

DIOCESE OF MOTHERWELL

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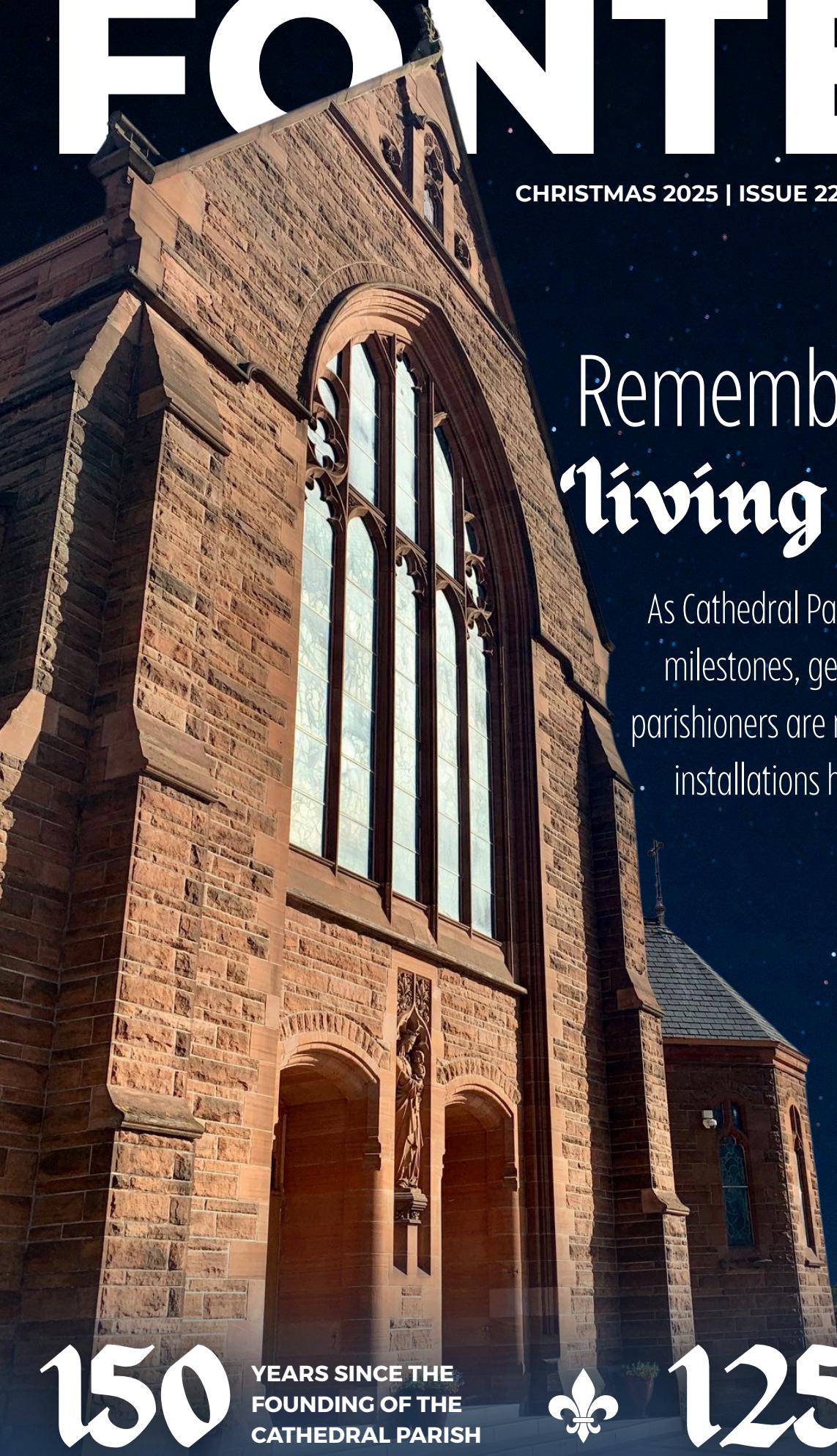
FONTES

CHRISTMAS 2025 | ISSUE 22

MAGAZINE

Remembering the
'living stones'

As Cathedral Parish celebrate historic
milestones, generations of faithful
parishioners are remembered with new
installations honouring Our Lady



150

YEARS SINCE THE
FOUNDING OF THE
CATHEDRAL PARISH



125

YEARS SINCE THE
OPENING OF THE
CATHEDRAL CHURCH

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NEXT EDITION

February 2026

Send your news, events and articles to media@rcdom.org.uk

A LOOK BACK AT THE JUBILEE YEAR 2025



Pope Francis
Church mourns death of Holy Father



New Pope
Church welcomes Pope Leo XIV



Ordination
Fr Christopher Furmage ordained



Pilgrimage
Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes



Jubilee Cross
Jubilee Cross tours Diocese



Ordination
Fr Christopher Igwe ordained



Pilgrimage
Deacons Pilgrimage to Rome



Schools
Schools Jubilee Mass at Carfin

A WORD FROM Bishop Toal



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As the Jubilee Year draws to a close, let us give thanks for the blessings received and the Spirit of Hope renewed. Through Advent that same Hope is engendered as we look forward with expectancy to the Celebration of Our Saviour's Birth, and to the Lord coming again in glory and majesty.

The Advent liturgies call on us to be ready and watching so that we "may inherit the great promise in which now we dare hope". Yes, we are indeed "Pilgrims of Hope", and each Christmas is a milestone on our earthly pilgrimage and an opportunity to be refreshed and renewed in our personal faith and its practice in the community of the Catholic Church.

It was the 1700th Anniversary at the end of November of the Council of Nicea, whose great proclamation of the Christian faith we profess at Sunday Mass. We do so also with special fervour at the Christmas Masses, emphasising in particular the Lord's Incarnation, his birth at Bethlehem – "For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man." We are a people of faith in God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and we are proud to profess it, particularly on Christmas Day. So let us be at Mass to do so!

Of course, we need to put our faith into action through our works of charity, our love for our neighbour, and Christmas is a time of generosity and sharing with those we love. Let us try also to extend our kindness to those who are more in need, both locally and further afield, recognising that the Lord asks us to do so in his name and with his compassion and self-giving. The Word did become flesh and continues to dwell among us through those who show his love.

I wish you all a very Happy and Blessed Christmas, praying especially that the Peace sung of by the Angels at Bethlehem may reign within and among us and throughout the whole world.

With my blessing for Christmas,

+ Joseph Toal



Ambrosians celebrate Mass in Coatbridge

BY JIM MCKELVIE

There was a good turnout of faithful recently at St. Bartholomew's, Coatbridge for the annual Mass of the San Ambrosio Society, the association of former students of the Royal Scots College in Spain. The Mass was celebrated by Bishop John Keenan and priests with an association with the college.

This year we welcomed Sñr Santiago Miralles Huete, the Spanish Consul General, who showed a great interest in the history of the Scots seminary in Spain, and we were honoured as he joined us for lunch after the Mass. Coincidentally, Sñr Miralles was brought up in central Madrid, not far from where the first Scots College building in Spain was situated.

This is an important time for 'Spaniards,' as we look forward to celebrating the 400th anniversary of the establishment of the College, which was founded in Madrid in May 1627.

Bishop opens Jubilee Rosary Garden at St Vincent de Paul's

BY KATRINA LOGAN

On Saturday, 27th September 2025, the parish of St Vincent de Paul, East Kilbride gathered together as a church for their annual Mass for the Sick, presided over by Bishop Joseph Toal.

The Bishop, joined for the Mass by parish administrator Father Romanus Ennyinnia and Deacon Stuart Dick, also took the opportunity to officially open and bless our beautiful Jubilee Rosary Garden. The garden was created to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of St Vincent de Paul Parish and was designed as a spiritual space for our parishioners to reflect the devotion of the Rosary.



New Parish Priest appointed to St Bride's Cambuslang

After 25 years of service as parish priest of St Bride's in Cambuslang, Father Paul Morton (above) will be standing down in early 2026. The much-loved parish priest, who celebrated forty years of priesthood earlier this year, will be leaving Cambuslang, where he has spent more than half of his ministry, to begin a sabbatical period.

Sharing the news, Bishop Toal said: "I take this opportunity also to thank Fr Morton for his 25 years of priestly ministry in St Bride's, recognising the quality of his care for the people of St Bride's over these years, and wishing him every blessing as he prepares to leave."

Bishop Toal also announced that having completed his second three-year term as General Secretary, Rev. Fr. Dr Gerard Maguiness (below) will be released to return to Motherwell Diocese and will succeed Fr Morton as parish priest of St Bride's in February 2026.

