you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of our creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty. Fill us with peace that we may live as brother and sisters, harming no one.*

*O God of the poor,*

*help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, so precious in your eyes. Bring healing to our lives that we may protect the world and not prey on it, that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.*

*Touch the hearts*

*of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor and the earth. Teach us to discover the worth of each thing, to be filled with awe and contemplation, to recognise that we are profoundly united with every creature as we journey towards your infinite light.*

*We thank you for being with us each day. Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle for justice, love and peace. Amen*





## The Pope's Intentions for January 2024

FOR THE GIFT OF DIVERSITY IN THE CHURCH

*We pray that the Holy Spirit may help us to recognise the gift of different charisms within the Christian community and to discover the richness of different traditions and rituals in the Catholic Church.*



Each month, Pope Francis puts forward a prayer intention and asks Catholics around the world to join him in prayer. These intentions cover all sorts of areas of life, encouraging faith, renewing hope and calling us to loving service.

PRAYING EACH MONTH

'The Pope Video' forms part of the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network. This video, published to Facebook and YouTube, includes a personal message from the pope as he asks us to pray for each monthly intention. You can find it at [www.thepopevideo.org](http://www.thepopevideo.org)

***Follow the process:***

**WATCH** 'The Pope Video' at the beginning of each month

**PRAY** with the Pope's intention each day at [www.clicktopray.org/daily](http://www.clicktopray.org/daily)

**REFLECT** on the 'Proposals' for action

**ACT** in light of the intention and proposals

**REPEAT** for each month of the year.

## 1 January - Solemnity of Mary, Holy Mother of God



**At the message of the angel, the Virgin Mary received the Word of God in her heart and in her body, and gave Life to the world. Hence she is acknowledged and honoured as being truly the Mother of God and Mother of the Redeemer (Lumen gentium, 52 – Light of the Nations).**

On the first of January, as so many in the world celebrate the beginning of a new year, the Church celebrates the Solemnity of the Mother of God. It is the oldest of all Marian feasts in our liturgy. It is also a feast uniquely appropriate to those of us concerned with new beginnings, with new resolutions, and renewed hopes.

Mary is blessed of all women, and we are told in the great Aaronic blessing from the Book of Numbers, that God will smile upon those he loves and who love him, that his face will shine upon them. On New Year's Day, we know that the face that smiles upon Mary as she holds Jesus in her arms, presenting Him to His Father in the Temple, is that of her new-born Son Jesus. This is the face we yearn to see, the face of God made flesh, born of the Virgin Mary. **Numbers 6:22-27.**

Mary stands as a model of faith and devotion for those who want to follow Jesus, her son. She is his first and foremost disciple. We learn from her how to walk in the footsteps of Jesus.

***"We must have the mind of Mary. As a very part of her apostolate we must seek to enter into her way of thinking. We must imagine how she would look on people. What would be her train of thought in a particular situation?" Frank Duff***

The New Testament describes the way that Mary lived. In her great song of praise, the Magnificat, Mary raises her voice in memory, thanksgiving and hope. She remembers and gives thanks for what God has done for his people.

At the Annunciation, Mary surrenders herself fully. She didn't say to the angel Gabriel, sorry, but I have my own plans. I want to do my own thing. She said it is not what I want, but it is what God wants that matters. Let what God wants be done to me. Mary made a complete gift of herself to God and accepted the task he gave her. Even though, she did not understand all the implications of it, she trusted that God would give her all the help she needed. In effect she was saying, I don't know what all this means but I trust that good things will happen. She gave up control of her future and let God define her life. She relies not so much on the

appearance of the angel as on the angel's word which is from God. She surrenders herself consciously and actively when she responds to the invitation to become the mother of Jesus.  
**Luke 1:38**

At the end of the earthly life of Jesus, we find Mary *"standing near the cross of Jesus."*  
**John 19: 25.** She is present with Jesus in a trusting surrender that is faith filled.

