



**Image of the day -  
Community prepared resources for  
annual  
Week of Prayer**



*Grandchamp sisters join hands with visitors to the community before the start of the Coronavirus pandemic*

## **Ecumenical community in Switzerland prepared prayers and reflections for annual Week of Prayer**

**Working for Christian unity means being grounded in your own identity and thereby being open to other people's opinions.**

That's not simply a slogan for the 2021 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, but rather it's a way of life for sisters of the ecumenical Grandchamp community in Switzerland who have prepared the prayers and reflections for this annual event.

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Founded in the 1930s in a small hamlet near Lake Neuchâtel, Grandchamp was one of the first monastic communities to be set up by a group of women from the Reformed tradition. Like the brothers from Taizé, who were establishing their own ecumenical community across the border in eastern France, the sisters welcomed women from many different denominations who were called to a life of prayer and hospitality.

Today, the community numbers around fifty members, from ten different countries, who continue the work for reconciliation between the divided Christian churches. The oldest sister is in her 90s, while the youngest are aged in their 30s and 40s. Unlike many more traditional religious communities, Grandchamp continues to attract new members, drawn to its way of ecumenical worship and communal living.

“It is both a mystery and a blessing that women continue to be called to this unique vocation,” says Sister Embla Vegerfors, who grew up in the Church of Sweden, the largest Lutheran church in Europe. She joined Grandchamp nine years ago and is one of a group of sisters that has been working with the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity (PCPCU) to develop the Week of Prayer resources.

Grandchamp sisters gather in the chapel to pray.

“We started by brainstorming with all the community together,” Sr Embla recalls, “and we soon decided on the text from John’s Gospel.” [Abide in my love and you shall bear much fruit: John 15: 5-9] “We wanted to share



***Grandchamp sisters gather in the chapel to pray.***

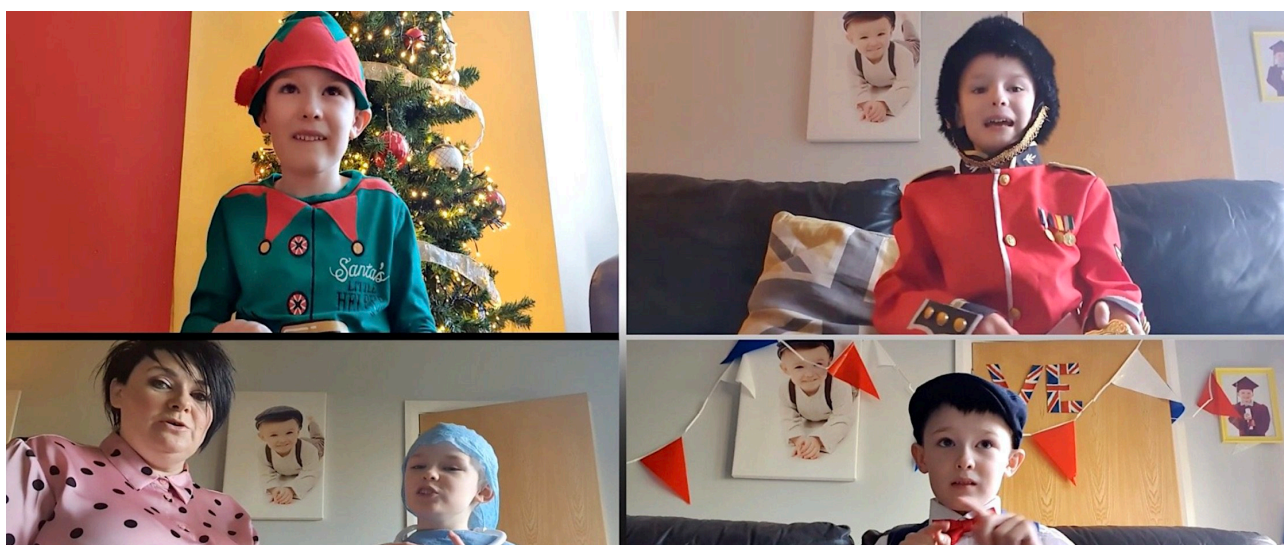
something about the way we live,” she continues, “moving from being grounded in God towards being open to other.”

