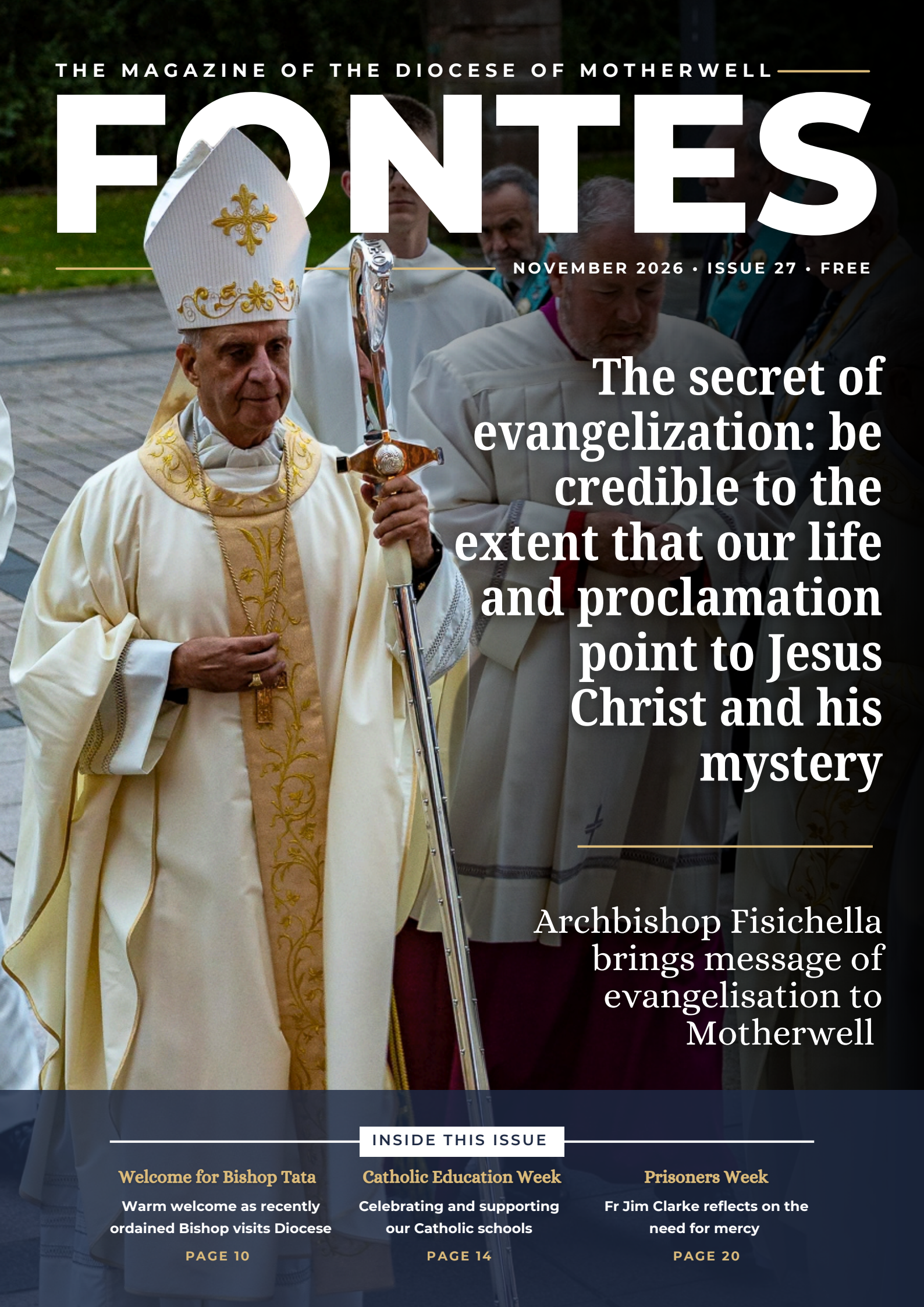
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The secret of evangelization: be credible to the extent that our life and proclamation point to Jesus Christ and his mystery

Archbishop Fisichella brings message of evangelisation to Motherwell

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Welcome for Bishop Tata
Warm welcome as recently ordained Bishop visits Diocese
PAGE 10

Catholic Education Week
Celebrating and supporting our Catholic schools
PAGE 14

Prisoners Week
Fr Jim Clarke reflects on the need for mercy
PAGE 20

Bishop's Diary

1 Nov	11.30am Mass and presentation of diocesan medals at St Bride's East Kilbride
3 Nov	9.30am Pre-Confirmation Visit to St Kevin's PS, Bargeddie 11.15am Pre-Confirmation Visit to St Bartholomew's PS, C'bridge 2.00pm Meeting of Diocesan Trustees 7.00pm Confirmations at Sacred Heart and St Gerard's Bellshill
4 Nov	9.30am Pre-Confirmation Visit to Corpus Christi PS, Calderbank 11.15am Pre-Confirmation Visit to St Dominic's PS, Airdrie 7.00pm Confirmations at Holy Family, Mossend
5 Nov	9.30am Pre-Confirmation Visit to St John Paul II PS, Viewpark 11.15am Pre-Confirmation Visit to St Bride's PS, Bothwell 7.00pm Mass for Deceased Clergy in Motherwell Cathedral
7 Nov	9.30am National Safeguarding Conference
9-11 Nov	Bishops' Conference meeting at Conforti
11 Nov	7.00pm Confirmations at St Aloysius, Chapelhall
12 Nov	9.30am Pre-Confirmation Visit to St Mark's PS, Rutherglen 11.15am Pre-Confirmation Visit to St Anthony's PS, Rutherglen 7.00pm Confirmations at Our Lady of Lourdes, East Kilbride
13 Nov	9.30am Pre-Confirmation Visit to Christ the King PS, Holytown 11.15am Pre-Confirmation Visit to St Mary's PS, Coatbridge
14 Nov	6.30pm St Margaret's Family & Children Care Society Dinner
15 Nov	11.00am Confirmations at St Bernadette's, Motherwell
16 Nov	9.30am Pre-Confirmation Visit to St Bridget's PS, Baillieston
17 Nov	11.15am Festal Mass at St Margaret's High School, Airdrie 7.00pm Confirmations at St Francis of Assisi, Baillieston
18 Nov	9.30am Pre-Confirmation Visit to St Cuthbert's PS, Hamilton 11.15am Pre-Confirmation Visit to St Ninian's PS, Hamilton 2.15pm Spanish Mass at St Ambrose High School, Coatbridge 7.00pm Confirmations at St Bridget's, Baillieston
19 Nov	11.15am Pre-Confirmation Visit to St Leonard's PS, East Kilbride 7.00pm Diocesan Education Mass in Cathedral
20 Nov	9.30am Pre-Confirmation Visit to St John the Baptist, Ud'ston 11.15am Pre-Confirmation Visit to Our Lady & St Joseph's PS, Glenboig 1.30pm Mass for 50th Anniversary of Christ the King PS, Holytown
22 Nov	12.15pm 50th Anniversary Mass at St Stephen's Church, C'bridge
23 Nov	9.30am Pre-Confirmation Visit to St Ignatius' PS, Wishaw 11.15am Pre-Confirmation Visit to St Patrick's PS, Shotts 3.00pm Meeting of the Council of Priests Executive 7.00pm Confirmations at St Bernard's, Coatbridge
24 Nov	9.30am Pre-Confirmation Visit to St Mary's PS, Larkhall 11.15am Pre-Confirmation Visit to St John's PS, Blackwood 2.00pm Wellspring Integration Meeting 7.00pm Confirmations at St Athanasius', Carluke
25 Nov	9.30am Pre-Confirmation Visit to St Patrick's PS, Strathaven 11.15am Pre-Confirmation Visit to St Mark's PS, Hamilton 7.00pm Confirmations at St Patrick's, Coatbridge
26 Nov	9.30am Pre-Confirmation Visit to St Charles PS, Newton 11.15am Pre-Confirmation Visit to St Peter's PS, Hamilton 2.00pm Council of Priests Meeting 7.00pm Memorial Mass at Our Lady's HS, Motherwell
27 Nov	9.30am Pre-Confirmation Visit to St Patrick's PS, New Stevenston
29 Nov	10.30am Mass at St Mary's Hamilton for 180th Anniversary
30 Nov	11.10am Festal Mass for St Andrew's High School, Coatbridge 7.00pm Confirmations at Cathedral, Motherwell

Inside this issue

6	Visit of Archbishop Rino Fisichella to Motherwell
8	Bene Merenti Medals recognise decades of faithful dedication
10	Welcome as Bishop Tata returns to Motherwell *by Fr Oluwafemi Orilua*
12	**Liturgy:** Month of the Holy Souls
14	**Education:** Catholic Education Week *by Dr Natalie Finnigan & Claire O'Neill*
19	**Youth:** Scottish pupils urged to become 'witnesses of hope' *by Nathalie Raffray*
20	**Justice & Peace:** Show Mercy: Prisoners Week 2026 *by Fr Jim Clarke SX Project*
22	**Wellspring:** sharing progress on parish renewal *by Stephen Ferrie*





NEXT EDITION: 19th/20th December 2026

Send your news, events and articles for the next edition to **media@rcdom.org.uk.**
Deadline for submissions - **27th November 2026**

www.rcdom.org.uk



Dear brothers and sisters,

I am writing this letter on the Feast of the Holy Guardian Angels, patrons of the Church's Safeguarding Mission in Scotland.

Pope Leo has spoken of the need to safeguard the dignity of the human person and to build a genuine Culture of Care within our communities. These themes reflect the vision of In God's Image Version 2, our safeguarding instruction, which calls us not only to maintain safe practices but to create parish communities where every person is welcomed, valued, respected, and protected.

A Culture of Care begins when we choose to notice the person we might otherwise overlook. It is reflected in the decisions we make every day. It asks not only whether our activities are successful, but whether they are safe, inclusive, and welcoming. It invites us to consider who may need additional support and how we can ensure that every person is treated with dignity and respect.

When we organise activities for children, young people, and protected adults, a Culture of Care ensures that those entrusted with leadership have been safely recruited and appropriately trained. When we plan pilgrimages and events, it encourages us to think about those who may need particular support to participate fully. In our everyday parish life, it challenges us to look beyond familiar faces and to notice who may be isolated or simply in need of welcome and companionship.