The very last biblical image we have of Mary is found in the Acts of the Apostles. 1:12-14 Her life can be summarized in the verse from St. Luke's Gospel, *"Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart."* **Luke 1:51**

Mary is truly a model for us as she contemplated Jesus. She found a focus in her life, she watched over Jesus throughout his life and she found in him a centre for her life.

*"The Virgin Mary is the perfect model of faith. From her 'Yes' to God at the Annunciation to her silent assent at the Cross, Mary's faith remained firm."*

**Irish Catholic Catechism for Adults**

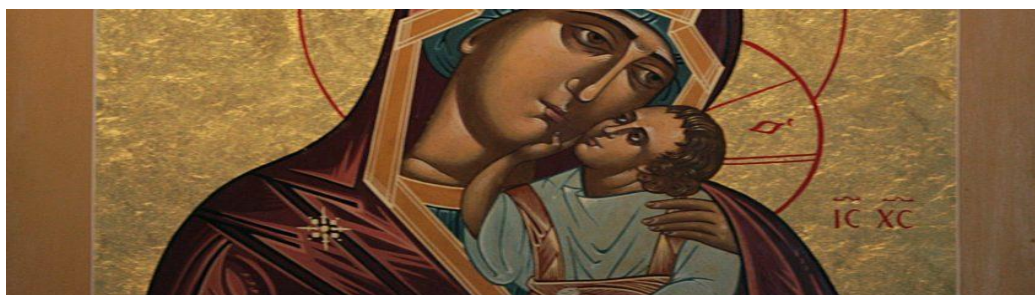
Mary is a model for us in all our challenges, doubts, joys and sorrows that form part of our lives.

Life imposes a lot of duties on us. Besides duties to ourselves, there are duties to our neighbours, our students, colleagues and to God. Where would the world be if everyone just thought of themselves and insisted on doing their own thing, seeking their own freedom, happiness and fulfilment independent of others and of God. Those who accept duty as Mary did may not find happiness and fulfilment in the eyes of the world but they certainly will find it in the eyes of God. Deep down they will know it. The greatest grace in life is when what we have to do is what we want to do.

We are called to model our lives in the way Mary lived her life in a spirit of faith, hope and love. As we begin a New Year, let us ask God's blessing on all that is to come and that our faith may guide us on our way.

## **Mother of God**

***Mary bore a son who was God and that ever since He likes to listen to her petitions – just as any great man would like to please his mother!"*** Frank Duff



**(Icon image by the late Sr Paula Kersey ocsa of St. Mary's Abbey, Glencairn)**

## 6 January - The Epiphany of the Lord.



The Feast of the Epiphany is celebrated on January 6. This feast commemorates the visit of the wise men to worship the baby Jesus. Tradition tells us that their names were Caspar, Melchior and Balthassar. The men were astrologers who were looking for the star that would lead them to the promised Messiah. This was prophesied in the Book of Micah. According to the Gospel narratives, the wise men brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh with them. These gifts were very meaningful. Gold was a precious and expensive gift, and showed how important Jesus was. Frankincense is a sweet perfume which was often burned in the temple to worship God. It was a sign that Jesus should be worshipped. Myrrh was used to keep things fresh, and it was used by the women to anoint Jesus' body when he died. By bringing it as a gift to Jesus, the wise men foretold his suffering and death.

### **Reflection, Excerpted from God's Word – Daily Reflections - St. Paul's Publications**

We all like to travel and enjoy the new experiences which we encounter on the way. Travelling can bring surprises, disruptions and challenges. We know the joy and relief of arriving at our destination. We can identify with the Magi because we, like them, are travellers and searchers. Their long journey was coming to an end. They saw the star which for them was a sign of hope. They may have been searching for a sign for many years. Perhaps they recognised the sign of God's presence in the star, leading them to the Infant Jesus.

