

Speculation abounded as to who it might be. All was revealed just over one hour later when Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost appeared on the balcony of St Peter's, having taken the name Leo XIV.

23 children from Scoil Íosa received their First Holy Communion on Saturday, 17th May. Fr. Stephen thanked their teachers, parents and guardians, in addition to all those who decorated the Church and grounds for the occasion. Refreshments were organised by members of the Parish Pastoral Council in the Community Hall after the ceremony. On the previous Thursday evening, Fr. Stephen led a graduation service for the Leaving Certificate class in Ballyhaunis Community School.

PPC Meeting

Fr. Stephen gave an updated report on the Church refurbishment at the meeting of the PPC on the 12th May. All being well, it is hoped that the refurbishment would be completed by the end of June.

The Corpus Christi procession was planned to take place after the Vigil Mass on the 21st June.

Julia Kelly spoke about the National Faith and Light group pilgrimage to Lourdes at Easter. The six-day pilgrimage included six members from Ballyhaunis, along with Fr. Stephen. It was pleasing to witness one of the local group carry the large *Faith and Light* Candle with Fr. Fergal Cunnane, PP, Dunmore, which was lit for the intentions of *Faith and Light* members and their families in Ireland.

June

Fr. Stephen celebrated Mass in the Community School on 4th June for the students about to commence their Leaving and Junior Cert examinations. The Children's Liturgy, meanwhile, took place at the 10am Mass on Sunday 15th. The focus was on the Holy Trinity, marking Trinity Sunday. There was also a special blessing for fathers on Father's Day at the conclusion of the Mass.

The daily Mass returned to the Community Hall in the first week of June as the Church refurbishment continued with the installation of the sound system and automatic doors, in addition to the sanding and varnishing of the floors. The placing of the new carpet on the Sanctuary on the 18th marked the successful completion of the first phase of the refurbishment project.

40th Anniversary of Fr. Stephen's Ordination

Heartiest congratulations are extended to our Parish Priest, Fr. Stephen Farragher on the 40th anniversary of his Ordination to the Priesthood. Fr. Stephen was ordained on June 16th, 1985. To mark the occasion, a special Mass was celebrated in our newly refurbished church on Friday the 20th. In attendance were Fr. Stephen's family members, Archbishop Francis Duffy, fellow priests, friends and parishioners. The homilist for the evening was Fr. Tommie O'Connor, while his brother, Fr. Pat Farragher, Adm., Tuam Cathedral, proclaimed the Gospel. The Parish, Abbey and Le Cárde choirs, under the direction of Martina Kelly, Paula



At Fr Stephen's Celebration of 40 Years of Ordination in July 2025,
L-R: Tom Pollard (brother-in-law), Della Farragher (Sister-in-law) Fr Pat Farragher (brother), Helen O Sullivan (sister) David Farragher (brother), Fr Stephen Farragher, Claire O Sullivan (sister), Ray O Sullivan (brother-in-law)

Donnellan and Ludmila Burcovski, with violinists Moira Delaney and Ita Fahey, provided the music for this memorable evening. At a function afterwards in the Rugby Club, presentations were made to Fr. Stephen by seminarian Wiktor Simeonkowski on behalf of the parish, and by the PPC. Sincere thanks are tendered to Fr. Stephen for his hard work, loyalty, compassion and dedication.

Corpus Christi Procession

The Corpus Christi Procession took place after the Vigil Mass on the 21st June. Fr. Stephen carried the Blessed Sacrament from the Parish Church through the town to the Friary, where it concluded with Benediction. Petals were scattered along the route by the First Holy Communion children with Mike Byrne and Joe Hosty reciting the Rosary and Mike Griffin acting as cross bearer. The MC for the evening was Tommy Caulfield. Fr. Stephen expressed his gratitude to the children who created the artwork outside the Friary; the canopy bearers; PPC members who organised it and to the Gardaí who ensured the smooth movement of the Procession through the town.

Friday the 27th marked the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. A statue of the Sacred Heart was placed at the front of the Sanctuary, marking the final day of the Sacred Heart Novena.

