



The Editorial Team had originally planned this edition for Easter. It never happened. I took the hard decision to close our parish churches after St Patrick's Day. I wondered if we were doing the right thing. Was it too drastic a decision? And then came lockdown: confined to barracks apart from an hour a day. It was a challenge to peace of mind, to peace in the home. I remember being able to hear the clock ticking in the parochial house kitchen. Then we opened for personal prayer. All the hygiene arrangements had to be figured out first and then put in place, as well



The Easter Vigil 2020

as the signage and the taping off the benches. And when at last we opened for public Mass, I remember wondering how would we manage social distancing if too many people turned up. It's been a stressful time. Thanks be to God for the parish webcam, which was put in in 2012 and was upgraded in 2015 after much was spent upgrading and improving the lights in the church.

Fr Joe had to isolate on account of the years. Deacon Martin took to writing and, later, recording fine reflections for our parish Facebook page. Fr Raymond and I took to a ministry of prayer, as well as continuing with the vast bulk of the parish Masses entirely over the webcam. We wanted to shape the day around regular reminders that God is with us on our up-&-journey of life, so as to keep anxieties at bay, and also to encompass the parish community (and beyond) in a web of prayer. We were so grateful to all who joined us over the webcam in prayer. One of the few blessings of this time has come through opening ourselves to a heightened sense of God with us on our journey, even when we weren't sure where this was going. We were all thrown in on our inner resources, so contrary to what we normally did.

So much of pre-Covid-19 life was about going out, spending money socially, keeping up to speed with the trends and fashions. When all this is over, what will our world be like? Will jobs, things and places be as they were before? Instead of complying with the demands, might we think twice about all the driving, all the spending? Things will be different. That difference is yet to emerge.

Meanwhile, under our 'church feet', so to speak, things are changing in our Diocese. I had thought that six parishes were without a resident parish priest. When I checked, I found out that twelve of our thirty-seven parishes have no resident parish priest. I have been appointed PP of Pobal (Tempo) Parish. Both our retired priests in this area are over 75 years of age. Things are surely about to change in a way that this parish hasn't seen since the 1960s. It's very appropriate that this newsletter is the first of a new Volume.

Monsignor Peter

Changed Times

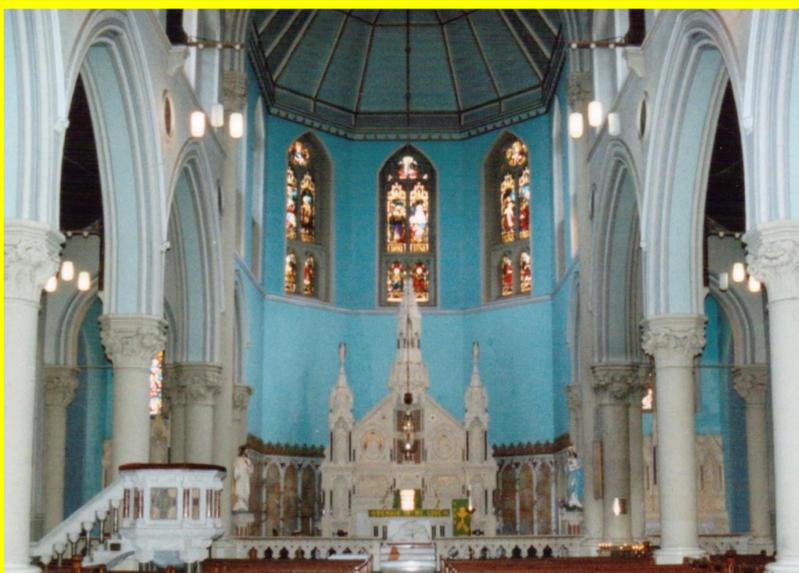
I was walked to the Convent Primary School in 1964 by my father Jack Nolan. My very first day at school was interspersed with some sandpit activity, an attempt at a wooden jigsaw and sitting with my finger on my lip to silence me when I obviously displayed my gift of the gab too frequently. My teacher was Sister Celestine and I loved her. She swooshed about the classroom in her black habit and was very kind. I remember thanking her very much for the lovely day I'd had and saying goodbye, glad to be going home for the rest of my life. Then she broke the news to me; did I not know I was coming back tomorrow and the next day and the day after that? For seven years! I was gutted. I cried the whole way home and couldn't be comforted! If someone had told me then that in fact I would be at school for the next fifty five years I'd have spontaneously combusted! I recently retired from teaching after thirty-six years in Saint Fanchea's College. It is a wonderful school and I was privileged to work with brilliant colleagues and wonderful pupils. My subjects were Religious Education and English. The gift of the gab came in very handy after all!



