

Pallottine Voices

Winter

2021

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A Covid Christmas

Fr Bernard Cotter

‘Have a Happy COVID Christmas’: it almost seems a contradiction in terms, doesn’t it? Yet it’s realistic, when you consider where we find ourselves now.

As vaccines have been developed and are widely available, we are in much better shape than we were a year ago.

Last year, all the talk was of a ‘meaningful’ Christmas, which seemed a realistic proposition but soon turned into a nightmare. Our Christmas socialising brought sky-rocketing COVID figures in the New Year and a Spring from hell (and in lockdown).

Wishing you a happy COVID Christmas, I am being realistic. This virus is still around almost two years after it first surfaced and it will be around for some time. The call this year is to celebrate sensibly and meaningfully if possible, but in such a way as to keep everyone safe.

In some ways, it was easier to keep safe when we all lived under strict rules: we knew where we stood. Personal responsibility is harder, but more adult. We are responsible for our own health and that of those we love, so we have to take every step to safeguard it.

I often wonder how Jesus would have coped with COVID-19 if everywhere he went in the Holy Land, he was confronted with those yellow signs, advocating social distancing, mask-wearing, and hand-washing. I can’t see him being held back by those laws, and neither can I see him telling his followers to put their own health, or other people’s health, in danger.

The example that comes to mind for me is that of the leper who approached Jesus. At the time when Jesus walked the earth, it was thought that leprosy was highly contagious, so lepers lived apart and people avoided them, literally ‘like the plague’. When the leper approached Jesus, the Lord did not hold back from touching him.

The leper was nervous and very tentatively asked for a cure, if the Lord wanted to do this. And of course, the Lord did desire to make him well. Then, in an action which must have sent shockwaves through his followers, he touched the leper and said “Be cured!”

And the leper, naturally, was cured.

But Jesus did not then turn to his followers and suggest they do likewise. His teachings make quite clear that Christians were to love and care for their brothers and sisters in need, but I can’t recall any instance where Jesus advocated foolishness or harmful behaviour!

If he walked among us now, I bet he would ask believers to work with the science. After all, the scientists who advise us are using their God-given talents to bring about healing and freedom from disease.

Jesus would, of course, reach out and touch COVID sufferers. It would be against his nature to hold back from embracing any human being, for he loves all equally. But his teaching to love and care for those in need is most visibly carried out by our health-care workers, who have learned to take proper precautions, and yet who do so much to comfort the suffering.



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Documentaries on RTÉ have shown us health-care workers in the time of COVID at St James and Tallaght hospitals. They included images of nurses and doctors holding patients’ hands, making sure they did not die alone, and were standing in for close family members who could not be there.

Phone and tablets and every other kind of technology available were employed to ensure families were visible to their sick members, and yet safe — all as Jesus would have wished and advocated.

So, let this Christmas be meaningful too, but let’s keep everyone else safe as well.

The Diaconate in East Africa

Fr Marcellus Okoth SAC



Our two brothers, Stephen Wambua SAC and Bernard Ouma Onyango SAC, were ordained to the Diaconate on the 10th of September 2021 at Our Lady of Sorrows Parish, Galapo, in Manyara, Tanzania. They were ordained by His Grace Anthony Lagwen, the bishop of the Catholic diocese of Mbulu, Tanzania.

These are the first members to be ordained for the new East Africa Region to be, on the 9th of January next. It has been a long journey for them, almost nine years of training and formation. It began with the year of discernment in the Postulancy house in Galapo which was followed by three years of philosophical studies in the Spiritan Missionaries seminary in Njiro-Arusha.

All Pallottines must do a year of further discernment. It enables them to learn about the spirituality of our founder, his life and the history of our Society. Stephen and Bernard were sent to Huye-Butare in Rwanda to do the spiritual year and thereafter they were enrolled in the Jesuit College in Hekima, Nairobi, to complete four years of Theological studies.

The two of them hail from Kenya. Stephen is from Machakos diocese. He is our 4th member from Machakos diocese to join the Pallottines. He is the only boy from the family of Patrick Kilatya and Monica Kanini. He is currently doing his pastoral experience at Padre Pio Parish, Mwenge in Singida diocese. Bernard Ouma hails from Homa Bay diocese. It is one of the newly established dioceses in Kenya. He is the first Pallottine from Homa Bay diocese. Bernard is the son of Milton Onyango and Monica Atieno. He is currently doing a pastoral year at Christ the King parish, Siuyu, in Singida diocese.