Perhaps the challenge for all of us is to ask simple questions:

- **Who might be vulnerable?**
- **Who has not been heard?**
- **Who might be overlooked?**

As we continue to embed the vision of In God's Image throughout the Diocese, let us work together to build a Culture of Care where safeguarding is understood as a shared responsibility. By listening with humility, acting with compassion, and remaining attentive to the needs of others, we can help ensure that our parishes are places where everyone knows they are welcomed, valued, protected, and heard.

I thank our Clergy, Religious Brother and Sisters, Parish Safeguarding Coordinators, volunteers and all those who contribute to this important ministry. Through your dedication and service, you help ensure that safeguarding remains a lived expression of our commitment to care for one another and uphold the dignity of every person.

+ Joseph Toal



If you wish to share any information of a safeguarding nature, please contact our Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor:

Veronica McKenna

Tel: 01698 269114

Email: veronicamckenna@rcdom.org.uk

Bishop Toal celebrates 70th birthday



Happy birthday to Bishop Toal who celebrated his 70th birthday on 13th October. Ad multos annos.



Giving thanks for 100 years of Schoenstatt Sisters

The Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary in Campsie Glen recently celebrated the centenary of their founding in 1926.

Archbishop Cushley was the principal celebrant at a special Mass of thanksgiving, joined by fellow bishops, including Bishop Toal, priests, sisters and friends of the community.

The celebration was an opportunity to give thanks for 100 years of faith, prayer and service, and to look forward with hope to the future of this international religious community, which has a special devotion to Our Lady.

The retreat centre in the Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh has long provided a place of prayer for many, with a number of parishes and schools from Motherwell Dicoese regularly making pilgrimages to Schoenstatt.

Ambrosian Society gather in Motherwell for annual Mass

Members of the Society of St Ambrose gathered recently at Our Lady of Good Aid Cathedral for their annual Mass and Annual General Meeting, celebrated by Bishop Joseph Toal. They were joined by Bishop Frank Dougan of Galloway and Bishop Brian McGee of Argyll and the Isles and clergy from dioceses across Scotland who studied in Spain.

The Society brings together former students of the Royal Scots College in Spain, maintaining the bonds of friendship and shared formation established during their studies. This year's gathering was also attended by the Spanish Consul General, D. Santiago Miralles Huete, and his wife.



SSVP gather to mark Feast Day


Photos: Matt Meade

Members and supporters of the Society of St Vincent de Paul in Motherwell Diocese gathered at St Columba's Church, Viewpark, recently for the annual SSVP Festival Mass celebrated by Bishop Toal.

The Bishop was joined by Fr Gerard Bogan, Diocesan Chaplain to the SSVP, and Deacon Stuart Dick, for the Mass which provided an opportunity to pray and give thanks for the SSVP members and volunteers for the work they continue to do in parishes and communities throughout the Diocese.



New Calvary Shrine unveiled

Sacred Heart and St Gerard's Parish in Bellshill has recently unveiled a new Calvary shrine which has been erected in the church gardens.

This beautiful shrine, which depicts the crucifixion of Christ alongside Our Lady and St John, was graciously donated by parishioners Danny and Myra Boyle. Recently, members of the parish gathered around the shrine for its unveiling and blessing by parish priest Fr Stuart Parkes.







Faith & Fun at Our Lady of Fatima

There has been a lot of activity going on in the parish of Our Lady of Fatima in Blackwood and Larkhall over the last few months.

In August over 130 parishioners came together for the annual Parish Summer Party, which included food, a scavenger hunt for the young people, a raffle and lots of other fun activities and games for all. A great night was had by all.

After Mass on 6th September, two young parishioners, Louisa and Bethany, sold their delicious scones, jams, and biscuits to raise funds for the wonderful work of Aid to the Church in Need. That weekend Fr James Flynn was celebrating the Mass and shared his own experiences of the help he received when working in the missions. The girls raised a wonderful £515.

The parish came together for our annual Parish International Mass and Meal on 11th September. 15 countries were represented, which make up our parish community and enjoyed food from Scotland, England, Australia, South Africa, the USA, Czechia, Poland, Russia, Romania, Fiji, Italy, France, China, Malta and Nigeria. It was a wonderful occasion to come together as one parish made up of many nationalities.

From the 13th to the 15th of September, our parish celebrated Forty Hours. On the Sunday we had Solemn Choral Vespers led by the Schola Benedicti; on the Monday we had a Mass with Anointing of the Sick, visits from the primary school children and a Holy Hour, and then on the Tuesday our closing Mass. The church was a powerhouse of prayer over those days, with hundreds praying before the Blessed Sacrament.

St John's Community Garden is situated behind the Church of Our Lady & St John's Blackwood and adjacent to St John's Primary School. This community garden is a wonderfully peaceful and sociable spot for quiet contemplation, wildlife and community gatherings and learning. It has been creatively designed into several areas, including a small orchard, a wild area, a community shed with a planted green roof, herbaceous raised wooden beds, an area for quiet contemplation and a new outdoor classroom structure that gives shelter from the weather.

This project really has the whole community involved, including the Kirkmuirhill and Blackwood Men's Shed, the Parent Council, the Church, and St John's Primary School, in particular the John Muir Eco Ambassador pupils. Local businesses have donated materials and time whilst members of the community help maintain the planted areas. Keep Scotland Beautiful have awarded the Community Garden a Level 5 Outstanding Award again this year.



Photos: John O'Neill

"Holiness is not a word of the past, but of the future"

The Diocese recently had to honour of welcoming Archbishop Rino Fisichella, Pro-Prefect of the Dicastery for Evanglisation, to Motherwell.

During the day the Archbishop met with the priests of the Diocese. In the evening, a special Mass was celebrated in the Cathedral, concelebrated by Bishop Toal, Bishop Frank Dougan of Galloway, Bishop John Tata and priests of the Diocese. A guard of honour by the Knights of St Columba welcomed the Archbishop into the Cathedral, where several hundred parishioners from across the Diocese gathered for the Mass to hear the Archbishop's word of wisdom, joined also by civic guests and representatives from schools. The Diocesan Choir provided beautiful music which included a Scottish flavour provided by piper, Deacon John Nevans.

Following the Mass, Bishop Toal said, "One message I received this morning said, 'What an inspiring celebration last evening's Mass for the New Evangelisation was, and how thought-provoking his Grace's words.' I think all present would concur with these words, and we were most appreciative of Archbishop Fisichella's presence with us in Motherwell yesterday, both for the Clergy Conference and as the main celebrant at the Mass."

The Bishop continued: "I wish to thank everybody involved in preparing for both and all who attended and assisted in any way. A special word of thanks to Fr Lamb and the Care for the Clergy Group who took the lead in organising this special day."

Bishop Toal also shared that His Holiness, Pope Leo XIV, has sent his good wishes to the Diocese: "Archbishop Fisichella brought good wishes to all in the Motherwell Diocese from our Holy Father, Pope Leo, whom he had met a few days before coming to Scotland. It was good for us to hear this message and to feel the communion between us in the Catholic Church with the Holy Father and through the presence and inspiring words of His Grace Archbishop Fisichella, the Pro-Prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelisation."

The full text of Archbishop Fisichella's homily from the Mass:





The Gospel (Luke 9:7-9) becomes for us a moment of reflection on what it means to be disciples of the Lord and to listen to his word in order to give meaning to our lives. At its centre we find the figure of Herod, who questions the person of Jesus and the activity of his disciples. The context of this passage tells of the power Jesus gave the disciples to cast out demons—that is, to conquer evil, heal sickness, and proclaim the Kingdom of God. The instructions Jesus gives the disciples also apply to us today: "Take nothing for the journey, neither walking stick nor sack nor food nor money, and let no one take a second tunic." In short, those who must proclaim the Gospel are to carry only what is essential, because their whole life consists in trusting in God and his grace. In the wider context (chapter 8), Jesus tells the parable of the seed that is sown: "Some seed fell on the path and was trampled… Some seed fell on rocky ground, and when it grew, it withered for lack of moisture. Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. And some seed fell on good soil, and when it grew, it produced fruit (a hundredfold)" (Lk 8:5-8). As we can see, we are faced with teaching that indicates not only how the sown word of God is received, but also how to become disciples according to Jesus' mind—or, if we follow Luke, how to become his mother and his brothers. In short: the seed either sprouts and bears fruit, or withers and becomes barren.

Here appears the figure of Herod, who is impressed by this person and especially by what he does; perhaps he too would like to have the power to perform the same wonders. Two verbs attract our attention: He "heard about all that was happening", and "he kept trying to see [Jesus]". Two verbs that indicate curiosity and desire; in him, however, they appear as perplexity and doubt. "John I beheaded. Who then is this about whom I hear such things?" How often the Gospels place this question before us! John the Baptist was the first to ask it, when he sent 'men to ask Jesus whether he was the one who was to come or whether they should await another'. The disciples too asked it when, seeing Jesus walk on the water, they said, "Who then is this whom even wind and sea obey?" In certain respects, Herod's attitude recalls that of Zacchaeus. He too had heard about Jesus and wanted to see him. At the risk of appearing ridiculous, he even climbed a sycamore tree, waiting for Jesus to pass that way.

There are many similarities but also a great difference. The Baptist listens to the answer and knows that he must understand the Messiah differently from the way he himself had preached him. The disciples welcome Jesus into the boat and follow him. Zacchaeus is seen by Jesus, who changes his life. Herod does not! Herod is full of himself: he has power; he asks the questions, but he gives the answer. When he meets Jesus, he does not listen but clothes him in a white robe to signify that he is mad… Herod is full of himself and embodies what his name implies: Herodes, a demigod, a strong and valiant hero. Yet he embodies the worst face of the hero, because he is arrogant and violent. He is the man who celebrates his birthday by having the Baptist's head cut off! How paradoxical: he celebrates birth with death! The life of Jesus and of the first Christian community is marked by the violent presence of the Herodian dynasty: Herod the Great wants to kill the child Jesus (and orders the slaughter of the innocents); his son Herod Antipas kills the Baptist; his grandson Herod Agrippa imprisons Peter and kills James; finally, his son Herod Agrippa II is present at the trial of Paul, who will be sent to Rome. The life of the Church will always be marked by the presence of a Herod who wants to take God's place and knows no way of doing so, except through violence. Herod is the face of evil that fights good until the end of time.

