

Living in FAITH

in the age of COVID-19



Emerging from the Desert

Issue 2: Feb 2021

CONTENTS

- Lent at home resources
- Pope Francis on Covid-19
- Ministry during Covid-19
- Bishops shining a light
- COVID-19 Vaccines
- Still gathering together
- Small acts of God's love
- Meetings, meetings . . .
- Tips for creating video

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Dear brothers and sisters,

Welcome to our second newsletter in which we highlight some initiatives taken by the Church in Scotland during the Pandemic. Initially, our group had presumed that the health crisis would be all but over by now and that parish life would be reasonably normal once again. Unfortunately, that has not been the case.

However, despite the present challenges, we know that we are not in the same place as last March. The Holy Spirit and your positive response have ensured this. I want to thank all our priests, deacons and religious for the pastoral and spiritual care they have given in this past year. I want to thank our lay faithful who have been so supportive to your families, your pastors, your fellow parishioners and wider society. You have witnessed to Christ in so many new ways.

Although we presently cannot worship and interact as we would like, we know by experience that we are not alone. The Lord is with us and within us!

This Lent will be different for us. We will be more on our own. Undoubtedly this brings challenges, but does it not also offer opportunities? After all, Jesus entered the desert alone before reemerging to begin his public ministry. Lent mirrors Christ's desert experience and so, perhaps during this particular Lent, we can become even more centred on the Lord. If we do, we will be allowing God's grace to raise us to new heights.



Yours in Christ,

+Brian McGee

Bishop of Argyll & the Isles
Chair of Pastoral Ministry Working Group

Resources for **Lent at home**

with almost all churches likely to remain closed at the start of Lent, various resources have been provided to support everyone at home to pray, act and fast during Lent.

These resources can be accessed here: <https://www.bcos.org.uk/COVID19/COVIDResources>



Lent at Home is an online resource which offers a range of ideas and materials:

- what can we do before Lent begins?
- find out about Ash Wednesday
- Lent in 3 minutes (video)
- family Prayer, Fasting & Almsgiving
- why do we fast? (video)
- every day in Lent suggestion
- prayers and readings for each day
- celebrating Mass as a family at home
- Lenten prayers, devotions and activities
- preparing for Holy Week



This is the text of a Liturgy of the Word with Distribution of Ashes for Celebration at Home.

In preparation for this celebration, you are encouraged to cover a small table with a white cloth and place a crucifix and a lit candle on the table. Prepare a container with ash which you may have received from your parish or which you can make by burning a blessed palm. The ash should be mixed with a drop of water.



This is the text of a short Stations of the Cross service.

This could be used in conjunction with relevant images of the various 'stations' of Christ's passion and death.

Being Catholic
Bringing Church Home

Being Catholic

This is a vibrant online resource which brings the church home and straight into your living room. This platform now includes a wide range of video materials by parishes, various religious communities, and associates across Scotland. Set up by the Media team in St Augustine's Parish Coatbridge, in the Diocese of Motherwell, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is hoped that other parishes will offer their own video materials for inclusion on the Being Catholic TV channel.

Pope Francis on Covid “crises”

Pope Francis, in a recent address, reviewed some of the crises provoked or laid bare by the pandemic and examined the opportunities they offer to build a more humane, just, supportive and peaceful world.



Health crisis

The pandemic, the Pope said, has brought humanity face-to-face with two unavoidable dimensions of human existence: sickness and death. It has reminded us of the right of each human being to dignified care, and that “each human person is an end in himself or herself, and never simply a means to be valued only for his or her usefulness”. “If we deprive the weakest among us of the right to life,” he asked, “how can we effectively guarantee respect for every other right?” He urged political and government leaders to work above all to ensure universal access to basic healthcare, medicines and treatment, pointing out that “concern for profit should not be guiding a field as sensitive as that of healthcare”. He called for an equitable distribution of the vaccines, based not on purely economic criteria but on the needs of all, especially of peoples most in need. In this regard, he urged that access to vaccines must be accompanied by responsible personal behaviour aimed at halting the spread of the virus, employing the necessary measures of prevention.

