

Education Secretariat



Post - Primary Diocesan Advisers Blog - December 2024

Dear Chaplains and R.E. Teachers,

It is December, the month when we celebrate the Birth of Christ. The feast of the Birth of Christ is drawing closer. December heralds the season of Advent. This is a time of waiting, of longing, of hope. We can't wait so Christmas begins earlier every year, undermining the whole purpose of Advent which is the time of waiting and watching for Jesus to come. It is a time to open our hearts in welcome and a time to get ready.

It is surely no accident that Pope Francis has chosen to publish his fourth encyclical, "Dilexit Nos" - (He Loved Us) in recent weeks. Pope Francis hopes that this document will invite people to reflect on God's love and resonate with "a world that seems to have lost its heart." In it, he says that he believes that the Church needs to deepen love even more than it needs to reform its structures. Perhaps this is something that we as educators can reflect on... even more than good policy statements and efficient management protocols. The students entrusted to us need to experience the personal care, kindness and compassion that are inherent qualities in any follower of Jesus.

The Irish Catholic Bishops Conference has also issued an important pastoral letter which touches on a similar theme... a love that welcomes the stranger and in doing so welcomes the Christ. "A hundred Thousand Welcomes" is a call to action to each and every one of us to welcome immigrants and to strive to help all newcomers belong to the life of the community. It is a call to reject voices that sow division. It challenges those in authority to provide more resources to address local social and economic shortages that have been neglected for too long. I hope that the key points from both Pope Francis' Encyclical and our own Bishops Pastoral letter will provide food for reflection.

May we, like Mary "treasure these things in our hearts" and may they bear fruit in generous open hearts ready to welcome the Christ Child when he knocks on our door.

All of the team in the Education Secretariat join us in wishing you a blessed Advent and a Happy Christmas.

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December: For Pilgrims of Hope



We pray that this Jubilee Year strengthen our faith, helping us to recognize the Risen Christ in our daily lives, and that it may transform us into pilgrims of Christian hope.

The “O” in Hope by Luci Shaw

Luci Shaw's poem celebrates the ordinary things of life within the framework of God's abiding love:

“Love forms a circle that holds us all together, safe in the centre of the loving heart of GOD.”

Hope has this lovely vowel at its throat.
Think how we cry “Oh!” as the sun’s circle clears the ridge above us on the hill.
O is the shape of a mouth singing, and of a cherry as it lends its sweetness to the tongue. “Oh!” say the open eyes at unexpected beauty and then, “Wow!”
O is endless as a wedding ring, a round pool, the shape of a drop’s widening on the water’s surface. O is the centre of love, and O was in the invention of the wheel.
It multiplies in the zoo, doubles in a door that opens, grows in the heart of a green wood, in the moon, and in the endless looping circuit of the planets. Mood carries it, and books and holy fools, cotton, a useful tool and knitting wool. I love the doubled O in good and cosmos, and how O revolves, solves, is in itself complete, unbroken, a circle enclosing us, holding us all together, everything both in centre and circumference zeroing in on the Omega that finds its ultimate centre in the name of God.

In Advent, we
proclaim and
celebrate our hope
and our trust that
our God is faithful:
that the Lord will
come again and
again to rescue us,
to heal us, to
console us, to be
with all that he has
called into life.

Archbishop Dermot Farrell



@dublindiocese

Advent Prayer Moments – Fr. Pat O'Donoghue

- **Advent** is a season for being alert, for life-giving preparation, for openness to being moulded and patient waiting for what we are about to celebrate.
- **Advent** is about slowing down, taking a step back and seeking a quiet time away from the frenzy and the unrealistically high expectations of a material Christmas.
- **Advent** calls us back to our core, our centre and re-connects us to who we really are - people of hope, peace, joy and love.
- **Advent** offers time for introspection, for listening, for resetting and rebooting our lives in preparation for what is about to happen.
- **Advent** is a journey, a pilgrimage through time... setting out on a journey implies movement and change...as in every journey, we can only start from where we are...

**“Advent is a journey towards Bethlehem.
May we let ourselves be drawn by the light of God made man.”**

Pope Francis

*Advent
begins*

During each Sunday of the Advent season, we focus on one of the four virtues Jesus brings us: Hope, Love, Joy and Peace.

Gospel readings

1 December - First Sunday of Advent - Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

8 December - Second Sunday of Advent - Luke 3:1-6

9 December - Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary - Luke 1:26-38

15 December - Third Sunday of Advent - Luke 3:10-18

22 December - Fourth Sunday of Advent - Luke 1:39-44

Advent is the liturgical season that most closely resonates with where we are at the moment in our journey together as Church. We are the Community of Jesus’ Disciples. We are a people that wait in hope for the fulfilment of God’s promise which continues to emerge among us. With Jesus, we wait in the wilderness of our personal and social uncertainties and with him we learn how to place our trust in the promise of a loving God, a promise made known to us through the Word made Flesh. We watch and wait. We watch and wait in anticipation. We watch and wait in hope.

Watching and Waiting are inevitable and even necessary aspects of human life, are not something that most of us relish. We wait in lines in order to pay our bills, to be served at restaurants, to be assisted in a bank, at stop signs and traffic lights, at amusement parks, or to see a play or a film. We must also wait for flowers to grow and bloom, for babies to be born, for wounds to heal, for bread to rise, for cheese to age, for children to mature, for friends to call, for love to deepen. Statisticians have estimated that in a lifetime of 70 years, the average person spends at least three years waiting! The readings during Advent invite us to wait for the rebirth of the Lord in our lives with repentant hearts and renewed lives. Advent is the time for us to renew our lives through prayer, reconciliation and sharing our blessings with others.



