

# The Irish Catholic

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## 78% back Church role in schools

Chai Brady

The voices of the silent majority of parents who want to send their child to a local parish school must be heard in the ongoing debate on education, the head of a group representing Catholic schools has insisted.

This comes following revelations that 78% of people support the Church having a role in continuing to shape and influence school ethos, according to a new survey entitled *Articulating a new positioning for Catholic education in Ireland*.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, General Secretary of the CPSMA Séamus Mulconry insisted that there are an "awful lot" of people who want Catholic schools, and if Ireland aims to be pluralist then their voices must be respected.

On the issue of parishes handing schools over to different patron bodies where there is no longer sufficient demand for Catholic schools, he insisted that while this is an issue for school patrons this will happen and that "there are a cohort of people out there who do want divestment, but I also think there are an awful lot of people who want to keep the Church in education and to keep their local school Catholic and I think it's about time their voices were heard as well."

"We are all committed and would all like to see a pluralist education system which is determined by the desires of parents but I think we do need to listen to those who want to keep their local Catholic schools as well," he said.

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### 'A Naomh Bríd, Muire na nGael – gui orainn...'



Siblings Cillian (8) and Aoife (4) Murphy from Newport, Co. Mayo, use hand-cut rushes from their home farm to put together DIY packs aimed at keeping the tradition alive. The packs include the rushes, a blessing and instructions on how to make a St Brigid's Cross.

## Ukrainian Catholic community lifted by Irish support

Jason Osborne

The Ukrainian Catholic community in Ireland have been taking "enormous" solace in the concern shown by Irish people about the widely-reported threat Russia poses their country, Fr Vasyl Kornitsky, chaplain to the Ukrainian community has said.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Fr Kornitsky expressed gratitude for "how supportive, how caring the Irish community has been".

"Every single day people come up to me, and because they know that I'm from Ukraine, they offer their prayers," Fr Kornitsky said.

"It's constant and it's every day. It's extremely important for me and for other Ukrainians living in Ireland to have that huge support."

He said that in the face of a renewed Russian troop build-up on the borders, "to have that spiritual connection with our brethren in Ukraine is very important for us here in Ireland".

Helen Vysotska a Dublin-based member of the Ukrainian Catholic community said that she also experienced the feeling of solidarity. "After every single Mass we have a prayer for Ukraine, so we always kneel and

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Living for the sake of the world

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# We have never been more connected, and yet we've never felt so alone

**M**any people are now returning to the workplace as Covid-19 restrictions lift further – journalists like me have been in the office throughout – and many people are wondering what overall effect the pandemic will have on the world of work. Certainly, for some, a form of 'blended work' seems to be part of the picture. People extol the virtues of this, and certainly it would be hard to argue with people who had been used to commuting for three or four hours every day to their office.

I'm not sure how much thought has been given to the downsides of peoples' worlds becoming smaller and smaller. I heard a commentator on the radio on Monday talking about how, even with restrictions largely gone, she prefers to have a drink with her friends over Zoom on a Friday night because it is cheaper and easier. Another person marvelled at how easy it is to do exercise classes remotely now rather than having to go to the gym. The feeling seemed to be overwhelmingly positive, without any thought or care given to the fact that – for example – by 'attending' exercise classes at home, one no longer meets anyone at the gym.

And yet, even before the pandemic introduced us to terms like 'social distancing', loneliness was already

becoming the defining condition of the 21st Century. What, if anything, can our parishes and faith communities do about this? Already, 'Mass from home' and 'blended worship' have become habits that will become difficult to break.

### Isolation

A recently-published book on the issue of isolation makes for frightening reading. *The Lonely Century: A Call to Reconnect* by Noreena Hertz paints a gloomy picture where the fabric of community is unravelling and our personal relationships are under threat. Decades of neo-liberal policies that placed self-interest above the collective good.

Mass migration to the cities and big towns, a huge phenomenon in Ireland, has only compounded the situation.

The research says that this is not merely a mental health crisis. Loneliness increases the risk of heart disease, cancer and dementia. Statistically, it's as bad for our health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. According to Ms Hertz, it's also an economic crisis, costing billions annually, and a political crisis, with feelings of margin-

## Editor's Comment Michael Kelly



alisation fuelling divisiveness and extremism around the world.

What struck me most about the research was the thought that if only there was a ready-made community that people could join and feel accepted, a sense of friendship and fulfilment. What if this ready-made community existed all over the world, in every corner of the globe, and in every suburb of our big towns and cities as well as the smallest villages?

**“The research says that this is not merely a mental health crisis”**

What if our parish communities could play a vital role in helping to ease the epidemic of loneliness?

In Britain, even before the pandemic one in five people said they felt lonely always or often. Now, according to new research from British Red Cross, a third of people there say they've found it difficult to reconnect with friends and family during the pandemic. Over a third (35%) say they feel less connected to their com-

munity than they did before. And a quarter say Covid-19 has left them feeling more isolated.

A parish with a genuine sense of community strikes me as a very good starting-point to address this urgent need. Already I can hear many priests groaning at the thought of just one more thing to be added to their 'to do' list. But, isn't this precisely the sort of thing that lay Catholics in parishes should be taking a lead on? How welcoming are our parishes really to newcomers to the area? Do we too often view those of us who attend Mass as 'the parish' and everyone else people who just happen to live within the boundaries? The permanent diaconate is a ministry that has gathered phenomenal pace in most Irish dioceses in recent years. Isn't there a useful role for deacons in helping to curb the loneliness that is acutely felt by so many people in our society?

Society and politics can't really help, but if the essence of being a parish is being a community of faith we are failing to be *koinonia* unless this is central to our concerns.

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## 'About time' for silent majority in favour of Catholic schools to be heard

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The survey also found that 79% of parents were either satisfied or very satisfied with the school their child was attending.

Mr Mulconry said that the survey proves that "there is a very high level of satisfaction with local Catholic schools and I would attribute that to the quality and the commitment of the people who work

in our schools, who lead them and who support them.

"It's part of a strange dichotomy where people are often very critical of the institutional Church but when you ask them about their local church and their local parish priest or the local religious they know and are familiar with, their attitudes are very different and I think it's a reflection of that. But I think it is a reflection of the

contribution that priests are making to schools locally as well," he said.

Asked about school choice, 72% of parents felt they had a choice of schools to pick from and sent their child to one of their choice. There were 24% who stated that they sent their child to the only school available in the area, while 4% did not get their first preference for their chosen school.

Some 500 parents were included in the survey commissioned by the CPSMA,

the Catholic Education Partnership (CEP), and the Association of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools (AMCSS), and conducted by external consulting firm Genesis.

In a report following the survey, Genesis stated: "It is clear that Irish parents prize highly the holistic development of their children. Parents cited a focus on respect, community, and faith formation as the three leading advantages of Catholic schools."

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## TheIrishSpirit.com goes live

Staff reporter

A new Irish-based digital magazine has launched pledging to exemplify the spirit of the Irish past and present. TheIrishSpirit.com is aimed at both those who continue to live in Ireland, and those who have moved abroad but remain Irish at heart.

The Irish Spirit Magazine is home to an extensive collection of feature stories, interviews, history, heritage, news, views, reviews, recipes, events, trivia, humour and tidbits from

across all Celtic Nations and beyond.

The young team behind the project say they hope to bring their own flavour to the magazine and condense all things Irish in one available space, setting it apart from the run-of-the-mill tourist-oriented websites and scattered blogs that currently litter the digital space.

As well as the website, social media channels on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter aim to inform and engage millions of Irish from all walks of life each week.

# Psychotherapist warns 'doomsday' news cycle is harming anxious adolescents

**Jason Osborne**

The relentlessness of 24 hour news cycles has created a sense of panic among young people, psychotherapist and author of *Fragile*, Stella O'Malley has said.

Ms O'Malley said this has been particularly acute in the reportage of the climate crisis, the Covid pandemic, and more recently the Russian-Ukrainian crisis.

This comes following a major report into south Kerry CAMHS last week, which revealed that a large number of children had been prescribed excessive and harmful medication.

Ms O'Malley said that if you've got a child "who is anxious by nature, and that could be for lots of different reasons" and "inflict that child with an awful lot of doomsday scenarios", it's not good for them.

"I think we forget just how much it [the climate crisis] was in the news and what a big deal it was before Covid arrived," Ms O'Malley said.

"Then Covid arrived and it took over the newspapers and we all collectively just put aside our climate crisis fears and we moved into Covid and it feels like it's happening again now with this 'world war three' line."

Ms O'Malley said it feels as though there's a "collective hysteria" around news cycles, which is the result of a "if it bleeds, it leads" concept.

"There is a concept that the more alarmist it is, the more our brains are drawn towards it. It's not good for us," she said.

## Diagnosing

Ms O'Malley said she believes rather than overmedicalising and overdiagnosing children, which is "creeping in" to Ireland from America, "I think what we're looking for is sustainable, long-term improvements in these children's lives, who are very vulnerable and very distressed".

"I think the families need more support to enact the kind of behaviour management that's often recommended by people like myself: therapists. I think too often what might happen is the parents might bring the child somewhere and somebody might, like a doctor, and they might be offered a behavioural management programme, but it's frankly

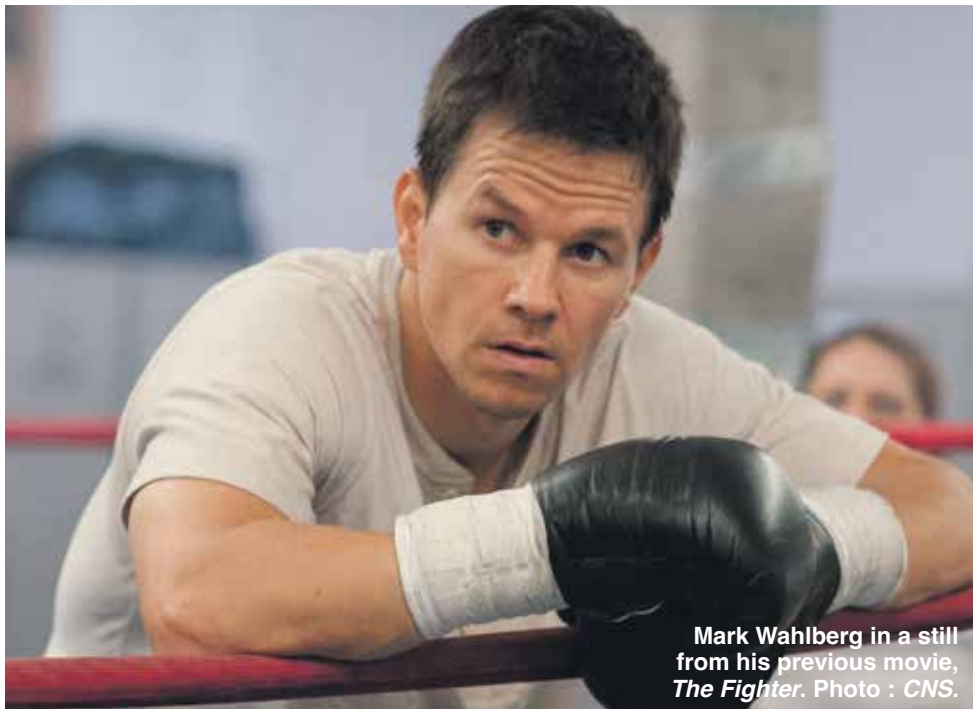
too difficult to carry out," she said.

"It's very, very difficult, so they might say different things that the parents need to do and it's incredibly difficult. It doesn't properly get carried out, and as a result, the parents move along the road into medication because that's the only option.

She said everybody would be "much better off" if the

family were supported and helped so that they could carry out this behavioural management, which "might be with mentors or buddies or some sort of family support system where the child is regularly meeting somebody who'd help them carry out the behavioural management, so it's not all up to the parents because it's too hard".

## Mark Wahlberg to play boxer turned priest Father Stu Long



Mark Wahlberg in a still from his previous movie, *The Fighter*. Photo: CNS.

**Brandon Scott**

Father Stuart Long, who was a priest of the Diocese of Helena, Montana, is set to be the main character in a motion picture starring Mark Wahlberg as the priest himself, with Mel Gibson playing the priest's father. The film is set to release April 15, 2022, Good Friday.

Father Stu, as he was affectionately known, pursued careers in boxing, acting, teaching, and museum management before discerning the priesthood.

While the thrust of the movie and plot details remain unknown, Wahlberg has been trying to get the movie in production for a number of years.

Speaking in 2016, he said of Fr Stu:

"He was a very tough guy who was a fighter, a football player... anything but a spiritual guy. He found his calling, and decided, after falling in love with a woman, that he wanted to become a priest.

"He suffered from this horrible muscular degenerative disease but was still ordained as a priest and passed away, but not before he was able to inspire thousands upon thousands of people."



Mark Wahlberg as Fr Stu. Photo: IMDb.

## Renowned Irish Dominican fears synodal overfocus on organisation and management

**Staff reporter**

Prominent theologian and author Rev. Dr Vivian Boland OP has warned that the synodal process the Church is embarking upon may focus too much on "organisation and management".

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper Dr Boland said it would be useful for the synodal process to consider the entirety of the Church rather than solely the hierarchy of bishops.

"I have a fear it [the synodal process] might become focused on organisation and management, but there's also the intellectual life of the community and the theological life of the community and the spiritual life of the community and the life of prayer and charity and faith," he said.

It's important to "allow those levels to inform the process as well".

Speaking about his new book, *The Spirit of Catholi-*

*cism*, Dr Boland described it as a "retreat" and a reminder of the "treasure" the Church carries "in earthen vessels".

"I mean, you're not just talking about the organisation of a golf club or a political party," he said.

"If you think of the other associations that people are involved in, obviously this is a very particular one and the characteristics that go with it need to be understood and respected..." See pages 16-17



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- Blaise Pascal

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# Pope's 'historic' Belfast address hailed

Chai Brady

A close confidant of the Pope has revealed how he felt touched by the ability of the Pontiff to reach across the sectarian divide in the North.

Austen Ivereigh, who has co-authored a book with Francis as well as being acknowledged as one of the Argentine Pope's most

authoritative biographers, said his recent experience in Belfast had confirmed Francis' contention that Christians must work to emphasise what unites rather than divides them.

Dr Ivereigh persuaded the Pope to record a message for the Belfast-based ecumenical Four Corners Festival which was shown in the Church of Ireland St Ann's Cathedral on

Sunday night in which the Pontiff encouraged mutual understanding as the route to an authentic shared future.

"It felt historic. I hadn't quite appreciated when I asked the Pope for the message just what a big impact it would have being played in the iconic Protestant cathedral of Belfast and just what a breakthrough that was.

"I was very touched by

how people coming up to me who were Church of Ireland, or Presbyterians, or Catholics all saying the same about Pope Francis - that he's just this extraordinary figure for them, he's an inspiration for them and they feel very blessed that he sent his message.

"They felt very touched at just that basic human, emotional, warm reaction

to the Pope. In other words, they see him as 'theirs' to an extent," Dr Ivereigh said.

Dr Ivereigh told *The Irish Catholic*: "I think unquestionably the North has become a laboratory for peace-making and reconciliation, just the people I met over the week-end: the tremendous experience they have of it, the many years that so many people have invested in that

relationship...I think that gives everybody great cause for hope".

In his address, Dr Ivereigh told the congregation that the Pope believes that disagreements should not be feared, but used to build understanding. The problem comes, he said, when those differences are instrumentalised and used to create division.

## Archbishop Farrell welcomes new SVD priests to 'mission territory' Ireland

Jason Osborne

The Society of the Divine Word (SVD) welcomed Saturday new Frs Clement Kwabena Narcher, Joseph Mensah and Liwei Huang, with Archbishop Farrell exhorting the men to go forward "so that the Gospel may reach the ends of the earth".

Speaking at the ordination in Mountview parish, Archbishop Farrell said the new Fathers have been "availing of the rich and varied opportunities presented to you in Ghana, China and Ireland, in St Patrick's College, Maynooth".

Their service in the parishes of Leixlip, Jobstown and Knock, he said, will



Frs Clement Kwabena Narcher, Joseph Mensah and Liwei Huang stand with Archbishop of Dublin Dermot Farrell following their ordination on Saturday.

help them to be "shaped in response to the special needs of the Church".

Referring to SVD St Joseph Freinademetz, who spoke about the importance of "Gospel inculturation", Archbishop Farrell said that inculturation applies to Ireland, which was declared "mission territory" by the Divine Word

Missionaries over twenty years ago.

"Be inspired and assisted by the example and encouragement of your founders," he said.

"Many people said that Arnold Janssens was not the right man for the job, or that the times were not right for such a project. Arnold's

answer was, "The Lord challenges our faith to do something new precisely when so many things are collapsing in the Church."

"We need to be brave in reimagining our Church so that it will continue to inspire and support a living faith in a secularised society," Archbishop Farrell said.

## Ukrainian Catholic community lifted by Irish support

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we say the prayer together as a diaspora, as a community, as the body of Christ".

Similarly, Svitlana Falenda of the same community said the threat of war is affecting every area of life in Ukraine, and that the community she's found here in Ireland is vitally important.

"It's really helpful because a lot of people in the Church are from my region, the same area I came from. We can really support each other," she said.

Fr Kornitsky said: "It's important for us to gather here in Ireland outside of Ukraine because some people feel far from their families, but when we come together and pray as a family here in Ireland that makes a huge difference on people's emotional and psychological well-being in the times of difficulty."

Pope Francis has urged Catholics around the world to join in praying for Ukraine.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Return of NI prison visits welcomed by chaplain

The return of in-person prison visits for family in Northern Ireland has been welcomed as "excellent" by Fr Stephen McBrearty.

Lead Coordinating Catholic Chaplain for all three prisons in Northern Ireland, Fr McBrearty said "there's nothing like having personal visits".

Visits for family members were temporarily suspended after Christmas in response to the Omicron variant. However, Fr McBrearty also welcomed the increased use of technologies such as Zoom and Skype.

"People have the offer of visits, but they still have the same offer of having Zoom visits as well now," he said.

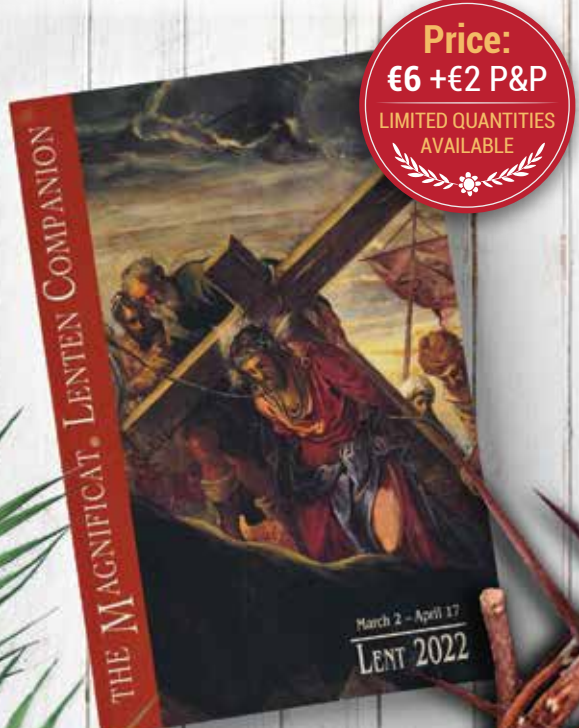
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## ACN praises Catholics under fire in Myanmar

Staff reporter

Aid to the Church in Need's recent call for prayer for Myanmar was in recognition of the "extraordinarily dangerous" situation the Faithful find themselves in there, Director of ACN Ireland, Michael Kinsella told *The Irish Catholic*.

The pontifical foundation invited Catholics on January 27 to observe a day of prayer on February 1 the day in 2021 when the armed forces seized power in Myanmar.

"Really it's a call for prayer for all the

priests and religious and catechists in the extraordinarily dangerous pastoral conditions in which they're working," Mr Kinsella told this paper.

"They're literally delivering and saving and serving the Faith under fire as we speak. In serving that Faith under fire, they keep the fire of Faith lit."

According to the advocacy group Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, almost 1,500 people have been killed in the crackdown and nearly 12,000 arrested as of January 28.

## James Joyce – a genius, but not a very nice man

There has been so much focus on James Joyce's *Ulysses* – published on February 2, 1922 – that some readers and viewers of public media complain they're being "force fed" Joyce's famous oeuvre. And some find the depictions of masturbation, to say the least, unedifying.

Well, *Ulysses* certainly was almost universally regarded as a 'dirty book' when it first came out – the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice spent a decade prosecuting it.

The universal embrace in which it is now held is a measure of a century's change, I daresay. And the book, taken as a whole, certainly is a work of genius – it invented a new way of transmitting the jumble of thoughts that go on in the human head, dubbed the 'stream of consciousness'.

It's worth reading, but parts of it are also worth skipping!

Joyce was a genius, but he wasn't a very nice man – it's often the way with geniuses. He was a cadger of drinks, and his children were deprived of stability because, for Jim Joyce, his writing came first. His son and daughter are reported to have moved schools 19 times: his daughter Lucia, who had a schizophrenic illness, cannot have benefited from this, and the poor girl spent much of her adult life in a psychiatric unit in Northamptonshire.

The critic Gabriel Fallon, who knew Joyce personally, told me that JJ was distressed, and puzzled, about Lucia's illness, and especially disturbed by the way her shattered mind focused on sexual obsessions. Fallon thought this tragically ironic.

It is said of Joyce that he



Mary Kenny



A 1934 portrait of James Joyce by Jacques-Émile Blanche

ceased being a Catholic, but never ceased being a Jesuit boy. His absolute dedication to his work is even ascribed to his Jesuit training – the 'AMDG' he wrote on his schoolboy copybook was, Joycean commentators have claimed, transferred to the greater glory of his art, pursued with the zealous commitment associated with the Jesuit tradition.

It's reported that Joyce was once asked if, having rebuffed the Catholic Church, he might like to become a Protestant, to which he replied – (ecumenists – look away now!) – "I said I had lost my faith – not my reason!"

After Joyce died, his wife Nora Barnacle, quietly returned to Catholic practice.

It's right that Ireland should recognise, and claim, James Joyce, the genius – although, let's be honest about this: some of the hullaballo is basically national merchandising. James Joyce is a 'brand' and flogging the brand enhances the source. Not to mention the literary industry it has prompted.

Not that Joyce would have objected. Unlike Yeats, who abhorred commercialism with snobbish disdain, Joyce's writing is full of commercial allusions, and the daily pursuit of making – or chasing – a buck.

### Irish links to Lourdes

The author Colm Keane, who has recently died aged 70, wrote many interesting works on spiritual themes, but his book on Lourdes *The Village of Bernadette: The Irish Connection* (written with Una O'Hagan, his wife) is a terrific history of Ireland's link with Lourdes going back to the 1870s.

The Irish pilgrims to

Lourdes have included the playwright Brendan Behan, in a picaresque journey from Paris, and the poet Seamus Heaney, who was a *brancardier* – a stretcher-bearer, at Lourdes as a young man. The Fianna Fáil politician, P.J. Little, a long-time Minister for Posts and Telegraphs, served so diligently at Lourdes that he was decorated by the

French authorities.

Lourdes has attracted some fine histories, including Patrick Marnham's comprehensive *A Modern Pilgrimage*, and the Jewish historian Ruth Harris's sympathetic *Lourdes: Body and Spirit in a Secular Age*, but Colm Keane, with his co-author, provide a unique record of the Irish perspective.

● A distressing statistic: 27 children and young people in State care in Ireland, or known to the social services, died last year. Natural causes, suicide, suspected drug overdose, and suspected homicide were among the reasons.

It's easy to blame Tusla, just as it was easy to blame religious institutions for past failures. But the management of problematic family issues are often complex and multifactorial. When the State is *in loco parentis* it can fail in its responsibility of care, just as families, or other institutions, have done

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# Supreme court ruling on homeschooling upholds constitutional rights of parents

Chai Brady

A Supreme Court ruling dismissing an appeal by the Minister for Education against two homeschooled students excluded from the Leaving Cert calculated grades scheme has been welcomed by home-schooling parents.

Wicklow-based Jaclyn Ascough, who has spent more than 20 years home-schooling her seven children – three of which she still teaches – said the ruling was an “affirmation”.

“I’m not at all surprised

at the ruling. The right for parents to be the primary educators of their children is upheld in the Constitution, I can’t imagine it going any other way,” Mrs Ascough said.

## Leaving Cert exams

Due to the pandemic, the Government decided not to hold traditional Leaving Cert exams but teacher assessed calculated grades in May 2020. The scheme did not include homeschooled pupils, two of which appealed the decision.

Mrs Ascough said: “I think a lot is misunderstood about homeschooling. People

homeschool for all different reasons – very few parents would be flat out anti-school. We were very motivated by the fact we had this lovely connection and dynamic in the home, we didn’t want to forfeit that.”

“There are countries in the EU that make homeschooling incredibly difficult or flat out illegal, that’s what is shocking,” she said, “Who should have primary decision-making powers over the education of their children other than the parents? Unless the parents have done something to lose their authority over their children, they should

have the authority.”

Four of her children have graduated or are currently in college, while three are still in school.

For another homeschooling mother and barrister Maria Steen described the ruling as “a good decision for homeschooling students and their parents”.

Mrs Steen said: “The Supreme Court has restated the wide-ranging freedom of parents to educate their children as they see fit, having regard to their right and duty to do so under the Constitution. So long as they provide the minimum education

envisaged by the Constitution, parents have very broad scope when it comes to determining what and how their children should learn, though the court held that this does not mean that the State has to provide for or facilitate examinations in whatever obscure subject a student and his parents might choose to study.”

