

FROM THIS WEEK'S SCOTTISH CATHOLIC OBSERVER

Don't let them be lonely this Christmas

■ Visit those who are alone over the festive period and help tackle the epidemic of loneliness, bishop says

By Amanda Connelly

BISHOP John Keenan of Paisley has encouraged people to visit those who are alone over the festive period, as 'awful' figures show 60,000 elderly people in Scotland will spend Christmas Day alone this year.

The bishop urged people to make even a small gesture of goodwill to neighbours in order to fight the statistics, which has seen an alarming 50 per cent leap from 2015.

"Even if you just popped round with a wee box of choos to your neighbour who's alone on Christmas Day," he said. "It might be all it takes to make their Christmas and get this awful figure down."

Epidemic of loneliness

The Age Scotland figures highlighted that around 60,000 people over the age of 65 will have no one to spend Christmas Day with — an increase of 20,000 in the 'epidemic of loneliness' since 2015.

The new report comes after the charity began its 'No one should have no one' campaign, which will draw attention to levels of isolation across the nation.

Approximately 80,000 people over the age of 65 reported feeling most lonely at Christmas than at other times in the year, and those who are widowed proving to be most at risk of feeling this way.

The same number of people said they saw the television as their only company, while 1 in 5 kept it on all day as it's 'lovely to hear human voices.'

Christian response

Other Christian groups are aiming to make Christmas less lonely for people across the UK, as Premier Christian Radio begin their annual campaign of creating a 'Christmas Alone Map'.

Individuals are invited to host a Christmas Day event for their local community or register any Christmas Day events that they know of to be added to the map.

Premier has also produced a downloadable Christmas Pack with all the information, questions and details needed to plan an event.

"Christmas should be one of the happiest times of the year for everyone; yet for millions of peo-

ple across the UK it can be the gloomiest," Premier said online of the campaign. "While most people are occupied amidst the festivities of the day with their families and friends, some people experience Christmas as one of the most loneliest times as businesses around the country shut their shops, leaving them with no place to go."

It was also revealed that almost 1 in 10 older people spend half or more of their days over Christmas by themselves, not receiving any calls

or visits from family or friends, while health secretary Shona Robison said loneliness is one of the main issues impacting on public health in Scotland, with research suggesting it can be as bad for you as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, be worse than obesity, can impact physical and mental health, result in long-term unhappiness, and contribute to health issues such as heart problems, mental illnesses and dementia.

"The epidemic of loneliness among older peo-

ple is having a devastating impact on their health and wellbeing," Chief Executive of Age Scotland, Brian Sloan, said. "While most of us are looking forward to seeing family and friends, it's sobering to think that 60,000 older Scots will have only their television for company. Many more will go for days without even a phone call."

Age Scotland's study spoke to 2,585 adults over 65 across the UK and was weighted to be representative of all OAPs in Scotland.