**Journeying with
Deep Hope**

**Watching and
Waiting.....**

Advent Prayer: In Solidarity with the Sufferings of the World

The Vincentian Family Office invites you to join in this common prayer.

As we enter the season of Advent, nothing urges our hearts more than to pray for peace in our world and to pray in solidarity for those who suffer.

Week One: “Comfort, Comfort My People” (Is.40)

For those whose daily survival has been affected by natural disasters and the need for our consciousness of the earth’s resources, we pray:

Give comfort and consolation to those who live among devastation and destruction, O Creator God. Provide them with their basic necessities and strengthen our resolve to care for our world.

Week Two: “Let every valley be lifted up and every mountain be made low.”

(Is.40)

For those whose lives are threatened by the ravages of war, the threats of gangs, and the violence surrounding them, we pray:

O Prince of Peace, fill the hearts of all people with your peace. Convert our hearts and minds to your way of love.

Week Three: “Let the uneven ground become a plain and the rugged terrain a broad valley.” (Is.40)

For those who are displaced from their homeland as they seek refuge and shelter, amidst their fears of oppression and terrorism, we pray:

O Lord of Light, overwhelmed by the tragedies of human suffering, we seek your truth and guidance as we search for ways to advocate for justice and peace.

Week Four: “Behold the Lord will come, The Everlasting God, and The Creator of the Ends of the Earth.” (Is.40)

For those who bear the burden of loss: loss of loved ones, loss of land and home, loss of employment, loss of health, and loss of freedom, we pray:

O Lord of Wisdom, tend to those whose hearts are grieving.

Give to our brothers and sisters unfailing confidence in your mercy and tender compassion.



ADVENT CALENDAR FOR YOUNG PEOPLE, YEAR C, DECEMBER 2024

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
<p>December 1 Jeremiah 33:14-16</p> <p>Reflect on the hope and anticipation of the coming of Jesus.</p>	<p>December 2 Matthew 8:5-11</p> <p>Reflect about the power of faith and trust in Jesus.</p>	<p>December 3 Isaiah 2:1-5</p> <p>Reflect on how we can work towards peace in our lives.</p>	<p>December 4 Isaiah 25:6-10</p> <p>Reflect on God's promise of a feast for all people.</p>	<p>December 5 Matthew 7:21, 24-27</p> <p>Reflect on building our lives on the rock of Jesus' teachings to ensure our faith is strong.</p>	<p>December 6 Matthew 9:27-31</p> <p>Reflect on the ways we can seek healing in our lives. Jesus heals the blind.</p>	<p>December 7 Psalms 146:1-6</p> <p>Reflect on the healing power of Jesus. Happy are all who hope in the Lord.</p>
<p>December 8 Luke 3:1-6</p> <p>Reflect on how we can prepare our hearts for Jesus.</p>	<p>December 9 Isaiah 35:1-10</p> <p>Reflect about the joy Jesus brings into our lives.</p>	<p>December 10 Isaiah 40:1-11</p> <p>Reflect on how we can share God's comfort, joy and hope with others.</p>	<p>December 11 Matthew 11:28-30</p> <p>Reflect on how Jesus brings rest and peace to our lives.</p>	<p>December 12 Isaiah 41:13-20</p> <p>Reflect on how God's help manifests in your life.</p>	<p>December 13 Isaiah 48:17-19</p> <p>Reflect on how you can better follow God's guidance and teaching.</p>	<p>December 14 Matthew 17:10-13</p> <p>Reflect on the ways God sends messengers to prepare us for Christ.</p>
<p>December 15 Zephaniah 3:14-20</p> <p>Reflect on how we can live out joy in our daily lives.</p>	<p>December 16 Numbers 24:2-7, 15-17</p> <p>Reflect on the prophecies that point to Jesus.</p>	<p>December 17 Genesis 49:2, 8-10</p> <p>Reflect on prophecies that reinforce your faith in Jesus.</p>	<p>December 18 Jeremiah 23:5-8</p> <p>Reflect on Jesus as the fulfilment of God's promises.</p>	<p>December 19 Judges 13:2-7, 24-25</p> <p>Reflect on the ways God prepares us for His plans.</p>	<p>December 20 Isaiah 7:10-14</p> <p>Reflect on the meaning of "God with us."</p>	<p>December 21 Luke 1:5-25</p> <p>Reflect on how we can be forerunners in preparing the way for the Lord.</p>
<p>December 22 Luke 1:39-45</p> <p>Reflect on the joy and support shared between Mary and Elizabeth.</p>	<p>December 23 Malachi 3:1-4, 23-24</p> <p>Reflect on how you can be a messenger of God's love.</p>	<p>December 24 2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-12, 14, 16</p> <p>Reflect on the fulfilment of God's promises in Jesus.</p>	<p>December 25 Luke 2:1-15-20</p> <p>Reflect on the birth of Jesus.</p> 	<p align="center">★ CHRISTMAS TIME. NATIVITY OF THE LORD.</p>	<p align="center">CELEBRATE THE JOY AND PEACE OF CHRIST'S BIRTH.</p>	

This is an Advent Calendar for Year C. It is designed to guide young people through the Advent Season. It will help them engage daily with Scripture and the Advent journey, leading them to a deeper understanding and experience of the season.

It reflects on the themes of hope, preparation and the coming of Jesus Christ.

