



Galloway Diocese NEWS

Advent Edition, December 2025

Young Adults Camino Pilgrimage



Eleven Young Adults along with three leaders, walked the last 115km of the Camino de Santiago in October

Full story and more photographs on page 15

Bishop Frank writes

We are surrounded by signs on hope, let us always strive to recognise them. Let us also be signs of hope in our own lives.



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Welcome to the latest edition of Galloway News. As we come towards the end of the Jubilee Year of Hope, I know that you will find within its pages real signs of Christian Hope in the many ways in which we see the hand of God in the work of the faithful throughout the Diocese. As I continue to make my home with you, I am blessed every day with the chance to see the faith of so many of you and to be inspired by your love of God and your neighbour. For this, I thank you.

A special thanks goes to our outgoing editor of the Galloway News, Mary Buckley. Mary has been the beating heart of Galloway News for many years, and I thank her on behalf of you all for the great work she has done. When people from outside Galloway see our publication, they are invariably impressed and usually jealous!



Since I mentioned signs of hope, perhaps this would be the best key for me to reflect on the past few months. I am in a privileged position to see so much in the Diocese and beyond, so I will briefly share some with you.

In September, I attended the course in Rome for new bishops, affectionately known as the 'baby bishops' course! Every new bishop is expected to attend this course, and I had been unable to make it last year. This year I was able to go along with

Bishop McKenzie, bishop of Dunkeld. It was a great opportunity to touch base with the Universal Church: we were among 240 bishops from across the world. We were able to celebrate the diversity represented by many nations but also, and crucially, the unity. Our shared experiences were a sign of the presence of the Body of Christ in every place, a sure sign of hope. And being part of the One Church was marked when we spent a morning in the company of Pope Leo, including the obligatory photo op! Unity is something we pray for every time we celebrate Mass (for example, after the Our Father) and it was a privilege to feel that reality.

And of course, the unity is marked above all by our celebration of the Eucharist. We celebrated Mass at the Chair of Peter in that same Basilica, at the Basilica of Mary Majors, and at the canonisation Mass for Saints Carlo Acutis and Pier Giorgio Frassati. Again, a chance to celebrate being a part of something rooted in Christ in every part of the world.

As bishop, I also work with the other bishops, and so I have a new job: I've been asked to oversee the media and communications side of things (maybe the main requirement is to be someone who likes attention!). This is a work in progress, and a part of it is the creation of the new Office for Communication and Evangelisation. This will aim to spread the Good News across the country through the various media, especially social media. Here,



we can reach out to those who have either never set foot in a church, or for whom it has been a while. We have to use all the means at our disposal to do this, so I look forward to this developing over the coming years. Already in the Diocese we have a great team of people working in online communications and I am grateful for what they do, another sign of hope.

In November, the clergy gathered with me for our two-day autumn assembly. I am so grateful for our priests and deacons and for their generous ministry. At the same time, as you well know, they are stretched. And so, it was important to invest time in looking at their well-being. We prayed about this, discussed it, and are developing plans to support them in their ministry. But of course, your support is so important too. The priests of the Diocese are a sure sign of hope. They are also a cranky, fallible lot (so, human beings then!). Please care for them, love them and remember how much your words of support can build them up ... and also how your words of complaint can knock them. We expect a lot of our priests, and they give so much. How much do you care for them, how often do you pray for them, how often do you build them up? If I sound a bit protective of them, that is because I am! And I do thank you all for what you do to make our parishes communities of faith, hope and love.

And other signs of hope can be seen in our schools. It never ceases to amaze me that people can be so quick to knock our schools and our teachers. And yet I see places where children are loved and cared for in a way that goes beyond contracted hours or job descriptions. Very often the staff in the school are the principal signs of Christ's love to our children and I am so grateful to them for all that they do. Our schools are real communities of faith.

I have barely touched the surface, but a bishop is given a word count just like anyone else. There are so many signs of Hope in our Church, locally, nationally and worldwide. As the Jubilee Year draws to a close, we don't stop looking for them. Let's pray for eyes of faith that see the hand of God in so many ways and continue to be Pilgrims of Hope.

And please pray for me.

St Ninian pray for us.

+Francis Dougan

Reflection

The Greatest

"Among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist"

By Jim McKendrick

Originally, I didn't really like John the Baptist too much. He seemed an odd, eccentric and uncouth person whose appearance was unkempt; clothing austere and diet unappealing. I used to skip through the Advent readings and fast-forward to Christmas. Gradually I began to wonder, have I got this wrong? Luke says that John lived in the desert until the day when he appeared publicly to the people of Israel. Suddenly it all clicked into place. As the historian, Josephus suggested, John had probably lived with an Essene community. The camel hair robe and leather belt; standard dress code and styling for a holy man or prophet. Honey and locusts: a strict interpretation of the Jewish dietary laws. The desert: as Jesus himself said – where else would you go to find a prophet?

During the last few Advents, reading and reflecting on John's story as narrated in all four Gospels and foretold by the prophets Isaiah and Malachi, has allowed me to see John in a different, more favourable light. He is one of the key figures of Advent. A relation of Jesus and Mary, his conception is announced to his father, Zechariah, by the angel Gabriel. "Great in the sight of the Lord, he is to be called John"; Zechariah is struck dumb for his lack of belief. When John's circumcision comes along, his mother, Elisabeth, insists his name is to be John and the family and neighbours turn to his father for confirmation. Unable to speak, Zechariah writes on a tablet "his name is John." Immediately, he can speak again and realises all that Gabriel told him is true. Praising God, he prophesies that John will be called a prophet of the Most High. Thus, completing the mission of Elijah and prepare the way of the Lord. Later, in his public ministry, Jesus, after the messengers from John the Baptist have left,

tells the crowd that John is a prophet, but more than a prophet; he is the messenger of God, sent to prepare the way of the Lord: the greatest man who has ever lived.

Where does this greatness come from? First of all, John was great because he was the transition from the Old Testament Prophets to the New Testament; from the Old Covenant to the New. He was the bridge that prepared for the new life to come. His unique mission makes him great. He knew who Jesus was and pointed him out, turning the eyes of his followers from himself to his Lord. "Behold the Lamb of God" - God's sacrificial lamb who takes away the sins of the world. John did his preaching mainly in the desert of Judea. He did not sit on a royal throne or enjoy the honours of the Jewish leaders. Instead, he was poor, simple, prayerful, regularly engaged in penance, remained in the desert and invited many people to come to him. And when they came, he was a strong and courageous voice announcing the arrival of the Messiah and preaching a message similar to Jesus. He baptised in water those who were repentant and sought God.

We can learn a great deal from John the Baptist. He persevered and fulfilled the mission entrusted to him by God. His message is timeless, still relevant for us today. With humility, he deferred to Jesus; always diverting attention to Him and pointing out to the crowds that it was not him but Jesus, they were looking for. He boldly preached his message of repentance and conversion to the crowds; and showed courage when he spoke out against the impropriety of a King's marriage, even when it cost him his life. On a personal note, I learned not to judge a book by its cover: what seemed like an itinerant hobo turned out to be a genuine superstar.

Safeguarding in Galloway Diocese

*Tony Fisher is Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser
and is based in the Diocesan Office.*



Annual Conference

Members of the safeguarding community in Galloway joined other delegates at Strathclyde University at the Annual Safeguarding Conference on 8 November where the topic of conversation was 'Journeying in Hope : Transforming the safeguarding culture of the Church'. Fascinating Keynote input was provided by Matthew McVarish and the Lucy Faithful Foundation.

Safe Words Presentation

A session took place at St John's Church Hall in Cumnock on Saturday 27 September where clergy, religious, volunteers and staff from the Diocese heard from Lesley Anne Pratchett of 'Break the Silence'. Many thanks to the volunteers at St John's for their assistance on the day and for the wonderful hospitality. Special thanks to Lesley Anne for the presentation and we are hopeful that we may be able to run a further session in the New Year.

Season's Greetings

Many thanks for all of the hard work and endeavour to all of the individuals who make up the Safeguarding Collective in Galloway and on behalf of everyone at Candida Casa, we wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous 2026 when it comes along.