Thanking Fr Maguiness for his time at the Bishops' Conference, Bishop Toal said, "Along with the other bishops, I acknowledge Fr Maguiness' outstanding contribution to the work of the Scottish Bishops' Conference over the last six years, while being very pleased to welcome him back to parish ministry in Motherwell Diocese."





St Joseph's finally dedicated as parish celebrate 150 years

BY FR. KENNETH O'BRIEN

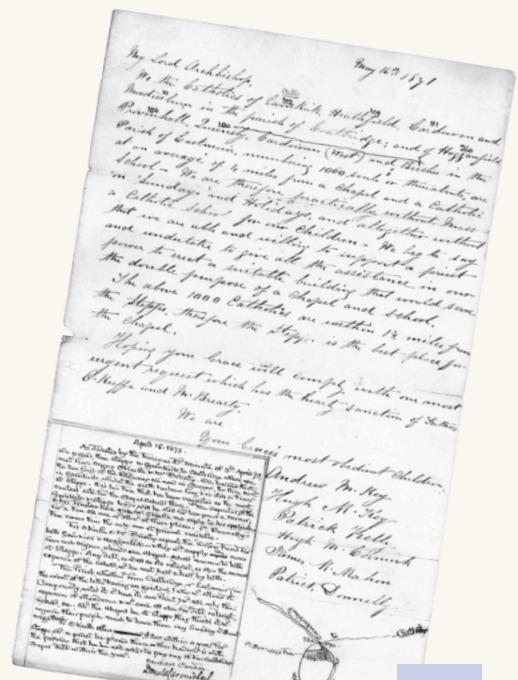
PARISH PRIEST

In 1871, a small group of only 6 men wrote to Archbishop Charles Eyre, who was the Apostolic Delegate for the mission territory of the Western District of Scotland. These men were representing a larger group of about 1000 who wanted a Catholic Church and school built, as they were finding it too far to travel to Coatbridge or Glasgow. This was before the restoration of the hierarchy in Scotland. Archbishop Eyre and his advisors agreed to their petition and the Parish of Saint Joseph's, Cardowan was opened in 1875 with a 'small gothic church.' This community has continued to gather, worship, and pray in this same 'small gothic church,' the fifth oldest church in the Diocese of Motherwell, for these past 150 years.

On the Feast of the Immaculate Conception 2025, the parish gathered in thanksgiving for the past 150 years, and were able to enter into the newly renovated church for a Mass of Dedication celebrated by Bishop Toal. Why St Joseph's had not been dedicated previously is lost in the passage of time. This mystery of time gave the current parishioners the great privilege and honour of gathering to celebrate this unique and rarely celebrated liturgy, as most churches in this part of the world are already dedicated. In his enlightening homily, Bishop Toal reminded all gathered that while we dedicate the physical building, we dedicate ourselves as the People of God, and this includes the mission of reaching out and making all people welcome into the family of God, especially the stranger.

A copy of the original letter sent by parishioners to Archbishop Eyre

The parishioners of Saint Joseph's Parish hope and pray that they continue to live as members of God's family and be inspired to continue the great mission entrusted to us of passing on the faith in our world of today. May Saint Joseph continue to bless us.





Bishop encourages prayers for vocation as Poor Clares mark new chapter with move to Blantyre

Bishop Toal celebrated Mass on the Feast of St. Andrew in St. John Ogilvie's Church, Blantyre, to mark the enclosure of the Poor Clare Community in the new location of their Monastery of the Immaculate Heart of Mary at St John Ogilvie's.

The Poor Clares recently moved from their monastery at St. Bride's Bothwell, where they had been based for over 50 years, to their new monastery at St. John Ogilvie's Presbytery in Blantyre, where the Sisters originally had their monastery.

Fr. Aidan McGrath, OFM, the Minister Provincial of the Irish and British Franciscans, preached at the Mass, noting the blessing of the continued presence of the Poor Clares in the Motherwell Diocese and their share in the Church's mission of bringing others to Christ, like St Andrew.

Reflecting on the Sister move, Bishop Toal said, "Our thoughts and prayers are very much with the four Sisters—Angela, Anthony, Colette, and Francis—as they leave Bothwell, and we wish them every blessing in their new home.

Please keep the Sisters in your prayers as they leave their home of over 50 years in Bothwell to return to Blantyre, the community's original home on arrival from Cork."

One of the intentions the Sisters, and many others, pray for is vocations to the priesthood and religious life, and our prayers do bear fruit.

Recently, three men have been accepted to begin formation for the priesthood by participating in the 2026 Propaedeutic Period in the Royal Scots College, Salamanca. These men are Craig Paterson of St Mary's and St Paul's Parish, Hamilton; Aiden Quinn of St Ignatius' Parish, Wishaw; and Matthew Graham of St John the Baptist's Parish, Uddingston.

Bishop Toal said:

"I thank those who are assisting them in discerning their vocation and have helped in the application process. Our prayers very much accompany Craig, Aiden, and Matthew as they leave for the six-month course in Salamanca in January."

Encouraging others to consider their vocation, the Bishop continues:

"I would wish to encourage others to think and pray about the possibility of a vocation to the priesthood and religious life. Now, as we begin Advent, is a good time to come forward, either speaking to your parish priest or contacting the Diocesan Vocations Director, Fr Charles O'Farrell."

Meanwhile, a parishioner of St Bride's, Cambuslang, Anju Bab (*second from left below*), was recently received into the Sacred Heart congregation in York. Anju will spend four years preparing before taking simple vows and then a further five years before final profession as a religious sister.



Families in the spotlight at National Conference

Recently, over 160 people from across Scotland gathered in Motherwell for the National Family Conference, a joyful day of faith, reflection, and community as we celebrated the vocation of family life.

The event began with an inspiring keynote from John and Angela Deighan, who offered a hopeful vision for living a vibrant Catholic family life today. Later, the conference was joined via Zoom by Chris Stefanick, who shared his

encouraging message, "Rebuild My Domestic Church", inviting us to renew faith within our homes.

Throughout the day, children and young people enjoyed dedicated activities, making it a true gathering for the whole family.

The conference concluded with Holy Mass in Our Lady of Good Aid Cathedral celebrated by Bishop John Keenan, giving thanks to God for the gift of our families and the grace of the day.



Marriage Preparation COURSES

Online booking is now open for couples preparing for marriage within the Catholic Church. Courses take place on Saturday from 10.30am to 3.00pm.

All courses take place at Saint Augustine's Parish Centre, Coatbridge, ML5 1DQ

The dates for 2026 are as follows:

JANUARY 31 2026	FEBRUARY 28 2026	MARCH 28 2026	APRIL 25 2026	JUNE 06 2026	SEPTEMBER 19 2026	OCTOBER 31 2026
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The course is £80 per couple and includes all course materials.

Book your course today at: www.marriagefamilylife.org

Please book only **ONE** day course. For more information, contact Deacon David Harper from the Marriage, Family and Life Agency: info@marriagefamilylife.org

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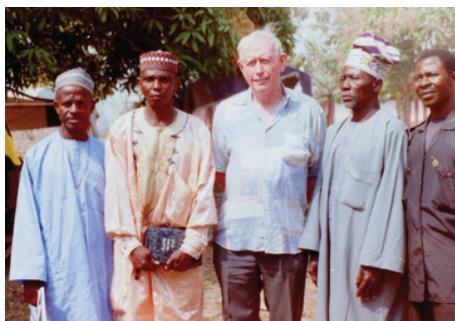
MASS FOR LIFE

LAST THURSDAY OF
EVERY MONTH

CARFIN LOURDES GROTTO

Rosary, Confessions and Adoration 7pm
Holy Mass 7:30pm

'Saviour of the Downtrodden' Tribute to Fr Paddy Gaffney CSSp



**BY FR JOHN MCFADDEN CSSP
SUPERIOR, CARFIN COMMUNITY**
Fr Patrick Gaffney CSSp hailed from Burnbank and owed his vocation to the Holy Ghost Fathers and their missionary work, to his familiarity with the 'local hero' David Livingstone and also to a familiarity with the songs of Paul Robson which his father used to sing at family gatherings. As well as that, their neighbouring family included Fr Frank O'Donnell who had already spent time as a missionary in Nigeria and also had a strong influence on the young Patrick.

He went to the Holy Ghost Fathers' junior seminary in Lancashire in 1951 and from there entered the novitiate in France. After this important year of spiritual formation, he returned to England to complete his philosophical and theological studies at their senior scholasticate at Upton Hall. He was ordained priest there on 15th August 1963 by the visiting bishop of Makurdi (Nigeria), Mgr James Hagan.