WEEK 1
Hope

Reminds us...
Jesus is coming

Bible Verse
Romans
15:12-13

WEEK 2
Peace

Reminds us...
To prepare the way
of the Lord

Bible Verse
Luke 2:14

Bible Verse
Luke 2:10

Reminds us...
The joy at the coming
birth of Jesus

Bible Verse
Luke 2:11

Reminds us...
of the gift of
God's love, Jesus.

WEEK 3
Joy

WEEK 4
Love

As we journey through Advent, we can reflect on some of the above Gospel readings and Scripture references to deepen our faith this Christmas.

Saint Mother Teresa, Calcutta

“At this Christmas when Christ comes, will He find a warm heart? Mark the season of Advent by loving and serving the others with God’s own love and concern.”

**Joy is prayer; Joy is strength;
Joy is love;
Joy is a net of love by which you can catch the heart of each person. Amen**



Advent Wreath



The Advent wreath began as a German and Scandinavian home devotional practice used to mark the four weeks of Advent. Families would light a candle for each past week and the current week at their dinner or evening time of prayer.

During Advent, as we prepare to welcome Jesus our light into the centre of our being, we are invited to share his light, his goodness with family, friends and all in our schools. One of the outstanding images of is that of the Advent wreath. Its circular shape with no beginning and no end symbolises the eternity of God. In the midst of the winter bleakness, its evergreen leaves remind us of the everlasting and never failing love of God.

The four candles represent the four weeks of Advent.

Purple is the colour of prayer and penance. Pink represents joy.

The lighting of the first candle symbolizes expectation, while the second symbolizes hope, the third pink candle joy and the fourth purity. On Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, we also light the white Christ Candle. This candle represents the light that Jesus brought into the world when he was born a little baby, God in the flesh, light of God, coming into the world.

The candles of the Advent Wreath burn brighter with each passing week announcing the coming of the One who is Prince of Light and Light of the World.

May our capacity to give and receive love expand as we draw nearer to Christmas and the birth of Christ.

The Jesse Tree is a statement of faith and was developed in response to questions about Jesus. The Jesse Tree is one of those long-standing Christmas traditions and is named after the Biblical figure Jesse, an ancestor of Jesus.



The tree is a reference to the passage from Isaiah 11:1,
“A shoot shall come out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.”

Using the prophets, the ancestry of Jesus is traced from the first day of creation to the birth of Jesus. The practice of the Jesse Tree is recorded from early Middle Ages and is even found in stained glass windows of cathedrals of the time. People were illiterate, so images on stained glass windows were used to teach the Bible in order to trace the ancestry of Jesus up His birth. One such cathedral is in the Cathedral of Chartres.

The tradition of the Jesse Tree, rooted in the Bible is significant in a lot of ways.

The symbols used in the Jesse Tree show Jesus’ ancestry as well as some of the prophecies foretelling and identifying the Messiah.

How Does the Jesse Tree Work ?

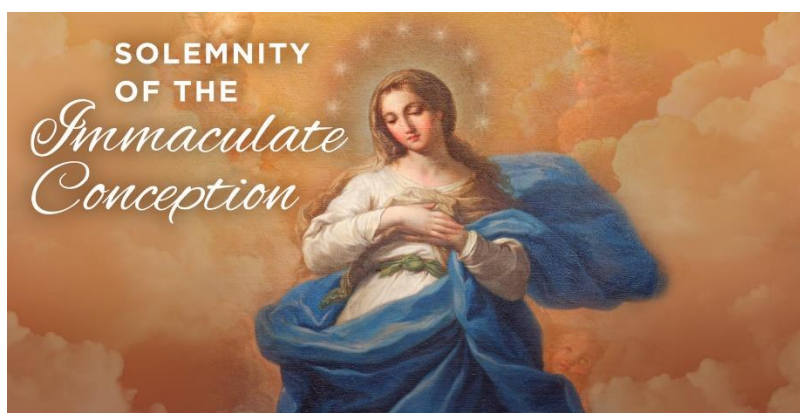
The ancestry of Jesus tells us that Jesus came from a long line of prophets – from Abraham to Moses to David, through the maternal (Mary’s) side. Promises made to various prophets are fulfilled by Jesus – the Messiah would come from the House of David; a shoot (Jesus) would come from the stump of Jesse (David’s father). In churches and indeed in some of our schools, you will see the Jesse Tree, the genealogy of Jesus and the symbols of persons from Adam and Eve to Mary the mother of Jesus. Jesse was one of them as he was the father of David who lived in Bethlehem. People were awaiting the coming of the Saviour. Isaiah was their most famous prophet. He foretold the most important events. He brought them comfort and hope in the promised redeemer. He explained that the Saviour would end injustice. He would dispel darkness and proclaim a kingdom of peace and grace for everyone.



Let us ask Jesus, our Saviour during Advent to come to our aid and bring joy and peace:

Come to us, Lord Jesus. Amen

The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary



The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary is transferred to the 9th December 2024 because the 2nd Sunday of Advent takes precedence. It is one of the most important feast of the liturgical calendar and it is a Holy Day of Obligation.

As part of God's plan, Mary, the mother of His Son, Jesus was conceived free from original sin. She was preserved free from the moment of her conception from original sin. God gave her this special grace to prepare her to be the mother of Jesus. We celebrate the feast of the Immaculate Conception usually on December 8th to honour Mary's purity and God's plan for her. It shows us the importance of Mary in our faith and how she is a model of saying 'yes' to God's will. The feast of the Immaculate Conception is usually celebrated on December 8th to honour Mary's purity and God's plan for her. It shows us the importance of Mary in our faith and how she is a model of saying 'yes' to God's will. The feast is significant because it reminds us that we too, like Mary might be able to say "yes" to all God wants to do in our lives. It challenges us to be open to the Spirit of God, so that we too might be able to give birth to peace, love, joy and hope in our hearts.