He is the expression of the person who will not listen because he trusts only in himself; if a voice reminds him of something more important and authoritative, he wants to silence and destroy it. We must not be surprised. We know by faith that he will not win. The struggle between good and evil is not on the same level: we believe that good and love will always prevail and emerge victorious.

This is the great dilemma of people today and of our mission as evangelisers: we are called to bring a message of joy, love, and salvation, but we also know that many do not want to listen to it. Being curious about God yet refusing to listen to him or let him enter one's life is a source of self-destruction. We need a word offered with such love and conviction that it can change life.

The secret of evangelisation lies entirely here: we shall be credible to the extent that our life and proclamation point to Jesus Christ and his mystery. We must go beyond ourselves—beyond the self-referentiality of a church concerned with material things and with what is immediate, while she is a witness to the invisible. We must "give voice to God's mystery so that the mystery of humanity may be illumined. This requires a life of faith that speaks of holiness. Holiness is not a word of the past but of the future. If the Church intends to be credible, she needs to be transparent. Saint Paul VI recalled this strongly: "It is often said nowadays that the present century thirsts for authenticity. Especially in regard to young people, it is said that they have a horror of the artificial or false and that they are searching above all for truth and honesty… Either tacitly or aloud – but always forcefully – we are being asked: 'Do you really believe what you are proclaiming?' Do you live what you believe? Do you really preach what you live?" (EN 76). Benedict XVI's words echoed this:

"What we need at this point in history are people who, through an enlightened and lived faith, make God credible in this world… We need people whose gaze is fixed directly on God, learning from him true humanity. We need people whose intellect is enlightened by God's light and whose hearts God opens so that their intellect may speak to the intellect of others and their heart may open the hearts of others. Only through people touched by God can God return to humanity" (L'Europa di Benedetto nella crisi delle culture – Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures, 63-64).

It is not artificial knowledge that illumines mystery; it is mystery that illumines the mind and heart of our contemporaries. We can arrive at the truth about our existence to the extent that we make room for the mystery that surpasses us and have the courage to immerse ourselves in and entrust ourselves to Christ's love.

> As evangelisers: we are called to bring a message of joy, love, and salvation, but we also know that many do not want to listen to it.
>
> ARCHBISHOP FISICHELLA



Recognising the people who keep our parishes going

Several members of the Diocese of Motherwell have been honoured with the Diocesan Bene Merenti medal in recognition of their longstanding and dedicated service to their parishes, the Diocese and the wider Church.

EIGHT PARISHIONERS HONOURED AT ST AUGUSTINE'S
Eight parishioners of St Augustine's, Coatbridge, received the Bene Merenti medal in recognition of their invaluable contributions to parish life and the wider community during a special Mass recently celebrated by Bishop Toal.

Betty McNamee was recognised for her involvement with the Legion of Mary, her role as a founding member of Lanarkshire Samaritans, and her work as a counsellor with the Diocesan Marriage Guidance Services. She has also served as a Reader for over 25 years.

Her husband, **John McNamee**, was honoured for his commitment to the Legion of Mary and the Wayside Club, as well as his service as an Extraordinary Minister of the Eucharist. He has also contributed to the SPRED group, Justice and Peace initiatives and the People's Pantry.

At the age of 25, **David Lindsay** is one of the youngest ever recipients of the medal. He was recognised for his enthusiastic contribution to parish life through the welcome ministry and his service as a passkeeper. Known for welcoming everyone with a smile, David is also involved with Stay Connected, the People's Pantry and Kairos Café. For his 21st birthday, he asked family and friends to contribute to the people's pantry instead of gifts, raising 60 bags of goods and £400 for the food bank.

Michael Rooney received the medal in recognition of his longstanding service as a reader, a ministry he has carried out since 1978, alongside his involvement in parish finances.

Charlotte Dunion was honoured for her contributions to the prayer group and cleaning team at Our Lady and St Joseph's, Glenboig. She also ran the piety stall at St Augustine's for ten years, providing an important service to the parish community.

Margaret Haggarty has served several parishes over the years, including St John Ogilvie's, Blantyre, St John the Baptist, Uddingston, and St Augustine's, Coatbridge. She was only received into the Catholic Church in 1999 at the age of 50; however, she has made many contributions, including the music ministry, the Society of St Vincent de Paul, serving as a reader, charity outreach work and the role of parish secretary. Along with her husband, Deacon Richard, Margaret took aid to Bosnia on several occasions to displaced families who were living in makeshift camps with very poor conditions due to war.

Rita Cairns was recognised for her faithful service as a reader, a ministry she has undertaken since 1992. Rita has also helped organising with organising the readers rota and preparing other reads as well as the Women's Group Coffee Mornings.

Tony McDougall was honoured for his service as an Extraordinary Minister of the Eucharist and reader at St Bartholomew's before continuing these ministries at St Augustine's. His many other contributions include involvement with the Society of St Vincent de Paul and the Knights of St Columba, where he was previously secretary and Grand Knight, as well as serving as a sacristan and helping with the parish breakfast club.

Together, the eight recipients represent the many different ways in which parishioners enrich the life of the Church through prayer, practical service, charitable outreach and a warm welcome to others.





THE GALLAGHERS HONOURED AT ST DAVID'S, PLAINS

Elsewhere in the Diocese, Bishop Toal celebrated the Vigil Mass at St David's, Plains on Saturday 19th September, where he presented the Bene Merenti medal to well-known local couple **Jim and Rena Gallagher** *(pictured above with Bishop Toal, Fr Begin and family).* They are known across Lanarkshire for their catering business, catering meals and functions in many parishes across the Diocese.

The couple were recognised for their dedicated service to the parish, their support for St Andrew's Hospice and their contribution to the wider community. Their award acknowledged the difference they have made through their generosity and commitment to serving others.

During the Mass, Parish Priest Fr Bill Bergin commented that they are "two people who have contributed so much to this parish, to this community and to the hospice and to so many other wonderful causes, and to me they have contributed so much, quietly, generously and kindly, and we are all better for knowing them."

HARRY CARLIN RECOGNISED IN HOLYTOWN

The following morning, Bishop Toal presented the Bene Merenti medal to **Harry Carlin** *(pictured above with his wife Margaret and Bishop Toal)* during Sunday Mass at Christ the King, Holytown.

Harry was honoured in recognition of decades of dedicated service to his parish and the wider community, reflecting a lifetime of commitment to the Church and to those around him. As a well-known trade unionist and member of the Labour Party, Harry has spent his life fighting to improve the lives of those around him, something he continued to do through his work with the Society of St Vincent de Paul and service to his local parish.

The Bene Merenti medals are a fitting tribute to these faithful members of the Diocese of Motherwell who through their many years of service have helped strengthen parish life, support those in need and put the Christian call to serve others into practice. Their recognition is also a reminder of the countless parishioners whose quiet dedication, generosity and faith sustain the life of the Church every day.

Called and Sent

Leadership Formation for a Synodal Church

The journey into a synodal way of being Church together, begun by Pope Francis and continued by Pope Leo, is one where we will require a new passion for equipping and using the gifts of leaders.

Responding to this call and to what people have asked for, the Bishops' Conference are excited to offer Called and Sent, a formation for Christian leaders. This course will equip people with skills and tools that, while necessary in the Church today, will be even more so in the Church going into the future, where clergy, laity and religious are called to be co-responsible for the 'the being and action of the Church'. (Pope Benedict). The course will be conducted in a spirit of prayerfulness and entail one full day's formation and four follow-up online formation sessions.

We are looking for people who are prayerful, faith-filled and already involved in the life of the Church in their parish, diocese or organisation. Please consider if you might be the right person for this course.

For more information, and to apply for Called and Sent, visit:
www.iscglasgow.co.uk/called-and-sent



Warm welcome as Bishop Tata returns to Motherwell

Motherwell Diocese recently welcomed Bishop John Tata back to the Diocese following his Episcopal Ordination with a special African Mass celebrated in the Cathedral.

BY FR OLUWAFEMI VICTOR ORILUA CSSP
It was a moment of great joy, colour and celebration on the 20th of September 2026 as the African Catholic Community gathered at Our Lady of Good Aid Cathedral, Motherwell, to welcome Bishop John Berinyuy Tata, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Bamenda, Cameroon.

For Bishop Tata, the visit was something of a homecoming. Before returning to Cameroon, he had spent time in Scotland and ministered within the Diocese of Motherwell, where he became well known and loved by many parishioners. His longstanding friendship with the Diocese, particularly with Bishop Joseph Toal, has continued over the years. His return, now as a bishop, therefore carried a special significance for the local Church.

A STORY OF GRACE AND PROVIDENCE

Bishop Tata's journey is a remarkable testimony to grace, courage and divine providence. In November 2025, while serving as a priest in Cameroon, he was abducted by armed men alongside five other priests. While the others who were subsequently taken were released earlier, Fr Tata remained in captivity until 2 December 2025. Only a few months later, on 13 February 2026, Pope Leo XIV appointed him Auxiliary Bishop of Bamenda.

His story brings to mind the words of St Paul: "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God" (Romans 8:28).

Presiding at the African Community Mass in Motherwell, Bishop Tata encouraged the community to remain at the service of love and unity, and to contribute actively to the growth of the local Church. His message was particularly meaningful to Africans who have made Scotland their home: they are not simply visitors in the Church but members of the one Body of Christ, called to offer their gifts in building up the Christian community.

As St Paul reminds us, "There is one body and one Spirit… one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians 4:4–5).

A CHURCH WHERE EVERYONE BELONGS

The welcome extended to the African Catholic Community also reflects the pastoral openness of Bishop Joseph Toal. His approach to mission continues to encourage a Church in which people from different countries, cultures and backgrounds can find a spiritual home.

This spirit of inclusion resonates beautifully with the Gospel of the workers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1–16). The landowner went out at different hours of the day, inviting labourers into his vineyard, yet each was received with generosity. In the same way, irrespective of when or where we first received the Gospel, each person has a special place in the heart of God and a contribution to make to the life of the Church.

The African community is therefore not merely an addition to

the Diocese; it is increasingly becoming part of the unfolding story of the local Church.

DIFFERENT NATIONS, ONE FAMILY

At a time when many parts of Europe are experiencing a decline in vocations to the priesthood, there remain encouraging signs of young people discerning priestly and religious life within the Diocese. The recent ordination of Fr Christopher Igwe, an African priest, alongside the continuing development of the African Catholic Community, further demonstrates the increasingly international character of the Church in Motherwell.