Rosemary Nolan

I was born and bred in Cornagrade with a wonderful view of the town from our house and, in particular, the chapel. It was a ten minute walk to Mass every Sunday and Holy Day of obligation. When I was a child, women and girls had to keep their heads covered when entering the church and men had to remove their hats and flat caps, all out of reverence. The chapel in its pre-Vatican II state was architecturally different to the interior we know and love today. As a child I remember the altar gates and the rails where we knelt to receive Holy Communion with our hands under a white cloth, our eyes peeled for the arrival of priest, altar boy and paten. The altar was attached to the Reredos, the pulpit positioned among the pews so at times the priest was up close and personal. The red sanctuary light burned perpetually in an ornate contraption suspended from the domed ceiling. Confession boxes with their red velvet curtains and double doors were positioned in five areas alongside the church walls to cater for the crowds attending weekly confession. The baptismal font was locked behind black open worked gates at the rear of the chapel. But most of all I recall the hard knee-crippling kneeling boards without any cushioning! Saint Michael's church was always impressive but it was quite austere in its own way and bitterly cold in the winter months.

When Spring sprung, Lent was in full swing. The church statues were draped in purple cloth. Familiar saints were shrouded in mourning and the stations of the cross depicted the greatest story ever told. I loved the drama of it all! Our parents 'kept Lent' and, therefore, so did we. Diligently, we sacrificed our sweets and treats and said our prayers. The forty days and nights in the desert was nothing compared to our longing for a bar of chocolate throughout Lent. When I was a child, I really didn't understand any of the words spoken at Mass as they were in Latin. But the burning of incense, the veiled religious imagery, the dry holy water fonts, and the solemnity of prayer itself struck a chord in me. I didn't need to understand it: it was enough to experience it. Glorious Easter was a feast of resurrection and renewal, and more Easter eggs than was good for you! Happy days!



St Michael's - before the changes of the 1990s

What went on in the chapel had a direct connection to what went on in the home and in school. These three tributaries ebbed and flowed through our lives; that was certainly my experience. My mother had as much to do with my religious formation as the parish priest or the sisters of Mercy. In fact, I'd say she was the most influential of them all. A strong mother, whose example spoke volumes, gave faith a leading role in our lives. I'm sure it was the same in many's a home. It was common practice every May and October in our house to kneel and pray the Rosary in honour of our Lady. It was a real pain, especially if the weather was good and I wanted to be out playing, but it definitely resonated throughout my life. It was the central prayer when I joined the junior Legion of Mary. Martha Maguire, as she was then, was our president. Can you imagine a group of teenagers meeting up on a Friday evening to pray and have craic and to plan our 'Corporal works of Mercy'? We did this happily, it was our social life!



The pulpit - a prominent feature of the 20th century St Michael's - and one of the church's five confession boxes

In May there was the parish mission. It may not have been an annual occurrence but when it happened it shook everything up. Women had their week of prayer first, then the men and finally everyone joined in for the big finale. Truthfully, it all went over my head but I do remember the hats worn by women were extraordinary and some went full out to impress. However, the truest missionaries with the greatest zeal were usually found peeling spuds at the kitchen sink. Family life, prayer, love of child and love of neighbour were at the heart of it all.

By the time I left the Convent Primary school with dreams of being a teacher, having been inspired by the gifted Mary Herbert, who taught me much more than she will ever realise, things were on the move in other ways too. Decimalisation with our 'new pence' saw the end of our old pounds, shillings and pence. The chapel was undergoing a dramatic change; the altar was now detached from the Reredos and Latin was again a dead tongue. In subsequent decades and with great vision the chapel was given the beautiful interior we enjoy today. The Sisters of Mercy were literally changing the habits of a lifetime with shorter hems and smaller veils and Sister Celestine was now Sister Maureen. After years of receiving Holy Communion by mouth we now were given an option to receive Eucharist in our hands. The laity took on roles never witnessed before as ministers of the Eucharist and ministers of the Word, for example. Women participated in these and it was an eye opener to see my female neighbours and relatives read from the ambo, hold the ciboria and take a very visible place in the celebration of Mass. It was indeed revolutionary and very exciting. What happened at Vatican II was filtering through to the parish. Not everyone was a fan but I took my lead from my mother. She often quoted Pope John XXIII, who wanted to open the windows of the church and let the Holy Spirit blow through! That was good enough for me!

