

# DIOCESE OF CORK AND ROSS

## Christmas 2020: A Message of Hope

This year more than ever we need to celebrate the feast of ‘God with us’ — Emmanuel. He chose to come among us and to bring to us and the world a message of hope. He came that we may have life “and have it to the full” (Jn 10:10). Christ is our hope!

### *A Different Christmas*

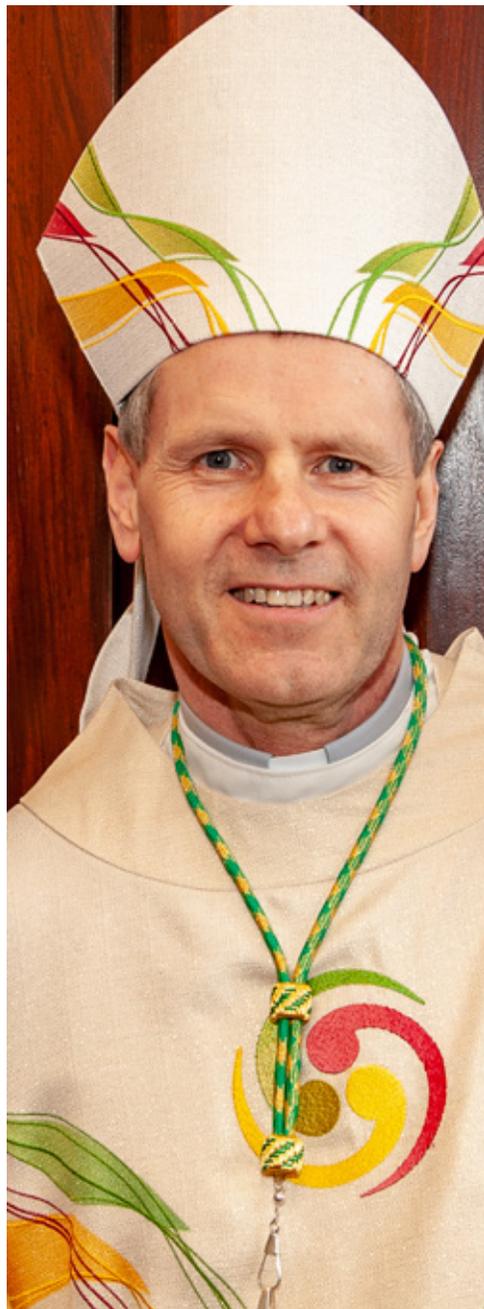
We have many reminders that this year’s Christmas is going to be different. We will be marking it in a new world, a changed society, a fragile community and in homes that are not the same.

Since the pandemic began people have made extraordinary sacrifices to support and help one another. Many people’s plans have had to go back to the drawing board. Some people’s lives have been irreversibly altered by the loss of a loved one and by the circumstances of their death and funeral.

We have also found ourselves reflecting more and refocussing our priorities. We are more aware of our vulnerability. These months have challenged us to focus on what is really important.

### *Preparing for Christmas 2020*

As we continue to live through this pandemic, how can we prepare ourselves for Christmas 2020?



I would like to suggest three foundation stones which we could focus on for Christmas. They can also be our steppingstones into a hope-filled new year. These steppingstones are family, friends, and faith.

### *Family*

**T**he part that family plays in our lives has been re-awakened. The pandemic has pulled some families apart due to travel and visitor restrictions. Physical contact between children and grandparents is missed. Other families are spending more time together than ever before.

Our sense of who we belong to lies deep within us and never goes away. At Christmas time it takes on special meaning because when everything else stops, being family does not.

Christmas, especially this Christmas, is about our real family and not how we might like our family to be. We look to Mary and Joseph as they set out on their journey filled with uncertainty and fear. Yet it was in this migrant tradesman and his frightened young fiancée that God saw the potential for a loving family for His Son. The only change they needed to make was to open their lives to God and trust him.

So, it is with us. Each of our families — with all their ups and downs — can also be a place where Christ is present in Christmas 2020.

### *Friendships*

**O**ur friendships, too, have been affected by the Covid19 restrictions. Students have found themselves more isolated from one another. Charitable Christmas-time projects in which so many people engage, especially young people, cannot happen this year.

While we cannot easily gather physically, we can find new and creative ways of keeping in touch in the lead up to Christmas and beyond, from Christmas card greetings to virtual messages to the traditional phone call.

In his recent letter ‘Fratelli Tutti’, Pope Francis talks about ‘fraternity and social friendship’. He highlights the need to see everyone, particularly the most weak and vulnerable as our brothers and sisters.

I know that many young people have extended the hand of friendship to those living in care homes with letters and cards. Some older people have rekindled contacts with people to whom they had not spoken for years.

This Christmas, will you broaden your friendship circle? I invite you to reach out to others. The fabric of our society needs faithful friendships that endure whatever comes.

### *Faith*

**T**he pandemic has forced us to ask questions about what our faith is and how it is expressed in pandemic times.

Given that the Eucharist is the source and summit of our Christian life, not being able to gather for Mass for long periods or with severely restricted numbers has not been easy. As we experience this Eucharistic fast, I encourage you to look at other ways we can meet Christ.

Can we mark Sunday — the Lord's Day — in a special way? When we view the parish webcam or the TV at Mass time, can we make time for it? Perhaps quieten the room — move away from distractions and sit with a lighted candle or a favourite icon? Can we gather the household together and dress and prepare as if we were travelling to church? This will help us to be attentive and to welcome Jesus in spiritual communion. We can also turn to the Sunday readings in our missal or online and take a few moments to pray and reflect on God's Word.

When we build sacred moments into our lives they become routine and supportive: encouraging children's morning and night prayers; saying Grace before Meals; blessing ourselves at a holy water font by the door; reciting the Angelus; praying a decade of the Rosary during a car journey or saying a quiet prayer in thanksgiving for a beautiful day.

The Covid-19 pandemic has helped many people to slow down and appreciate more the beauty and fragility of all that God has created for us. Have you time to read Pope Francis' letter on care of the earth - our common home? In it he calls us to create a world without walls, without borders, without rejected people, without strangers. (The letter is called 'Laudato Si').

Maybe it is time to bring to fruition that promise you have often made that you would read some of the Bible! Maybe take an hour or two to simply read one Gospel from start to finish? Maybe focus on a passage which you have always struggled? Then take time to look up an explanation of the passage or a reflection on it. There is plenty of material

on the bible or the Sunday Mass readings online. Look especially at our diocesan website.

Some people have made time during this pandemic to start a weekly discussion group, meeting online with a few friends to simply read and discuss a chosen passage. Perhaps this winter would be a good time to discuss one book of the Bible or some religious text in an online book club format?

### *Focus on Family, Friends and Faith*

By focussing on family, friends, and faith in these weeks of preparation, we look on what we can do rather than on what we cannot do. We can really make Christmas 2020 count, as well as opening the door to 2021 with hope.

The pandemic has taken away many things to which we had been accustomed. However, it cannot take away our hope. Christ, our hope, is always with us!

### *“Always be thankful” (Col 3:15)*

I thank all those in our diocesan community, priests, religious and people of the diocese, who have lived these months of the pandemic with faith, commitment, and deep care for others. I thank especially health care personnel and others who work in essential roles for their generous and heroic service to the community.

My prayer for each of us this Christmas is one of hope and solidarity — that we might meet Christ as we reach out to others with His love, compassion, joy, and peace.

May your Christmas be a blessed time this year.

Beannachtaí na Nollag.

✠ Fintan Gavin,  
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