*"The Magi set out because of a deep desire which prompted them to leave everything and begin a journey. It was as though they had always been waiting for that star."*

Pope Benedict XVI

**What signs of God's presence do I notice in my own life?  
Do they fill me with joy?**

**How can I be a beacon of hope and love in my school community?**

**How can I support others in their journey of faith?**

*Lord, we ask for your wisdom, for your strength and power to be constantly present within us.  
We pray you would make us strong and courageous as we travel together on the road ahead.*

## 7 January - The Baptism of the Lord



“Jesus is anointed with the Spirit and his power. He is proclaimed Messiah. He now goes about doing good, working the signs that make him known as Servant of God. He is the one who brings good news to the poor and tells of salvation. Through our Baptism each one of us is ordered to the life of Christ- Priest, Prophet and King - and the Father looks on us with favour.”

**Liturgical Calendar for Ireland 2024.**

The feast of the Baptism of the Lord marks the end of the Christmas season. On this day we recall when John the Baptist baptized Jesus in the river Jordan. This event marks the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, but more than that, it reveals His identity as the beloved Son of God. In this act of baptism, God publicly affirms Jesus, not only as His Son but as the One in whom He finds joy and pleasure.

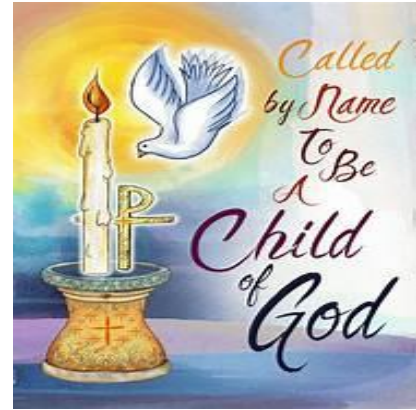
The heart of this feast is found in the Gospel for the Baptism of the Lord. **(Mark 1:7-11)**. John the Baptist, a prophetic figure preparing the way, baptizes Jesus in the Jordan River. This moment is transformative not only for Jesus but for all of humanity. As Jesus emerges from the water, the heavens open, and the Spirit descends like a dove, a scene rich in symbolism and meaning.

The Baptism of the Lord invites us into a deep reflection on our identity and calling as baptized Christians. We are reminded of God's abundant invitation to us, a call that Jesus Himself answered in the Jordan River. We are affirmed as God's beloved, just as Jesus was, and this identity shapes our way of living.



The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord challenges us to reflect on our own Baptism and its significance in our lives.

*This is a good day to think about our own Baptism.*



*Is Baptism significant for us as Christians?*

*What does it mean to be baptized? What impact has it on my life?*

*How does our baptismal call to action manifest in our everyday lives?*

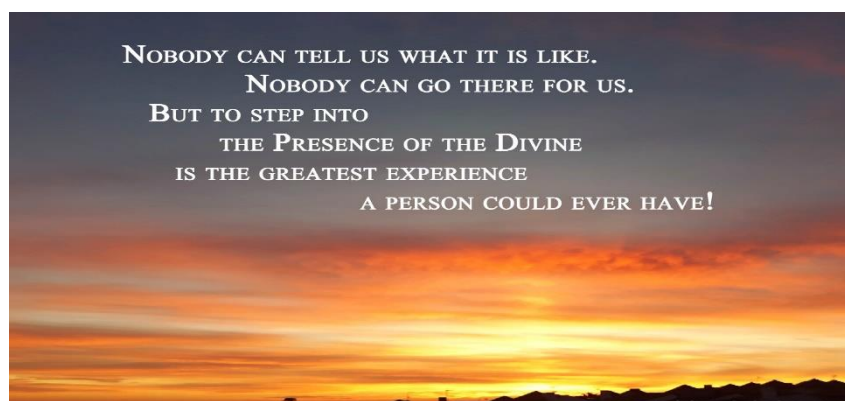
The feast offers us an opportunity to be more committed to our Christian calling.

Just as Jesus was baptized by John, Christians are baptized into Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. This sacrament is seen as an entry into the Christian community and a sharing in the life of Christ.

*How can we proudly express our faith in God through membership of the Church?*

The feast of the Baptism of the Lord reminds us of our identity and that like Jesus, we are members of God's family through the gift of baptism. We are called to be bearers of the Good News of Jesus Christ by our transparent Christian lives of love, service and forgiveness.