Who knows what the future holds but when I see the wonderful work of Clogher Don Oige, for example, and its powerful youth ministry then I feel optimistic. It is all very different from the Legion of Mary days but it would do your heart good to see our teenage boys and girls work with the assisted pilgrims in Lourdes, pray together and work to build something meaningful and positive. Change is ongoing, inevitable and necessary. It means we're alive!

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your spirit and they shall be created and you will renew the face of the earth.

(Photographs of the church interior curtesy of Gerry Murphy)

A Time for Solidarity

Just a Thought by Fr Joe

There's an old Irish saying: "*Ar scáth a chéile a mbaireann na daoine*" (We live in each other's shadow.) which expresses the truth about community life that we may have lost in recent years. Nothing shows the truth of this saying like the threat of Covid-19. The outbreak of the Coronavirus, which has spread throughout the world, has reminded us how closely we live together and how much we depend on each other on this planet. It has reminded us how we are called to show solidarity with one another. We are now so much more aware of our need for global solidarity. (This is also true with regard to the climate change crisis facing our planet.) Since we have all been forced to slow down and stay home we begin to realise how crazy the world had become. With the threat posed by Covid-19, we humans are being taught a lesson by nature. We have become aware of just how vulnerable we are to illness and disease. We might now realise how much we need to care for one another and enjoy the simple things of life and nature.

Lockdown

Yes there is fear.
Yes there is isolation.
Yes there is panic buying.
Yes there is sickness.
Yes there is even death.
But,
They say that in Wuhan after so many years of noise
You can hear the birds again.
They say that after just a few weeks of quiet
The sky is no longer thick with fumes
But blue and grey and clear.
They say that in the streets of Assisi
People are singing to each other
across the empty squares,
keeping their windows open
so that those who are alone
may hear the sounds of family around them.
They say that a hotel in the West of Ireland
Is offering free meals and delivery to the house-
bound.
Today a young woman I know
is busy spreading fliers with her number
through the neighbourhood
So that the elders may have someone to call on.
Today Churches, Synagogues, Mosques
and Temples
are preparing to welcome
and shelter the homeless, the sick, the weary
All over the world people are slowing down
and reflecting

All over the world people are looking at their neigh-
bours in a new way
All over the world people are waking up to a new
reality
To how big we really are.
To how little control we really have.
To what really matters.
To Love.
So we pray and we remember that
Yes there is fear.
But there does not have to be hate.
Yes there is isolation.
But there does not have to be loneliness.
Yes there is panic buying.
But there does not have to be meanness.
Yes there is sickness.
But there does not have to be disease of the soul
Yes there is even death.
But there can always be a rebirth of love.
Wake to the choices you make as to how to live
now.
Today, breathe.
Listen, behind the factory noises of your panic
The birds are singing again
The sky is clearing,
Spring is coming,
And we are always encompassed by Love.
Open the windows of your soul
And though you may not be able
to touch across the empty square,
Sing.

Getting to know ... Deacon Martin

A native of Portadown, from the Parish of Drumcree, I was educated at the Presentation and St Columba Boys primary schools. After gloriously failing the 11 plus, I attended St Malachy's Secondary School in Portadown. It was run by the De La Salle Brothers who were to have such an influence on my career .

In 1974, I began teacher training at De La Salle College, Manchester. I was, and still am, passionate about Catholic Education. In over thirty-six years in Education, I served as a teacher and Principal and as a Senior Education Adviser, with CCMS. I had wonderful opportunities for further study with Masters degrees at Ulster University and Queens in Education Leadership and Philosophy. I also had the benefit of short international courses at Boston College, USA, and in Pisa Italy.

In 1980, I married Caitlin - a Portadown girl with family roots in Lisnaskea. We have two children, Ciara and Brian. We sadly lost Laura and Grainne at birth. We now have two grandchildren, Lorcan and Laura, who keep us on our toes.