In the summer of 2013, when I was parish secretary in St Andrew's, Dumfries, Father David Borland suggested I have a look at page 16 of the Galloway Diocese News, "because I think you might like it." "It" was an appeal for someone to take over the production of the magazine and he was right - I did like it - so I offered my services and joined the editorial team, and 12 years and 50 editions later I am handing over to Louise in the hope that she enjoys it as much as I have.

Over the years we have covered many diocesan events, the most obvious of which were the various pilgrimages, to Lourdes, the Holy Land, Whithorn and, most recently, the Camino de Santiago. All of these involved reminiscences from the pilgrims, tales of places seen, emotions experienced, and friendships made as well as spiritual and prayerful comfort, but my main recollection is of sifting through dozens of photographs to whittle down to the half dozen or so to include in the articles. Spotlight on Education is a recurring feature and recently the Youth pages, but what has given me most enjoyment was the little news items about what you are doing in your parishes and schools; the trips you take, the social occasions you have, and the fundraising events, especially in schools.

We have featured many series; Understanding the Gospels, The Teaching of Pope Francis and, of course, the series on Prayer from Father Martin Chambers. The saddest article I have written was 'In His Own Words' featuring extracts from this. There have been other sad items; we have included many obituaries for priests and for Bishops Cunningham and Taylor, but also joyful occasions, especially the appointments of Bishops William Nolan and Frank Dougan. (The news of the appointment of Bishop Nolan came, annoyingly two weeks after the magazine had gone to the printers, so we hastily put out a supplement.)

As you know, the Galloway Diocese News is produced four times a year and we were bowling along happily when - wham - Covid hit. Overnight the churches were closed, congregations had to stay at home and the country was plunged into a deep depression. Production of the magazine was threatened because we had no-one to distribute it to, but the team decided to do some online editions. Thank you now to the priests who readily wrote movingly about their experiences of saying Mass in an empty church, what they were doing to keep in touch with parishioners and, subsequently, their joy at being 'back in business' albeit with a 'booking system'. (And I especially enjoyed including 'Covid Chuckles' and 'Lockdown Laughter'). It has not always been smooth sailing of course. There are some who view the deadline for articles as a basis for negotiation rather than a date to be aimed for and 'can you keep it to 500 words, please' is usually a forlorn hope!

Now that social media is so ubiquitous, the 'news' items on the magazine are often overtaken and, of course, it is now published online as well as in print, but there is still room for a place to see your photographs, read about what's happening in your parish and 'check in' with the longer pieces reflecting our faith. I hope you have enjoyed reading the GDN over the years and that you continue to do so. Keep your contributions coming in - remember, this is your Galloway Diocese News. Thank you for the privilege of helping to bring it to you.



Mary and Lucy the cat watching the Episcopal Ordination of Bishop Dougan online taking notes for the GD News

A Note from the New Editor

Louise Girvan takes over as editor from this edition

Being appointed the new editor of the Galloway Diocese News is a great honour, and I am so grateful to Mary and the editorial team for making the transition so smooth. I have always been fond of the Galloway Diocese News and have enjoyed growing up with the opportunity to gain insight into what is happening across our entire diocese through the magazine.



I am originally from Prestwick and still occasionally play the organ at St Quivox when I am home, but I now live in Dumfries, where I work as a secondary music teacher and attend both St Teresa's and St Andrew's parishes. I am also a leader for the Diocesan Youth Office, so I am involved in the monthly youth evenings as well as the larger youth events.

I have been running the social media pages for four parishes for some time and have also taken photographs for diocesan events - Whithorn, the Papal Nuncio visit, etc. so I was often emailing photographs and articles to Mary for the magazine.

Having the opportunity to now serve the diocese as editor of the magazine is hugely exciting - although I have big shoes to fill - and I am looking forward to seeing how faith and the mission of the Church continue to flourish across the diocese. I feel incredibly lucky to have grown up in Galloway, surrounded by so many faith-nurturing people and experiences, and I hope to be able to give back as much as I can.

Galloway Diocese News

Deadline for the Lent edition
27th February 2026

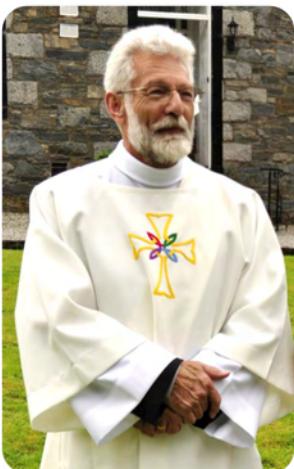
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Bob Simpson will be remembered as one of the first people to minister as a deacon in the diocese when the Permanent Diaconate which enabled married men to be ordained to service in this particular Order was restored in Galloway.

Bob was born in Kirkcaldy, attended the Royal High in Edinburgh, and went on to study at the University of Edinburgh. It was there he graduated in Chemistry and where he met his wife, Geraldine. The couple married in 1969 and then spent a year in Nigeria, where Bob was received into the Catholic Church in 1970, having previously been a member of the Church of Scotland.



When they returned to Edinburgh in 1970 Bob resumed his studies and completed his PhD in 1971.

Bob and Geraldine had three children, and then in 1981 the family moved from Alloa to Newton Stewart when Bob became Deputy Head at Douglas Ewart High School, a post he held until he retired in 2002.

A few years after retiring from school, Bob discerned the call to the Permanent

Diaconate, and he started his formation which led to ordination in August 2011 in the Church of Our Lady and St Ninian's, Newton Stewart, by Bishop John Cunningham.

Bob brought with him to the diaconate many gifts and talents, including his professional experience in

Requiescat in pace

education, his love of the Church, and his genuine desire to serve others. When in Alloa, he had been a member of the St Vincent de Paul Society and the Catenians, and after moving to Newton Stewart he spent time as a Scoutmaster, a custody visitor, and he served on the Parole Board. He was also an active member of Rotary and later of Probus. All of which demonstrate his deep-rooted desire to help others and his commitment to the local and wider communities.

Bob and Geraldine loved to travel. As a family they enjoyed many holidays in France and then latterly he and Geraldine delighted in travelling the world on cruise ships. He was a proud father and grandfather, a keen amateur photographer, a dedicated gardener, a keen amateur wine and beer maker, a dedicated hillwalker, a choir and operatic member, and a steam train enthusiast all his life.

As a deacon Bob ministered with great dedication, serving the people of the parishes of East Wigtownshire in Newton Stewart, Whithorn and Wigton. He also served the diocese in bringing his educational expertise to assist and advise on education, and he was a member of the editorial board of the diocesan publication, *The Galloway News*, for many years.

Bob will be remembered for his authenticity, his gentle and unassuming manner, and for the dedication he showed to his family, his school community, and to the Church which he loved and served with such devotion. He was a wonderful witness to his vocation to marriage and family life and to his vocation to the Permanent Diaconate.

Bob died peacefully in Stranraer Hospital after a short period of illness bravely borne.

Father John Kinsler

Reflection by Canon Matt McManus

Fr John Kinsler and I were ordained on the same day, 3rd April 1965, in the then Cathedral of the Good Shepherd, Ayr, by Bishop McGee. Earlier this year we celebrated 60 years in the priesthood. We have been friends for sixty-six years. We celebrated Mass together (on 3rd April 2025) in the Holy Rosary Residence, Greenock, with Fr John's family, fellow priests and friends – and then together in St Peter's, Ardrossan in May. Fr John thoroughly enjoyed both celebrations of his Jubilee, and in his usual way was the life and soul of the party. But it was noticeable that his health was failing.

Fr John served the people of Galloway Diocese faithfully all the years of his priesthood - and in his retirement in Mossblown was always willing to supply in any parish



which needed him, 'till failing health and the retirement of his friend and housekeeper, Margaret Mullen, meant that he needed the devoted care of the Sisters and staff of Holy Rosary Residence.

For me the most memorable of the appointments John had was to the tiny parish of Gretna - of course he met, befriended and celebrated the marriage of many

couples looking for the romance of a Gretna Wedding. But it was in Gretna that John found his "second" – or perhaps "third," after Golf – vocation. He assisted the local farrier in shoeing horses and even the heaviest of heavy horses was no match for this wee man. He never neglected his parishioners: two legged or four legged. Johnny was less than pleased when Bishop Taylor declined to let him attend the National School of Blacksmithing for a qualification!