Through these eight days of prayer resources, the sisters seek to share the message that unity is not about “losing your identity,” but about “being grounded in your own identity” and therefore open to others. “If we are secure in our relationship with God, then we’re also secure in our relationships with other people,” Sr Embla insists. She continues: “The differences become less threatening and we have less need to defend our own opinions. We see that someone who has a different way of doing things may be trying to express the same things as us, using a different language, but their goal is the same.”

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The sisters at Grandchamp experience the truth of this in the practicalities of their everyday lives. “Whether it’s something as simple as cleaning or washing the dishes,” Sr Embla explains, “everyone who comes here has their own way of doing things.” But whatever the different backgrounds, she continues, “we have to learn to let go of our own traditions, to know where we come from, but also to enter into something completely new, and to be challenged to see that we are here for a bigger purpose.

## Jensen teaches classmates sign language



**The folks in Ballybeen Parish, Dundonald, are very proud of young Jensen who has featured on BBC News NI online.**

The seven-year-old schoolboy has been teaching British Sign Language to classmates throughout the lockdowns. Jensen, who is deaf in one ear, started making videos on his

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YouTube channel last April to teach friends at Dundonald Primary School some sign language.

The Year Three pupil often dresses up in elaborate costumes and signs along to his favourite songs for his videos.

Jensen and his mum, Gillian Douglas–Rea, hope the videos will get more children learning BSL.

## **Change in Children’s Ministry Group in Cork**

Canon Elaine Murray, who has devoted six years to the continuing work of the Children’s Ministry Group in Cork, Cloyne and Ross, building on the foundational work of the Reverend Anne Skuse as first convenor of the group, stepped down at the end of 2020 and the baton has been handed over, by the Bishop, Dr Paul Colton, to the Reverend David Bowles.

Speaking about her six years Elaine said, “My 6 years of coordinating the Cork, Cloyne and Ross Children's Ministry Group was a totally joyful experience. Working with a dedicated team and getting to meet all of the wonderfully committed group of volunteers in the diocese was both inspiring and rewarding.

Bishop Colton, thanking Elaine, said that her six years giving a lead in this important aspect of work in the Diocese were 'creative, innovative, imaginative and ground-breaking.' He said:



Elaine and her whole team from the Children's Ministry Group, have put in place many exciting initiatives. When Elaine (photo above) accompanied me on a Diocesan visit to the Church of Finland she soaked up ideas from that part of the Church. I want, on behalf of us all, to thank Elaine most sincerely, and also to thank David Bowles for accepting my invitation to take this on.

In the course of the last six years there have been a number of very useful training sessions and activities including: holiday club training, mental health issues relating to  
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children, Godly Play, two banner-making workshops, a Nativity evening, and liturgical resources for Lent, Easter, Advent, Christmas and Epiphany.

Elaine encouraged people to network, to pool resources regionally in the Diocese, and set up the Cork, Cloyne and Ross Children's Ministry Group page on Facebook.

Following the Finland visit, a host of ideas were shared and taken up. A table of Children's Ministry resources and ideas became a regular feature at Diocesan Synod. Of particular significance to this period of time was a peace banner workshop to design and make banners for use during this time of the Decade of Centenaries in Ireland tying in with the Diocesan Commemoration and Reconciliation Project.

## **Vatican modifies distribution of ashes for Ash Wednesday**

The Congregation for Divine Worship releases a note laying out the procedures priests around the world are to follow for the distribution of ashes at the start of Lent.

The health situation caused by Covid-19 continues to force changes on daily life, which are also reflected in the Church's sphere.

Ahead of the beginning of Lent, on Wednesday, 17 February, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments has published a note detailing how Catholic priests are to distribute ashes.



## **Instructions**

After blessing the ashes and sprinkling them with holy water in silence, the priest addresses those present, reciting once the formula found in the Roman Missal: “Repent, and believe in the Gospel” or “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return”.

At that point, the note continues, the priest “cleanses his hands, puts on a face mask, and distributes ashes to those who come to him or, if appropriate, he goes to those who are standing in their places.”

He then sprinkles the ashes on each person’s head “without saying anything.”

## **Russian church makes an unorthodox modern pitch**

Among the golden icons, incense and a cappella chanting of the Orthodox Christmas service, an altar server pulls an iPhone from his robes and takes a photo of a priest that will later be uploaded to Instagram, Theo Merz writes from Moscow.