Church Refurbishment

There has been a very positive reaction to the successful completion of the church refurbishment project from parishioners, visitors and from the many who have viewed it online. Fr. Stephen expressed his thanks to Peter Feeney who coordinated the project and Michael Kilcourse for giving his carpentry skills free of charge. Gratitude was expressed to Tadhg Buckley for transporting the Stations of the Cross to Dublin and transporting the statues to and from the workshop of the artist who repaired them and to Irene Nunes and her team of volunteers for having the Church cleaned and ready for the weekend Masses as the refurbishment was continuing; Mary Henry, Ann Phillips and Miriam Judge for the choice of paint scheme for interior and carpet choice for Sanctuary, and Mike Griffin, who had the Community Hall prepared to facilitate the daily Masses. Thanks to all who volunteered their services during this time.



Ballyhaunis Parish Pastoral Council Newsletter

January

Cluster Mass

A large attendance gathered for the 11th annual Cluster Mass hosted by our Parish on New Year's Day. The theme was *Pilgrims of Hope* aligned with the theme for the 2025 Jubilee year as designated by the late Pope Francis. Fr. Stephen was joined in the concelebration of the Mass by Fr. Brendan McGuinness (Bekan), Fr. Richard Gibbons (Knock) and Canon Joe Feeney (Ballinlough). The combined cluster choirs, directed by Martina Kelly and accompanied by Georgina Costello, provided music. John Kelly and Mary Gormley proclaimed the readings, while Audrey Montgomery and her children presented the gifts. Sofia Balbino led the reflection after Communion.

The Vigil Mass on the 11th January marked the resumption of the *Grow in Love* programme for 2nd class children in Scoil Íosa, who would receive their Holy Communion in May. The focus was on Baptism and its significance, while the Scoil Íosa choir provided the music.

PPC Meeting

A meeting of the Parish Pastoral Council took place on Monday the 13th of the month. Fr. Stephen gave a comprehensive update on the imminent Church refurbishment. He explained that the Stations of the Cross and statues would be taken down to allow painting of the church to commence on Monday the 20th followed by 12 weeks of electrical work. As the Church would be closed for the refurbishment, the daily Mass would be held in the Community Hall and live streamed for online viewers from the 15th of January. Weekend Masses and Funeral Masses would continue in the Church.

Fr. Stephen informed all present that a brochure on Funeral ministry with accompanying nominations forms is being prepared.

The November Remembrance Mass received positive feedback. The Remembrance Tree, where the names of the deceased from 2024 were displayed, was a great source of comfort for all those attending, in addition to the crosses displayed in the upper garden which were blessed after the Mass.

The Christmas ceremonies were very well attended. Margie Phillips, Marion Regan and Geraldine O'Dwyer were thanked for their hard work and dedication in ensuring our Church looked so well for the ceremonies.

It was decided that, going forward, the Church will donate a shrub/tree to all children being baptised in Ballyhaunis. Thanks were also expressed to Miriam Judge and Ruth Murphy for making the Children's Liturgy so successful.

Sacramental Preparation

The First Holy Communion preparation continued monthly at the Vigil Mass.

A meeting of parents and guardians was scheduled for the 14th to start preparing the students for the Sacrament of Confirmation, involving four weekly sessions in February. It was agreed that, because of the Church Refurbishment, First Confessions could take place in Scoil Íosa in March.

Faith & Light Fiesta

The Christmas *Faith and Light* Fiesta event was held in Dunmore in December. Over 15 service users from Ballyhaunis attended this joyful event.

Catholic Schools Week

Sunday, 19th of the month heralded the start of Catholic Schools Week. Its theme was *Catholic Schools: Alive in Christ*. The unique contribution that Catholic Schools make to their communities was highlighted.

February

Confirmation Enrolment Mass

February began with the Feasts of St. Brigid, patroness of Ireland, the Presentation of the Lord (Candlemas Day) and St Blaise, with blessings of crosses, candles and throats. St Brigid's Day also coincided the Confirmation Enrolment Mass. The *You Shall be my Witness* preparation programme then got underway the following Wednesday evening in Scoil Íosa, with some parents volunteering to lead the 4-week programme, which was coordinated by Paula Donnellan.

The Children's Liturgy took place on the third Sunday at the 10 o'clock Mass.

Grow in Love

The *Grow in Love* preparation programme for children making their Holy Communion in May, continued at the Vigil Mass on the 22nd, focusing on the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Roof Repairs following Storm Éowyn

Storm Éowyn left a trail of destruction in its wake in January. The roofs of many churches were damaged and the roof of our church was no exception. The damage was right up at the ridge of the upper roof. Photo shows Clint repairing the damage done to the roof from a crane.