Canon Matt McManus with Fr John Kinsler in April 2025

I will miss my friend, but surely he will find a horse or two in Heaven needing his attention. God will welcome Fr John, a faithful priest of Galloway.



Catholic Education Week

Pilgrims of Hope

16th – 30th November

By Amélie Davidson

Catholic Education Week is an annual celebration that highlights the vital contribution that Catholic schools make to our Church and to society. It is a time for pupils, staff, parents, and parish communities to come together in thanksgiving, prayer, and reflection - recognising that faith lies at the heart of our learning, our service, and our daily lives. This year, Catholic Education Week was celebrated under the inspiring theme "Pilgrims of Hope." Rooted in the Jubilee Year of Hope, the theme invites us to see our journey of faith as one of trust, renewal, and shared purpose. Pope Francis encouraged us all to "fan the flame of hope," reminding us that as pilgrims, we walk together - guided by God's love and strengthened by one another.

Throughout the week, schools across the diocese reflected on what it means to be pilgrims of hope in today's world. In classrooms and assemblies, pupils explored how hope can be found in small, everyday moments - through kindness, perseverance, and prayer. Teachers led reflections, discussions, and creative activities that inspired young people to consider how they can bring hope to others in their schools, families, and wider communities. Many schools marked the week with liturgies and Masses, celebrating the unity and shared mission that define Catholic education. Others organised acts of service such as collections for local food banks, writing letters to care home residents, or launching environmental projects to care for God's creation. School corridors came alive with displays and artwork capturing the message of hope, while classes composed prayers, poems, and songs inspired by the Jubilee theme.

Catholic Education Week serves as a powerful reminder that hope is not simply a word we speak. It is something we live each day. Through their compassion, generosity,

and care for others, pupils across our schools have shown what it means to live as true witnesses of hope. The theme Pilgrims of Hope also encourages everyone to look beyond themselves - to care for creation, to reach out to those in need, and to walk alongside others with empathy and courage. Pupils reflected on how they could share hope in simple but meaningful ways: by including others in the playground, standing up for justice, or offering a helping hand to someone in need. In these moments, the Gospel comes alive, revealing the strength and beauty of faith in action.

As the week drew to a close, staff and pupils were reminded that being a pilgrim of hope is not limited to a single week of celebration. It is a lifelong calling; to walk forward in faith, to nurture our relationship with God, and to share hope wherever we go. Guided by the light of Christ, we continue this journey together, trusting that even the smallest acts of love can keep the flame of hope burning brightly for all.

Jacob L., a Primary 7 pupil at St Patrick's Primary in Troon, reflects on the meaning of hope as part of Catholic Education Week:

"Hope to me means not giving up, having that urge to keep believing that it isn't the end. No matter where you are in the world everyone has hope. Hope can also mean you want something good to happen or something bad. Hope is a merciful feeling that you can never stop believing. Hope works for some people and for others maybe not. Anything can have hope whether it is an animal or a human. Sometimes you may feel you don't have hope but in your heart you do. There is always that feeling that you can't give up, and that is what gives you hope."

Community of Faith Staff Retreat Celebrates Catholic Education Week

Staff from Queen Margaret Academy, St Patrick's, St Ninian's, Sacred Heart, St John's, and St Cuthbert's came together for a Community of Faith Staff Retreat to celebrate Catholic Education Week.

The day began with a beautiful Mass celebrated by Bishop Dougan, setting a reflective and hopeful tone. In this Jubilee Year of Hope, staff were reminded of the call to share Christ's hope within their schools and communities, nurturing faith through everyday acts of love and service. During the retreat, staff were inspired by an uplifting and thought-provoking input from SCES Director Barbara Coupar, who spoke about the vital role of Catholic educators in helping young people grow in faith, love, and learning.

The retreat provided a meaningful opportunity for prayer, reflection, and connection among colleagues from across the Queen Margaret Cluster. It was a day that renewed a shared sense of mission and strengthened the bonds of community among all who serve in Catholic education. Staff returned to their schools refreshed and inspired, ready to continue building communities of faith, hope, and joy throughout the year ahead.



Catholic Education Week

Pilgrims of Hope: Living Justice and Peace Today

16th – 30th November

By Victoria MacRae

As schools across the country celebrate Catholic Education Week, this year's theme -"Pilgrims of Hope" - has invited pupils and staff to reflect more deeply on how our faith calls us to journey together toward a more just and peaceful world. Two significant events helped illuminate this mission: inspiring visits from Justice and Peace Scotland and SCIAF, each offering a challenge rooted in the heart of the Gospel.

Justice and Peace Scotland encouraged pupils to look with open eyes at the world around them - both the beauty of God's creation and the suffering of those treated unjustly. Their message was clear: Catholic social teaching is not simply something we learn, but something we live.

They reminded students that being a "pilgrim of hope" means speaking up for the poor, welcoming the stranger, caring for creation, and standing against structures that harm human dignity. In their visit, SCIAF shared powerful stories from communities around the world who are overcoming poverty, conflict, and climate challenges. Through their work - improving access to education, providing clean water, supporting families after disasters - SCIAF shows what Catholic compassion looks like in action.

They reminded pupils that even small acts of generosity, prayer, and solidarity can have global reach.

So What Would Jesus Want Me To Do in the World?

Amid these visits, pupils were encouraged to ask a profoundly personal question: What would Jesus want me to do?



The Gospels offer a simple but demanding answer. Jesus would want us to:

- Love without limits - especially those who feel forgotten or alone.
- Choose peace, even when anger or division seems easier.
- Defend the vulnerable, just as He lifted up the poor, the sick, and the outcast.
- Care for creation, recognising the world as a gift entrusted to us by the Father.
- Bring hope, through kindness, courage, and faith-filled action.



In short, Jesus asks each of us to become His hands and feet in today's world - to bring light where there is darkness, and hope where there is despair.

Catholic Education Week reminds us that faith is a journey we walk together. The visits from Justice and Peace Scotland and SCIAF have helped our school community recognise that our pilgrimage is not just about where we are going, but about who we become along the way. Some of our S6 Caritas students have shared this message with all our school community through Assemblies saying this - As Pilgrims of Hope, we are called to carry Christ's message into the world -not only in words, but in choices and actions that reflect His love. May we continue to ask, with open hearts:

"Lord, what do You want me to do?"

And may we have the courage to live the answer.





St Joseph's Academy

Celebrates 70 Years on Grassyards Road

By Donna Shearer

St Joseph's Academy has a rich and proud history as a Catholic secondary school in Kilmarnock. Opening as St Joseph's High School on Grassyards Road in 1955, the school was formally opened by Bishop McGee. In 1967, following the removal of the tiered education system, all Kilmarnock secondaries were re-designated as Academies, and thus St Joseph's Academy came into being.

As enrolments changed over time, St Conval's Secondary School in Cumnock was annexed with St Joseph's Academy in 1998, becoming St Joseph's Academy (Cumnock Campus). The two schools later came together on one site in 2004. On 17 September 2008 the newly rebuilt St Joseph's Academy Campus opened its doors, following the Mass of Dedication on 28 August 2008 at which Bishop Cunningham presided. At that dedication Mass, Lord Matthews, a former pupil of St Joseph's Academy, spoke warmly and fondly of his own school days. Also situated on the campus is the new St Andrew's Primary School, an amalgamation of St Columba's and St Matthew's Primaries, St Andrew's Early Learning and Childcare Centre and joining us recently has been the Senior Phase pupils from Park School. Throughout every change in name, building, and catchment area, the distinctive Catholic identity of this school has remained steadfast at the heart of our mission.

Celebrating our Mass in November, rather than on the exact anniversary date, allowed our school and wider community to come together in thanksgiving as part of Catholic Education Week and acknowledge the 2025 theme Pilgrims of Hope. Showcasing 70 years of our school was always going to be a challenge, however, we were hopeful former pupils and staff would respond to our request to provide historical items for our display, and they did not let us down! Bishop Dougan presided over Mass with Fr McGrattan and Fr Rennie concelebrating. The Junior Choir, directed by Mrs Grant led the beautiful music during the event, while current and former pupils delivered the liturgy. During the Procession of the gifts, past pupils and staff were invited to take up memories from across the decades. Almost 200 people joined our celebration, and the 'street' was buzzing after Mass as everyone enjoyed refreshments while perusing display items and conversing with each other. To conclude the celebration Caritas Pupils, our Junior Leadership Team and the SJA Events Team provided the opportunity for our guests to tour our school building.