Another beautiful sign of this integration can be seen in marriages between Africans and Scots. Such families naturally bring cultures and traditions together, creating bonds that go beyond nationality and reminding the Church of St Paul's words: "You are no longer strangers and aliens, but… members of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19).

A CELEBRATION RICH IN AFRICAN CULTURE

The Mass, which began at 1.00 p.m., brought together about 300 lay people, representing different African nations as well as members of the Scottish Catholic community and two African nuns. Bishop Tata presided at the celebration, joined by Bishop Toal and nine other priests.

The universality of the Church was particularly evident during the Prayer of the Faithful, with intentions offered in different African languages, including English, Shona, Swahili, Annang and Luganda. Different voices and languages became one prayer before God, recalling the beautiful image of Pentecost, when people from many nations heard the wonders of God proclaimed in their own languages (Acts 2:5–11).

The Zimbabwean Community led the offertory procession, bringing forward the gifts in a colourful procession accompanied by traditional song and dance. It was a joyful expression of faith in which African culture found a natural home within the Catholic liturgy.

FROM THE ALTAR TO THE TABLE

The celebration did not end at the Cathedral altar. Afterwards, the community gathered in the hall, where an impressive variety of food and refreshments was shared.

Perhaps most significant was the spirit behind the meal. The food was the collective handiwork of members of the community, who contributed generously to a common pot and worked together to ensure that everyone was welcomed and fed. In its own simple way, it reflected the life of the early Christian community: "All who believed were together and had all things in common" (Acts 2:44).







Top left: Bishop John at St Mark's Rutherglen with Fr Stephen Reilly & Fr Christopher Igwe, Top right: At St Patrick's Sheildmuir with Fr Ricklan Malya & Deacon Harry McKenna, Bottom: Visiting St Patrick's Primary Coatbridge with Fr Kevin McGoldrick & Deacon Tom Gorman.

It was a fitting conclusion to a celebration centred on faith, unity, hospitality and belonging.

As well as celebrating a special Mass at the Cathedral, during his visit to the Diocese, Bishop Tata also spent time at Carfin Grotto, St Patrick's Coatbridge, St Leonard's East Kilbride, St Patrick's Sheildmuir and St Anthony & St Mary's Rutherglen, visiting parishes in which he had previously served and catching up with priests who had become friends.

The visit of Bishop John Tata was therefore much more than the reception of a visiting bishop. It was a celebration of a Church whose richness is found in the diversity of her people —a Church in which African and Scottish Catholics can worship, serve, eat, laugh and grow together as one family of God.

As Scripture beautifully declares:
"There is neither Jew nor Greek… for you are all one in Christ Jesus." — Galatians 3:28



Photos: Fr Oluwafemi Victor Orilua

Month of the Holy Souls



November is traditionally dedicated to the Holy Souls, offering us a special opportunity to pray for the eternal rest of all the faithful departed and to remember with love those who have gone before us. Throughout the month, the Church invites us to reflect on the hope of eternal life and to entrust our deceased family members, friends and fellow parishioners to the loving mercy of God.

A number of opportunities will take place across the Diocese of Motherwell to come together in prayer and remembrance. On Thursday, 5 November, at 7pm, Our Lady of Good Aid Cathedral, Motherwell, will host the annual Mass for the Deceased Clergy (Bishops, Priests, and Deacons). Although there have been no clergy deaths over the past year, it remains important to remember the Bishops, Priests and Deacons who have who have gone before us, thanking God for their service to the Church in Motherwell Diocese as we pray for their eternal rest.

Parishes across the Diocese will also celebrate their own Remembrance Masses throughout the month, an opportunity to pray for all of our deceased relatives, friends and parishioners, with particular remembrance of those who have died during the past year. Details of these Masses will be announced locally in parishes.

Throughout the Sundays of November, services have been arranged to take place at many of the cemeteries across the Diocese for people to gather and pray for all those buried there. Details of some of these services are listed here, whilst others will be announced locally.

Sunday 8 November is Remembrance Sunday, when we remember all those who have died in war and conflict, giving thanks for their sacrifice and praying for peace throughout the world. North Lanarkshire Council has informed the Diocese of the local remembrance services at Coatbridge War Memorial, Bank Street, Coatbridge, at 10.45am and Motherwell Cenotaph, Duchess of Hamilton Park at 3pm. Other remembrance services will take place locally across the Diocese.

As we journey through November, may we remember all who have died in our prayers, asking the Lord to grant them eternal rest.

Cemetery Services

Sunday 1st November 2026

Larkhall Cemetery, Larkhall - 1.30pm
St Joseph's Cemetery, Airdrie - 2.00pm
St Patrick's Cemetery, New Stevenson - 2.00pm
St Peter's Cemetery, Dalbeath (Glasgow) - 3.00pm

Sunday 8th November 2026

Lesmahagow Cemetery, Lesmahagow - 1.30pm
Rutherglen Cemetery, Rutherglen - 1.30pm
Old Monkland Cemetery, Coatbridge - 2.00pm
Airbles Cemetery, Motherwell - 2.00pm

Sunday 15th November 2026

Bothwellhaugh Cemetery, Bellshill - 2.00pm

Sunday 22nd November 2026

Bothwellpark Cemetery, Bellshill - 2.00pm
Coltswood Cemetery, Coatbridge - 2.00pm

Diocese of Motherwell

Mass for Deceased Clergy

Thursday 5th November | 7.00pm | Our Lady of Good Aid Cathedral, Motherwell

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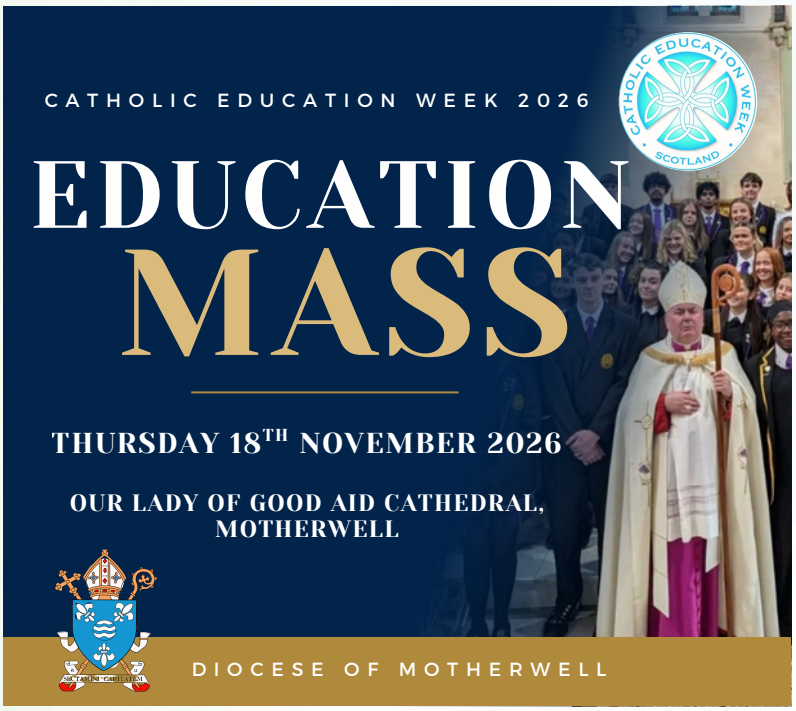
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Catholic Education Week

Catholic Education Week takes place each year from the Feast of St Margaret of Scotland (16th November) until the Feast of St Andrew (30th November). The theme for 2026 is "To Know God, Love God and Serve God"

The purpose of Catholic Education Week is to highlight the significance of education, not only for young people but also for society as a whole. Students, parents, teachers and others are asked to reflect on their own roles in the education process – at home, in school, in the local parish and in other educational settings.

Every year, as part of Catholic Education Week, the Diocese comes together in Our Lady of Good Aid Cathedral to celebrate the Annual Education Mass, where Bishop Toal is the main celebrant. All those who have a connection to Catholic education, past and present, are warmly invited to attend this Mass on Thursday 18th November at 7pm.

Catholic Education: A New Session

BY DR NATALIE FINNIGAN
The new school session has begun with a real sense of energy and enthusiasm across the Diocese of Motherwell, with much to be encouraged by in the life of our Catholic schools. Through Wellspring, we continue to consider how best to support our school communities in their Catholic mission, recognising the good work already taking place and seeking opportunities to build upon it.

The first few weeks have provided a range of opportunities for teachers at different stages of their careers to come together for professional learning and faith formation. Our work with school leaders and chaplains has also continued, providing opportunities to listen to the experiences of those working in our schools and consider how we might best support them.

One of the highlights of September was the annual Caritas Commissioning Service at Our Lady of Good Aid Cathedral, where young people from across the Diocese gathered with Bishop Toal as they began their Caritas journey. It was particularly encouraging to see so many young people willing to give of their time in service to others. Earlier in the month, Caritas pupils had also supported the National Pilgrimage at Carfin, providing a very visible example of faith being put into action.

Looking ahead, we are particularly excited about our forthcoming S6 Forum, which will bring together young people from across North and South Lanarkshire to engage in conversation with Bishop Toal and a panel of invited guests. We hope these gatherings will provide an opportunity for our young people to ask questions about matters that are important to them and to reflect on the place of faith in their own lives.

As the session progresses, we hope to build on these early experiences, particularly through closer collaboration with our schools and parishes. There is much that we can learn from one another, and an important part of our work through Wellspring is to listen to our school communities and respond in ways that help them flourish in their Catholic mission.

A new role for Stephanie



BY CLAIRE O'NEILL
The Diocesan RE department recently bid a fond farewell to Mrs Stephanie McCrossan after more than 13 years of excellent service.

Stephanie, who is well known across the Diocese as the Schools Retreat Team leader, is returning to her studies at the University of Glasgow to train as a primary teacher. We wish Stephanie every success and look forward to welcoming her as a teacher in the Diocese in a few years.

The Diocesan Retreats Team continue to offer Primary 5 and Primary 7 retreats for schools in their own local parish. For more information about availability, please email retreats@rcdom.org.uk

Education Mission Leads meet with Head Teachers

BY CLAIRE O'NEILL
DIOCESAN RE CO-ORDINATOR AND PRIMARY RE ADVISER
When Bishop Toal appointed Dr Natalie Finnigan and myself as joint Mission Leads for the Education Mission of Project Wellspring, we realised that before we could set priorities for the Education Mission, we should take stock of the current situations in the diocesan schools. It made sense to concentrate on meetings with the Catholic head teachers as they are the main stakeholders. Within the Diocese of Motherwell, there are 73 primary schools and 11 secondary schools so to arrange meetings with this number of colleagues was no small undertaking.

