

The Irish Catholic

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'Persecuted but not forgotten'

Iraqi archbishop tells of hope after 'miraculous' Papal visit

EXCLUSIVE

Chai Brady

An Iraqi prelate who trained for the priesthood in Ireland has said that the historic visit of Pope Francis is a reminder to the world that the tiny Church there is still a beacon of hope despite the challenges.

Archbishop Bashar Matti Warda told *The Irish Catholic* that he hopes the visit will inspire a new generation since young Iraqi Christians were instrumental in organising the Pontiff's trip.

"I said it in my final thanks to His Holiness: 'You told us that we are not forgotten, persecuted but not forgotten'", Archbishop Warda told this newspaper speaking from Erbil where the Pope met local Christians.

He said that he believes the Pope's humble example will give local Christians the impetus they need to continue rebuilding after the horrors of Islamic State.

"Sometimes people - even when it comes to NGOs - are tired because there is so much help needed, but the presence of the Christians made it clear

» **Continued on Page 2**

A match made in Heaven



Fr Bryan Shortall OFM Cap. with his newly wedded cousin Fintan Lacey and wife Leona, after Fr Shortall married the couple on March 6.

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The Pope in Iraq offers a powerful message of solidarity and fraternity

They say a picture paints a thousand words, and if that's true the image of Pope Francis at the weekend standing in a bombed-out church in Iraq speaks more powerfully than any of the thousands of column inches that have been and will be written about the trip.

As images go, it would be hard to find one more poignant than Christ's Vicar in the ruins of Mosul's Church Square. It stands as proof that love actually does conquer hate, and that the barbarism of the likes of the Islamic State never has the final word.

Joy

And yet, as Christians danced and sang out their joy at the visit of Pope Francis, there was not the slightest hint of triumphalism but gentle relief at their delivery from some of the greatest horrors the world has ever seen.

“The Church in Iraq is alive and Christ is alive and at work in his holy and faithful people”

It was fitting that the first visit of Pope Francis since the onset of Covid-19 was to Iraq. As the birthplace of Abraham, it was the perfect setting to reaffirm his constant refrain that we are all members of the one human family. Abraham is father in faith to Jews, Christians and Muslims – what we call the Abrahamic religions.

Message

The Pope's message was clear: “If God is the God of life – for so he is – then it is wrong for us to kill our brothers and sisters in his name.”

“If God is the God of peace – for so he is –



Editor's Comment Michael Kelly



Pope Francis in Church Square in Mosul. Photo: CNS

then it is wrong for us to wage war in his name.

“If God is the God of love – for so he is – then it is wrong for us to hate our brothers and sisters.”

But, the Pope was speaking not only to religious believers who may be blinded by ideology to kill in the name of their religion. He was speaking to a jaded Western world that too easily swallows the lie that religion is the root of all conflict and that a world without religion would be a world at peace.

Remind

The 20th Century alone should be enough to remind us that the exclusion of God and the subsequent relativisation of what is absolute, unleashed terror upon the earth. The nihilism of Islamic State sought to do the same and set communities in the Middle East against one another. The Christians – who have been in Iraq for 1,800 years – have paid a heavy price along with other minori-

ties. But, the visit of Pope Francis also showed to the world that while they may be persecuted they are not forgotten.

The coverage of this papal trip also cast Iraq in a new light. Long a byword for violence and conflict, the Pope's insistence on universal fraternity means that this land should now be a beacon for tolerance and co-existence.

Remains

Amid the rubble and bombed out remains of four churches destroyed by Islamic State militants, Pope Francis held up the martyrs as the model of faithfulness for Christians.

“If God is the God of peace – for so he is – then it is wrong for us to wage war in his name”

In boldly proclaiming that “The Church in Iraq is alive and Christ is alive and at work in his holy and faithful people” the Holy Father is also offering hope to people living in darkness in troubled parts of the world that the darkness will never overcome the light.

In the midst of pandemic gloom, it is a message we can all benefit from.

📞 To join Friends of The Irish Catholic and support Catholic journalism, please phone the office on 01 6874094 for more information or to make a contribution.

Iraqi archbishop tells of hope after ‘miraculous’ Papal visit

» Continued from Page 1

to the people who were helping and are still helping that their help is making a difference.

“Still we have Christians here, despite all the difficulties, because you have cared a lot for the Christians – so still we have Christians.”

“I think yes we are not forgotten, the visit showed that quite clearly,” he said.

Speaking of the influence of young Iraqi Christians on

the papal trip, Archbishop Warda – a Redemptorist who trained in Dundalk, Co. Louth – said: “Believe me, what I've seen over the last month from the young people was really a miracle.”

“We are not really specialists or experts in organising big events. We don't have organisational companies; we have done it ourselves. We have learned in the spirit of joy and hospitality how to prepare for this.”

Archbishop Warda said

the general feeling in Iraq was that it was “an historical moment” as “the world is seeing images different than they're used to seeing from Iraq. There is no war, no violence, no sectarian conflicts, no political disputes, it's images of people shouting, dancing, praying”.

So far, about 11,000 Christian families have been resettled with the main priority being rebuilding homes as well as churches in Iraq by global charity Aid

to the Church in Need (ACN).

ACN Ireland Director, Dr Michael Kinsella, described the organisation as “emboldened” and “encouraged” by the Pope's trip to Iraq, which saw the pontiff pray at many of the sites destroyed by Islamic State.

“The reality is that what has been rebuilt is still very small and still very fragile,” Dr Kinsella said, continuing, “the work has only begun”.

See page 6.



Photo: Abbie Tyley-Smith / Concern Worldwide

Adukual* (18) and her seven-month-old baby, Elizabeth* live in South Sudan, a country torn by years of conflict.

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'Blatantly obvious' anti-Catholic bias in Government, says TD

Ruadhán Jones

TD Michael Healy-Rae has said there is "blatantly obvious" anti-Catholic bias in Government.