Catherine Labourè joined the Daughters of Charity in 1830. She experienced visions of Mary in the chapel at the Rue du Bac, Paris. In one, she saw a picture of the virgin standing on a globe. With her were the words " O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee." ON the opposite side of the image appeared a cross, two hearts, 12 stars, and a letter M.

The Miraculous Medal

In 1854, Mary's Immaculate Conception became dogma. Pope Pius IX declared "that the doctrine which holds that the Blessed Virgin, at the first instance of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin, has been revealed by God, and therefore should firmly and constantly be believed by all the faithful."

Dogma of Faith

... **Mary is your Mother and she pours life into you – the life which is her Son. Then she does not merely fill you, but she reaches out through you.**

Extract from *Mary Shall Reign* by Frank Duff

Some Teachings on Mary:

- **Mary is attentive to the Word of God.**
- **Mary is completely open to God.**
- **Mary leads the way for us.**
- **Mary waits.**
- **Every event in Mary's life is a sign of God's presence and she responds in faith.**
- **Mary shows us the paths towards God.**
- **Mary is a woman rooted in reality and she responds.**
- **Mary is present for others.**
- **Mary stood by Jesus in his darkest moments.**



Some Questions for Reflection:

- **Who is Mary for us, for our schools and our families?**
 - **What does Mary mean to you personally?**
 - **How do you relate to her?**

Litany to Mary – Response: Pray for us

Mary, the mother of Jesus

"The angel said to her, 'You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, ... and of his kingdom there will be no end.' ... Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her."

(Luke 1:31-33, 38)



Mary so accepting



Mary, Mother of Jesus



Mary so happy



Mary so patient



Mary so sad

Mary so worried

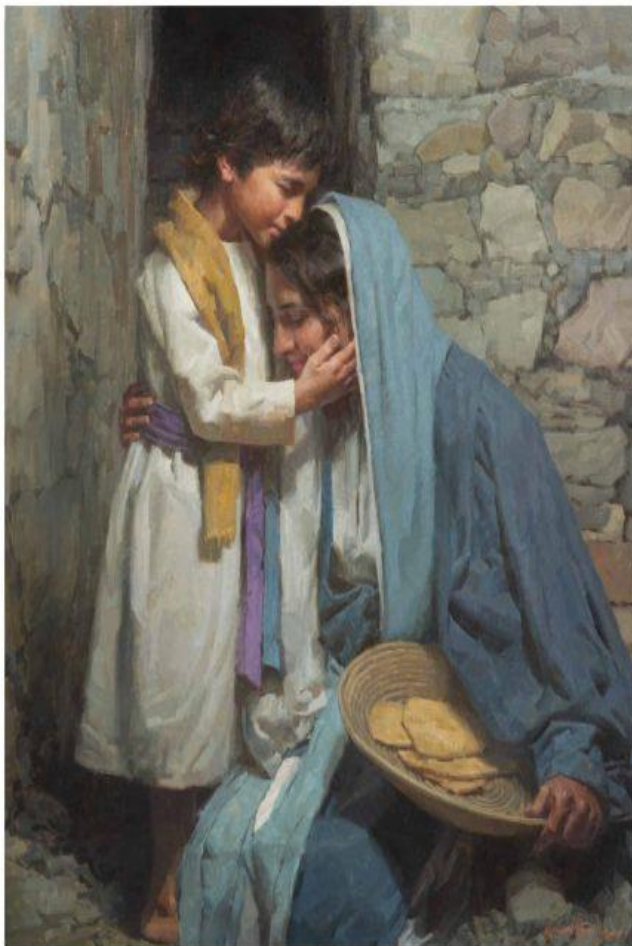
Mary so tired

Mary so busy

Mary so puzzled

Mary so excited

Mary so wonderful



Kissed by God
By William Boufford

**Mary,
Kissed by God**

**Mary,
Queen of Heaven**

‘We must ensure the next generation believe in God’

The Irish Catholic, October 24, 2024

Archbishop Eamon Martin, Archbishop of Armagh:

...“But remember the Faith, and the passing on of the Faith, is the really important thing, not the buildings, not the structures, but ensuring that the next generation of Irish people believe in God ...that is the reality we are facing.”

“Most of our religious beliefs and convictions are second-hand. They came from our parents, our teachers, and the community in which we grew up. We didn’t have to work out anything for ourselves. This is especially true of us Catholics. We didn’t have to make too many decisions because we grew up in the faith.






That was fine for years ago but it will not do for our time. It is no longer enough to be born into the faith. A second hand faith is an inadequate faith. We need to make faith our own. We have to find meaning in it through personal experience if it is to come alive for us. Let us be so grateful for the faith that we have. We would be lost without it.”

Dom Augustine McGregor, Cistercian

Faith is not always easy. It is difficult to have faith in something you can’t touch, see, smell, taste or feel. But that is exactly what God asks from us. We are called to have faith and trust in a God we have never seen. Faith is believing in God and in what Jesus has told us.

The apostles said, *“Increase our faith.”* (Luke 17:5) Growth in faith is not an automatic gift. It takes patience and humility and a willingness to live out our Christian values. Increased faith also comes with listening to God’s word, spending time in prayer, reaching out to others, especially those who are experiencing poverty in its various forms and in receiving the sacraments.

Questions for Reflection:

-  Am I like a little child in faith?
-  What and whom has God used to reveal to me the gift of my faith?
-  Can I open and make myself present to God?
-  Am I ready to really follow Jesus or do I merely admire him at a distance?
-  What is my response to Jesus today?

