

## Whatever you do...you do to me

My niece, Abi, is seven years old and can definitely be described as being a "Whovillian". For those who aren't familiar with the title, the name "Whovillian" applies to a person who loves Christmas and prepares for it months in advance.



It comes from the film "How the Grinch stole Christmas" where the inhabitants of Whoville are contrasted with the Grinch, a character who does everything he can to ruin Christmas in Whoville by stealing the inhabitants' Christmas presents and sabotaging the decorations festooning the town.

For those of us who, as December 25th gets closer and closer, begin to feel increasingly Grinch-like in our lack of Christmas spirit, it is good to be able to see Christmas through the eyes of a child and to experience again that unique and magical moment on Christmas Day when they are able to open their presents and to enjoy all of the trappings of a family Christmas.

Sadly, not all children will be able to celebrate Christmas in this way. For many families in our region, including those who, until recently, may not have had to think about these things, this Christmas will be a time not of unalloyed joy but of worry. Worry about how to afford the presents the children are asking for. Worry about how they are going to be able to serve up the turkey with all of the trimmings. Worry about how to pay the increased heating bills during the cold winter months.

For the last 38 years, Brentwood Catholic Children's Society has always been there to support families in Essex and East London throughout the year but the pressures that Christmas brings about means that this is a particularly busy time for the staff and volunteers of BCCS.

Like many parishes across the diocese, in Billericay we will be encouraging parishioners to support the work of BCCS by donating to the Christmas Crib appeal.

When we look at the figures of the Holy Family in the crib, we are reminded of the fact that Jesus, the Son of God, was born, not into great wealth and opulence but into poverty and hardship. What kept the Holy Family going was the love that they had for each other and the faith they had in a loving God.

One of my favourite stories about Christmas comes from the United States during the Great Depression of the 1930s. It focuses around a 6-year-old boy called Pete. Pete lived with his mum and dad, and they were just about able to manage on the low income his dad earned but as Christmas got closer his parents realised that they wouldn't be able to have enough money to buy presents for each other.

A week before Christmas they explained to Pete that there would be no presents from the shops. "But I'll tell you what we'll do" said Pete's father, "we can make pictures of the presents we'd like to give to each other."

Christmas Day arrived and the family awoke to find their little Christmas tree made magnificent by the pictures they had put on it. There was a picture of a black Rolls Royce and big red boat for Dad, a diamond bracelet and fur coat for mum, a camping tent and a garden with a swimming pool for Pete. Then finally Pete pulled out his present, a drawing of a man, a woman and a child with their arms around each other laughing. Under the picture he'd written the word "US".

May God's blessing be upon you all this Christmas and please spare a thought for those children and families for whom this Christmas will be particularly difficult. As Jesus reminds us in the scriptures, "Whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you do to me."

**Father Dan Mason**

Parish Priest, The Most Holy Redeemer Parish, Billericay.

## Supporting the youth pilgrimage to Lourdes

We enjoy a very positive association with BCYS (Brentwood Catholic Youth Service) and so when Fr Dominic suggested that one of our therapists could accompany BCYS on the youth pilgrimage this year, our Art Psychotherapist, Claire Gillan jumped at the chance. Claire shares her experiences below:

I was delighted to be asked to attend the Lourdes Youth Pilgrimage to provide a supportive role in terms of wellbeing and navigation of the joys and challenges which such an event can bring to all.

Before the trip I met with BCYS staff to talk through what the provision in Lourdes would look like and agreed on a flexible approach to support the processing of difficult feelings arising from being away from home, new places, experiences and people.

I got to know the team quickly and our first meal together gave me the opportunity to introduce myself to the young pilgrims. The notion of having a member of the medical support team at Lourdes who specialises in mental health was completely normalised. The young people were very open and willing to have conversations about wellbeing, especially as we walked to various venues and naturally a 'walking and talking' modality of therapeutic support evolved.

On other occasions, I brought art materials into the chapels at Lourdes, to help process feelings and experiences in a contained and creative way. This was an exercise in finding common ground and connection and an understanding that feelings are a natural part of pilgrimage.

Throughout the week I came to realise that therapy and counselling can take many forms and that I can walk for miles! I also learned from the young people about how modern life has an impact on them, and it reminded me that simply to listen in a non-judgmental and empathetic way is so beneficial to us all. Young people need our understanding and our time; they needed space to explore the emotions evoked from what they came to 'seek' at Lourdes.

### *Community and belonging is at the heart of pilgrimage*

The spirit and enthusiasm of the BCYS team is infectious and I feel privileged to have worked with them. The whole experience had community and belonging at its heart and from the outset I felt very much part of the team. I am looking forward to working with BCYS in the future to provide further support for all attendees of the Summer Lourdes Pilgrimage.

Claire Gillen, BCCS Art Psychotherapist.



### What it meant for BCYS

In recent years we have seen an increase in the number of young people facing challenges around mental health. Lourdes has the ability to stir emotions in all of us and we wanted to ensure that we gave the right support to both young people and leaders which is why reached out to BCCS. Having Claire with us made a huge difference. She was able to support those young people with more complex needs in a way our young leaders cannot. In the past some of those leaders would have been trying to support the young people with these 'big' feelings, but we recognised the importance of having someone with more experience and knowledge to take on this role. Claire was a support to all our leaders and accompanied them throughout the week. We are so thankful to BCCS and Claire for being with us throughout the week, it really did make a difference.