## Educational and job prospects

She added that in the circumstances of the particular case however, “the court held

that the students’ educational and job prospects had been adversely affected by the Department of Education’s refusal to admit them to the calculated grades scheme, or make similar arrangement for them, and that the department’s decision affected the students’ constitutionally protected freedoms. It gives confidence to parents to know that the courts will uphold their constitutional rights and those of their children in this most important area of education”

# Pope Francis key to improving Irish-Vatican relations, says expert

Ruadhán Jones

Pope Francis’ leadership has been key to improving diplomatic relations between Ireland and the Holy See, an expert in Vatican diplomacy claims.

Victor Gaetan told *The Irish Catholic* that, according to sources in Rome, it was “the Irish Government’s willingness to work with Pope Francis that inspired it to re-open its embassy in 2014”.

Mr Gaetan, author of the book *God’s*

*Diplomats*, added that concerns for the environment and human rights have been “precious common ground” between the two states.

Irish-Holy See diplomatic relations were tense following the reports on the Church’s handling of abuse, Mr Gaetan said, but “Francis had jumped that wall”.

“Had Pope Benedict XVI continued in office, the tension between the Irish Government and the Holy See over how the Church handled its history of clerical sexual abuse would probably still char-

acterise the Ireland-Vatican bilateral relationship,” Mr Gaetan said.

In 2011, the Holy See recalled the Vatican ambassador after comments from then Taoiseach Enda Kenny. Later that year, Ireland closed its embassy in the Holy See, in what was then interpreted in Vatican circles as a snub by Ireland.

The embassy reopened in 2014, and has had two ambassadors since then, including current ambassador Derek Hannon.

# Key NI census date announced for autumn

Staff reporter

The North’s Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) this week announced the timeframe for a phased release of data from the census held across the region last year.

The agency said that the first results on raw population statistics will be published by June, with further Census 2021 results published in stages until summer 2023.

The key data on religion and the background commu-

nity people identify with will not be published until the Autumn. This data is amongst the most keenly-anticipated since it gives the most authoritative breakdown on religious demographics in the region. The breakdown is used by many observers as a rough guide to the unionist-nationalist split in the North.

Unlike in the Republic where a census is only held very ten years, the North holds one every five years in tandem with England, Scotland and Wales.

## Time to give thanks...



On Thursday January 27 representatives from all the primary and secondary schools in Newbridge Parish, Co. Kildare gathered for 10am Mass in Cill Mhuire Church where they were then presented with a token of appreciation for the work they do by Fr Ruairí O’Domhnaill, parish priest.

# “A legacy of *incredible* humanitarian significance”

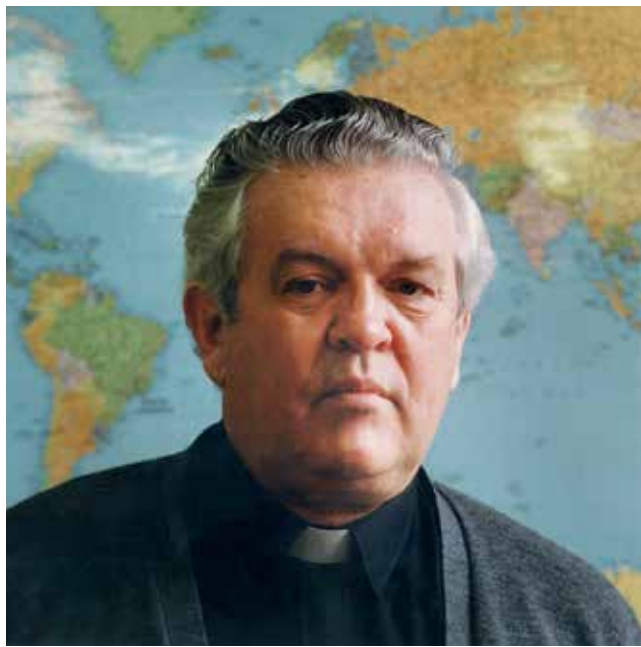


Photo: Concern Worldwide.

Fr. Aengus Finucane.

The Irish Catholic looks at a rich and varied life lived in the service of others and of God.

**F**r. Finucane was ordained as a Holy Ghost Priest in 1958. In his first assignment in Uli, Nigeria, Fr. Finucane found himself involved in the bitter civil war between Nigeria and Biafra.

Following Biafra's attempt to secede, this widespread conflict had displaced millions. What's more, there was a blockade of food, medicine and basic necessities by the Nigerian authorities.

*At the height of the crisis in the summer of 1968, it was estimated 6,000 children died every week.*

## An Irish effort

In response to the Biafrans' terrible plight, Concern Worldwide – originally called Africa Concern – was founded and began raising awareness and funds to help those suffering.

On 6th September 1968, the 600 tonne, Columille set sail for Sao Tome – a Portuguese island close to West Africa. The cost of chartering the ship and its vital cargo of powdered food and medicines was all paid for with donations from the people of Ireland.

To circumvent the blockade, the supplies were then flown from Sao Tome to Biafra overnight. The following day in Uli, Fr. Finucane was among the Holy Ghost priests who would help distribute the life saving supplies.

With his commitment and

that of the Irish public and priests, this operation grew into one flight a day for 11 months.

Fr. Finucane was deeply committed to helping the poorest of the poor. So after leaving Biafra, in 1972 he became Concern's Field Director in Bangladesh after its war of independence from Pakistan – the war had left millions in desperate need of food.

The period after Fr. Finucane's time in Bangladesh was particularly testing. In Thailand's Kampuchea refugee camps he saw the desperation of Cambodians who had fled the Khmer Rouge's genocide.

And in Uganda the horror of HIV in Kampala, where even in the best hospitals one third of the children born were HIV positive.

Fr. Finucane worked tirelessly to alleviate suffering, and recognised his responsibility to help the poor and underprivileged.

Concern appointed Fr. Finucane as its Chief Executive in 1981.

During his 16 years as the head of the charity he was 'on the ground' during many of the world's worst disasters. These included the 1983-1985 famine in Ethiopia and the Rwandan genocide in 1994.

Relinquishing his post in 1997, Fr. Finucane became Honorary President of Concern Worldwide US. He held this post until his death on 6th October 2009.

## Fr. Finucane's legacy

Fr. Finucane is the cornerstone behind much of what Concern has become today. It was he who expanded its aid work into 11 countries and dramatically increased its fundraising.

Tom Arnold - Concern's CEO from 2001 to 2013 - says:

*“There can be few Irish people of his generation, or of any other generation, who have contributed as much to improving the lives of so much of humanity.*

*“He inspired a whole generation of Concern overseas volunteers.”*

Fr. Finucane continues to inspire as his legacy still influences Concern 12 years after his death.

**“Do as much as you can, as well as you can, for as many as you can, for as long as you can.”**  
– Fr. Aengus Finucane

In 2020 Concern worked in 23 countries, responding to 78 different emergencies, helping 36.9 million of the world's poorest and most vulnerable people.

Concern's vision, mission and work continues to strive to end extreme poverty, whatever it takes. The charity believes that no-one should live in fear of not having enough food.

## The devastation of climate change

Today one of the primary causes of acute food insecurity are weather extremes.

Climate change is increasing hunger levels and pushing even more people to the brink of famine. With multiple famines predicted, there are currently 41 million people teetering on the edge of starvation.

Extreme weather caused by climate change is having a devastating effect on the most vulnerable people in the world's poorest countries.

And these calamitous weather conditions are now more frequent and varied. No sooner has one disaster struck than another arrives. People don't have enough food for months, sometimes years on end.

In Malawi droughts, floods and strong weather patterns are a regular occurrence – placing huge stress

on land and crop production resulting in food shortages and hunger.

These weather extremes affect an already vulnerable population where 80% source their livelihoods from the land, 71% live below the poverty line and an estimated 20% are living in extreme poverty.

People like Yona Lambiki and his family.

Yona, a farmer, lives in Nkhambaza village with his wife and five children. He was always able to support his family with the crops and food he grew providing them with a healthy balanced diet. Any excess was sold, with some of the money used to pay for his children's schooling. But two years ago everything changed ...



Photo: Kieran McConville / Concern Worldwide.

Crops destroyed by Cyclone Idai.

In March 2019 Cyclone Idai caused devastating floods and loss of life in Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. The floods completely destroyed crops just weeks away from harvest – food people were relying on for survival.

Although his house wasn't affected, like thousands of others, the crops Yona was about to harvest were completely washed away. There was nothing for his family to eat, let alone any to sell.

## Help for now and the future

But thanks to Concern's generous donors and Yona's hard work he is now able to look after his family again.

Yona immediately received a vital cash transfer from Concern. With this he bought food and other basic necessities his family needed to be safe and free from hunger.

Yona received seeds including maize, tomatoes, beans, three bundles of sweet potato vines and other vegetables to grow so he could, once again, support his family. He also received, fertilizer and a hoe to help him grow his crops. As well as five goats for milk and manure.



Photo: Jason Kennedy / Concern Worldwide.

**“I would really love to meet everyone that is behind this support so I could thank them in person.”** – Yona Lambiki

Like other families in his community, Yona planted the seeds he received in his home garden. What they harvest is used to feed their families, any excess is sold to improve their livelihoods.

But Concern do far more than simply give communities plants, seeds and tools. They provide training in Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) to ensure long term, inter-generational support.

providing support for years – possibly decades – to come.

On speaking about the people who support Concern and make our work possible, he said, *“I'm so very happy with the support I have received from Concern. My life and family's life is healthy and can afford everything we could not afford before. I'm so happy and thankful to Concern.”*

## Will Fr. Finucane inspire you too?

There's a way you, just like Fr. Finucane, can leave the world a better place. And help improve the lives of families like Yona's both now and for future generations.

How? By leaving Concern a gift in your Will.

When you leave a gift, your legacy lives on - helping for years to come.

*“I know that this is a very personal decision. But I assure you, gifts in Wills have had a phenomenal impact in reducing extreme poverty, hunger and suffering around the world. Today, as the catastrophic combination of conflict, climate change and COVID-19 have plunged so many people into the grip of crisis, your gift will help us to be there in their time of need.”*

– Dominic MacSorley, CEO, Concern Worldwide

Gifts in Wills are a vital source of funding for Concern.

Your legacy will help families like Yona's reverse the many struggles caused by Climate Change ...

... will provide the tools and knowledge they need to not just survive but help themselves – a gift from you they can pass down for generations.

To find out more about how a legacy gives a safe, secure future, please request your complimentary copy of 'A World Without Hunger' – Concern's legacy booklet.

You'll learn of others who desperately needed help, and how legacies from people just like you have done so much.

There are also answers to common questions people ask about leaving a gift in their Will. And explains how to get started.

Requesting your free booklet does not oblige you to do anything else.

To receive your free, no obligation booklet – in complete confidence – please contact Concern's Legacy Manager, Siobhán O'Connor. Call **01 417 8020**, email **siobhan.oconnor@concern.net**, or write to 52-55 Lower Camden Street, Dublin 2



## Michael Kelly

The View



# When the HSE is involved, no-one is ever responsible

It was revealed on Monday that the Director of Public Prosecutions will not be pressing ahead with charges against those responsible for the care of 'Grace'.

The disabled woman known as Grace – not her real name – was placed in a foster home for 20 years in the south-east, even though there were allegations of sexual abuse there.

A Commission of Investigation into her foster abuse case in 2021, found the intellectually-disabled woman was placed in the care of foster parents, despite them both having criminal convictions.

### Neglected

Grace was neglected to a point where she suffered repeated injuries to her body, required "significant dental work" and instances of inappropriate stripping went unreported.

The Garda investigation into the matter began four years ago following a tip-off from a whistle-blower, however now it has been confirmed that the DPP will not be pressing charges against those responsible for decisions relating to her care.

This is despite the fact that gardaí made recommendations that prosecutions be brought forward in relation to negligence and endangerment.

A decision was reached in 1996 to remove Grace from her foster home on account of the sexual abuse concerns – but the health board committee then moved to overturn that decision and as a result, she remained in the foster home for a further 13 years.

### Awarded

Grace was quite rightly awarded a settlement of €6.3m in 2017 as a result



of her treatment in State care. Though, obviously, no amount of money can atone for the misery that was inflicted upon her and could

have been stopped earlier by the same State that was duty bound to ensure she came to no harm.

It's a depressingly familiar pattern: a whistle-blower comes forward, alleges serious negligence and mis-management by officials of the HSE. Government ministers are shocked and appalled by the case. Senior management in the HSE come out to express surprise at the revelations, pledge investigations and insist that people will be held to account. But, time and again, when the State is failing the most vulnerable of citizens – no-one seems to be responsible. Sometimes we get vague assurances that there were 'systemic' failings (are the decisions made by computers?) or that 'lessons have been learned'.

**“A decision was reached in 1996 to remove Grace from her foster home on account of the sexual abuse concerns”**

Back in 2010, we had the notorious Roscommon 'house of horrors' case where children were horrendously abused over an extended period in their own homes while 'known to the HSE'. Being 'known', in social work terms, means that concerns have been raised. The review found that social workers repeatedly visited the family home and found the children in

various states of distress and neglect. Yet, their plight continued for years as officials dithered over what to do. Eventually the children were removed with the courts saying they had suffered significant life-long damage.

Cue an "unreserved and unequivocal" apology from the HSE and – again – pained insinuations that lessons had indeed been learned.

Yet again, none of the officials – who evidently failed the children in their decision-making – were held to account.

Just before Christmas, we had the long-awaited 'Brandon Report' which found that staff and management at St Joseph's Hospital in Stranorlar were fully aware that one resident – given the pseudonym Brandon – sexually abused 18 other residents over a period of 13 years.

It states that Brandon was able to identify particularly vulnerable residents before pursuing them relentlessly.

It found that management were aware of the sexually inappropriate behaviour by Brandon and the strategy to deal with it was to move him around various wards – ultimately giving him access to other vulnerable patients, many of whom became new victims (familiar?).

### Incidents

It notes that staff felt 'powerless' as they regularly reported incidents to HSE management "in the expectation that something would change, which it never did".

HSE Chief Executive Paul Reid in December said: "The report does outline an appalling set of failings in care at the HSE-run residential and day service for adults with intellectual disabilities in the northwest," he said.

### “Shocking”

He said the events have had "shocking consequences for many people".

"The facts are very clear," he said. "Vulnerable people were sexually abused in our care."

He went on, quite rightly, to point out that thousands of HSE staff "give great service, care and compassion" to patients around the country every day.

No-one doubts this, nor the selfless commitment of so many staff. But what about those shown to have failed? Where is the accountability? It cannot always be 'systems' that let people down. Someone in the HSE must be responsible for making decisions and when they make decisions that fail people in such a dramatic way there should be accountability.

**“It found that management were aware of the sexually inappropriate behaviour by Brandon and the strategy to deal with it was to move him around various wards”**

What of the thousands of families who entrust their loved ones to the care system on a daily basis in the understanding that they will be looked after and not abused? Don't they deserve to know that when things go wrong, someone will be held to account?

There are many other instances, too numerous to list here, of the same familiar pattern of no accountability. We now hear calls for an inquiry to investigate how the HSE handled the Covid-19 pandemic. At one level, it is an inquiry that I support. But, at another level, I can't help but ask 'why bother?' – it's not that anyone will be held to account for any failings revealed.

## The Irish Catholic

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# 'Shadow of secrecy' still hangs over North

Staff reporter

Primate of All-Ireland Archbishop Eamon Martin has used the 50th anniversary of the unlawful killing of 14 unarmed Catholics by the British army to criticise the fact that no one has ever been prosecuted. "Very painfully, the Bloody Sunday families were denied for too long the truth about what happened to their loved ones. And sadly they are not alone. A legacy of heartbreak, and with it, a dark shadow of secrecy, still hangs over much of our troubled past," Archbishop Martin said.

Speaking at Mass in St Eugene's Cathedral in Derry, the archbishop said: "Many families from right across our communities still endure the anguish of not knowing why, or how their loved ones were killed or injured or punished or targeted or disappeared or defamed or locked up, or interned or otherwise banished. Their unanswered questions linger on, as a constant

nagging reminder to the next generation of unfinished business, of a grief that is unsatisfied with silence, a pain that does not go away but lies beneath, an unhealed wound that is passed on to the next generation. It is difficult for them to move on."

On Bloody Sunday – January 30, 1972 – the Parachute Regiment, an elite branch of the British army, shot dead 13 people; another died later from his injuries. Those killed were participating in a civil rights protest calling for fairness for Catholics in the allocation of public housing, employment and education. The army immediately claimed that the people killed were terrorists, a claim always disputed by clergy members who participated in the demonstration and journalists who witnessed the event.

It took until 2010 for the British government to apologise and admit that the people were innocent and the killings "unjustified and unjustifiable".



Women and children carry crosses during the ceremony to mark the 50th anniversary of Bloody Sunday. Photo: CNS

## Tribute for popular author Colm Keane

Peter Costello, Books Editor

The popular author and publisher Colm Keane has died after a cancer diagnosis. Over recent decades he created some 29 books, many of which were highly successful.

He touched an enormous number of people through the books he and his wife Una O'Hagan, published through the small publishing firm they founded and ran themselves.

In an era of negation these carried a positive, life enhancing tone. His achievement has lessons for other creatives in the area of religion and spirituality.

The books came out of the personal experiences of themselves and others. Colm Keane brought to the realm of writing and publishing the techniques of television and radio: individual voices talking about themselves, their feelings and thoughts were the essence of it.

His latest book, out last September, which he wrote with his wife, was reviewed in these pages in the issue of October 7, 2021. In my review I noted the making of what they write "accessible, vivid and immediate to a wide audience". I should add here that Colm's knack as a communicator came as much from his own personality and character. He gave both pleasure and peace of mind to many.

## Senator calls for withdrawal of abortion review appointee

Jason Osborne

Senator Rónán Mullen has suggested that the abortion review chair appointee should "honourably withdraw".

This comes in light of the appointee, Ms Marie O'Shea's, past social media activity which shows a preference for the repeal of the 8th Amendment, and the legalisation of

abortion in the State.

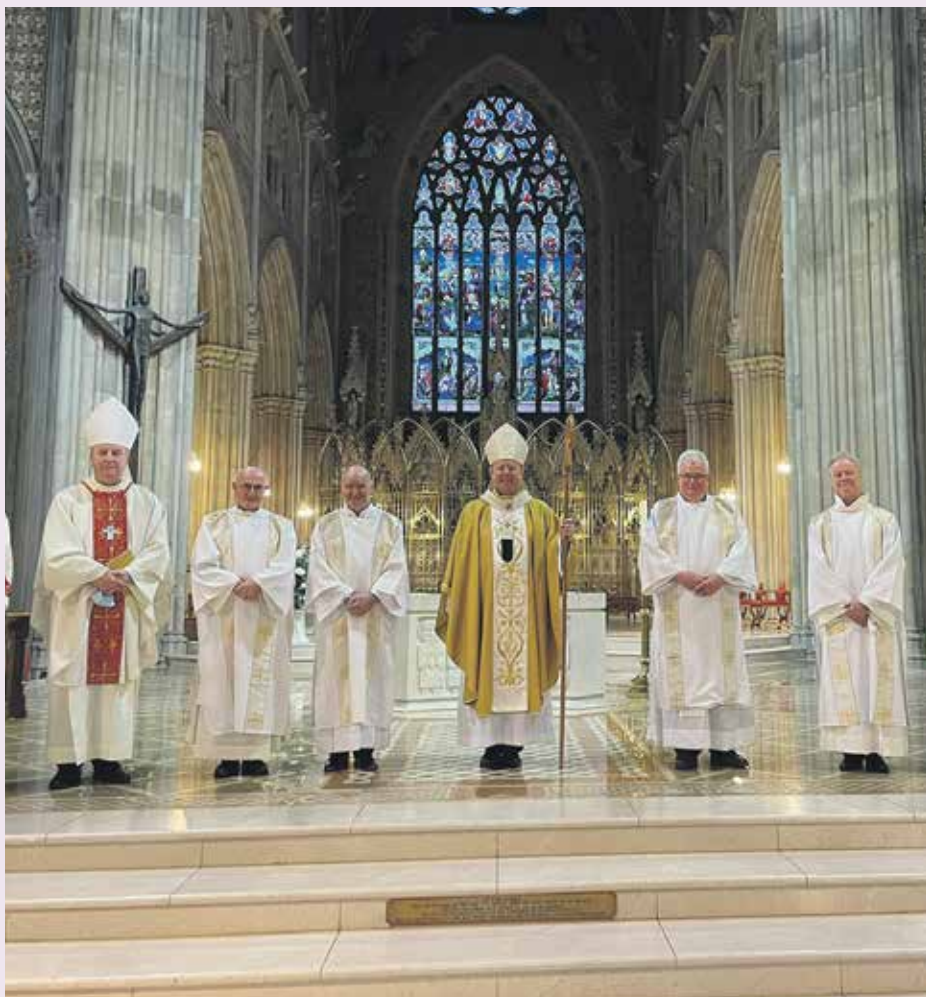
Examples included "retweeting a post in favour of repeal, including the hashtag of the repeal campaign, at the time of the referendum," and "joining in an online conversation criticising 'illegal' No campaign posters on the N11 during the abortion referendum campaign."

Ms O'Shea's tweets also

disagreed with Pope Francis' intervention on abortion, and supported former president Mary McAleese's criticism of the Church on the topic.

Senator Mullen previously contended that the Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly should have tendered openly for the role, and that the minister should address the matter in the Seanad.

### Sent out to serve...



Five men were ordained permanent deacons by Archbishop Eamon Martin in St Patrick's Cathedral for service in the Archdiocese of Armagh and also in the Diocese of Dromore, on January 30. The five men include: Eunan McCreesh, George Kingsnorth and Pat Butterly from Armagh and Brendan McAllister and Gerry McBrien from Dromore.

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  - Return taxi transfers to Mount Tabor

# Coming together to celebrate St Brigid in Armagh



Pupils from St Patrick's Grammar School Armagh joined parishioners in making St Brigid's Crosses as part of Catholic Schools Week, which ran from January 23-30 and focused on the theme, 'Catholic Schools: Living Life to the Full.'



# Synod: Faithful must focus on gifts they can offer the Church



**Deacon Frank Browne asks: Is the decline in priestly vocations a wakeup call to take the synodal pathway seriously?**

I have fond memories of student life in Clonliffe College, the Dublin Diocesan seminary in the early 1980s.

There was hardly a vacant room with over 100 students. Most of my class were just out of school. Enthusiastic 18-year-olds, with a strong personal faith and a desire to help others. Many of us had limited life experience, but we matured within the seminary, forming friendships, understanding our faith better and getting an experience of pastoral work by undertaking home visitations with the Society of St Vincent De Paul, working with adults with disabilities and even playing soccer against the juveniles in St Patrick's detention centre.

However, Clonliffe closed its gates to students in 1999 and the college and grounds were sold to the Gaelic Athletic Association in 2020.

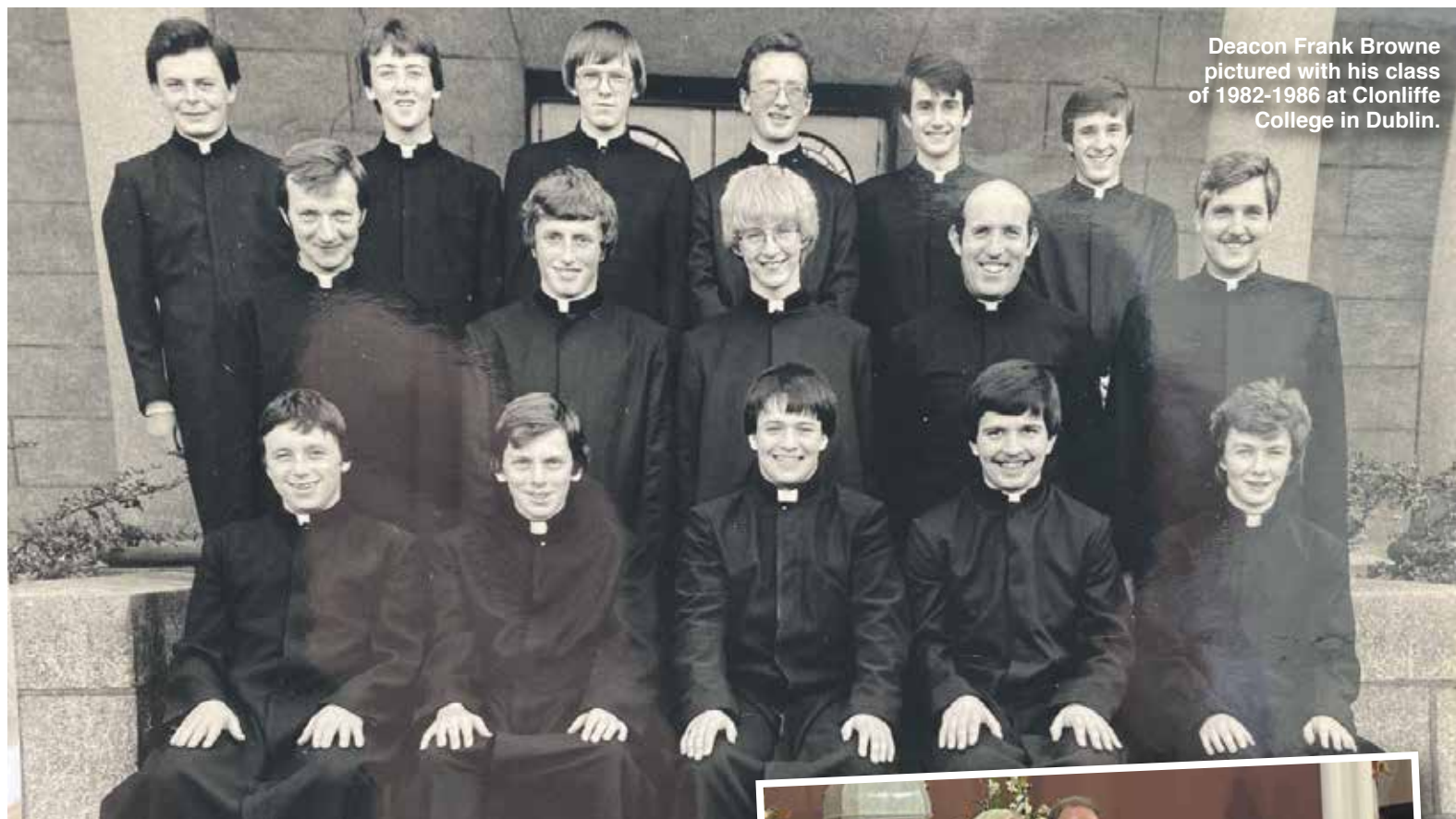
**“Some of us may be fearful of change, others cynical that no real meaningful change will occur and perhaps many uninterested”**

The Catholic Church in Ireland, in responding to Pope Francis's call, has begun the first phase of what is referred to as the synodal pathway and every parish is preparing to facilitate a listening exercise with parishioners and anyone on the margins of faith.