How and why I am a Deacon is what many people want to know—usually asked in a way which questions my sanity. To put it simply, it wasn't my choice - God called and I answered. To some this may seem terribly pious but, in truth, it was through prayer. Throughout my life, in every parish in which I lived or worked, I was always involved in lay parish ministry: reader, choir member, collector, pastoral council member and with St Vincent de Paul.

When aged eighteen to twenty, I nearly opted to become a De La Salle brother but the way I chose to fulfil the commission at the end of Matthew's Gospel was 'To Teach'. At early retirement stage, simply through prayer and sacraments, I felt drawn to serve other people. Diaconate was just being reintroduced in Ireland and this seemed worth considering. With wonderful support, Mgr O'Reilly and Mgr La Flynn encouraged me that if the diaconate was to be for me, *'It would be God's way never mine'*. How true and wise those words were.

When I expressed my interest to Bishop MacDaid, he asked me to study for a one-year Higher Diploma in Pastoral Liturgy (two days per week for a year). This was a rich and valuable experience. During that time, I prayed and simply asked God to direct me. Discernment was hard. There were times when I felt like Jesus in Gethsemane, *'Father take this cup away from me'*. But each time the doubts came, something always happened to keep me on track. Trust in God sustained me undoubtedly by a translation of Isaiah 42:16 which I pray and quote often, *'I will lead you on a new path and guide you on ways you do not know'*

I commenced my training with men from Down and Connor in St Mary's University College, Belfast, under the direction of the then Fr Alan McGuckian SJ, now Bishop of Raphoe (who ordained me in 2018 as Clogher was then 'in sede vacante' - without a bishop). The study, focused on theological, human and pastoral formation, was challenging but the grace of God, the support of my wife, children and their spouses, the prayers of my friends and the fellowship and banter of my brother deacons in Belfast saw me through to ordination.

I was proud to be ordained, on 17 June 2018, in St Michael's, where many friends and parishioners had given me so much prayerful support and encouragement.

Please keep me in your prayers so as I can live up to the motto of my ordination *'As one who serves'*.



Deacon Martin Donnelly

A conversation with Church of Ireland Bishop of Clogher, Most Reverend John McDowell

by Fr Joe McVeigh

Since this interview, I have learned that Bishop John has been chosen to be the next Anglican Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland. I am sure all our readers will join with me in wishing Bishop John every good wish and every blessing as he takes up his new appointment. Bishop John brings many fine qualities to his new position - kindness, generosity of spirit, humility, intelligence, gentle leadership and a sense of humour. Bishop John has a vision for a new and tolerant Ireland based on the Gospel message of Love. He would like the Christian gospel of justice and reconciliation to be heard and put into practice throughout the land. He will continue to reach out the hand of friendship to all. Ad Multos Annos!

I met with Bishop John McDowell of Clogher on two occasions in November and December 2019. The meetings were at my request and I am most grateful to him for taking the time to meet me in my home. Bishop John has led the Church of Ireland in Clogher Diocese since September 2011 when he succeeded Most Revd Michael Jackson, the present Archbishop of Dublin.

Born in Belfast in 1956, he grew up there during the Troubles. Educated in Queens University, following his ordination in 1997, he worked as a curate in Antrim and as a rector in Ballyrashane, County Antrim and in St Mark's, Dundela, Belfast, the home parish of the renowned writer, C. S. Lewis. In recent times, he has been outspoken about the possible harmful effects of Brexit and a hard border on the communities living in his diocese and made his views known in an Open Letter to the British Prime Minister. Since his elevation to the episcopate, he has worked closely with the Catholic bishops, the clergy and people to promote better understanding.

As a general reflection on the political discourse in a divided community, he makes the case that there needs to be 'more civility'. Anyone dealing with him will acknowledge that Bishop John personifies 'civility', a man at ease with himself and always willing to engage with others. He speaks as his Christian conscience dictates and not a spokesperson for any political party, so his approach is open and reflective, rather than guarded and partisan. John has kindly given me permission to publish the following:

Fr Joe: *Could you tell me a bit about your background?*

Bishop John: I was born in Donegall Pass and brought up in East Belfast. My mother was very devout and attended church every week, whereas my father was less devout, but was a believer. He worked in the shipyard during the war years and later became a tram conductor, but for most of his life worked in Shorts Aircraft factory. I have a twin brother who worked for British Aerospace and now lives in South Australia. He was, until recently, chancellor of the University of South Australia. We two were the youngest in a family of four.