What lies before them is both a privilege and a duty, a mission so great that only by the power of the Spirit will they be able to succeed. Remember that the first martyr of

the Church was a deacon, St. Stephen. By the power of the Holy Spirit, he found the courage to suffer and die for the love of Christ. Addressing both the newly ordained deacons and those who attended the ceremony, Bishop Antony said, "This is what you demonstrated when you humbly prostrated on the day of your Diaconate. It spoke louder than the words of your readiness to be a servant of Jesus and his Body the church.

Therefore, Jesus equipped you for the sacred ministry, exercised at the altar and among the poor, proclaiming the gospel and serving the needy.

We wish you, Stephen and Bernard, God's blessings on your future ministry as labourers in the vineyard of the Lord. Remember these words of our founder, 'Life is given to you as an opportunity to work for the apostolate, mainly for the glory of God and the



L/R Bernard Onyango, Bishop Anthony Lagwen, Stephen Wambua

salvation of souls'. Make sure that you practise the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Be vigilant in doing good to all. In this way you imitate God who, as infinite goodness, shares and radiates Himself to all."

Our Mission office wishes to thank most sincerely our associates, helpers, benefactors, friends and family members and anyone who have contributed to the training and formation of our future priests. May the Good Lord bless you all with his many graces.

Did You Know

that less than half of all people have a Will?
Be one of those who have chosen to be good stewards, and take time to prepare a Will or other estate plan. The Pallottines appreciate any consideration for a gift to support our Missionary Work.

From the Mision Desk: The Church celebrates the feast of Christ the Universal King on the 21st of November and we begin the season of Advent on the following Sunday in preparation to celebrate the Nativity of the Lord. On behalf of the Pallottiness, once more I wish to express our sincere gratitude to all of you, our associates, benefactors, helpers, friends and families members for your support in these challenging times. Your support helps us to continue of our work as a Province and to serve those in need. Be assured of our continued daily prayers for you and your family in our Community prayers. I wish you all God's blessings and good health.

Fr Martin Mareja SAC

Our Lady Queen of Apostles Church in Cheddar

Robert Vale



It was in 1942 that the Pallottine Priests first came to Cheddar in Somerset. At that time the Catholic Community was very small, consisting of just twelve families. Mass had been said on an ad hoc basis by visiting priests, or the monks from Downside Abbey, and took place in any school, barn, hall or hotel where a suitable room could be found.

When Fr. Jeremiah Keogh arrived, the Order purchased a house in which regular Masses could be said. Fr Keogh was replaced by Fr Michael Gormley in 1948 and followed by Fr Harry Madden in the early 1950s. Fr Stephen Keogh came in 1957 and it was this Pallottine Priest who recognised the need for a proper Church in Cheddar. He began to organise activities to raise the funds necessary to build a Church.

Fr Daniel Hayes came to our Parish in December 1959 after having spent some time in America, and was the fifth Pallottine Priest to serve our community. There was at that time a chronic lack of resources. The meagre income from the small number of parishioners meant that Fr Dan had barely sufficient funds to make ends meet. But it is recorded that even though times were hard, there was a very special atmosphere of friendliness, and generosity of a kind that is still apparent in our Parish today.

Although moves towards the building of a new Church had already begun, no-one could see where the money would possibly come from. But with their deep faith and a series of surprise events, the money came in. It fell to Fr Dan to commence the building of our Church and in May 1965, he laid the Foundation Stone. The Church was opened on the 19th of June 1966. The debt incurred in the building was repaid in 11 years, so on the 17th of June 1977 our church was Consecrated to Our Lady Queen of Apostles by Bishop Mervyn Alexander.

Relics of St. Vincent Pallotti and St. Oliver Plunkett were enshrined in the Altar during the Consecration and St. Vincent Pallotti's name is carved in the oak kneeler at the front of the pews on the left-hand side of the Church.

In 1973 Fr Hayes sold the original house and purchased one adjacent to the Church. It was to become the Presbytery, home to Fr Hayes until his retirement, and then to Fr John Guidera and Fr Philip Barry – two much loved Pallottine Priests who are still remembered and talked about with affection and respect by our parishioners today.

When the Pallottines were no longer able to provide a Priest for us in Cheddar, Fr Phil prepared us for the possibility that we would be without a Priest. He chose people to become Eucharistic Ministers, and set up teams and committees with people who would be prepared to

continue God's work in our Parish, to become leaders and to offer support both spiritual and practical, to enable the Parish to survive. With the departure of Fr Phil, the Parish purchased the Presbytery from the Pallottines at a very reasonable price.

Thankfully, we weren't left without a Priest but were allocated a Diocesan Priest – Fr Peter Slocombe – whom we had to share with another Parish. He was followed a few years later by Fr Tibor Szende. Both Priests made the Presbytery their home and were very happy there.