The process will ultimately culminate in a General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, in October 2023, which will be followed by the implementation phase that may see significant changes, in the life and mission of our Church.

Some of us may be fearful of change, others cynical that no real meaningful change will occur and perhaps many uninterested.

Pope Francis and our own bishops are passionately arguing that this



Deacon Frank Browne pictured with his class of 1982-1986 at Clonliffe College in Dublin.

synodal process, is an opportunity for people of faith to come together, to listen, share and pray together for the Spirit to guide the future direction of our Church. They do not want a debating event, that polarises people or that alienates those on the margins further. In a way, it is inviting people like my seminary classmates of 1982, to consider what God may be calling them to do.

Perhaps at 18 and just out of school, taking a leap of faith is easier with fewer commitments at that stage in life. Having a demanding job, a mortgage and family commitments can militate against anyone giving time to parish ministry and becoming actively involved in the synodal pathway. However, it is important that we do participate if our parish churches are to remain thriving parish communities rather than museum-like infrastructures.

## Seminaries

Perhaps the empty seminaries in Ireland are not just the result of the secularisation of Ireland, the past sexual scandals or even the loss of religious practice but are also a sign that we were not listening to the Spirit.

While I enjoyed my years in Clonliffe College, I was unhappy with a potential life of celibacy and questioned my vocation. But being open to the Spirit, I fulfilled my vocational calling many years later in 2020, when I was ordained as a permanent deacon. As both a married man with a family and a deacon, I can bring my life experience to ministry in a different but complementary way to my parish priest.

Today there are more vocations to the diaconate than the priesthood.

There is more lay ministry within parishes, such as regarding sacramental preparation, and funeral ministry. Parish pastoral workers have brought lay men and women of faith, and with a thorough theological understanding, to support the faith development across the age-ranges within our parishes.

**“Priests officially retire at 75, which means that by 2026, there will be approximately 173 active clergy to serve Dublin's 1.1 million Catholics”**

Change is never easy, particularly for those of us who are older and comfortable with the traditional teachings of our Church and the practice of our faith.

But an openness to change is important, with a willingness to listen to others and reflect upon our faith, if we are to have a faith that can make sense of life with all its challenges. As we know from the Archdiocese of Dublin's 'Building Hope Task Force 2021' the reality for the diocese is that almost half of the 312 priests are over 70 years old, with just two students preparing for priesthood. Priests officially retire at 75, which means that by 2026, there will be approximately 173 active clergy to serve Dublin's 1.1 million Catholics.

Whatever the merits of various solutions such as married priests or women deacons to fill the void, the synodal pathway is not about debating this now, but rather what each one



Deacon Frank Browne with his family.

of us is called to do, and what gifts do we have to contribute to our Church, because we are the Church.

## Future

The future of our Church will ultimately be in the hands of our young people. The synodal pathway must reach out to include, in whatever way possible their voices. The young adults that I meet, may not practice their faith in the traditional way, by attending Mass weekly, and they have no fear of God, but they have an openness to discussing spiritual matters.

They value the Church at times of bereavement, they respect many of our more recognisable religious, who have dedicated their lives to the most vulnerable. But they lack a real understanding of the Catholic Faith and why the Church teaches what it does. Rather than initially, emphasising the traditional doctrines and teachings of the Church, creating a space for a dialogue might be more productive. Inviting young people to consider the humanity of Jesus, and what we know about his

life and subsequent influence on his followers, might excite curiosity and encourage them to consider that Jesus has relevance today. If young adults can form a faith relationship with Jesus, everything else in terms of faith development, and becoming part of a parish community, has the potential to fall into place.

Finally, I hope that during our synodal pathway journey, we can shift our instinct away from operating within our minds, to getting in touch with our emotions. Surely, it is when we take time to reflect from our heart, that we can create a space for that Spirit to influence us, and to whisper a vocational call for our future relationship with God. In the words of Pope Francis “let us journey together, in order to experience a Church that receives and lives this gift of unity, and is open to the voice of the Spirit”.

Frank Browne is a deacon in Ballyroan Parish in Rathfarnham, Dublin.

# Awareness of God and of sin

## The Sunday Gospel

Fr Silvester O'Flynn OFM Cap.



**T**he days are lengthening, daffodils are here and there is encouraging news about control of the Covid-19 pandemic. Is there any possibility that the virus of sin might be stamped out? Sadly, following the news any night, the evidence is depressing.

The readings at Mass today are about two people, Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1-8) and Simon Peter (Luke 5:1-11), who became aware of their shortcomings when they were granted a glimpse of the holiness and power of God. Isaiah's instant reaction was a sense of his unworthiness. "What a wretched state I am in! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips and my eyes have looked at the King, the Lord of hosts." But an angel touched his lips with a live coal and told him that his sin was taken away. And then he agreed to become God's messenger.

When Simon Peter, an experienced fisherman, saw the miraculous catch of fish, he and his companions felt humiliated like Isaiah. He fell at the feet of Jesus saying, "Leave me Lord; I am a sinful man." Jesus told them not to be afraid. They too would become God's messengers. Instead of leaving Jesus, they left everything to follow him. It was awareness of their sinfulness that drew them closer to God.

## The Good News is sin

About 70 years ago, G.K. Chesterton was a great apologist for Christian values. He liked to shock his readers with startling, paradoxical sayings. In his book on St Francis, he asks a question, "what is the Good News?" In one word he answered, "Sin!" What on earth did he mean? It makes you think. We all know that there is something seriously wrong in our sick world of daily murders, constant wars, appalling injustice in the gap between rich and poor nations. Now, imagine if you felt really unwell, so you go to your doctor. The last thing you want to hear is that the doctor is unsure, so you are sent to a specialist who sends you on to another specialist. It is good news when your own GP makes a confident diagnosis

and assures you that this prescription will make you well again.

Chesterton diagnosed sin as the root cause of the problems in our world and that the cure is what St Paul says in today's second reading. "I taught you what I had been taught myself, namely that Christ died for our sins". Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection conquered sin and death. He goes on to say, "I hardly deserve the name apostle; but by God's grace that is what I am, and the grace he gave me has not been fruitless." The risen Lord came through closed doors to the terrified apostles. He breathed on them, saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven." And that is when the Sacrament of Reconciliation was instituted.

## The loss of sin

It must be 70 years or more since Pope Pius XII said that the greatest sin of our time is the lack of the sense of sin. In more recent times, Pope Benedict XVI said that when the sense of sin is gone it is like a bell ringing to call people to church in a valley where nobody lives.

**“Is there any possibility that the virus of sin might be stamped out? Sadly, following the news any night, the evidence is depressing”**

Sin is a problem today. Rather, the fundamental problem is that sin is not a problem for the majority of people. Cynics point the finger at what they call 'Catholic guilt'. Undoubtedly, there were preachers and severe confessors who created a guilt complex for people. But the fact remains that when somebody does wrong, then guilt is the proper response.

I heard a wise man say that if you want to know about sin, don't ask a sinner. Ask a saint. One of the psalms says that sin speaks to the sinner in the depth of his heart but the sinner knows not his sin. Genuinely holy people have glimpsed the gap between the holiness of God and us. We read of saints who would weep for their sinfulness even though they were not committing what we ordinary folk might call sin. St Francis of Assisi wept because love is not loved. In the light of a



St Francis of Assisi wept "because love is not loved".

more intimate experience of God, it is deeper to say "I am a sinner" than to say "I have sinned". The focus of attention is more on who I am than on what I have done or failed to do. That is the sense of sin.

## The sinner's return

The wonderful parable of the prodigal son tells the story of the awakening of a young man to his sinfulness. The turning point is when he came to his senses as he remembered his father's house where everyone was so well treated. He makes three decisions: I will leave this place; I will go to my father; I will say, "Father I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son." Just like Simon Peter and Isaiah he felt he was not worthy to belong to the fam-

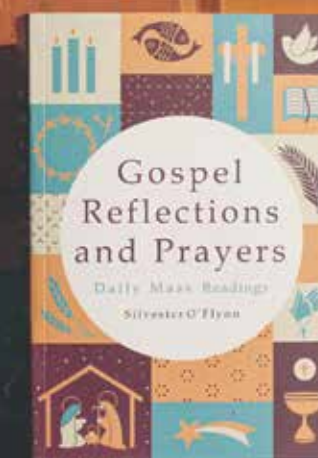
ily. But belonging to God's family is not something depending on our worthiness. It comes from the love and mercy of God.

The parable then focuses of the father. Here is one of the most important revelations of what God is like. The father ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him. That hug of God is the best description of the grace of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The father did not apply a penance to fit the crime. No, he called for the best robe, a family signet ring, and a great banquet with music and dancing. God already knows our sins before we mention them. Let us focus more on the celebration of God's merciful hug.

With St Francis we pray. "Who art thou, my God, and what am I?"

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# Modern sexual morality is producing problems it won't admit

We rebelled against the sexual constraints and hypocrisies of the past, but we cannot have it both ways, writes **David Quinn**

**I**n the United States a fellow who goes by the internet name of 'West Elm Caleb' has caused a sensation, with his case even being discussed on big talk shows.

'Caleb' (as we'll call him for short) is a tall, handsome, 25-year-old white male who has been using the internet to date as many women as possible.

Once upon a time, someone like Caleb had to go to a bar or nightclub to find a date, but now he can stay at home and use dating apps for the purpose. 'Dating' here is a euphemism for 'hooking up' or casual sex.

He can trawl through the apps looking for people he likes, and who like him in return, and then can easily arrange to meet them. For someone who is good-looking, there will be no shortage of offers. You might say it has always been so, but the dating apps massively increase the potential supply of people who will be interested in you.

This 'game' Caleb has been playing has now backfired on him. He who lives by dating apps, can die by them. The numerous women he has dated have been using the internet to compare notes and discovered he has been dating several of them at the same time. He is, in the old-fashioned parlance, a 'cad'.

After his dates, he frequently 'ghosts' women, that is, stops responding to any of their attempts to contact him.

The discovery of Caleb has sparked a huge debate about modern sexual behaviour and etiquette, with many attacking him, but some saying that in an era of easy, casual sex, this is simply the way things are. If you consented to the 'hook-up', then you don't really have a cause for complaint, even if you thought the relationship was exclusive. (This seems a very dubious argument).

## Sharing their stories

Lots of women have commented on the case, sharing their own stories of going out on dates, 'hooking-up' and being 'ghosted' afterwards.

There must be plenty of 'West Elm Calebs' in Ireland also, and women who feel very let down by them.



The terrible murder in Tullamore of school-teacher, Ashling Murphy, has sparked a wider debate about male sexual behaviour towards women. There have been further calls for reform to how relationships and sexuality education are taught in our schools, and for a better understanding of what consent means.

**“Even if you allow that only a small minority of students responded to the survey, the numbers are still highly disturbing.”**

Last week, the results of a survey of third level students were published, showing that many young women at third level say they have experienced sexual harassment or violence.

Three thousand female students responded to the survey, with more than 1,000 saying they have experienced non-consensual vaginal penetration (which is to say, rape) through coercion, incapacitation, force, or threat of force.

Even if you allow that only a small minority of students responded to the survey, the numbers are still highly disturbing.

It is hard to know whether things are worse now than in the past. When I wrote an article for this newspaper some time back about another survey showing high levels of sexual assault or harassment against female third level students, I rightly pointed out that survey was based on a non-representative sample of the overall student population and had given rise to exaggerated headlines about the extent of the problem.

## Getting worse

However, a counsellor at one of the universities contacted me afterwards to say that the problem is bad and in her experience is getting worse. She said that the widespread use of hardcore pornography by men is a contributory factor, and so is excessive drinking (a long-time problem), and also drug-use.

It is very hard to know if a young, single woman today is more likely to be sexually harassed or assaulted while out socialising compared with (say), her equivalent in the 1950s (when my mother was in her twenties).

People will say a lot of sexual abuse in the past was hidden. A lot existed in the home and in institutions. That is obviously true, but I am specifically talking about the likelihood of

being sexual assaulted while out socialising, say at a bar, or dance, or afterwards.

An extremely common complaint about Ireland in the past is that it was sexually repressed and too tightly controlled (even while sexual abuse was taking place in some settings and being covered-up).

Dance halls were carefully regulated and the priests of legend would beat the hedge-rows with their blackthorn sticks to ensure no 'courting couples' were hiding in them after dances.

**“It is very hard to know if a young, single woman today is more likely to be sexually harassed or assaulted while out socialising”**

A report from 1931 (the 'Carrigan report') expressed concern that sexual morals had declined badly as a result of the chaos caused by the War of Independence and Civil War, and a growing number of girls and young women were being sexually abused and exploited as a result.

The concerns it addressed were not a million miles removed from some of the concerns being raised today. They helped to lead to a

tightening of controls in social settings like dance halls.

Eventually we rebelled against the sexual constraints and hypocrisies of the past, but we cannot have it both ways. We cannot say at one and the same time that the constraints of the past were terrible, and that they had no protective effects whatsoever.

## Combination

It is stretching credulity to say that a combination of hardcore porn, excessive drinking, drug-use, dating apps and a 'hook-up' culture are not major contributors to sexual harassment and violence today and the terrible experiences many women seem to have of the dating scene.

Can 'consent' classes really address this, or is something far more ambitious needed, including widespread education on the terrible effects of porn, problem drinking, and drug-abuse?

Is 'consent' enough of a basis for true sexual morality? The 'West Elm Caleb' case shows how many women feel used and disrespected in a hook-up culture where there might be consent, but nothing beyond that.

Christian sexual morality tells people to wait until they are married before having sex, a very high bar in today's culture. But if we've made it unrealistic to expect people to wait until they have at least gotten to know and trust each other first, then we have a big problem, and to deny it is a new form of hypocrisy because it refuses to acknowledge that modern sexual norms have produced problems of their own.

**“The terrible murder in Tullamore of school-teacher, Ashling Murphy, has sparked a wider debate about male sexual behaviour towards women”**



Victor Gaetan tells **Ruadhán Jones** about the inner-workings of papal diplomacy and evaluates Pope Francis' contribution

**T**he Catholic Church as an institution has a curious structure. Its foot soldier, the parish priest, is visible in almost every community in Ireland. And yet, as Victor Gaetan tells me, "so much good that the Church does around the world is, by design, unknown to believers, especially those living comfortably in the West".

Mr Gaetan's recent book, *God's Diplomats: Pope Francis, Vatican Diplomacy, and America's Armageddon* brings the reader behind the scenes, unveiling exactly that hidden work. Using his experience as a Vaticanista – an expert on the Vatican – as well as material from inside-sources, Mr Gaetan provides valuable insight into the work of God's diplomats, as well as Pope Francis' contribution.

Born in then-communist Romania to a family with Italian lineage, a formative experience for young Victor was the opening of Catholic churches as a result of Vatican diplomacy.

"I remember visiting a small church dedicated to St Anthony of Padua in a mountainous region where my grandmother lived," Mr Gaetan explains. "The community had no priest, but the Church was open and a cantor led the small congregation in hymns that touched my soul. Years later, I had a chance to meet several Vatican diplomats who helped negotiate the agreements in Eastern Europe that led to openings such as the one I experienced. Their humility and great intelligence were so impressive that I began paying special attention to this area of Church activity."

While this sowed the seeds of Mr Gaetan's interest in Vatican diplomacy as such, his desire to write *God's Diplomats* came during a reporting trip to Cuba in 2010.

### Programmes

"I ran into valuable programmes run by the Catholic Church, for the elderly, the sick, the poor, young children – but the religious who ran them made me promise not to reveal their activities, to protect them," Mr Gaetan says. "Not because the state had no idea – the state certainly knew – but because technically the Church was not supposed to be playing this charitable role."

"I realised so much good that the Church does around the world, is by design, unknown to believers, especially those living comfortably in the West. These were the seeds of the book."

# Papal diplomacy: the



The Chinese national flag flies in front of a Catholic church in Huangtugang, China, in this 2018 photo.

There is often an image that the Church is distant from the reality on the ground. However, nothing could be further from the truth, Mr Gaetan says: "Vatican diplomats posted abroad are deeply involved in the life of the countries where they live. They have two huge assignments: to represent the Holy See to both the host country governments and to the Catholic bishops in the nation. Two very different constituencies!"

**“While this sowed the seeds of Mr Gaetan’s interest in Vatican diplomacy as such, his desire to write *God’s Diplomats* came during a reporting trip to Cuba in 2010”**

Not long before Mr Gaetan spoke to me, he had interviewed Archbishop Christophe Pierre who is nuncio (Vatican-ese for ambassador) to the US, who, in the last two weeks of September, "spent most of the time on planes and in places far from Washington DC as he attended ordinations, gave speeches, and visited Catholic communities," Mr Gaetan says. "He said his life was 'exhausting', but necessary for him to really have the pulse of the land."

"Imagine how deeply involved in local reality Italian Archbishop Leopoldo Girelli is," Mr Gaetan continues. "He is the apostolic nuncio to Israel, a post created when Israel and the Vatican recognised each other in 1994. Girelli also serves as the apostolic delegate to Jerusalem and Palestine,

underscoring the Holy See's position that Jerusalem should be considered an international city with special status because it has sites sacred to three world religions: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism.

"The nuncio has stepped in on occasion to mediate between the Palestinian community (including Muslims and Christians) and Israeli authorities. And he serves as nuncio to Cyprus, thus monitoring another major conflict zone: the island is divided between Greeks and Turks since the Turkish invasion in 1974. Girelli is managing information in multiple conflict zones!"

### Fascinating

The first half of *God's Diplomats* details the fascinating history of Vatican diplomacy, tracing its roots right back to the early centuries of the Church's existence and setting the scene for his analysis of Pope Francis' approach to diplomacy. As Europe was converted and Christendom formed, the Church played a key role in dynastic and political settlements, as well as the political formation of many regions. However, it wasn't until 1870 that the modern phase of Vatican diplomacy began, when the Kingdom of Italy completed the country's reunification by stripping Rome from the Holy See, Mr Gaetan explains.

"Pope Pius IX promptly declared himself a prisoner of the Apostolic Palace – a situation that lasted for the next 59 years until the Lateran Treaty was signed [in 1929]," he continues. "Fortuitously, the first pope to cope with dispossession and landlessness for his entire pontificate was a graduate of the Vatican's diplomatic school. Pope Leo XIII (1878–1903) understood



Victor Gaetan, author of *God's Diplomats: Pope Francis, Vatican Diplomacy and America's Armageddon*, is pictured in an undated photo.

diplomacy's potential as he sought to reshape the Church's global mission.

**“The first half of *God’s Diplomats* details the fascinating history of Vatican diplomacy, tracing its roots right back to the early centuries of the Church’s existence”**

"Leo cemented the contemporary importance of the Vatican diplomatic corps as the infrastructure of papal influence not only to secular gov-

ernments but to far-flung Catholic parishes throughout the world. The 'captive popes' (1870-1929) did a brilliant job redefining Church power, centralising it in the figure of the pope and forging new roles, valued by other sovereign actors.

"Between 1914 and 1978, every pope had served as a Vatican diplomat before being elevated to the chair of St Peter, and those skills profoundly shaped the exercise of papal leadership in the 20th century."

The second half of the book is devoted to analysing Pope Francis' efforts on the diplomacy scene during his papacy. According to Mr Gaetan, the Pope's views on doctrine and the goals of Vatican diplomacy, especially peace-making are in perfect continu-

# Church's political power



Pope Francis greets then US Vice President Joe Biden at the Vatican in this April 29, 2016, file photo. Photos: CNS

ity with the last three pontiffs. What sets him apart is his enthusiasm and his “masterful” operation of the full diplomatic dashboard available to the Supreme Pontiff.

“In the first part of the book, I provide a historical and organisational review of the subject, to really explore the resources that any pope gains upon elevation to St Peter’s throne,” Mr Gaetan says. “Then I look at what prepared Francis to take advantage of these assets and boil it down to his three identities as manager, mystic, and missionary. For decades, Jorge Bergoglio managed Church organisations. At just 36 he was named provincial of Jesuits in Argentina. Later, he served as a leading light in the pan-Latin American conference of bishops, CELAM.

“As I show in seven case studies, Francis builds on initiatives of his predecessors – in China and Cuba, for example. At the same time, he brings new attention to situations in Colombia, Kenya, and South Sudan. People who work with the Pope say he works constantly and tirelessly. Plus, the diplomatic structure is itself an unusually efficient organisation, providing a constant stream of intel from nearly every country in the world. Francis thrives on these inputs, soaking them in every morning. Pope Benedict XVI was more interested in different things. He never visited Asia for example.”

## Studies

Through his case studies, Mr Gaetan argues that there have been several success stories in Pope Francis’ papacy. However, when I asked him to pin it down to one, he broadened the question out. Where Pope Francis has been most successful, Mr Gaetan says, is in how he “has shared his wisdom with all of us, believers and non-believers, including his core approach to diplomacy.

“When Francis promotes a culture of encounter, he is suggesting a process through which people, in

good faith, can share ideas and find agreement without losing or giving up their own identity,” he continues. “What the culture of encounter represents is an attitude of open-heartedness toward others, including rivals or opponents. It includes the Pope’s call to ‘go to the margins’ and serve people on social and geographic peripheries. The culture of encounter is meant to describe real encounters with real people. It’s a programme of action, not theory.

**“Through his case studies, Mr Gaetan argues that there have been several success stories in Pope Francis’ papacy”**

“This approach flows from Christianity itself. At the heart of Catholic faith is the incarnation of God as man; the torture and murder of that innocent man, Jesus Christ; and each believer’s encounter with his life and resurrection through the sacraments, through Scripture, and through the teaching authority of the Church. The reality of God entering human history is not abstract, and the impact of his sacrifice should not be theoretical for the Faithful. The Pope reminds us of that.

“Personally, one of Pope Francis’ ‘rules of thumb’ that I find particularly helpful is that we should start processes, without trying to predict

or control outcomes. By starting an encounter or dialogue or negotiation, we give space for God to step in.”

## Theoretician

Though Francis does not play the role of a theoretician, Mr Gaetan discerns a number of hallmarks that could be expanded to a theory, or at least some “rules of thumb”.

“I see three hallmarks of Francis’ approach: commitment to the centrality of personal encounters in problem solving, respect for local perception, and patience. As I studied his diplomatic practice, I distilled five main ‘rules of thumbs’ that he returns to again and again: start processes (that God can finish); initiate encounters with humility and respect; proceed through concrete steps and gestures; allow mutual respect to grow, step by step. But as the nuncio to Spain explains, the culture of encounter is the ‘golden thread’ tying all Pope Francis’ words and actions together,” Mr Gaetan explains.

When it comes to interacting with the big world players, like the US and Russia for example, Pope Francis is “unusually independent”, Mr Gaetan says.

“His birth in Latin America takes him out of the Cold War dynamic that popes since 1948 were implicated in,” Victor suggests. “His assessment of international politics reflects this independence. He practices diplomacy for a multipolar world. He doesn’t consider Russian imperialism any more dangerous than American imperialism.

**“When it comes to interacting with the big world players, like the US and Russia for example, Pope Francis is ‘unusually independent’”**

“So he dares to offer a critique of Western foreign policy practices and failures, such as the perpetually churning war machines; arrogant ideas like gender ideology and other products of radical individualism being brusquely imposed on traditional, communitarian cultures; and consumerist indifference that sees many as ‘throwaway’ people, such as the elderly and the preborn.

“Regarding Russia, [in *God’s Diplomats*] I trace how, since the fall of Communism and the Soviet Empire, the Holy See has worked diligently to forge new and stronger relations with the Russian Orthodox Church, which has a constructive, collaborative relationship with the Russian government. Like John Paul II and Benedict XVI, Francis is committed to a view that sees Western Christianity as including Russia. Vatican leadership believes Russia is a valuable ally for Europe: it sees relentlessly negative depictions of Vladimir Putin as peculiarly short-sighted. Rome’s approach directly contradicts the American and Western European effort to isolate Russia.”