This moment in the Jordan River is not just about Jesus; it speaks to each one of us. In our baptism, we too are claimed as God's beloved children. The voice that declared Jesus as beloved echoes through time, calling each one of us into a special relationship with God. This affirmation of identity is crucial; it reminds us that before we do anything, we are loved and cherished by God. *May the grace we receive at Baptism help us to experience the presence of God within us and to acknowledge our own dignity as God's children in thought, word and action.*



## Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 18 - 25 January



The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is an annual ecumenical celebration. Christians around the world are invited to pray for the unity of all Christians, to reflect on scripture together, to participate in jointly-organized ecumenical services, and to share fellowship.

The theme for 2024 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is based on a text from the Gospel of St. Luke.

*“You shall love the Lord your God...and your neighbour as yourself.”*

**Luke 10:27**

The theme, leading to the parable of the Good Samaritan helps us to recognise that the love of Christ unites all Christians and is stronger than their divisions.

### **Modern Parables - Good Samaritan - Revisited - You Tube**

[https://www.bing.com/ck/a?!&&p=f2af2322b714b4dbJmldHM9MTcwMzgwODAwMCZpZ3VpZD0xZGVlODkyMS1iOGY0LTZhNDItMWJmYy05YWMyYjlmNDZlNjYmaW5zaWQ9NTlwMg&ptn=3&ver=2&hsh=3&fclid=1deb8921-b8f4-6a42-1bfc-9ac9b9f46b66&psq=modern+parables+good+samaritan+you+tube&u=a1aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cueW91dHVlZS5jb20vd2FOY2g\\_dj1KRlotRGI3Y2p0TQ&ntb=1](https://www.bing.com/ck/a?!&&p=f2af2322b714b4dbJmldHM9MTcwMzgwODAwMCZpZ3VpZD0xZGVlODkyMS1iOGY0LTZhNDItMWJmYy05YWMyYjlmNDZlNjYmaW5zaWQ9NTlwMg&ptn=3&ver=2&hsh=3&fclid=1deb8921-b8f4-6a42-1bfc-9ac9b9f46b66&psq=modern+parables+good+samaritan+you+tube&u=a1aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cueW91dHVlZS5jb20vd2FOY2g_dj1KRlotRGI3Y2p0TQ&ntb=1)

### **Resources**

Material for the Week is jointly published by the Dicastery for Promoting Unity and the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches. [www.christianunity.va](http://www.christianunity.va)

These source texts have been further adapted and added to by the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and are available in English and Irish at <https://ctbi.org.uk/>

**Lord Jesus, as we celebrate this Week for Christian Unity, we are reminded that you came on earth for all people and that all human beings are our neighbours. Help us to overcome the barriers and divisions which prevent us from loving them like ourselves. Grant to us O Lord, a new Spirit of Love and Solidarity that we may proclaim your good news to all of creation. We make this prayer through your Son, Jesus Christ, who with you and the Holy Spirit are one God, forever and ever. Amen**

## Catholic Schools Week



Catholic Schools 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.**

*Let us thank all those who teach in Catholic schools.  
Educating is an act of love; it is like giving life.  
Pope Francis*

### **Catholic Schools Week 2024 – Catholic Education Partnership**

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 – Post Primary Resources**

<https://www.bing.com/ck/a?!&p=43d2f3d9b21b9880JmItdHM9MTcwMzYzNTlwMCZpZ3VpZD0xZGVlODkyMS1iOGY0LTZhNDItMWJmYy05YWMSYjlmNDZiNjYmaW5zaWQ9NTE5Nw&pfn=3&ver=2&hsh=3&fclid=1deb8921-b8f4-6a42-1bfc-9ac9b9f46b66&psq=catholic+schools+week+2024&u=a1aHR0cHM6Ly9jYXRRob2xpY2VkdWNhdGlubi5pZS9jYXRRob2xpYy1zY2hvb2xzLXdldlZWstMjAyNC8&ntb=1>



## International Perspectives on Forming Catechists / International Perspectives in Catholic Educational Leadership

Joint initiatives between St. Kieran's College, Kilkenny and the University of  
Notre Dame Australia