The Kerry TD told *The Irish Catholic* that "governments present and past seem to be engaged in a continual downgrading of the Catholic religion".

Bias

"Of course there is anti-Catholic bias in Government - is that not blatantly obvious," Mr Healy-Rae said, adding that the Government has "treated the rights of the Faithful unfairly", particularly in relation to funerals.

"At the moment when people are going out of this world, it does not make sense that no matter how large a church is, only ten people are allowed

to attend," he said. "I think that that is wrong, I think it's insulting and degrading to the families."

According to Mr Healy-Rae, "the smallest church in Ireland is capable of hosting ten people safely and adhering to some proper social distancing".

The TD's comments come as pressure mounts on the Government over restrictions on public worship.

The Western Bishops released a statement last week in which they expressed concern that public worship may not be available "for months to come".

"It ignores the important contribution of communal worship to the mental and spiritual well-being of people of faith," the six Western bishops said.

They joined the call for an increase in the number of mourners allowed at funerals,

arguing that "a modest increase to 25 would, without compromising safety, bring much consolation to grieving families".

Meanwhile, Aontú representative for Cork-West Becky Kealy has started a new petition calling for a return to public worship for Holy Week.

Ms Kealy said it is "vitaly important" that public worship be allowed from Holy Week on.

Holy Week

"People have been finding it really difficult being away from the sacraments, and the routine of attending daily Mass for the elderly," she continued. "We're pushing for it to be reopened by Holy Week because of the importance of it and because we were in lockdown for Easter last year."

Health Minister criticised for reply to public worship query

Chai Brady

A TD has criticised Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly for "dodging" a question about risks associated with public religious services as "very hurtful" to her constituents who have been vocal about the issue.

Sinn Féin's Sorca Clarke of Longford-Westmeath constituency submitted a question to Minister Stephen Donnelly about risk assessments related to the restrictions on public worship last week.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* Ms Clarke said the response she received was "very, very disappointing".

"I have been contacted by multiple constituents at this stage who would like to see their churches reopening. They feel that the churches themselves can manage the restrictions very easily and very effectively and they don't understand why it is that they have been closed," she said.

In response to Ms Clarke, Minister Donnelly said the number of people allowed to

gather in different scenarios in the Covid plan "is based on a review of international practice and the judgment of public health experts".

He said the plan seeks to "balance the risks" of different types of gatherings. "The measures in place for each level reflect the prevailing disease situation and recognise that we can and must prioritise some activities over others," Mr Donnelly said.

Ms Clarke said: "The question that I asked was very straight forward: the risks associated with opening churches. There was nothing very complicated about it; the risk assessment.

"When a minister dodges questions like this it's very hurtful to people and it's very dismissive of people who want these questions asked, my job is, as a public representative, to ask questions on behalf of my constituents and this is one that constituents have been quite vocal about."

She added: "I know the number of phone calls I would not have received if people were just given clear and concise information as to why something can't happen. Where there is a void of communication, it leads to people being very upset and it leads to people being very hurt."

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Running on God's grace



"I can't help but thank God for his grace," UCD sprinter Israel Olatunde posted on Instagram, following his fourth place finish in the 60 metre sprint at the European Indoor Athletics Championship in Poland last weekend. 18-year-old Mr Olatunde's time of 6.79 seconds was just shy of his U20 national record from two weeks ago of 6.73 seconds. "I thank God for the opportunity to be back competing," Mr Olatunde posted, saying that he was looking forward to seeing what lay ahead.

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Distributing Communion outside churches is not against the law says Trinity professor

Chai Brady

A Dublin priest was not in breach of any laws when he was distributing Communion after his online Masses, according to a law professor.

Fr Binoy Matthew co-PP of Mountview and Blakestown had been allowing people to come to the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Hunstown during a two-hour window to receive Communion after he celebrated online Mass. He was told to stop by gardaí who said it was akin to an organised event and in breach of Covid regulations, according to the priest.

Legislation

Prof. Oran Doyle of Trinity College Dublin said that Covid legislation “does not currently prohibit or restrict religious services in general, although it does limit the number of people who can attend funerals”.

In March 2020, the Oireachtas passed an act giving the Minister for Health

power to make regulations to help stop the spread of Covid, in particular, the act gave the minister the power to prohibit events or classes of events.

Although the act defines ‘event’ as meaning “a gathering of persons, whether the gathering is for cultural, entertainment, recreational, sporting, commercial, work, social, community, educational, religious or other reasons”, the minister made regulations that prohibit what they call ‘relevant events’.

Prof. Doyle said: “Crucially, the definition of ‘relevant event’ does not include events held for religious reasons. It is clear, therefore, that the minister has chosen not to prohibit events held for religious reasons. Therefore, there is no legal restriction on religious events.”

The Archdiocese of Dublin released a statement on February 5 asking priests not to distribute Communion before or after Mass.

The archdiocese said: “Under current restrictions all religious services

continue to take place online. In the interest of health and safety priests and parishes ought not to distribute Holy Communion before or after Mass, in or outside churches.”

Gatherings

“Drive-in masses are not permitted as no gatherings of people outdoors or indoors are permitted. Churches remain open for private prayer only; liturgies and devotions (exposition of the blessed sacrament, rosary, stations of the cross) can take place in closed churches, online only.”

Previously speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Fr Matthew said he was distributing Communion after Mass as “a way of keeping people sane in Ireland”.

“For some people religion means a lot and faith means a lot and this is a way of keeping in touch with them and lots of people have said they are very, very appreciative of what we were doing,” he said.

Beaumont Hospital removes ‘Saint’ prefix from IT systems

Staff reporter

A Dublin hospital has decided to remove any reference to ‘Saint’ from the names of the wards on their IT systems.