**Most Reverend John McDowell, Church of
Ireland Bishop of Clogher**

After secondary school in Annadale, I went to Queens where I studied Medieval history. I met my future wife at Queens when she was a first-year student. She was interested in drama and became a professional actress. We married in 1986.

Fr Joe: *How do you feel about the Tory success in the recent British general election and the implications of that for whatever Brexit deal may be ratified?*

Bishop John: Well, speaking as an individual rather than as a bishop or a churchman, like everybody else I was a bit surprised at the scale of the victory. I just wonder, at the same time, might it mean that, in fact, there's more of a chance of a softer Brexit because Boris Johnson is not dependent on the votes of 'the Spartans' anymore and he may, as a result, have a bit more latitude. How his Brexit deal will impact on our own situation is very unpredictable: you just really never know what's going to happen. Having said that, it's going to be the same deal for Northern Ireland as it was before the election, so there's going to be a lot of work needs to be done. I just hope that the Assembly can get back to do the work of trying to make the best of whatever emerges. Whereas, I'd rather Brexit didn't happen at all, it is going to happen and I think we have to try to make the best of it.

Fr Joe: *Can you see our local political leaders 'making the best of it'?*

Bishop John: About a year ago the Church leaders got the political leaders together in a room for the first time in a couple of years. I was involved in that and one of the things that emerged was that some of the political people had never really spoken to each other much before. And it's going to be a case in the Assembly that some people elected on the last mandate have never actually met their colleagues from other parties. Certainly, I think this business of the very cold, distant, aloof kind of attitude, you know, people passing one another in corridors and not speaking ... no democracy can work like that. Just because you're being civil doesn't mean that you don't hold something very firmly, you know – they're not exclusive things at all.

What I would like to see in terms of politics, is a start of civility, where we are not deliberately sticking a thorn in another man's thumb just to get them riled. And the reason that I was thinking of it – and this is a big digression – is because it was a word that Abraham Lincoln used a lot after the Civil War in America in referring to 'the civility of politics'. The civility of civic life and what that means, helping democracy embed itself and become mature, is extremely important. We have what we have and we're going to have it for five years. Why would Boris Johnson go back to the polls with that sort of a majority? So we might as well try and work with what we have.

As to how the election result will impact on this island, we are now back to the *status quo* as a footnote to the history of England in a sense. I think we need united voices to make sure that as a footnote we don't get completely written out of the script, as the emphasis of this government is going to be very much on England.

Fr Joe: *I'd like to know how you think the non-Unionist community, including Sinn Féin, might contribute to creating more civility in politics and more lasting friendships?*

Bishop John: By trying to put themselves in the other person's shoes, trying to see the world as the others see it. The late Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich used to say that most of the religious bigotry comes from Protestants and most of the political bigotry comes from Nationalists. I think by that he meant that you get Protestants who just cannot understand how Catholic people believe what they believe, and from the political side you get Nationalists who think that Unionists are just deluded people who need to be reprogrammed in a way the Uighers are being reprogrammed and then they'll see it in the right way.

Unionists have a viewpoint and hold it sincerely. Some of it is rational, some of it is bred in the bone, some of it is the culture we've been brought up in, so non-Unionists need to try to understand it. It's a wee bit like that thing that's fashionable now, this 'receptive ecumenism' – this business of not wanting to be like you but appreciating what it is you have and seeing why you have it and why you like it. It's like the family photograph.

Fr Joe: *For many non-Unionists, like myself, the close relationship of your Church with the Orange Order has posed a problem. Is that something that is changing?*

Bishop John: As you probably know, there are no what you would call formal or constitutional links, they're not part of the same organisation – as it were, but it would be very foolish to think that most Orangemen aren't members of one Church or another and the Churches have traditionally, in this part of the world certainly, held certain services where there would be Orange lodges present. With regards to the Orange Order, I have found it in Fermanagh to be a civil organisation in a sense. Insofar as they are a religious organisation, they are there to promote the discipleship of Jesus Christ as they see it. I think that's why the Churches have a place and a part to play in that but I think that [the dispute over Orange Order marches at] Drumcree was a watershed event following which all Protestant Churches had a look at themselves and discussed their relationship with the Orange Order as an institution. We owe allegiance to one person, to Jesus Christ. Other allegiances may be divided, ours aren't and we have to judge everything by those standards.

