



Diocesan Centre
Coursington Road
Motherwell
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Rt Rev. Joseph Toal STB KC*HS
Bishop of Motherwell

30th December 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I wish you every blessing for 2022. I thank you for your prayers and support during 2021, and for your good wishes and generosity to the clergy and myself at Christmas.

I pray that you and your families keep well as the omicron variant of the virus spreads in our communities. Hopefully the more optimistic reports on its effects will be true and normality will come a little closer. Until we know though we are asked to be cautious and take the requested steps to protect ourselves and others, including receiving the booster. I can understand that some will be hesitant about coming to church until things improve and it is appropriate for you to decide when that will be the case. If you don't feel able to come to Mass on Sunday at present, then pray at home, preferably with your family, and if possible follow Holy Mass on-line. Sunday is the Lord's Day and it should always be kept in his honour, with time being given to him even when we cannot attend Mass.

I thank all those who work in particular ways to support our parishes and the Diocese. A particular word of thanks to the volunteers who have taken responsibility for caring for our churches and assist those who attend Mass and other services in these difficult times. Your commitment, patience, and good humour is much appreciated.

I thank you for your continuing financial support for the Church. With smaller congregations there has been a fall in income and this is a challenge as we look to the future, especially with the increase in the cost of living and the threat of more rises to come. This has been especially noticeable in the cost of building materials, which are making repair work or improvements more costly. In such circumstances wise judgments are required in deciding what work is essential and what will have to wait. While others parishes can offer some support through the Parochial Investment Fund, parishes do need to seek generous donors and do fund-raising themselves

All parishes, and indeed other groups, have been asked to participate in the Synodal Process in the first three months of the year. I recognise that the present restrictions on gathering in groups may curtail the planned meetings but I hope that some will be possible with beneficial outcomes for the parishes and the Diocese and Church in Scotland.

On 1st January the Parish of St John Ogilvie's, Blantyre, will be amalgamated into St Joseph's. This means that there will one parish in Blantyre, St Joseph's, with two churches (St Joseph's and St John Ogilvie's). Such an amalgamation was proposed some time ago and I have held further consultative meetings in recent months. It seems appropriate to make this change as the New Year begins and to bring the faithful in Blantyre together in one parish. Let us pray for them and their Parish Priest, Fr Brian Lamb, and Deacon Joe Dowds, at this important time.

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Early in January, three young men from Motherwell Diocese are due to leave for the Royal Scots College in Salamanca, Spain, to participate in what is known as the Propaedeutic Course for the Priesthood in Scotland. They are Aidan Farrell from St Mary's, Lanark; Matthew O'Neill from St Mary's, Whifflet, Coatbridge; and Aidan Kelly from St Ninian's, Hillhouse, Hamilton. On behalf of us all I wish them well and assure them of our prayers as they begin their formation for the priesthood in Motherwell Diocese.

Our present seminarians are at home for the Christmas Holidays – Chris Furmage, Ronan McQuade, and Kieran Burt will return to Rome early in January, while Deacon Chris Morris, Colum Martin, and Christopher Igwe will do Parish pastoral placements before returning to St Mary's, Oscott, later in January. I ask your continued prayers for all of them. Deacon Chris Morris is due to be ordained as a priest on June 30th 2022 in Motherwell Cathedral, and Colum Morris to be ordained a deacon the previous week, on June 25th at St Mary's, Oscott.

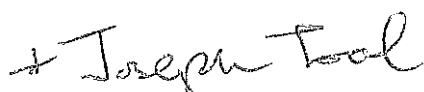
If any man is considering a vocation to the priesthood and is ready to enter into the discernment process, please make yourself known to your Parish Priest or contact Fr Charles O'Farrell at Our Lady and St Anne's, Hamilton. Likewise if any man is considering a vocation to the Permanent Diaconate, please speak to your Parish Priest or contact Fr James Grant at St Francis Xavier's, Carfin, the Vocations' Director for the Permanent Diaconate.

Pope Francis wrote an uplifting letter last Sunday, the Feast of the Holy Family, to married couples, encouraging them to remain aware of and fully open to the person of Christ in their lives together. We intend to have a Mass for married couples, particularly those who married last year or celebrated special anniversaries, in the Cathedral on Thursday 27th January, so hopefully it can be go ahead and couples and their families will feel able to attend.

On Sunday we celebrate the Solemnity of the Epiphany, and keep the World Day of Prayer for Peace. As always. this is an important intention as we begin the New Year with its renewed optimism that our world will indeed be more peaceful in 2022. We also add Justice to our prayers for Peace here in Scotland and Bishop Nolan offers us a letter for reflection and action, which was issued with the ad clerum of 17th December, for a more just and peaceful world.

With my prayers and best wishes,

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joseph Toal". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

+ Joseph Toal