Beaumont Hospital confirmed to this paper that the ward names are not being altered and the existing signs will be the same but the names would be changed on their IT systems to avoid “potential ambiguity” and “duplication”.

When asked whether the former IT nomenclature had resulted in any threat to patient safety the hospital said it had not.

This meant that wards named after saints will only be referred to by their

first names. For instance, ‘ST’, ‘St’ or ‘Saint’ James ward will now be referred to as James ward.

The move came into effect on February 22, with the names changed on all their IT systems.

In a statement to this paper Beaumont Hospital said: “The actual ward names in Beaumont Hospital are not being altered and existing signage is being maintained.”

“However, with regard to the ordering of ICT based tests and investigations, the prefix of ‘Saint’, ‘ST’ and ‘St’ is being removed thereby avoiding potential ambiguity, duplication and generally enabling a more efficient ordering system in this regard.”

Young hearts to receive God’s fire at Ignite conference

Jason Osborne

The Ignite student conference is set to hit the airwaves this year in partnership with Radio Maria, with a focus on the theme of evangelisation.

Established at the end of 2019, Ignite is a Catholic conference aimed at college students and organised by young people themselves.

Broadcasting on Saturday, March 20 from 11am-5pm on Radio Maria, conference organiser Sarah Kate Moynihan said the decision to share the conference over the radio came about as a result of ‘video fatigue’.

“We decided we can’t go online, whether through Zoom, YouTube or Facebook, because people aren’t really tuning in for that long anymore,” Ms Moynihan said. “So it would have been a lot of effort for little engagement”.

Confident that the radio is the medium through which to share a star-studded line-up, including prominent Catholic internet communicators Fr Gregory Pine OP, Sr Mara Rose OP, and Irish priest Fr Vincent Stapleton, Ms Moynihan expects a “great reaction” to it as there is a “real hunger” among the youth for quality Catholic events.

Smiles all round as new Red is professed in Belfast



Bro. Ryan Holovlasky (right) after his Perpetual Profession as a Redemptorist on Sunday March 7 at Clonard Monastery, Belfast.



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NEWS IN BRIEF

Focus ‘concerned’ over single adults in homelessness rise

While the last 12 months have seen a decrease in homeless families, there has been a “concerning” rise in the number of single adults,

according to homelessness charity Focus.

During 2020 family homelessness decreased by a significant 37%, while adult-only household homelessness increased by almost 10% over the same period.

“The return to an increase in the monthly homeless figures is deeply concerning, particularly in the middle of a pandemic and Level 5 lockdown,” said Focus Ireland Director of Advocacy Mike Allen.

Former Sisters of Mercy Cork property on sale for €1.2m

A convent and lands in Cork previously owned by the Sisters of Mercy have gone on the market for €1.2 million.

The Passage West 3.16-acre mixed-use town centre site is being sold by ERA Downey

McCarthy on behalf of Barry Coleman of Clyda Eco Homes Ltd.

Overlooking the harbour, the convent site is earmarked as a “key regeneration opportunity” in the Passage West Strategic Plan 2018-2022, and has full planning permission for 35 apartments, 13 detached homes and two retail units.

Buildings currently on site include the former St Mary’s National School, the Sisters of Mercy convent, a former industrial school and some ancillary outbuildings.

The Old Testament knew all about sibling rivalry



Mary Kenny

According to some royal sources, the root of Prince Harry's bitter feelings towards his family lie in a very old, even biblical, scenario: that is, when brothers fall out because one feels the other is favoured over the other. That was the basis of the Hebrew Bible's first account of homicide: when Cain slew Abel, (told in Genesis 4:1-16.)

It is said that Prince Harry strongly resents some of the words spoken to him (especially about his wife, Meghan) by his elder brother, William, and feels disparaged, too, by his position in the family - behind William in order of precedence. William is due to be the monarch one day: Harry, sixth in line, is unlikely to be. He has also indicated that his brother William, along with Kate Middleton, were jealous of Meghan's successful way of connecting with people on royal tours.

Rivalry

Psychoanalysts often focus on the Cain and Abel story as the classic example of rivalry and jealousy between brothers. In Genesis, Cain was the elder and Abel the younger: yet Cain was jealous that God found greater favour with his younger brother. As we know, when the Almighty asked Cain about Abel's disappearance, the offender answered: "Am I my brother's keeper?"

The issue of sibling jealousy occurs at several points in the Old Testament - notably that of Joseph and his brothers. Joseph's jealous brethren plotted to kill him - stripping him of the special coat his father had made for him and chucking him into a pit.

And so, this story of brothers at war, or at log-gerheads, has been repeated down the ages, in families, in history, in novels, in legends. William and Harry's apparent rivalry would be par for the course.

Brothers

And yet we also have vivid examples of brothers who worked together in harmony. Literary brothers like Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm, or Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, produced their classics in unison. Orville and Wilbur Wright were inseparable as aviation pioneers: Vincent van Gogh was supported throughout his short life by his brother Theo.

“The issue of sibling jealousy occurs at several points in the Old Testament”

The poet and writer Patrick Kavanagh was loyally supported all his life, and after it, by his brother Peter. Patrick Pearse and his brother Willie were so close that Willie was executed just for being Patrick's brother.

So, although we've seen brothers fall out - many of us could find examples in our own families - it isn't always so. If brothers share a common aim and if other family members are supportive - particularly wives - brothers can be the best of friends.

● Incidentally, the tabloids weren't always nasty about Harry's mother, Diana, Princess of Wales, as he alleges. I was writing for *The Daily Mail* during Diana's prime and she seemed to approve of my despatches. She actually asked the editor of *The Daily Telegraph* "Why can't you write nicely about me, like Mary Kenny in the *Mail*?"

And yet, I think the truth is that Diana had an ambiguous relationship with the media. In one way, she courted it, in another, she felt herself persecuted. But accumulated pressure on her was indeed colossal.



