

# Parish of Bangor, Member of Ards Pastoral Community

Parish Priest: Very Rev Joseph Gunn St Comgall's Presbytery, 27 Brunswick Road, Bangor, Co Down, BT20 3DS  
T: (028) 9146-5522 E: bangor@downandconnor.org W: [www.bangorparish.com](http://www.bangorparish.com) Office Hours: Mon-Fri 9.30pm to 1pm.

## 7th Sunday in Ordinary Time C, 19/20 February 2022

Dear Parishioners

As you know the declared intention of the parish was to alternate Sunday Mass on a monthly basis between Donaghadee and Ballyholme with the latter reopening in March. Unfortunately, for reasons detailed below, this will have to be delayed. Sunday Mass at 9.00am will continue in Donaghadee until it is possible to re-open Ballyholme safely.

Storm damage removed a ridge tile and this and other missing slates have allowed water to enter the Church penetrating the electrics and making the Church unsafe. Major problems with the boiler and heating system have been discovered. Plaster has fallen inside the Church and cracks in the other wall have been reported. A Condition Report has been commissioned and its findings are awaited with trepidation. Given the seriously reduced income of the parish since 2020 the prospect of major financial outlay is daunting. The Finance Committee is weighing up the demands against available resources and given the more pressing needs of Ballyholme has advised the postponement of the cosmetic repairs planned for Donaghadee.

As soon as more information is available it will be communicated to you.

Yours sincerely  
J Gunn



### BANGOR PRAISH PODCAST

You can listen to the Parish Podcasts by clicking on the audio files on the website or by searching for

"Parish of Bangor Podcast" in the apple or google podcast

*Apps. Then subscribe to our channel so that you will receive all the latest podcasts straight to your device.*

Bishop Treanor will celebrate the Ordination to Diaconate on **Saturday 19 February at 12noon** The Ordinandi are:

- Jackie Breen (Downpatrick)
- John Downey (Belfast)
- Kieran Hunt (Belfast)
- Paddy Keown (Belfast)
- Mark Leneghan (Castlewellan)
- Ricky Looney (Larne)



Please pray for the Ordinandi and their families .

**Mass is Live Streamed and can be accessed via the Parish Website**

[www.bangorparish.com](http://www.bangorparish.com)

**FULL COPY OF THE SUNDAY MISSALETTE CAN BE FOUND ON THE PARISH WEBSITE UNDER "NEWS"**

### Your prayers are requested for

#### Recently Deceased:

Geraldine Hamill (Canada)  
Robert Moore

#### Anniversaries:

Kay Mackenzie, James Johnston,  
Mary Hamilton, Patrick Larkin,  
Mary Larkin, James Hart, John Robinson,  
Ann Sharvin, Mary & Eric Beaman,  
Patrick McAloon, Gerald Beaman,  
Irene Thompson, Thomas Donohue,  
Edith Williamson, Anita Phillips,  
Susan Crotty-Bradley, Eric Young,  
Fr John Courtney.

**Bethany Bereavement Support Group** we are here to support and listen.  
Confidential. **075 1085 2157**

**St Vincent de Paul Helpline 077 0367 9384**

**BAPTISM REGISTRATION**  
Evenings only until further notice at 7pm.  
Wednesdays and Thursdays.  
Please register online SIDE BAR under 'Sacramental Preparation'

**PRAYING WITH THE ICONS**

under **The Four Saints** found in  
'Parish Today'

**SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION  
CLASSES**

For all children not attending  
Catholic Schools.

**1<sup>ST</sup> PENANCE & HOLY  
COMMUNION –**

Classes to be held in the Parish  
Centre on  
Sunday mornings at 9:15 starting in  
November 2021.

Please register by contacting the  
parish office by email stating the  
Child's(rens) Name(s), Primary  
School, Year Group and Age.