We are invited to make a response of faith to the person of Jesus. We are called to enter into a deep, personal relationship with Jesus, every day and to imbibe into our lives the virtues and values that Jesus lived. It is by responding to Jesus, encountering him as a friend and a travelling companion that our lives will be transformed.



Pope John Paul II's words to the young people of Ireland in 1979 are just as rich and important for us 45 years later in 2024!

"God has his plan for the Church in Ireland, but he needs you to carry it out. What the Church will be in the future depends on your free cooperation with God's race."

Christ has the answers to your questions and the key to history; he has the power to uplift hearts.

He keeps calling you, he keeps inviting you, he who is the way, and the truth, and the life. (Jn. 1:16) Yes, Christ calls you, but he calls you in truth. His call is demanding, because he invites you to let ourselves be "captured" by him completely, so that your whole lives will be seen in a different light."

Words from Pope Francis to Youth at World Youth Day

"Don't be afraid to open your heart to him and ask him to renew the fire of his love, so that you can embrace life with all its frailty and flaws, but also its grandeur and beauty. May he help you to discover the beauty of being alive."

We are invited to walk with young people on the journey of faith. We must support, encourage and nurture the spark that is within them. This means creating spaces where they feel welcomed and valued, where their voices are heard and where they can explore their faith in meaningful ways. It also means that we must be open and willing to learn from them.

Pope Francis tells us the more we share our faith, the more it deepens within us.

***Young People are the future of the church
but they are also the present.***

Guidelines for Planning Prayer with Students

When planning prayer with students aim to:

- Create a place for prayer
- Choose a particular theme or invite students to do so
- Keep to small groups, to personalise the experience
 - Keep it short and keep it moving
 - Keep it simple, clear and uncluttered
- Begin with something that draws everyone together
- Move to a more deeper understanding of the particular theme and conclude with a response

Structure for Prayer

- ❖ Gather
- ❖ Focus - some activity
- ❖ Celebrate - can be a song/hymn

Gather: Play recorded music

Focus: Let us become aware of the presence of Jesus among us, symbolised by the light of the candle. Acknowledge the presence of those present. Invite students in the silence of their hearts to talk to Jesus about whatever they wish. Play some music and spend a few minutes enjoying the stillness and the presence of God.

Theme for Prayer Time: Be Still

Resources: Plain coloured cloth, large candle, stones, shells and sign "Be Still" with some music.

Introduction: Invite students to make themselves as still as the items on the sacred space. "We can appear to be as still as the stones, shells, at least on the outside but we can't be that still inside. Blood and oxygen are rushing around our bodies, thoughts and feelings too."

- **What thoughts and feelings are rushing around your body?**
- **What is on your mind today?**
- **Catch your thoughts and feelings?**
- **Put your thoughts and feelings on the sacred space.**

- Imagine Jesus is sitting next to you.
- Talk to Jesus about your thoughts and feelings.
- Take a pause.
- What does Jesus say to you?
- Another pause
- Open your eyes



Reflection - Read slowly by a different voice

God, our Father loves us.
 He is patient, kind,
 He sees the good in us and
 Forgets the wrong that we do.
 He trusts us and has great hopes for us.
 He will stand by us in good times and bad.

Celebrate - with song of choice

God is concerned with what is in our hearts, what we are like inside. He does not judge us by how we appear on the outside.

Closing Prayer: God our Father, You made us in your image. Help us to see the good inside ourselves and in others. Do not let us be fooled by outward appearances. Help us to really get to know each other, through sharing and listening by our acceptance in a spirit of faith and trust.

Prayer and Guided Meditation

There is an energy and a stream of grace available to us when we pray. Sometimes, not often, we will experience this while we open ourselves to God's presence. Usually, we will experience it at other moments in our lives. Whether we feel it or not this loving energy which envelops us is there for us.

How do we help students to access prayer in their lives?

How do we teach them to be aware?

How do we help them to pray?

"I like to speak with Jesus about all that I am living and feeling."

Blessed Carlo Acutis

I suggest that this Advent you might lead a group of students in a guided meditation and I offer a very simple one below.



Meditation

The Wedding at Cana

(15 Minutes)

“Do whatever he tells you.”

*“He let his glory be seen,
and
his disciples believed in him”*

Invite the group to sit quietly and in a comfortable position.

Encourage them to close their eyes and to become aware of the sounds around them.

Ask the students to become aware of their breathing.

With every breath in, breathe in the love of God.

With every breath out, breathe out the worries that weigh them down.

Read the Gospel passage slowly. **John 2:1-12**

Imagine the scene.

Watch the bride and groom. Look at their friends. Listen to the music.
Sense the atmosphere.

Observe the waiters coming over to say the wine vats are empty.

See the embarrassment of the bride and her family.

Have you ever felt embarrassed in front of your friends?

Notice the empty vats. See Mary asking her Son to help them.



Have you ever experienced an emptiness in your life?

Is there anything you need to help you to live more fully?

Ask Mary to whisper it to her Son.

Open yourself to receive that gift.

Thank God for his kindness and generosity in your life.

Finish with the prayer - Glory be to the Father...



What are you expecting for Christmas?

Zechariah and Mary didn't expect to have a baby in old age.

Mary didn't expect to become mother to the Son of God.

Joseph didn't expect his young bride to be pregnant.

Herod didn't expect to be disturbed by the word of the Child.

The shepherds didn't expect to see angels in a field.

The Magi didn't expect to find the Saviour in a manger.

The real message of Christmas is about what we don't expect.

That's what we ought to be looking for, what we don't expect because that's the way God is.