Britain's Prince Harry and Meghan, Duchess of Sussex, are shown with Oprah Winfrey in the March 7 interview. Photo: Harpo Productions

And the same principle goes for sisters. They can be loving and close - like the Brontes - or lifelong feuding rivals, like the film stars Olivia de Havilland and Joan Fontaine, who never patched up their sibling enmity.

Whether Harry's well-aided hostile feelings towards his family, including his father, will heal the difference with his brother - or amplify it - remains to be seen. It is certainly a situation with a long back story, and an old, biblical warning.

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St Peter in paintings

For mid-March, our main Lenten saint must be St Patrick: but as my focus here is on remarkable paintings of saints, I've chosen the first Pope, St Peter. Peter has inspired many great artists, including Raphael's *Peter Appearing to the Apostles* (in London's Victoria and Albert Museum), Da Vinci in *The Last Supper*, Georges de la Tour's warmly-lit *Tears of St Peter*, at the Cleveland Museum, and Masaccio's *St*

Peter Healing the Sick, in Florence.

Rembrandt painted three stunning pictures of Peter: one is the reflective *St Peter in Prison*, hanging in Jerusalem; another is the dramatic *Denial of Christ by St Peter*, in Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum.

I was fortunate enough to see the original of Rembrandt's tender *St Peter*, as a self-portrait, in the national museum in Stockholm. It is the most haunting picture of Peter as an

old man, with all the wisdom and experience of his extraordinary life expressed in his face. A great, holy, picture.

PS: On St Patrick, the excellent Central Catholic Library in Dublin will be holding a virtual seminar at 7.30pm on Monday March 15 on 'St Patrick - The Man and His Mission', given by Dr Paul Byrne. Applications for attendance by Zoom from Edel Purcell on: edelpurcell@gmail.com

ACN's efforts bear fruit in Iraq

Jason Osborne

11,000 families have been resettled and "several hundred churches reconstructed" in Iraq by Aid to the Church in Need (ACN), according to ACN Ireland's Director, Dr Michael Kinsella.

He described the organisation as "emboldened" and "encouraged" by the Pope's trip to Iraq last weekend, which saw the Pope visit many of the sites decimated by Islamic State.

"Islamic State had something of a 'rolling thunder' operation, which was not just about the triumph of Islam, but the extinction of Christianity," Dr Kinsella explained.

This comes on the back on comments by Syriac Catho-

lic Patriarch Ignace Joseph III Younan during the Pope's visit to Qaraqosh in Iraq, which saw the patriarch commend ACN among others for their work in helping to rebuild Christianity in Iraq.

ACN's Nineveh Plains project has supplied €49.5 million in funding to the Church there over the past decade, which according to Dr Kinsella, has seen what was "seemingly irretrievably destroyed brought back from the brink".

The Pope's presence in Qaraqosh has been received as highly symbolic, with images of a tabernacle and chalice from the area having gone viral on the internet in 2019 after being used as target practice by Islamic State militants.

"The reality is that what has been rebuilt is still very small and still very fragile," Dr Kinsella said, continuing, "the work has only begun". Dr Kinsella was quick to add that while the situation has improved drastically, "Christians are still in a very dangerous situation in Iraq".

Iraq's Christian population has plummeted from one and a half million in the early years of the 21st Century to around 250,000 now, but Dr Kinsella is optimistic that the future is bright for Christianity in Iraq, despite the challenges.

"We ensure our pastoral and humanitarian approaches are united," Dr Kinsella said. "The mission of ACN is the mission of the Church."

All aboard the Papal plane



Colm Flynn, an Irish journalist with EWTN, speaks to the Pope on the flight to Iraq where Mr Flynn was covering the Pope's visit, March 5.

'The State has failed homeless people', says charity

Ruadhán Jones

Homelessness charities and politicians have criticised the Government's inaction over homeless deaths, saying the State has 'failed people in homelessness'.

Deaths of people in homelessness rose by 61% in Dublin last year according to the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive (DRHE), but no statistics are recorded for other localities around Ireland.

Aontú leader Peadar Tóibín has said that lack of information on homeless deaths is a "shocking thing".

"I get the sense the Government is sitting on its hands and are not proactive but reactive," said Mr Tóibín.

Aontú are calling on the Government to record the number of homeless deaths around the country because

"if you can't measure it, you can't manage it", Mr Tóibín said.

"There are people dying on the streets from homelessness," he continued. "There's no efforts made by Government to record all of those figures or to understand why it happened so that we can figure it out."

Mr Paul Sheehan, spokesperson for homelessness charity Cork Simon, said that the State has "failed every person who has become homeless first of all".

"We know that people experiencing homelessness die younger," Mr Sheehan continued. "There are reasons that can be identified as to why that person died... and we want to know if there's some way that could be addressed in the future."

Homeless from outside Dublin no longer refused hostels

Staff reporter

The move to allow homeless people from outside Dublin access to hostels has been welcomed by Fr Peter McVerry, who said it'll "make a big difference" to those on the capital's streets who come from outside Dublin.

This comes in the wake of the *RTÉ Investigates* which revealed that homeless people in the capital were being turned away by the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive (DRHE), even on nights

when there were free beds in emergency hostels around the city.

"Some counties have very few or no services for homeless people, some of them have no hostels for homeless people, so if you're homeless you sleep rough," Fr McVerry told *The Irish Catholic*, clarifying why so many homeless people come to Dublin.

"So I supported the minister's (Darragh O'Brien) order to ensure that everybody who rings up looking for a bed for the night would be offered a bed," he said.

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Breda O'Brien

The View



Perhaps imprudent, Pope Francis' Iraq visit was definitely prophetic

Pope Francis is sometimes controversial but never boring. As John L. Allen of *Crux* Now put it, the pontiff's current trip to Iraq is perhaps his most emblematic trip – if only because his stubborn streak ensured that it happened.