28 Nov - 2 Dec, 2023

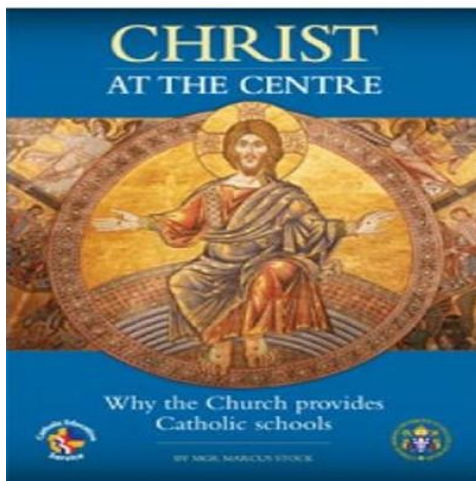
Archbishop Michael Miller C.S.B, (Canadian Archbishop) states there are five  
Essential Marks of Catholic Schools which give our schools a Catholic Identity.

### A Catholic School should be:

Inspired by a Supernatural Vision  
Founded on Christian Anthropology  
Animated by Communion and Community  
Imbued with a Catholic Worldview throughout the Curriculum  
Sustained by Gospel Values

These are measurable benchmarks, forming the backbone and inspiring the mission of  
every Catholic school.

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### The Catholic Church provides schools to

- Be part of the Church's mission
- Provide a broad and balanced curriculum so that all can "Reach Full Potential"
- Assist parents as the prime educators
- Give service to society; civic duty



## *To Conclude:*

### *At the beginning of a New Year*

Des Hayden

*“Let us be aware that setting out on a journey as we begin a New Year implies movement and change... as in every journey, we can only start from where we are.*

*We bring our experiences of the past with us but we look forward to the days ahead, not knowing what will happen on the way, not knowing the final destination, but knowing that our journey will change us, that we will end up in a place different from where we started.”*

This is where we are asked to trust, to take the step forward into the unknown believing that God will guide us; trusting that even though we cannot see the distant scene, *“one step is enough for me.”* **St. John Henry Newman**

Keep thou my feet;  
I do not ask to see  
The distant scene  
one step enough for me.

-Lead, Kindly Light Hymn

May your journey through this New Year be a safe one. May it lead you to discover God in unexpected places and to discover the joy of accompanying each other along new paths and sharing your gifts at ever deeper levels with your students, your colleagues and families.

**In these troubled times of disharmony and perhaps in some difficult circumstances of our daily lives, we need to live with the eyes of faith and join in hope with one another and begin anew. Let us together strive to make a positive difference each day in our schools and in our wider communities.**

*May we be instruments of kindness, compassion and love to one another throughout 2024.*

## A New Year ... A New Start ... Under God's Protection

### Beannacht/Blessing by John O'Donohue

On the day when  
The weight deadens  
On your shoulders  
And you stumble,  
May the clay dance  
To balance you.

And when your eyes  
Freeze behind  
The grey window  
And the ghost of loss  
Gets into you,  
May a flock of colours,  
Indigo, red, green  
And azure blue,  
Come to awaken in you  
A meadow of delight.

When the canvas frays  
In the currach of thought  
And a stain of ocean  
Blackens beneath you,  
May there come across the waters  
A path of yellow moonlight  
To bring you safely home.

May the nourishment of the  
earth be yours,  
May the clarity of light be yours,  
May the fluency of the ocean  
be yours,  
May the protection of the  
ancestors be yours.

And so may a slow  
Wind work these words  
Of love around you,  
An invisible cloak  
To mind your life.

### Reflection

*May God's Spirit of Life be with us, life to be cherished and nurtured and lived to its fullness.*

*May God's Spirit of Wisdom be with us, guiding us to seek always with the eyes of faith and truth.*

*May God's Spirit of Peace be with us, guiding us always towards the way of peace.*

*May God's Spirit surround us with Light.*

*May God's Spirit open us to the mystery of today.*

*Togha sláinte san athbhliain díbh go léir,  
Sr. Bernadette and Sr. Concepta*