The Church of Saint Antipas, a short walk from the Kremlin in central Moscow, dates back to the 16th century but is taking a distinctly modern approach to attracting new worshippers.

The Russian Orthodox Church as a whole is a conservative, politically powerful institution that, unlike the Church of



**The Church of Saint Antipas, a short walk from the Kremlin in central Moscow, dates back to the 16th century but is taking a distinctly modern approach to attracting new worshipers**

England or even the Vatican, has done little to adapt to the times.

But with its range of hoodies, smartphone cases and a fashionable café on church grounds, Saint Antipas is making a unique appeal to a young, urban audience.

“In Russia there is sometimes wariness in relation to the Church. ‘You can’t walk here. You can’t stand there.’ There are shawls [for women to cover their hair],” said Father Andrei Shchennikov, a former stage and TV actor who now heads Saint Antipas.

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While he supports Orthodox traditions, Father Andrei said he wanted to “defuse tension” over religious worship. “You have to go where the people are,” the 44-year-old said of his church’s activity on social media. The priest himself used to run its Instagram account but he recently handed over duties after tiring of online “haters” and the need for constant updates.

The church counts a number of Russian celebrities among its congregation.

At the weekends, its café buzzes with millennial Muscovites.

Along with flat whites and pastries, the café sells a slickly produced Orthodox lifestyle magazine called Khleb or “Bread”.



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Although the majority of Russians describe themselves as Orthodox believers, and President Vladimir Putin is often photographed at services, surveys show few regularly attend mass.

Banned under the Soviets but now closely aligned with the Kremlin, the Orthodox Church has found itself at odds with progressive Russians.

## **Opinion - Democracy in far greater peril than complacent West realises**

**There is no certainty that free societies can survive the twin threats of China and the death of truth, William Hague, parliamentarian and former leader of the Conservative Party, writes.**

For anyone who believes in democracy, the year 2021 has had a very bad start. The Capitol building in Washington DC, the great cathedral of “government of the people, by the people, for the people” was invaded and desecrated. Worse still, this happened at the hands of a mob incited and motivated by the president of the United States himself.

On the same day, in Hong Kong, 53 pro-democracy legislators and campaigners were arrested for “subverting state power”. Their offence was to have organised or taken part in primary voting to choose candidates for an entirely legal election. Such activity now amounts to “disrupting and undermining the Hong Kong government”. These arrests took place conveniently just after the EU had signed a new

investment agreement with China, with European leaders played for fools.

Meanwhile, voters anywhere trying to make sense of events are battered by categorical assertions that have no basis in fact. Trump has continued to maintain that he won by a landslide an election that he lost by seven million votes, even though there isn't a single scrap of evidence to support him. Allegations about the dangers of vaccinations have led many millions of people in France to be unwilling to be vaccinated at all. In China, the foreign minister, Wang Yi, spoke last week of his country having "raced to report the epidemic first" and that "the pandemic is likely to have emerged in many places around the world", in spite of all the evidence to the contrary.

The combination of a loss of trust in elections in the world's most powerful home of freedom, the cost-free snuffing out of democratic ideas by totalitarians and the steady erosion of the public's grip on what is true or false add up to a gathering crisis for the future of free and open societies. In Moscow, Tehran and Beijing, there is much satisfaction at the chaos in Washington and at the state of the West: increasingly unsure of its own institutions, polarised within nations and suffering severely in a pandemic that hits free people particularly hard.

Global surveys have demonstrated a growing loss of faith in democracy among young people. Even in countries with democratic traditions going back decades, the space for effective opposition to incumbent governments is being constrained. In Hungary, the media and judiciary have fallen under the control of ministers; in India, the Modi government

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is showing autocratic tendencies; in Erdogan's Turkey, some opposition politicians are in prison; in Sri Lanka the government is empowering the military and abandoning commitments to justice and human rights.

Complacency about democracy is too easy. We all believe the 20th century made the world safe for it and the Cold War proved its timeless superiority. And in the decades since, we have felt able to get on with our inward-looking disagreements without worrying about its future. We reassure ourselves that democracy has proved its resilience time and again. Isn't it great that the courts in the US refused to entertain the baseless arguments of Trump's legal team? Didn't the Republicans do well to finally turn against him, rather than set aside the outcome of a presidential election? The system did indeed hold up. But we cannot be sure that it could withstand another president trying to stay in office whatever the cost, or another time that vast numbers of people believed an election was stolen.