He ignored worries about super spreader Covid-19 events and security issues in order to draw attention to the forgotten Christians and other minorities in Iraq, and to advance interfaith relations.

The Vatican ambassador to Iraq, Archbishop Mitja Leskovar, along with several other staff members of the nunciature, tested positive just days before the visit and had to self-isolate. The timing was far from ideal given how central the nunciature would have been to planning the event.

Covid-19 has taken a serious toll on Iraq, with 703,778 infections including 13,458 deaths. Let us all pray that there is no major outbreak of Covid-19 as a result of the visit.

“The defeat of ISIS in Iraq in 2017 did not bring an end to discrimination and displacement”

Iraq only started vaccinating two days before the Pope arrived, using 50,000 Sinopharm vaccines donated by China as part of China's so-called vaccine diplomacy. Astutely, China is seeking to secure influence through the strategic deployment of Sinopharm vaccines. Iraq will also purchase a further two million doses from China.

It is a reminder of how much the troubled areas of the world have been ignored by the wealthy West when it comes to sharing vaccines, a gap which China is more than willing to fill. The West has had almost as little interest in looking out

“The West has had almost as little interest in looking out for religious minorities, or more accurately, Christians, in Iraq”



Pope Francis is pictured with religious leaders during an interreligious meeting on the plain of Ur near Nasiriyah.

for religious minorities, or more accurately, Christians, in Iraq.

Pope Francis visited the small Christian community of Qaraqosh last Sunday, where only a fraction of families displaced by the ISIS attacks in 2014 have returned. His visit culminated with an open-air mass in Erbil, where about 10,000 attended. Those seated in the stands showed little evidence of social distancing, whereas the guests on the field were seated at least a metre apart.

Unfeigned

Yet the joy of Christians was unfeigned. They have endured torment not just since 2014 but since 2003 when the US, backed by the UK, launched an invasion of Iraq. It was not that Saddam Hussein, whose regime was toppled, was a particular friend to Christians but he was neutral enough to appoint Tariq Aziz, a Christian, as his deputy. Hussein encouraged inter-Christian conflict, however, when it suited his purposes.

By 2007, the UN's refugee agency, UNHCR, was reporting that more than 2.2 million Iraqis had sought refuge in neighbouring countries, most of them in Syria and Jordan, while another two million Iraqis were internally displaced. Christians left the country in droves. Then

came ISIS, who extended their so-called Caliphate into the Nineveh Plains, arriving in Qaraqosh in 2014, forcing virtually all Christians to flee.

ISIS persecuted other Muslims, especially Shi'a Muslims but anyone at all who did not conform to their brand of Salafi Islam, and of course, Yazidis and other minorities. Christians fell between stools because the US was reluctant to feed the narrative of a clash between Islam and Christianity, which it saw as a propaganda bonus for ISIS. The persecution of Christians never received due attention.

The defeat of ISIS in Iraq in 2017 did not bring an end to discrimination and displacement.

“Perhaps more than any other Pope, he has reached out to Islam”

The famed Nineveh plains are one of the last places where Aramaic is spoken – not the Aramaic spoken by Jesus but the various dialects are the closest thing we have in the modern world to what the disciples would have heard. It is close to being wiped out.

The Pope wanted to travel to Iraq to highlight

the martyrdom of Christians but also as a significant interfaith gesture.

Reached out

Perhaps more than any other Pope, he has reached out to Islam. The meeting with Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani is significant because Iraq is a Shi'a majority state. Francis signed a document of fraternity in 2019 with the respected Sunni leader, Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb, the grand imam of Al-Azhar, in Cairo. (Islam has no central figure like the Pope, which is one of the reasons that dialogue is not easy.) Pope Francis declared that his encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, had been inspired in part by his dialogue with Grand Imam al-Tayeb, which certainly is a first in Catholic history.

Interfaith dialogue in all its forms is important to Francis but particularly between the Abrahamic religions. Who can forget the sight of Pope Francis, embracing his Argentinian-Jewish friend, Rabbi Abraham Skorka and his Argentinian-Muslim friend, Omar Abboud, on a pilgrimage to the Western Wall in 2014?

The reason that Pope Francis may have been willing to travel at a time when Covid-19 is still so rampant in Iraq is because he has longed for this visit for a very long time. It may not have been a prudent visit in public health terms but it is certainly prophetic.

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Christian persecution not addressed during Simon Coveney's Iran visit

Chai Brady

Foreign Affairs Minister Simon Coveney did not address the issue of Christian persecution during his meeting with Iran's president despite serious concerns about religious freedom for the minority group in the country.

Minister Coveney met with President Hassan Rouhani and Foreign Minister Javad Zarif in Tehran, Iran over the weekend. The Department of Foreign Affairs confirmed he did not specifically raise concerns about Christians but

did raise human rights issues including "freedom of expression".

Mr Coveney's department said his discussions in Iran focused on the Iranian nuclear deal – the JCPOA [Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action] – as well as regional issues and Ireland-Iran bilateral relations in advance of the re-opening of an Irish diplomatic presence in Tehran.

Regarding other, specific concerns that were addressed, the department told this paper: "In his meeting with Foreign Minister Zarif, Minister Coveney raised concerns over

human rights in Iran including use of the death penalty (including for minors), discrimination against the LGBTI+ community, women's rights, and freedom of expression.

"He also expressed concern that Iran was blocking the visit of the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Iran from visiting the country. The minister urged Iran to engage in further dialogue on human rights issues, both bilaterally and through the EU."

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) 2017 report has continued to designate Iran as a Country

of Particular Concern (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA), because the "government of Iran [is] engaged in systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom, including prolonged detention, torture, and executions based primarily or entirely upon the religion of the accused".

The report's findings highlight ongoing persecution of Christians and other minorities in the country: "Severe violations targeting religious minorities – especially Baha'is, Christian converts, and Sunni Muslims – [has] continued unabated."