**Claire Bailey, Director of Youth Ministry, Diocese of Brentwood**

# My counselling journey

***Our thanks to this very brave young person who was willing to share the story of their counselling experience with us.***

The idea of having counselling at school was really daunting for me at first. It was offered after mum told the school how I'd been feeling very low for a while, sometimes using self-harming as a way of coping. I'd experienced some bullying when I was younger and during lockdown had felt quite isolated, but it was when my Nan died that I started to really struggle. I didn't always get on with my parents, but Nan was someone I could really talk to, and I just couldn't get used to losing her.

Before starting sessions, I worried about what it would be like, and what it meant about me; was I normal, or was there something wrong with me? I had this idea that it would be dark and silent with this strange adult sitting in judgement on me. From the start my counsellor did everything she could to create a comfortable atmosphere; I remember relaxing immediately when I saw the art resources, games and other things on the table that I could use if I wanted to. I haven't used those things often, but it has helped me at times when I've not been sure how to express things in words.

After the first session I remember feeling quite raw and emotional; I think I was just so used to trying not to think about those difficult things. Having tried to plan what I wanted to talk about, I often found myself saying things I hadn't expected to, and sometimes worried afterwards that perhaps I'd said the wrong thing and that I might get into trouble for it. Gradually I was able to get past this as I realised that my counsellor really did keep our sessions private, and when she needed to report an issue to the school, she involved me and in the end, it helped to help keep me safe.

***Over time I've learned about the relief that comes from saying things out loud, and someone just listening, without judging me. After a session now, I take a deep breath and say to myself: "it's out, it's over, I'm ok".***

One thing I realise has been really helpful may sound a bit surprising. My counsellor doesn't always agree with me! She always listens to my point of view first, but sometimes she'll encourage me to see things from a slightly different perspective. It makes me think about how I've managed certain situations, like if I've argued with someone, and I can see how I could have handled things differently.

I'm taking away some practical ideas from my sessions too – things I do now to help myself feel more grounded when I start to feel panicky about something. My counsellor has also suggested some free apps and websites I can use, safe places where I can find more ideas and support.

I wouldn't say I'm out of the woods yet and do still feel a bit overwhelmed sometimes. But it's been several months since I self-harmed, and it's starting to get easier to talk to people about how I'm feeling, instead of bottling it all up.

For any young people thinking about trying counselling, I would say, just go for it; take a deep breath, and give it a try. It may not always be easy or comfortable, but it can show you that there are things that can help, and although it feels dark now, there is light at the end of the tunnel.

## Child and Family Counselling Service

Parents and carers are able to access direct support for their child by referring them into the safe hands of our CFCS team. Our team consists of highly experienced counsellors, specialist child and adolescent counsellors and play therapists. Our new building provides us with bespoke counselling rooms, each equipped for play therapy, adolescent therapy, parental and family therapy.

We offer support in relation to issues such as: self-harm, identity, anxiety, bullying, bereavement, parental separation and family issues or conflict.

The pathway is overseen by Sarah D'Lima, who is an experienced counsellor herself. Sarah and the team are passionate about and dedicated to the wellbeing of children and young people.

If you are looking for support or know somebody who might benefit from our specialist services, please contact Catherine by email [cmunns@bccs.org.uk](mailto:cmunns@bccs.org.uk).





## A visit from our President, Bishop Alan

As we go to print, we are looking forward to welcoming our President, Bishop Alan to our new home in Billericay where he will perform a Blessing and Opening Ceremony. He will be joined by Bishop Thomas, local clergy, some of our trustees and staff, former directors and benefactors. We look forward to inviting our volunteers, corporate supporters and headteachers to similar 'welcome' events over the coming months and would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone involved in our move from Rayleigh to Billericay.

**Our new home has been made possible by a gift made to us by the Jeanne Marie Gunn Trust and our heartfelt thanks goes to them for making this possible.**



## Christmas Craft and Gift Fair

Our second Craft and Gift fair was a great success in early November with around 40 stallholders taking part selling all manner of homewares and edibles. Despite the very wet day, there was a steady flow of visitors to the Mill Hall in Rayleigh throughout the day and many were pleased to pick up some bargains and early Christmas presents.

We would like to thank our dear friend Malachy who organised this event for us and worked so hard to make it happen, and 'The Two Margarets', our volunteers who helped run our stall for the whole event.

## Tree of Angels

We are delighted to host our online Tree of Angels platform again this year which allows our supporters to light up an angel on a virtual Christmas tree and post a message of remembrance during November or a Christmas greeting during Advent.

Our Tree of Angels can be used as a way of posting a prayer or dedication for a friend or family member to let them know you are thinking of them or to remember someone who has died. Go to our webpage at: <https://www.bccs.org.uk/christmas/tree-angels/>



## Billericay Christmas Market

We look forward to having a stall outside our new premises at the Billericay Christmas Market on Sunday December 6th and hope lots of our local supporters will come along and introduce themselves to us during the course of the day.

## Christmas Cards – selling fast!

Our Christmas cards have been selling fast since the start of October and we are delighted that many of our supporters have decided to order and pay for their cards online at our website.

If you would like to order some of our religious-themed charity cards, please use the Christmas card order form enclosed or go to our website at [www.bccs.org.uk](http://www.bccs.org.uk) and click onto our Christmas tab.

**Please note that Design A Unto Us A Child Is Born and Design B Silent Night are now out of stock.**



## A final word from our Director

Whilst the season of Christmas brings joy to many, it is also a very difficult time for some of our families and children who are struggling with loss, family separation and financial worries.

We want to support our community and realise that not every family can afford the cost of therapy for their child. We will never deprive a child of a service they need due to financial limitations. We need your continued help and as always, your support for our **Advent Appeal** is welcomed.

We wish you and your families a peaceful and happy Christmas and a healthy New Year.

**Bernadette Fisher, BCCS Director**