Environmental crisis

The pandemic, the Pope continued, has also demonstrated once again

that the earth itself is fragile and in need of care. The impact of climate change, such as extreme weather events of flooding and drought, and malnutrition or respiratory disease, entail consequences that persist for a considerable time. Pope Francis hopes that the November United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26), will effectively address the consequences of climate change.

Economic and social crises

The Pope highlighted how restrictions on freedom of movement imposed by governments to contain the spread of the coronavirus have especially harmed medium-sized and small businesses, adversely affecting employment and consequently the life of families and entire sectors of society, especially those that are most fragile. This economic crisis, he noted, has highlighted another illness of our time: that of an economy based on the exploitation and waste of both people and natural resources. What is needed is an economy that is “at the service of men and women, not vice versa”, an economy that “brings life, not death, one that is inclusive and not exclusive, humane and not dehumanizing, one that cares for the environment and does not despoil it”.

Crisis of human relationships

According to the Pope, the most serious crisis of them all is that of “human relationships”. It is “the expression of a general anthropological crisis, dealing with the very conception of the human person and his or her transcendent dignity.” He expressed his conviction that “fraternity is the true cure for the pandemic and the many evils that have affected us.” The Pope continued, “Along with vaccines, fraternity and hope are, as it were, the medicine we need in today’s world.” The isolation and often loneliness due to the pandemic, he said, have brought out the need of every individual for human relationships. With schools and universities shifting to online educational platforms, a marked disparity in educational and technological opportunities has appeared, with many students falling behind in the natural process of schooling. Calling it a “sort of ‘educational catastrophe’”, he called for a renewed commitment to an education that engages society at every level, because education is a natural antidote to the individualistic culture and indifference. Marriage and family life, the Pope noted, have also been affected, with many experiencing domestic violence. The pandemic has also had adverse effects on fundamental freedoms, including religious freedom, with restrictions in public worship and in the educational and charitable activities of faith communities. “Even as we seek ways to protect human lives from the spread of the virus, the Pope said, “we cannot view the spiritual and moral dimension of the human person as less important than physical health.”

[reported in Vatican News](#)
[by Robin Gomes.](#)

Reflecting on ministry



**An Advent Afternoon of Recollection
for Priests in Scotland**
with Abbot Christopher Jamieson OSB

Thursday 10th December 2020
From 2.00pm - 4.00pm
(Zoom access link will be emailed in advance)

To register for this online Recollection visit:
www.bcos.org.uk/clergy

For further support email queries to:
clergy@bcos.org.uk

The Bishops' Pastoral Ministry Working Group hosted an Advent Afternoon of Recollection for the priests of Scotland on Thursday 10th December. This recollection was led by the well-known Benedictine Abbot Christopher Jamieson.

The online event attracted fifty priests to the two-hour long conference which focused on the impact of the pandemic upon priests and its effects on their pastoral ministry.

Abbot Jamieson gave a refreshingly honest presentation of the inevitable impact of this pandemic upon our lives as priests. Using video media and real-time group commenting, he led a very engaging two-hour recollection which was welcomed by all the online participants. For myself it was great to see so many familiar (and some unfamiliar) faces on screen, especially given that clerical gatherings have been on-hold for so long.

Abbot Christopher presented as a spiritual realist, who didn't deny the dire impact and human costs of isolation and lockdowns. Yet he framed this challenging reality within a context of hope. He spoke of his own experience of 'isolation by choice' and the solitary monastic life which has so much to say to us secular priests living 'on the outside'.

He also focused on the key questions which naturally come to the fore in the hearts and minds of those struggling with our current situation. Where is God in all of this?

As we all grapple with the difficult human dimensions of this pandemic, Abbot Jamieson made a passionate plea for us to remain focused on the spiritual realities that are unfolding in these unusual times. He also encouraged us to look for opportunities to grow interiorly rather than lament the inevitable restrictions which are part of our daily experience.