Thanks to everyone who helped make this event a success.



Dilexi Te: The First Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Leo XIV

By Father William R. McFadden



APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION
DILEXI TE
OF POPE LEO XIV
ON LOVE FOR THE POOR

In October Pope Leo issued his first teaching document called "Dilexi te" which offers us insight into his pastoral vision and adds his own voice to the existing body of social teaching offered by his predecessors from Pope Leo XIII to Pope Francis. As to be expected, Leo's words show a specific continuity with Pope Francis but done in his own style and reflecting his own experience.

The document can be summed up as a teaching which repeats once again that the direction of the Church must be one in which there is a preferential option for the poor and for the marginalised. God's love is above all for those suffering because of poverty and marginalisation, and just as Jesus identified with the hungry and the rejected, so must we as members of the Church today. Leo recognises the many faces of poverty, including new and subtle appearances which demean individuals and communities: "...we should perhaps speak more correctly of the many faces of the poor and of poverty, since it is a multifaceted phenomenon. In fact, there are many forms of poverty: the poverty of those who lack material means of subsistence, the poverty of those who are socially marginalised and lack the means to give voice to their dignity and abilities, moral and spiritual poverty, cultural poverty, the poverty of those who find themselves in a condition of personal or social weakness or fragility, the poverty of those who have no rights, no space, no freedom. (#9) He then adds: "God has a special place in his heart for those who are discriminated against and, he asks us, his Church, to make a decisive and radical choice in favour of the weakest." (#16)

Dilexi te explicitly mentions the experience of migrants as a crucial part of the Church's mission today: "The Church, like a mother, accompanies those who are walking. Where the world sees threats, she sees children; where walls are built, she builds bridges. She knows that her proclamation of the Gospel is credible only when it is translated into gestures of closeness and welcome. And she knows that in every rejected migrant, it is Christ himself who knocks at the door of the community." (#75)

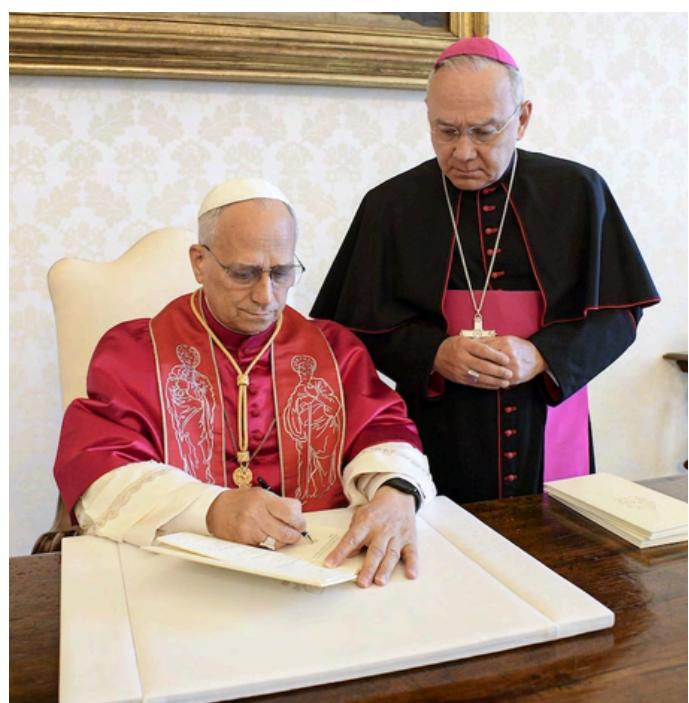
The Exhortation is a poignant reminder to the Catholic community that it is incumbent upon us to raise our voices to challenge unjust structures and systems: "Unjust structures need to be recognised and eradicated by the force of good, by changing mindsets but also, with the help of science and technology, by developing effective policies for societal change. It must never be forgotten that the Gospel message has to do not only with an individual's personal relationship with the Lord, but also with something greater: "the Kingdom of God (cf. Lk 4:43); it is about loving God who reigns in our world. (#97)

Leo goes on to remind us that we must support the poor with generous almsgiving which of itself can make tangible differences to those suffering poverty and need: "Almsgiving at least offers us a chance to halt before the poor, to look into their eyes, to touch them and to share something of ourselves with them. In any event, almsgiving, however modest, brings a touch of pietas into a society otherwise marked by the frenetic pursuit of

personal gain. In the words of the Book of Proverbs: "Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor" (22:9)." (#116)

With this his first magisterial teaching of his pontificate, Pope Leo reminds us that the poor are at the heart of the Church. We must be a Church of the poor, for the poor and with the poor. We must be aware of the poverty caused by what he identifies, quoting Pope Francis in his encyclical Laudato si, as the "throwaway culture." We cannot remain silent as "millions of people die of hunger or survive in conditions unfit for human beings." (#96) Our mentality and mindset must not be one of indifference but follow the example of the many committed and witnessing saints who have shown love and compassion for those most in need down through the centuries. Among these many witnesses mentioned by Leo are Saints Francis and Clare of Assisi, St Teresa of Calcutta, St Oscar Romero, and St Camillus, all of whom can inspire us in different ways to imitate their love for the poorest of the poor.

Dilexi te is a very readable but hard-hitting and challenging document. It offers us a window into the mindset and priorities of our new Holy Father. With this text he is undoubtedly affirming that the Church under his leadership will be one where the wisdom communicated and handed on by previous popes in the Social Teaching of the Church will remain central. He has strongly repeated the need for us all to make a preferential option for the poor. It is up to us now to decide how this can and will be lived out in our individual lives and in our parish communities.



The Art of the Nativity Through the Ages

By Amélie Davidson

Every Advent, the Nativity scene finds its place again - on our mantles, in our churches, and within our hearts. From fragile wooden figures to glowing stained glass, it remains the central image of Christmas. Yet behind every familiar depiction lies centuries of artistic faith, creativity, and devotion. From the catacombs of ancient Rome to contemporary Scottish churches, the Nativity has inspired artists for over two millennia.

Early Beginnings: A Hidden Hope

In the early days of Christianity, when faith was often practised in secret, believers carved humble images into the walls of Roman catacombs. These early depictions - a mother and child, a star, a shepherd - quietly proclaimed hope amid hardship. When Christianity was legalised in the 4th century, art burst into the open. In Rome's ancient basilicas, glittering mosaics of the Nativity adorned sanctuary walls, their gold tiles shimmering like the light of Bethlehem's star. Art became not only decoration but proclamation: Christ had come into the world.



Mosaic of the Nativity, Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome, 5th century

The Middle Ages: Light in the Darkness

In medieval Europe, artists used art to teach faith to people who could not read. The Nativity appeared in illuminated manuscripts, altar panels, and cathedral windows, each detail rich in meaning. Giotto's Nativity in the Scrovegni Chapel is among the most moving - Mary tenderly cradles her child, while angels bend low in adoration. Every symbol speaks: the ox and ass represent faith and doubt; the star leads the way to truth; and the rocky cave hints at the tomb, reminding viewers that birth and redemption are one story. Through these paintings, faith became visible. In a time of darkness, art offered light.



Giotto di Bondone, The Nativity, Scrovegni Chapel, Padua (c.1305)

The Renaissance: God Among Us

The Renaissance brought new realism and emotion to sacred art. Botticelli's *Mystic Nativity* shimmers with angels dancing in the heavens, while Caravaggio's *Adoration of the Shepherds* places the Holy Family in shadow and straw - utterly human, utterly divine. This meant that, for the first time, artists showed the roughness of the stable, the tiredness of Mary and the shepherds too were no longer faceless figures in the background, but shown with weathered hands. The story of Bethlehem was no longer distant or idealised: it was immediate, earthy, and full of life. The Incarnation was no longer abstract. It could be seen, touched, and felt.



