

Sharing the Good News

NEWSLETTER OF THE IRISH CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

Christmas Messages reflect on the hope that Jesus brings to our world

In their joint message for Christmas 2021 the Catholic and Church of Ireland Archbishops of Armagh are reflecting on the "little ones" mentioned in the Gospels. They said, "At this time of the year, perhaps, it is the very lavishness of Christmas that gives us a heightened consciousness of (and a bad conscience about) the "little ones" mentioned so often in the Gospels: the homeless, the poor, the rejected, and all those who long to see the world turned upside down again, when "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters fill the sea".



Archbishop Eamon Martin and Archbishop John McDowell

"At present there are many people who have had not just the two worst Christmases ever, but two of the worst years ever – those whose bodies have been overwhelmed, or whose minds have been scrambled by Covid-19; those who've had bereavements during the pandemic, whose plans have been cancelled, families separated, visits curtailed, operations postponed, businesses and livelihoods upturned."

The archbishops continued, "If the Spirit is saying anything to the Churches this Christmas, might it not be to think about how we, as individuals, but also as a society, can enter prayerfully and hopefully into that great mystery of the "Word made flesh", and hold on to more of the upside down world embodied in the Gospel narratives?"

You can read this message from Archbishop Eamon Martin and Archbishop John McDowell in full, along with a selection of other messages for Christmas 2021 on our website www.catholicbishops.ie.

Christmas Day Broadcasts on RTÉ One Television & Radio



Watch the traditional 'Urbi et Orbi' greeting from Pope Francis on RTÉ One Television at 11.45am on Christmas Day. This will be immediately followed by the Christmas Message from the Archbishops of Armagh at 12.10pm. You can also listen to seminarians Stephen Sherry and Anthony Hartnett on Christmas Day with Miriam O'Callaghan on RTÉ Radio 1 from 10am.

Sharing the wisdom of time with Pope Francis on Netflix

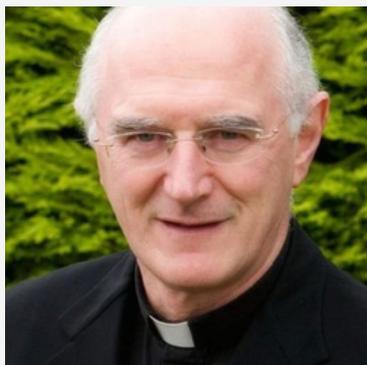
Netflix has produced a four-part documentary series entitled 'Stories of a Generation', which is inspired by the 2018 best-selling book called *Sharing the Wisdom of Time*. The series is set for global release on Netflix on Christmas Day. *Stories of a Generation* features profiles of 18 elders featured in the book, across five continents and is filmed and produced by talented young filmmakers under the age of 30. The filmmakers worked under the direction of Fernando Meirelles, who directed *The Two Popes*. The series also features special commentary from Pope Francis himself.



"Plague of drugs is raging out of control"

- Archbishop Dermot Farrell

"Dublin is experiencing a plague of drugs which is raging out of control, Archbishop Dermot Farrell of Dublin has said. In Ireland generally, taking drugs for some people was now the same as having a drink, he said. "The 'normalisation' of a drugs culture in Ireland is a major societal issue," he said. Archbishop Farrell was speaking at Mass for the first Sunday of Advent in Westland Row Church in Dublin City Centre. You can read his homily in full on www.dublindiocese.ie.



Bishop Denis Nulty warns of 'hidden silent pandemic' of domestic abuse during Covid-19 lockdown

"Domestic abuse, domestic violence, silent stonewalling are a much deeper pandemic that becomes all the more exacerbated in a pandemic lockdown." Those were the words of Bishop Denis Nulty, President of Accord Catholic Marriage Care Service CLG during their recent graduation ceremony of sixteen counsellors and nineteen graduates in Marriage Facilitation Ministry at the College Chapel of Saint Patrick's College, Maynooth, on 4 December. Bishop Nulty told the graduates that they will have to be at the heart of the Church's "synodal process" which is underway in every diocese and throughout the world. "You have the training, you have the skill-set, and you have the ear to hear what is being said and sometimes what is not being said," he said. You can read Bishop Nulty's graduation address in full on our website catholicbishops.ie. Anyone seeking marriage and relationship counselling can contact www.accord.ie.



Catholic Bishops of Northern Ireland call to defend the most vulnerable in our society

The Catholic Bishops of Northern Ireland have issued a statement on the recent Northern Ireland Assembly vote on the Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment Bill) N.I.



They said, "It is a matter of grave concern for all those who uphold the preciousness and dignity of every human life that the current legal framework in Northern Ireland permits abortion, to the point of birth, where an unborn child is found to be suffering from a serious but non-life-threatening disability. The nature of such a disability is not defined in our legislation but will include conditions such as Down's Syndrome. The effect of similar legislation in other parts of the world, especially in Scandinavia, has been to screen out of existence an entire sector of humanity. The Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill, recently voted on in our Assembly, was a measured and reasonable attempt to address this injustice and remove from the current abortion regulations discrimination against unborn children with non-fatal disabilities. Its defeat in the Northern Ireland Assembly represents a profound and fundamental failure to respect the equality of all persons, born and unborn, in our society."

You can read the bishops' statement in full on catholicbishops.ie.

Mass of Thanksgiving for Archbishop Michael Neary at Knock Shrine to mark his retirement



Photo: Sinead Mallie

On 5 December a special Mass of Thanksgiving was celebrated for Archbishop Michael Neary in the Basilica at Knock Shrine to acknowledge his kindness and support over the years. Archbishop Neary, whose resignation was accepted by Pope Francis on 10 November, is pictured after Mass with an Icon of Our Lady which he was presented with as part of the ceremony.

The Installation Ceremony for Archbishop-elect of Tuam, Francis Duffy, will take place

from 2.30pm on Sunday 9 January 2022, the Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord, in the Cathedral of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Tuam. The ceremony will be broadcast on the cathedral website at www.tuamparish.com/web-cam.

'We look forward to hearing what the Spirit is saying to the churches' - Bishops

Bishops provided an update on the Synodal Pathway in Ireland and the Universal Synod as part of their Winter General Meeting which concluded online on 1 December. Bishops said, "We are grateful for the many developments already experienced in the first stage of the Synodal Pathway. A wide range of people have indicated their interest in, and support for, the process including webinars and retreats based on the theme of synodality.

Bishops went on to highlight the importance of prayer as part of the synodal process and encouraged people to say the official Synodal Prayer to the Holy Spirit which is widely available.



Bishops continued, "Dioceses have begun engaging actively and creatively with the topics of the first phase of the national synodal pathway that coincides with the universal synodal process with its focus on Communion-Participation-Mission. Diocesan synodal delegates and teams have been established. Training is being put in place for local parish synodal representatives. Local parishes are beginning to hold listening sessions. Regional meetings of the diocesan delegates have taken place, a website will very shortly be in place and further resources provided."

PHASE ONE OF SYNODAL PATHWAY TO CONTINUE UNTIL JUNE 2022



The Universal Synod logo is now available in the Irish language from www.aynod.va

The first phase of the Synodal Pathway will continue until June 2022. It will see the diocesan, parish and other initiatives continue and gain momentum, especially during the season of Lent. After Easter next year, dioceses will begin to gather up the fruits of this first phase by holding diocesan pre-synodal gatherings to listen together in a spirit of prayer and sharing to what their diocese has heard and to discern what they would want to feed into the universal synodal process. This will lead to the composition of a report from each diocese for the Bishops' Conference. This report will also be a summary of the first phase in the diocese of the national Synodal Pathway with its focus on how we are 'journeying together'.