I had a famous predecessor, R. P. C. Hanson who is reputed to have said that the Orange Order was 'a cross between the Mafia and a Sunday school picnic'. As a result, while he remained the Bishop of Clogher for some time, he wasn't really able to function. So you have to acknowledge the water you swim in and bellowing across divides won't work, regardless of how refined or educated your bellowing. And if the peace process has taught us anything it is that patient engagement is the way forward and that's the same with everything. I think it's the same with the Church's relationship with the Orange order, political relationships, all relationships.

Fr Joe: *How do you feel about the issue of a border poll as provided for in the Good Friday Agreement?*

Bishop John: I can remember being asked to speak to a group of English bishops not that very long ago and saying to them that 'there are two things at the moment that Northern Ireland doesn't need and probably Ireland doesn't need; one of them is a no-deal Brexit and the other is a border poll. And I just thought that at the moment the atmosphere is febrile enough without that also being thrown into the mix.

However, I think it is absolutely right that people should argue for that provision of the Good Friday Agreement to be taken into consideration. For instance, Colin Harvey at Queens has taken a lot of unfair criticism for the approach he has taken. Yet, all he is doing is, as you say, looking at the Good Friday Agreement and saying 'that provision is there and there's no reason it shouldn't be considered at the moment.' Now I think I would differ from him there in so far as he believes it to be a helpful thing or a useful thing to be triggered *at the moment*. But it's there for a reason and let's have real conversation over a period of time

Fr Joe: *How might the Unionist population be persuaded that their best interests would be served in a united Ireland and could the Protestant population in the South make a contribution to persuading their brothers and sisters in the North that the old fear 'Home Rule is Rome Rule' has no basis in modern Ireland?*

Bishop John: I don't think the fear of Home Rule being Rome Rule is still around at all. It's a peculiar irony that probably back then the reason that Protestants in the North wouldn't go in to an all Ireland is because the South was too conservative. Now they won't go in because it's too liberal.

I think that Unionists feel the union is their *raison d'être*. You can't really have Unionism without the union. It's a kind of a *sine qua non*. Therefore the argument has to be much, much more subtle and much more to do with identity than that kind of rationale, the economic rationale particularly.

Fr Joe: *Are we not now in a post-Christian age in Ireland?*

Bishop John: We probably are, but as long as we remember that post-Christian isn't the same as pre-Christian, that something has happened in between and that that has fed into society and can't just be taken out of it: that is the Christian element and the Christian foundation of a great many of what we would now call human rights. You can't un-bake a cake. You can't pretend that didn't happen. Therefore, I think there

still is a foundation there on which the Christian Churches can speak, provided we remember that we don't have the first word and we certainly don't have the last word. We have a word to say and a contribution to make to civic society. Whether we speak on education or on human rights or in advocating for the poor or whatever else, what we say should not be simply for our institutional benefit. It must be seen for what it is; a distinctive Christian contribution to the common good and not just the Churches protecting our own interests and institutions.



Bishop John McDowell with Fr. Raymond Donnelly, Dean Kenny Hall, Deacon Martin Donnelly, Monsignor O'Reilly and Fr. Kevin Malcolmson on the 40th anniversary of Monsignor Peter's ordination

Fr Joe: *Could the Churches do more in Ireland to be the voice of the poor and the marginalised?*

Bishop John: Yea, I think they could. Someone like Peter McVerry is a prophet, he is a real prophet. He speaks God's truth into that situation as we have it now and he lives it. And like all prophets, very few prophets didn't suffer something or other, although he is a very smiling sort of a character. So yes, I think and I've said this before, there has been a very uncritical acceptance of a particular economic model which was sort of tinkered with a bit after 2008 but it wasn't really radically looked at and I think that we, as Churches, have put far too much effort into criticising and analysing certain identity issues, issues to do with sexuality and whatnot, rather than that huge injustice that underlies so many of the other injustices and finds its expression in homelessness. I don't just mean the people who are on the streets; I mean the people who are in mortgage arrears and who are sofa surfing, hundreds, thousands of people.