Caravaggio, Adoration of the Shepherds, Messina (1609)

Baroque to Modern Times: A Universal Story

As art styles evolved, the Nativity followed. Baroque artists like Rubens and Rembrandt captured the drama and radiance of divine light breaking into the night. In the 19th century, painters often placed the Holy Family in their own homelands - Bethlehem became a European village or a sunlit Mediterranean hillside. These reimaginings revealed a powerful truth: Christ is born not just in one place or time, but in every land and every heart. In the modern era, artists have continued to reinterpret the scene in striking ways - from Picasso's bold lines to John Piper's luminous stained glass. Around the world, African wood carvings, Latin American retablos, and Asian crèches each proclaim the universality of Emmanuel, "God with us."



Rembrandt, The Adoration of the Shepherds (1646)

The Nativity Today: Art as Prayer

Even now, the Nativity remains alive in new forms - in parish cribs lovingly arranged, in children's classroom paintings, in candlelit school plays. Each is a small act of devotion, a re-telling of the greatest story ever told. In a world that can feel hurried and distracted, sacred art invites us to slow down. The gentle gaze of Mary, the protective stance of Joseph, and the quiet radiance of the Christ Child reminds us of what Advent truly asks of us: to wait, to watch, and to wonder. Whether carved in marble or drawn in pencil, the art of the Nativity helps us see what words alone cannot express - that the infinite God chose to come close, to be held, to be loved. May the art of the Nativity this Advent open our eyes and hearts once more to Emmanuel - God with us.

Red Wednesday



Aid to the
Church in Need

Red Wednesday is an annual global campaign, launched in 2016 by the pontifical foundation of the Catholic Church, Aid to the Church in Need (ACN), to raise awareness of people persecuted for their faith. Churches, cathedrals, and landmarks are lit up in red - the colour of martyrdom - as a sign of solidarity. On Wednesday 19 November 2025, Bishop Dougan celebrated Mass in St Margaret's Cathedral as part of Red Wednesday, and Peter Diamond from ACN spoke about the work of the organisation. The evening raised £637.50 for suffering and persecuted Christians around the world.

Bishop Dougan, in his homily, spoke about the importance of remembering those who are persecuted, as we have the natural temptation to turn away. He said: "We have a responsibility to look persecution in the eye, no matter how horrible it is - and because it is so horrible, we have the practice of that, because we are used to looking at the cross." Bishop Frank also recalled last year, when the parish priest from Gaza spoke in Glasgow and simply described what is happening in the region. He bore witness, which the Bishop emphasised is our duty too: "To listen, to be in solidarity with those who are persecuted, not to turn away. It is more comfortable to turn away, but we are not called to be comfortable Catholics. We are called to be taken out of our comfort, to see their suffering, to pray for them, to notice them, and to speak to others about it."

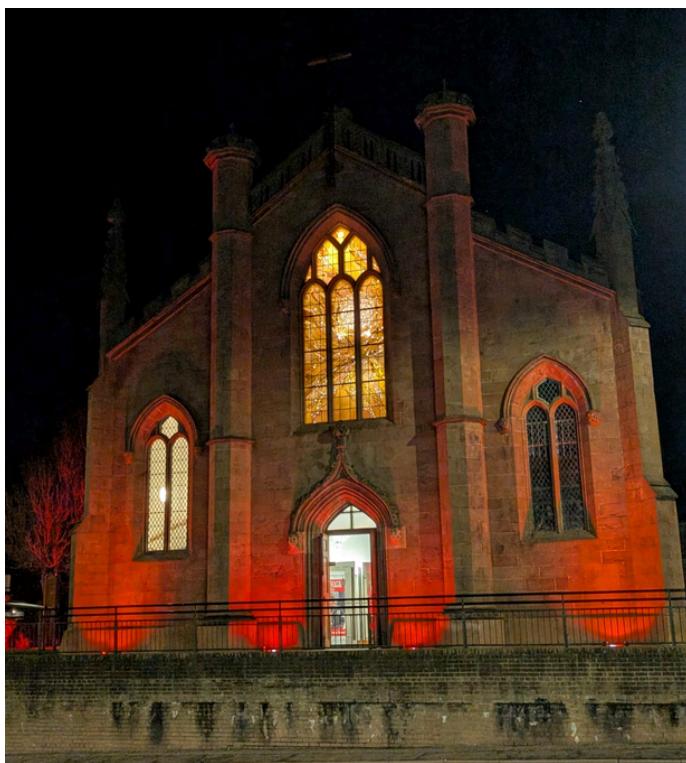
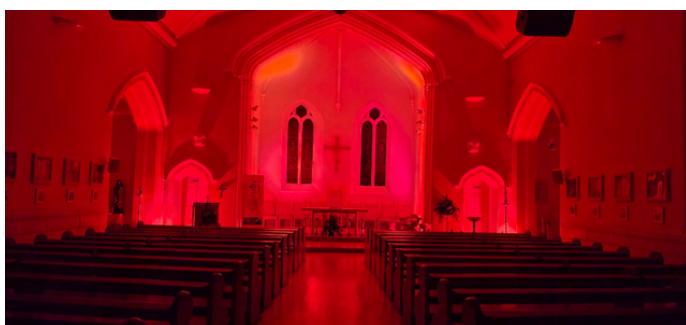
Later in the Mass, Peter Diamond spoke further about the work of ACN. He highlighted that ACN operates in 140 countries worldwide and supports over 5,000 projects to help our suffering and persecuted brothers and sisters.

Red Wednesday, ACN's annual global campaign, aims to shed light on the persecution of Christians and other faith minorities across the world. The persecution of Christians is a huge issue, which is either not talked about or given very little airtime in our Western, secular culture. Therefore, it is vital that we inform ourselves about the horrors faced by our brothers and sisters in Christ, as religious freedom is a fundamental human right, enshrined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Aid to the Church in Need believes that where religious freedom is upheld, dignity, justice, and peace can flourish. Where it is denied, oppression quickly takes root. Peter commented that he was speaking at his third Mass of the day and had purposely not received Communion until this celebration. He explained that he wanted to feel a tiny fraction of what it must be like to be denied access to the Eucharist.

This Red Wednesday, Aid to the Church in Need launched a petition to the United Nations, advocating for the urgent global protection and promotion of the fundamental right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. Red Wednesday calls us to stand in solidarity with those who suffer on account of their faith. Just last month in Burkina Faso, more than a dozen people, including children, were pulled off the bus they were travelling on and shot by extremists - all because they believed in Jesus.

Understanding the global situation is vital if change is to happen. We need to pray, we need to inform ourselves, but fundamentally we need to take action. If you are able, please sign up to the ACN mailing list - either to receive paper mail or news straight to your inbox - about Christian persecution stories that are hidden from our world and absent from our news feeds. And please sign



their petition to the UN on Article 18, which has already gained over 10,000 signatures. You can make a difference.

You can find more information about ACN Red Wednesday and the petition at:

<https://acnuk.org/redwednesday>

<https://acnuk.org/article-18-petition-religious-freedom-human-right-not-privilege>

The Feast of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux at St Teresa's, Dumfries

On 1 October, St. Teresa's parish in Dumfries celebrated the feast of our patron Saint, Thérèse of Lisieux.

The occasion was marked with an evening Mass where we recognised those in our parish community who give their time in service of the Lord. All our volunteers were given a little something from Fr Uchenna and Fr Francis as a mark of this.

It was a joyous occasion full of love and service, and a reminder to us all that we owe merit and gratitude to those who have served our parish in many ways over the years.



St Mary's, Irvine 150th Anniversary

By Fr Mark Kelly



At the end of Mass, the Motion of Congratulations which had been submitted at the Scottish Parliament to mark the occasion, was read by Ruth Maguire MSP. Michael Diamond, a parishioner and brother-in-law of one of the Parish's most famous sons, the late Bishop-elect Martin Chambers, talked about the history of the Parish and the rich legacy she has been left. He also looked to the future and the mission of the Church, in particular as 'Pilgrims of Hope' in this Jubilee Year.