An afternoon well spent, I now look forward to attending our next recollection for clergy, and a chance to see a few more familiar faces!

At the time of going to press, a second Reflection had been offered to priests and deacons and presented by Fr Tom Kilbride, Rector of Royal Scots College, Salamanca.

A third Recollection day is now being planned to take place in Lent.

Fr. Michael Kane is the Parish Priest of St. Augustine's, Coatbridge

Being elderly is a gift of God



The Pontifical Academy for Life has published a document to highlight the plight of the elderly amid the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

"Old age: our future. The elderly after the pandemic" reflects on the lessons to be drawn from the tragedy caused by the spread of Covid-19, on its consequences for today and for the near future of our societies.

The document notes how, during the first wave of the pandemic, a substantial portion of deaths from Covid-19 occurred in institutions for the elderly, places that were supposed to protect the "most fragile part of society" and where instead death struck disproportionately more than in the home and family environment.

In our society, the idea of old age as an unhappy age often prevails, often understood only as the age of care, need and expense for medical care.

"Being elderly is a gift from God and an enormous resource, an achievement to be safeguarded with care," the document continues, "even when the disease becomes disabling and the need for integrated, high-quality care emerges. And it is undeniable that the pandemic has reinforced in all of us the awareness that the richness of our years is a treasure to be valued and protected."

Shining a light in the darkness

In December 2020, the Bishops of Scotland published [a pastoral letter on the COVID-19 pandemic](#) to offer reasons for hope, even in the darkest days of the health crisis. These excerpts are still relevant at this time..



In their pastoral letter the Bishops recalled how, on 27th March 2020, Pope Francis had led an Extraordinary 'Urbi et Orbi' from a wet and empty St Peter's Square, as Covid-19 swept the world.

The Pope had turned to prayer and pointed to the Gospel story of the storm on the lake. Likening the world's experience of the Pandemic to the apostles' fear of being drowned in their storm-tossed boat, he said the virus had "exposed our vulnerability".

Pope Francis has reminded us that every crisis presents opportunities. We have well-founded reasons for hoping that the Pandemic has led society to a rediscovery of the dignity of every human person, especially the most vulnerable, along with a new appreciation of the goodness manifested by so many.

A refreshingly simple human response to the Pandemic emerged across the world when Governments urged their citizens to make difficult and prolonged sacrifices for the sake of the most vulnerable and they willingly responded. People were asked to stay at home to save the lives of the elderly and

those with underlying health conditions while countless fellow citizens served on the frontline and in key services, putting their lives at risk, all for the sake of vulnerable strangers.

That genuine concern for the vulnerable was obvious and beautiful. Society willingly came to a consensus about protecting the vulnerable, at great personal cost to many, revealing how sacrificial love can shine out from human hearts.

The Bishops pointed to the contribution made by people of faith to the common good of society. The Covid-19 crisis now offers a unique opportunity to rebuild society by fostering these values. The tragedy wrought by the Pandemic has awakened us to the value of all human life and we welcome this rare opportunity to commit ourselves to protecting and supporting all our people

This crisis has retaught us the dignity of every human person and, on this rediscovered principle, our society can be rebuilt. Like the Good Samaritan, we can create a better society by recognising even the most vulnerable as our neighbour.

Vaccines

Scotland's Catholic Bishops welcomed



news of the approval of the COVID-19 vaccines for the UK, expressing the hope that this would allow an immunisation programme that would protect the population and offer the prospect of some return to normal life.