**CONFIRMATION 2022 -**

Confirmation Classes will be starting  
on 23 January 2022 – Please  
register by email to the parish office  
Email: [bangor@downandconnor.org](mailto:bangor@downandconnor.org)



**SUNDAY MASS TIMES THIS WEEKEND**

ST COMGALL'S CHURCH, DONAGHADEE

Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> February @ 9.00am

ST COMGALL'S CHURCH BRUNSWICK ROAD

Saturday vigil 19<sup>th</sup> February @ 6.30pm

Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> February @ 10am & 12noon

**7th Sunday in Ordinary Time C**

**NO REGISTRATION NEEDED**

**ALL MASSES ARE SUBJECT TO DIOCESAN REGULATIONS.**

**SUNDAY MASSES**

Admittance will be on a first come first served basis and if the  
permitted number is exceeded a notice to that effect will be posted  
on the Church door.

Safety of parishioners and welcome to all, particularly families are  
joint top priorities. **Please note that the Covid sanitising  
regulations have not changed and will continue to be  
strictly observed.**

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**DAILY MASS NEXT WEEK – 22<sup>nd</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> February**

Tuesday to Friday at 9.30am

*[may be changed at short notice due to a funeral]*

**REQUIEM MASS – Monday 21<sup>st</sup> February – Robert Moore**

We have a number of Masses including funerals recorded.  
These can be accessed when you click on the link below:

[www.churchservices.tv/bangor](http://www.churchservices.tv/bangor)

**The Society of St Vincent de Paul** offers practical and confidential help to those in need  
throughout the North Down Area. We know it can be hard to ask for help but please,  
if you need help call us on **our Helpline: 077 0367 9384.**

To help us to help others you can make direct payments to Conferences Bank Account.  
St Comgall's, Allied Irish Bank. Sort Code 93-82-03. A/C No is 25302098.  
Most Holy Redeemer Ballyholme, Allied Irish Bank. Sort Code 93-82-03. A/C No. 06885061.

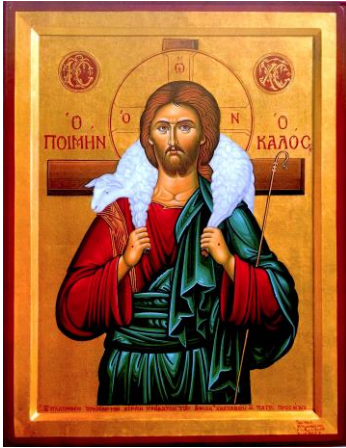
Donations can also be made to SVP Giving Page at [www.svp-ni.co.uk](http://www.svp-ni.co.uk). If you are a UK income tax payer please  
consider Gift Aiding your donation, which will enhance your donation by 25% at no extra cost to you. Gift Aid  
forms are available on the Parish website, or on request, via SVP Helpline number, as above.

The Society wishes to thank you for your tremendous response to our Annual Appeal, on the theme of "Impossible  
Choices" Through your generosity St Comgalls Conference were able to assist over 150 families in the month of  
December, and Most Holy Redeemer Conference Ballyholme provided assistance to 108 families and individuals over the  
same period To include those donations enhanced by Gift Aid, the Appeal raised over £10,000. We thank you on behalf of  
the Society, and on behalf of those we assisted.

The Society is always on the lookout for new Members, and if you are interested and can spare a few hours  
per week please speak to a Conference Member, or leave your name and contact number on the Helpline and  
we will return to you promptly. You will be warmly welcomed and full training will be given.

***We can now accept donations of Good quality furniture –  
please call our Helpline or speak to a member of the Society.***

**Storehouse North Down** - Storehouse continues to help St Vincent De Paul provide non-perishable food for those in need. Storehouse welcomes donations of foodstuff at their premises, 12 Balloo Avenue, Bangor on Mondays and Thursdays between 10.00am to 3.00 pm. Cash donations are also very acceptable.



## 7<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME C – 19 & 20 February 2022

**Lord Jesus, you have said, 'Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you.'** I come to you in faith and trust, in love and hope. Let me know your closeness to me and your care for me and for all who are dear to me.

**My intention:** Hear my prayer (*mention intention*); grant what I ask, and may I always trust that in all that happens in life, you will be close to me as my friend, guide and saviour. And so, Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, I place all my trust in you.