We can no longer be sure that the faltering performance of many Western nations in the face of a pandemic, the growing gulf between populations and elites, the discontent over inequality, the loss of trust in public institutions and the disaffection among young people are just problems we can overcome eventually, with the system still intact at the end. Attention needs to be given to repairing, sustaining, justifying, strengthening and defending democratic values. The virtues of freedom, and the human dignity and fulfilment that come from allowing competing ideas in a tolerant framework within the rule of law need to be advocated and championed again.

Of course, this is a vast and complex task. Democracies like ours will have to forge a stronger common national purpose so that conflicting cultural identities don't pull us apart. We will have to allow more decentralised decision-making. It will be vital to regulate social media so that varied views are heard instead of a stream of assertions that reinforce our prejudices. We will have to be better prepared for an unexpected crisis such as the pandemic. Such challenges will be the work of decades.

But we can at least begin, with a robust defence against external interference, a clear-eyed understanding of what is going on under authoritarian regimes, and a reinvigoration of the Western alliance with intensified cooperation on trade, technology and security. Joe Biden's election is a rare opportunity to do so, since he is committed to at least trying to bring the world's democracies together. Given that Twitter last year alone deleted more than 1,000 accounts promoting state-backed Russian propaganda and thousands spreading Chinese official opinion, it is fair to assume that a massive effort is still going on to ensure voters are misinformed and misled.

The world's democratic leaders should agree to pool their efforts to disarm such attacks. They should speak frankly about the conditions in countries without the freedoms we take for granted. Tomorrow, the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission will publish a new report on China, detailing a wide range of abuses including torture, arbitrary arrest, forced confessions and the incarceration of huge numbers of people in Xinjiang.

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Such findings should be taken seriously by leaders who still prefer to turn a blind eye to the nature of a ruthless one-party system. And with Trump's go-it-alone attitude on the way out, Western nations should work towards finding solidarity on trade, so that Australia isn't being penalised by the Chinese at the same time as Brussels pushes for a trade agreement with Beijing.

If Joe Biden can muster the clarity and create the unity that is needed, democracy could be in better shape by the end of this year. He needs support from those who love freedom, anywhere in the world.

Follow William Hague on Twitter [@WilliamJHague](https://twitter.com/WilliamJHague); read more at [telegraph.co.uk/opinion](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion)

## News briefs

**From Connor to Bath** - The Rev Dr Ian Mills, curate in the Parishes of Larne and Inver, Glynn and Raloo, has been appointed rector (vicar) to the Benefice of Chew Valley West in the Diocese of Bath & Wells.

Ian, a Minor Canon of Belfast Cathedral, grew up in Derry where he was a chorister in St Columb's Cathedral. He did A-levels at Foyle College before studying a Bachelor's degree, a Master's degree and eventually a PhD in Music at Queen's University Belfast.

Before studying at the Church of Ireland Theological Institute, Ian worked as Organist and Master of the



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Choristers in Derry Cathedral under the leadership of the Very Rev William Morton. He also worked as a freelance recitalist and accompanist, and taught in St Malachy's College and Methodist College, Belfast.

Following his ordination as a Deacon in Connor Diocese in August 2017, Ian served an Internship in the Parish of St John the Baptist, Agherton, and spent two months on the clergy team at St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast, before taking up the role of curate in Larne following his ordination as a priest in September 2018.

Ian is married to Kelly-Anne, and in January 2019 was appointed President of the Ulster Society of Organists and Choirmasters.

Paying tribute to his curate in a social media post, the Rev David Lockhart, rector of Larne, Inver, Glynn and Raloo, said: "Rev Ian and I were in a unique situation when we both arrived here in 2018 within a week of each other. Ian has always been very supportive so whilst I am delighted for him I will miss him being part of the team. His exceptional musical talent and many pastoral gifts have blessed us all and I know he will be missed."

**Missing Choral Evensong?** - We're all missing it right now, so here's No1Cathedral Canterbury marking the 850th anniversary of the martyrdom of St Thomas a Becket [<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000qmhr>]

**New C of E National Register of Clergy** - By 23 February, all 20,000 active clerics in the Church — those who hold a licence or permission to officiate (PTO) — are required by [churchnewsireland@gmail.org](mailto:churchnewsireland@gmail.org)

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canon law to confirm with both the National Church Institutions (NCIs) and the dioceses that their information is accurate. The new public database is to go live in May.

