**Pastoral Conversations 5 - Christmas 2020**

This part of our presentation reflects some of the points made by Archbishop Diarmuid Martin (**marked in bold**) in his letter to parishes about the celebration of Christmas.

**Advent**

**‘We have to use Advent to prepare for how we will celebrate Christmas, both liturgically and through our care services.’**

Our second Pastoral Conversation was entitled ‘Advent Countdown’. You received and shared many helpful ideas for the celebration of the season with prayerful resources, music and symbols. Take a look http://litmus.dublindiocese.ie/category/advent/

Next Saturday evening we begin that journey of attentive waiting with joyful hope. How are those Advent Wreaths going? Will they be ready for blessing at the Advent Service?  Will your blessing include Advent wreaths in people’s homes? Is your Advent Sacred Space in process? Are you ready in your heart?

Each Sunday we could draw attention to the work of one of our care services as we light the advent candle of the day – Crosscare, Society of St. Vincent De Paul, The McVerry Trust and Alone for example. Each parish will have their own particular charities. This will link prayerful moments with practical action in the name of Jesus.

**Christmas Masses**

**Can we find ways of spreading attendance at Mass over a longer period than just Christmas night and Christmas Day?   How can we organise more Masses at Christmas, while managing necessary levels of hygiene and sanitising?**

Christmas Eve and Christmas Day are most suitable for the Eucharistic celebration of the Birth of Jesus. The number and styles of these events will depend on the number of priests available and their energies to celebrate multiple Masses. The other vital component will be an active local support team who will organise, welcome, guide, lead, read, sing at each gathering and sanitise after.

*What mechanism does your parish have for hearing new ideas and making decisions?*

Will the parish team offer a variety of styles of celebration? - Family Mass, Simple Mass, Music Mass, Young Adult Liturgy. Who do we need to draw into the planning group? Are there people with talents that might be willing to play an active role for this Christmas with no strings attached? All liturgies will be live-streamed where feasible. Is there a possibility of a shorter celebration of the Word for children with a focus on visuals. Those watching could be encouraged to draw or colour their interpretation of what they have seen or heard. Who remembers ‘Let’s Draw With Bláithín’? These services could be led by a lay person with good communications skills, biblical background and a flair for art.

*Are some of these suggestions practical for your community?*

Archbishop Martin poses the question about spreading out Masses over a longer period.

The Twelve Days of Christmas might offer us a framework for this extension. We have

Saturday 26th St. Stephen’s Day, Sunday 27th Feast of the Holy Family, Thursday 31st New Year’s Eve, Friday 1st January New Year’s Day – Mary Mother of God, Saturday 2nd Vigil of Second Sunday after Christmas, Sunday 3rd Second Sunday after Christmas, Tuesday 5th Vigil of the Epiphany, Wednesday 6th Epiphany Day. This offers 8 more days with a specific emphasis that can be highlighted. New Year’s Eve might lend itself to a prayer service instead of a Mass?

*What creative possibilities come to you about the post-Christmas period events?*

**Lonely People**

**How do we reach out to people who will be lonely at Christmas? Many people living alone may not be able to travel to relatives?**

Some people will be quite pleased to stay at home and others will have issues around privacy – so tread gently here. Check in with social care agencies in your parish to see what they have planned. Contact Friends of the Elderly or Alone for example to find out the possibilities they offer. Could you arrange with local people in the hospitality sector to deliver a hot meal safely? This could be sponsored by the parish community.

Can Holy Communion be safely brought to the housebound? A designated family member might undertake to bring the sacred host from a parish celebration. Loneliness does not indicate old age. Those of other faiths or none in the community can be encouraged to join in the non-religious part of the celebrations in the same way as they often offer an invitation to us at the time of Diwali or Eid.

*What do you think? Who might be enlisted for these tasks?*

**Children**

**How can we ensure that children can experience the mystery of Christmas as the birth of the Christ Child?   Families could be encouraged to visit the crib together.**

The situation of the crib is the first question. Have you considered an outdoor crib? What about a large star on the outside of the building that can be lit at the Vigil Mass for the first Sunday of Advent? Invite people to follow the star from that evening until the end of Epiphany. Can we encourage people to make their own crib and figures as a family activity? They could bring their Baby Jesus to the church for a blessing or if necessary have them blessed during an online service for families

**Carols**

**Can we provide simple online services of religious Christmas music and stories?**

Normally these take place before Christmas with a live choir/music group. Invite your parish musicians to work on this online project. Organise an online social for your music people to let them know that they are still a vital part of the parish worshipping community. You will find plenty of carol service examples on our website [www.litmus.dublindiocese.ie](http://www.litmus.dublindiocese.ie) under Seasonal Resources. Try *‘There Is Faint Music’* by Forrest/Buckley or ‘*Cuireadh Oileánach do* Mhuire’ by our own Ronan McDonagh.

*Who do you need to talk to about this? What about publicity?*

**Reconciliation**

**The Bishops also reminded that, when access to the Sacrament of Reconciliation is not readily available, people can make acts of perfect contrition in order to attain forgiveness and return fully to the state of grace.**

People would welcome this reassurance. For some, Christmas isn’t the same without being at a performance of *‘Messiah’*. For others, Christmas is not complete without an encounter with Jesus in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. What about an online Penitential Service? This could conclude with the communal recitation of the Act of Perfect Contrition and some quiet music. Help people differentiate between the celebration of the sacrament in real time and this online service. People could also be invited to the places in the Eucharist where healing is offered – Penitential Rite ‘May Almighty God have mercy on us… before Communion ‘Lord I Am Not Worthy’.

There are many examples of Penitential Services on our website. Please adapt them to your own circumstances.

**We have to show that the simplicity of the Christmas message can touch hearts in any situation.**