One diplomatic aspect of Pope Francis’ tenure that has particularly grabbed the world’s attention is the so-called ‘China Deal’. The deal, a 2018 accord with the Communist Chinese government that gave the Pope final say on the appointment of bishops, sought to heal divisions between the underground Church and the government controlled Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association (CPCA). The deal, which was renewed in 2021, established a formal dialogue with Beijing after decades during which Chinese Catholics faithful to the Pope were largely driven underground.

## Mixed reaction

However, it met with mixed reaction both within and outside the Church. I asked Mr Gaetan if he thought the China deal will define Francis’ diplomatic legacy.

“Will a persistent misunderstanding of what the ‘China deal’ represents define Francis’ diplomatic legacy? Certainly not,” he responds emphatically. “The Trump Administration weaponised the China deal to try to cow Francis into backing down as part of its own objective of demonising the Chinese; Francis didn’t blink.

“The agreement signed with Beijing pertains to the selection of bishops and is designed to achieve unity between two communities of Catholics in China. It was essential to preserving the apostolic succession of bishops to preserve the sacraments too. It is mainly an ecclesiastic issue and relates to one of the four key functions of Vatican diplomacy: preservation. The other three are representation, mediation, and evangelisation.

“The Church in China was badly fractured under Mao Zedong. The process of achieving unity will take many years, but Francis, building on initiatives of John Paul II and Benedict XVI, has made concrete progress, whereas under his predecessor, progress alternated with setbacks, as different personnel came and went on the scene and the two sides were unable to establish a threshold of trust, essential in diplomacy.

“I think Francis’ real diplomatic skill has been on display in the China case. That doesn’t mean that the Catholic Church hasn’t witnessed real persecution and martyrdom in China. It has. And the Pope and his diplomats are painfully aware of that reality too.”

**“I see three hallmarks of Francis’ approach: commitment to the centrality of personal encounters in problem solving, respect for local perception, and patience”**

Ireland’s own diplomatic relationship with the Vatican has been fraught in the past two decades, as revelations around abuse caused a great deal of strain. Mr Gaetan reached out to sources in Rome before our interview to find out how Francis’ diplomatic practice has affected Irish-Vatican relations.

“According to sources in Rome it was the Irish Government’s willingness to work with Pope Francis that inspired it to re-open its embassy in 2014. Since then, the two ambassadors, Ambassadors Emma Madigan (2014-18) and Derek Hannon (2018-present) have been highly professional. The Holy See and Ireland have also found precious common ground vis-a-vis the environment and human rights – two issues less discussed during Benedict’s pontificate.

“Had Pope Benedict XVI continued in office, the tension between the Irish Government and the Holy See over how the Church handled its history of clerical sexual abuse would probably still characterise the Ireland-Vatican bilateral relationship! Francis, eventually, jumped over that wall.

“Francis got off to a rocky start regarding the breadth and depth of the clerical sexual abuse scandal. He did not take sufficiently seriously corruption around clerical sexual abuse in Chile. Since, he has aggressively corrected his response – and accepted responsibility for the ‘catastrophe’ of this crisis. What he said last year about victims in France applies just as strongly to victims in Ireland: ‘It is also my shame, our shame, my shame, for the incapacity of the Church for too long to put them at the centre of its concerns.’”

**Victor Gaetan’s new book *God’s Diplomats: Pope Francis, Vatican Diplomacy, and America’s Armageddon*, published by Rowman & Littlefield, is available online and in stores.**

# Getting back to the heart of the Church



Dr Vivian Boland OP's latest offering is a reminder to a forgetful Church of its true nature, and the role God, Mary and all the saints play in it, writes Jason Osborne

Nearly one hundred years ago, German theologian Karl Adam released what would become one of the most highly regarded and influential books on the nature of the Church and the Catholic Faith. *The Spirit of Catholicism* went on to have an impact on much subsequent theology, but despite that, the vast majority of us are still unable to provide a very clear explanation of what exactly the Church is, and how God is present in it. Still less are we able to account for the evil that often plagues it, and the entirely "earthly" limitations that hinder it from carrying out its divine mission.

The need for a modern restatement of such a work is evident, and while not a direct adaptation of Adam's book, Dr Boland's new book goes forth in the same spirit. Dr Boland's *The Spirit of Catholicism* goes forth into a world in which the Church often seems to be lurching from crisis to crisis. Marred by scandals and divided by theological, political and cultural differences, the Catholic Church of the 21st Century seems to be struggling.

## Unshakable faith

And yet, the unshakable faith and trust its adherents have in its divine foundation and the slow but steady growth of the Faith around the world speak of a different reality. How are these pictures to be reconciled? How to hold together the earthly, fallen realities of the Church, and the graced presence and gift at the centre of it? Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper, Rev. Dr Vivian Boland OP explains how he does it, and how his new book explains it.

"So the title, I can't claim any credit or blame for. That came from the publisher, but I was happy to take on the project and what he requested was a book that would present the heart of Catholicism," Dr Boland explains.

"Not so much a book engaging with current controversies or current problems in the first place, but a book that would take a few steps

back from the current controversies and problems, of which there are many, and just take a moment to remember what it is we're talking about. When we talk about the Church, what's the spiritual, theological reality we're talking about, which I think we have to do every so often – it's a bit like a retreat, like going on retreat. Just stepping back from the immediate concerns and issues and saying let's just remember the theological heart of the matter, if you like."

**“The community of believers in Christ is an embodied community”**

Superficially, it may seem a simple thing, giving an explanation of the Church and its mission. Upon closer examination, however, it's not quite so easy to formulate a definition that defies all scrutiny. Dr Boland offers the reflections that guided his explanation of the nature of the Church.

"My first thought was the Church is an institution. Rather than saying, 'Oh, that's terrible, let's try and find a better way of thinking about the Church,' I thought, well, that's part of the reality of the Incarnation, that the Word became flesh.

"The community of believers in

Christ is an embodied community. It's a community of men and women living across the centuries, ordinary human beings and their life together in the Church is characterised by all that characterises human societies and human communities and human groups, for good and ill. That was my first thought, to say, 'Well let's just face this head on,' that the Church is an embodied community, flesh and blood, a body.

## Sacrament

"That led to me thinking that the first part of the book should be about the Church as a Sacrament, because that's the word that's used in theology to describe visible signs of invisible grace. So, the Church is a visible sign of invisible grace, and in that sense is a Sacrament. The sacraments are material realities, rituals, liturgies that are enacted by human beings every day of the week, and they're marked by what marks ordinary human encounters and interactions and meetings, and being together and so on and so forth," he says.

The Pauline understanding of the Church as a body is central to Dr Boland's approach, with the thought of St Thomas Aquinas playing a large role too.

"As used by Paul and developed by Thomas Aquinas, they really get into the image of the body as an organic, animal body and try to think about the Church in relation to

that image of the body, which means it grows, which means it's healthy, which means it's unhealthy, which means it's in time and space – all the things that go with being embodied, including corruption.

"You know, a body that can generate and flourish can also corrupt and perish, so there's a chapter on the corruptions that can attend this body as well and the need for reform and renewal, which comes from time to time."

**“It's a book which says let's just take stock for the moment about what we're talking about”**

Unfortunately, the Faithful throughout the ages have been all too familiar with the corruption that can spring up in the midst of the Church, whether it issues forth from our own sins or those of others. One contribution Dr Boland says he perhaps sees the book making is a certain 'steadying of the ship' for those whose faith has been shaken throughout the decades by the various problems and difficult questions that have arisen.

"I think, in one sense, I think of it as being written for my generation, for older people who have come up through the last 30, 40, 50 years and whose faith perhaps has been severely shaken in different ways by different questions that have come up and problems that have arisen. So that would be my first response to that, is to say that rather than saying,

**“The Pauline understanding of the Church as a body is central to Dr Boland's approach, with the thought of St Thomas Aquinas playing a large role too”**





Rev. Dr Vivian Boland OP.

'Here's a solution to this question or that question', it's a book which says let's just take stock for the moment about what we're talking about."

### Retreat element

This is the retreat element the book offers. Rather than offering arguments against many of the talking points of the age, Dr Boland instead offers clarity regarding the ground upon which the Faithful stand, and a reminder of why it is we're here.

"I like the image, I use it a lot, of St Paul: 'We carry this treasure in earthen vessels.' We've been very conscious of the earthen vessel in recent decades, how fallible the Church is, how sinful the Church is, how inefficient and all kinds of things, but nevertheless, that mess is carrying a treasure, so let's just take a moment to remember the treasure that we believe is being carried in spite of the limitations and mistakes and so on of so many Church leaders and so many Church people. That's how I see it [the book] making a contribution."

Dr Boland says you could write a book engaging with the issues that have become synonymous with the idea of the "culture wars", which he acknowledges are very important, but says he feels he doesn't "have anything particular to add to arguments that are being made".

"You could add your voice to this argument or that argument, but I felt at the moment maybe it's more important to write a differ-

ent kind of book that will say to everybody, 'Hey, let's just take a moment to remember the heart of what we're dealing with.'"

**“When it goes out of balance, you get various problems, because it can go out of balance in different ways, not just in one way. So that's the second main part of the book, it's part three”**

The nature of the Church as a Sacrament, the embodied nature of the Church and the idea of the Church as carrying treasure in earthen vessels are all central to the book, but how do the heavenly figures of the saints and Mary play into all of this. The majority of the Faithful are familiar with the notion of the communion of saints, but how is it to be understood? Dr Boland offers some thoughts, which are to be found in the third part of the book.

"I use Cardinal Newman and von Hugel, a thinker called Friedrich von Hugel, developing ideas in Newman, who talked about how the

healthy religious body, or a healthy religious person, is one in whom there's a kind of balance of the institutional, historical, the intellectual/philosophical and the spiritual, mystical, active – they use different terms at different times.

### Hierarchy

"But I propose that, as a way of thinking about something like hierarchy, for example, and say that rather than saying, 'Oh, let's see if we can have a Church without hierarchy,' to say, 'Oh, well actually we have three hierarchies, but we don't give enough attention to two of them,'" he laughs.

"Or two of them don't register with us in the way the other one does, so there's a hierarchy of teachers, there's a hierarchy of thinkers/theologians, and there's a hierarchy of saints. Each of them contributes to the overall health of the Church. Von Hugel talks about, he calls them the elements of religion, and that a healthy religion will have these three elements in the proper balance, so the institutional, the intellectual, and the pastoral/mystical, whatever you want to call it. When it goes out of balance, you get various problems, because it can go out of balance in different ways, not just in one way. So that's the second main part of the book, it's part three. So I talk about leadership and communion and the intellectual life.

"I take St Peter, St Paul and St

John as the representatives of these three aspects of the Church. Peter, Paul, John and Mary then comes in with John. It was interesting the way Our Lady presented herself to me, and more or less said, 'Hey, what about me? What about my place in the Church?' So there's a section there where I'm talking about communion and the life of communion in the Church, where I talk about Our Lady," Dr Boland says.

**“These reflections on the Church arrive in a timely manner with the synodal spirit already rippling throughout the universal Church”**

Our Lady is of course offered pride of place at Christ's side in the heavenly kingdom, but what is her role in the Church, theologically speaking? Where does she fit into the hierarchy of the Church, properly understood?

"Because of the generation I belong to, the book is very much informed by the documents of Vatican II, and the option of Vatican II was to talk about Mary in *Lumen Gentium*, in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, so that was the option which the council made. When we teach the course in Mariology, the first point everybody makes is Mary is not to be understood separately from Christ or separately from the Church, and because this book is on the Church, Christ as well, but that's where she showed up, if you like, in talking about the Church. Interestingly, not one of the infancy Gospels, but the passage in Revelation, the Book of Revelation, Chapters 11 and 12, where she's described as first of all as the Ark of the Covenant in Heaven, and then there's the vision of the woman with the crown of 12 stars and the sun and the moon and she is Ecclesia, she is the Church, and she is for Catholic tradition, she's Mary as well, so that's the text that became that.

"Cana was also very important, the marriage feast of Cana, but the text from Revelation became quite important for me in thinking about Mary in relation to the Church, as a personification of the Church," Dr Boland says.

These reflections on the Church arrive in a timely manner with the synodal spirit already rippling throughout the universal Church. Asked whether theological illiteracy is a present issue for the Church, Dr Boland responds: "I think so, yes. I mean, you're not just talking about the organisation of a golf club or a political party. If you think of the other associations that people are involved in, obviously this is a very particular one and the characteristics that go with it need to be understood and respected."

### Church's change

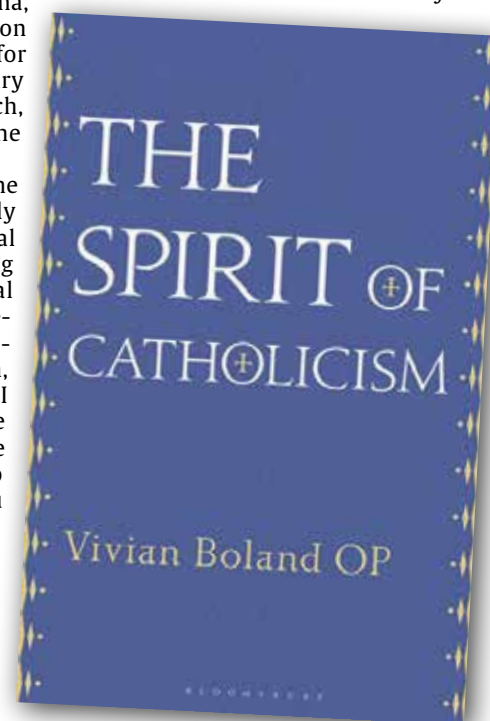
The Church is obviously capable of change, Dr Boland says, having changed many times throughout its lengthy history. However, he likens the Church's change to an expanding house, in which, despite the growth in size and the transformation, the proportions and parts all remain in right relation to one another. In this sense, everything is already present in the Church in seed form, and simply expands and develops throughout history.

"The argument would be about where, at what point, does the Church feel it needs to be obedient to things it has received from Christ or from the Apostolic Church, and where does it feel that it has the freedom, given to it by Christ, to organise the life of the Church in different ways," Dr Boland says.

"It's a body in history, and therefore it's subject to historical forces. I think, maybe what I'd say about the other two hierarchies would be helpful. There's the hierarchy of the bishops who have their particular authority in the Church, but there's the hierarchy of theologians who are all the time studying and recovering the memory of the Church.

"Because sometimes, I think the people who like to think of themselves as most traditional are victims of the recent past. Their memory is not as long as it could be...There's also then the hierarchy of the saints or the prophets, you know, holy people who also call us back to what's essential and what's at the heart of the Church, it might be helpful in the synodal process to keep that in mind. I have a fear it might become focused on organisation and management, but there's also the intellectual life of the community and the theological life of the community and the spiritual life of the community and the life of prayer and charity and faith – to allow those levels to inform the process as well."

Those oft-neglected aspects of the Church will certainly inform the synodal process once Dr Boland's book gets out into the wild, with its focus on the Church's "treasure in earthen vessels" offering a much-needed retreat and corrective for a people that sometimes loses its way in the fractured and complicated world of today.



# Giving your life for the restoration of humanity



Capuchin friars in discussion in Church Street friary in Dublin.



## Consecrated life has a unique offering to a world 'broken by hopelessness', Chai Brady hears

Pope Francis encouraged those who support consecrated life to look to the future with confidence, as he said hope continues to prevail, in a December message to some 60 members of the Vatican Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life at the end of their plenary assembly.

### Future

It could be easy to be negative about the future of consecrated life in Ireland considering the rising age demographic of priests and religious, the lack of

vocations and the closure of many properties belonging to orders.

But speaking to *The Irish Catholic* before the World Day for Consecrated Life on February 2, Capuchin friar Fr Martin Bennett OFM Cap. (Order of Friars Minor Capuchin), who is the parish priest of Halston Street Parish and Director of Communications for the order, says despite dwindling numbers, "we always have hope".

"People living consecrated life are always adapting, one of the core things is listening to the signs of the times and seeing what we can do. I'd say what holds back religious orders at the moment is just the sheer age and illness of the people who are there. If they had younger members, you would see stuff sprouting all around the place," Fr Bennett says.

His focus is on the strengths of the order, the resources they have available and how they can be used to help them further their mission in the future.

Although it's important to acknowledge the reality of the situation for religious orders in Ireland, "let's not get lost in it," he says.

"I'm sure after the crucifixion, when the stone was rolled across the front of the tomb, people thought that was it, it's over, I've prob-

ably wasted my time. And then something extraordinary happened and new life sprung up. So even with diminishing numbers, illnesses, deaths and closures, there's always new hope."

For Sr Julie Doran OLA (the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles), consecrated life sends a message of hope in and of itself.

**“Women of faith and courage who with commitment to God and neighbour will stand up and be counted for what they believe, living witness of faith like the many religious who have gone before them”**

She says: "As OLA missionaries who have walked with people in their greatest sorrows, we have seen the degradation of human life but have remained hopeful. Our message is never lose hope in God and this hope is manifested through the generosity of thousands of OLA sisters who have given their lives as consecrated sisters to the restoration of humanity and creation in a world broken by hopelessness."

Religious life will always have a place in Ireland, Sr Doran states, because the Ireland of today needs "women of faith and courage who with commitment to God and neighbour will stand up and be counted for what they believe, living witness of faith like the many religious who have gone before them".

She says that today women and men whose lives proclaim the gospel of love are needed and "who through their commitment to live this gospel give hope to those they minister to".

### Consumerism

It is certainly not always easy for religious to be heard, particularly when there are so many other forces driving and distracting people.

In a "consumer-driven world", Fr Bennett says people are always searching for deeper meaning, which is expressed in different ways throughout a person's life. He adds that consecrated life has something unique to offer the world, regarding the Capuchins it is a sense of community, of working together in a common mission which can have "powerful affects in the world, and always has".

"If you look across Irish society, things have changed completely. We had a

particular Ireland where religious observance was very, very strong and it's moved into a different space now but I think at the heart of it all people are always still searching for meaning," he says.

**“Fr Bennett references the Capuchin Day Centre in Dublin, who feed the homeless and impoverished, as a very concrete example of their ministry”**

"I think the credibility of the Church has really been hit and people's trust not only in the Church, but in banks, Government, any kind of institution that's been there and been strong and to the fore over the last 20-30 years has been hit and it's been called into scrutiny. In many ways this has made the Church a better place, a safer place, a more reflective place.

"Now we're moving into the synodal pathway and I have great hope for this. I think it's very much our way of doing business within the Franciscan tradition – try-

ing to collaborate, that's a big word for us: how do we create connections with people? How do we involve people in our ministries and work with people as best we can? We're always trying to have that approach."

Fr Bennett references the Capuchin Day Centre in Dublin, who feed the homeless and impoverished, as a very concrete example of their ministry.

### Negativity

Speaking about the rejection of the Church by many people in Ireland, and the associated negative view, Sr Doran says the sisters combat this by simply giving witness to what they believe. She says this leads people to see "beyond the negativity that the world throws at us to the immense generosity of service that is being lived in care for the poor, the marginalised, the homeless, the migrants and the earth".

Despite the drastically different landscape of Ireland today, Sr Doran believes Ireland showed its best face during the Covid-19 pandemic, expressing values such as dedication and commitment. She also described the response to the murder of the young primary school teacher Ashling Murphy in Tullamore on January 12 as "prayerful", and that the Irish



Sr Julie Doran OLA congratulating Rev. Dr Yusef Bamai on his graduation at St Patrick's College Maynooth.

**“Vocation is almost like a foreign language, you have to learn the language of vocation because we’re not brought up in households generally where this stuff is discussed”**

people showed “bravery” after the tragedy.

Sr Doran works with the Irish Episcopal Council for Immigrants which serves as the centre of a network of diocesan and parish personnel who minister to various ethnic groups and people on the move throughout the country.

**“The council aims to develop and foster initiatives between the Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference and the dioceses and parishes in relation to the pastoral care of immigrants”**

It is tasked with increasing pastoral awareness, cultural sensitivity, and the dynamics of outreach, welcome and support throughout its network. The council aims to develop and foster initiatives between the Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference and the dioceses and parishes in relation to the pastoral care of immigrants.

Sr Doran says many people came to her, even during Covid, to see how they could help migrants, adding that

“even if Covid held us down we still had the ability to continue to reach out”.

### Feminism

Asked about feminism and what it means to the OLAs – considering it is a very popular ideology with many different beliefs attached to it depending on the individual – Sr Doran says in its Christian context feminism is the “recognition of the giftedness of women”.

She says “the OLAs value the life, contribution and ministry of women in the Church and society. I would prefer to say that the OLAs have a profound regard for the lives of women whether married, single or in consecrated life”.

The Church, Sr Doran feels, is a very welcoming place for women. Having visited many parishes across Ireland, she says that from the point of view of being accepted as a woman, “with the bishops, the priests, the people they were always delighted to hear a woman’s voice in the Church”.

“I have not encountered any antagonism against women in the Church, maybe once, but other than that, old, young, religious people, all love to have



The Solemn Profession of Bro. Antony Kurian, which was held in Church Street, Dublin, on October 4, 2021.

you. I always felt there is welcoming and positivity towards a woman in the Church.”

### Vocations

When it comes to someone considering a religious vocation today, it can be a daunting concept as it’s not considered a “viable option” by many, according to Fr Bennett, but if someone is feeling a call to consecrated life, “go for it”.

“I’d say if you’re feeling it in your heart, if you’re feeling a curiosity, if you’re feeling in some way interested, want to know more, or even stronger than that, well then that’s the Holy Spirit moving in your heart and your heart is not going to rest ultimately until it spends some time reflecting upon this,” he says.

Fr Bennett has been involved in vocation ministry for more than a decade and served as vocations director

for the Capuchins. He has found that God is still calling people, but sometimes they are “frightened” and are concerned about what others will think of them.

At times they also receive contact from people in their 40s and 50s who are more comfortable with who they are in themselves and wish they had looked at a vocation to religious life much earlier.

**“Having been a chaplain in a secondary school in Cork, he noticed that religious life was not promoted as a vocation”**

“I met a priest from our area the other day and he says ‘I’m fully convinced that God is calling people to the priesthood and religious life, because I’ve met

them, and I hear the way they talk and hear what they’re interested in, yet there is something in them that holds them back from committing to it’. So again, I think we have to make it ok for people to do this, that it’s not such a big deal,” he says.

Having been a chaplain in a secondary school in Cork, he noticed that religious life was not promoted as a vocation.

“I’d love to see at careers fairs, that priesthood and religious life genuinely being seen as a viable option for somebody,” Fr Bennett says, adding: “Look at all the young people who travel and help out over in Lourdes with the pilgrimage every year. Experiences like that are life-changing they are real encounter-with-Christ experiences but oftentimes we’re not good at helping them when they

come back. They come back to a bit of a vacuum and we’re not good at saying, ‘right, you’ve had this experience what do you want to do with it? Where do you want to go from here?’”

He insists that those who feel a calling should go out to meet people in religious orders to get an experience of what it is like, for Fr Bennett it was only when he visited the Capuchins in person he knew for certain and felt a “sense of peace inside myself”.

“All of this is spiritual stuff, it’s really hard to put your hands on, and oftentimes this puts people off when it comes to vocation because it’s so hard to put it into words.

**“The order currently has two postulants in their postulancy programme in Raheny, with about five others who are in contact with them at the moment”**

“Vocation is almost like a foreign language, you have to learn the language of vocation because we’re not brought up in households generally where this stuff is discussed,” he explains, “We’d have a language of sport much more readily available to us, but with vocation we have to learn that language and it takes time.”

The order currently has two postulants in their postulancy programme in Raheny, with about five others who are in contact with them at the moment.

“I would say to people if you’re feeling it inside, if there’s any curiosity, remember that phrase from the Gospel: Don’t be afraid. You’re only going to receive a welcome from the people that you make contact with and I know from my own experiences because I joined the Capuchins when I was 32, I came from a background in financial services.

“Even looking at religious orders and looking at the websites, you have to find a place of peace in your heart with regard to them, you can be overwhelmed by how many there are and what they all do.”

Fr Bennett adds: “The best piece of advice I got; one priest said, ‘listen, get two or three of them, almost print them out and have them in front of you and sit there, and in prayer, look at them. And whichever one you feel more at peace with maybe there’s something in that for you to go and explore’.”

# THE CAPUCHINS

*A life of Prayer and Service in the footsteps of St Francis of Assisi*



## OVER 400 YEARS OF SERVICE IN IRELAND

The Capuchin Franciscan Friars were founded in the early 1500's in Italy with the desire to return to a closer living of the rule of St Francis of Assisi. Capuchins arrived in Ireland in 1616 and since then have become an intrinsic part of the Irish story.

Today in Ireland we have Friaries in Cork, Dublin, Donegal, Carlow and Kilkenny as well as Irish Friars serving overseas in Zambia, South Africa, New Zealand, South Korea and California. Wherever we are found our mission is the same, to be an authentic Gospel presence as Brothers of the People.

## SOME FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### How do I know if I am called to be a Capuchin Friar?

The process of discovering what God is calling you to is called discernment. It oftentimes begins with a feeling or an experience or encounter that invites and compels us to seek deeper relationship with God, others, and all of Creation. This takes time, patience, prayer and guidance. It requires of us that we open our hearts and begin to trust in God in a whole new way. In many ways, it requires a step into the unknown.