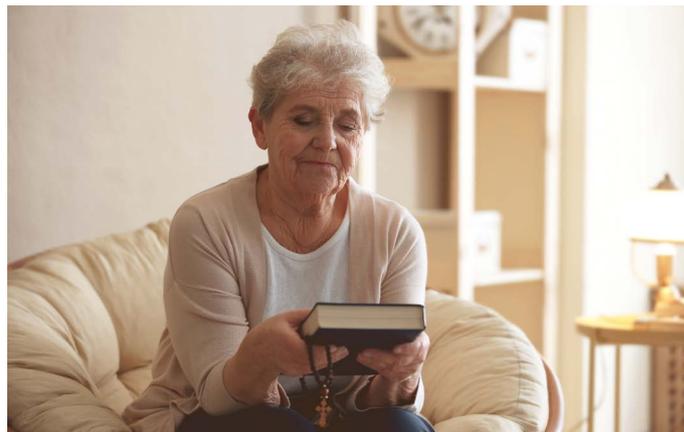
They noted that contemporary society rightly pays attention to the ethical sourcing of commodities like food and clothing to ensure that the benefits to us do not come at a disproportionate cost. While similar concerns have been raised about vaccines, they reassured the Catholic population that, the longstanding guidance from the **Pontifical Academy for Life** was that it is ethical to take any of the C19 vaccines purchased by the UK at the present time, either because foetal cell lines have not been used in their development or because their sourcing is sufficiently remote.

While the Bishops affirmed the ethical acceptability of taking these vaccines, they stated that they do not support bio-technological processes that develop products from abortion or research using these cell-lines. They hoped that those with objections to such vaccines would be respected and offered alternatives. They called upon companies to use only ethically sourced material. They encouraged wider debate in society on progressively eradicating the misuse of human products in bio-technologies in the future. Similarly, they urged governments to work to ensure COVID-19 vaccines are made available equitably across the world, according to human need and not economic status.

Gathering together in Jesus' Name

Lockdown, the parish, and technology

A few years ago I read that Pope John Paul II had nominated St Isidore to be the patron saint of the internet in light of his effort in the seventh century to record everything that was known in an encyclopaedia that was ultimately published after his death. He doubtless had to compare notes with St Clare, who has had the television portfolio for quite some time. I am not sure if you can get double time in Heaven but recently they have had their work cut out and maybe they should put in a claim. Not only has the science proceeded at a staggering pace but the uses to which it has been put would have been unthinkable a few years ago.



When I was at secondary school one of the things we did in Maths was to make a computer using cards and knitting needles. It was based on the binary system and was only marginally less sophisticated than a box which the teacher wheeled out and which had a row of lights which were either on or off. Nowadays if I leave home without my mobile phone, which I rarely use for phone calls, I feel as if I have lost a limb.

There is of course nothing novel in the idea that religious services should be broadcast. There are plenty of examples of that having been done in the past, such as the Pope's Urbi et Orbi message, and we have been watching televised Mass for decades. However, those were in addition to, and not in substitution for, "the real thing" and I for one did not fully appreciate that there was a real need for a facility to attend Mass remotely. It is only now that I have been, to some extent at least, walking in the shoes of those who cannot attend Mass that I can appreciate what a Godsend (literally) this facility is.

Who would have thought that, instead of using YouTube to look at videos of grumpy cats, we would now be able to use it to access live the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, from churches all around the world, a practical demonstration of the meaning of the word Catholic?

Perhaps, in healthier times ahead, the livestreaming of Mass can continue for the benefit of the housebound. Maybe we could even then continue to take the

opportunity, if we have a little time, to tune in to Mass somewhere in the world, in addition to our normal attendance.

Note that I used the word "watching" televised Mass at first and then changed it to a reference to "attending" Mass. Whatever may have been the case in the past, it is not now just a question of being a passive viewer. The broadcast is an opportunity for us to join with our community in the celebration which defines us. That being so it is incumbent on us, if we can, not just to sit in a chair and watch but to stand, kneel, say the responses and unite our thoughts and prayers with the whole body of the Church, our parish and the wider community. Though far apart we are still gathered together in Jesus' Name. Let's remember that if we continue to attend virtually from time to time once things are back to normal.

While the Mass is at the centre of parish life, there is more to it than that.