God is a God of surprises.

We never know where or when they are coming?

John Killinger

Christmas is about being thankful for the gift God has given,
which is the birth of Jesus in our world.



When creating our Crib.....

“Created things should be a reflection of eternal beauty which entices us to love God, the source and origin of all things.

They should form a ladder which makes it easy for us to ascend towards God and to achieve unity with Him.” Antonio Cardinal Bacci

Blessing Prayer of the Crib Figures



Loving God, you loved us so much

That you sent Jesus your Son to be our brother and Saviour.

Bless all these images in our crib.



May they be a sign of your presence in our school and in our homes.

Lord Jesus, give your blessing to all who will be with us this Christmas,

Especially our family and friends.

Bless those who cannot gather with us this Christmas too,



And keep us all safe in your love.



Help us to share the joy of knowing you,

And to give generously to those who have nothing to share this Christmas.

We ask this through Christ, Our Lord. Amen.

Family Christmas Prayer



Loving God, during this season of Christmas, we ask your blessing on our family.

Let Mary's openness to your wondrous ways inspire us to place our trust in you.

Let Joseph's courage provide us with hope during times of anxiety and uncertainty. Let Jesus' life ignite all families with a spirit of light and love.

May the grace that encircled the Holy Family widen to encircle our family this Christmas.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

St. Mary's Pro-Cathedral Crib

A list of Year End Questions

What did I accomplish?

What did I experienced that made a difference to me?

What fun things did I do?

What were the most significant events of the past year?

What good decisions did I make and keep?

What was my greatest contribution?

Who did I rely on during the year?

What were my biggest challenges?

How have I experienced God's presence in my life?

For what am I particularly grateful?



Find

some time for quiet and reflection.



Review

your journey of the past year.



Think

of the possibilities that lie ahead.

DARE TO BE

When a new day begins, dare to smile gratefully.

When there is darkness, dare to be the first to shine a light.

When there is injustice, dare to be the first to condemn it.

When something seems difficult, dare to do it anyway.

When life seems to beat you down, dare to fight back.

When there seems to be no hope, dare to find some.

When you are feeling tired, dare to keep going.

When times are tough, dare to be tougher.

When love hurts you, dare to love again.

When someone is hurting, dare to help them heal.

When another is lost, dare to help them find the way.

When a friend falls, dare to be the first to extend a hand.

When cross paths with another, dare to make them smile.

**When you feel great, dare to help someone
else feel great too.**

**When the day has ended, dare to feel
as if you've done your best.**

Dare to be the best you can -

At all times, dare to be!

Steve Maraboli

At the End of the Year...

As this year draws to its end,
We give thanks for the gifts it brought
And how they became inlaid within
Where neither time nor tide can touch them.



Days when beloved faces shone brighter
With light from beyond themselves;
And from the granite of some secret sorrow
A stream of buried tears loosened.



We bless this year for all we have learned,
For all we have loved and lost
And for the quiet way it brought us
Nearer to our invisible destination.



John O' Donohue

Websites and Resources to Explore...



The Synodal Pathway

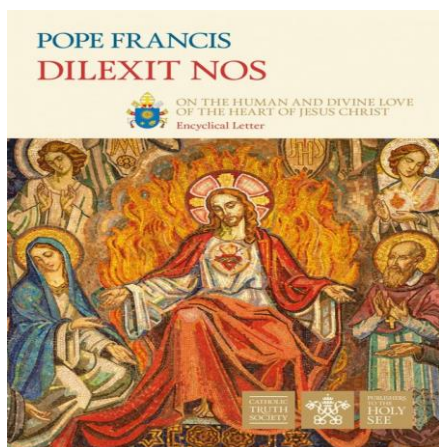


*Diocesan Gatherings in Spring 2025
leading to a national pre-synodal
gathering.*

- ❖ A working translation of the final document from the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod.
- ❖ The National Synthesis, Synthesis of the Consultation Ireland for the Diocesan Stage of the Universal Synod 2021 – 2023.

Website: www.synod.ie

The *Building Hope Pastoral Strategic Planning Resource 2025–2027*, is now available at <https://dublindiocese.ie/planning-resource/>.



In his latest encyclical,

Dilexit Nos,

Pope Francis invites us into a profound meditation on the human and divine love of Jesus Christ, expressed through the symbol of the Sacred Heart.

Archbishop Eamon Martin reflects on Pope Francis' new encyclical 'Dilexit Nos.'

Some Points from “Dilexit Nos”

***“All of us need to rediscover the importance of the heart.”
“Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the spring of life.”***

Pope Francis calls on all Catholics to rediscover the love and compassion found in the heart of Christ. The heart of Jesus offers the transformative power to heal the divisions that plague our world and our lives.

- Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.
- In a world that is frequently fragmented by superficial concerns linked to social media and consumerism we forget to nourish ourselves with the strength of the Eucharist ... in contrast, the heart represents the “profound unifying centre” for each person and society.
- Love has a missionary impulse... Christ’s heart not only leads us to the Father but sends us out to our brothers and sisters.

“In the heart of each person there is a mysterious connection between self-knowledge and openness to others.”

“Only by letting God’s love work within us can we hope to heal the world’s imbalances, which ultimately begin in the human heart.”

- The wounded heart of Christ is a wellspring of peace and unity.

“Christ is the wounded stag, wounded when we fail to let ourselves be touch by his love.” “In contemplating the heart of Jesus, we encounter not just a symbol but a relationship, one that calls us to trust, dialogue, and friendship.”

Bishops Brendan Leahy and Alan McGuckian welcome new Synod document.