### Who can help me discern my vocation?

The Irish Province of the Capuchin Franciscans takes the discernment process very seriously. We are committed to helping men discover their call by means of a comprehensive vocation accompaniment programme. This programme enables people explore the questions they have and to discover some new ones. The aim of accompaniment is to walk with you as a brother as you discern, listen and reflect, while offering sound guidance and practical support. Each and every vocation journey is blessed and unique.

### Do you wear a habit?

Yes! Capuchins wear a simple brown habit and white cord. The cord has three knots that serve as a reminder of the three vows we profess.

### What are the vows that you take?

We take three vows: poverty, chastity and obedience. Poverty allows us to develop a deeper respect for the world around us and for all the good things that God provides. Chastity encourages us to live with hearts centred on God and obedience invites us to listen deeply to God's plan for us.

### How long does it take to train as a Capuchin Friar?

Our training is known as formation and usually takes between six to eight years. A Friar in formation will study, work, pray and minister while growing into what it means to be a Capuchin Friar in the world today. Formation is an exciting and deeply meaningful time.

### Was Padre Pio a Capuchin Friar?

Yes, the Capuchin Franciscan Order are blessed to have many saints and St Pio is certainly one of the best known, particularly in Ireland. Saints like Pio, all went through a time of discernment, in fact it was something they did throughout their lives. As St John Paul II reminds us 'we are all called to be Saints'.



**That's great, what do I do now? I'd like to find out some more.**

To arrange a conversation with our Vocation Promoter, simply e-mail: [capuchinvocation@gmail.com](mailto:capuchinvocation@gmail.com)

You can also visit the vocation page of our website [www.capuchinfranciscans.ie](http://www.capuchinfranciscans.ie)





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# Out&About

## Pennies from Heaven



**LOUTH:** Fr Colm O'Mahony, Prior of the Drogheda Augustinians presents a cheque to transition year students from St Mary's Diocesan School, Drogheda for the school's TY programme.



**DUBLIN:** Members of the youth group Pure in Heart take part in an Exodus and Fiat 90 hike at Howth, which was carried out in prayer and memory of Ashling Murphy and all victims of violence and abuse.



**CORK:** Fr Eamonn McCarthy and his team from Radio Maria meet up with the Missionaries of Charity, the order founded by St Mother Teresa, in Blarney, Co. Cork, January 24.

### IN SHORT

#### Clogher diocese ordains new permanent deacon

Bishop of Clogher Larry Duffy ordained Paul Flynn February 2 as the second permanent deacon ordained for the diocese in the last four years.

Ahead of the ordination, Bishop Duffy said that "permanent deacons, as ordained ministers, are called by the Lord to be part of the Church's response to the needs of a changing world.

"Deacons today, along with their families, make many sacrifices to be able to serve the people of God and for that we are very grateful.

"In particular, I pray for Paul, and I wish him, his wife Angela and their family every

blessing for the future," Bishop Duffy said.

A statement from the diocese emphasised that a deacon "is not a substitute priest... Deacons bring to Church life a whole different perspective of the world today".

Deacon Flynn lives in the parish of Urney and Annageliffe, Cavan Town, with his wife Aisling and their four children, four children, Aisling, Peter, Leo and Felicity.

He is currently the chaplain to Mount Lourdes Grammar School, Enniskillen and the music director of the 10.30am Sunday morning choir.

Mr Flynn was ordained February 2, in St Michael's Church, Enniskillen by Bishop Duffy.

#### Archbishop Martin welcomes Pope's call to listen 'with the heart'

Archbishop Eamon Martin welcomed Pope Francis' message for World Communications Day 2022, which calls for people to "listen with the ear of the heart".

The Primate of All-Ireland "warmly welcomed" the message for its emphasis on the importance of listening.

"This year's message, 'listening with the ear of the heart', is an invitation to reflect on how listening involves more than simply the sense of hearing," Dr Martin said.

"True listening is a foundation of genuine relationships, and is foundational to the

relationship between God and humanity."

The importance of listening is heightened in the context of the synodal process underway in Ireland and the global Church, Archbishop Martin continued.

Quoting the Pope's message, Dr Martin called "us [to] pray that it will be a great opportunity to listen to one another. Communion, in fact, is not the result of strategies and programmes, but is built in mutual listening between brothers and sisters".

World Communications Day 2022 takes place May 29, the 56th celebration since the day was first established by the Second Vatican Council. Archbishop Martin is chair of the council for communications of the Irish Catholic bishops' conference.

Edited by Ruadhán Jones  
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Events deadline is a week in advance of publication



**KERRY:** Second class students in Caherleaheen NS make some rice crispy buns as part of their procedural genre in literacy, January 21.



**MEATH:** Bishop of Meath Tom Deenihan presented the Pope John Paul II Awards to 11 young people from the parish of Trim and Boardmill and six from Kilbeggan parish who successfully completed the programme, January 22. Pictured with Bishop Deenihan are Calum Buckley and Conor McKeown.



**ARMAGH:** Primate of All-Ireland Archbishop Eamon Martin opens the Novena to St Patrick in St Patrick's Cathedral, praying for the renewal of faith on the island of Ireland.

**WATERFORD:** Bishop of Waterford Alphonsus Cullinan visited Clogheen January 23, the last day Sr Elsie Walsh and Sr Aine Power spent in the Mercy Convent, to thank them for their dedicated service. Also pictured are Fr Bobby Power PP and Cllr Marie Murphy.



**ROME:** Ireland's ambassador to the Holy See Derek Hannon greets Gillian Kingston, Vice-President of the World Methodist Council, as part of the week of prayer for Christian unity, January 21.



## Events

● In the current Covid-19 crisis, it is clear that most (and perhaps all) Church events, other than some Masses, are suspended. Consequently, we are withholding the popular Events Listing column until normal activities can resume in our parishes. However, please do email us if you know of any parish event planned and we will publish details.



# World Report

## IN BRIEF

### Pope to meet students as part of synodal process

● Highlighting the importance of a Church that truly listens, Pope Francis will participate in a virtual meeting hosted by Loyola University in Chicago with students from North, Central and South America.

The February 24 virtual meeting, titled 'Building Bridges: A Synodal Encounter between Pope Francis and University Students', will be an opportunity to "address the salient challenges of our times", the university's website said.

"The Pope will dialogue with these university students who will share concrete educational projects that seek to justly transform environmental and economic realities," as well as discuss the challenges of migration, it said.

### Catholic media told accurate information a 'human right'

● Catholic communicators must help provide correct and truthful information about Covid-19 and its vaccines and do so in a way that avoids oversimplification and creating conflict, Pope Francis said.

"Fake news has to be refuted, but individual persons must always be respected, for they believe it often without full awareness or

responsibility," he said.

"To be properly informed, to be helped to understand situations based on scientific data and not fake news, is a human right. Correct information must be ensured above all to those who are less equipped, to the weakest and to those who are most vulnerable," he added.

### Nuncio urges action against armed conflict

● Efforts by the United Nations to limit the use of explosive weaponry in highly populated urban areas gained the support of the Vatican's nuncio to the world organisation.

Archbishop Gabriele Caccia said civilian populations in cities must be protected in armed conflicts so that lives are not lost and daily life is not massively disrupted. He made the comments during a UN Security Council meeting January 25.

Saying that protocols under the Geneva Conventions extend protections for civilians in conflict zones, Archbishop Caccia said such safeguards have "proven inadequate in the face of what Pope Francis calls 'another world war... fought piecemeal'".

### Toppling of Puerto Rican statue condemned by archbishop

● The Archbishop of San Juan de Puerto Rico, Roberto Octavio González Nieves, expressed his sorrow and repudiated the demolition of the city's statue of Juan Ponce de León, a Spanish coloniser who was Puerto Rico's first governor.

"I would like to express my sadness over the acts that led to the demolition of the

statue of the first governor of Puerto Rico, Juan Ponce de León. Said action must draw our strongest feeling of repudiation," the archbishop said in a statement.

The statue was torn down the night of January 23-24, shortly before the visit of Felipe VI, the king of Spain, to the US territory. The statue was reinstalled later on January 24.

### Honduran bishops seek dialogue during political crisis

● The Honduran bishops' conference has urged dialogue as a political crisis threatens to torpedo the Central American country's presidential inauguration.

A prominent Honduran Jesuit, meanwhile, called the prospect of dialogue "remote" as rival groups vie for control of the country's congress.

"We are making a sincere and open call to dialogue as soon as possible between the president-elect and representatives of both groups that aspire to the presidency of congress, so they can come to an agreement and find a solution that respects the law and restores serenity, peace and order," the bishops said.

## Cardinals cite Benedict XVI's outreach and action against abuse

A cardinal who had served as an aide to now-retired Pope Benedict XVI and was present for his meetings with survivors of clerical sexual abuse said he never found in him any shadow or attempt to hide or minimise anything".

The depths of human sin and depravity "distressed him intimately, and he sometimes remained silent for a long time – all the more so if these human miseries were the responsibility of men of the Church," said Cardinal Fernando Filoni, grand master of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.

The cardinal distributed his "testimony" about Pope Benedict to the media January 28, saying he wanted to present an eyewitness account of how Pope Benedict reacted to allegations of clerical sexual abuse and, especially, to the survivors of abuse in the wake of reports about the retired Pope's handling of cases when he was archbishop of Munich. A report released January 20 said then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger mishandled four cases.

Cardinal Filoni, who was the *sostituto* or substitute for general affairs in the Vatican Secretariat of State from 2007 to 2011, said that in that role, he met with then-Pope Benedict at least once a week and, in addition, oversaw the organisation of papal trips abroad.

"He had a clear sensitivity for the victims," the cardinal said.



Cardinal Fernando Filoni, Grand Master of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre, is pictured in his office at the order's headquarters in Rome. Photo: CNS.

"When, in preparation for apostolic trips – to the United States, Australia, etc. – he received requests for meetings with victims of abuse, he spoke to me about it; he wanted to know my thoughts on how to accommodate these requests," the cardinal said.

But in the discussions, he said, Pope Benedict always insisted on "deep respect for the victims whose identity had to be safeguarded; therefore, he wanted the meetings to take place far from the gaze of cameras" and

insisted the meetings not be an "audience" with a simple handshake and exchange of pleasantries.

The meetings Cardinal Filoni said he was present for had "a spiritual dimension and took place in front of God, from whom we had to implore mercy".

Meeting the survivors in a chapel, he prayed with them and "listened, with visible and palpable emotion", the cardinal said.

"In those meetings, there was not only the sense of a humiliation suffered by the

victims, but also the humiliation of a man of the Church who could never have imagined that such degrading actions could happen, and yet now offered the balm of prayer and the relief of a solidarity in the name of that God."

Austrian Cardinal Christoph Schönborn of Vienna also spoke positively of the former Pope's handling of abuse during an interview January 28 with ORF, the Austrian broadcaster, according to KNA, the German Catholic news agency.

## US cop wins settlement following abortion clinic prayer

The city of Louisville, Kentucky, is paying a local police officer a \$75,000 settlement after he was suspended for praying outside an abortion clinic, according to the firm representing him.

Officer Matthew Schrenger was off-duty when he stopped to pray with his father on the public sidewalk outside the EMW Women's Surgical Center nearly a year ago, on February 20, according to the Thomas More Society. Mr Schrenger arrived in the early morning, before the abortion provider opened, as part of 40 Days for Life,

an international grassroots campaign dedicated to ending abortion through prayer and fasting.

Matt Heffron, senior counsel for the Thomas More Society, previously said that Mr Schrenger, a 13-year police veteran, was praying the rosary, according to WDRB News.

For his actions, Mr Schrenger was suspended for more than four months with pay, stripped of his police powers, and placed under investigation, a January 27 press release by the Thomas More Society read.

According to a letter last June obtained by WDRB News, the Louisville Metro Police Department expressed concern that Mr Schrenger wore his full uniform while participating in "protest activity," but acknowledged that he attempted to cover it up with his coat.

Surveillance video obtained by WDRB showed Mr Schrenger praying and walking outside of the clinic for an estimated 45 minutes and carrying a "pray to end abortion" sign at one point, the outlet reported.

## Dominican priest killed in Vietnam knife attack

Fr Giuse (Joseph) Tran Ngoc Thanh, OP, was killed in a knife attack on Saturday.

Fr Tran was attacked January 29 at a mission of Dak Mot, about 40 miles northwest of Kon Tum. He was hearing confessions before

the last Mass of the evening, according to Ordo Praedicatorum on Facebook.

The Diocese of Kon Tum said he was murdered in his house, and that a suspect has been arrested.

Fr Tran was born in 1981

in Ho Chi Minh City, and took his religious vows in 2010. He was ordained a priest in 2018.

A funerary ceremony was held January 30 at the Dominican monastery in Kon Tum.

His interment was held January 31 at St Martin Chapel in Biên Hòa.

"Please unite to pray so that Father Giuse's soul may soon enjoy the glory of God," the Diocese of Kon Tum said January 30.





Edited by Jason Osborne  
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## Remembering together



Pope Francis meets Edith Bruck, 90, a writer and Holocaust survivor, at his residence at the Vatican, January 27. Photo: CNS.

# Holy Land's bishops invite Orthodox leaders to synodal path

Catholic bishops in the Holy Land invited their Orthodox counterparts to contribute to the consultation process leading to the 2023 Synod on Synodality.

In a letter dated January 24, the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land (ACOHL) explained that Catholics in the region were taking part in the local stage of a two-year synodal path launched by Pope Francis last October.

"We would be delighted to share with you what we are learning and also learn from you, listening to your wisdom and experience," they wrote.

"Pope Francis has said and written repeatedly that Catholics have much to learn from the Orthodox regarding the exercise of synodality. As we set out on this way, we are more aware than ever that we, all together, as disciples of Christ in this land, which is his home, are called to witness to him. We remember that his dearest wish was that we should be one (cf. John 17)."

The letter to the heads of the Christian Churches in the Holy Land was signed by ACOHL president Patriarch Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem,

and secretary-general Father Pietro Felet.

The Assembly comprises leaders of the Latin Church, Greek Melkite Catholic Church, Maronite Church, Armenian Catholic Church, Syriac Catholic Church and Chaldean Catholic Church in Israel, Palestine, Jordan, and Cyprus.

The bishops issued their invitation as part of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, an annual event that Pope Francis concluded this year on January 25 at an ecumenical service in Rome's Basilica of St Paul Outside-the-Walls.

The Holy Land's Catholic

bishops explained that the synodal process was seeking to renew the Church as it faced "so many crises at every level".

"The pandemic has had tragic effects on the life of the Church. The political situation continues to create innumerable obstacles to our mission and in the lives of our Faithful," they wrote.

"Our Faithful are exhausted and often despair, seeing little or no future for Christians in our region. We all need to renew our energies, recommit to our faith and believe that walking with Christ leads to a horizon of hope."

## Cardinal Marx apologises to victims after Munich report

Cardinal Reinhard Marx offered a personal apology to abuse survivors on Thursday, in the wake of a report criticising the handling of cases in his archdiocese of Munich and Freising.

Speaking at a live-streamed press conference in Munich, southern Germany, the 68-year-old cardinal said that the treatment of victims was "inexcusable," reported CNA Deutsch.

"I am attributed responsibility in this report and I am prepared to take respon-

sibility. Last year I wrote to Pope Francis, and I have also stated elsewhere before, that for me the greatest guilt is to have overlooked those affected. That is inexcusable," he said.

"There was no real interest in their fate, in their suffering. In my opinion, this is also due to systemic reasons, and at the same time I bear moral responsibility for this as acting archbishop."

He went on: "Therefore, first of all, I apologise once again personally and

also on behalf of the archdiocese to you as those affected for what you have suffered in the sphere of the Church."

"I also apologise to the Faithful in this archdiocese who doubt the Church, who can no longer trust those responsible and whose faith has been damaged."

The more than 1,000-page report, issued on January 20, accused Cardinal Marx, one of Germany's most influential churchmen, of mishandling two abuse cases.

## Peter's Pence donations fall by 15% in 2021

• Donations to Peter's Pence fell by around 15% in 2021, the Vatican announced on Friday.

In an interview with Vatican News published on January 28, Father Juan A. Guerrero, S.J., prefect of the Secretariat for the Economy, said that, while donations were still arriving from some countries, there was a marked decrease compared to 2020.

He also disclosed that the sale of a London property at the centre of a landmark Vatican finance trial would be concluded in June.

Commenting on Peter's Pence, he said: "Roughly speaking, I can say that in 2021 there has again been a decrease compared to the previous year, which I would venture to quantify at no less than 15%."

Peter's Pence is the Holy See's annual collection to finance the pope's charitable works and other priorities, including the Roman Curia.

The annual collection is usually taken up in Catholic churches around the world on a weekend close to the June 29 Feast of Sts Peter and Paul.

## Pope meets Auschwitz survivor on Holocaust Remembrance Day

• Pope Francis marked International Holocaust Remembrance Day on Thursday with an hour-long meeting with Auschwitz survivor Edith Bruck.

The Holy See press office said on January 27 that the Pope had "a long and affectionate conversation" with the 90-year-old Hungarian-born Jewish writer at his residence, the Casa Santa Marta.

"In particular, both stressed the inestimable value of transmitting the memory of the past to the youngest, even in its most painful aspects, so as not to fall back into the same tragedies," the press office said.

The Pope visited

Bruck at her home in Rome in February 2021.

The writer was born in Hungary in 1931 but has lived in Italy since her early 20s. She survived the Nazi concentration camps in Auschwitz and Dachau, where she was sent with her parents, two brothers, and a sister at the age of 12.

Her parents and a brother died in the concentration camps. Bruck and her remaining siblings were freed from the Bergen-Belsen camp by the Allies in 1945.

Bruck previously thanked the Pope for highlighting antisemitism during his visit to Hungary and Slovakia in September 2021.

## Pope Francis plans two-day visit to Malta in April

• Pope Francis intends to make a two-day visit to Malta in April, according to a local newspaper.

*The Times of Malta* reported on January 25 that the Vatican had informed the government and Church leaders that the Pope would visit the country on April 2-3.

The Vatican has not confirmed the report.

The Pope initially planned to visit the archipelago in the central Mediterranean Sea on May 31, 2020, the Solemnity of Pentecost. But the Vatican announced in March 2020 that the trip had been "postponed until further notice".

*The Times of Malta* said that Malta's President George Vella and Prime Minister Robert Abela had accepted the dates of the April visit.

Malta, located south of the Italian island of Sicily, is named in the Acts of the Apostles as the site where St Paul was shipwrecked on route to Rome in 60 AD.

In a pastoral letter anticipating the Pope's scheduled 2020 visit, Malta's bishops said that the theme of the trip would be "They showed us unusual kindness" (Acts 28:2).

# Letter from Rome



John L. Allen Jr

Last night, 80-year-old Sergio Mattarella was re-elected overwhelmingly as Italy's President of the Republic, a result that triggered joy both inside parliament and in Italian streets. Mattarella is a widely beloved figure here, perhaps the most popular man in the country, someone who's demonstrated both keen institutional judgment and also a remarkable ability to capture the national mood.

Mattarella won with 759 out of a possible 1,059 votes, the second most commanding victory for the presidency since Italy became a republic in 1948 following the Second World War.

**“On Saturday night, Mattarella didn't address the question of whether he plans to remain in office for the full seven years of his second mandate”**

With Prime Minister Mario Draghi leading arguably Europe's most robust economic recovery amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, and Mattarella guaranteeing maturity and stability in the presidency, many observers believe Italy could be poised for a strong run over the next few years – assuming, that is, the country's dysfunctional politics don't produce a cataclysm of self-destruction in the meantime.

Ironically, Mattarella himself had done almost everything he possibly could to avoid the outcome. Throughout 2021, as the clock wound down towards the end of his first term, he made it clear he had no interest in a second. As recently as December, he appeared to definitively close the door, making a farewell visit to Pope Francis on December 16 and even offering the opinion that a second term for a president was of dubious constitutional validity.

(Although the constitution does not specifically bar a second term, prior to 2013 no president had ever stood for re-election.)

On Saturday night, Mattarella didn't address the question of whether he plans to remain in office for the full seven years of his second mandate. Some observers here believe it's possible he'll be around only until 2023, when the current governing majority has to face national elections, with the idea being that Draghi might then transition to the presidency himself.

None of this has anything directly to do with the Catholic Church, especially since the Vatican, in keeping with Francis's broad policy of stay-

## Italy's dumb luck may offer warning for the Church's next transition



Italian State Police on horseback guard outside St Peter's Square at the Vatican during Italian President Sergio Mattarella's visit with Pope Francis in December. Photo: CNS.

**“Italy, in other words, enjoys strong leadership today almost in spite of, not because of, the health of its democracy”**

ing out of partisan politics in the country, was largely silent as the manoeuvring over the presidency unfolded. Yet there's also a moral here that could be of relevance to the Church whenever it, too, faces the next transition in its own top job.

### Mattarella's re-election

While Mattarella's re-election is being greeted as great news for the country, it's also widely seen as a damning indictment of the country's politics. For months, the major parties on both left and right bickered over who might take over, at various stages floating creative possibilities for what might come next – the election of Italy's first woman as President of the Republic, for example, or the selection of a much younger candidate to shake up what's traditionally been a fairly gerontocratic system.

In the end they weren't able to agree on anything, and the forecast

seemed to call for months of prolonged acrimony and indecision. In that context, Mattarella's willingness to stick around for a while effectively saved the country from itself.

Much the same could be said of the 74-year-old Draghi, who was dragooned out of semi-retirement in 2021 after the government of Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte essentially imploded due to irreconcilable differences in the governing coalition, initially composed of the right-wing Lega party and the centre-left populist Five Star movement, with the Lega later pulling out to be replaced by the centre-left Democratic Party. In that situation too, the major parties were hopelessly divided and only a sort of saviour figure outside the political establishment was able to put Humpty Dumpty back together again.

None of this, it should be said, is especially new. Of Italy's stag-

gering total of 59 prime ministers since 1948, an average of one every 18 months, only eight served a full five-year term while 18 logged less than a year before being ousted. Yet there's a keen sense today that the country's ideological divisions run deeper than ever, rendering the expressions of those divisions in the form of political parties less capable of compromise and acting in the national interest than perhaps at any point since Italians were actually shooting at one another towards the end of World War II.

Italy, in other words, enjoys strong leadership today almost in spite of, not because of, the health of its democracy.

### Catholic Church

If there's a lesson for the Catholic Church, it might be that while Italy's dumb luck has been impressive, it's also terribly fragile and probably not really a basis for long-term plans.

At some point, the Church will also face a decision about who should lead it next, and it's not at all clear there's any greater reason to believe consensus will prevail in Catholicism than in the Italian parliament. At the moment, Catholic opinion appears sharply divided between ardent supporters of Pope Francis and embittered critics, and

the level of rancour expressed in both public and private between those two camps is often alarming.

The Church can't help but be influenced by the broader culture, and today the cultural winds don't usually nudge it in the direction of moderation, patience and a sense of common cause.

**“If there's one thing gamblers everywhere will tell you, however, it's that luck never holds forever, and the trick to staying afloat is figuring out what to do when the hot streak ends”**

Of course, perhaps Catholicism, too, will get lucky, and maybe a beloved figure outside the system can be found to paper over those troubling realities for a while longer. If there's one thing gamblers everywhere will tell you, however, it's that luck never holds forever, and the trick to staying afloat is figuring out what to do when the hot streak ends.

*John L. Allen Jr is Editor of CruxNow.com*

# Spain's government vows to investigate Church abuse



Inés San Martín

Spain's ruling coalition wants historic clerical sexual abuses to be investigated in the country, and Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez has said he will first meet with abuse victims.

"We're going to talk and build," said the head of the coalition government that rules Spain. "The human dimension of this problem is important."

**“He accuses the bishops of having ‘an obstructionist attitude’ towards an independent investigation to be carried out, as has been the case in France and Germany”**

Three left-wing parties – Unidas Podemos, ERC and EH Bildu – presented a petition for the creation of a commission in Spain's Congress to launch an investigation into the sexual abuses of minors committed within the Catholic Church.

The three parties presented the petition on Thursday, after calling these “abominable events” and saying that they consider the efforts carried out thus far by the Spanish Bishops' Conference to be insufficient.

In a statement quoted by *Europa Press*, Jaume Asens, president of the parliamentary group of Unidas Podemos, explains that “these are abominable facts that not only question the victims, but also society as a civilisation in the face of the refusal of the leadership of the Spanish Church to obey the Pope's recommendations in this matter.”

He accuses the bishops of having “an obstructionist attitude” towards an independent investigation to be carried out, as has been the case in France and Germany. Seeing this attitude, he argues, the commission aims at knowing “the whole truth, to make reparations to the victims, to purge responsibilities and that this will never happen again.”

Mr Asens claimed that the bishops' conference “has turned a deaf ear, has looked the other way, that seems serious to us, the ecclesiastical leadership has not opened its archives, has not communicated data on the number of victims, has denied its responsibility, has trivialised the seriousness of these facts by talking about small cases.”



Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez gestures at a news conference after the first Cabinet meeting at Moncloa Palace in Madrid, 2020. Photo: CNS.

The request of a commission following the negative response of the bishops' conference to create one at a national level, follows an investigation carried out by *El País*, a national newspaper, that was handed to Pope Francis in December. According to the newspaper, the investigation is “unprecedented” for the Church in Spain, as it includes allegations made against 251 members of the clergy and some lay people from religious institutions of sexual abuse against minors. The investigation was opened in October 2018.

## Spanish bishops

Cardinal Juan Jose Omella, Archbishop of Barcelona and president of the Spanish bishops, said earlier this month following a meeting with Pope Francis that he hopes to bring to light the abuses perpetrated by members of the Spanish clergy and by religious and lay people in Church-related settings, but said that “for the moment” the bishops have no plans to summon an independent commission.