Students and sisters get hands dirty for 'pocket forest' at Loreto College Crumlin



Sr Mary O'Dwyer IBVM, Laura Casanellas – a volunteer from Bloomin Crumlin – TY students Abigail Managhan and China Manalo and Sr Veronica O'Donoghue IBVM planting saplings for the pocket forest, March 3.

Ruadhán Jones

Loreto College Crumlin are turning an acre of unused land into a "pocket forest" and biodiversity meadow with the help of staff, students and the local Loreto Sisters.

The girl's secondary school decided to start the biodiversity project last year to utilise a plot of unused land, deputy principal Matt Whelan told *The Irish Catholic*.

"A former pupil came and advised us to let it grow. Don't do anything, let the land grow and see what happens," Mr Whelan explained.

The school left it growing up until March of last year, when staff and students started planning how to develop it into a native meadow.

"The students did research into what we could possibly grow there," Mr said. "Basically it's to provide biodiversity in what is essentially a very urban area.

"An awful lot of our students live in flats and apartments and wouldn't have access to greenery themselves," Mr Whelan explained. "They've got their hands dirty as well and stuck in."

Two Loreto Sisters (pictured) living on-campus were also invited to help with proceedings and have since attended every session.

"I'm really, really enjoying it," said Sr Mary Dwyer. "It's just lovely, there's one sapling already that has a little green bud – so there's life already."

Stillbirths linked to Covid cause for precaution not panic

Jason Osborne

Preliminary reports of four stillbirths linked to Covid should inspire precaution, but not panic, leading obstetrician Dr Trevor Hayes has advised.

"Pregnant women should be cautious – washing their hands, wearing a mask, decreasing their exposure to the virus," Dr Hayes said, but was quick to add that "the vast majority of women have healthy babies, and that's a year into the pandemic".

He noted that pregnant women were three times more likely to be put on a

ventilator if they contracted Covid-19, but that this was due to the heightened vulnerability that comes with pregnancy.

This came in response to NPHET's announcement late last week that they had received four preliminary reports of stillbirths in Ireland, that could potentially be associated with a condition called Covid Placentitis.

However, Dr Ronan Glynn also stressed that the condition was "very rare".

"We have not seen a high incidence of it internationally, and we wouldn't expect to see a high incidence of it here," he said.

NEWS IN BRIEF

'Huge' attendance at Hope Ireland's conference

A conference hosted by Hope Ireland against euthanasia and assisted suicide saw close to 1,000 people register to attend.

The seminar entitled "End of Life Matters" focused on "positive end of life care options" and resisting calls to legalise euthanasia and assisted suicide in Ireland.

A panel of nine disability rights advocates, medical professionals and suicide prevention experts took issue with the Dáil's euthanasia Bill and

included talks by Baroness Ilora Finlay, Elma Walsh, Joan Freeman and Dr Miriam Collieran.

Other speakers included Conor Lynott, a recent graduate of UCD and a young disability rights advocate, who said that the introduction of euthanasia in Ireland would have a large cultural impact and "inevitably" lead "to an increase in people with a disability or terminal illness feeling that they are a burden on society".

Life Institute launch abortion pill reversal website

The Life Institute have launched a new website to provide guidance and support to women seeking to reverse the abortion pill.

Niamh Uí Bhriain of Life Institute Ireland said the website's purpose is "to ensure that women can be informed if they change

their mind on taking the abortion pill, that there is help available".

The process is effective in 60% of situations, Ms Uí Bhriain explained.

For more information, visit <https://www.abortion-pillreversal.ie/>.

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Rejoice in the Lord

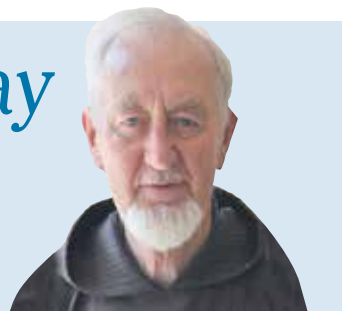
“Rejoice, Jerusalem, and all who love her. Be joyful, all you who were in mourning; exult and be satisfied at her consoling breast.”



A sculpture representing Moses' staff and the serpent is seen on Mount Nebo at sunset in Jordan. Mount Nebo is visited by pilgrims revering the place where Moses is said to have seen the Promised Land and died. Photo: CNS

The Sunday Gospel

Fr Silvester
O'Flynn OFM Cap.



The entrance antiphon for today's Mass is the perfect antidote to any darkness or frustration one might be feeling as the lockdown continues. The Fourth Sunday of Lent is a *laetare* Sunday - rejoicing Sunday - as the readings invite us to rejoice as we reflect on God's love and mercy. In our weekly reflection I usually concentrate on the Gospel of the day, but today I will take the three readings as each one speaks of the joyful experience of God's love.

The end of the exile

The Old Testament reading (II Chronicles 36:14-23) is the astounding message to the exiles in Babylon that the new king, Cyrus, has announced that the Jews may return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. For 70 years, by the rivers of Babylon, they hung up their harps for how could they sing the song of the Lord on alien soil? Overnight the scenario changed. When God's

moment comes, a thousand years is like a single day. Let us bravely co-operate with the frustrating restrictions and pray in hope that our pandemic exile will soon end.

God's work of art

The second reading, from Paul's Letter to the Ephesians 2:4-10, continues the saving power of God's love. "God loved us with so much love that he was generous with his mercy: when we were dead through our sins, he brought us to life with Christ." Then Paul continues with one of my favourite lines in the Bible: "We are God's work of art, created in Christ Jesus to live the good life as from the beginning he had meant it to be." Various philosophers have given us their take on the meaning of life but I doubt if anyone has surpassed Paul's answer that we are God's work of art.