The second month-long session of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod on Synodality was a Church gathering of 368 delegates of lay women and men, clergy and religious orders from all over the world, to...

“The outcomes of Synod 2021-2024 will be on God’s time and terms, not ours.”

Fr. Eamonn Conway, an Irish representative at the Synod - a non-voting theological expert

Catholic News – “Dilexit Nos” and New Synod Document

<https://www.bing.com/ck/a?!&p=00c49fa4852f5c4e1ba3a5c6df75e4494f7c222870c10760e534eade64e9c275JmltdHM9MTczMDY3ODQwMA&ptn=3&ver=2&hsh=4&fclid=3a5185c9-f561-6922-3a5d-9194f481683b&psq=catholicnews.ie&u=a1aHR0cHM6Ly9jYXRob2xpY25ld3MuaWUv&ntb=1>

[iCatholic.ie](http://Catholic.ie) has produced and posted a great selection of 12+ videos from the **Synod on Synodality** which are available on [YouTube](#), [Facebook](#) and [X](#) with videos on **Dilexit Nos** and the **Jubilee Year**.

**Bishops' Pastoral Letter on
Immigration:
A Hundred Thousand Welcomes?**



Irish bishops' have launched a new pastoral letter A Hundred Thousand Welcomes? The theme is about people welcoming the migrant in contemporary Ireland as modelled by the parable of the Good Samaritan. The pastoral letter encourages people to welcome the migrant and to reject voices that attempt to sow division and also calls on State authorities to provide more services at a community level. It explores the challenges and opportunities Ireland faces with rising immigration. Reflecting on Ireland's long tradition of hospitality and Christian values, the letter highlights how welcoming migrants aligns with both historical and faith-based principles. It urges communities to foster genuine inclusion and encounter, drawing inspiration from the Gospel and the Irish migrant experience.

<https://www.bing.com/ck/a?!&p=ee3ce41e0312f39e142277301b568f456fb2a66295b720b7a6f1fdeb297d5f6fJmltdHM9MTczMDC2NDgwMA&ptn=3&ver=2&hsh=4&fclid=3a5185c9-f561-6922-3a5d-9194f481683b&psq=irish+bishops+conference&u=a1aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuY2F0aG9saWNiaXNob3BzLmllLw&ntb=1>

The full text is available by clicking the link below.

<https://www.catholicbishops.ie/bishops-pastoral-letter-on-immigration-a-hundred-thousand-welcomes-downloadable-resources/>



**Global Researchers
Advancing Catholic Education**

**Report 5 GRACE (Ireland) National
Research Project 2021- 2024 Findings**

**Religious Education as an Expression of
Identity and Ethos in Catholic Schools
in Ireland**

Global Researchers Advancing Catholic Education (G.R.A.C.E.) is a new international research project and community of practice focused on Catholic education. G.R.A.C.E is a long-term collaboration between five partners: Boston College in the United States, the University of Notre Dame in Australia, Mary Immaculate College Limerick in Ireland, Saint Mary's University Twickenham in the United Kingdom and the International Office of Catholic Education in Rome.

<https://www.bing.com/ck/a?!&p=5d980cfc15a3d44dJmltdHM9MTcyODUxODQwMCZpZ3VpZD0zYTUxODVjOS1mNTYxLTY5MjltM2E1ZC05MTk0ZiQ4MTY4M2ImaW5zaWQ9NTIzOA&ptn=3&ver=2&hsh=3&fclid=3a5185c9-f561-6922-3a5d-9194f481683b&psq=GRACE+REPORT+Mary+immaculate+college++&u=a1aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuWjJlLnVsLmllL3NpdGVzL2RIZmF1bHQyZmlsZXZmvdXBsb2Fkcy8yMjIvR1JBQ0VfUkVQT1JUJTlWNV9XRUIucGRm&ntb=1>

‘Something More’ By Canon Farrell



‘Something More’ by Derek Jude Farrell contains songs of life and songs of faith, hope and love. Canon Farrell, parish priest in Garristown and Naul, sees his songs as gifts to be shared, and as personal expressions of his pastoral care and outreach.

The album is available on CD and on multiple online platforms, including Spotify, iTunes, Apple Music, YouTube Music, Deezer and Bandcamp.

The CD can be ordered, and more information can be found, at <http://derekjudefarrell.bandcamp.com>

Bello Duo - **When You Believe**



*“There can be miracles when you believe,
though Hope is frail it’s hard to kill....*

<https://www.bing.com/ck/a?!&&p=89ef4dc018afc0caff31bca3c45d3d00018e498ca33820305e3c7959b6acca79JmItDHM9MTczMjIzMzYwMA&ptn=3&ver=2&hsh=4&fclid=3a5185c9-f561-6922-3a5d-9194f481683b&u=a1L3ZpZGVVcy9yaXZlcnZpZXcvcvVsYXRlZHZpZGVVpP3E9QmVsbG8rRHVvK3lvdSt0dWJlK1doZW4reW91K2JlOGllMmUmbWlkPUY5QzQ4MTdBMDkyM0FEQ0VDMTQ2RjIjDNDGxN0EwOTIzQURDRUMxNDYmRk9STT1WSVJF&ntb=1>

If Jesus Comes Tomorrow

Song by *Owen Mac*

To Spend Some Time With You

<https://www.bing.com/search?q=owen+mac+if+jesus+comes+tomorrow&filters=dtbk:%22MCFsaXN0ZW4hb3ZlcnZpZXchYmYxZDFmZTYtOWNhZS0wN2Y0LWQ5MGItMDImMWQwNzExNDU1%22+sid:%22bf1d1fe6-9cae-07f4-d90b-09f1d0711455%22+tpint:%22f%22&FORM=DEPNAV>

What Are You Waiting For? A Lesson Plan on Advent



<https://young-catholics.com/5845/waiting-for-advent-lesson-plan/>



RE Lessons
This resource invites secondary schools to journey through the four weeks of Advent, reflecting on the Gospel and sharing in the stories of others around the world.