The purpose of the meetings was to listen to inform so appointments were made for a structured hour-long meeting with each head teacher in their own school. Through these discussions, some common themes of areas of strength and development needs began to emerge. It was very reassuring to see that every school nurtured a strong Catholic ethos where Christ is put at the centre of the school and indeed many schools have their patron saint and school prayer on display in the school foyer. Prayer, as you would expect, permeates the school day both in the classroom and during assemblies, and there were many examples of prayer being part of outdoor learning, with some schools saying morning prayer in the yard, taking part in Stations of the Cross in the playground and using the school gardens to say a rosary as a class together.

There were so many inspiring examples of excellent practice, particularly in Catholic Social Teaching and strong parish links, that it was decided that the first meeting of the Association of Catholic Primary Head Teachers would be dedicated to a sharing of these examples of good practice.

It was also of equal importance to recognise the common challenges which schools are facing. Many head teachers noted a need for continuous teacher formation and a better understanding of Church approval, and there was some concern about the impending introduction of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle, which is part of a Scottish Government (Education Scotland) update and review of the Curriculum for Excellence. All of these highlighted themes are now already part of the Education Mission priorities, and plans are already underway to provide ongoing support for probationer teachers, aspiring Catholic leaders, and CREDL seminars, as well as a session for Catholic Approval and another for Church Representative training.

We were incredibly grateful to the head teachers who made time for these important meetings, and we look forward to continuing with this strategic support for Catholic schools.

Annual Conference for Catholic Primary Head Teachers



BY CLAIRE O'NEILL
On 1st and 2nd October, Bishop Toal joined Diocesan primary head teachers at the Annual Conference of the Catholic Headteachers Association for Primary Schools in Scotland. Bishops, clergy, head teachers, RE advisers, SCES and university staff travelled from all over Scotland to attend this unique event, which this year shared the theme with the 'Big Ideas' of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle: Know God, Love God, and serve God.

Bishop Frank Dougan of Galloway Diocese presided over the opening Mass, where the music was provided by vice chair Kris Thomas of St John Paul II Primary. Then, over the course of two days, the theme was explored by Barbara Coupar (Director of SCES), Sarah Gallagher (Lead Officer for RERC, Education Scotland) and keynote speaker David Wells.

After the closing Mass, where Archbishop Cushley of the Archdiocese of St Andrew's and Edinburgh presided, head teachers returned to their schools with renewed enthusiasm and fresh vigour for their vocation as Catholic school leaders.

Commissioning of Caritas Students and MISSIO Champions



BY CLAIRE O'NEILL
On Wednesday, 30th September, the Diocese of Motherwell saw hundreds of young people commit to the service of others. In the Cathedral, Bishop Toal commissioned almost 700 S6 students as they begin their Caritas Award, and later at St Francis Xavier Parish, P6 pupils from across the Diocese were commissioned as MISSIO Champions for their schools. Please keep these young people in your prayers as they begin this year of faithful service for their schools and parishes.



Photos: Fr Oluwafemi Victor Orilua

Dare to Love

Bishop Toal commissions 623 pupils as they begin their Caritas journey

BY FR OLUWAFEMI VICTOR ORILUA CSSP
CHAPLAIN TO ST AIDAN'S HIGH SCHOOL, WISHAW
At Motherwell Cathedral on 30 September 2026, Bishop Joseph Toal welcomed 623 pupils, teachers and chaplains from 11 secondary schools across the Diocese of Motherwell for a special Caritas commissioning service.

The schools represented were Taylor High School, St Ambrose High School, Holy Cross High School, St Aidan's High School, Trinity High School, Cardinal Newman High School, Our Lady's High School, St Andrew's High School, St John Ogilvie High School, St Margaret's High School, and St Andrew's & St Bride's High School.

This solemn celebration was enriched by beautiful music provided by the pupils and staff of St Andrew's & St Bride's High School, helping to create a prayerful atmosphere as the young people prepared to begin their journey of faith, love and service.

However, the spirit of the Caritas Award echoes Pope Benedict XVI's powerful invitation to young people at World Youth Day in 2007: "Dare to love." He challenged young people not to settle for anything less than a love that is strong, beautiful and capable of transforming their lives into a joyful gift to God and to others.

In his homily, drawing on Romans 6:14–18 and Matthew 11:28–30, Bishop Toal encouraged the young people to imitate the love of Christ and to allow that love to become visible in the way they live and serve others.



Bishop Toal also invited them to reflect on the life of St Francis of Assisi, whose radical commitment to Christ was expressed through humility, simplicity and loving service to others.

The young people were then invited to make their own commitment to love and service. Bishop Toal blessed their Caritas badges, which represents a call to become visible witnesses of Christ in their schools, parishes, families and communities.

He concluded by recalling Christ's command to his disciples: "Love one another as I have loved you."

Following the final blessing, the young people gathered for refreshments at St Bride's Hall, bringing to a close a joyful celebration but marking the beginning of something much greater: their Caritas journey.

For these 623 young people, the challenge now moves beyond the Cathedral doors: to dare to love, to choose service, and to make the love of Christ visible wherever they go.



Week in the life of a Caritas Student at Cardinal Newman High

BY SHAUN BELL, S6 CARDINAL NEWMAN HIGH BELLSHILL

Through Caritas we are able to take opportunities that help improve our leadership and responsibly. This week was no different as Caritas pupils were able to lead a celebratory Mass for the retiring Mrs McDade.

By leading this Mass, it represents giving a little love back after years of work and dedication that Mrs. McDade has put into the school. This type of unconditional love is what we learn about, to try to show, and is emphasised at our gathering points.

On Thursdays, I normally take part in giving out leaflets around houses with some of my classmates and my parish priest, Father Bogan. These leaflets emphasises that St Columba's isn't just a church but a welcoming community with a place for everyone. Father Bogan likes to stress that there is always a way for God's love to re-enter your life, whatever path you have entered. This is something I feel is important to me while I proceed through my Caritas journey. Due to circumstances, we were unable to deliver leaflets this week, but we did have a plan B. This is helping with the cleaning of the church. By doing this, it created not only a great opportunity to help look after the church but also a deeper understanding of gratefulness for all that volunteers do to allow the church to operate.

On Sunday I attended Sunday Mass; this is a great way to reflect on my week. I finished my week with 20 minutes of silent prayer. This is simple and can be done by anyone (credit to Father Bogan for teaching me it). Find a quiet place, straight back and hands on lap, and repeat the words in your head: *'Lord Jesus, you're here, you're with us, you're in us.'* It is completely normal to become distracted but return to prayer. I recommend trying, as it helps me reflect on myself as an individual and through my faith.

Photo: Shaun's parish of St Columba's Viewpark





Cathedral Primary win top prize



BY KRISTIN CARROLL

Cathedral Primary School in Motherwell were absolutely delighted to celebrate an outstanding national achievement for their school, with our learners winning 1st Prize across Scotland in the Bishops' Conference of Scotland's Design a Garden Competition.

Their winning design was created by their junior chaplaincy pupil group, Ignite. The planned garden will be much more than a beautiful outdoor space. It will serve as a place for prayer, reflection, learning and appreciation of the natural world. The design celebrates God's creation, honours St Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology and the environment, as well as paying tribute to the school's patron saint, Our Lady of Good Aid. The Ignite team will be working throughout the year to ensure that their vision begins to take shape so that the newly created garden space will become a lasting legacy for their school community.

This fantastic achievement was recognised at a special presentation at Cathedral Primary, where Bishop Toal presented the £250 first prize to Mrs Carroll and members of our Ignite group. We were delighted to welcome June Clunie, Assistant General Secretary of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland, along with Michael Roache and Des Hamill from the Knights of St Columba, and Joanna Sweeney from SCES, who joined us to celebrate this fantastic achievement.

Mrs Duffy, Acting Head Teacher, was delighted with the exceptionally high standard of the Ignite team's entry and their thoughtful vision for the garden. She commented on how proud the school is of the pupils' creativity, faith and commitment to caring for God's creation and is looking forward to seeing their ideas develop throughout the year.

The completed garden will be a wonderful addition to our school grounds and a special space for our whole school community to enjoy, reflect and learn.

All Saints bids farewell as Mr Connelly retires



BY MICHAEL DEANE

After an incredible 42 years of teaching, including 32 years at Alexandra and All Saints Primary Schools, Francis Connelly has decided to begin a well-deserved retirement.

Throughout his remarkable career, Frank has made a lasting impact on the lives of thousands of children, families and colleagues. His dedication to education, his love of Scotland and his passion for the great outdoors have been an inspiration to so many.

From countless school camps and outdoor adventures to memorable trips to bothies with children and their families, Frank has created memories that will be treasured for many years to come.

As he brings this wonderful chapter of his life to a close, Frank leaves with the great honour of having received the Diocesan Medal from Bishop Toal and Father Doyle, recognising his many years of dedicated service.

From everyone in our school community, we would like to wish Mr Connelly and his wife, Maureen, a very happy, healthy and fulfilling retirement. We will miss him greatly, but Frank will always be a very special part of our school family.



St Bride's welcomes new Mini Vinnies

BY MARGARET DALY

St Bride's Bothwell welcomed its newest members of the St Vincent de Paul Society when 28 Mini Vinnies were commissioned during Mass on the Feast of the Guardian Angels.

Their teacher, Miss Nelson, prepared the children beautifully to make their promise to be kind, caring and charitable to everyone. Father Kevin Ryan invited the children to make their promise before concluding the ceremony with a prayer. A wonderful start for our newest and youngest members of the St Vincent de Paul Society.

Hundreds of Scottish pupils urged to become ‘witnesses of hope’ at major youth rally



BY NATHALIE RAFFRAY

Cheers, music and moments of silent prayer marked one of Scotland's largest Catholic youth gatherings as more than 700 young people came together to learn about the realities facing Christians persecuted for their faith around the world.

Pupils from 23 schools attended Catholic Charity Aid to the Church in Need’s Scottish Youth Rally on Tuesday, 8th September, where they learned about the challenges faced by suffering Christian communities.