In 1967 he set off for his appointment to Nigeria and arrived there in the middle of the civil war. As a young priest he was sent to various parishes in the extensive

diocese of Makurdi, which was just slightly larger than the whole of Ireland in area. Being a graduate, he soon got involved in the Church's educational activities and was the principal of Emmanuel Secondary School in Ugbokolo to begin with. He was then asked to start up a new school in a remote part of the diocese where none existed beforehand; he thus became the founder and first principal of St John's Secondary School, Amoke.

About this time he contracted a bad dose of cerebral malaria, which often makes people delirious and disorientated, so he had to go home for treatment. He was checked by several psychiatrists, including a government one, who, apparently, on examining him, found that he was quite sane!

On his return to Nigeria, he expressed a preference for parish work. It was a moment in the Church in Makurdi when there was suddenly a great upsurge in the numbers of people requesting baptism and instruction to join the Church.

Fr Gaffney was one of the great promoters of the RCIA movement and with the aid of local catechists,

in the villages, the faith spread very widely. He soon saw the need for better places for the communities in each village to worship in and embarked on an extensive programme of church building. This he continued right up until the time when he left Nigeria round about the year 2000 and took up residence in the fathers' community house in Carfin.

From here, until his health began to deteriorate in 2022, he continued to do mission appeals and supplies for the local clergy in Motherwell diocese. Late last year he had a fall in his room which resulted in an extended stay in hospital until he was transferred to the Little Sisters of the Poor care home in Greenock. He passed away quietly in his sleep in the early hours of Friday, 28th November, at the age of 87 years.

The impact of his missionary work made a deep impression on the people he worked with in various parishes, such that he was honoured by the people of one of his last parishes with a traditional title; these are often given to foreigners who have done a lot to help the locals and are often given to clergymen as well. The people of Onyagede bestowed on him, with the approval of the local elders, the title "OHONYETA" – which means in English "Saviour of the Downtrodden".

May he rest in peace and receive the rich reward he deserves for bringing the knowledge and love of Christ to countless thousands of people.



Martinmas: Celebrating Community and Social Justice

BY JAMES MCCLUSKEY

Martinmas is an annual parish event at St Ninian and St Cuthbert's, held on the Saturday closest to 11 November, the Feast of St Martin of Tours. Inspired by St Martin's act of sharing his cloak with a beggar, the day focuses on charity, community, and parish life.

What began years ago with just a few tables has grown into a vibrant gathering of parish groups. This year, contributions included:

- The Craft Group selling handmade blankets for the Sisters of the Gospel of Life
- The Legion of Mary offering medals and books

- The Care of Creation group collecting toys and giving energy-saving advice
- The SVDP sharing their work
- A parishioner selling calendars for the St Peter Claver Sisters

There were also handmade Christmas cards, wood-crafted items from SOC in Hillhouse, and a tombola and "Guess the Saint's Name" game by the One World Group.

The hall was filled with a warm sense of community as people met old friends, made new ones, and supported those in need. Almost £800 was raised, with an additional £120 for the Sisters of the Gospel of Life.



Martinmas gives our parish a chance to imitate St Martin's generosity. This year, several SVDP conferences across the Diocese of Motherwell also held their own Martinmas fairs, fittingly coinciding with the Holy Year's Jubilee of the Poor

Singers and Musicians come together for Jubilee for Choirs



On the Solemnity of Christ the King, choirs and musicians from across the Diocese came together for a celebration at Carfin Grotto to mark the Jubilee of Choirs as part of the Holy Year celebrations.

The event was led by Fr Jim Grant with contributions from Carfin Parish Choir and organist Derek Burns, the Diocesan Music Group led by Kris Thomas and the Diocesan Schools choir led by James Greechan.

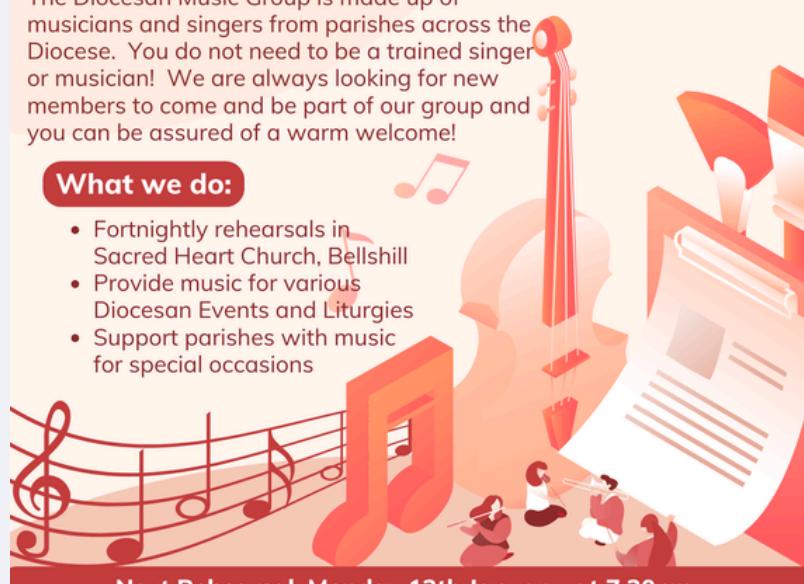
Diocese of Motherwell Diocesan Music Group



The Diocesan Music Group is made up of musicians and singers from parishes across the Diocese. You do not need to be a trained singer or musician! We are always looking for new members to come and be part of our group and you can be assured of a warm welcome!

What we do:

- Fortnightly rehearsals in Sacred Heart Church, Bellshill
- Provide music for various Diocesan Events and Liturgies
- Support parishes with music for special occasions



**Next Rehearsal: Monday 12th January at 7:30pm
in Sacred Heart Church, Bellshill**

Contact Kris: 07747867003



St Mary's Lanark given a boost with grant awards

BY MARGARET DAVIS

St Mary's Lanark is perhaps best known for being one of the most beautiful churches in Scotland, with four "A" listed buildings in total, but more importantly it is beautiful inside and out, with a vibrant, loving parish community.

It sits at the heart of the town of Lanark in every sense, open all day every day for parishioners and visitors alike, offering a safe place for worship or just friendship and providing facilities for every type of club and group. With over 120 active volunteers, a highly motivated Social Committee and a forward-thinking, hard-working Parish Priest in Fr McShane, it is a well-cared-for parish and very busy with spiritual and social events.

This was recognised recently with the award of two grants, both of which valued St Mary's community spirit as much as its historical and architectural significance.

Recent investigations had shown that important work was required to the bell tower and spire. The bell tower sits above the main entrance doors to the church, and its good order is critical to the continued use of the building. It is also an iconic part of our heritage, which can be seen throughout the Clyde Valley.

The grant given by Historic Environment Scotland was for £11,278. HES have been tremendous supporters of St Mary's for many years, having supported the re-roofing of the church and external works during the major renovation project.

St Mary's was also delighted to have been awarded £10,000 by the National Churches Trust / The National Lottery Heritage Fund and to be part of the outstanding work that they do.

The project has also been supported so well by St Mary's parish community, with St Mary's Social Committee raising and donating £4,000 towards the project. As well as raising the funds, the activities of the Social Committee are fundamental in building community spirit at St Mary's.

Fr McShane commented: "The grants from National Churches Trust and Historic Environment Scotland mean the world to us. Our bell tower needs urgent repair work. It sits above our main entrance porch, so the grant literally means we can safely stay open and continue to serve the community.

The support from the grants team at both organisations has been invaluable. From day one we were offered expert guidance in a warm and friendly way and never felt afraid to ask a question.

Support is so important to us. We have been undertaking restoration in the church for over ten years now, and without this financial, professional and emotional support, it just wouldn't happen.

The grants have other benefits for us going forward too. We will be using social media and our interactive screen at the rear of the church to document the project and let everyone see, probably for the first time in over 150 years, the inside of the bell tower and how buildings like ours are cared for."

At St Mary's we are custodians of our beautiful church for future generations and are so blessed to have such a centre not just for our community, but for the wider community, both socially and for worship. We are so excited that this project is happening and to share it with you on our website, in our parish bulletins on our interactive system and in Fontes.

“In the quiet and darkness of captivity, your prayers became rays of light sustaining my hope”

A popular priest who has spent several summers providing supply in Motherwell Diocese has been freed after being kidnapped in his native Cameroon.

Father John Tata of the Archdiocese of Bamedna was abducted, along with his assistant, by gunmen on 15th November whilst returning from an Inauguration Mass in Ndop.

Upon hearing the news, Bishop Toal requested the faithful of the Diocese to pray for Father Tata's safe release.