**Penitential Act:** I confess to the almighty God and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do, through my fault, through my fault,

through my most grievous fault; therefore I ask blessed Mary ever-virgin, all the Angels and Saints, and you, my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord our God.

### PRAYERS AT HOLY COMMUNION

#### Spiritual Holy Communion Prayer

My Jesus, I believe that you are present in the most Blessed Sacrament.

I love you above all things and

I desire to receive you into my soul.

Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart.

I embrace you as if you have already come, and unite myself wholly to you.

Never permit me to be separated from you.

Amen.

*composed by Saint Alphonsus Liguori*

#### ANIMA CHRISTI

#### Prayer to the Most Holy Redeemer

Soul of Christ, sanctify me.

Body of Christ, save me.

Blood of Christ, embolden me.

Water from the side of Christ, wash me.

Passion of Christ, strengthen me.

O good Jesus, hear me.

Within your wounds hide me.

Never permit me to be separated from you.

From the evil enemy defend me.

At the hour of my death call me

and bid me to come to you,

that with your Saints I may praise you

for age upon age. Amen

### CALENDAR OF SAINTS DAYS

## FEBRUARY / MARCH 2022

#### Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> February

Saint Fintan, Abbot

#### Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> February

Blessed Virgin Mary

#### Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> February

7<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time C

#### Monday 21<sup>st</sup> February

Saint Peter Damian, Bishop & Doctor of the Church

#### Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> February

The Chair of Peter

#### Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> February

Saint Polycarp, Bishop & Martyr

#### Friday 25<sup>th</sup> February

Day of Prayer for Survivors & Victims of Abuse

#### Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> February

Blessed Virgin Mary

#### Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> February

Day of Prayer for Temperance

#### Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> March

Saint David

#### WEDNESDAY 2<sup>nd</sup> MARCH – ASH WEDNESDAY

Day of Fast and Abstinence

#### Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> March

Saint Kieran, Bishop

**Knock Shrine** - Daily Masses continue to be broadcast on the Knock Shrine website and Facebook page at 12 Noon and 7.30pm, with Rosary at 7pm. Sunday Mass is broadcast at 12 noon, Rosary at 2.30pm and Mass at 3pm. For further details, please see [www.knockshrine.ie](http://www.knockshrine.ie)

**Prayer Online:** Come and join us at... [www.soulpardonmission.com](http://www.soulpardonmission.com) Who are we? We are a new interactive prayer website created by Jacinta Crockford DipTH, Spiritual Director living in Down and Connor. What's on offer? A variety of PDF meditations on Mother Teresa, St John Paul II, Ignatius Spirituality to name but a few. Lots of content to Dive into! There you will find - Podcasts on Faith, Friendship & Knowledge; Rosaries, Prayers and Marian Consecration. Come and join us and be part of the prayer movement online!

**Saturday at 4.30pm (live) Rosary** and later **Saturday at 8.30pm** I will be leading prayer with Eucharistic Adoration on the Catholic Internet TV – Shalom World.org Just click on the following link to access this time of prayer. [www.swprayer.org](http://www.swprayer.org) Please be assured that I will be including all the parishioners and their families during this live Eucharistic Adoration.

### **Laudato Si' – grounding the teaching in our everyday lives**

Pope Francis' encyclical Laudato Si' highlights the beauty of the earth and our role as stewards of this great gift of creation. To care for our common home there are many changes that we all need to make and the first change is a change of heart, an ecological conversion. Join Prof John Barry, Fr Tim Bartlett and Rev Cheryl Meban in conversation as they explore Laudato Si' and how we can each embrace change in our everyday lives to care for the earth.

You can be attend in person on **Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> Feb** at 7pm in St John's Church, Falls Road. Parking available and venue on main bus route. Online viewing via parish webcam [www.stjohnsfallsroad.org](http://www.stjohnsfallsroad.org)

**Invite someone else too!**

### **Preparing for Marriage? Catholic Engaged Encounter**

A Marriage Preparation course is planned for **9/10 April 2022** in **The Drummond Hotel**, Ballykelly, Co. Derry. This 2-day **non-residential** course is a positive way of preparing for Marriage where you will discover how you can enrich your future relationship. Information/Booking: [marriageencounter.ie](http://marriageencounter.ie) or 028276 38512

**The Lough Derg Pilgrim Path** on the lough shore is now open daily. The full route is a 12km loop, with a shorter 8km option, and several information boards highlight features of particular interest. Leaflets are available at the Visitors Centre. For bookings and further information email [info@loughderg.org](mailto:info@loughderg.org) or telephone 0(0353) 71 9861518.