Now in its 10th year, the rally’s dual theme for 2026 was Witnesses of Hope & Called and Sent, encouraging young people to reflect on their own faith and how they can support Christians suffering or facing persecution.

Over four hours pupils in Hamilton’s Town House watched harrowing footage documenting attacks on Christian communities, heard from guest speakers, and took part in Eucharist Adoration.

The event’s MC - Aberdeen’s Father James Anyaegbu, a Tik Tok phenomenon with 1.8m followers - got them out of their seats dancing, singing and posing for selfies.

A message of support from Pope Leo was read during the event, in which he offered encouragement and blessings to those taking part.

Among the guests were Dominican Sisters of St Cecilia who responded to pupil queries in “Ask a Sister”, ACN’s international Advocacy Director Marcela Syzmanski and the Clydebank-based Catholic charity Firecloud, whose music accompanied periods of prayer and reflection.

One of the most memorable moments came during an interactive session led by Dominican Sisters Isabelle Marie and Angela Marie in a “do this, not that” game; pupils enthusiastically competed to be the last person standing while learning a deeper lesson about faith and discipleship.

Reflecting on the exercise, Sister Isabelle Marie said, "This is what it means to be part of a crowd and singled out in a crowd and that wave of enthusiasm. That was the crowd when Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.”

Suzanne Burniss, director of Firecloud, who provided music, said, "It's brilliant to see young people come together like this. We do Eucharistic Adoration, so there’s a real presence of Christians here.

“We have the privilege to do the music ministry. For us it’s a great privilege to do that part.

“It stirs the heart of these young people to respond to the mission of ACN at home and around the world, and that is really powerful. We’re delighted to be asked to be part of this event.”

The rally struck a chord with pupils attending from across Scotland. Fr Anyaegbu said, "Events like this help young people understand what's happening in places such as Africa, India and Ukraine. We need to be aware of those facing persecution and speak out about it.”

William More, head of ACN in Scotland said: “For me, the most powerful part of the rally was seeing hundreds of young people realise what happens to Christians around the world. Young people are not simply the Church of tomorrow — they are the Church of today.

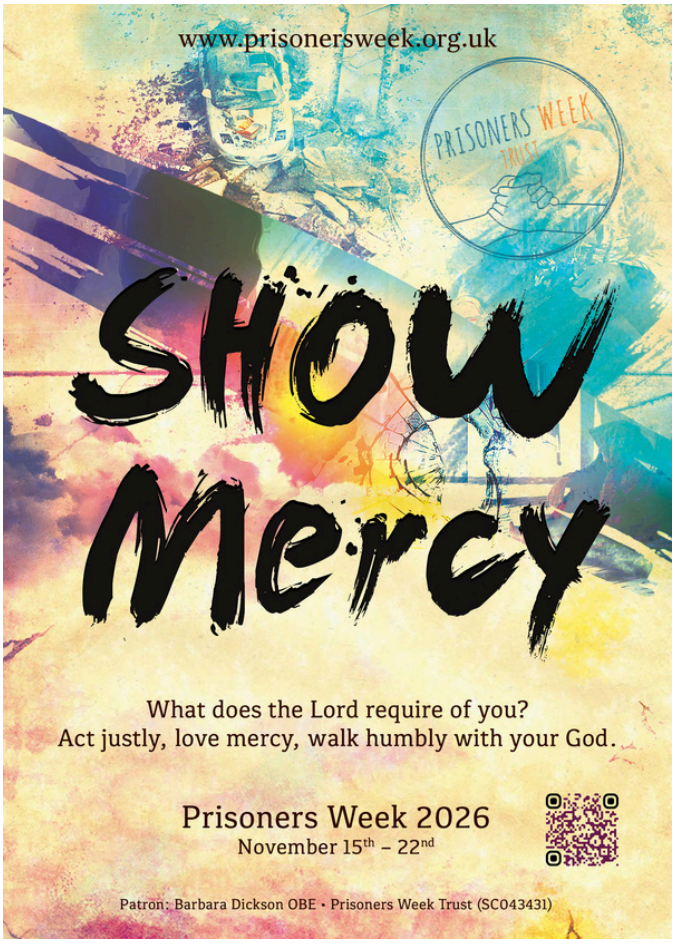
“We want them to hear the stories of Christians who are persecuted for their faith, to be moved by those stories, and then to ask themselves, 'What can I do?' Our hope is that they leave this rally not just inspired but ready to be witnesses of hope wherever they are.

“All of this gives me hope and excitement for what young people can achieve, and I can’t wait to share their successes.”

Show Mercy

Prisoners Week 2026

Ahead of Prisoners Week, 15th to 22nd November, **Fr Jim Clarke SX,** Catholic Chaplain to **HMP Shotts** provides



> Perhaps more than ever we live in a society where mercy has left the building...Pope Francis said the world needs a 'revolution of tenderness'
>
> FATHER JIM CLARKE SX

There is a hymn, perhaps not used too often in our Masses today, which has the lyrics; "O Lord all the world belongs to You, and You are always making all things new. What is wrong? You forgive, and the new life You give is what's turning the whole world upside down."

These words came to me as I was reflecting on the theme for prisoners' week – "Show mercy" – and brought to my mind the radical project of life proclaimed in the beatitudes of Jesus, one of which is "Happy the merciful, for they shall have mercy shown them."

The Beatitudes remind us of the type of lives we are called to live. Lives that are very different from the world. The world tells us... happy the rich, the strong, the perennial pleasure seekers, the users, the merciless, the powerful, the famous, the privileged, the mighty, and those who build their own kingdoms.

Jesus tells us...happy the poor, the gentle, the empathic, the justice seekers, the merciful, the pure and simple, the peacemakers, the compassionate, the humble, and those who build up God's Kingdom.

Perhaps more than ever we live in a society where mercy has left the building; it's no longer in vogue; it's a sign of failure or weakness. Pope Francis said the world needs a "revolution of tenderness", and as we see how unforgiving, judgemental and self-righteous our culture has become, his words ring truer and more necessary than ever.

And what of prisoners. What an outcry there was when prisoners in England were being released halfway through their sentences, and it reminded me again that it is all to easy to point the finger, to condemn the other, to point out the splinter in my neighbour's eye!

I have been blessed to serve as Chaplain in HMP Shotts for over 2 years now. There is not a day when I don't leave the building saying, "There but for the grace of God go I." Many of the men in prison never had a chance in life; born into families plagued by addiction, or dragged into criminal gangs, or suffering from a vast array of mental health issues, or brought up in a less than adequate care system, or one wrong choice or a senseless mistake... there but the grace of God might go.

The theme for Prisoners Week, "Show Mercy", is a timely reminder that, as Christians, mercy and forgiveness are at the heart of our faith. The prayer Jesus left us, "Forgive us our

trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" isn't just a nice soundbite or something we try to live. It's a condition for truly following Jesus and living as true sons and daughters of the Father.

So perhaps during Prisoners Week we can reflect on our own attitudes. How forgiving or unforgiving am I? Am I truly merciful in my opinions and comments, or am I hard of heart? Do I try to put myself in the other person's shoes, or am I content to just condemn? Do I reiterate the fake news and stereotypes that Tabloids peddle, or do I seek to inform my opinion?

And perhaps during Prisoner's Week we can pray for all those in prison, their victims, those who work there and the families of those in these institutions. And perhaps we can challenge the tainted and twisted narrative that our society is happy to spin. After all, turning the world upside down has to start somewhere.



A Time to Write

Graeme Shaw from **Prison Fellowship Scotland** shares how you can support prisoners by taking part in their **'A Time to Write'** campaign.

BY GRAEME SHAW, PRISON FELLOWSHIP SCOTLAND
For many men and women in prison, life can be incredibly lonely. Separated from family, friends and their communities, it can be easy to feel forgotten or to lose hope.

A Time to Write, run by Prison Fellowship Scotland, offers a simple way to change that.

At its heart, A Time to Write is about relationships. Volunteers exchange letters with someone in prison, building a genuine and supportive connection over time. It is not about having all the answers or trying to fix someone's life. It is about being willing to listen, to encourage and to remind another person that they matter.

As Christians, we are called to share God's love not just through what we say, but through how we treat people. A regular letter can be a small but powerful expression of that love. It can say, "You are not forgotten. You are valued. There is still hope."

Volunteers write one letter each month for a minimum of four months, with full training and ongoing support. All correspondence is carried out using an alias, so personal addresses and contact details remain private.

Sometimes building a relationship begins with something as simple as putting pen to paper. Could you spare a little time each month to share God's love with someone who may feel forgotten?

For more info contact
letterwriting@pfscotland.org




Photo: Elaine Furmage

Project Wellspring
sharing progress on parish renewal

Stephen Ferrie recaps the recent Wellspring Parish Forum Meeting

The latest in a series of highly successful parish Forum meetings took place on 5 October at Our Lady and St Anne's in Hamilton. The focus for the meeting was progress with parish renewal and evangelisation under Project Wellspring.

Father Charles O'Farrell, parish priest of Our Lady and St Anne's, opened proceedings by welcoming clergy and lay people from parishes across the Diocese to the recently refurbished parish hall, which proved to be an excellent venue for the gathering.

The objectives for the Forum were

- Promote parish renewal and evangelisation
- Profile the work of our Wellspring Mission workstreams
- Share ideas and discuss progress with parish plans and priorities

We were delighted that some of our newer Missions had an opportunity to provide an update on progress with their plans. Eileen McQuade outlined the journey that her Care for Creation Mission has been on, while Father O'Farrell shared with the audience his thoughts on how we move forward with our most recently constituted Mission that is focused on Vocations.

In between those updates, Natalie Finnigan, who jointly leads our Education Mission, took the audience through an abbreviated version of the Called and Gifted experience, which helps individuals to discern their particular charisms or spiritual gifts. The interactive nature of this session proved particularly popular and generated lively discussion all round.

Having heard from the Mission leads, the second part of the evening involved inter-parish discussion reflecting on what people had just heard about Mission progress. It also entailed discussing progress with individual parish renewal plans. As ever, the table discussion was lively and energising, with people keen to share ideas and learn about what others have been working on.

The meeting concluded with a brief look at progress with the Diocesan Synodality project. Ann Marie Dickson from the project team outlined the scope of the work that is underway and signposted a number of important milestones that are scheduled for the first part of 2027. Suffice it to say, it promises to be a very busy start to the year!