“All the dioceses are responding little by little. They have replied to *El País* asking them to send data because in some cases there is no data,” Cardinal Omella said. (“If there has been an accusation of a priest or a religious, say who it is and we will investigate.”)

The inquiries will have to branch out according to the competent ecclesiastical entity, since they affect 31 religious orders and 31 dioceses.

During an informal conversation with the press, Mr Sánchez didn't reject the proposal nor the possibility of putting the weight of the government behind it. However, he said, he will first meet with abuse victims and listen to their testimonies. This private encounter will take place this week, Spanish media reports.

**“According to the three parties that presented the proposal, a parliamentary investigation of clerical sexual abuse can facilitate reparation to the victims”**

Sánchez is the leader of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), which formed a government thanks to an alliance with Unidas Podemos. Due to how the Spanish Congress is divided, PSOE would have to support the initiative for it to go through. The other two major parties, the conservatives PP and VOX, have already rejected the possibility.

According to the three parties that presented the proposal, a parliamentary investigation of clerical sexual abuse can facilitate reparation to the victims. It would grant survivors a space, through restorative justice procedures, to narrate their experience with

freedom and with the assumption of institutional responsibility.

Speaking with Spanish weekly magazine *Vida Nueva*, child psychiatrist Pedro Strecht, coordinator of the Independent Commission for the Study of Sexual Abuse in the Portuguese Church, urged the Spanish bishops to open a similar inquiry.

“Trust the people, listen to the people, facilitate the possibility of giving voice to the silence,” he said. The Portuguese bishops announced the creation of the Commission last December, and it was officially launched January 10. Five days later, the Commission shared that it had received more than 100 testimonies.

## Clerical abuse crisis

According to the expert, Portugal and Spain have similar situations when it comes to the clerical abuse crisis.

“We have lived through similar realities: we are both Latin countries, we have both lived under dictatorships for many years, from which we have historically freed ourselves very recently,” Dr Strecht said. “We had decades of pockets of poverty and unprotection, in which it was the Church that took in the youngest, who, moreover, needed more support and affection.”

The Spanish Conference of Religious (CONFER) has asked for “forgiveness” for “not having acted correctly” in the face of the sexual abuses committed against minors by members of their congregations.

“As a first reaction, and out of respect for the victims of these abuses, we want to ask forgiveness for not having acted correctly in something that, as Church entities, we should have taken care of,” said Jesús Miguel Zamora, the secretary general of CONFER.

The major superiors of the congregations affected by cases collected by *El País* of abuse have met “not only” to “review the past” but to “proactively” avoid cases “in the present and the future.”

During that meeting, the various institutes of consecrated life emphasised that they want to be “a safe place of accompaniment and responsible growth for the children, young people and vulnerable adults” they serve.

“It is our commitment to the Gospel and we want to do it well, even if it costs and is painful,” Mr Zamora stressed.

He also indicated that they want to find mechanisms and help each other “to find ways in the prevention of abuse” so that their institutions “educational, pastoral, of welfare or other, offer a safe place for minors and vulnerable people.”

Speaking to *Europa Press*, the president of CONFER pointed out that “inevitably” it is necessary to make “a review of the past” on cases of sexual abuse in religious congregations but also bets on “training” to avoid more cases in “the present and future.”

# Letters

## Letter of the week

### A mixture of misogyny and misandry at play

**Dear Editor,** The name of Ashling Murphy, R.I.P. will never be forgotten, nor should it be. As the eyes and ears of the world looked at and listened to reports of her brutal murder, there seems to be a renewed and steely determination that this indeed will be a watershed moment in the struggle to bring an end to violence against women.

There is a mixture of misogyny and misandry at play in articles and commentary, both online and in the media at large. There is a myriad of suggestions as to where the blame lies; the widespread availability of pornography? Violence on TV, in cinema,

in video games? Poor role models for children? Poverty? Addiction issues? Immigration? Inadequate psychiatric services... the list is endless. Suggested solutions are numerous; an overhaul of the judicial system, increased garda presence on the streets, more CCTV surveillance, legalising the use of pepper spray, self-defence training and education on courtesy, respect and etiquette in schools etc.

However, missing from the whole debate is discussion of the lack of respect for and equality afforded to all human life, irrespective of age, colour or creed. Violence is violence, period!

Here in Ireland, the recent push for euthanasia of the sick, elderly and vulnerable, as well as the introduction of abortion for babies who are unplanned, unwanted or 'imperfect', both speak of a society where life has become cheap and disposable, once a human being is unproductive or inconvenient. We need to 'join the dots' and 'make the connections', if we dare to be honest.

Little will change in this country as long as some human beings are deemed more worthy of life than others.

*Yours etc,*  
**Sinéad Tracey,**  
Leitrim Village, Leitrim

### Connection between pornography and violence against women

**Dear Editor,** I welcome Jason Osborne's feature on the evil of pornography in [*The Irish Catholic* - January 20, 2022]. He certainly hit the nail on the head. It was the word "drug" in the heading that caught my eye and pornography is both addictive and destructive. But what is the drug really, is it not lust?

This is the one mentioned in the Bible and which Jesus specifically refers to, so specifically, when he says that anyone who looks at a woman with lust in his heart has already committed adultery. Let's call a spade a spade.

But Mr Osborne is right, if ever we needed a discussion in society today about anything, we need one on the connection between pornography and violence against women.

*Yours etc,*  
**Gerard Kavanagh**  
Ballybrack, Co. Dublin



### Articles on synod were very encouraging

**Dear Editor,** Dr Murray is so right in stating that: 'It's good to talk - but robust and intelligent teaching is needed too' [*The Irish Catholic* - January 20, 2022]. It is so sad that so many Catholics have very little accurate knowledge of their faith. I think we have lost two, if not three generations through ignorance of the Faith. Many, indeed, rely only on what is depicted in the media.

I disagree with Sean O'Connell's criticism of Dr Murray's view of the synodal process [*The Irish Catho-*

*lic* - January 13, 2022]. Mr O'Connell asks 'who should preside at the Eucharist'. Who, indeed, but the priest as Christ's representative. The priest is called to be another Christ and to be totally devoted to God and his parishioners. A married priest, on the other hand, has a first duty to God and then his family, and then the parishioners. In other words, his vocation is equivalent to being a doctor, engineer, carpenter, etc.

Mr O'Connell goes on to refer to 'disciplinary arrangements' in contrast to Dr

Murray's reference to "either we believe that the Church has correctly understood and interpreted Jesus' actions and words and intentions, and we commit to that; or we consider the matter to be a merely human invention and interpretation, one that is constantly open to reform because it is only human".

I found Dr Murray's articles very encouraging and I thank *The Irish Catholic* for publishing them.

*Yours etc,*  
**Mary Stewart**  
Ardeskin, Donegal

### We still need to be mindful of others

**Dear Editor,** "We need to see each other smile; we need to sing again" is the chorus An Taoiseach uses in a song with no verse nor meaning.

Spring is coming he sings as he forgets to remember the most vulnerable, leaving them on the scrapheap of hope.

A new beginning is not always a new place, it is a state of mind. We still need to be mindful of others.

*Yours etc,*  
**Darren Lalor**  
Tyrrelstown, Dublin 15

### An Post has shown 'flagrant disrespect' to Christians

**Dear Editor,** What a contrast in the respect shown by An Post to celebrating the centenary of the publication of *Ulysses* and the celebration of Christmas. The stamps just issued for *Ulysses*, which focuses on one day, June 16, celebrating the perambulations of Leopold Bloom, feature beautiful pictures of life in Dublin between 1897 and 1904 taken by JJ Clarke, a doctor from Castleblayney in Co. Monaghan. The stamps issued for Christmas, which focuses on one day, December

25, celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, featured trashy slogans like Naughty and Nice or some such rubbishy words that had nothing to do with the nativity narrative. An Post's management didn't have the interest or willingness to respect Christmas and Christians by drawing on any of the great works of art produced by artists to commemorate Christmas over two thousand years. I don't begrudge the respect shown to *Ulysses*; it is one of the greatest of the great works of literature.

But the management of An Post let itself down in its flagrant disregard and disrespect for religious beliefs and traditions at Christmas 2021. These stamps commemorating the publication of *Ulysses* are another reminder of that. Will An Post do the right thing and rectify that error next Christmas?

*Yours etc,*  
**Dr Noreen O'Carroll**  
Blackrock, Co. Dublin

## facebook community

Each week we publish a selection of comments from *The Irish Catholic Facebook page*

### It's good to talk - but robust and intelligent teaching is needed too

The Catholic Church never encourage the reading of the Bible at home, in national school or anywhere else in life. How can we understand Christ and his teaching if we don't read the Word. The Bible is the autobiography of the Lord. Like you'd read an autobiography of Jim McGuinness or Roy Keane if you wanted to understand their life. - **Sheila McGirr McGarry**

Why is it so complicated, it's not rocket science... Jesus's teaching in the Bible and the true magisterium of the Church, that's it. - **Michael Holland**

Well whose fault is that? The religious stopped teaching and practicing! Scandal after scandal! The good thing is the separating of the wheat from the chaff! - **Dave Lynch**

### Rituals around death remain a huge part of who we are

Yes. The wake was very important. I went to many. There was something very comforting about it, for the grieving family. It helped the young generation not to be afraid of death or the dead. Respect too was there. - **Deirdre Quinn**

What do you think? Join in the conversation on *The Irish Catholic Facebook page*

## Spreading blame across all men

**Dear Editor,** The terrible murder of Ashling Murphy generated a lot of comment from feminist groups, politicians and mainstream media about male attitudes to women. Much of it was misandry labelling 'all men' as having an inherent propensity for violence towards females. It served the prevailing ideological narrative to spread blame across the wider demographic of men which causes division between the sexes.

Sadly, a secular culture that has no respect for Christian values on human life has taken firm "root in our time and culture" with the introduction of liberal abortion, the growth in violent crimes against people, the sexualisation of children and young teens through comprehensive sexuality education with some content that is perverse, whilst euthanasia is in the pipeline fanned by RTE and other media as 'dignity' in dying. Equally sad is witnessing a Catholic Church where many of its leaders say publicly what the dominant secular culture of our time wants to hear. That has become a defining characteristic of those leaders who have become influenced by the politicised secular culture that is smothering Catholic values and teaching.

*Yours etc,*  
**Matt Moran**  
Fountainstown, Co. Cork

### Letters to the Editor

All letters should include the writer's full name, postal address and telephone numbers (day and evening). Letter writers may receive a subsequent telephone call from *The Irish Catholic* as part of our authentication process which does not amount to a commitment to publish.

We regret that we cannot give prior notice of a letter's publication date, acknowledge unpublished letters or discuss the

merits of letters. We do not publish pseudonyms or other formulae to conceal the writer's identity, such as "name and address with editor". We do not print letters addressed to someone else, open letters, or verse. Letters to the Editor should only be sent to *The Irish Catholic*, and not other publications. Letters should not exceed 300 words and may be shortened for space requirements.

# Around the world



▲ **VATICAN:** Pope Francis accepts a gift from Stan de Saint Hippolyte, deputy CEO of the Catholic media organisation, Aletheia, during a meeting of the International Catholic Media Consortium on Covid-19 vaccines. Photos: CNS.

◀ **SOUTH KOREA:** Archbishop Peter Chung Soon-taick and other bishops lay hands on deacons to ordain them to the priesthood at Myongdong Cathedral in Seoul, January 28.



**HOLY LAND:** Children kick snow by the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem's Old City during a winter storm, January 27.



**YEMEN:** A man displaced by war collects recyclables from a garbage container in Sanaa.



**RUSSIA:** A Russian soldier fires a howitzer during drills in Rostov, January 27. The build-up of tens of thousands of Russian troops on Ukraine's borders in recent weeks has stoked fears of an invasion.



**USA:** New York City police officers are seen on motorcycles near St Patrick's Cathedral during the funeral Mass for Officer Jason Rivera of the New York Police Department January 28. Officer Rivera was killed while responding to a domestic violence call.

# Pornography and chastity

**P**ornography is the biggest addiction in the world today, and by a wide margin. Mostly it afflicts men, but is also a growing addiction among women. Much of this of course is driven by its easy and free availability on the internet. Everyone now (not least our own young children) has immediate access to it from the privacy of their phones or laptops, and in anonymity. No more having to sneak off to some seedy section of the city to watch the forbidden. Today pornography is gaining more mainstream acceptance. What's the harm or shame in it?

**“It's psychologically naïve to argue that this kind of deep intimacy can be put on public display”**

Indeed, what's the harm or shame in it? For a growing number of people today there is no harm or shame in it. Their view is that, whatever its downside, pornography is a liberation from former religious sexual repression. Indeed, many people see it as a healthy expression of sexuality (surprisingly this includes even some feminist writers). Characters on mainstream television joke about their pornography collection, as if it were as innocent as a collection of favourite old albums, and I have colleagues who argue that our resistance to it simply betrays sexual repression. Sex is beautiful, they argue, so why are we afraid to look at it?



**Fr Rolheiser**

[www.ronrolheiser.com](http://www.ronrolheiser.com)

## Wrong

What's wrong with pornography? Mostly everything, and not just from a moral perspective.

Let's begin with the argument: sex is beautiful, so why are we afraid to look at it? That logic is right about one thing, sex is beautiful, so beautiful in fact that it needs to be protected from its own power. To say that it can be looked at as one might gaze at a beautiful sunset is naïve, religiously and psychologically. Religiously, we are told no one can look at God and live. That's also true for sex. Its very luminosity needs shrouding. Moreover, it's psychologically naïve to argue that this kind of deep intimacy can be put on public display. It can't and it shouldn't. Public display of that kind of intimacy violates all laws of propriety and respect for those engaged in this

intimacy and those looking on. Like all things deeply intimate, it needs proper shrouding.

Next, when talking about the beauty of sex and the human body, we need to make a distinction between nudity and nakedness. When a good artist paints a nude body, the nudity serves to highlight the beauty of the whole person, body and soul, including his or her sexuality. In a nude painting, sexuality is connected to wholeness, to soul; how much to the contrary with nakedness. It exposes the human body in a way that obliterates its integrity, detaches its soul, and splits off sex from one's whole person. When this happens, and that is precisely what happens in pornography, sex becomes something soulless, split off, mechanical, devoid of deep meaning, bipolar, something from which you need

to return to your real self. And, when that happens, all profundity disappears and then, as W.H. Auden writes, we all know the few things that we, as mammals, can do.

**“When talking about the beauty of sex and the human body, we need to make a distinction between nudity and nakedness”**

Sadly, today for many of our young people, especially for boys, pornography is their initial sex education, and it is one that can leave a permanent imprint in them. That imprint can have long-term effects in the way they understand the meaning of sex, how they respect or disrespect women, and how they grasp or don't grasp the vital soulful link between sex and love. Pornography, and not just in the young, can leave scars that are hard to overcome. The argument against this is that pornography might well initially deform the vision of

an adolescent but that this will be cured once he matures and truly falls in love. My hope is that this is true, but my worry is that the initial imprint can, long term, taint the way a person falls in love and especially how he understands the radical mutuality of sex within love. Such is the potential power of pornography.

## Strong argument

Beyond all this, a strong argument might be made that pornography (in its production and its viewing) is violence against women and that pornography subtly and not-so-subtly promotes violence against women.

Finally, in a culture that prides itself above all else on its sophistication and liberation, not least on its liberation from many of our former religious taboos, one hesitates to even mention the word “chastity” in this context. Dare one even say that pornography is bad because it is the very antithesis of chastity? Dare one use chastity as an argument when for the most part our culture disdains chastity, pities it, and reserves a particular cynicism for religious groups who still advocate the old adage, “save it for your partner in marriage”? Worse still, is today's cynicism vis-a-vis the idea of remaining chaste for Jesus. But, the ideal of chastity embeds sex within romance, sacredness, commitment, community, and soul, whereas pornography portrays it as soulless and embeds it in a sick privacy. So I leave you with the question: which one makes sex something dirty?

**“What's the harm or shame in it? For a growing number of people today there is no harm or shame in it”**

# Family & Lifestyle

The Irish Catholic, February 3, 2022

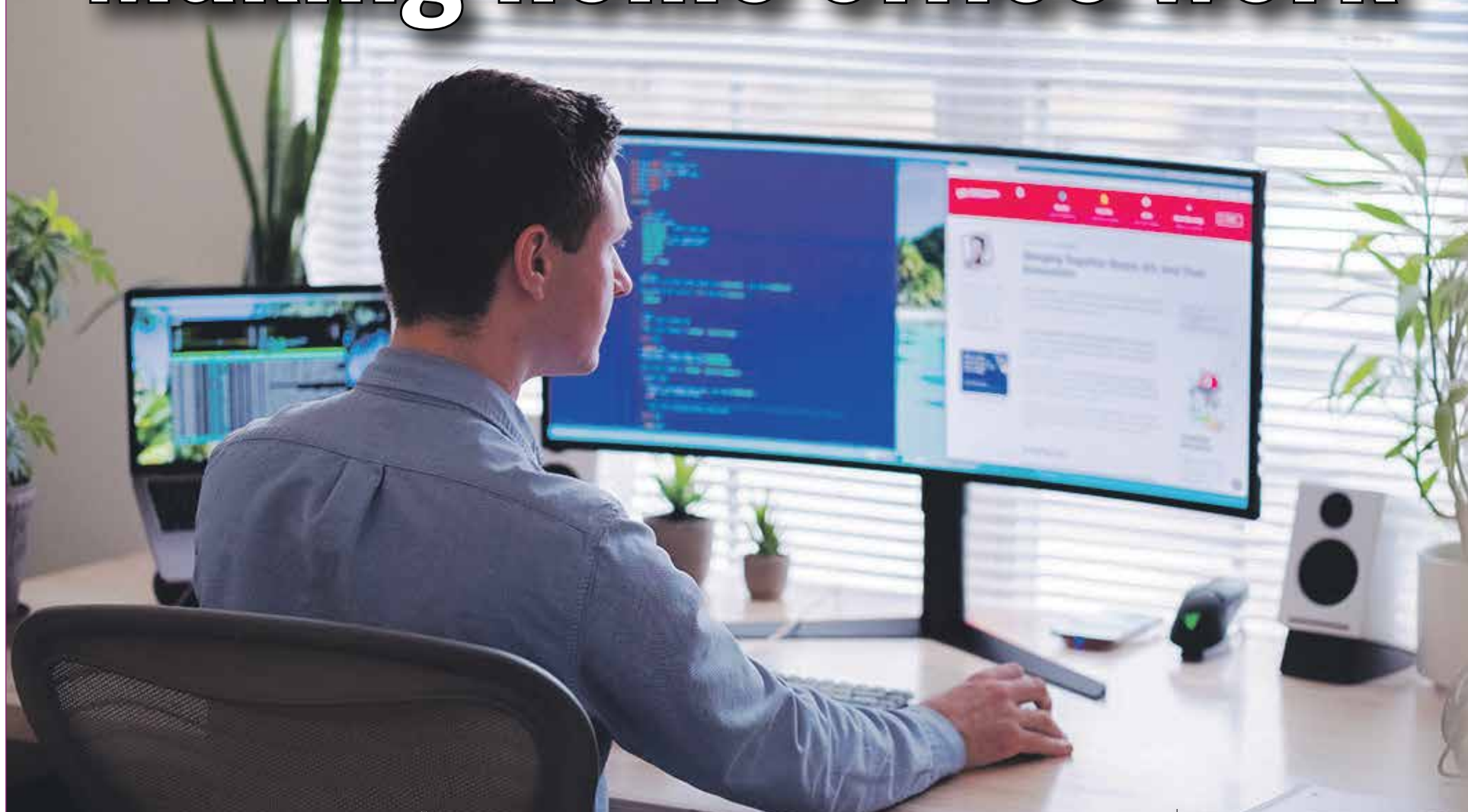
## Personal Profile

Giving back gifts received from the Lord

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# Making home office work



**W**ith the Cabinet signing off recently on proposed laws which will allow employees the right to request remote working, it's likely far more people are going to continue to work from home than pre-pandemic. A blessing for some, and a curse for others, especially if it's mandated for some reason or other – such as the waning pandemic.

I read recently that in a conventional office, co-workers pose the greatest threat to productivity, while at home, it's generally we ourselves that get in the way. While I think the distraction offered by co-workers is actually a pleasant and deeply important element in our social lives, the point about the distraction we cause ourselves at home can hit a little too close to the mark.



**With remote working likely here to stay for many, it's important to carve out a suitable workspace for ourselves at home, writes Jason Osborne**

Without the comradery of an office space, or even the basic motivation of having a boss nearby to compel the work along, it can prove difficult for many to get the work done. Distractions abound, and it's not always easy to come by the necessary willpower to overcome them. However, it's not all doom and gloom. Working from home, or a form of hybrid working between home and office, offers some real opportunities. It's really in our own hands whether we capitalise

on them or not.

In Catholicism, there's always been a great premium placed on the home as a place of sanctuary, rest, and a kind of holy, overwhelming energy. There's no reason why that same bubbling, comforting environment can't infect and guide our work, to the point that we're as effective, if not more so, than anywhere else.

With that in mind, here are some tips and considerations to keep in mind as those of you who are looking to continue working

from home go about preparing your homes for long-term home office.

### Act like you're going in to the office

Drawing mental lines and distinctions is incredibly important if you find yourself preparing to work from home. Throughout the pandemic, I found that when I lounged around in the morning, or worked from home as though I had a day off, I unsurprisingly got very little done.

What's more, failing to prepare for work when you're working from home can result in an uncomfortable blurring of lines between personal time and work time. Again, if you find yourself working in your pajamas or track-suit, there's not as big a distinction

from your personal time as if you dressed smartly as you worked.

So start well by instantly making that mental link between work and preparation for work. Get up early, perhaps setting an alarm, exercise if that's your thing, have a healthy and energising breakfast, shower and get dressed as though you were going in to the office. We're creatures of habit, and going through the old motions will prepare us mentally for a day of work. Conversely, going through the motions of a day off prepares us mentally to kick back and do little.

### Choose and customise a workspace

Another vital step is dedicating a specific room or corner of your home to your workspace. Again,

» **Continued on Page 33**

## Family News



## AND EVENTS

### DRIVERLESS TRUCKS SET TO TAKE OVER ROADS IN TEXAS

A giant 18-wheel transport truck is barreling down a multi-lane Texas motorway, and there is no one behind the wheel.

The futuristic idea may seem surreal, but it is being tested in this vast southern US state, which has become the epicentre of a rapidly developing self-driving vehicle industry.

Before driverless trucks are allowed onto roads and motorways, however, multiple tests must still be conducted to ensure they are safe.

Self-driving lorries are operated using radars, laser scanners, cameras and GPS antennas that communicate with piloting software.

"Each time we drive a mile or a kilometre in real life, we re-simulate a thousand more times on the computer by changing hundreds of parameters," explains Pierre-François Le Faou, trucking partner development manager at Waymo, the self-driving unit at Google's parent company Alphabet.

### TONGA EXPLOSION EQUIVALENT TO HUNDREDS OF HIROSHIMAS - NASA

The Tonga volcanic eruption unleashed explosive forces that dwarfed the power of the Hiroshima atomic bomb, NASA scientists have said.

The NASA Earth Observatory said the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai volcano spewed debris as high as 40 kilometres into the atmosphere during the 15 January eruption that triggered huge tsunami waves.

"We think the amount of energy released by the eruption was equivalent to somewhere between five to 30 megatons of TNT," NASA scientist Jim Garvin said in a press release.

NASA said the eruption was hundreds of times stronger than the US atomic bomb dropped on the Japanese city of Hiroshima in August 1945, which was estimated to be about 15 kilotons of TNT.

The agency said the eruption "obliterated" the volcanic island about 65 kilometres north of the Tongan capital Nuku'alofa.

It blanketed the island kingdom of about 100,000 in a layer of toxic ash, poisoning drinking water, destroying crops and completely wiping out at least two villages.

### PRISTINE CORAL REEF FOUND OFF TAHITI

Scientists have discovered a pristine, 3km-long reef of giant rose-shaped corals off the coast of Tahiti, in waters thought to be deep enough to protect it from the bleaching effects of the warming ocean.

The reef, which lies at depths of more than 30 metres, probably took around 25 years to grow. Some of the rose-shaped corals measure more than 2 metres in diameter.

"It was magical to witness giant, beautiful rose corals which stretch for as far as the eye can see. It was like a work of art," said French photographer Alexis Rosenfeld, who led the team of international divers that made the discovery.

Most of the world's known coral reefs are in warmer waters at depths of up to 25 metres, UNESCO said. The reef off Tahiti lies in the "twilight zone" 30 to 120 metres below the surface, where there is still enough light for coral to grow and reproduce.

# Wokeness and conceptual clarity

Modern academic philosophy is divided into two broad camps or traditions: 'analytic philosophy' and 'continental philosophy'. They each have their own stereotypes. Continental philosophers, the heirs of Sartre, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Camus, are stereotyped as being interested in big, existential questions – but writing about them in ways that range from 'poetic' to 'unclear' to 'baroquely baffling'.

On the other hand analytic philosophers, the heirs to Bertrand Russell, G.E. Moore, and Karl Popper, are stereotyped as using clear and precise arguments to make nitpicky and trivial points about things like the metaphysics of parts and wholes.

**"I think though that analytic philosophy is currently in a healthier state than its continental counterpart"**

These stereotypes are just that, but they hold some truth. For instance, analytics are more inclined to get lost in boring detail – there's a reason why, among the philosophy written since the 20th Century, non-philosophers are far more likely to have read something continental than analytic.