On 2nd December, Father Tata was finally released and regained his freedom.

Following his release, Father Tata wrote to Bishop Toal to thank him and the faithful of the Diocese for their prayers.

In the letter, Father Tata wrote:
“I write with a heart overflowing with gratitude to God and to you for the fraternal love, spiritual solidarity, and unwavering prayer you offered during my recent captivity.”

He continued: “For two weeks, when uncertainty and danger surrounded me, your prayers rose like incense before the throne of God, becoming for me a source of profound consolation.”

“Though you were far away in Scotland, your closeness was tangible.” Father Tata said, adding, “To the Christian faithful of Motherwell, thank you for every prayer whispered and every candle lit. I assure you that not a single act of charity is forgotten before God.”

He concluded his letter with prayers for the Diocese, saying, “In the quiet and darkness of captivity, your prayers became rays of light sustaining my hope... I continue to hold you in my prayers and ask God to bless the Diocese of Motherwell with peace, joy, and abundant grace.”



Prisoners Week Scotland: A witness to Justice and Peace

BY MIRIAM MCKERNAN

Prisoners' Week Scotland (PWS) was held 16-23 November 2025. The vision of PWS is for a just and peaceful society where all people can be cared for: prisoners, their families, all who care for them, and the victims of their crimes.

Pope Leo in his Apostolic Exhortation “Dilexi te” (He loved you) encourages us to follow the example of Pope Francis in his concern for prisoners.

Inspired by our Popes, Justice and Peace Motherwell invited Deacon Kenny McGeachie, RC Chaplain, Scottish Prison Service, to share with us about challenges and pastoral care for all those in and around prisons. With him, we committed to the PWS Charter. Bishop Toal signed for Motherwell Diocese and Miriam McKernan for St Columbkille's, Rutherglen, on 30 October 2025. During Prisoners Week, we displayed our PWS Charter and prayed for all those associated with prisons. We attended the ecumenical opening service in St Mark's, Letham, Perth, on 16 November 2025.

A Law Without Dignity

Scotland's Assisted Suicide Bill Must be Rejected

BY ANTHONY HORAN

Holyrood's Health Committee has rejected more crucial safeguards as consideration of amendments to Liam McArthur's Assisted Suicide Bill draws to a close.

Having already rejected a slew of sensible amendments, recently the committee rejected a proposal to require doctors involved in assisted suicides to be trained in identifying domestic abuse and coercive control.

This was met with dismay by Anni Donaldson, an expert in domestic abuse crimes at the University of Strathclyde, who described the rejection as "both baffling and alarming", admitting that she remains "deeply concerned that the legislation will make life more dangerous for vulnerable women".

Ms Donaldson appealed to MSPs to "have victims of abuse in mind when they vote on the Bill again."

The committee has, in fact, rejected every single amendment tabled to define coercion and pressure in the Bill, leaving vulnerable people, including domestic abuse victims, at the mercy of a dangerous and unsafe law.

The committee also rejected calls for authorities to consult with palliative care providers, including hospices and charities, on future reviews of assisted suicide law. This follows last week's rejection of an institutional opt-out for hospices and care homes, meaning some care homes and hospices may lose funding or be forced to close, including Catholic ones, if they did not want to facilitate assisted suicide.



“
The committee has already rejected several sensible amendments relating to palliative care

The committee has already rejected several sensible amendments relating to palliative care, including a proposal that would have required individuals seeking assisted suicide to have a fully costed palliative care support plan, ensuring that all care alternatives were explored before proceeding with an assisted suicide.

Helen Malo, Senior Policy and Public Affairs Manager for Scotland at Hospice UK, said: "Hospice UK has no collective view on whether the law should change on assisted dying, yet we feel it would be a moral and practical failure if a single person in future felt compelled to seek an assisted death due to a lack of available palliative care."

"Every person in Scotland should be able to access high-quality care and support at the end of life, wherever they live."

Hospices in Scotland are currently being forced to make cuts due to underfunding, which has left them "stretched to breaking point". The committee also rejected all 'sunset clause' amendments, meaning that, even if the law went badly wrong, there wouldn't be an automatic mechanism for the Parliament to review it.

In total, around 150 amendments have been rejected over the last three weeks. These include an amendment to exclude individuals whose motivations stem from non-terminal conditions, such as intellectual disabilities, eating disorders, and feelings of being a burden.

Astonishingly, the committee also rejected an amendment to prevent doctors from raising assisted suicide with patients, meaning doctors will be able to initiate discussions on assisted suicide, a

move that significantly risks undermining trust in the doctor-patient relationship and puts vulnerable people at risk.

Anthony Horan, Director of the CPO, said that the committee's consistent failure to protect vulnerable people leaves MSPs with only one option when they vote again on the Bill at Stage 3.

"For reasons unknown this committee has consistently rejected important safeguards, the main consequence of which is an inexplicable failure to protect vulnerable people.

"As parliamentarians, MSPs have an important role to provide the legislative and policy framework for the protection of the poorest and most vulnerable in our country and to ensure the provision of vital support to those most in need.

"This Bill does the exact opposite; it leaves vulnerable people exposed to coercion, and, in stark contrast to providing essential help and support to help people live, it offers death.

"There is no dignity to be found in this Bill and MSPs should do the right and sensible thing and reject it at Stage 3."



CATHOLIC PARLIAMENTARY OFFICE

Keep up to date with all the latest updates on this important topic and other news at

rcpolitics.org

"There can be no tolerance for any form of abuse in the Church"

Bishop issues annual safeguarding statement renewing appeal that abuse cannot be tolerated in the Church



At this time of year, I send an annual statement on safeguarding in the diocese. In doing so I offer some words written recently by our new Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV.

"The Church is our spiritual home; as such every parish and pastoral activity is meant to be a space in which we glorify God and care for others, especially children and the vulnerable. In this regard I renew my appeal that there can be no tolerance for any form of abuse in the Church."

It is not a new message, but sometimes we can get tired of hearing it, so it is good, therefore, to hear Pope Leo emphasising that any form of abuse cannot be tolerated in the Church. As Bishop of Motherwell Diocese, along with all of you, I completely agree with Pope Leo and commit our community to preventing any abuse happening in our parishes and pastoral activities.

Safeguarding is not only about compliance. It is about creating spaces where those who have experienced harm feel safe, heard, and supported. I thank all those working in the Diocese to ensure our National Safeguarding Standards are being implemented and adhered to. I encourage the full cooperation of all our clergy and lay

volunteers in working together to ensure our churches are safe places for worship, and our pastoral events and activities are well organised and attentive to the safety and protection of all participants.

We acknowledge the deep and lasting impact that harm can have, and I share the sorrow and shame that some have suffered grievously because of abusive behaviour. Forgiveness is sought, but the wounds are hard to heal, and the trauma caused is often lifelong. As a diocese, we recognise the bravery of those who come forward to report abuse and offer humble assurance that you will be heard and supported.

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

May Our Suffering and Crucified Lord console all survivors of abuse, while trusting that renewed hope can be found in Our Risen Lord and Saviour.

DIOCESE OF MOTHERWELL SAFEGUARDING ADVISOR

Mrs Veronica McKenna

Telephone:

01698 269114

Email:

veronicamckenna@rcdom.org.uk

Fleur de lis honours Our Lady as Cathedral celebrates anniversaries





BY FR BRIAN LAMB, CATHEDRAL ADMINISTRATOR

The Fleur de Lis has since medieval times, been associated with the Cult of Our Lady and is to be found emblazoned in many churches and especially in liturgical vestments. It is part of the Coat of Arms of Pope Leo XIV, Bishop Toal and the Diocese of Motherwell. Its inclusion denoted a respect for and devotion to the Blessed Mother.

As the Cathedral Parish celebrates the 150th Anniversary of its Foundation and the 125th Anniversary of the opening of the present church, it is worthwhile reflecting on the Fleur de Lis and its significance for our parish and Diocese. The name of our town and Diocese relates back to the medieval Holy Well which is now to be found in a private garden in Ladywell Road in the town. Before the Reformation the "Ladywell" and the nearby St Patrick's Well brought many visitors and pilgrims to the area. With the Reformation Holy Wells were deemed frivolous and unacceptable, and the well and its significance diminished. The town name Motherwell is derived from the presence of the well, and the Mother referred to is none other than Mary, Mother of Our Lord and Saviour.