The candidates for Confirmation from Scoil Íosa, along with teachers and SNA, following their retreat at Knock Shrine.

PPC Meeting

At a meeting of the PPC on Monday 10th, Fr. Stephen reported that the painting of the church had been completed, and the electrical work had begun. He thanked the painters and the PPC members responsible for choosing the colour scheme. Thanks were also expressed to Pete Feeney for organising the trades personnel and to Eamonn Monaghan, Padraig Murphy and other local tradespeople who were so forthcoming with their advice and support. The Stations of the Cross were sent to Dublin for restoration. An art teacher from Abbeyknockmoy, meanwhile, will carry out the paint work on the statues.

Two of the confessionals are to be removed over a phased period, with the other one being retained. Consideration was also being given to relocating the Cross currently at the rear of the Church. Work would be completed on the floor towards the end of the project, additional lighting would be provided in the choir area, while on the suggestion of council members, it was agreed that cut stone should be added to Our Lady of Lourdes grotto and that smokeless candles would replace the existing ones in order to prevent the accumulation of soot. With the refurbishment works progressing well, the Confirmation ceremony could now take place in our church, rather than in Knock as originally planned.

A recent meeting of the Claremorris Deanery and the Council of Priests discussed the second draft of the leaflet on Funeral Ministry. Fr. Stephen said that, while the training content is important, equally significant is the process of bringing people on board and of ongoing mentoring. The process would begin with nominations, and the nominees would then be invited to attend an information evening. If they are interested, training and mentoring would subsequently be provided.

Julia Kelly gave a comprehensive report on behalf of the *Faith and Light* subgroup on the recent Fiesta held in Clare Court. The theme was *Faith, Hope and Love*.

March

March opened with the Ceremony of Light for the Confirmation candidates on Monday 3rd. On the following evening, the Holy Communion class of Scoil Íosa made their First Confession in our church.

Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday saw a large attendance for the morning mass. The ashes were blessed and distributed at the end of the Mass.

On Saturday 8th, a tree called *Davida Involucrate* was planted in the Church grounds to mark ‘National Tree Week’. This was followed by a series of stimulating talks in the Friary by guest speakers John Anderson and Séamus O’Brien, organised by Margie Phillips.

On the opening Sunday of Lent, five members of our Brazilian community received their First Holy Communion.



Tree Planting for Tree Week in March 2025.
Back l-r: Joan Rogers, Kristin Jameson, Robert Wilson-Wright, John Morley, Orla Phillips, Terry Smith, Audrey Ryan, Laura and Dara Rochford, Margaret Monaghan, Margie Phillips.
Front: John Anderson (Keeper of the Gardens at Windsor Great Park) and Seamus O'Brien (Curator at Kilmacurragh National Botanic Gardens).

Confirmation

On Thursday, 13th March, the Sacrament of Confirmation was administered to 40 candidates by Archbishop Francis Duffy in our Church. The choirs of Scoil Íosa and the Community School joined together to provide the music and singing. Fr. Stephen expressed his gratitude to Archbishop Francis, the parents and guardians, sponsors and teachers through the facilitation of the *You Shall Be My Witness* programme. After the ceremony, refreshments were served in the Community Hall by members of the PPC.



Confirmation Day, March 13th.
L-r: Fionn Finnegan, Irene Nunes, Jonathan Powers, Fr Stephen Farragher, Archbishop Francis Duffy.

Lá Fhéile Pádraig

Lá Fhéile Phádraig, an lá a cheiliúraimid ár gCríostaíocht, ár n-oidhreacht agus ár gcultúr. There was a great turnout at the 10 o'clock Mass on the feast of our national Saint. The Parish and Abbey choirs combined to provide a joyous selection of music and songs, while the readings were proclaimed by Martin Fitzmaurice. D'fhógair an t-Athair Stiopháin an soiscéil as Gaeilge agus choisgrigh sé an tseamróg ag deire an Aifrin Bhí siamsaíocht agus ceol sa halla phobail tar éis an Aifrin.