### **"Spiritual Challenges in Later Life" with Sr Una Agnew SSL PhD**

*hosted by Drumalis via Zoom from 11:00 am – 12:15 pm  
(22 Feb 2022)*

"Spiritual well-being in later life is a potential that needs to be explored even as it is happening within us and among us. During this series, we will explore together this rich season of grace that we call ageing." (Una Agnew SSL) Suggested Donation: £50 per person. For further details or to book a place, please contact Drumalis during office hours (Mon-Fri, 9 am – 5 pm) – 028 28272196/28276455 or email [drumalis@btconnect.com](mailto:drumalis@btconnect.com)

### **"Patrick Kavanagh – A Poet for Spring" with Sr Una Agnew SSL PhD**

*hosted by Drumalis via Zoom from 11:00 am – 12:15 pm  
(2, 9 & 16 March 2022)*

"As we embark on the season of spring, we celebrate in poetry the way Kavanagh senses the stirrings of his soul as the earth comes alive in Spring. His liturgy of the seasons enhances his poetic pilgrimage from Monaghan to the Grand Canal." (Una Agnew SSL) Suggested Donation: £30 per person. For further details or to book a place, please contact Drumalis during office hours (Mon-Fri, 9 am – 5 pm) – 028 28272196/28276455 or email [drumalis@btconnect.com](mailto:drumalis@btconnect.com)

### **South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust Carer Support Service**

**Are you an unpaid carer who cares for a family member of friend?**

You are invited to come along to the Carer Support Service Carer Hub in Bangor.

**When:** 1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday of every month

**Where:** North Down Community Wellbeing Hub, Main Street

**Time:** 10.30 – 1pm

No need to book, just call in at any time during the morning for carer information advice and guidance. Join us for tea/coffee and scones, we would love to meet you.





**TRÓCAIRE** thank you for your help. You can donate in the following ways:

1. Online at [www.trocaire.org](http://www.trocaire.org).
2. By phone: 0800 912 1200 (NI)
3. By post to Trócaire, 10 King Street, Belfast, BT1 6AD (NI),

This Christmas see the gifts online @ [www.trocaire.org/gifts](http://www.trocaire.org/gifts)

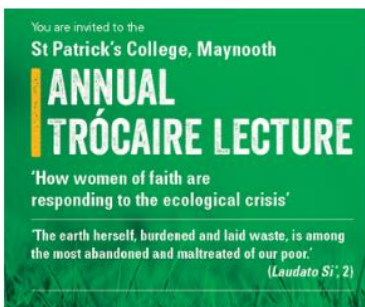
Our first workshop is on Tuesday, 22<sup>nd</sup> of February at 2pm and this workshop is on our Lent parish resources and the context in Zimbabwe. We will be privileged to be joined by our colleague Yvonne who is based in our country office in Zimbabwe.

You can register here on this link for our workshops- <https://forms.gle/jbb8mxLt8t1NpSzU8>

Please register so we have knowledge of numbers attending.

In preparation for these workshops- please have a look at our resources for Lent on our parish page; <https://www.trocaire.org/our-work/working-in-ireland/parishes/lent-2022/>

Looking forward to any enquires and seeing you at our workshops.



You are invited to the  
St Patrick's College, Maynooth  
**ANNUAL  
TRÓCAIRE LECTURE**  
'How women of faith are  
responding to the ecological crisis'  
The earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among  
the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor.  
(Laudato Si', 2)

Dr Carmody Grey (Assistant Professor of Catholic Theology at University of Durham) and Lucy Vokhiwa (Chairperson of Catholic Women Organisation, Archdiocese of Blantyre, Malawi) will co-deliver the keynote address.

