

# **Parents' Newsletter, Christmas 2020**

## **Advent Prayer Services**

The weeks leading up to Christmas 2020 have been different this year. That may be an under-statement of epic proportions but it's been that kind of year everywhere. Normally, we would have welcomed Fr. Peter our Chaplain and his priest colleagues into the school in early December for Confessions, and to celebrate Mass with us. Not to be this year though! Instead we had our own Advent Prayer Services with all the junior students in the school, each year group in their turn. We had past pupil Sean Joyce on guitar, leading the beautiful carol singing. All in all, it was a lovely occasion in the school for everybody to relax and enjoy what the true meaning of Christmas is. Thanks to Ms. Byrne, Ms. McLoughney and Ms. Cruise for their great work in organising a memorable event for the students.

## **Retreats**

All of our senior students had their annual retreats this week, held this year in the Town Hall, Claremorris, to facilitate social distancing. The feedback from the various year-groups was very positive. The retreats were given by An Tobar Nua, a group made up of Catholics and other Christians, who help young people become aware of the value of a faith based life. They encourage students of all denominations to pursue an ongoing, trusting relationship with God in their own faith communities. Thanks to Ms. McLoughney for all the organising involved.

## **Christmas decorations in front hall and in classrooms**

The LCA students and the Art students were busy again this year painting and decorating the front hall of the College in early December. The artwork on our windows is simply beautiful and thanks to Ms. Kelly and Ms. Monaghan for overseeing the great work. The Christmas tree and Crib are very welcoming in the foyer and the twinkling lights lend a very festive atmosphere to the entrance hall of the College. Lots of teachers have decorated their classrooms too and it all helps to bring a sense of optimism for us at the end of a difficult year.

## **Foot Golf for Leaving Certs**

Our Leaving Cert students took an opportunity to leave the classroom for a few hours to play Foot Golf on Friday 4<sup>th</sup> December. Leaving Cert year is always a busy one, even in normal circumstances, so it's good to get a chance to relax and what better way to do that than head off to Cross, Co. Mayo to play Foot Golf, an activity that is becoming

more and more popular over the past few years. Thanks to Ms. Cruise, Ms. McGrath and Mr. Brandon for accompanying the lads.

### **Winter Exams**

The Winter Exams took place from 9<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> November this year and results issued to parents/guardians in late November through the VShare platform.

### **Covid-19**

Covid-19 has dominated all our lives throughout the year and of course it did so in the College as well. However, great credit is due to all the students and staff for rolling up the sleeves and getting on with it! We have all become only too familiar with the hand-washing, mask-wearing, social-distancing requirements imposed on us by Government and Health authorities. When we came back to school in September after the protracted break we all wondered how we could adapt to the really difficult situation that faced us. It took great courage and determination on everyone's part to teach and learn in a whole new atmosphere, in a strange new reality for all of us. We are still battling the virus at every level of society but it seems that there may be some light emerging now at the end of a very dark tunnel. The top pharmaceutical companies of the world are giving us hope with the development of vaccines that may finally help us win the battle against Covid-19. Caution and patience are still the bywords, however, and we would encourage everyone to exercise due diligence over the Christmas period. Thanks to everyone in the St. Colman's College community for the sustained efforts to keep the school operating over this past few very difficult months.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> year Play area**

The second-year play area is getting a facelift! The workmen are on-site at the moment erecting new fencing, increasing the size of the hard-surface area and installing basketball facilities. The benefits of all of this work will be there to see right after the Christmas holidays and we look forward to that.

### **Signs at front entrance**

You will have noticed our new signs at the entrance to the College. We are celebrating our 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, having been founded in 1945, and we felt that it was time to update the signs to mark the occasion. The new signs have all our contact details and our website address, in a vibrant red background, along with our emblem of a lighted candle and the caption: 'Mol an Oige', 'Praise the Youth'.

### **Trees on the Avenue**

It was with great sadness that we had to take a decision to remove the trees on the avenue leading to the College buildings. Unfortunately, a number of the trees, as well as many large branches, fell over the past few years and we were growing increasingly

concerned about that. The Health and Safety of every member of our school community must always take precedence over everything else and so the trees were removed. But, fear not! We intend to replace them in the New Year and we have a few ideas in the pipeline in that regard. Watch this space!

### **Pope John Paul II Awards**

Our Transition Year students that have signed up for the Pope John Paul II Awards this year had a trip to Croagh Patrick last week. We were joined by Patricia Gallagher, Diocesan Youth Minister, and past pupil Fr. Shane Costello who celebrated Mass with us in the hallowed surroundings of Murrisk Abbey, at the foot of Croagh Patrick. The TYs are a great group of students and they will earn the Award by doing work over the next year in school, parish and community. Thanks to Ms. Egan for accompanying the students and for her ongoing commitment to the students in St. Colman's College.

### **Transition Year Young St. Vincent de Paul Society**

Well done to the TY students who have done fantastic work over the past number of weeks fundraising for St. Vincent de Paul and generally raising awareness among the students and staff of all the great work being done by SVP in our community. The students presented a cheque for over €1000 to the local SVP Conference of Claremorris this week and those funds will help a lot of people at this time. We are deeply indebted to everyone who supported the various fundraising initiatives and well done to Ms. McLoughney who has been coordinating the SVP projects in the College.

### **Virtual Enrolment for 2020-21**

This year, like many other schools, we replaced our traditional Enrolment evening for incoming first-year students with an online 'virtual' enrolment event. It was very successful and we were delighted with how everything went. Thanks to all the teachers and to Mr. Timoney in particular for a huge amount of work in organising the online event.

### **Closure for holidays**

St. Colman's College will close for the Christmas break on Tuesday, 22<sup>nd</sup> December at 12:10pm. Our 1<sup>st</sup> Years, Tran Years and LCA students get holidays on Friday 18<sup>th</sup> December. 5<sup>th</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Years finish on Monday 21<sup>st</sup> December while 6<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Years finish on Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> December at 12:10pm. The College reopens on Wednesday, 6<sup>th</sup> January 2021 for everyone.

### **VS Mail**

We have introduced a new method of communicating with all our parents/guardians, called VS Mail. You are already familiar with this platform as you have received recent

examination reports through VS Ware. Some weeks ago, we asked you to download the app to your computer/tablet/phone to facilitate better communication between the school and home. Here is the link again in case you missed it: <http://support.vsware.ie/parent-app-overview>

### **Mayo for Sam!**

All of us here in the College would like to send our very best wishes to the Mayo team contesting the Senior All-Ireland final against Dublin this weekend. We are very well represented both on the team itself by Colm Boyle, James McCormack, Darren Coen and Stephen Coen and in the backroom by Conor Finn (Strength and Conditioning coach) and Mark Gallagher (Physio). The Mayo team exudes resilience and determination and we would be so delighted for everyone if we could end the year on a high note in Croke Park.

### **Happy Christmas!**

As we come to the end of the first term of the 2020-21 school year we would like to thank you for your understanding, your patience and your encouragement for your sons during a very difficult time. Keeping spirits up and persevering in the face of adversity has been the challenge for all of us but we continue to do it for our students because they deserve no less than that. We appreciate all you do for them, and for us in the College, so thank you! From all of us here in St. Colman's College we would like to wish you and your families a very Happy Christmas and all God's Blessings for the year ahead.

*Roy Hession*

Principal