

Irish Episcopal Council for Emigrants



Christmas Parish Resource Pack

2012

Message from Bishop John Kirby

A Phobal Dé,

As we prepare to celebrate Christmas it is important that we come together to remember and pray for our emigrant population, especially those who are unable to be with their loved ones this Christmas.

Sadly, as the economic crisis continues, increasing numbers of Irish people are leaving our shores in the hope of making a new life for themselves and their families. Their departure creates a void in Irish families and in parish communities.

We hope this Resource Pack will assist you in raising awareness of the issues affecting Irish emigrants and in showing solidarity with those who have been affected by emigration. I encourage you to make use of these resources in reaching out to the people of your parish in relation to this important issue.

If the Council for Emigrants can be of any assistance to you in your ministry please contact our office in Maynooth. I also encourage you to visit our website at www.catholicbishops.ie/emigrants

Críost linn.



†John Kirby
Bishop of Clonfert
Chair of the Irish Episcopal Council for Emigrants

Emigration Statistics

A report released by the CSO in September 2012 provided details of the number of people who emigrated between April 2011 and April 2012. During this period overall emigration is estimated to have increased to 87,100 and 53% (46,500) of those who emigrated were Irish nationals.

The CSO figures showed that 35,800 of those who emigrated were in the 15-24 age group and 39,500 were in the 25-44 age group.

During this period there was an increase in emigration to the US and the 'Rest of World' while there was a small decrease in emigration to the UK. 19,000 people emigrated to the UK; 8,600 emigrated to the US; 24,000 emigrated to the EU; and 35,600 emigrated to the 'Rest of World'.

The number of Irish men emigrating increased from 24,500 to 26,000 and the number of Irish women emigrating increased from 17,500 to 20,600.

Remembering Emigrants at Christmas

In Your Parish:

- * Invite people to bring forward the names of family members who have emigrated and leave them in the sanctuary area. Include these names in prayers at Mass over Christmas.
- * Have a map of the world in the church and allow people to stick a pin with a name flag on the spot where their loved one is.
- * Have a prayer wall in the church and provide “stick it notes” so people can write on a note and stick it on the wall. This photo shows such a prayer wall at the Eucharistic Congress.
- * Organise an emigrant coffee morning where families affected by emigration can come together and share a cup of coffee and a chat.



At Home:

- * Put a nice framed picture of the person who has emigrated on a mantelpiece or shelf in the living room. Place a candle beside the picture and keep that candle lit over Christmas.
- * Get a nice notebook and keep a journal over Christmas. Get different members of the family to write in this including children and any visitors who drop in. Send it to your loved one after Christmas.
- * Phone and Skype your loved one as often as you can.
- * Go through your Christmas ornaments and find one that you have had for many years, maybe a Christmas tree angel or a decoration. Send it to your loved one so they will have something familiar close by to link them to home.
- * Lighting a candle in the window is an ancient Irish ritual during which prayers are said for those who are not present. Traditionally it was believed that the candle would light the way for Mary and Joseph as they sought shelter on Christmas Eve. The candle can remain lit over Christmas until after The Epiphany of the Lord on the 6th of January.

Prayer of the Faithful

Introduction (by the Presider)

In communion with Christ and with one another we pray:

Intercessions

1. That all of us, as the body of Christ, be faithful to the promises of our baptism and live out the values of Jesus Christ today.
Lord, hear us.
2. For all who are active in the various ministries of the church and parish, and especially for the Parish Pastoral Council.
Lord, hear us.
3. For families of emigrants in our parish, that they may find support and care within the Church and the state for family life.
Lord, hear us.
4. For prisoners and their families, for prison officers and chaplains and all who work for the improvement of prison conditions.
Lord, hear us.
5. For those we love who are overseas this Christmas, give them strength to face their challenges and look kindly on those who are no longer in contact with their family.
Lord, hear us.
6. For all who have died, especially those who have died far from home, may they enjoy the eternal happiness of heaven.
Lord, hear us.