**International Women's Day, 2022  
Tuesday, 8 March, 7 p.m. GMT**

This is a free online event and registration is essential

Please register using this link:  
[https://trocaire-org.zoom.us/webinar/register/ANW\\_R59M-zzR5Srn4awZc0WsdQ](https://trocaire-org.zoom.us/webinar/register/ANW_R59M-zzR5Srn4awZc0WsdQ)



## REFLECTION DAYS AT SMA DROMANTINE

**Sun. 6<sup>th</sup> March 9.30am - 5.30pm**  
**'A Lenten Day of Reflection'** provides time and space

to reflect and pray on Lenten Themes in preparation for the celebration of Holy Week and Easter.

**Led by Fr. Damian Bresnahan SMA.**

Cost (including full lunch) £35/E40

**'The Wonder of Creation: the Miracle of Life'**

**Fri. 11<sup>th</sup> 5pm – Sun. 13<sup>th</sup> March (2pm)**

Message of Hope and challenge in a Planetary Emergency.

In contemplating the wonder of our Common Home and

current threats to its integrity, we will explore an ecological vision in responding to the cry of the poor at this time of unprecedented planetary change.

**Led by Sr. Nellie Mc Laughlin RSM**

Cost: including full board £220 / E260

Tel.(028)30821964

email:[admin@dromantineconference.com](mailto:admin@dromantineconference.com)

## DROMANTINE CONFERENCE NEW WORKSHOP 2022 - BOOKINGS NOW OPEN

Please contact Jacinta or Louisa to reserve your place: TEL: 028 (048 from ROI) 3082 1964  
EMAIL: [admin@dromantineconference.com](mailto:admin@dromantineconference.com)

## LENTEN PIONEER PLEDGE

Many people choose to abstain from alcohol during Lent. Why not take this opportunity to perhaps help yourself or someone you know with an alcohol or drug problem by offering your sacrifice for freedom from addiction? Please consider taking the short- term Lenten Pledge and make a difference to someone's life and say the following daily prayer.

**PRAYER:"** I promise in honour of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and with the help of the Blessed Virgin Mary to abstain from all alcoholic drink during Lent."



Please find the information below for your Parish bulletin. The Living Church office will be facilitating the Lenten programme, 'No Greater Love' over Zoom for this Lent.

### NO GREATER LOVE

Lent is a season of reflection and preparation as we look forward to the celebration of Easter. Why not join **Living Church** as we reflect together over Zoom on the final moments of Jesus' life. In a series of short films shot on location in the Holy land, **No**

**Greater Love** is a biblical pilgrimage that reveals Christ's amazing love for us. Best-selling author, Edward Sri, will guide us through the final hours of Christ's life. Over 5 weeks we are given the opportunity to walk step by step with Jesus through the Scriptures from the Garden of Gethsemane to Mount Calvary. At each session there will be the opportunity to meet others from across the Diocese to pray, share and reflect together. There are 5 online sessions – one for each week of Lent which will lead us into Holy week. To book your place on our online program please e-mail [livingchurch@downandconnor.org](mailto:livingchurch@downandconnor.org)

There are 6 options for you to choose from:

Monday 14<sup>th</sup> March at 11am or 7pm

Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> March at 7:30pm

Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> March at 7:30pm

Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> March at 11am or 7pm

## Icon Painting Workshop Knock, Co. Mayo

Experience the unique spiritual world of the Byzantine Era through icon painting

September 26 - October 1, 2022  
Alexian Brothers Monastery  
Knock, Co. Mayo



The Alexian Brothers Monastery is excited to welcome back master iconographer Theodore Papadopoulos! Join us on this six day intensive course under the direction of visiting master iconographer and expert instructor Theodore Papadopoulos from Greece. This Virgin Mary icon will "come alive" as he will guide you step by step, through the ancient techniques of Byzantine Iconography. Let us journey together, discovering anew, this traditional artistic expression of theology and spirituality often called the "meeting place of the Divine". Whether you are a beginner or an advanced artist, you will be able to follow the instructor for an outcome of a beautiful icon.