**Stalwart of Dromore Diocesan Historical Society** - Dean Anthony Davies was a founder member of the Dromore Diocesan Historical Society, elected Hon Treasurer at its inaugural meeting in Dromara Parochial House on Monday 17th October 1977. Dean Davies managed the finances of the Society with a sure hand and steady eye for 40 years while contributing articles and lectures on topics as diverse as Irish Dancing, Mass Rocks, the Bishops of Dromore and the local historian Patrick Keenan.

He was custodian of much of the important Keenan archive and himself continued the tradition of maintaining the Diocesan archive, begun by Fr Edward Campbell in 1924, compiling and publishing two volumes of Diocesan Notes covering the years 1978 to 2012.

The Society's debt to Dean Anthony Davies is inestimable. The Committee and members of the Society extended their deepest sympathies to Dean Davies' brother and sister and extended family. Ar Dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis.

**Second bishop dies in Scotland** - Tributes are being paid to Bishop Vicent Logan, Emeritus (retired) Bishop of Dunkeld, who has died at the age of 79 after contracting coronavirus. His death comes just a day after the Archbishop of Glasgow, Most Rev Philip Tartaglia, passed away after getting the virus as well, marking a week of loss and mourning for the Catholic Church in Scotland.



## Pointers for prayer

Today we pray for those facing food insecurity globally. Coronavirus, conflict and cuts to UN funding are increasing the risks of food insecurity and malnutrition in 2021, in particular in South Sudan.

An increase in domestic abuse has been an unwanted consequence of the global pandemic. We pray for all who have suffered that they will have help to rebuild their confidence in their self-worth and practical ways to move forward in life.

Prolonged restrictions and times of isolation can lead to a loss of confidence in venturing out and interacting with others. We pray for all who are experiencing this and ask

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God to help us gently reach out with encouragement and understanding.

We pray for those who have lost jobs in the last months and are now seeking new employment. May their confidence in their abilities stay strong and may unexpected doors open for them to new opportunities for work.

The #COVID19 pandemic has wreaked havoc in the lives and livelihoods of so many. We pray today for God to give us the means to help rebuild hope and confidence in people, through practical help as well as emotional and spiritual support.

Today we pray for the USA. We pray for stable democracy and an end to divisions in the USA as a new president is inaugurated this month.

Today we pray for teachers and students. As the new term starts, schools have faced a lack of clarity over reopening which has made it more difficult to plan appropriate education for students and has left teachers and support staff without clear guidance.

## **Speaking to the Soul**

So Noah did everything exactly as God had commanded him. When everything was ready, the Lord said to Noah, “Go into the boat with all your family, for among all the people of the earth, I can see that you alone are righteous.”  
Genesis 6:22-7:1 NLT

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The Bible is full of wonderful stories – and this is one of the best! Noah is asked by God to produce an enormous boat and to fill it with his family and a wonderful collection of animals and birds. We don't know where he lived but it may well have been in the desert and the whole idea of building a boat would have seemed laughably absurd. The key to the story is that Noah trusted God and was happy to do exactly what God told him to do. He is described as being righteous, which literally means he loved doing the right things.

I thank God for people I've known who, just like Noah, have been happy to do apparently crazy things because they believed that God had called them. I think of many doctors that I have known who have headed out to poor parts of the world where their skills were desperately needed. The reward that they got was an income that was a tiny fraction of what they would have earned in this country – but, like Noah, they were happy to be obedient because their priority was to serve God. I think of a number of successful businessmen who have gladly moved on because they heard the Lord calling them to do different work for him.

I have to believe that Noah had lots of doubts and questions as he constructed his surprisingly large boat. Being obedient to God is bound to trigger all sorts of very good questions. But Noah pressed on and when the flood engulfed the world he and his family together with all the birds and animals were saved. When we obey God there will be lots of challenges along the way but I thank God for the peace and joy he always gives to those who obey him.

*Continued next page*

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## QUESTION

What would you do if God asked you do something really, really surprising?

## PRAYER

God our Father, thank you for the inspiring example of Noah. Help me to be willing to be obedient to you, whatever you ask me to do, however surprising or difficult. Amen.