Fr Joe: *Pope Francis has taken a great stand on caring for creation and I see you've mentioned it in your Christmas message, your joint message with Bishop Duffy. This is becoming perhaps the most important issue of our time, particularly for young people. Couldn't our Churches unite around this issue and make it the moral issue of our time, if only as a path to regaining some credibility for the Christian Churches in Ireland?*

Bishop John: I think you're absolutely right because there's nothing in it that would be divisive for the Churches. It's not an identity issue at all, it's to do with creation and obviously with *Laudato Si* and you have

other documents as well produced by the Irish Council of Churches and others. I think that in the past there were a couple of things that prevented it: firstly, the future of our planet and of every living thing was such a huge issue that it was very difficult to understand what either individuals or Churches could do.

The second thing was that some of the contributions on environmental issues were a bit shrill. Some of it was very, very catastrophic and sometimes that puts people off. I think that if we could come at it from this very Christian idea that Creation is God's gift, that we are stewards of it and are handing it on to future generations. The Irish Council of Churches has done a certain amount of work on this. All of the Churches, and certainly those that have assemblies to make decisions about where they put their money, have also been addressing these issues in terms of investment. So there are certain things already being done. They're not very visible, but they are crucial in terms of avoiding investments in sectors that are environmentally damaging.

Fr Joe: *What should be the priority for the Christian Churches – dealing with secularism or dealing with poverty?*

Bishop John: Well 'secularism' from the old Latin version of The Lord's Prayer 'saecula saeculorum' you know, it's not a non-religious word since the secular, in a sense, is religious. This is God's world and there's no truth in it that isn't God's truth so the whole idea of secularisation – it depends on what it is. If you mean like as in France 'laïcité', where almost any religious voice is shut out, there's almost no place for it in conventional society, that's not good. But, if instead of secularism you're talking about pluralism, we're talking about working out how people who see the world rather differently can nevertheless contribute towards the common good. Maybe, there's the challenge for the Churches to work out how it fits into that society, how it contributes to it. There's a challenge to that society also; how it tolerates – tolerance is a very weak sounding virtue – and how it includes people like religious people who maybe bring other criteria to bear when making decisions about things, whether they are to do with the Scriptures or whether they're to do with Catholic tradition, the deposit of faith that they have developed. So there's a certain locus of authority that the world doesn't recognise, but religious people do. They think they can reasonably stand over it as well. So, it's a two-way thing where, I think, a mature society will work out these relationships.

Fr Joe: *Would you agree that in a way they're connected, the two and that in a proper understanding of secularism, it could be understood to mean that the poor should always be included and should be the primary concern of our Churches?*

Bishop John: I always think of that great phrase in Deuteronomy, 'There shall be no poor among you'. This is as much a command as 'you shall not steal.'

Fr Joe: *Thank you, Bishop John.*



"Faith is the first requirement for "true prayer ... Many times prayer is only oral from the mouth... but it doesn't come from the faith in the heart, or it's a weak faith ... I pray either with faith or out of habit. Let's be attentive when we pray not to fall into routine, without the awareness that the Lord is here, that I'm speaking with the Lord and He is able to resolve problems."

The second requirement, the Pope said, is perseverance ... *"Some people ask and then the grace doesn't come. They don't have this perseverance because deep down they don't need it or they don't have faith ... Faith and perseverance go together because if you have faith you're sure that the Lord will give you what you are asking. If the Lord makes you wait, knock and knock and knock. In the end the Lord gives the grace."* If the Lord makes us wait, the Pope said, He does so *"for our good. He takes prayer seriously"*.

God wants us to pray courageously. This is the third requirement, the Pope said. *"Is courage necessary to pray?, someone might think. To remain before the Lord: yes, it's necessary. It's almost, almost, I don't want to say a heresy, but almost as if we're threatening the Lord. Moses's courage before God when God wanted to destroy the people ... Abraham's courage when he negotiates the salvation of Sodom. What if there are 30? What if there are 20?' Courage. This virtue of courage is very much needed, not only for apostolic works, but also for prayer."*

"Faith, perseverance and courage. In these days, it's necessary to pray more. Imagine if we were to pray like this. With faith – that the Lord can intervene; with perseverance and with courage. The Lord never deludes. He makes us wait. He takes His time. But he never deludes. Faith, perseverance and courage."