The Potato Famine in Ireland and the exodus which followed heralded the return of the Catholic Faith to these parts and made it appropriate to establish a parish in 1875. It seemed obvious to give patronage to the mother of Christ. A wooden church/school was built and replaced with a stone structure a few years later. Within a decade, it was decided that a more permanent church should be built, allowing the school full use of the previous church/school building. In 1900 a fine new church designed by Peter Paul Pugin was erected in Coursington Road. Although plans were scaled back to save money and avoid scandalising the non-Catholic population of the town, a fine church was erected and dedicated to Our Lady of Good Aid. The Church was consecrated on 14th December 1929.

When the Archdiocese of Glasgow was to be split up in 1947, it was decided that two new Dioceses would be established in Motherwell and Paisley. Our Lady of Good Aid Church became the Cathedral Church of the new Diocese of Motherwell on 14th December 1929.

The church has seen many changes and renovations in its 125-year life and history. As with most Pugin churches, the sanctuary was not installed as per the plan. The archdiocese of Glasgow was experiencing a massive population expansion, with people coming from Ireland and elsewhere in Europe. Many new churches were being built to support the growing population. Fine churches were erected, but the provision of a fine interior would be left to another generation to install once debts were paid off, and the parish could then enhance its building as deemed appropriate.

On the Cathedral Sanctuary [under the statues of St Joseph and St Patrick], a carved fleur-de-lis is visible and is part of the original Pugin design. As we celebrate the 150th anniversary of the parish and the 125th anniversary of the opening of the present church, it was deemed appropriate to repeat this emblem – honouring the Blessed Virgin – on the back wall of the sanctuary as this generation's recognition that we too "become living stones built into a spiritual temple". 1 Peter 2:5. The installation was paid for by two generous donations in memory of lost loved ones who were members of our community and are remembered among the thousands of faithful "living stones" who have worshipped in this place over its long and proud history.



Although the Diocese of Motherwell has no Catholic ASN (Additional Support Needs) school of its own, the commitment to ensuring that every child can grow in faith remains strong. Many Catholic pupils in ASN schools and units receive religious education in accordance with parental wishes, and teachers work tirelessly to shape a curriculum that responds to each child's unique needs and gifts.

Supporting this work is the diocesan ASN Network, a group of dedicated Catholic teachers who meet regularly throughout the year. Together, they share resources, offer mutual encouragement, and exchange good practice, ensuring that no teacher walks this path alone. The network not only builds confidence among staff but also ensures that children in ASN provision are accompanied with the same care and creativity as in any Catholic school.

One particularly exciting development last year was the Diocese's sponsorship of Clare Preston of Drumpark Primary to become a Makaton Trainer for faith-based signing. Over two Saturday sessions, Clare trained 18 staff from schools across the diocese, equipping them to bring this powerful form of communication into their RE lessons. The fruits of this training were soon evident. At the annual ASN Confirmation Day in Our Lady of Good Aid Cathedral — a highlight of the diocesan calendar — elements of Makaton were woven into both the liturgy and the hymns. The sight of Bishop Toal and Fr Lawrie joining the children in signing parts of the Gospel and prayers was a moving testament to inclusion in action.

The Confirmation Day itself is a joyful and grace-filled celebration held on a Sunday close to Pentecost. Music from the Diocesan Music Group helps lift the occasion, and families treasure the experience of seeing their children welcomed so fully into the life of the Church. In the lead-up to the sacrament, the children are invited to visit the Cathedral, meeting Bishop Toal and exploring the space so that it feels like home on their special day.

Accompanying Every Child: Faith and Inclusion in the ASN Sector

BY CLAIRE O'NEILL

The care for children in ASN settings extends beyond Confirmation. Each year, pupils are welcomed to the Cathedral for an interactive Lenten prayer service, tailored to be accessible and engaging. In addition, the diocesan school retreats team offer bespoke retreat experiences within ASN schools themselves, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to reflect, pray, and encounter God's love in a way that speaks to them.

There may be no Catholic ASN schools in the Diocese of Motherwell, but the presence of Christ is clear in the dedication of teachers, the support of the ASN Network, and the joy of the children themselves. Each child is accompanied on their own journey of faith, and in that journey, the diocese itself is enriched.

SCES and the Diocese of Motherwell offer this unique course to equip those teaching RE and leading liturgies with the skills to use Makaton signs and symbols to make the Christian faith accessible and inclusive for all children and learners. Participants will develop confidence in everyday and faith-based Makaton vocabulary while exploring strategies to promote inclusive communication during Masses, parish events, school prayers and liturgies. Hosted over 6 weeks, this course offers 3 twilight in-person sessions and 2 study at home sessions. The course includes the "KNOW AND GROW" workbook and certification for all participants and would be beneficial to parishes, schools, chaplaincy teams, clergy and laity.

THE SESSIONS GIVE:

- Confidence**
Develop confidence in using everyday Makaton signs to enhance communication and inclusion.
- Vocabulary**
Learn Makaton vocabulary specific to Christian teachings, worship, and community life.
- Practical Ideas**
Explore practical strategies for creating inclusive environments where every learner can participate fully.

BOOK HERE TO JOIN OUR WORKSHOPS

Hosted by Diocese of Motherwell, Diocesan Centre, Coursington Road, Motherwell
10th February - 17th March 2026
Costs: £60 including Know & Grow workbook and certification
Early bird offer - £60 if you register by December 31st 2025

Week One 10th February - 4pm - 6pm: In person, Diocesan Centre
Week Two Home study; preparing for Ash Wednesday
Week Three 24th February - 4pm - 6pm: In person Diocesan Centre
Week Four Home study: Videos and tutorials to develop your confidence
Week Five Home study: Videos and tutorials to increase your confidence
Week Six 17th March - 4pm - 6pm In person, Diocesan Centre, conclusion & liturgy

<https://form.jotform.com/2529946795382>

A Term of Mixed Emotions at Sacred Heart Primary

BY SANDRA MCLEAN

This term has been one of celebration and reflection for our Sacred Heart Primary community.

We proudly achieved the Gold Rights Respecting School Award, a testament to our commitment to embedding children's rights at the heart of our school ethos. This recognition highlights the dedication of our pupils and staff to creating an inclusive, respectful environment where every voice matters. Achieving the Gold Rights Respecting School Award shows how deeply our pupils understand and value their rights. It's a proud moment for our whole school community.

At the same time, we have said a heartfelt goodbye to our beloved school building, which has served generations for 67 years. To mark this significant moment, we gathered for a Mass of Thanksgiving at Sacred Heart Church, followed by a 'Trip Down Memory Lane' event, where past and present pupils, staff, and families shared stories and cherished memories. Celebrating the closing of our school building with a Mass of Thanksgiving and a Trip Down Memory Lane reminded us of the love and legacy that Sacred Heart has built over nearly seven decades.



Little Pilgrims at Carfin Grotto: St Stephen's Primary School, a day of Faith and Wonder

This autumn our whole school (5 buses in total!) journeyed to Carfin Grotto for a spiritual retreat to celebrate the Jubilee 2025.

The pupils explored the beautiful grounds of Carfin Grotto, with primary 1 pupils enjoying some quiet time for personal reflection at the statue of Our Lady, while P5-7 pupils enjoyed a tour of the Grotto from Claire O'Neill (Diocesan RE Co-ordinator) and visited the Carlo Acutis statue. The whole school then came together for Holy Mass



in St Francis Xavier's Church celebrated by our school chaplain, Father Thomas Doyle. The theme of the Mass was The Jubilee: Pilgrims of Hope with the pupils leading the liturgy.

The day ended with the school's "Mini-Vinnies" leading our school community in some closing prayers at the shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes.

For the teachers, support staff and parent helpers who accompanied the pupils, it was a reminder that even at a young age, children are capable of profound spiritual experiences – and that places like Carfin Grotto continue to nurture the seeds of faith for generations to come.

We are proud to be Pilgrims of Hope.



Schools celebrate being Pilgrims of Hope

ST EDWARD'S AIRDRIE BY LORRAINE MCDADE

St. Edward's Primary School held a Pilgrims of Hope Showcase in November, as part of Catholic Education Week. The school community was delighted to welcome guests, parishioners, parents and families for the event celebrating the school's ongoing journey of faith and learning.

The celebration began with introductions and opening prayers led by the newly commissioned Missio Champions. The assembly featured collaboration from all classes, showcasing the talents and hard work of every pupil. Senior pupils from Stirling House also shared some of their reflections on their experiences and growth as part of the school's faith journey.

Throughout the year, pupils had been taking part in a range of events connected to the theme "Pilgrims of Hope". Recently, the children embarked on their own pilgrimages to local places of worship, with parents joining pupils and staff on the journeys.

A particularly special moment during the pilgrimage to St.