At the conclusion of Mass, Dr Raymond McCluskey performed the 150th Anniversary Fanfare for Organ 'Spes non confundit!' ('Hope does not disappoint') commissioned for the occasion and composed by Adam Lee of the BBC Symphony Orchestra. Following the Mass there was a reception in the Hall including the cutting of the Anniversary cakes by Bishop Frank. In his speech the Depute-Provost highlighted the contribution that St Mary's and her daughter-Parishes have made to Irvine and beyond over the decades. John McLaughlin, a parishioner of St John Ogilvie's parish - the only continuing daughter-parish since the closure of St Margaret's in 2012 - then recounted some of the links between the parishes and the great cooperation and friendship that unites the communities. St John Ogilvie's Parish will herself celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Opening of the Church in 2029, while St Mary's looks forward to the 150th of the current Church building in 2033 - another Jubilee Year for the Universal Church!



St Mary's, Irvine, was delighted to welcome Bishop Frank Dougan to celebrate Mass on Friday 26th September as the Parish marked 150 years of the modern St Mary's. Fittingly, around 150 parishioners and guests were in attendance for the Mass, including Ruth Maguire MSP, the Depute-Provost of North Ayrshire, Councillor John Sweeney, Rev Neil Urquhart of the United Irvine Church of Scotland as well as representatives from St Mark's Primary and St Matthew's Academy. Among the nine concelebrants were two "sons of the Parish" and two former Priests of the Parish.

During his homily, Bishop Frank spoke of his recent visit to Rome, including meeting Pope Leo XIV, and how the Church is called to be "one", not just across the world but in each and every location in which the faithful. Towards

been submitted at the Scottish Parliament to mark the occasion, was read by Ruth Maguire MSP. Michael Diamond, a parishioner and brother-in-law of one of the Parish's most famous sons, the late Bishop-elect Martin Chambers, talked about the history of the Parish and the rich legacy she has been left. He also looked to the future and the mission of the Church, in particular as 'Pilgrims of Hope' in this Jubilee Year.



Farewell to Father Gabriel Onoyima CSSp

By Isobel Gallacher

On Sunday 28th September the parishioners of St Paul's Hurlford, said farewell to Father Gabriel Onoyima CSSp, who had been their Parish Priest for seven years, and to Martins Ekere their Spiritans seminarian from Nigeria. Sam Bain gave a lovely speech which expressed how much Fr Gabriel meant to the parishioners and how much we appreciated everything that Martins had done for the Parish in his time with us, and wished them well in their new appointments. Martin Shepherd presented gifts from the parishioners to both of them. This was followed by a lovely farewell party in the church hall.



Fr Gabriel, Ross McGhee, Martin Shepherd and Martins Ekere.

Fr Erasmus finds spiritual inspiration in St. Maximilian Kolbe, the words of the Psalmist, “If the Lord had not been on our side...” (Psalm 124:1), and in the Ignatian invitation to “see God in all things.” These guide him in a ministry rooted in trust, gratitude, and humble service. Outside of his pastoral work, he enjoys playing tennis, watching football, and keeping up-to-date with developments in technology - a hobby he affectionately calls “Tech Watch.”

We warmly welcome Fr Erasmus and assure him of our prayers as he begins this new chapter of ministry among us.



Welcome to Father Erasmus Egenonu CSSp

The Diocese of Galloway is delighted to welcome Fr Erasmus Egenonu, CSSp, who has recently taken up his appointment as Parish Priest of St. Sophia's, Galston, and St. Paul's, Hurlford.

Originally from Nigeria, Fr Erasmus' vocation began at a young age. A lesson in primary school titled “The Priesthood is a Call” awakened in him a deep awareness of God's invitation. That moment stayed with him and grew into a lifelong desire to dedicate his life to God through priestly ministry. He was ordained in 2001.

His early ministry included service as Bursar for both the Postulancy and his Province in Nigeria before he was missioned to the United Kingdom in 2010. In the Archdiocese of Birmingham, he served at St. Michael's and the Holy Angels, West Bromwich, and later at St. Philip Neri, Smethwick. In 2018, he was appointed to St. John the Evangelist Parish in Kirkdale, in the Archdiocese of Liverpool.

Between 2022 and 2024, Fr Erasmus undertook a period of renewal, assisting at Our Lady of Grace, Chiswick, and residing at St. Mary Immaculate and St. Peter's, New Barnet. During this time, he completed a Master of Science in Information Systems at the University of West London. In September 2024, he began ministry at St. John Vianney, West Green, and served as Chaplain to St. Ignatius College, Enfield, in the Archdiocese of Westminster. Fr Erasmus is particularly looking forward to this new chapter, as it marks his first experience of ministry in Scotland. He is eager to get to know the people of the parishes and to walk with them in faith, pastoral care, and shared mission.

News from Rome

On 1st November in Rome, seminarians from the Pontifical Scots College alongside seminarians of the Pontifical Beda College served Mass for Pope Leo as he proclaimed Saint John Henry Newman as a Doctor of the Church. Reflecting on the occasion, Christopher, a seminarian for our own Diocese who served as Thurifer, said:

"When I was asked to serve for the Pope, I thought my role would be something small - but to my surprise, I was asked to be the thurifer, a significant and deeply symbolic role in the liturgy.

Before the Mass, I met the Holy Father. I shook his hand, told him it was great to meet him, and then I kissed the Fisherman's Ring. He looked at me and simply said, "Good morning." It was indeed a very good morning!

I asked if he might bless my vocation ring - one I had bought at the Basilica of St Paul when I first arrived in Rome. The spiritual and human gifts I received from today are truly indescribable.



What surprised me most was that I wasn't nervous at all, either before meeting him or during the Mass. I'm still trying to understand why, because that's definitely not normal for me! My best theory is that, even though it was the Pope's Mass, it is still the same Holy Mass - the same mystery, the same Holy Spirit descending to transform the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ.

It was, in every sense, good practice for serving for Bishop Frank too!"

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Walking the Camino

5 days, 115km, 11 Young Adults, 3 Leaders, 1 Camino de Santiago

WHAT IS THE CAMINO?

Santiago de Compostela has been a place of pilgrimage for centuries. It is believed to be the resting place of Saint James the Great, one of Christ's Apostles, who is buried in the tomb underneath the Cathedral sanctuary. Saint James is the Patron Saint of Spain, however pilgrims from around the world walk the Camino.

Every year, over 400,000 pilgrims walk the Camino de Santiago. Each pilgrim is on a journey, walking it for different reasons ranging from spiritual to personal. Regardless of their initial reasons for walking the Camino, almost all of those pilgrims who walk it will encounter Christ on the journey: through the other pilgrims who they journey with, through finding an inner strength to carry on when the road seems too difficult, to a renewed sense of the presence of Christ in their lives.

There are many different Camino routes, the original Camino route is the Camino Primitivo runs from Oviedo to Santiago, a challenging 319km route. Very few pilgrims walk the Primitivo today, with a majority instead following the 11th century Camino Frances, a 770km route from Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port on the French border to Santiago. Some pilgrims will walk the full route, although many will start somewhere along it. As a minimum, pilgrims must walk 100km to qualify for the Compostela: the certificate testifying that they have walked the Camino to Santiago (following any approved route) and have walked it for religious reasons.



Some of the Galloway group at the 100km distance marker on day one.

From 12th - 19th October a group of eleven young adults from across the Diocese, accompanied by three leaders from the Diocesan Youth Office, walked the final 115km of the Camino Frances, the French route of the Camino de Santiago. Here, Kieran O'Neill, one of the young adults from Kilmarnock, who took part in the Camino, reflects on the journey.



In October, the Galloway Young Adults group, led by Fr Kevin Rennie, embarked on its inaugural pilgrimage, walking 115km of the Camino de Santiago. This group consisted of young people from Kilmarnock, Auchinleck, Largs, Prestwick and Dumfries. We walked the French way starting in Sarria, stopping in Portomarin, Palas de Rai, Arzua and O'Pedrouzo, on route to our desired destination of Santiago de Compostela.

A hold up at the airport meant we arrived at our first location of Sarria later than expected. So late in fact that it was pitch black and the streets were deserted, our "innkeeper", nowhere to be seen. The only moment of calm before the storm of what would be an exciting and eventful week ahead. After a little Spanish sweet talking from Fr Stephen, with the hostel owner, we were finally into our accommodation for the night. A humble abode with bunk beds waiting to be made up by us, this was to be the running theme for the week. We were glad to be in, settled and starting the Camino journey.