When Fr Tibor moved to pastures new, the Presbytery was no longer required, so the Diocese gave their permission for it to be let. This provided a good source of income and formed the basis of our fund-raising towards the building of a much-needed new hall. The old hall had been built as a temporary building in 1970 and did us proud until it was demolished to make way for the new one last year.

In 2020, with no resident Priest, the Presbytery was sold, with the proceeds making a significant contribution to the building of our new hall.

St Vincent Pallotti chose Mary – the Queen of the Apostles – as the protectress of his work. Our Parish celebrates the Feast Day of Our Lady Queen of the Apostles every year with Holy Mass on the Saturday after The Ascension, followed by lunch in our Hall.



As our predecessors built our beautiful Church for us, we now build for our children and grandchildren and all who follow on. In recognition of the love and devotion of all the Pallottine Priests and with gratitude for all their hard work in Cheddar throughout the years, we are happy to name one of the two halls within our new building as... The St Vincent Pallotti Room.

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A Late Night Thought

Fr John Sweeney SAC

I am writing this on All Souls night in my sitting room in Mercedes, in the province of Buenos Aires. The weather has cooled down this week. The high today was just 25 degrees. Last week we had unseasonably hot weather hitting between 35 and 38 degrees with 85 to 90 percent humidity so the rain that fell in these last days has been a great relief.

With the freshness brought by the rain and the gloominess today, it felt like being at home in Ireland on a nice autumn day. My thoughts are of home and those who are awaiting us in heaven, the Holy Souls. I remember always my grandparents and my two uncles, relatives and friends and deceased Pallottines who have impacted my life. Their example and influence on my journey in life often appear in the strangest places. I feel their presence and guidance.

Recently, we marked "Mission Sunday". It is a different experience in Argentina, with a stronger tradition of receiving Missioners than providing them. Father Tom O'Donnell, here for 45 years, and I, are witness to that. This is a time when vocations are so precious and rare in Ireland and the Western World in general. For the first time since 1909 the Pallottines have no student in formation in Ireland.

I have read that there are now more Catholics, Priests and Seminarians in the world than in any time in the past, the vast majority of them in Africa, Asia and Oceania, and this is a sign of hope. The good work done by Missionaries in these countries has borne fruit.

Perhaps, like Argentina now, in the near future in Ireland we will begin a new tradition of receiving Missionaries rather than producing them. This is a humbling experience

for countries that traditionally enjoyed many vocations but also a potentially enriching and joyful one. I often think my bad Spanish is an awful infliction on the people here, but I trust that my desire to share the Gospel witnesses to Jesus and is more eloquent than any dexterity in the language.

As we face a future of the Church in Ireland being supplemented more and more by Vocations from overseas, we must look at this as an opportunity to return to the purity of the Gospel. The Church in Ireland has been generous in providing Missionaries, but we must now prepare to be generous in welcoming Missionaries and people of different cultures. I feel we are more than up to the task.



Earlier this year, I returned to Ireland for my sister's wedding, a time of great joy for all the family. It took place within Covid restrictions but that did not affect the fun that was had. As ever, I was overcome by the generosity of the people of Doon and of other friends towards my work in Argentina through their prayers and financial assistance.

One of the big projects we have undertaken in Argentina in the last three years is the construction of a new Chapel in one of the rural areas of the parish of Mercedes. It is named in honour of Our Lady of Fatima. Due to Covid, we have not been able to celebrate the Eucharist there as often as we would have liked, but it has proved a great resource for the area. It is used for Catechesis and we have a good number being prepared for their First Eucharist and Confirmation.

Also we are currently constructing an Adoration Chapel in honour of Our Lady of Knock. We hope to have it ready for the 8th of December, the last day of the year of Saint Joseph, both to mark his year and to honour Mary. As Knock was a silent, Eucharistic apparition, a Chapel dedicated to silent adoration is very apt. Again, thank you to all who have supported us through your prayer and generosity.

Of course as well as being home for my sister Anita's wedding, it was a great joy to be home for the championship and to see Limerick do 2 in a row, and better yet have such a strong presence from my own club in Doon.

Traditionally, Limerick has provided many vocations to the Pallottines and I know that the success of the Limerick team has brought great joy to Limerick Pallottines working in different corners of the globe.

God bless you all, and I pray our paths cross soon.

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Please cut out this form and return it with your donation.
Please remember the Pallottines in your will. Thank you.

Dear Fr. Martin,

I enclose an offering of € to help the Pallottines' mission to assist, educate and empower the people they minister to.

PLEASE USE BLOCK CAPITALS.

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Send to: **Fr. Martin Mareja, SAC**
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