> Synodality is a style; it is a walk together, and it is what the Lord expects from the Church of the third millennium.'
>
> POPE FRANCIS, 2019


Photo: Elaine Furmage

Prayers for Pope Leo XIV

The bishops of Scotland have invited all Catholics and all people of goodwill across Scotland to keep Pope Leo XIV in their prayers following surgery at Rome's Gemelli Hospital.

The Holy See Press Office has confirmed that tests carried out during the procedure have diagnosed the Holy Father with a common form of lung cancer.

The operation was successful, and there were no complications. Pope Leo is now recovering following surgery.

In a statement issued on behalf of the Bishops of Scotland, they called for "the people of Scotland to keep the Holy Father in their thoughts and prayers in the days ahead, together with the doctors, nurses and all those caring for him."

"May the Lord grant Pope Leo strength, peace and healing as he begins his recovery," the statement concluded.

Writing to the Diocese days after the announcement from the Vatican, Bishop Toal said, "We are all concerned by the news of Pope Leo's cancer diagnosis, and we will keep him in our prayer as we hope for a full recovery."

Days after his surgery, the Pope celebrated Mass in the hospital. A statement said: "In his homily, the Pope thanked all the staff—doctors, nurses, and orderlies—for the work they do every day caring for patients in their frailty, and especially for what they have done and continue to do for him."

News of the Holy Father's health came just weeks after his visit to France, during which he celebrated Mass in Notre Dame Cathedral in Parish and spent time at Our Lady's Shrine at Lourdes.

In Lourdes, the Holy Father took part in the nightly torchlight procession and spoke to those gathered, saying, "How moving it is to see the faithful, from one generation to the next, respond with love and trust to the tender invitation of the Virgin Mary. How consoling it is to hear Christians sing hymns filled with fervour and faith and to see them walk, with a light in their hands, towards their Mother in Heaven, the Mother whom Jesus gave us from the Cross. I give thanks to the Lord that I, too, may respond this evening to the call of our Mother, becoming a pilgrim among pilgrims."

Pope Leo's Prayer Intentions

Every month, The Holy Father asks Catholics around the world to pray for a particular intention.

NOVEMBER

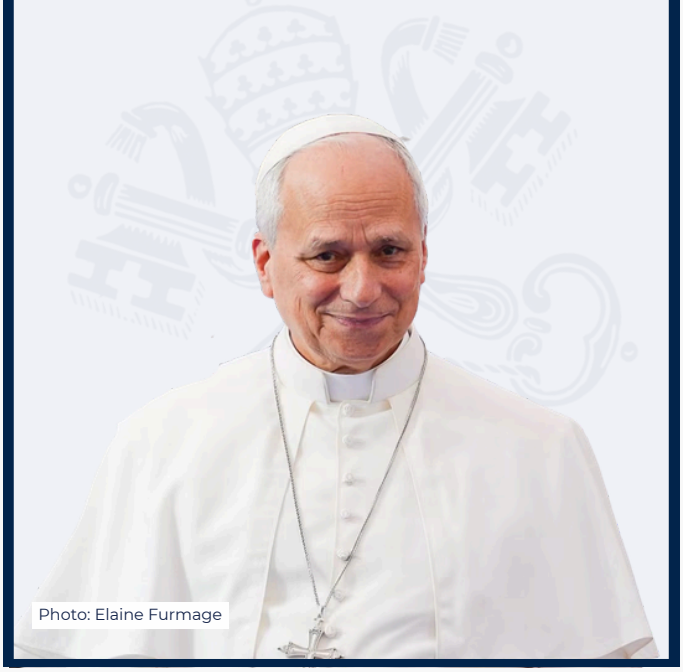
FOR THE PROPER USE OF WEALTH

Let us pray for the proper use of wealth, that not succumbing to the temptation of selfishness, it may always be put at the service of the common good and solidarity of those who have less.

DECEMBER

FOR SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES

Let us pray for families experiencing the absence of a mother or father, that they may find support and accompaniment in the Church, and help and strength in the faith during difficult times.


Photo: Elaine Furmage

Opening the Scriptures

with **Father Thomas Magill**

Sunday Reflections

Solemnity of All Saints A - 1st November

Revelation 7.2-4, 9-14; Psalm 24; I John 3.1-3; Matthew 5.1-12

There's a beautiful linkage in all the readings between the "already" and "not yet", between the joys and sorrows of this present world and the glory yet to come. The blessedness of the Beatitudes is the experience of divine wisdom and not the logic of the world. (Gospel) They reveal our own powerlessness and make room for the power of the Cross; they enable us to get in touch with our misery and glory and so give a foretaste of the heavenly reward. They tell us that we are already the children of God and that when Christ is fully revealed we shall be like him (2nd reading). In the meantime, we should have a real vision of humanity fully restored in the beauty of Christ in the company of all the Saints, which fills us with hope as we make our pilgrim way. (1st reading)

All Souls' Day A - 2nd November

Isaiah 25.6a, 7-9; Psalm 27; Romans 5.5-11; Matthew 11.25-30

Death is the final barrier humans cannot overcome, the ultimate situation they cannot fix. Death is powerlessness laid out in full view. It is in this helplessness that hope is born for those with faith. No longer able to rely on self, they are opened up to a new reality: that God is with them in dying. In Christ, he has been there before them. He is the powerful one who comes to them in their weakness, who instils his gift of hope in their hearts. (1st reading of Romans) In suffering and dying, they are yoked to the dying and rising Christ. (Gospel) Christ offers no explanation for suffering, no easy words about death. He simply assures his presence and peace and cancels death's threat of annihilation. (1st reading: Wisdom) He encourages his followers to make friends with death while they are alive by constantly dying to self, by losing their lives, and by taking up his yoke and burden of the Cross. "Whether we live or whether we die, we belong to the Lord." (Romans 14.8) This deep belonging allows us to pray for each other, both the living and the dead, during this earthy journey and for that journey to eternal life.

32nd Sunday Ordinary Time A - 8th November

Wisdom 6.12-16; Psalm 63; I Thessalonians 4.13-18; Matthew 25.1-13

So often the parables of Jesus make us want to identify with the "winners" – here the wise virgins. (Gospel) As we listen attentively, we discover it's not quite as simple as that. All the virgins were invited to the wedding feast. All are waiting for the bridegroom. But there is a mixture of readiness and unreadiness among them. Some are well-stocked; others have let their resources run down. The whole group reflects every individual believer. At times, our faith is alive and active; at other times, we feel we are running on empty. The Christian life invites us to be awake, to watch, and to be alert. Christ the Bridegroom comes not only at the end of time but also each day in different guises. The more light we bring to our world, the more we will recognise him, coming to us radiant and unfading. (1st reading) The more we encounter this Lord in life, the more ready we will be to recognise him at the end. He is the Lord who died and rose again and embraces both the living and the dead (2nd reading)

33rd Sunday Ordinary Time A - 15th November

Proverbs 31.10-13, 19-20, 30-31; Psalm 128; I Thessalonians 5.1-6; Matthew 25.14-30

Jesus is nearing the end of this part of his journey, and expectations are high. Once again, Jesus tells a parable to invite his listeners to examine those expectations, to probe their presuppositions, and to invite them to a deeper understanding. The story is about gift and response. All the servants are and have a pure gift. The money given is not owed, not earned; they are slaves after all. The master gives them space, room, and time to respond. And that response itself emerges from the gift. The slothful servant is projecting his own miserliness upon the master. He lives in fear and has become stuck. The parable challenges the listeners' understanding of God and their proclivity to make God in their own image. The image we have of God will be revealed in our open-handedness to the poor and needy (1st reading) and in how we stay alert to this Lord who comes to us unexpectedly and unannounced. (2nd reading)

Solemnity of Christ the King A - 22nd November

Ezekiel 34.11-12, 15-17; Psalm 23; I Corinthians 15.20-26, 28; Matthew 25.31-46

"Christ is King" is becoming a motto of those who want to create an exclusionary and intimidating Christianity, who want to divide and sow hatred. This is diametrically opposed to Christ the Shepherd King (Psalm) who gathers and leads all of humanity into one flock. In him all shall be made alive. (2nd reading) Contrast this with the human propensity to exclude and marginalize others, so often "the least of these brothers"

of Christ. The Christian life is about reaching out, not pushing away; empathy, not antipathy; and walking, not walking away. Christ comes in the here and now and invites us to a recognition and friendship which will last for eternity. Christ is the one who separates but doesn't exclude. Through his fire of divine love, he separates the dross in us from who we truly are, beloved children of God. He takes the goat out of us so that we can truly belong to his flock. (1st reading) He destroys and burns up every rule, authority, and power in us that is not of God. (2nd reading)

1st Sunday of Advent B - 29th November

Isaiah 63.16b-17; 64.1,3b-8; Psalm 80; I Corinthians 1.3-9; Mark 13.33-37

Advent is a season of longing and yearning for the God who comes to us in Christ, for God to rend the heavens and come down. (1st reading) It's a time to rediscover that to be a Christian is to stay awake and be alert to the divine presence in our midst. (Gospel) Through baptism and in faith we have been graced with a heightened consciousness and deeper awareness of Christ around us and deep within us. We are given the knowledge that we are not lacking in any gift and that we are deeply enriched through him. (2nd reading) The world wants us to grow dry, to become numb in our feelings, and low in our expectations. As servants in charge, we are made ready to encounter the Master who comes at each moment of our lives.

2nd Sunday of Advent B - 6th December

Isaiah 40.1-5, 9-11; Psalm 85; II Peter 3.8-14; Mark 1.1-8

John the Baptist erupts out of the desert strangely dressed and with an even stranger diet, a man who wants to be noticed and whose message to be heard. There is an urgency, a certain breathlessness in his call to repentance. Yes, he calls for a repentance of sins, but first and foremost he urges a change in the people's way of thinking (this is the primary meaning of the Greek metanoia). We must put on the mind of Christ, as Paul would later say. John's unconventional lifestyle anticipates the Lord's message that we must not settle for the conventions of this world. God is creating a new heaven and a new earth, a new way of living and relating in holiness and godliness. (2nd reading) Changed radically by this new mind, we are called to be heralds of the good news of Christ. (1st reading)

3rd Sunday of Advent B - 13th December

Isaiah 61.1-2a, 10-11; Magnificat; I Thessalonians 5.16-24; John 1.6-8, 19-28

Gaudete Sunday is marked by the joy we feel as we anticipate the Saviour's birth and the deep union between the human and the divine it brings. The Spirit of God is poured out over the entire creation. (1st reading) John the Baptist is presented quite differently from last week. Here, he is the one who gives testimony, who bears witness to the Christ who is to come. (Gospel) He points away from himself – later he would say that Christ must increase while he must decrease. The joy of today and this season comes from the knowledge that God truly is present to us in Christ, that he will always be faithful to us. (2nd reading) With John, we become witnesses to what God is doing as we "decrease" and make room for Christ; as our voices are raised, often in the wilderness, to give voice to the poor and to be an echo of the divine Word of gladness reverberating through the entire universe.