Conclusion

Lord God, in faith we pray to you, your beloved sons and daughters, made your children in baptism. Be near to us as we pray, and be close to us as we work in your service. Grant this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Homily Notes

The Word became flesh and lived(s) among us: John 1:14.

St. Irenaeus gives us one of the most simple yet profound explanations for the Incarnation. "God became one with us so that we could become one with God".

We as Catholics are often slow to accept the humanity of Christ, and indeed this is also the case when it comes to appreciating and celebrating the gift of our own humanity.

Someone once said, "we are a community of men and women, we are not angels". And as men and women made in God's image and likeness we are called to embrace our humanity. The feast of Christmas, the feast of the Word made flesh, is truly a call to celebrate the beauty of our own flesh. We as Christians are invited to accept the goodness that is ours, the God given gift of our lives in the flesh.

This is a particularly important message for every age but has an acute meaning in our time. We live in an age that exploits the human person as a commodity, and one that often uses the human body as an object to promote commercial goods and services.

On the other extreme we see religious people over reacting to this exploitation by rejecting the body as something bad and sexuality as something shameful. Sad to say the heresy of Jansenism is alive and well today.

At the heart of the Christmas feast is a call to reject this erroneous approach, to look beyond our brokenness and truly celebrate the truth that each of us is a God bearer. This truth is expressed in the name Immanuel, which means, God-with-us. This is an important message for us as we journey on our individual and communal ways. It is a particularly strong reminder to all immigrants who journey from family and homeland in search of a better life.

God in Jesus accompanies us on our pilgrim ways. Immanuel is God-with-us, God-for-us. The Holy Family too endured the trials of immigrants, and all the uncertainties that are part of life for those who live away from their homeland.

The Good News of Christmas bids all of us who follow the Christ child (having



celebrated our oneness with our God) to reach out in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in immigrant communities everywhere.

This call to be ministers of God's love to all is expressed beautifully in a favorite hymn of mine, by Susan G. Wentz:

MAKE US TRUE SERVANTS

Make us true servants to all those in need,
Filled with compassion in thought, word and deed;
Loving our neighbor, whatever the cost,
Feeding the hungry and finding the lost.

Lord, make us prophets to cry out the way,
Telling the nations of mercy's new day.
Let us break barriers of hatred and scorn,
Speaking of hope to all people forlorn.

When I was a child growing up in a cottage in the west of Ireland during the 1960's, we had the practice of lighting a candle in the window at Christmas. This, I was taught, was to be a sign to the Holy Family, that they would find welcome and food in our home.

Today, we are still called to be a light to others. The biblical call "to welcome the stranger", is very relevant in a world where so very many are forced to wander far from home. We are especially called to promote human dignity in a broken world.

This Christmas may the light of our Love burn strongly above and beyond the glitter of the festival to the fact of the feast, God-with-us, God-for-us. And may that message shining through us be a beacon of hope to all immigrants and refugees this Christmas and into the New Year.

Fr. Michael Leonard

Chaplain, Chicago Irish Immigrant Support

Prayers for Emigrants

Bless all those who have left our country and now live in other lands.
Give them a strong faith so that they will always put their trust in you
and make you known by the example of their lives.
Console those who are lonely because they are separated from those they love.
Help all missionaries who are working far from home to make your love known.
Bless our people overseas who are sick or in prison.
We pray for foreigners living in our country that they may experience our hospital-
ity.
Grant your eternal welcome to our emigrants who have died and to all the dead.
Amen.

Leckpatrick Parish, Derry Diocese

Loving God,
We pray for those
whom we love,
but who are absent from us.
Keep them safe
from all harm, evil, and danger.
Bless them with
peace, laughter,
wisdom, love and joy.
Grant that we may be reunited
in the fullness of love;
In Christ's name we pray.
Amen.

Prayers of our Hearts, Vienna Cobb Anderson

St. Colmcille,
Who suffered pain and grief of exile,
watch over the children of Ireland,
scattered throughout the world.
Obtain for them solace and courage,
and keep them true to God
in every trial and temptation!
Amen.

Prayers of an Irish Mother



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