<https://caritas.org.au/resources/school-resources/advent-secondary/>

Catholic Resources by Date – Young Catholics

Make a Jesse Tree



Set up an Advent Table



<https://young-catholics.com/98/advent-ideas-make-a-jesse-tree/>

<https://young-catholics.com/131/advent-idea-set-up-an-advent-table/>

The Nativity - told by the McCormack family

Based on the writings of Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich
Directed, Produced Acted, Scripted, Music and Edited by the McCormack family.

"It is our hope that many will share The Nativity with schools and in their local community centres, with families, hospitals and prisons this Christmas." Thomas and Solvita McCormack

The film: https://youtu.be/S9kkT_XLXV0

The Trailer: https://youtu.be/Eua_fogFKD0

Scripture Union Ireland - Nua Films

How to access all series?

myNUA – Library

- Register for free on www.nuafilms.com to access all of the series and its supporting materials/downloadable resources – all in one place
- Be part of an online community of facilitators, leaders, teachers and youth workers.
- Get instant access to the new resource materials and videos

Carols with the Dublin Diocesan Music Group

Date: 16 December Time: 8.00 p.m.

Venue: Monastery of St. Alphonsus,
Drumcondra

In aid of: UNICEF

All are welcome!



Featuring a new Christmas Song, Blazing Sky.

Go to www.blazingsky.ie for preview and story of this moving new Christmas song.

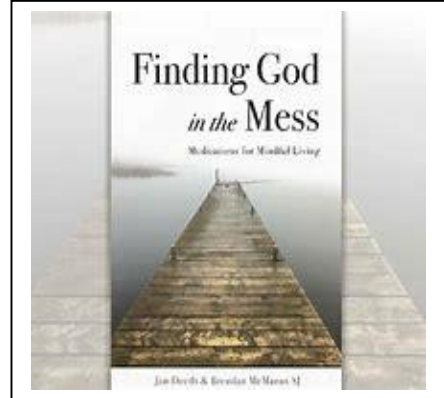
Finding God in the Mess

A Recording of the Webinar with Jim Deeds and Brendan McManus, SJ

October 16, 2024

Despite our best efforts, our lives can become chaotic and messy, leading us to feel as though God is distant and unavailable. Ignatian spirituality, however, teaches us that God holds us close, loves us, and desires the best for us at all times—even in the midst of chaos. This webinar is about how we can and must learn to pause prayerfully and recognize God's presence as an anchor amid life's storms.

The book is designed for group work. Loyola Press



<https://www.bing.com/ck/a?!&p=056bfc0c6e23a155dfa401ea0361e42c24a086d96ac61bc11570ca71912de0fJmItdHM9MTczMjA2MDgwMA&ptn=3&ver=2&hsh=4&fclid=3a5185c9-f561-6922-3a5d-9194f481683b&psq=Ignatius+SPirituality+finding+god+in+the+mess&u=a1aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuaWduYXRpYW5zcGlyeXR1YWxpdkhkuY29tL2ZpbmRpbmctZ29kLWluLXR0ZS1tZXNzLWVtd2ViaW5hci13aXRoLWppbS1kZWVkc31hbmQtYnJlbnRhbi1tY21hbnVzLXNqLw&ntb=1>

National Speech Writing Competition

act:onaid

Competition closes on January 24th 2025

Action Aid Ireland has launched a speech writing competition on important global themes open to young people, aged between 14 - 18 years old. It is aimed at encouraging students to explore the underlying causes of both local and global injustices, giving them a platform to share their perspectives. **Action Talks is a great opportunity for young people to develop writing skills and deepen their awareness of social issues. This year's focus is on the climate crisis, women leadership during emergencies and the role of Official Development Aid (ODA) and women rights' organisations.**

It is hoped that students will come up with innovative, well-researched, and creative speeches, using their own unique perspective. In addition, there is a €50 voucher prize for regional winners, with a first-place prize of a €500 voucher, with an additional €100 for their teacher.

Download Resources: For teachers resources are recommended for English, CSPE or Politics and Society classes. These resources include 3 presentations, all of which feature videos, group work, and interactive elements. Each presentation is under this year's themes. There is also corresponding lesson plans to help deliver each lesson.

<https://www.bing.com/ck/a?!&p=ed18229a9211505e171588a68ca8438d1bdd90f3cb4cb483ba25a4f9a7064396JmItdHM9MTczMDY3ODQwMA&ptn=3&ver=2&hsh=4&fclid=3a5185c9-f561-6922-3a5d-9194f481683b&psq=http%3a%2f%2factionaid.ie%2fspeech-writing-competition&u=a1aHR0cHM6Ly9hY3Rpb25haWQuaWUvc3BlZWNoLXdyaXRpbmctY29tcGV0aXRpb24v&ntb=1>

JESUS IS THE GIFT

*that perfectly fits
the size of every heart.*



TO CONCLUDE:

May the Star of 
Bethlehem shine
into your homes
and schools.

May the feast of
Christmas bring
Peace, Love and Joy
into your lives.

May you rest well
during these days of
school closure and
enjoy time with
family and friends.

**Happy Christmas
and a Peaceful
New Year.**

You will be
remembered in
prayer at the crib.

Sr. Bernadette
and
Sr. Concepta