Pope Francis

Hope in the Darkness

Ask for help, tell someone else about what you are going through, confide in a trusted person, good friend, counsellor, doctor. Keeping significant issues to yourself has never been known to work; it's a recipe for illness and breakdown. Being human means that we need support and other people.

If you are dealing with a mental health issue, start with your GP and ask for a referral; don't let things drag on: issues tend not to get better by themselves. Don't be passive but deliberately act against the tendency to isolate and withdraw: www.jesuit.ie/blog/brendan-mcmanus/ignatian-guide-to-tackling-depression/

Grief is a very human and understandable response to loss. It has to be worked at and it does take time to work through it though. Ignoring or minimising it doesn't work at all, and also getting completely lost in it is often unhelpful. In between these two extremes is a more balanced approach: give yourself permission to feel things, learn what others have done to help them get through, and pray for patience, courage and wisdom. Keep it real.

Especially, don't 'spiritualise' a mental health problem: that is, assume that God sent it as a 'cross' or that it can be dealt with only in prayer. Sometimes we are called to act and to address psychological issues with therapy and modern medicine. Make use of all the modern supports and therapies that God has given us.

Join a support group: the Aisling Center has a number of groups for grief, suicide bereavement and depression. <http://www.theaislingcentre.com>

Pray for healing, specifically direct your prayer to your personal need, ask for the grace of healing, of having the courage to change the things you can and accept the things you can't.

Do the Review of the Day prayer, a Jesuit prayer that looks at how you have been during the day and where God has been.

Five steps:

1. **Ask God for light (look at my day through God's eyes, not merely my own),**
2. **Give thanks (Be grateful, for the day you have just lived is a gift from God.**
3. **Review the day (look back on the day just completed, being guided by the Holy Spirit).**
4. **Face your shortcomings (face up to what is wrong - accept mistakes).**
5. **Look toward the day to come (ask God for help to live a better day tomorrow).**

Real faith means taking real action, making decisions to address issues and solve problems. God doesn't want 'pious escapist' who don't live in the real world and don't deal with the reality. Remember that God is in the mess with us. Equally however, prayer can be a huge help and support when going through difficult times.

See: [Finding God in the Mess, J Deeds and B McManus SJ, Messenger Publications 2017.](#)

Most things can be healed with prayer, courage, intervention and wise actions; sometimes you have to let go of your own pet ideas or theories. However, pride often gets in the way and prevents people getting help.



Fr Brendan McManus SJ

Supporting Mental Health and Well Being in the Community

An initiative of St. Michael's Parish Pastoral Council

After Coronavirus

Will life ever be the same after Coronavirus? Will the world ever be the same? Will I ever be the same? Will we ever be the same again? These are some questions I ask myself as the Covid-19 disease spreads throughout the world and forces drastic changes to the way we have been living. We are now urged to live in self-isolation. We are being forced to think and to change our habits – to keep our distance and to wash hands. Hygiene has become of the utmost importance to help in stopping this disease from spreading.

The Church has had to cancel public Masses for the first time in living memory. Fortunately, with the aid of technology, we are able to broadcast Masses thus giving the faithful an opportunity every day to take part in the Eucharist and find nourishment for our souls from the Word of God and the Prayers of the Eucharist. It is hoped that we will be able to return to our Churches for Mass as soon as this crisis is over.

I think the crisis may be an opportunity for us in Ireland to think about how to create a new kind of Church within the existing structures – a church made up of small communities of around ten people-who would meet in houses to read the Bible, to reflect and to pray together. This model of church has been in existence in South and Central America for many years and has led to a great renewal of faith and commitment to social justice and caring for Creation.

Nobody knows how long this Covid-19 threat will last but, however long it lasts, we have a new opportunity to show love and compassion for all our neighbours - more especially for the elderly as well as for all those affected by this disease. We have an opportunity to pray again as families and as individuals for the safety and healing of the world and to work for the protection of all of God's Creation. This could be an opportunity to create a new kind of Church in Ireland.

I do not think life will ever be the same. I do not think we will ever see the world in the same way again. We may never think of our Christian faith in the same way again. It is sad that it took this devastating virus with such suffering and loss of life to bring us to our senses. There will be some important lessons to be learned from this tragic and painful crisis.



Fr. Joe McVeigh



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