I think though that analytic philosophy is currently in a healthier state than its continental counterpart. I am biased – my own education was mostly analytic. But it's a fact that for at least the past few decades continental philosophy has been hugely influenced by postmodernism about truth



## Everyday philosophy Ben Conroy

and relativism about morality. Analytic philosophy, on the other hand, is probably the branch of the humanities that has most successfully resisted both. I think that's no accident.

When I listed the influential analytic philosophers at the start of this article I laughed a bit, because none of their projects have anything much to do with me or with a lot of the analytic philosophers I know. Analytic philosophy has become extremely diverse: what ties us all together is really a commitment to a certain style of writing. The primary goal of that style is clarity.

That commitment can make it easier for analytic philosophers to be boring, and I wish having a good prose style was more common in the tradition ("physician, heal thyself"). But analytics have their priorities right. If you don't keep your concepts clear, it's much easier to start making mistakes in your thinking. Before you know it those mistakes can multiply, pulling you further and further from the truth.

OK, but what has this pleasant diversion into academic inside baseball got to do with everyday philosophy? Well, conceptual clarity is as essential outside the academy as in it. Take what's now a very everyday concept: wokeness.

Wokeness is probably the defining cultural concept of the age. "Woke vs anti-woke" is the most expansive front of the

culture wars.

But what exactly does it mean to be woke? It's hard to say. Trying to describe wokeness in a neutral way that the woke and the anti-woke will both accept often feels like a fool's errand. It's not 'liberalism'. JK Rowling is a liberal Blairite but her stance on transgender issues has put



her firmly outside the woke category (though I'm old enough to remember the misty days of 2014 when the word woke was first coming into wide use: Rowling at that stage would have been considered the epitome of wokeness). Classical liberals are often among the most fiercely anti-woke. It's something broader and more all-encompassing than 'identity politics' or 'political correctness', themselves somewhat vague terms. Using a dictionary definition like "the quality of being alert to injustice and discrimination in society" is not going to fly with anyone who doesn't consider themselves woke, and it doesn't seem to properly capture the whole concept either. Wokeness seems very important: but

what's important about it? That question is hard to answer when it's hard to say what it is.

Anyone influenced by the analytic desire for clarity can't be tempted by the suspicion that the reason for all the confusion is that wokeness is barely a concept at all. A.J. Ayer, one of the driest of old British analytic philosophers, used to talk about 'pseudo-concepts' which seemed like they were expressing a real idea but failed to be ultimately meaningful. I'm not sure if I'd quite go that far about wokeness – in particular contexts about particular issues it does denote particular positions. But I do think that trying to treat it as a consistent ideological category tends to muddle thinking.

**"I live in the United States now, and agree that many of its social institutions are systemically racist"**

For example, is your columnist woke? I support the general aims of the #MeToo movement and think it mostly hasn't gone far enough. I'm almost always supportive of free speech, even for people whose ideas are wicked or dangerous. I live in the United States now, and agree that many of its social institutions are systemically racist. I'm a pro-life, doctrinally orthodox Catholic. I think capitalism bears a hefty share of blame for many of the world's biggest problems. It seems like I both do and do not fall under the concept.



» Continued from Page 31



this is as much about the mental side of working from home as it is the physical.

Rather than getting cosy in bed or on the couch – places properly associated with rest, relaxation and leisure – locate your workspace in an ergonomic, sturdy chair, ideally at a desk rather than a coffee table or makeshift surface. Spruce it up however you like, with natural light or a plant or flowers being pleasant touches that keep you in touch with earthier things than your laptop. Most importantly though, if possible, adorn your workplace with silence or whatever eliminates distraction for you.

**“Even if you choose not to go out, it’s important you somehow separate yourself from the work mindset sufficiently that your break is just that: a break”**

The key is to form a mental association between work and a particular place in your home, such that when you sit down at the beginning of the day or stand up at the end of it, you transition noticeably between home and work.

**Prepare food the night before**

Discipline and organisation are key traits for a successful home office career, with sharp distinctions having to be drawn in order to successfully balance home life and office life – at home. We’ve already touched on how to separate yourself from the home-mentality when working at home by conducting yourself as though you’re heading into the office, and we’ve already addressed setting out a dedicated workspace at home, if possible.

Another crucial time to handle properly is lunch time. For those working from home, making an effort to get out of the house is important, even if

only for a brief stroll or breath of fresh air. Obviously, the ideal time for this is lunch time. Even if you choose not to go out, it’s important you somehow separate yourself from the work mindset sufficiently that your break is just that: a break.

When working in an office, we always bring in lunch or buy it, thus cutting out the lengthy process of making a meal, which gives us ample time to take a break and chat healthily with colleagues. Try and give yourself the same opportunity when working from home.

Cook meals the night before, or cook meals that will last you a couple of lunch breaks, so that you just need to heat it up and eat when lunch comes around. The rest of your time can then be spent as you please, hopefully resulting in you feeling well-rested and ready to get back into the work mindset.

**Make an effort to socialise**

Opportunities to interact with others are severely cut by working from home. While this may suit the introverted among us, I dare say it’s important an effort is made to step up our socialising around work as a result. Humans are social creatures, and it’s important we double down on this all-too-easily neglected aspect of ourselves.

Buy into phone calls and Zooms with colleagues and others. Invite those in your vicinity out for walks on lunch breaks, if it can be co-ordi-



nated. After work and at weekends, devote serious time to family and friends, so that you don’t unconsciously slip into an anti-social rut. This is especially important if living alone, so perhaps make the resolution to see at least one friendly face a day if you find yourself in this situation, even if it’s just over Zoom.

**Start and end at definitive times**

Drawing boundaries or distinctions has been a frequent theme throughout this piece, and that is most important when it comes to starting and finishing work. The temptation can be to allow work to bleed over either side of the day, as you never really leave the office when working from home.

**“The key to running a successful home office is getting the balance between work and home just right, and this is done best by demarcating work and home, both physically and mentally”**

It’s crucial that you start as you used to go on in the office, starting and finishing at your set times. Whereas co-workers’ activity at the beginning and end of the day once alerted us to the time, it’s now up to us to be the ones to get up and close our laptops when the time comes, despite the temptation to keep going.

The key to running a successful home office is getting the balance between work and home just right, and this is done best by demarcating work and home, both physically and mentally.

## Faith — IN THE — family



Christina Malone

**“A**fter 39 years it is time to hand it over to someone else.”

These are the words of a 80-year-old parishioner who has been in charge of the parish shop for half her life. A Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) member for over 12 years recently said, “If I don’t do it, who else will do it?” Many people have given a lot of time and energy to the parish community.



have been active for the past 20-odd years or that lady that has been running the parish shop for nearly 40 years but parishers also have to give them the freedom to retire. Those people that have given their life to the parish community deserve ‘to walk away’ and just be there.

They deserve a medal for their commitment, energy and support and make room for someone else to step up.

Often in parishes

one person has four or five different roles. They are not just the stewards, they are also Baptism team members, arranging the flowers, being a Eucharistic Minister and if there is a shortage, they step in to be the Minister of the Word. We all know those parishioners. Long story short it seems like once you ‘are caught’ you sign up for life. However, this is not sustainable and times have changed. Many parishes need new people and that needs to be welcomed, encouraged and enabled by those already in active ministry. If we really welcome people where they are at, it means we have to allow them to be involved once a month, three times a year or maybe for a period of time. Whatever we do moving forward, we have to allow for people to retire. I am aware some people might enjoy being the centre of it all, but that is a completely wrong understanding of ministry. If sharing the Good News becomes about us, as individuals, we have misunderstood Jesus’ message “to do this in memory of me” and “make disciples of all nations”.

Maybe we should reflect on: How welcoming is the parish to allow new people to join? What is your understanding of time commitment? Can you accept, if someone can only give one Sunday a month or is ‘only’ available for the Easter Triduum? Some people might find it challenging to commit to every Sunday or every Thursday night. However, what they might be able to offer is one Sunday a month or two evenings a month. Many parishes run the John Paul II Award which gives teenagers the opportunity to be involved in parish ministry. Many parishes during lockdown depended on those young people for stewarding, becoming readers or taking up other important ministries in the parish. How about asking families who are presenting their children for the sacraments of initiation to take on an active role in the parish? Many have an openness to explore and reconnect with their faith those months leading up to ‘the big day’. Maybe they are not signing up for years but perhaps for a few months. Giving them a good experience of a welcoming parish community is something they will always remember. I am aware it needs people like the PPC member that

Maybe you can also help and encourage people when it is time to let go. What happens if there is no one running a parish shop? Who would notice? What happens if I don’t do it? Would that encourage others to be involved? It is not easy to hand over and let someone else do what you used to do, in their own way, but in order to grow and to move forward we need to open up to new people joining. As the Church starts to prepare listening sessions for the synod, maybe we could include questions like: How can you become an active member of the Church? What can you offer to make sure that the Church is still going to be there in years to come?

# Giving back gifts received from the Lord

## Personal Profile



Ruadhán Jones

When Declan Lawlor was coming of age as a young man at college in the 1980s, the Church in Ireland was beginning to ebb and the secular tide was rising. Declan's own faith was drifting, but Our Lady intervened, drawing him first to Medjugorje and then to the Legion of Mary.

“After this, a lady in his locality convinced him to go to Medjugorje, a prospect which initially didn't hold much interest for Declan”

Declan grew up in a Catholic household and his parents were quite devout, he explains: “They kept my faith going, really, going themselves to Medjugorje and saying the rosary every day”. But even with a Catholic upbringing, the steady creep of secularism and the lack of appeal to young people by the Church left him unmoored.

“The Faith was always there, but this was the 1980s and what the Church offered at the time was very bland... the 1980s was domi-

nated by recession, there was a lot of emigration at that time – it was a choppy period. The faith was, you know, it was just there.”

### Strong secularism

“It was a time of strong secularism. Pope John Paul II visited in 1979, that was the high point and then the next 10 years when I was in the middle of college in Trinity, 1985-89, a lot of the secularist ideas were creeping in. I did BESS – business, economic and social studies – which put me right in the thick of it... you saw both sides of the spectrum, I suppose you could say, left and right ideologies. My faith would have been weaker during those years, very much so.”

Declan says.

But then, a number of things happened. First, Declan realised that he needed help getting through law exams he was sitting: “I started to pray about them because I needed help. It was simple as that, the ATM machine approach to God. I made a deal in my head, that I was going to get serious about this if this comes right, which it did. And I couldn't be like a leper healed and run off again, I had to stick with it.”

After this, a lady in his locality convinced him to go to Medjugorje, a prospect which initially didn't hold much interest for Declan. But his experience there led him to seek greater involvement in the Church at home.



Declan Lawlor.

“I suppose it was about 25 years ago now, that I went to Medjugorje. I went once or twice, and I just got to the point that I thought I'd better do something for Our Lady and for the mystical body, the Church. But that time I was kind of trendier, I was still in my 20s so I had some sort of idea that I was relevant or cool,” Declan jokes.

“I was hoping to join something more like Barnardo's, but suddenly I was slapped with the Legion of Mary card. I thought about it and said, well that's the blue rinse brigade, a knitting club. It didn't really appeal to me at all. There was a fight there. Wild horses wouldn't let me go into the first meeting to be honest.

“Declan began volunteering in the Legion-run Morning Star hostel for homeless men, and never looked back”

“I walked down the road to the meeting house, I walked up to the door and said to myself, I can't do this. It was some kind of parish centre and I thought it really wasn't for me. I walked away and visited a friend's house... but I only stayed for 40 minutes and later I was walking by and wondered if the meeting was still on, an hour later. I thought I'd just go in and see how it would go.

“I went in, caught the last 20 minutes and, for me at the time, it seemed as bad as I feared. I said to Our Lady, I've done that, bought that t-shirt, it's not for me so good luck. But then two or three weeks later, I got the call 'won't you come back?'. I said to myself 'you're trying to suit yourself really. You got on the bus for a few minutes and

jumped off. Maybe you need to look at this again.' The anxiety had gone out of it a bit.

“I decided I would go back to it. Then when I started reading the Legion *Handbook*, I noticed that it was all about souls. Whereas the Church I was in didn't talk about souls at all. But I started to have a look at it and I thought, you know, they're really walking the walk here. They're doing Our Lady's work, they're bringing people to Jesus. And so when I looked under the rocks, I thought that there was a bit of purpose there and it felt right. And that was it, I stayed with it and kept going.”

Declan began volunteering in the Legion-run Morning Star hostel for homeless men, and never looked back. He tells me that over the 23 years or so of his time in the Legion, he has done the full gamut of their works: young adult groups; annual gatherings; a project week; and street contact to name but a few. He saw it as a chance to deepen his faith and give back some of the gifts he had received from God.

“To quote Frank Duff, it's a half-circle of Christianity until you start doing the bit of work really... it fulfils that apostolic call, reaching out to souls. You're contacting people, bringing them to meetings, to events, building them up. On one level, it's lifting up another soul, and on another it's dealing with another person as they process where they are, where they were, where they're going. Even during the week, I met a man and we were talking for an hour, maybe an hour and a half, all under Our Lady's mantle. It's not just ticking the boxes as you get another soul – it is dealing with the person,” Declan finishes.

Do you know someone who we should profile? Send an email to [ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie](mailto:ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie)

## Love Notes



Marta Osborne

## Reviving hospitality as our homes reopen

Both myself and my wife were very concerned about the virus and reduced our social contacts to the minimum since the beginning of the pandemic. Now with restrictions lifted, we'd like to make a renewed effort with our friends and family. Any advice?

Most of us breathed a sigh of relief after hearing the majority of the restrictions were lifted. For the first time in nearly two years, we are told, it's safe to invite friends to our homes or even shake hands. Finally, we can welcome our friends and family into our homes again. This might be the perfect time to be reminded of a fundamental Christian value: opening our homes to others – hospitality.

In his Word, God invites us to show hospitality. Jesus teaches us that to be a Christian is to make others feel welcome and loved. What better way to do that than to welcome them into our homes

and give them our time and attention?

Ever since we got engaged myself and my husband were looking forward to inviting friends and family over to our new, shared home. We are blessed to have each other and to want to share our love and joy with others by creating a home where everyone feels welcome.

However, true Christian hospitality is about more than inviting our good friends over for dinner to enjoy a Friday evening in pleasant company, and we don't always find it easy to make more of an effort with others.

### Practical ways to show Christian hospitality

- Pay attention: It's amazing to think that we have the ability to make someone feel appreciated by the mere effort of giving them our full attention during a conversation.
- Focus on building relationships, not proving

your point: True Christian hospitality is making an effort with everyone, even, maybe especially, with those with whom we might disagree.

- Adopting a welcoming attitude, giving others the benefit of the doubt and focusing on what we have in common instead of on what divides us requires effort but will often pay off in the long run.

- Revive home-made meals: Jesus tells us that we should serve one another as he served his disciples by washing their feet. By inviting a person to our home and serving them we fulfil Jesus' commandment of love for God and neighbour. In fact, by serving others we serve Christ himself. “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was a stranger and you invited me in.” (Matthew, 25:35).

We are invited to be generous with our time and our efforts. Surely, if it was Christ visiting us we would prepare the best food, serve the best wine and wear our best clothes. As we reopen our homes to welcome others let us remember that every guest is the Lord.



# TV Radio

Brendan O'Regan



## A timely reminder that children need more than medication

Last week was Catholic Schools Week, so hopefully it will have a positive impact on students in those schools.

The event was book-marked in the media by two Masses. On the Monday it was the regular 10.30am Mass on the RTÉ News channel, with Fr Michael Toomey from the Holy Family Church Ardfinnan, in Co. Tipperary. He was joined by some students and teachers from the High School in Clonmel where Fr Toomey is chaplain and the students did a confident job on the readings. The music group was excellent as well – far better than having CDs playing in the background. Then last Sunday's Mass (RTÉ One) was celebrated by Fr Gareth Byrne, long involved with catechetical matters, along with students from Oatlands College in Dublin. For a change it was broadcast from the Divine Word Chapel, Maynooth, rather than the RTÉ studio. The musical director was Adam McDonagh and I loved his acoustic piano accompaniment. The songs were familiar – a personal favourite was John Michael Talbot's *Only in God*. Fr Byrne's homily was gracious in expressing gratitude to staff and students of Catholic schools in their efforts to create communities of love, inclusive of parents and grandparents. Echoing the theme of that special week he hoped the young people



would "live life to the full" and face the future joyfully, certainly a challenge these days. I'd like to have seen a mixed school or girls' school added to the event, though I'm sure the requirements of Covid-19 restrictions played a limiting part here.

### Deficiencies

Driving down the country on the Wednesday I listened to developing news about the

deficiencies, to put it mildly, in child mental health services in South Kerry. The report that sparked the story told a tale of serious harm being caused to children by issues relating to diagnosis, medication, medical oversight and even record-keeping. In Barry Lenihan's coverage for *Today With Claire Byrne* (RTÉ Radio One) there were references to "significant harm", "risky

treatment" and "psychological distress". I may be wrong, but I've long felt that there has been too much recourse to medication in dealing with children who have issues that make it difficult for them to concentrate in the standard school classroom setting. During the coverage, I felt for the parents that, understandably, went along with everything the medical people prescribed, despite their reservations and the evidence of their own eyes. On several programmes, including *Prime Time* (RTÉ One, Thursday) Maurice O'Connell had an upsetting story about the effects on his son Jason. His story and other coverage referenced another doctor, described as a whistle-blower, who was treated badly by the authorities for his efforts. Ain't that a familiar tale!

### Come back

It seems to come back to how poorly our society regards children at times, especially the ones who are vulnerable, troubled or troublesome. This was the case in the Church's child abuse scandals as well as, apparently, in the current issue, though some reports in this case suggested that over-zealousness was part of the problem. As in all these cases how they were handled became part of the problem, worsening a situation that was bad enough to start with. And it galled

### PICK OF THE WEEK

#### RTÉ INVESTIGATES: DOMESTIC ABUSE, A YEAR OF CRISIS

RTÉ One Monday February 7, 9.35pm

For the last 12 months a fourfold increase in emergency calls from domestic abuse survivors seeking shelter has left refuges overwhelmed.

#### TURLEY TALKS

EWTN Tuesday February 8, 11am and Wednesday February 9, 8.30pm

Kevin Turley speaks to Fr Benedict Kiely, founder of the charity Nasarean.org to discuss the plight of Christians across the Middle East.

#### MONTY DON'S ADRIATIC GARDENS

BBC Two Wednesday (night) February 9, 3.40am

Another chance to see this wonderful series – gardening, natural beauty and a dash of spirituality.

me to hear politicians wringing their hands about this, politicians who campaigned not so long ago for children to be deprived of their very right to be born. Moral blindness would be the most charitable way to describe it, though I could think of others.

### Good news

By contrast, one quirky good news story from last week was the David v Goliath stand-off between the Irish fishing industry representatives and the Russian navy. The outcome was biblical! The wits were out of the block quickly with suggestions that the fisher's negotiators should be sent forthwith to Ukraine, where a more worrying dispute is playing out. I was impressed by fish producers' represent-

ative Patrick Murphy, interviewed on *Morning Ireland* (RTÉ Radio One) on Monday of this week. He described the outcome as "kinda surreal". He said we Irish were not "a bad crowd" and were leaders all over the world – certainly true as regards UN peacekeeping, development aid, missionary work and more. The Russians agreeing to move their ships farther away he classed as "a brilliant result", and also referenced the many good people lost at sea in his industry. He faltered when he remembered his own father who had died recently.

A little gem of a story.

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[@boreganmedia](https://www.facebook.com/boreganmedia)



# Film

Aubrey Malone



## Re-Joyce for Jimmy's *Ulysses* centenary

February 2 was the centenary of the publication of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. You might be interested in seeing the film version if you haven't done so already. It was directed by Joseph Strick in 1967. Ten years later, Strick directed *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce's earlier novel.

Opinions differ on the two films. Some say they're masterpieces, others that they're disasters. My view would be that Strick did his best in difficult circumstances. Whatever about *Portrait*, it was a brave man who took on the task of trying to direct a book as abstruse as *Ulysses*.

A lady called Mary Ellen

Bute even had a go at filming *Finnegans Wake* in 1966. Someone once said *Ulysses* was the most unread book of the 20th Century and *Finnegans Wake* the most unreadable one. How do you film an unreadable book?

"With great difficulty," is the answer to that question.

Joyce became manager of the Volta cinema in Mary Street in 1909. Not a lot of people know that, as Michael Caine might say. He had an idea it might make him rich.

Writing never pays much, though Joyce was no slouch at finding sponsors. Would *Ulysses* ever have seen the day if it wasn't for Sylvia Beach or Harriet Weaver? (Being self-published, I've always



Barbara Jefford as Molly Bloom and Milo O'Shea as Leopold Bloom in *Ulysses* (1967).

thought, it could have done with some editing.)

There have been a number of films made from his short stories, both for the big screen

and the small one. They've had varying degrees of success. His work is so eccentric it seems to militate against conversion to any other medium.

The exception to all in my view was John Huston's masterly film of *The Dead*. I don't know how many times I've seen it. Each time it throws up new riches. Was Anjelica Huston ever better? Or Donal McCann? His soliloquy at the end gave me a lump in my throat.

I got to know Donal after it was made, running into him one night in the Grave-digger's pub in Glasnevin. Both of us lived near it. I interviewed him a few times afterwards and kept seeing him in the street afterwards – usually outside bookie's shops. Gambling was his favourite hobby after drinking. Acting came third.

He could be crabby when

he had a few jars on him – which was, I'm afraid, most of the time. But if you let him rant on you wouldn't see a sweeter soul.

Huston died a few months after I got to know him. I called up to his house to commiserate. There were tears in his eyes. I asked him how he took the news. "It was a shock but not a surprise," he said, typically enigmatically. Huston had emphysema for years. He'd directed *The Dead* wearing an oxygen mask.

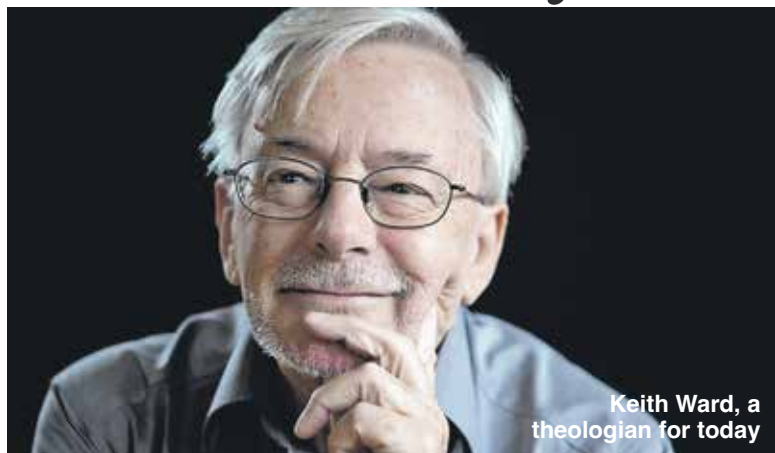
Donal was only 56 when he passed away a decade or so later. When I watch *The Dead* now it's with an even bigger lump in my throat.

# BookReviews

Peter Costello



## A personal theology for modern days



Keith Ward, a theologian for today

### My Theology: Personal Idealism

by Keith Ward  
(Darton, Longmann & Todd, (£8.99 / €12.59))

#### Anthony Redmond

Keith Ward was Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford University. He is an ordained priest in the Church of England. He has written over 20 books on various aspects of philosophy and theology and is regarded as an important Christian apologist refuting the so-called new atheists. I have seen him interviewed many times on television and he comes across as a down-to-earth man with a sense of humour who speaks in a manner understandable to the average intelligent person.

His latest book, *My Theology: Personal Idealism*, is an easy-to-read work that makes us think.

Keith Ward is an Idealist in that he believes in mind and consciousness and freewill. He opposes the atheist view that we are merely determined, programmed robots devoid of freewill. He believes in objective, self-vindicating moral values which couldn't exist without the reality of a transcendent God.

#### Atheist

Roughly stated, the atheist believes (if he or she puts their beliefs into practice) that a human being is merely a complicated machine, completely determined by forces outside his control. And, of course, a machine has no spiritual dimension. In a world of machines there can be no absolute moral or aesthetic values. As Ivan Karamazov says: "If God does not exist, then everything is permitted."

If the atheists and determinists are right and God does not exist then we are not free to choose, and we are not responsible for our actions. All praise and condemnation become meaningless. There would be no objective moral difference between Hitler and Mother Teresa. Both are enslaved by forces outside their control. Even an atheist cannot live by this philosophy. The atheist's life is usually a contradiction of this belief. Atheists like Sartre and Camus opposed Nazism as a great evil.

Keith Ward believes in an infinitely compassionate, loving God. He doesn't appear to believe in an eternal

Hell where the sinful are tortured and punished for all eternity.

#### Crucial

He writes: "A crucial feature of the Gospels is Jesus' teaching that he came to find those who were lost in hatred and greed (in 'sin') and invite them to turn again to the God who always wishes for their liberation and fulfilment. The parable of the Prodigal Son teaches that anyone who wishes, if only after long and bitter experience, to turn from hatred to love, will be met with joy by God, who will empower them to do so. There is judgment on those who have caused immense harm and frustrated the purposes of God. There is punishment, though that is not a set penalty imposed by God, whatever the consequences for them. If God is indeed good, punishment will be corrective, intended to bring them to turn back from evil and accept the liberating power of the spirit.