The maintenance of a spirit of community is difficult, if not impossible without effective communication in a parish. So, the practice of sending out an online newsletter, which is necessary because of Covid restrictions, is something which could usefully continue once the pandemic is over, although there will doubtless always be a place for printed copies to be distributed, at least until we are all online. Why not continue to print copies at home for parishioners who cannot pick up their own instead of relying on the

parish priest or someone in the office.

Before the 1960s, people could have been forgiven for thinking that Mass and parish business generally was almost like something that was done to the congregation rather than something in which they participated. The role of readers, extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, parish pastoral councils and the like is now a given but we have all had to adapt. Readings are recorded and council meetings conducted through Zoom or the like. Were it not for technology, the laity might have felt sidelined and parish life might have stagnated. Face to face communication and interaction is part of being human and there is no real substitute for meetings in person but I can think of no reason why a parish council meeting in the future could not be a mixture of physical and virtual attendance, catering for those who, for whatever reason, cannot be there. Maybe parishioners who cannot be in Church through illness for example could still have their voices heard through recorded readings.

One of the odd things about this pandemic is that, at least for someone of my generation, it almost seems that it requires a greater effort to attend Mass or parish meetings than was the case when all I had to do was leave home and go there. Will I still make the same effort, perhaps channelled in a different direction, when I can be present physically or will I take it for granted? I think we all know what the answer should be.

Hugh Matthews, Kilmarnock

Enjoying God's love in small acts

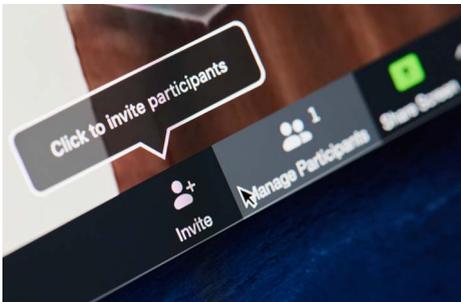
As a father, son and husband, Iain McLean from Greenock found lockdown to be eventful. He shares his view that his family have been blessed with opportunities to encounter Christ within our domestic church.

During the first lockdown, we prepared a home altar together to serve as a focal point for our faith journey, within our living room. This still remains at the heart of our daily interactions with one another and serves as a reminder of the key role of our home as a domestic church. Originally, we gathered around the altar, lit a candle and sat our laptop beneath to watch online Mass. This allowed us, as a family, to share intimately in the Mass. Thanks to the wonders of modern technology we have since advanced onto watching it via YouTube on a smart TV. Nonetheless, our new Sunday routine is fairly well established and less frantic than before. Lucy (11) sets up Mass on the television and lights the candles just as she would have done when serving on the altar at our local parish. We do our best

to participate reverently, standing, sitting and kneeling as appropriate. However, our son Joseph (9) usually has other ideas. It has certainly been more challenging to keep our children engaged in Mass during this second Lockdown but we try our best. He does however enjoy treating us to a hymn at the end of Mass (and sometimes throughout), usually with his own humorous variation on the words. Joseph had made his First Confession on the Feast of St Joseph in school and was due to make his First Holy Communion on 16th May 2020, exactly 33 years to the day from my own. His communion was rescheduled to Tuesday evening in September. Whilst it was wet, windy and cold, with no extended family or friends to join us, the experience was very moving. We were all able



to receive communion as a family for the first time in months. Joseph's heart was full of joy, captured in an image of him with his sisters Lucy and Niamh (18) which we were able to share with grandparents. Whilst there have been additional stresses and challenges during lockdown, the pace of life seems to have slowed. Our time together as a family has enabled us to be more reflective and enjoy the small acts of God's love in the world by simple acts of kindness.



Meetings, meetings . . .

The Covid-19 pandemic prompted governments around the world to introduce restrictions on the movement of citizens and the closure of many sectors of society, including places of worship. In March 2020, the Bishops of Scotland decided that Catholic churches should close in the interests of the common good, given the serious threat the virus posed to health. It turned out that the feast of St Joseph on 19th March 2020 would witness the last celebration of Holy Mass for some time.