Edward's Church was the presentation of a beautiful crucifix, which had been donated by the late Sarah Teresa McGuinness, a Motherwell diocese parishioner who had recently passed away. The crucifix, brought all the way from Jerusalem, served as a powerful symbol of faith and unity. Fr. Desmond offered a blessing for the crucifix, ensuring that it will hold a special place within the school community for years to come.

As part of an interdisciplinary topic, all classes had been working hard to explore the meaning of the Jubilee Year and to reflect on what it means to be Pilgrims of Hope in today's world. Pupils combined learning across RE, art, literacy, and social studies, creating thoughtful displays, artwork, prayers, and performances that expressed their ideas of faith, kindness, and unity.

The Showcase Assembly was a faith-filled and uplifting celebration, highlighting the children's dedication, creativity, and understanding of how hope and faith can guide us all on our journeys.

ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI BAILLIESTON BY KIRSTY FERGUSON

The pupils of St Francis of Assisi Primary have truly embodied the spirit of being Pilgrims of Hope through their care and service within the local community.

With joy and enthusiasm, they have taken part in litter picking to help protect God's creation, collected food and essential items for the local food bank to support those in need and played an active part in our school Masses. Through their thoughtful actions, our young learners are examples of hope and faith in action by living out the school values every day.

Primary 7 pupils have also been preparing to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation in November. They have reflected deeply on how they can live as witnesses to the Holy Spirit and continue to bring hope to others through their words and actions. The children were delighted to share how hard they are working to be Good Samaritans within our community with Bishop Joseph Toal, who encouraged them to continue growing in faith and service as they move forward in their journey with God.

Bishop Toal Celebrates Spanish Mass with Higher Spanish and Leadership Class in St Ambrose

BY ANGELA BOYD

His Lordship Bishop Joseph Toal of Motherwell paid a special visit to the school during Catholic Education Week, joining the Higher Spanish and Leadership class for a unique celebration of Holy Mass in Spanish. The liturgy, dedicated to St. Margaret of Scotland, was a joyful and memorable occasion that highlighted both faith and language learning in action.

A Mass in Spanish

The pupils themselves provided all the parts of the liturgy in Spanish, showcasing their dedication and skill. From readings to prayers, their confident participation reflected both their academic progress and their commitment to celebrating faith in diverse ways. The music department led the congregation in song, filling the oratory with vibrant hymns that brought the liturgy to life.

A Shared Celebration

Bishop Toal presided over the Mass, joined by Deacon Kieran Patrick Burt, who proclaimed the Gospel. Their presence offered the young people a powerful reminder of the wider Church community and its encouragement of their talents and faith journey.

Afternoon Tea and Conversation

Following the Mass, pupils and staff enjoyed afternoon tea together, creating a warm and relaxed atmosphere. This gave the young people a chance to connect personally with Bishop Toal, sharing conversations about their hopes and plans for the future. Topics ranged from UCAS applications and learning to drive to part-time jobs and even restaurant recommendations for enjoying authentic Spanish food here in Lanarkshire.



Faith, Language, and Leadership

The visit was a celebration not only of Catholic Education Week but also of the school's commitment to nurturing confident, multilingual leaders. By blending faith, language, and community, the Higher Spanish and Leadership class demonstrated the richness of Catholic education and the joy of learning together.



Jubilee Jamboree

A Day of Hope and Celebration

BY ARLENE KELLY

On the 14th of September we held our very special Jubilee Jamboree to celebrate the Year of the Jubilee – and what a wonderful day it was!

Pope Francis asked us to "be infected by the light of hope and spread it to others." That's exactly what our event was all about. Families, parishioners, and community members joined together to share faith, fun, and friendship.



There were so many highlights:

- A rock cave created from recycled materials, inspired by Lourdes, where families lit candles and prayed quietly.
- Pebbles of Peace, decorated with words and drawings of hope.
- A Community Wall of Thanks, where we shared what we are grateful for.
- A Time Capsule of Hope, filled with prayers and wishes to be opened in 10 years' time.
- Our beautiful Tree of Hope, blossoming with messages and intentions.

It was a day filled with joy, prayer, thanksgiving, and hope – bringing young and old together to celebrate what makes our school and parish family so special.



St Benedict's Prayer Breakfast

BY JACQUELINE MURPHY

To start off Catholic Education Week 2025, St Benedict's Primary in Easterhouse had a breakfast prayer service with Father Jim Thomson and Head Teacher Mrs Parkinson.

The children made the choice to start CEW, putting their faith in action as pilgrims of hope. Our Missio champions and Altar servers, as well as some P7s, attended, celebrating their role in the school and St John Bosco parish. Rounding off the morning service with a roll and sausage and cup of tea!

Project Wellspring: exciting developments for evangelisation across the Diocese

BY STEPHEN FERRIE

Excellent progress continues to be made with Project Wellspring, our diocesan programme dedicated to strengthening evangelisation in our parishes and communities. Recent months have brought fresh momentum, especially with the rollout of our Pastoral Directory and the introduction of a simplified planning process to help parishes deepen their evangelising mission.

The Pastoral Directory, launched in September, is now well and truly up and running. It brings together the wonderful work emerging from the Wellspring Missions workstreams – from Youth and Liturgy, right through to Adult Formation and Care of Creation, to name only a few. We have received very encouraging feedback about this new resource and how it helps parishes and individuals stay connected with the many opportunities now available to support evangelisation.

The Directory offers an at-a-glance summary of resources, events, and initiatives coming from the Missions workstreams and from across the Diocese. It highlights upcoming liturgies, gatherings, online resources, training opportunities and formation programmes. Updated weekly, it provides a simple and accessible reference point that parishes and lay people can draw upon as they seek to grow in missionary discipleship.

If you would like the latest version of the Directory delivered directly to your email inbox, simply scan the QR code below to join the mailing list. Equally, if your parish, school, or group has an upcoming event or evangelisation initiative you would like to share, please send the details to media@rcdom.org.uk, and we will make sure it is included.

Another encouraging development has been the introduction of a simplified planning process for parishes beginning to focus more intentionally on evangelisation. We recognise that every parish is unique and that some may feel daunted by planning processes that appear too complex or time-consuming. The new approach offers a gentle, step-by-step guide that parishes can adapt to their own circumstances as they reflect on how to share the Gospel more fruitfully. To support this work, we can also provide a two-part spirituality workshop led by Fr Vincent Lockhart – an ideal starting point to ensure that all our evangelisation efforts are rooted in prayer and in conversation with the Holy Spirit.

Following a very positive series of gatherings in 2025, our next Diocesan Wellspring Forum will take place on Tuesday, 27 January 2026, 7-9pm, at St Joseph's Parish Hall, Blantyre. The focus of this meeting will be to celebrate and share the many evangelisation initiatives now taking place in parishes throughout the Diocese. It promises to be another warm, hopeful, and energising evening. All are welcome. You can register your interest in attending the January Forum by emailing sferrie@rcdom.org.uk



Diocesan Pastoral Directory



Sign-up to mailing list



PARISH EVANGELISATION PLAN

A Step-by-Step Guide From Maintenance to Mission



PROJECT WELLSPRING PASTORAL RENEWAL FORUM

TUESDAY, 27TH JANUARY 2026 AT 7.00PM
ST. JOSEPHS CHURCH HALL, BLANTYRE



Luisa is first lay faithful and first woman appointed General Secretary of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland

The Bishops of Scotland welcome Luisa Campbell to the office of General Secretary of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland from February 2026, when Fr. Gerry Maguiness completes his second term of office.

In parallel with her working career, Luisa has been actively involved in the life of the Church in Scotland at both parish and diocesan levels in the areas of youth work, parish administration, liturgy, evangelisation, RCIA and finance.

Luisa retired early from work in 2020 to pursue her passion for voluntary work in the Catholic Church.

After gaining Master's degrees in both Engineering and Business Administration, she worked for almost forty years in industry, ultimately as chief executive of a Scottish business which she led for over two decades. Her roles involved leadership, governance, strategy, commercial finance, mergers and acquisitions and organisational development.

During that time, she also acted as a trustee of several charities and served as a non-executive director and as trustee of a large pension scheme.

Luisa grew up in the diocese of Galloway and has lived in both the archdiocese of Glasgow and the diocese of Aberdeen. Her work has taken her to every diocese in Scotland.

She will be the first member of the lay faithful and the first woman to take on the role of General Secretary.

Responding to her invitation from the bishops, Luisa said, 'I look forward to serving the Bishops of Scotland in my new role as General Secretary, bringing together my experience in the Church and in the world of business.'