"And punishment will be self-imposed, not torture by God (no loving God could torture anyone), but the regret and bitterness of finding themselves in the company of those who are filled with hate and greed, now exposed in its full destructive power, and shut out from joy and true friendship."

I think this is quite powerful. When we come face to face with God, we will realise our own imperfections and sinfulness and that realisation will be quite a punishment. We will see ourselves as we really, truly are.

As I was reading Keith Ward's fascinating book I thought of something the theoretical physicist, Freeman John Dyson, said about human beings and the universe: "It's as if the universe knew we were coming." The properties of the universe are such to allow human beings to arrive and evolve. We call this 'The Anthropic Principle'.

The notion of pure random chance seems utterly preposterous. The belief that morality has no intrinsic value or meaning, is purely subjective and is just a matter of opinion, is not a belief anyone can really live by. It simply doesn't make sense.

We need people like Keith Ward to encourage our faith and to refute the philosophy of atheism.

## The abundant life of

### Returning Light: 30 Years of Life on Skellig Michael

by Robert L. Harris  
(Harper Collins Ireland, €13.99 / £14.99)

#### J. Anthony Gaughan

This is a tale about a remarkable location, a remarkable monastery and a remarkable person.

The remarkable location consists of two huge pinnacles of rock reaching skywards from the sea-bed of the North Atlantic 11 and a half kilometres west of the coast of Co. Kerry. The larger one is known as the Great Skellig, the other one as the Little Skellig. Since the 10th Century the Great Skellig has also been known as Skellig Michael (Sceilig Mhichíl) after a monastery which had been sited on it. Skellig Michael is 540 acres of rock with twin peaks. The two Skelligs are home to colonies of a wide variety of birds. They make their nests, lay their eggs and raise their chicks in the crevices of the rock. Ornithologists estimate that at any one time more than 500 puffins alone can be over Skellig Michael as they fly in and out of their nests.

#### “No information about the monks and their monastery which would satisfy a professional historian has survived”

From May to early October the pier on Skellig Michael is accessible. The visitor then finds three sets of stairs leading to the summit of the island. One leads directly to a ghost monastery. Here on a man-made platform is a ruined medieval chapel, and in a circle, six beehive cells and two oratories. In the centre of the compound is a High Cross. Nearby is a small graveyard with a row of small crosses. There are also patches of ground suitable for cultivation and cisterns for retaining rain-water. And, apart from this little walled monastery, there is evidence of hermitages on other terraces nearby.

#### Legend

Skellig Michael's monastery features in legends and there are references to it in the Annals of the Four Masters. It seems that the 'King of the World' visited it and a Norwegian King was baptised on it. It is claimed that the Vikings attacked it and kidnapped the abbot Eitgal in the 9th Century. St Michael on one occasion was alleged to have changed water into wine to enable the monks to celebrate Mass. Regrettably, no information about the monks and their monastery which would satisfy a professional



historian has survived. Hence one is left with only the 'educated guess' that the monastery existed here from the sixth to the 12th Century.

#### Thesis

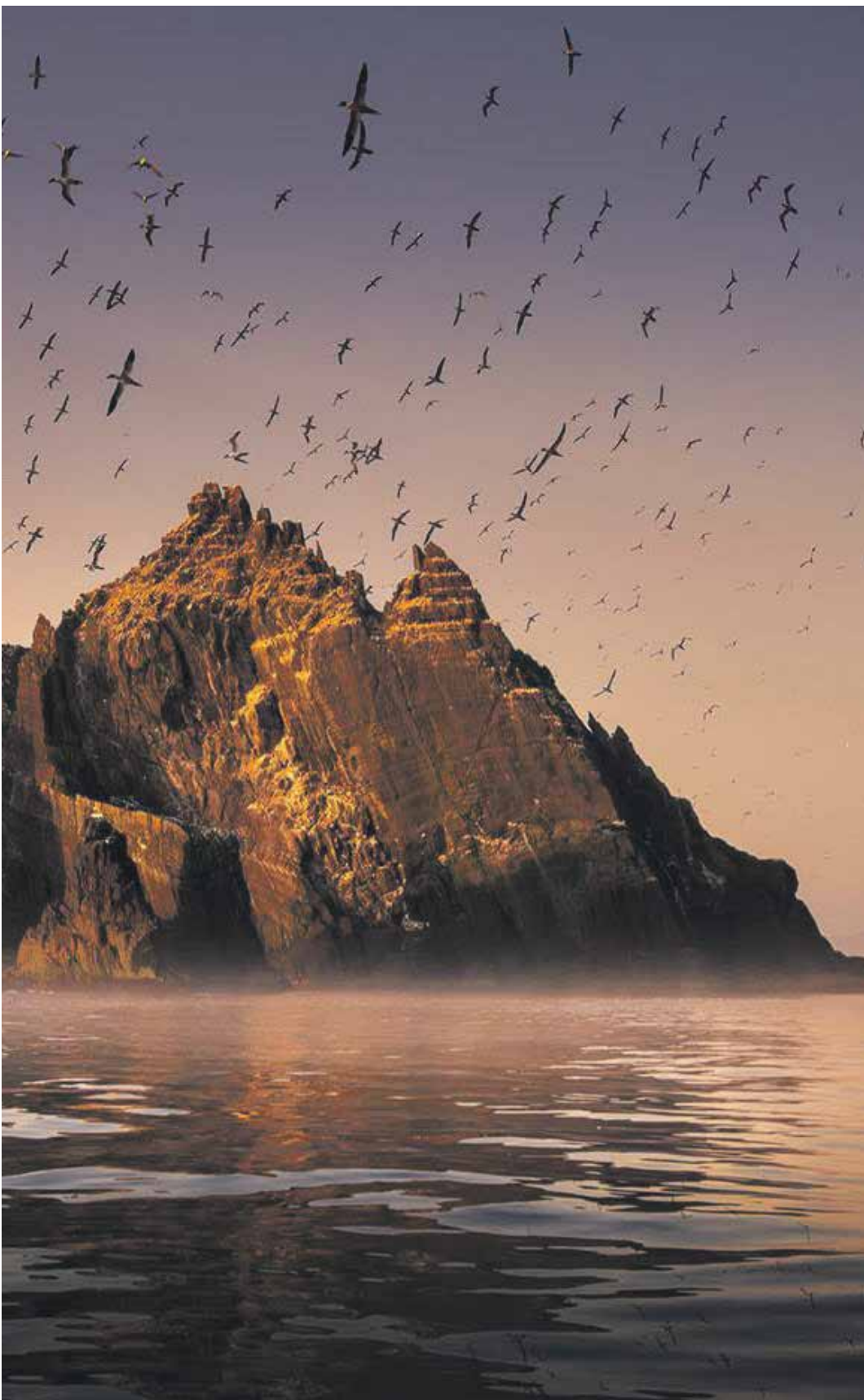
The author, Robert L. Harris, travelled from the US on a scholarship to Edinburgh University to complete a post-graduate thesis. While exploring the Western Isles of Scotland, including Iona, he met Landscape Artist and Native of Killarney, Maighréad, who was eventually to be his wife. She

introduced him to Skellig Michael in 1987. Within a week he was appointed by Kerry County Council to supervise the island's maintenance and the guiding of visitors to it. From 1987 to 2019 he spent half of each year between Skellig Michael and his home in North Leitrim.

In his memoir, apart from exhibiting his penchant for monastic and natural history, Harris's love for people is apparent. During his stewardship there were more than 100,000 visitors to Skellig Michael.

Readers should note that *The Irish Catholic* circulates throughout the island of Ireland and the book prices listed are the retail price recommended by the Irish or British publishers, in either euros or sterling, as a general indication of what purchasers may expect to pay.

## a famous shrine



The glorious bird life of the Skelligs.

### Learn

He communicated with many of them and learned the profound effect the climb to the 'monastery on high' had on them. Sadly, he also records that three visitors died on the island. Harris reserves his highest praise for Dermot Walsh, coxswain of Valentia Lifeboat who, in his Agnes Oilibhear, ferried people between Portmagee and Skellig Michael and he recalls with

gratitude the camaraderie of custodians of the lighthouse during inclement weather.

**“Every page evinces Harris’ love affair with the bird-life of the island”**

Every page evinces Harris’ love affair with

the bird-life of the island. He recalls some of the extraordinary interactions he had with individual birds, mainly puffins. His fascination with the light as it streamed into different parts of the islands at different times and seasons prompts him to become at times lyrical and break into poetry.

Like its author this memoir is also truly remarkable.

# A diplomat’s guide to *Ulysses* in its centenary year

## *Ulysses*: a reader’s odyssey

by Daniel Mulhall  
(New Island Books,  
€15.95)

Felix M. Larkin

This book is a delightful, chatty introduction to the wonderful world of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*.

It is written by Daniel Mulhall, an Irish diplomat for more than 40 years and now Ireland’s ambassador to the United States of America. In the prologue to his book, he muses on the importance for Ireland of what he calls “cultural diplomacy” – in other words, using “the lure of our literature as a resource for creating vital affinities with Ireland”.

He writes that our great writers give us a profile overseas that we could not otherwise achieve.

The book had its origins in blogs that Mulhall began posting on the Washington embassy’s website in 2018, with the aim of “elucidating Joyce’s great novel for American audiences”. Its aim is to do the same now for a wider audience.

It makes no claim to be an academic study, though Mulhall has read deeply in Joycean scholarship and has immersed himself in Joyce’s writings. He is addressing a general reader, the ordinary man and woman – an appropriate audience since the principal character in *Ulysses*, Leopold Bloom, is “an exceptional figure because of his essential ordinariness” (to quote Mulhall).

**“A central focus in Mulhall’s book is what can be gleaned from *Ulysses* about our history”**

Mulhall commends *Ulysses* to us on the basis that “Bloom is ultimately a life-affirming character, and *Ulysses* a life-affirming novel”. He admits that “reading *Ulysses* is a daunting undertaking... with its frequent shifts of writing style and the mix of narrative, dialogue and interior monologue”, but his helpful advice to “readers who encounter passages

they struggle to understand is not to be deterred, but to move on”.

He even suggests that readers who do not have the stamina to read the entire work should read just seven of its 18 episodes, the “more accessible and immediately compelling” ones – namely, 1 (Telemachus), 2 (Nestor), 4 (Calypso), 6 (Hades), 8 (Lestrygonians), 12 (Cyclops) and 18 (Penelope) – in order to get “a flavour of what it [the complete novel] has to offer and of the feat of writing that it represents”.

### Focus

A central focus in Mulhall’s book is what can be gleaned from *Ulysses* about our history. Mulhall tells us that he has “come to Joyce through a passion for Irish history”. While we must be cautious about reading *Ulysses* as history, it is nevertheless deeply rooted in actuality and suffused with a sense of history: it is, to quote Elizabeth Bowen about her novel *The Last September*, “fiction with the texture of history”. That is part of its charm for Mulhall – and indeed for this reviewer.

Its action, such as it is, famously takes place on June 16, 1904. It thus captures Dublin on the cusp of change, figuratively in

transition from Parnell to Pearse. Parnell was Joyce’s great hero, and Mulhall notes that Joyce attended an Irish language class conducted by Pearse but soon dropped out because “he objected to Pearse’s habit of denigrating the English language”. He speculates that “Joyce’s political outlook lies somewhere between the assertive parliamentarianism of Parnell and the more advanced but non-violent nationalism of Arthur Griffith”.

**“It thus captures Dublin on the cusp of change”**

In *Ulysses*, Bloom opines that “revolution must come on the due instalments plan” – that is to say, gradually – and Stephen Dedalus dismisses patriotic zeal with its concomitant violence by exclaiming: “Let my country die for me... Damn death. Long live life.” There is no doubt these sentiments are those of Joyce himself.

Anyone planning to mark the centenary of the publication of *Ulysses* this year by dipping into Joyce’s masterpiece would do well to begin by reading Daniel Mulhall’s book.



“The ghost of Sandycove Tower”: James Joyce, as reimagined by Ronald Searle (drawing in ink and wash, 1963).

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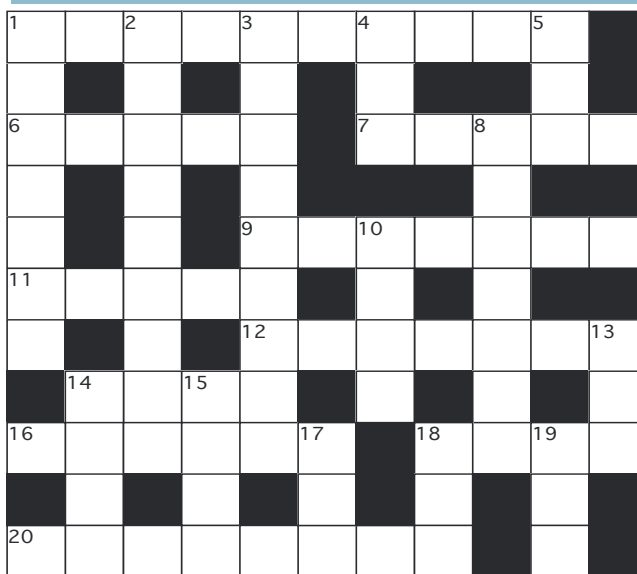


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## Crossword Junior

Children's 418



### Across

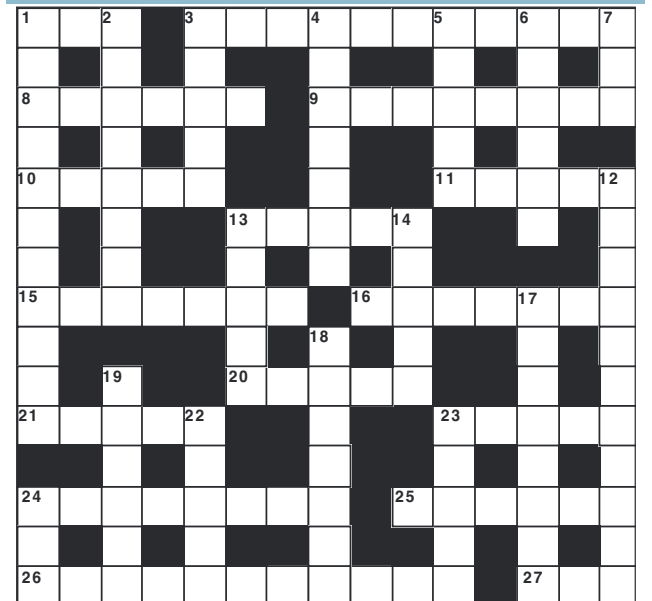
- 1 Take one from one hundred to get this number (6-4)
- 6 Use it to dry yourself (5)
- 7 Cardiff and Swansea are in this country (5)
- 9 This male bird displays a very colourful tail (7)
- 11 In the legend, Oisín went to Tir na nÓg with her (5)
- 12 The world's largest bird (7)
- 14 Intend (4)
- 16 Stallions and mares (6)
- 18 Hens lay them (4)
- 20 It's the \_\_\_\_\_, the one with the lowest price (7)

### Down

- 3 Use it to ring someone up (9)
- 4 At this very moment (3)
- 5 A female sheep (3)
- 8 Having a glance (7)
- 10 Plays a part in a play or movie (4)
- 13 Belonging to him (3)
- 14 This creature looks like a butterfly (4)
- 15 China and India are in this continent (4)
- 17 Notice with the eyes (3)
- 18 Have some food (3)
- 19 Rifle or pistol (3)

## Crossword

Gordius 544



### Across

- 1 Crone (3)
- 3 Nitrous oxide, a mild anaesthetic often used by dentists (8,3)
- 8 Ornament ball of material used by a majorette (6)
- 9 Got back garden, (ie) redesigned (8)
- 10 Man-eating monsters (5)
- 11 Pains (5)
- 13 Shade of purple, or a flower (5)
- 15 & 6d Twentieth century peaceful campaigner upset to see Adam hating ham (8,6)
- 16 & 14d Microprocessors (7,5)
- 20 Toboggans (5)
- 21 Notices symptoms of acne (5)
- 23 Move as a caterpillar does (5)
- 24 Change the fee, Basil - it can be done! (8)
- 25 US state in the middle of the Pacific (6)
- 26 Myopic (4-7)
- 27 Garden implement (3)

### Down

- 1 Is it part of the brain or university grounds for large animals? (11)
- 2 One of the two Biblical Cities of the Plain (8)
- 3 Weaving machines (5)
- 4 Huge primate (7)
- 5 Weather presenter Ms Carey has appeared in In Tua Nua, lately (5)
- 6 See 15 across
- 7 Piece of turf (3)
- 12 Stabilise an arrangement for the patron of throat disease (5,6)
- 13 Walks lamely (5)
- 14 See 16 across
- 17 Make an impression in elegant style (3,1,4)
- 18 Implore (7)
- 19 Instrumental composition (6)
- 22 & 23 Variety of leafy vegetable (5,5)
- 24 The supporter can bring a breath of fresh air (3)

## SOLUTIONS, JANUARY 27

GORDIUS NO. 543

**Across** - 1 Richter scale 7 Mug 9 Reno 10 Secret agent 11 Cree 14 Brake 15 Bloke 16 Acts 18 Tiffs 21 Reams 22 Coypu 24 Ursa Minor 26 Crush 29 Lame 33 Abroad 34 El Al 36 Tor 37 Saint Pancras

**Down** - 1 Roe 2 Cook 3 Tass 4 Recur 5 Check 6 Emir 8 Grey squirrel 9 Rubber bullet 12 Romans 13 Mensa 14 Bathe 17 Crying 19 Fetch 20 Scamp 27 Robin 28 Stoop 30 Mars 31 Odin 32 Tear 35 Ass

CHILDREN'S No. 417

**Across** - 1 Frozen peas 7 Short 8 Nails 9 Ice-cream 12 Oven 13 Grandson 15 Key 17 Opposite 18 Yolk 19 Artists

**Down** - 1 Fishing rod 2 Ozone 3 Enter 4 Panda 5 Acid 6 Asking 10 Congo 11 Monkeys 14 Ships 16 Yell

## Sudoku Corner

418

### Easy

6	8				1	3		
9	7			8	5		1	2
1	2							
5				3		9		8
4	6						3	7
3		2		6				1
							2	6
8	4		1	9			7	3
		1	6				9	4

### Hard

9		7				2		4
		5	9	2				
1							8	5
			4	8			2	
	5						9	
	3		6	9				
5	9							6
				4	5	8		
8		3				7		2

### Last week's Easy 417

9	5	4	6	8	2	3	1	7
6	8	3	4	7	1	2	9	5
7	2	1	9	5	3	8	4	6
4	3	2	1	6	7	9	5	8
8	9	7	3	4	5	1	6	2
5	1	6	2	9	8	4	7	3
1	6	5	8	3	9	7	2	4
2	4	8	7	1	6	5	3	9
3	7	9	5	2	4	6	8	1

### Last week's Hard 417

5	1	7	6	8	3	2	4	9
4	9	8	2	1	5	7	6	3
2	6	3	9	7	4	8	5	1
7	4	6	5	9	2	3	1	8
9	8	5	7	3	1	6	2	4
3	2	1	4	6	8	5	9	7
1	7	4	8	2	6	9	3	5
6	5	9	3	4	7	1	8	2
8	3	2	1	5	9	4	7	6



Fr Bernard Cotter

Notebook

# Not all heroes wear capes but some wear collars

**I WONDER HOW** many priests in Ireland contracted Covid-19 during the pandemic? I wonder if this statistic has been recorded anywhere? We were often told that not all heroes wore capes; I wonder if some of them had collars?

In each diocese, priests got plenty of advice and many directives about how to keep safe from Covid-19, and how not to pass it on. But priests who work in pastoral ministry know that it is hard sometimes to live entirely within the limits suggested by such guidance. Pastoral situations present themselves which demand a compassionate, pastoral response, and no amount of previously-issued norms will spare the pastoral priest from tending to his flock, even when he thus endangers himself. Being amenable to people is right and proper, but that very availability can sometimes put the priest in danger, particular when a pandemic is raging – from which priestly ordination alone does not give immunity.

**Instance**

For instance, a colleague told me of the challenge which landed in his lap: he was called on to preside at



a funeral Mass where one of the chief mourners had Covid-19 and insisted on attending the funeral – sitting a few feet away from my colleague for much of the time. I asked why he had not avoided this situation. His answer would be similar to the one most priests in parish ministry would make: “What could I do?” What indeed? What priest can refuse to assist pastorally even when it puts his own health in danger?

My own moments of danger were not as extreme as my colleague’s. Once, during lockdown, I was called to say prayers in the home of a person who had died suddenly. Unfortunately most of

the family, in-laws, grandchildren and neighbours arrived before me, so the small house was filled with people in a non-ventilated space, very few mask-wearing. On another occasion, wake prayers were held in the home of people who evidently did not believe in mask-wearing; I alone did, among 60 or so others. That I managed to attend to both situations and not pick up Covid-19 was a matter of luck and grace – or of speed.

**Stricter**

People might well wonder why priests are not stricter on such occasions. But as most priests will tell you, entering into any debate at the time of a funeral is pointless, given the mourners’ sensi-

tivity: reasonableness is rare in emotionally-charged situations.

In a one-priest parish, the one priest has to avoid Covid-19 if at all possible, knowing that the isolation period would in all likelihood deprive the parish of its weekend Masses. Heroes don’t all wear capes, but they do run towards danger when others run away. Priests in pastoral ministry definitely qualify for heroic status: I only hope someone somewhere is noting the names of our priestly heroes, who served even when personally in danger of Covid-19. But even if no earthly scribe notes the risks of their pandemic pastoral ministry, it will hardly escape the notice of the Chief Shepherd.

**Remaining cautious of Covid**

I have visited rural churches in a few dioceses recently, and note how like my own they are. In each place, sanitiser is plentiful, as are notices advising caution and care, while ropes or strings cordon off every second seat. In rural Ireland, we remain cautious about Covid. Parishioners want space between them and those behind and beside them. And our churches look full, even if we do not admit that they cannot be more than 50% occupied. We are still a long way from what seemed normal just two years ago, wondering if we will ever return.

**A Protestant minister and Catholic priest go to heaven...**

I am grateful to the *The Tablet* magazine for a lovely witty anecdote, which carries the semblance of truth: a priest apparently told it at an ecumenical service on Assumption Day. A priest and a Protestant minister both died and went to heaven. Jesus came out to greet them both, naturally. To the Protestant minister, Jesus said: “I am going to introduce you to my mother, you don’t know her very well.” The priest was feeling quite smug, until Jesus turned to him and said: “I am going to introduce you to my mother, sometimes you confuse her with my Father!”



## PLEASE HELP TYPHOON VICTIMS IN THE PHILIPPINES

The Montfort Missionaries have written to The Little Way Association appealing for urgent help for the victims of typhoon Odette which hit the Philippines in December 2021.

The Fathers have been sheltering homeless victims, and urgently need funds to continue feeding the homeless families, to repair the community’s own properties and to build the people new houses.

Fr Norwyn Baydo SMM writes: “The typhoon made landfall in different provinces. Our community in Minglanilla have opened their house to twenty families, though our own building was itself damaged by the typhoon. On Kinatarcan island, our house was used as an evacuation site for 10 families. The community members are all safe and are serving the people in providing shelter and for their needs.

“I’m asking on behalf of the victims for financial help to support our relief operation and also for the rebuilding of their houses. Please help us to continue our relief work. God bless you.”

**Funds sent to The Little Way Association for the homeless are conveyed to religious such as the Montfort Missionaries without deduction of any kind. Please be generous and particularly remember the families with small children.**

**Typhoon Odette left families in the Philippines homeless and destitute. You can enable missionaries to help rebuild the victims’ lives.**



“It is love alone that matters.”  
- St Therese

**MISSIONARIES NEED YOUR MASS OFFERINGS**

The Little Way Association regularly receives appeals from bishops and religious superiors on the Missions for Mass stipends and intentions for their poor priests. Such payments help them to meet basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter. Also, the poor and deprived people, whom the clergy serve so faithfully, often turn to their priests for assistance. Thus, your stipends are gratefully received and your intentions are faithfully honoured at Holy Mass.

**We like to send a minimum of €5 or more for each Mass. Our benefactors will be glad to know that a Mass is offered each day for their intentions.**

**WELLS NEEDED**

Missionaries constantly appeal to The Little Way for funds to sink wells in order to provide clean water, the lack of which causes much illness and many medical needs. On average, women in Africa and Asia walk around three hours every day to fetch water, often in scorching heat.

**Can you help provide a well?**

Crossed POs and cheques should be sent and made payable to:

**THE LITTLE WAY ASSOCIATION**  
Sacred Heart House, 119 Cedars Rd, Clapham Common, London SW4 0PR  
(Registered Charity No. 235703) Tel 0044 20 76 22 0466  
[www.littlewayassociation.com](http://www.littlewayassociation.com)

- I enclose €..... to be allocated to:
- €..... PHILIPPINES TYPHOON APPEAL
- €..... HUNGRY, SICK & DEPRIVED
- €..... WELLS AND CLEAN WATER
- €..... MASS OFFERINGS (Please state no. of Masses \_\_\_\_\_)
- €..... LITTLE WAY ADMIN EXPENSES

To donate online go to [www.littlewayassociation.com](http://www.littlewayassociation.com)

**DONATIONS FOR THE MISSIONS ARE SENT WITHOUT DEDUCTION FOR ANY EXPENSES.**

Please tick if you would like an acknowledgement

Name (Rev. Mr. Mrs. Miss) (Block letters please)

Address