Our churches eventually reopened with strict and highly effective safety and hygiene measures in place. Restrictions did, however, need to be tightened again following increased transmission of the virus during the winter months and the discovery of new, more transmissible, variants.

The disruption of the last ten months has been huge, and it will leave a mark on all of us. It has been a truly testing time for everyone, including those in authority who have had to grapple with tackling the virus and engaging the public in the process, as well as taking on the concerns of citizens and a multitude of sectors of society.

During the early months of the pandemic, it was apparent that the Scottish Government was struggling to appreciate the importance that faith communities place on being able to attend a place of worship. This was particularly relevant to the Catholic community and the celebration of the Eucharist. However, as time has gone by the government's knowledge and appreciation of Catholic worship has improved and there is now a greater understanding. This is primarily down to regular and active engagement in meetings between the government and faith leaders and representatives. Both Bishop Hugh Gilbert, President of

the Bishops' Conference of Scotland, and Anthony Horan, Director of the Catholic Parliamentary Office, have regularly participated in these meetings.

The meetings have been important platforms, not only for educating government ministers and officials on the essentials of Catholic worship, but just as importantly to challenge government on decisions made during the pandemic, including decisions relating to the closure of churches, restrictions on funerals, and to put forward arguments to ensure chaplains and priests are able to visit the sick and dying.

It is hoped that these meetings will continue beyond the pandemic, not least to provide a space to examine the many questions the pandemic has raised about the relationship between the Church and the State.

Anthony Horan,
Director,
Catholic Parliamentary Office

Creating video for social media



With easy access to using cameras on mobile phones, some of us might find ourselves being asked to contribute videos for online Church services during Lent or for social media posts. These video clips might be edited together with other people's contributions, or they might be used as short standalone pieces in order to share Lenten and Easter messages.

Here are a few tips for making the most of making video face-to-camera.

Prepare: it's worth taking the time to think about your background, the lighting and the sound before you start to film. Do a few practice runs and agree how you're going to go about it if your piece will be edited together with videos made by others.

What are you filming for? This will determine the format and quality of the recording. It will also be more straightforward to edit if every contributor uses the same setting and it will make a more polished end product for sharing. If your piece is for social media it might be best to film as using the 'Square' setting on your phone that is used across Facebook, Twitter and Instagram etc rather than filming as landscape or portrait.

The subject should be standing or sitting in the centre of the shot. **Position the camera** to capture the head and shoulders in the frame. This will be close enough for good sound if you don't have a microphone.

It might be worth investing in a **camera stand** if you are doing a lot of filming – you can get very reasonably priced ones. If you don't have a stand and you're filming someone else, hold the device straight and steady, with your upper arms against your body when you film.

Background: choose the plainest background with the best lighting that you can.

Light: if you are inside, the subject should be facing the window and the light should be behind the camera. Stand somewhere else if shadows are cast over them. Inside or outside, make sure the subject is not squinting in the light. If you've not got a lot of natural light in the room or you're filming in the evening, use lamps and lights to brighten the background. Avoid glare by positioning the lights just out of shot.

Sound: find a quiet place and time to film because background noise will be picked up. Do a trial run or two to make sure your device is picking up the sound, that the volume on your phone is correct and that your voice doesn't sound echoey.

Look straight at the camera when speaking (you might be surprised that many people don't do this).

Clean your lens and your screen. It's important to clean your lens for a sharper picture and you'll see your handiwork more clearly with a smudge-free screen, so give them both a wipe before you start. Cloths/ wipes for spectacles will do the trick.

Finally ... and importantly. **Be brief:** try to keep your video succinct and to the point. You can use easy editing tools to clip your video (iMovie for Apple and Video Editor for Windows) and there are many tutorial videos on YouTube on how to do this.

[Click here to see an example of parish guidance \(and a consent form\) on the use of Zoom for parish activities.](#)