The Camino de Santiago was not just a walk for me, it is
**something that has given me a
completely new outlook on my faith
and indeed my life.**

It is something that I think isn't talked about as much as it should be and something I think everyone should do if they get the chance as it is something you never forget.
Buen Camino!

- Luca Baxter

In stark contrast to the previous night, as soon as we began our walk we were joined immediately by thousands, of pilgrims from all over the world walking along with us. Rings of “*Buen Camino*”, (safe journey) amongst pilgrims could be heard all over the Spanish countryside. Another running theme of the week.



Setting out each morning it was often completely dark with only a torch for light. As the sun rose, the scenery was beautiful and a real reminder of God's closeness.

Early rises and intense days walking were filled with great conversation and camaraderie along the journey not just from our own group but other pilgrims along the way. I remember the only Scotsman we bumped into was ironically from Irvine, it's a small world! The leisurely Spanish culture allowed us to recover well in the evenings and take time to relax and reflect on the journey each day. We would end the day with a group meal usually tapas, a personal highlight as I'd never tried it before.



Santiago itself was particularly special for the group as it was the end point of our journey and we were ecstatic to make it in one piece. It was emotional to stand outside the cathedral looking up at it and realising that we had taken the same journey as millions of pilgrims throughout the ages including the apostle St James, the patron saint of the Camino. Even though some of us had to overcome blisters and other physical injuries it was truly worth it in the end. Our last two days were spent in relative luxury in a hotel and we were able to experience the history and culture of not just the cathedral but Santiago city as a whole.

THE IRON CROSS

Traditionally, at the highest point on the Camino pilgrims leave a pebble or a stone at the Iron Cross. This pebble or stone has been carried by them from wherever they started their journey and represents all of those things which distract them from Christ: their worries, concerns, distractions and vices – all of those things which separate them from Christ and which they're seeking healing for on their pilgrimage.



Galicia, the region of Spain Santiago is in, has locally their own version of the bagpipes - the Gaita - as the group walked into the Cathedral square they were accompanied by the Gaita, a reminder of their closeness to home at the end of their Camino.

It was a tremendous privilege to go on the pilgrimage to Santiago as part of the young adults group—walking the Way of St. James. Leaving early in the darkness each morning, we found ourselves surrounded by a calm and prayerful stillness. As dawn broke and we ascended some very steep sections of the path, the beauty of the landscape and the glistening morning dew brought to mind the Eucharistic Prayer of the Mass, when the priest places his hands over the bread and wine and says: “Send down your Spirit upon them like the dewfall, so that they may become the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

In many ways, Jesus and His Passion paralleled our own journey.

We faced moments of pain, anguish, and trepidation - times when we wondered whether we could continue. Yet the answer, again and again, was yes.

The pilgrimage offered us deep spiritual benefits that will bear fruit in our lives and in the lives of those around us.

- Michael McGlynn



The group also carried with them two pebbles from Whithorn representing the needs and intentions of the wider Diocesan community, one of which was left as part of the stone cairn. Many of the group found the Iron Cross service to be hugely moving, representing not just a momentary change of heart, but a genuine desire for conversion and a transformation of heart in Christ. The group celebrated their Iron Cross on the Thursday morning, having walked over 80km, and, following the service were encouraged to make the focus of their day's prayer a desire to see Christ more clearly: to hear, to know, and to love him in their lives.



I would describe my personal journey on the Camino as humbling. Humble walks, humble accommodation and humbling experiences. Some highlights for me were the iron cross service where we laid a pebble with all our burdens to be left behind, with the determination of filling that void with new positive practices to bring home. It was humbling to have mass in Santiago Cathedral. A cathedral not just huge in size but also huge in historical and artistic significance all in the honour of God. It was to be immersed in the Spanish culture, try my hand at speaking the language and forging new friendships with the other young adults on the trip.

We would like to thank the team of Fr Kevin Rennie, Margaret McGrath and Fr Stephen McGrattan for their support and guidance on the pilgrimage. Thank you for looking after us.

I would urge any young adults in the diocese who are thinking of joining the group please do so. Sister groups run in Kilmarnock and Dumfries. There is a great opportunity here to develop not just your spiritual relationship with God but also develop friendships with other young Catholics in the diocese. Opportunities to participate in other pilgrimages are on the horizon in the near future. Come along and get involved.

God Bless.



On day three, the group's longest day, they prayed in front of a crucifix which is said to be one of only two in Spain. The crucified Christ is reaching out his right hand to those praying in front of the crucifix. A powerful reminder of Christ's sacrifice for all of us, made out of love, and his reaching out to those in front of the crucifix, inviting them to make of their lives an offering to him, to unite their whole lives to him in love. For the whole group, it was a hugely powerful encounter.

My time on the Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage was a deeply meaningful experience that combined physical challenge, personal reflection, and a renewed appreciation for connection — both with others and with myself.

Walking the Camino offered me a rare opportunity to step away from the pace of everyday life and immerse myself in a journey shaped by simplicity, intention, and tradition.

A particularly special aspect of this experience was completing the journey alongside the Diocese of Galloway Young Adults. Sharing the path with this group enriched the pilgrimage in ways I had not expected. The sense of community, shared faith, and mutual encouragement made each day more memorable. Our conversations, moments of quiet reflection, and the support we offered one another created bonds that strengthened my own sense of purpose and belonging.

Each day on the trail presented its own lessons. The steady rhythm of walking taught me patience and resilience, while the openness of the path encouraged introspection. Meeting fellow pilgrims from all over the world further reminded me of the universal desire for meaning, healing, and growth.

Reaching Santiago was a moment filled with profound emotion. Standing before the cathedral after so many days of effort, reflection, and anticipation brought an overwhelming sense of achievement, gratitude, and relief. It was not simply arriving at the final destination, but recognising the personal and spiritual transformation that had unfolded along the way. The combination of exhaustion, joy, and deep spiritual connection made it one of the most powerful moments of the entire journey.

My experience on the pilgrimage — especially shared in community with the Diocese of Galloway Young Adults — continues to shape how I approach challenges, relationships, and the values I want to cultivate in my life. It remains one of the most meaningful and emotionally resonant journeys.

- Devlin McCloskey



It's hard to describe the Camino without understating its profundity, but in a word: experience. Walking the Camino allowed me to see so much of the natural beauty of Spain but also the beauty of the Human spirit.

A friend once asked me “Where do you see God?” and the answer is in the sweeping vistas of the Galician countryside; in the majesty of the statues and pillars of the Cathedral at Santiago; in the small moments of companionship and fellowship with my compatriot pilgrims.

In our modern lives it is tempting to feel numb to the world around us with all its distractions, to lose perspective on life and the Human condition. But when your feet are aching and when you're tired from an early rise, knowing you still have so many kilometres left to travel, it is in these moments that you become thankful for all the comforts of home and daily life. To do the Camino is to know gratitude for at the end of it all you are greeted by one of the greatest works of human devotion to God. Words do not do justice to standing beneath the Cathedral amidst so many other people who have all made a similar journey. Pictures cannot capture its scale. I am thankful for the opportunity I had and would recommend it to anyone and everyone I meet so that they too might catch a glimmer of the beauty of God's creation.

- Ruairidh Heron Cunningham

Throughout their journey the group prayed for their own needs, the intentions they carried with them, and the needs of the Diocese. The day would begin with morning prayer and a reflection on a theme for the day, at a suitable time in the day they would also celebrate Mass together, on the Camino or at the end of the day. Here, they're pictured at the end of day one, preparing for Mass on the Terrace in their accommodation.

Coming up in 2026...

Youth or Young Adult? Why not come along to some of our events in 2026!

YOUNG ADULTS (S5-30)

Have you been inspired reading about our Young Adults Santiago Pilgrimage? Why not come and join the group for one of their socials or for one of their monthly evenings? Each month they welcome a different guest speaker as they present on a different aspect of faith, theology or the church - inspiring conversation among our young people as they seek to grow in faith and knowledge of God. As you have read from our Santiago Pilgrimage, the group is very sociable and always welcomes new members. You can find a full list of dates until summer 2026 on the right - the themes for each month will be announced at the Christmas Dinner.