Years ago, somebody gave me a very simple but beautiful black and white poster. It showed a

little boy, maybe four years old, looking out at you, very serious and very happy. Underneath was his message. "I know that I am somebody, 'cos God don't make no junk."

He must have heard Paul's message about being God's work of art. Of course, any work of art can be spoiled or even destroyed, which leads us to the Gospel of the day (John 3:14-21).

Jesus and Nicodemus

Jesus has been speaking with Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews, who came to him by night. Jesus explains that he is offering a whole new form of life, a spiritual rebirth, if we allow ourselves to be lifted up to the values that he called the kingdom of God, a kingdom of life and light, of truth and peace, of mercy and love.

He recalled the strange story of Moses lifting up the serpent in the desert. People had been poisoned by snakebites. Moses told the people to fashion a bronze serpent and to look up at it. As snakes shuffle off their exterior shell to expose a brand new one, the snake was revered as a symbol of new life. Until recent times, a snake curled around a drinking vessel was the sign outside a pharmacy. Jesus would be lifted up on the cross and in his resurrection, shuffling off what Shakespeare called this mortal coil to reveal his resurrection.

God loved the world

The Gospel then gives us this beautiful thought. "For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life. For God sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but so that through him the world might be saved."

“God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son...not to condemn the world but so that through him the world might be saved”

Does this mean that nobody will ever be condemned, that there is no hell? We can be sure that the merciful God will do his part. "No one who believes in him will be condemned." However, we must do our part by following the light of Jesus. "Whoever refuses to believe is condemned already because he has refused to believe in the name of God's only Son." God will not condemn anybody but people condemn themselves by refusing to follow the way of light. "Though the light has come into the world, people

have shown they prefer darkness to light because their deeds were evil. Indeed, everyone who does wrong hates the light and avoids it for fear his actions should be exposed." People who live evil lives hate the light of goodness.

That's enough of the bad news. Let us concentrate more on what Pope Francis calls the joy of the gospel. It is a good idea to have a little notebook for your favourite quotations. Today's readings are full of light and hope. "You are God's work of art". "God don't make no junk." "God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son...not to condemn the world but so that through him the world might be saved."

Prayer

O God of love and mercy, we raise our minds and hearts to you in this difficult exile of fear and frustration. You once healed people from an epidemic by looking at a bronze serpent. Today, we raise our minds and hearts to Jesus lifted up in his suffering on the cross and in the new life of his resurrection. On this Sunday of joy, may we truly be God's work of art, created anew in Christ Jesus to live the good life as from the beginning he had meant us to live it.

The illegal adoptions of the past are continuing in a new form



We have little right to be judging the past while we deny children their identity with the blessing of the State today, writes **David Quinn**

‘Who am I?’ was the question asked by a recent

RTÉ programme about illegal adoptions in Ireland. It is one of the most fundamental questions we can ask ourselves. Most of us grow up with some version of an answer to the question. We know who our parents are. We have some idea who our ancestors were. We know who we take after and who we look like.

Adopted people

Adopted people often don't know any of these things. Some don't mind. They are happy about the family in which they were raised and have no wish to find their natural families. Others might love their adoptive parents, but still have a burning desire to find their biological parents. It often depends on the person. We all differ.

The worst cases involve those who were led to believe that their adoptive parents were their natural parents only to find out they were deceived, especially by the people who raised them.

Then, when they go looking for their natural parents, they find that their birth certificates were illegally altered, often with the collaboration of adoption societies, medical personnel and members of religious bodies.

This was the subject matter of the *RTÉ Investigates* programme mentioned above. The Child and Family Agency, Tusla, upon examining the files of the St Patrick's Adoption Guild, found 126 cases of children whose birth certificates were illegally



Countless children produced from assisted human reproduction cannot answer questions about their origin.

altered to pretend that the adoptive parents were the natural parents.

Those affected were contacted by Tusla. They are all now in middle age at least. Imagine reaching the age of 50 or 60 only to find out that the people you thought were your natural parents had deceived you with the help of others who should have known better?

So much of what you thought you knew about yourself disappears overnight. The sense of betrayal would be huge.

In some of the 126 cases, the name of the biological mother could be found, but often the mother had already died.

“They might also hire a woman to have the baby for them, a so-called ‘surrogate mother’”

People are rightly shocked. The only possible excuse (and it is not a good one) is that the adoptive parents felt it would be better for all concerned if the child they were adopting was not aware of their origins and believed their adoptive family was actually their natural family, or else that the biological mother never wanted to be traced.

But the fact that it was against the law even at the time shows that altering birth

certs was never considerable acceptable.

Today, we like to think things are much improved and that we are far more enlightened. It's not true though, not by a very long shot.

“The children produced in this way might never be told of their origins”

The big complaint of the *RTÉ Investigates* programme is that those who were illegally adopted cannot answer the question, ‘Who am I?’ But countless children produced by the Assisted Human Reproduction (AHR) industry cannot answer that question either.

If the people who use, say, IVF to have children provide their own sperm and their own egg, then the question can be answered. But often couples or single people use the sperm or eggs (or both) of a third party, a donor, or more like a seller.

They might also hire a woman to have the baby for them, a so-called ‘surrogate mother’.

You can look up sperm banks in the likes of the US and find whole catalogues of sperm sellers. It won't give you their names, but it will provide details, such as the height and weight of the donor, their education, their ethnicity, and maybe a picture of them as a child.

Market

The ‘better’ the sperm donor, the higher the price. It is the same for eggs, but the price is always much higher for eggs because eggs are far scarcer than sperm and much harder to extract from the person.

This is a market. There is no other word for it.

The same applies to surrogacy. Even when the surrogate mother (that is, the birth mother) isn't paid a fee for the rent of her womb, she will be paid ‘reasonable expenses’, which can run to tens of thousands of euro.

The children produced in this way might never be told of their origins. A woman might be impregnated with the sperm of a donor, but she might not tell the hospital. The hospital will be none the wiser, nor will the registrar of births. How is this better than past practice?