PPC Meeting

Fr Stephen informed a meeting of the PPC on the 10th March that significant progress had been made on the Church refurbishment project. An alternative to the planned refurbishment of Stations of the Cross had to be found due to existing damage. Fr. Stephen photographed the paintings and with the assistance of Sinéad Mallee, had them digitally enhanced and imaged onto a canvas. They were then reset into the existing frames. The confessional on the right had side of the Church had been removed, and the Crucifix, which was formerly at the rear of the Church, had been relocated in this alcove.

After examining the sound system, an expert had suggested that it be replaced. Council members were unanimous that this was a very worthwhile investment. The question of a suitable carpet selection for the altar was also discussed.

Correspondence was received from Archbishop Francis Duffy in relation to Funeral Ministry. Claremorris and Dunmore Deanery are currently being piloted. A brochure outlining what is involved will be distributed in early April. A nomination form will accompany it, inviting people to submit suitable nominees. An information evening will follow in June, with training scheduled for the Autumn. Upon completion the members will work alongside the priest.

April

Holy Week & Easter:

Palm Sunday Mass, broadcast on Midwest Radio, marked the start of Holy Week. The palms were blessed at the beginning of the Mass with Fr. Stephen being joined in the reading of the Passion by Joan Flanagan and Tommy Caulfield. The music and singing were provided by the Abbey Choir with organist Paula Donnellan.

Gerry Glennon was MC for the Easter Triduum, introducing the various parts of the ceremonies over the three evenings, all of which were broadcast live on Midwest Radio. At the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday, Fr. Stephen washed the feet of 12 volunteers who had cleaned the church every Friday evening during its period of refurbishment. The Parish Choir provided the music and singing, with Orla Phillips doing the readings. The Stations of the Cross were held in the Friary on Good Friday, with Anne Durkan as the narrator and Fr. Stephen reading the reflections. Later that evening, at the celebration of the Lord's Passion, Paula Donnellan and Martin Fitzmaurice joined Fr. Stephen in the reading of the Lord's Passion with Áibhe Donnellan and Katie Conlon proclaiming the prayers of intercession. This was followed by the Veneration of the Cross.



Easter Vigil, Baby Cúan Ó Ráighne's Baptism.

At the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday, the Abbey Choir members were in full voice. Fr. Stephen lit the Paschal Candle, with the readings being proclaimed by Mary Donnelly, Marie Jordan, Emer Gallagher and Tommy Caulfield. The gifts were brought to the altar by Anne Carney, Frances Mulhern and Breege Halpin. Fr. Stephen baptised three babies – Emma Catherine Lyons of Leow; Matej Barcanec of Tooreen and Cúan Ó Ráighne of Loughrea. At the conclusion of the ceremony, a wide variety of Easter food, prepared by our Eastern European community, was blessed.

On Easter Sunday, the 10am Mass was broadcast on Midwest Radio. The resurrection of Jesus was depicted by the beautiful tableau at the base of the altar. The reading was proclaimed by Willie Ryan with the Parish Choir. After the Mass, a get-together of parishioners and those home for Easter, held under the auspices of the Parish Pastoral Council, took place in the Community Hall. Kaitlyn Clarke, meanwhile, was the soloist for the 12 o'clock Mass, with Mike Byrne doing the readings.

Fr. Stephen thanked all who had helped to organise and who participated in the Easter Ceremonies. He had a special word of gratitude to the following: Gerry Glennon of Midwest Radio, electrical contractor Kieran Jennings and his team for completing the works in time for the Easter ceremonies; to Irene Nunes and all who volunteered each Friday evening during the refurbishment to have the Church ready for the weekend Masses; those who prepared the Community Hall for the weekday Masses during the Church refurbishment works, and to the Community School students who filled the Easter Holy Water bottles.

Passing of Pope Francis

Early on Easter Monday morning, Catholics around the world learned of the passing of Pope Francis. There was a sense of shock, as on the previous day his Holiness appeared on the balcony of St. Peter's to wish all present a happy Easter. The Pontiff was a person of humility and warmth, who eschewed the trappings of wealth and lived in a modest apartment in the Vatican. He was a champion of the marginalised, the poor and homeless. He was also the initiator of the synodal pathway which invited lay people to engage in dialogue about the future of the Church.

May

Pope Leo XIV

Just after 5 o'clock on Thursday, May 8th, white smoke was billowing from the chimney of the Sistine Chapel signifying that a new Pope had been elected.