A pilgrim contemplating the view on the moors above Peebles

The Kentigern Way Pilgrim Route
Walking in Mungo's Footsteps

Bill Jack explores the Kentigern Way Pilgrimage route from Hoddom to Glasgow

There is a rather unremarkable-looking field in the lower Annan Valley at the place called Hoddom. A passerby would scarcely give it a second glance. The field is named the St Kentigern Graveyard, but Kentigern is not buried there; his remains lie in the crypt of Glasgow Cathedral. Nevertheless, there has been a long and persistent tradition linking this field with St Kentigern (also known as St Mungo). This connection is increasingly supported by recent archaeological evidence, with radiocarbon dating indicating the presence of a large monastic site as early as 500-600 AD. It is probable that this monastery at Hoddom served as Kentigern's episcopal seat for many years and played a major part in his story.

Kentigern was born around the middle of the 6th century. He is the son of Princess Enoch, daughter of King Llewdwn (Lot), head of the powerful Gododdin (Lothian) kingdom. Here we touch on a delicate matter: Enoch conceives out of wedlock. The circumstances of the conception are obscure, but the reaction of Enoch's father is not. He is furious. He no doubt had plans to marry Enoch off to achieve some beneficial dynastic union. Poor Enoch is brutally expelled from the court on Traprain Law and set adrift in the Firth of Forth, left to perish in a tiny coracle. After an unimaginably terrifying passage, a heavily pregnant Enoch is washed ashore at Culross, where she gives birth to a son. They are given shelter in the Abbey, and the abbot, St Serf, immediately takes a liking to the child. He names him Mungo – 'little dear one'.

Mungo grows up in the abbey under the tutelage of St Serf. He proves to be an outstanding student greatly favoured by St Serf. But much to the abbot's dismay, when Mungo reaches manhood, he feels the calling and decides that he must venture forth to undertake the spreading of the Christian message. In the north St Columba and the monks of Iona are already busy evangelising among the Picts, so Kentigern turns his attention southwest and directs his steps towards the largely pagan Kingdon of Strathclyde.

Sometimes inauspicious beginnings result in unexpected and hugely beneficial outcomes. As a result of the travails of his mother, Mungo does not grow up as a cosseted prince in a pagan court. Instead, his unique talents are harnessed to the Christian cause with lasting effects which will echo down the ages and are still in evidence today.

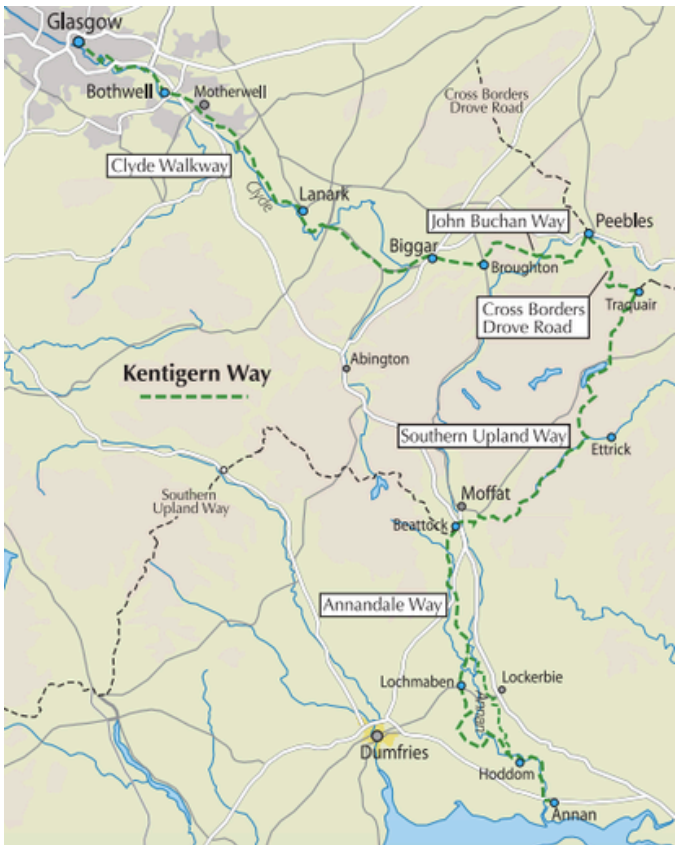
Mungo sets up his monastic cell on the banks of the Molendinar burn and sets about his duties with diligence and devotion, spreading the word of Christ along the Clyde Valley. He is clearly a charismatic figure with a commanding presence and rises through the ranks eventually to become Bishop of Strathclyde. It is possibly around this time that he acquires the title Kentigern, denoting a senior administrative position. Thereafter he becomes more generally known as Kentigern, but the Glasgow and Strathclyde folk still prefer to refer to him affectionately as Mungo – their 'wee darlin'.

Everything is going well when a dispute about access to food breaks out between Kentigern and a powerful local prince called Morken. The matter culminates in a confrontation, and Morken assaults Kentigern, giving him a severe beating. Shortly after, Morken contracts a disease and dies. Morken's family members accuse Kentigern of casting a spell on him and vow revenge. Kentigern is obliged to leave Strathclyde for his own safety, and once again enforced exile becomes part of his story.

Kentigern travels southward to the kingdom of Rheged, located around the Solway Firth. He is well received by Urien, King of Rheged, and continues his evangelical activities in that region, possibly from a base at Hoddom. The success of his activities reaches the ears of St David of Wales, who requests that Kentigern travel to North Wales to spread the Christian message in Gwynedd. Kentigern accepts and spends an extended period there establishing an abbey, and it is recorded, making several pilgrimages to Rome. Eventually things quieten down in Strathclyde, and King Rhydderch asks Kentigern to return. Kentigern eventually relinquishes the charge of the Abbey to his senior monk St Asaph and sets off on his return journey with a (suspiciously accurate) retinue of 665 acolytes. On the way back he stops off at Hoddom and spends a considerable time there until Rhydderch becomes impatient. A delegation is sent to accompany Kentigern back to Strathclyde, where he resumes his role as Bishop of Strathclyde.

This then is the inspiration for the Kentigern Way pilgrim route, a journey which retraces Kentigern's steps from his episcopal seat at Hoddom to his final resting place in Glasgow Cathedral. A period of research was initiated to determine the route that Kentigern might have taken. In the post-Roman period of the 6th century, the Roman road system was probably still serviceable, at least for foot traffic. It is very likely that Kentigern would have made use of these roads. He would have followed Agricola's road along the Annan Valley and over Beattock to Biggar and the upper Clyde Valley. From there he would have picked up the Antonine Wall supply road along the Clyde Valley to Glasgow. However, the central section of this route from Moffat to Abbington is now the M74 motorway and not conducive to pleasant walking. After much trial and error, a route was finally decided. This follows the Annandale Way to Moffat, then loops eastward through Traquair, Peebles and Biggar, avoiding the motorway. From Biggar it links up with the Clyde Walkway at Bonnington Lynn and follows it into Glasgow and the Cathedral.

The complete trail is 150 miles in length and mainly follows waymarked off-road tracks. Work is currently underway to construct a new path between Biggar and Bonnington Lynn. When this is completed, the pilgrim route will be entirely pathed. The route can be subdivided into around ten walkable



daily sections with accommodation available at each stopping point. For those who do not wish to walk the route in one continuous expedition, the intermediate sections are readily accessible by public transport.

In October 2021, Bill and Christine Jack, the architects of the trail, undertook an inaugural pilgrimage. We contacted many churches along the way and arranged to meet the representatives of those churches which had responded to our invitation to walk a token section with us. The pilgrimage finished in Glasgow Cathedral with a service of dedication.

We commend the Kentigern Way to you. It is a delight to walk, passing through many a bonny Border town and traversing an engaging variety of riverside and moorland trails. On the way, many places of historical interest will be encountered, ranging across the centuries from prehistoric to modern times. The act of pilgrimage is making a resurgence in Scotland with several new pilgrim routes now developed. Pilgrim walking offers the opportunity to step aside from daily life and create a space to refresh body, mind and spirit. The Kentigern Way is on your doorstep. You shouldn't miss the opportunity that it presents.



The Steering Group being presented with an SPRF accreditation certificate in the St Kentigern Crypt of the Cathedral.

Water is Life



BY CLAIRE COOK
Water – it's not something we are short of here in Scotland, especially as the winter months draw in!

We can reach for the tap without thinking when we need to drink, bathe, safely cook our food, or even wash the car.

In some of the countries SCIAF works, water isn't quite so instantly accessible. People can walk for hours to access water that's unclean and dangerous to drink. Water is life but should never be taken for granted.

Every year, SCIAF offers Real Gifts, giving supporters the chance to buy meaningful Christmas presents for loved ones. Every Real Gift that's shared with a loved one goes to support those most in need in communities around the world. One of the gifts often bought by parishes is 'Water for a village'.

Bishop Brian McGee is SCIAF's Bishop President and has seen for himself how precious the gift of water is.

He said, "Water is life – the foundation for all flourishing. It's vital, therefore, that we reach out to those who don't have access to clean, safe water now!

Bishop Brian added: "It is right that the Catholic Church here in Scotland reaches out to those most in need. And there are lots of ways we can continue to provide hope and love.

"This Christmas, I hope parishes, schools and individuals come together to raise money for this transformational Real Gift so that SCIAF can help install new water points and irrigation schemes in some of the world's poorest places."

There is a wide range of Real Gifts, from seeds to emergency food packages, access to education and even chickens.

To find out how you can make this Christmas more meaningful with a Real Gift, please visit **www.sciaf.org.uk/realgifts**

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REAL GIFTS