

**Love *Madonna*? *–* Share it with others**

By Fr Andrew Hamilton SJ

**2020 has not been a kind year to magazines. Shrinking subscriptions, the closure of news agents and other places that stocked them, and financial pressures associated with the coronavirus have led many to disappear. They include such titles as *Elle* and *Harpers Bazaar.***

**Catholic print magazines have experienced the same pressures. Among those imperilled is *Madonna* magazine published by Jesuit Publications. It has recently begun a program to seek new subscriptions and donations.**

**First published in 1897, *Madonna* magazine it is one of the longest surviving Catholic magazines. It has had an important part in Catholic life. Its initial publication was a sign of hope for the Catholic community as it suffered in the Great Depression of the 1890s. Jesuits Fr John Ryan, a visionary planner and canny administrator, and Fr Michael Watson, a gifted writer and speaker, saw in it a complement to the widespread parish Sodalities of Our Lady. It helped people to pray and deepen their faith by providing attractive material for prayer and reflection that touched their daily lives. Each edition included short stories, poems, advice about the ordinary challenges of family life, suggestions about cooking, sewing and raising families.**

**It also provided news about the wider Church, and particularly about Ireland which was still the spiritual home for many Catholics. It covered, too, the public issues of the day that bore on Catholics, particularly on the right to Catholic schooling. Because it saw its readers not as isolated individuals but as members of the Madonna community, it was conversational in its style.**

**Through all the changes in Catholic life, including two World Wars and another Great Depression, it has continued to form a community for Catholics who wanted to centre their lives on faith. After the Second Vatican Council, especially when Fr Henry Wilkins was editor it had a major role in introducing people to the changes brought about by the Council. Fr Wilkins’ column in which he entered into conversation with *Madonna* readers about the changes in the church was as wise, lively and quirky as he was. For his calling card he used a memorial card on which only the date of his death remained uncompleted.**

**More recently, *Madonna* magazine under the editorship of Patrick O’Sullivan, Andrew Bullen and Christopher Gleeson, has continued to share stories of Catholic life in a fast-changing world. Its first website page attracted a huge audience that mistakenly identified it with another Madonna more celebrated in popular culture. It attracts good writing on the place of women in the church, care for the environment, the gift of Indigenous spiritualities to the Church, and faith in a secular world.**

**The centre of *Madonn*a has remained its reflections on prayer, both in its articles and especially in its prayer notes based on the daily Mass readings. These reflections are written by members of the wider *Madonna* community.**

**At a time when the Catholic Church needs to build communities centred on prayer *Madonna* magazine remains a precious resource. You can help by donating or buying a subscription for yourself a friend or for a prisoner through the Catholic Prison Ministry. More details at** [**madonnamagazine.com.au**](https://www.madonnamagazine.com.au/)