Our two groups meet monthly in St Teresa's, Dumfries and St Joseph's, Kilmarnock, beginning with Mass at 6.00 pm.

January - Christmas Dinner

Sunday 11th January
St Joseph's Church, Kilmarnock

May

Sunday 3rd May

June

Sunday 7th June

February

Sunday 1st February

March

Sunday 1st March
Sunday 29th March

July

Sunday 5th July

JOIN OUR YOUNG ADULTS GROUPS ONLINE

If you do not live in Dumfries or East Ayrshire, you can now also join our talks online through Microsoft Teams, to hear the talk, ask questions, and be part of the discussion. If you're aged S5-30 you qualify to do so just register through our website: youth.rcdg.org.uk and click on Young Adults.

YOUTH (P6-S4)

Our monthly Youth Evenings are now in full swing in all four clusters, since September, we've launched in Ayr and Ardrossan, welcoming young people from across the Queen Margaret Academy and St Matthew's Academy clusters. Youth Evenings now take place monthly in:

- St Joseph's Church, Kilmarnock
- St Teresa's Church, Dumfries
- St Margaret's Cathedral, Ayr
- St Peter-in-Chains Church, Ardrossan

Each evening begins with Mass at 5.00 pm, following which the group continue in the hall with our S3 Junior Leaders leading a range of different games and activities, delivering a short talk/reflection on the theme of the evening, and of course everyone sharing a pizza supper!

Are you in P6-S4? Would you like to come along? Why not join us in 2026!

January - Christmas Party

Saturday 10th January

*St Joseph's Church, Kilmarnock for all four clusters.
Transport provided free of charge.*

February - Lent: Repent

Sunday 15th February

March - St Joseph

Sunday 15th March

April - Easter Youth Day

Saturday 18th April

*St Teresa's Church, Dumfries for all four clusters.
Transport provided free of charge.*

RC Diocese of Galloway
Youth Office
Gather • Pray • Discuss • Socialise

CHRISTMAS YOUTH DAY

SATURDAY 10TH JANUARY 2026

11.00 AM TO 4.00 PM

P6-S4

ST JOSEPH'S, KILMARNOCK

JOIN WITH YOUNG PEOPLE FROM ACROSS THE DIOCESE AS WE GATHER FOR OUR CHRISTMAS PARTY! WE'LL HAVE OUR USUAL FANTASTIC SELECTION OF GAMES, ACTIVITIES, TALKS, AND FOOD - ALL THEMED AROUND CHRISTMAS!

MASS . GAMES . TALK . ACTIVITIES . PIZZA . SOCIAL

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SCAN THE QR CODE TO REGISTER.

FREE TRANSPORT FROM AYR, DUMFRIES, AND ARDROSSAN.

May - The Eucharist

Sunday 17th May

June - Who are we in the Church?

Sunday 21st June

Galloway Youth Online Store
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2026 Calendar £10
Featuring a fantastic selection of images from all of our events including the launch of our Youth Evenings in all four clusters!

Youth Office Mug £8
Enjoy your morning coffee in style with our Youth Office mug, featuring the Youth Office's crest printed on both sides.

Youth Office Pen £4
Show off your support for Galloway Youth in meetings and school with a Galloway Youth pen!

Christmas Cards £1
Show your support for Galloway Youth to friends and family by sending them a Galloway Youth Christmas Card - 6 for £5!

All proceeds go to supporting the work of the Youth Office in sharing the Gospel message with young people throughout Galloway.

Go to: youth.rcdg.org.uk/shop or email: youth@rcdg.org.uk for an order form.

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Support our work...

Help us to help young people encounter Christ!

We always do our best to run events free of charge and, where a cost is incurred - such as our residential retreats - we'll always make this as affordable as possible. To help us to continue to do this and to provide funded places to ensure equal opportunities for all young people we invite you to consider supporting our work by:

BUYING FROM OUR ONLINE STORE: where there's a fantastic selection of different gifts this Christmas, including our 2026 Calendar featuring images from all of our events this year, and a full calendar of Holy Days and Youth events for 2026. We've also got mugs, pens, and Christmas Cards on offer at great prices. Delivery or collection is available. To check out our shop, go to: <https://youth.rcdg.org.uk/shop>.

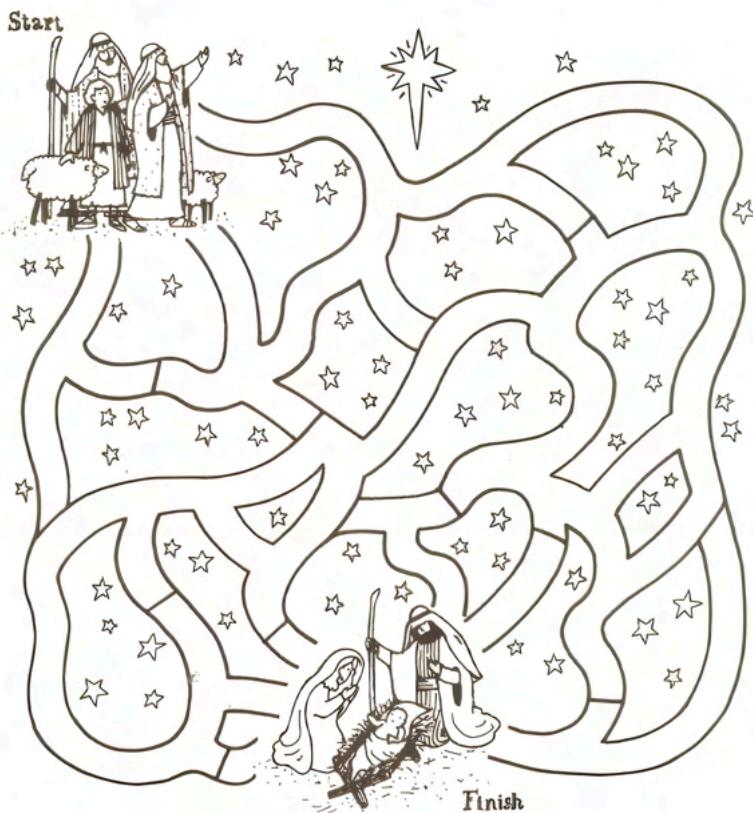
JOINING OUR 200 CLUB: and being in with a chance of winning cash prizes every month. Monthly membership is £5 with a chance of winning: 20%, 10% and 2 x 5% prizes each month. Go to <https://youth.rcdg.org.uk/200-club> or email youth@rcdg.org.uk to request a form.



Galloway Diocese Children's Liturgy



Help the shepherds find the path to Jesus.



Advent is a time of waiting and getting ready. Just like we get excited and prepare for a birthday or when a special visitor is coming, we prepare our hearts for Jesus. We might tidy our homes or decorate for Christmas, but Advent reminds us to get our hearts ready too. We do this by showing love, kindness, and prayer.

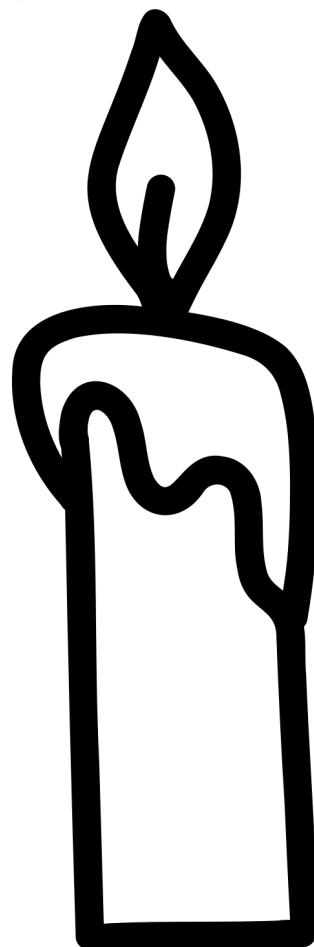


Loving God,

As we wait for Jesus this Advent,
Help us to be kind, patient,
and full of hope.

Light our hearts with your love
So we are ready to welcome Jesus
at Christmas.

Amen.



Advent candles
help us to count
down the four
weeks before
Christmas.
Design your own
advent candle!