Your tuition fee of €480 includes all materials.  
Space is limited. Please register early to secure your spot.  
The Alexian brothers have excellent accommodations.

For registration and more information visit the website  
[www.theodoreicons.com/knock](http://www.theodoreicons.com/knock)  
or contact Theodore Papadopoulos at: [theodoreicons@gmail.com](mailto:theodoreicons@gmail.com)

### Re: The Kiss of Christ • A Pastoral Introduction to *Lectio Divina*

on [aspal.ie](http://aspal.ie)

In *Dei Verbum*, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation from the Second Vatican Council, and probably its most far-reaching document, the Church teaches that:

she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the Bread of Life from the table both of God's word and of Christ's body. (§21)

For well over a century, ever since the days of Pope Saint Pius X, the Church has been able to renew how it 'offers to the faithful the Bread of Life' at the table of Christ's body. Not only has this renewal of Eucharistic life and practice permitted God's people to be sustained by the Body of Christ, it has led to the renewal the Church's inner life and our presence in the world.

However, the renewal of how the Church 'offers to the faithful the Bread of Life' at the table of God's word is still in its early stages. This led Pope Saint John Paul II to ask,

to what extent has the Word of God become more fully the soul of theology and the inspiration of the whole of Christian living, as *Dei Verbum* sought? (TMA §36)

This question he asked in 1994 as he began prepare for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. You yourself will be best able to judge the Church's response to his searching question.

The ancient discipline of *lectio divina* has re-emerged in the last 25 years as one balanced way for all the faithful to receive the word of God and be sustained by it. It brings together the Scriptures and life—what Pope Francis calls "that inseparable pair." (Address to the *Catholic Biblical Federation*, April 2019). In a desire to sustain those involved in *lectio divina* and to provide for their ongoing formation, St Patrick's Pontifical University, Maynooth is offering an online introduction to *lectio divina* in a pastoral key over the next eight weeks. Alternating between brief presentations which may be accessed at any point, and a fortnightly live *lectio*, this short course will provide a pathway through *lectio divina* while participants journey with the Sunday gospels of Lent.

Addressing the challenges of praying together during the Covid-19 pandemic has permitted many to gain confidence in negotiating virtual environments. Building on this confidence, the course, under the guidance of Father Séamus O'Connell, will provide resources and support for the prayerful reading of the Scriptures in a way that will nourish the faith of the individual, and inspire the lives of our parish and diocesan communities.

"To whom shall we go?" said Peter, "You have the words of eternal life."

## AID TO THE CHURCH

<https://www.acnireland.org/n-donate>

SUBSCRIBE TO THE MIRROR

**Egyptians love their national football team, but some feel left out**  
**CHRISTIANS MAKE UP AROUND 15% OF THE POPULATION OF EGYPT AND ARE AS**  
**FOOTBALL-CRAZY AS THEIR MSLIM NEIGHBOURS, BUT THERE IS NOT A SINGLE COPT IN**  
**THE NATIONAL TEAM. By Filipe D'Avillez**

A Coptic Cross. (Credit: Aid to the Church in Need)

As the Egyptian national football team progressed through the African Cup of Nations, **football fever** once again gripped the nation.



**"Egyptians are completely crazy about football.** They love it", says Manuel José, a Portuguese manager who coached Egypt's biggest club, Al-Ahly, for eight years, witnessing the fan's passion first-hand. "When I coached in Egypt the International Stadium in Cairo had a capacity of **100,000**, and it would fill up three hours before matches."

Tony Ghali with his daughters. (Credit: Tony Ghali)

**Tony Ghali** left Egypt years ago. He now lives and works in Germany, from where he closely followed the progress of the Egyptian team in the African tournament.

**Before each game he and his daughters donned their Egypt jerseys, printed with the name of national hero and star player Mohamed Salah.** Like all Egyptians, they were praying for a win, but Tony, like many other **Coptic Christians**, knows that no one on that team prays the way he does. "One rarely sees a Christian player in Egypt", he tells Aid to the Church in Need (ACN).