Bishop Keenan, President of the Bishops' Conference, said, 'The bishops are delighted that Luisa has accepted this post and will continue the good work carried on by Fr Gerry Maguiness over the past years. Luisa brings a wealth of experience both as a committed laywoman in the Church who has



served our parishes and dioceses loyally over the years and who also has vast experience of life in the world and where she has made a fruitful contribution. We look forward to working with her in the service of the Church in Scotland in the years ahead.'

New Office of Communications and Evangelisation launched by Bishops

A new Office of Communications and Evangelisation has been launched by the Bishops of Scotland to support the Church's mission to share the Gospel and highlight the positive impact of Catholic life across the country.

The new office – led by director Fr Michael Kane – will manage and distribute official statements from the Catholic Church in Scotland and will work closely with dioceses, parishes, schools, religious communities, and lay groups to promote the spread of the Gospel. It will also develop relationships with secular media so that the message of the Church is amplified

in national conversation. A key part of its mission will be to strengthen digital evangelisation across Scotland. To support this work, Being Catholic TV will become the official digital platform of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland, providing video content, live events and other faith resources.

Bishop Frank Dougan, who has episcopal responsibility for Communications, added, "We are launching this new initiative because evangelisation is at the heart of the Church's mission. We are called to be missionaries, using every means available to reach everyone we can — including the



opportunities offered by digital media."

The creation of the Office of Communications and Evangelisation marks a renewed commitment by the Church in Scotland to communicate confidently, transparently, and joyfully — both within the Catholic community and to wider society.

New Coat of Arms for Bishops' Conference



The Bishops' Conference of Scotland has a new Coat of Arms created by one of the oldest heraldic courts in the world.

The **Celtic Cross** reminds us of the ancient roots of the Catholic Church in Scotland, going back to St Ninian in the fourth century AD.

The **Saltire** represents Scotland and its principal patron, St Andrew.

The **red tressure** (border) indicates episcopal authority over a given area. It symbolises a clan, or group of colleagues, thus indicating the bishops as a conference.

The **gold martlet** (bird) is taken from the coat of arms of St Margaret of Scotland, the secondary patron of our nation.

The two **bishops' croziers** represent the two ecclesiastical provinces - St Andrews & Edinburgh and Glasgow, respectively.



Could local teen be a future saint?

The Bishops' Conference of Scotland has confirmed that it supports the request of the private association and other supporters, promoting the cause of Joseph Wilson.

Who was Joseph Wilson?

Joseph (Joe) Wilson was born on 12 December, 1994, and lived with his parents, Alan and Veronica Wilson, and younger sister, Angela, in Newarthill, Scotland. From a young age, Joe demonstrated a depth of compassion, intelligence, and spiritual maturity. He attended Our Lady and St Francis Primary School and later Taylor High School, where his strong Catholic faith grew alongside a deep love for others. Living near Carfin Grotto, a Marian shrine, Joe frequently visited for prayer and reflection. Inspired by the saints, especially by St Thérèse of Lisieux, he cultivated a quiet yet profound devotion to intercessory prayer.

Joe was academically gifted and aspired to become a doctor, not for prestige, but to relieve suffering. His life was tragically cut short when he collapsed and died on December 20, 2011, just after his 17th birthday, due to an undiagnosed heart condition. Following his death, a collection of excerpts from his diary entries was discovered and later published as "Joe's Words", revealing a soul of exceptional depth and holiness.

Why a Cause for Joseph Wilson?

Joe Wilson is an example of an outstanding Christian whose life offers positive and compelling evangelical and human potential in a largely secular western country. Considering the type of saint he could be, his life and story appeals to people on a human level. Because of this, Joe, as well as his evident appeal to people locally, has the potential to become a major, globally loved saint in a way similar to that of the two recently canonised saints, St Carlo Acutis and St Pier Giorgio Frassati, both of whom were young people and inspiring role models. Even people who do not have, or are cynical about, faith are impressed by Joe's dedication to God, his attractive personality, and his constant desire to help others during the course of his short life. His diaries, only discovered after his death, are a major asset because they reveal the depth of his faith while living out his life as a teenager.

Keep an eye out for the next edition of *Fontes* in the New Year where we will have a full report on the cause of sainthood of Joe Wilson.

The Scriptures



by FATHER
THOMAS MAGILL

The Solemnity of Christmas Year C 25th December 2025

There is a wealth of Scriptures to savour and enjoy today, with different readings for the Vigil Mass, Midnight Mass, Mass at dawn, and Mass during the day. All focus on Jesus of course, but in their different ways. The Vigil Mass emphasises the fulfilment in Christ of God's promises and of the people's hopes and dreams. At Midnight Mass the glory and beauty of what is happening is visible in the appearance and song of the heavenly host. It is a glory in the poverty of the manger, a glory wrapped in swaddling clothes. The dawn Mass describes the journey of the shepherds who glorify and praise God for all they had seen. At the Mass during the day we listen to the Gospel of John describing the Word made flesh who dwells among us who see his glory, grace and truth. The Church desired by God is one formed by an attentive listening to this Word made flesh who dwells in our midst. Like Mary, this is a contemplative Church which ponders and treasures these things in her heart

Feast of the Holy Family Year A 28th December 2026

Sirach 3.2-6, 12-14; Psalm 128; Colossians 3.12-21; Matthew 2.13-15, 19-23

With his description of the Holy Family's flight to Egypt, Matthew shows that the persecution which would bring Jesus to the Cross was present from the very start. But so too was the divine presence, revealed to Joseph in his dreams and manifest in the fulfilment of prophecy. By anchoring this

fulfilment of God's plan within a poor family forced to migrate, Matthew shows the sacredness of every human family, always tethered to God even in the midst of crisis. It is there that healthy human relationships are first formed (1st reading) and the gospel values of love, kindness, compassion, humility, meekness and patience are learned. It is in the living out of these values that the Word of Christ richly dwells in us. (2nd reading)

Mary, the Mother of God Year A 1st January 2026

Numbers 6.22-27; Psalm 67; Galatians 4.4-7; Luke 2.16-21

The people "wondered" at the testimony of the shepherds; Mary "treasured" and "pondered" these things in her heart; the shepherds, changed forever, returned to their flocks, "glorifying and praising God." (Gospel) In this season we too are filled with wonder, praise, and glory. Mary, at the heart of the story, shows that these deep emotions lead to profound contemplation of what is taking place. In her silence and stillness, she shows us what it is to be united with her Son, "born of woman, born under the law" so that we might be reborn as God's children. (2nd reading) As God makes his face shine upon Mary and is gracious to her, so he does to all who follow her Son. (1st reading)

Epiphany of the Lord Year A 4th January 2026

Isaiah 60.1-6; Psalm 72; Ephesians 3.2-3, 5-6; Matthew 1.1-12

The contrast between light and darkness, the feel of movement, the sensation of being drawn and

gathered, the pull of the earthly by the divine, the urgency of the journey are all present in both the readings from Isaiah and Matthew. Isaiah describes the thrill of this experience; Matthew, the joy. Both show forth the brightness and radiance of what is taking place, though for Matthew there are still pools of darkness. Herod is stuck in the seeming fastness of his palace, unwilling to emerge from its shadows. His questioning of the Magi reveals a shady and shadowed mind. He is unwilling to move, to change or be challenged by the events taking place. He is filled with fear and apprehension. He is content with the system that was and supremely unaware how deeply it was collapsing with this new thing that God was doing. By contrast, the decision of the Magi to bypass Herod on their return journey and to go home "by another way" shows they are utterly changed by what they have experienced, still filled with the joy of their encounter, ready to continue on the journey. No longer will they dally with darkness or pander to the powerful; now they are their own men, claimed by God through this ecstatic experience; now they can choose a new road which will take them home, yes, but by different means and by new mapping, "no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation." Now they walk together to the homeland as fellows with all in Christ, members of his body, and sharers in his promise.



Baptism of the Lord Year A

11th January 2026

Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7; Psalm 28; Acts of Apostles 10:34-38; Matthew 3:13-17
The Spirit hovers over the waters in this liminal space, the Jordan river, the margin separating the wilderness from the land of bounty. We hear so many echoes: the creation, the flood, the waters flowing from the Temple, the years in the wilderness, the land flowing with milk and honey. These echoes come together in harmony with that voice from heaven: "This is my beloved Son: with whom I am well pleased." (Gospel) This Holy Spirit, Peter tells his audience, anointed Jesus with power to preach his good news of peace, to bring goodness and impart healing to all impartially. (2nd reading) He will be the light to the nations and will establish justice on earth, treating the bruised and broken with gentleness. (1st reading) In him, strangely, wonderfully, we are gathered to the God who comes to us, covered in the comfort he wraps us with. In Christ, we are plunged into this good earth to be raised up renewed and regenerated, now standing on holy ground, in sacred time and space. Now the whole of creation becomes sacred, all humanity is made holy. As we wait for our blessed hope, we recognise that we live in a sacramental world, that materiality itself is shot through with the heavenly, where everything points to and holds the divine.

