



Let's Pray: March 2022

How can we pray well as we head into this new month?



Do you celebrate Saint Patrick's Day?

Saint Patrick's story is one clouded in misconceptions, misunderstanding and stereotypes. Contrary to popular belief, Patrick did not drive all the snakes out of Ireland. He certainly didn't dress in the emerald and shamrock-laden costumes that fill some streets during parades or celebrations. The Patron Saint of Ireland wasn't actually Irish.

As a teenager, Patrick was taken away from his family, who lived in Roman Britain, to Ireland where he was sold into slavery. After six years, he escaped and made his way home. Believing that his experience had been in God's hands, Patrick devoted the rest of his life to learning about and serving God. It was while training for ministry that he felt God calling him back to Ireland to share his faith. He built churches and grew communities of Christians across the island.

According to Shane Claiborne and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove in their book *Common Prayer*, when Patrick wasn't out and about sharing the good news of Jesus, he "spent time praying in his favourite places of solitude and retreat."¹



Saint Patrick's Breastplate is a prayer or 'lorica' attributed to Saint Patrick. It's a prayer of protection, the latter part of which contains a repeated invocation for Jesus to be present. You can read this section of the prayer in full at the end of this resource, but there are five lines in particular that I hope can guide our prayers this month for care-experienced children and young people, the families who care for them and the communities who surround them with encouragement and support.

**Christ with me,
Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ on my right,
Christ on my left.**

These words remind me of Jesus' promise to always be with us as our ever-present friend. They illustrate to me that Jesus' presence can look different as it surrounds us from every angle. They bring to mind individuals and groups who reflect the love and friendship of Jesus in a variety of ways. And as I think of the work of Home for Good, these words draw me to consider those who walk with children, young people and families.



Christ before me...

I think of those who walk ahead; who clear the way, shining a light on the path, making those following in their footsteps aware of the obstacles and giving direction as they navigate their way around. I think of experienced carers and parents who are a few steps ahead on the journey and who share their wisdom, understanding and reflections with those who are newer to caring for children. I think too of the community leaders, campaigners and politicians who urge change within the systems and structures that hold care-experienced children and their families.



Christ behind me...

I think of those who follow behind, who cheer and encourage. I don't know if there are any parkrun participants out there reading this – there's lots about parkrun that I think we can learn from when it comes to practicing community, but by far my favourite thing about the Saturday morning running event is the deliberate deployment of a 'tailwalker'. The tailwalker is a volunteer who stays at the very back of the crowd for the duration of the run, so if you take part, you can be confident that no matter how fast or slow you go, you will never finish last.

So, I think of the tailwalkers; those who follow behind, who notice when things are starting to feel a little heavy, who are there even when it feels like everyone else is rushing past at a much faster pace, and who bring affirmation that you can do this.



Christ on my right...

I think of those who walk alongside; the friends and family members who do life together, who are present for both the highs and lows. I think of those who, in really practical ways, provide what is needed in the here-and-now – cooking a meal, helping with the school run, taking on a load of laundry. I think of those who listen, those who can be leant on, those who understand and those who pray.



Christ on my left...

I think too of the professionals who journey with children and young people; the teachers, the classroom assistants, the social workers, those who care for their health and wellbeing. Some are in a child's life for a brief moment, others for long periods, but each has the potential to make a difference.

This month, let's thank Jesus for his presence with us – before us, behind us, alongside us – and for those who model his presence and love.

Points for Prayer

Home for Good is a UK charity, with a network that reaches from the top of Scotland to the South Coast of England; from Wales across the sea to Northern Ireland. We would love for you to join us this month in praying for children, young people, families and church communities in every corner of the United Kingdom. Take some time to pray for each of the following areas:



Scotland

There are around 10,895 children in care in Scotland. Approximately 44% of children in care live with a foster family, and there are around 3,620 approved foster care households in Scotland. 41% of children in care live with kinship carers.²

North East and Yorkshire

In 2021 there were around 15,000 children in care in the region. 1,290 children experienced three or more moves last year.³



North West

The number of children in care across the North West region has risen by one third since 2012, with over 15,000 children currently in care.⁴

Northern Ireland

The number of children in care in Northern Ireland has risen by 41% in the last ten years. 31% of children in care have been in the care system for five years or longer. 41% of children in care are aged 12 or older.⁵





Central and East of England

Almost 8,000 children entered the care system in 2021, bringing the number of children in care in the region to more than 24,000. ⁶

Wales

Wales has the highest rate of children looked after away from home in the UK. There are around 7,263 children in care in Wales. Last year, 27% of children in care were placed outside of their home local authority, and a further 6% were placed outside of Wales. ⁷



South West

Last year, there were around 6,270 children and young people in care, and 2,795 approved foster homes in the South West. ⁹

London and South East

In 2021 there were more than 20,000 children in care in London and the South East. 22% of children and young people in the South East were placed more than 20 miles from their homes last year. ⁸



Each of these children and young people are precious, unique individuals. Each of them, and every parent, carer and professional involved in their lives, are seen, loved and surrounded by the presence of Jesus.



Saint Patrick's Breastplate

The beautiful thing about prayer is that there's no one 'right' way to pray. Our intimate communication with the Father can be expressed in words, in song, in pictures, in silence and in so many other ways.

The practice of reciting liturgical and written prayers is one that spans generations and denominations. To participate in a prayer that has already been prayed before you, that is at present being prayed all over the world, and that will be prayed by the voices and minds of the future, is to enter into communion not just with God but with the Church. Praying words that have already been written allows for the expression of what's in our hearts but that we can't always find the words for. To practice the repetition of a particular prayer or set of prayers is to build rhythms and habits, allowing the words to weave themselves into our own thoughts, desires, attitudes and actions.

Whether this type of prayer is something you are used to and familiar with, or it's totally new, we invite you to join with us in praying Saint Patrick's Breastplate this month. You may want to carve out some time in your day or week to do so; you may find it encouraging to pray the same words a few times over the course of the month. You can pray these words for yourself, or bring to mind someone you'd like to pray for – perhaps a child, a young person or a family you know or have been thinking of – and replace the word 'me' with their name.

As you do so, know that you are praying words that have been prayed by followers of Jesus for hundreds of years to the God who throughout that time has remained the same. How exciting and beautiful it is to think of the many voices within our Home for Good network, reaching across the UK and beyond, uniting in one prayer.

**Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when I arise,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.**