**There are no official statistics on the number of Copts in Egypt, but estimates vary between 10% and 20%.** The vast majority belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church, with a small number belonging to the **Catholic Coptic Church**. The fact that no Copts, of any denomination, are represented in top-level football, and therefore in the national team, stings.

"I will always be excited by the national team, because the players represent the country. But we're sorry that they don't use the full potential of the people. I am sure there is plenty of talent among the Copts", says Tony. **"It isn't possible that among 20% of the population there isn't anybody who can play football"**, he adds.

His sentiment is echoed by **Andrew Youssef, a Coptic lecturer and PhD candidate in theology**, based in Canada. "Overall, I'd say **the average Copt loves football** and is happy to see the national team win, while **upset there's discrimination** against Copts in that regard", he tells ACN.

Bishop Youssef Aboul-Kheir during prayer. (Credit: Aid to the Church in Need)



But is there actual discrimination? On the one hand, some are adamant that there is and that it is more widespread. They point to the fact that there were also no Copts in Egypt's recent Olympic teams. Even **the head of the Coptic Orthodox Church, Tawadros II**, remarked in an interview with Egyptian newspaper Al-Youm Al-Saba, in 2018, that **"it's extraordinary that all of Egypt's football teams don't have a single Copt** who has good legs and who kicked a ball on the streets when he was little".

**Some Muslims also agree.** Former player **Ahmed Hossam**, known as **Mido**, who played for many international clubs, said in an interview with Egyptian television station DMC, in April 2018, that "regrettably, there's **a lot of people**

**in Egypt who are bigoted over colour, religion and ethnicity.** We must confront them and not bury our heads in the sand. **Can you believe it that in the history of football in Egypt, only five Christians played at the top level?"**





**Among Copts, stories abound of young boys who were turned away from big clubs at trials when it was revealed that they were Christians, either by their names or, in one case, by the tattoo of a cross that many young men have on their wrists.** How many were actually cases of discrimination, and how many were just interpreted that way by a people who have learned to see life through a lens of persecution, is impossible to tell. Tony Ghali tells Aid to the Church in Need that “perhaps clubs **fear raising a Christian Egyptian** to the status of hero”.

A café in Giza, Christians and Muslims sit side-by-side to watch Egypt in the final game against Senegal, which Egypt lost on penalties. (Credit: Micheal Youssif)

**One aspiring player with an unmistakably Christian name, Mina Bindari, , was asked by a club to play under the name Ibrahim.**

At first, he accepted, but later preferred to drop out of professional football and **form an academy** to give young Christian players a chance to improve. Because he refused to replace one form of discrimination with another, the Je Suis academy is open to Muslims as well, who form around 10% of the players.

Others, however, say that the problem is not discrimination. **They claim that Christian parents discourage their children from playing football** and that the perception that bias is widespread gives young Coptic players an excuse to give up when they fail trials in the first place, instead of fighting for their dreams.

When he spoke to Aid to the Church in Need, Manuel José seemed oblivious to the idea that Christians suffered discrimination in football. “I was there during the Arab Spring. I saw how football fans, Copts and Muslims, side by side, protected the protestors from the police. I still have two jerseys at home that belonged to two fans who were killed. **After the revolution there were some problems, some churches were burned, but then things calmed down and both communities get along with each other**”, he says.

Critics of the discrimination theory generally point to **Hany Ramzy**, a former player and manager who enjoyed great success in Egypt and abroad, including as captain of the national team, despite his religion. **Ramzy himself says he never encountered discrimination.** Tellingly, however, **his name is not clearly Christian** and he himself admits that for years nobody in football knew that he was a Copt.

**Egypt’s eventual defeat in Cameroon prevented celebrations back home, but fans will have another chance soon, as their players take on Senegal in a difficult tie in March, to try and qualify for the World Cup in Qatar, this year.** In victory or in defeat, football continues to show that it has the power to unite people despite their differences. To Copts, however, it seems that **this unifying factor could be explored more deeply,** for the benefit of the country as a whole.