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time A

18th January 2026

Isaiah 49:3, 5-6; Psalm 40; I Corinthians 1:1-3; John 1:29-34
The prophet Isaiah has the profound conviction of being called by God to be his servant so that his people will return to him and his salvation will reach the ends of the earth. (1st reading) Described as the "light of the nations", Isaiah already points to Jesus who comes as the light to overcome the darkness and to serve rather than be served. John the Baptist also points to Christ and away from himself. He sees, discerns, Jesus for who he is, the Lamb of God, and witnesses to him.

(Gospel) All Christians are "sanctified by Christ Jesus, called to be saints" (2nd reading) and must likewise see their lives in terms of service to all, always pointing away from themselves and towards Christ, and so witness to his presence in our world.

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time A

Sunday of the Word of God

25th January 2026

Isaiah 9:1-4; Psalm 27; I Corinthians 1:10-13, 17; Matthew 4:12-23

Matthew constantly presents Jesus in terms of the fulfilment of God's promises. By situating the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Galilee, the territory of Zabulon and Naphtali, he directly references the words of Isaiah (1st reading). This is the "marginal" place far away from the centres of power in Jerusalem, on the edge of the pagan world. His first message is a call to conversion and the announcement of the presence of God's Kingdom. (Gospel) This kingdom he establishes through his preaching, teaching, and healing. "Kingdom," in fact, can be considered shorthand for his entire ministry. It is into this Kingdom he calls his first disciples. Paul emphasises that the preaching of the good news of the Kingdom is his first duty so that all would be united in the same mind and same discernment. (2nd reading) On this Sunday of the Word of God, we are reminded of the importance for all ministers of the Gospel of preaching the good news of God's Kingdom. Fed, nourished, taught, and healed by this Word, all God's holy people can then bring this to the world.

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time A

1st February 2026.

Zephaniah 2:3, 3:12-13; Psalm 146; I Corinthians 1:26-31; Matthew 5:1-12
Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount" echoes Moses' going up the mountain of God to receive the ten commandments. Jesus is presented as the new Moses but no longer does he give a list of laws to be obeyed but rather a relationship to be entered into. The Beatitudes outline the attitudes and the way of living which allow us to live

constantly in and through the Lord by making the way he lived his life our own. (Gospel) We can see how each of the Beatitudes describes the way he lived – as poor in spirit, not overbearing and controlling; as mourning for the oppressed situation of his people and not being distracted by fleeting pleasure; through his meekness and humility and not through self-seeking and aggrandisement; through seeking justice for those denied it; through mercy rather than revenge; through purity of heart and not selfish motivation; through peace rather than force. As a result, he experienced misunderstanding, persecution, and the Cross. But it was precisely in this way that he revealed the wisdom of God which brings righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (2nd reading). It is in this new way of living and relating that we truly seek the Lord. (1st reading)

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time A

8th February 2026.

Isaiah 58:6-10; Psalm 112; I Corinthians 2:1-5; Matthew 5:13-16

The Lord tells the crowds and us who we truly are at the core of our being – salt to the earth and light to the world. Our true identity, our real self, is a pure gift from God not the result of our efforts. The images of salt and light reveal that every human life is a life lived for others, poured out for the hungry, spilled out for the oppressed. (1st reading) We are made to bring taste and texture to this life lived together, to add flavour, to season and transform so that what is already there, the divine presence, is brought out to be savoured and enjoyed. We are called to bring illumination to the dark places of this world, to enlighten the gloom and darkness which so often engulfs others. When we lose our "taste" and hide our lights, we are only in touch with our false self and are no longer true to who we are. Indeed, we are called not to rest in human wisdom but in the power of God. (2nd reading)



700th anniversary of buying Grisy-Suisnes farm



BY FR MICHAEL BRIODY

People wouldn't believe me when I told them I was going to France to celebrate the 700th anniversary of buying a farm. "Yes, buying a farm," I often had to repeat.

The farm in question, at Grisy-Suisnes, 38 kilometres south-east of Paris, was bought in 1325 by David, Bishop of Moray - Scottish Dioceses had different names in those days - so that its revenues would pay for the cost of young men from his diocese receiving a university education in Paris, not necessarily for Priesthood, although it included that possibility. There were no universities in Scotland at the time, and eleven years after Bannockburn, still within the reign of King Robert the Bruce, it was unthinkable to send young Scots to Oxford or Cambridge. Moreover, Bishop David was persona non grata in England being known as one of Robert the Bruce's staunchest allies. He had been educated in Paris himself, and the purchase of the farm came only 30 years after the beginning of the 'Auld Alliance'. Indeed, on a plaque on the street side of the farm wall its states that this was "Temoignage

d'Alliance Francaise-Ecossaise", a witness to, or proof of, the Franco-Scottish Alliance. The treaty of 1295 had been signed at Creteil, on the road between Paris and Grisy. A more public sign of this union came when Mary, Queen of Scots, was sent to France, at the tender age of six, for safety, education and eventual marriage to the Dauphin, the heir to the French throne. She visited Grisy on one occasion and also met with some of the students in Paris.

The purchase of the farm at Grisy was the beginning of the story of the Scots College in Paris. Continuing the link, Bishop Gilbert of Aberdeen and I travelled to Paris on Friday 19th September, and the next day concelebrated Mass, in English, in the chapel of the old Scots College, along with Fr Ross Crichton, parish priest of Eriskay and Daliburgh, the Scottish Bishops' appointee to the Fondation Catholique Ecossaise. The Mass was attended by about thirty people of various nationalities. It was followed by a talk in French about the Jacobite Court-in-exile at St Germain-en-Laye, situated 12 miles north-west of Paris, with which the Scots College, Paris was heavily involved

over several decades. To finish, there was une verre de l'amitié, a glass of friendship, which turned out to be champagne in a paper cup but was no less appreciated for that.

On Sunday 21st, the organisers laid on a taxi to transport us to Grisy-Suisnes, to the village's usual Sunday morning 10 o'clock Mass. A pipe band, in full highland attire, greeted us at the church door and marched down ahead of us in the entrance procession. The main celebrant was Bishop Guillaume Leschallier de Lisle, auxiliary of the local Diocese of Meaux. Bishop Gilbert, Fr Crichton and I concelebrated along with a few local priests. After Mass, still wearing our vestments, we processed along the street, following the pipe band and followed by the whole congregation. We entered the farmyard, about fifty yards away. It showed all the signs of still being a working farm with very up-to-date machinery in view. Bishop de Lisle blessed the farm, and the band played "O Flower of Scotland". They had played "Highland Cathedral" earlier and a selection of instantly recognisable Scottish tunes. After returning our

vestments to the church, there was another verre de l'amitié in the village square (another paper cup), during which commemorative lapel badges were distributed. Meanwhile on the village green some athletic people were exhibiting Scottish pastimes like tossing the caber! The pipe band continued to play. They were from Moigny-sur-Ecole, about 40 kilometres to the south in Gâtinais, a protected area of "outstanding natural beauty". From their website, as well as listening to them, it was clear they were a very professional outfit, committed to interesting local people in learning the Scots pipes and drums.

We then repaired to the parish hall for a celebratory meal which was attended by about 100 people. Bishop Gilbert, Fr Crichton and I were introduced by name, explaining our connection with the event, as were many other individuals and groups representing the Fondation Catholique Ecossaise, the Association Franco-Ecossaise, the Franco Scottish Association and the Grisy-Abernethy (Fife) twinning link, among others. No pains had been spared to provide a meal worthy of a 700th anniversary. There were five courses, including some locally sourced typical dishes. I was sitting between the local parish priest and his curate. They have 75,000 souls in their parish, which is situated on the Plains de la Brie, the famous French cheese, which, naturally, was on the cheese course. The French always have a cheese course. My French is not the best, but I rustled together a few words to say, "There are three perfect things in France – the wine, the bread and the cheese." That seemed to go down well. The people there were effusively grateful for our presence, taking the trouble, as they put it, to come such a long way to take part.



After the meal, there were prolonged farewells before returning to the village green, where they were still tossing the caber and putting the shot. Then it was a drive back to Paris and our hotel, reluctantly passing up on a greatly desired visit to the newly restored Notre Dame Cathedral, because the sciatica said enough was enough for one day and we had an early start for the airport in the morning.



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