Currently, the AHR industry in Ireland is not regulated. It is the Wild West. The fertil-

ity industry even admits that sometimes a couple might use the sperm or egg of another family member to have a child. The woman, for example, might use her brother-in-law's sperm, meaning the child could grow up never knowing his or her ‘uncle’, is, in fact, his or her father.

“Eventually, programmes will be run asking again, ‘Who am I?’, and this time the people asking that question will be the products of the fertility industry”

A law governing AHR is in the pipeline and has been for a very long time. It bans anonymous egg and sperm donation so that a child upon reaching 18 will be able to

discover that their father or mother might be an egg or sperm donor. But there is no need to tell them before that.

In addition, the sperm will almost certainly have been obtained from overseas, from a country like Denmark, or the egg from Spain. So even if you find out your father is ‘Lars’ from Denmark, or ‘Juanita’ from Spain, how likely is it that you will ever get to know them? How much closer will you be to finding the answer to the question, ‘Who am I?’

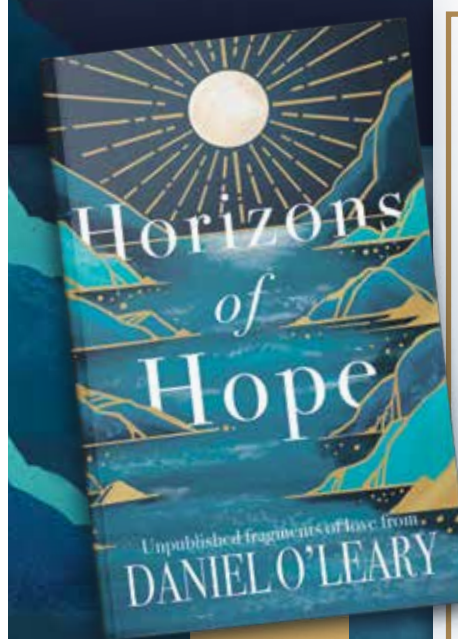
Modern Ireland

This is what we are doing now in modern Ireland, and for the most part with the blessing of the State. We have little right to be judging past practices. Eventually, programmes will be run asking again, ‘Who am I?’, and this time the people asking that question will be the products of the fertility industry. We will wonder society today allowed their rights to an identity to be so badly abused.

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‘The State is failing homeless people’



Politicians and homelessness activists tell **Ruadhán Jones** about the importance of recording homeless deaths

In Dublin last year, the number of people dying in homelessness rose by 61%. In 2019, 49 people died in homelessness; in 2018 it was 47; in 2020, the number was 79, according to the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive (DRHE).

Given that the capital experienced such an exponential increase in deaths, you would expect the pattern to be repeated across Ireland. It may have been – it may not. The fact is that we don't know because regional authorities are not required to record the number of homeless deaths and there is no national body responsible to collect the figures.

“We’ve asked the Government to record the number of homeless people in each county and the number of homeless people who are dying”

This, according to Aontú leader Peadar Tóibín, is a “shocking thing”. The Meath TD has been questioning the Government’s approach to the issue of homeless people’s deaths, as well as wider issues related to homelessness, for several months.

“The current state of play is that homeless deaths are not collected or recorded in other local authorities outside of Dublin,” Mr Tóibín explains. “It’s only Dublin

that collects them which is a shocking thing. Obviously, Dublin is likely to be the worst affected, but no doubt every local authority, every county in the country is suffering with regard to homelessness.

“We’ve asked the Government to record the number of homeless people in each county and the number of homeless people who are dying. We’ve also asked Government to carry out an investigation into the reason why there are so many homeless deaths this year. The figures are far higher this year than in previous years.”

A review

The Government is currently conducting a review on the question of homeless deaths, though the results have not been released yet, Mr Tóibín explains.

“I haven’t seen it yet – but I do know that Darragh O’Brien was out recently stating that some of the homeless deaths were not as a result of homelessness,” he continues. “He quotes one situation where a homeless person was killed in a car accident.

“My view on that would be that, to be honest, similar to other ministers previously, he is trying to change the nature of the statistics instead of trying to fix the problem itself in the first place. The criteria for recording homeless deaths hasn’t changed in five years, yet the numbers radically increased. Maybe one or two situations are for issues such as car accidents, but it can’t explain the great increase in the last while.”

There is a level of complexity involved in recording homeless deaths, however, as Paul Sheehan of Cork Simon explains. Cork Simon works with people in homelessness, offering food and shelter to those who come.

“The issue of homeless deaths is very difficult because certainly we would come across cases where people who would be known to homeless services have died, but quite often we don’t know why

they died until the post-mortem or inquest is completed,” Mr Sheehan tells *The Irish Catholic*. “Certainly the inquest can be sometime later.

“You know, can you say for certain that the persons homelessness contributed to their death? Or was it one of the factors for why they became homeless that contributed to their death? It depends on how you look at it I suppose.

“If you’re just looking at anyone who is homeless, so in the Government’s eyes that would be anybody staying in emergency accommodation. If you just look at it black and white, how many people died who were using emergency accommodation? That might be one way to look at it.

“Peadar Tóibín agrees it is essential that the deaths be recorded, though for slightly different reasons”

“But the complexities around homelessness means that people often have very complex underlying health conditions that may also contribute to their passing. In some cases, it might be self-inflicted, in some cases it might be an overdose, you know it’s very difficult.”

However, Mr Sheehan still believes that having the statistics would help their service. There are currently 402 people accessing homelessness accommodation in Cork, a slight decrease from the high of 447 in October 2019. These figures are not exhaustive, as they don’t include those sleeping rough or outside emergency accommodation. As to the number of deaths, Mr Sheehan doesn’t know as the figures aren’t recorded. He sees the statistics as the first step on the road to a more detailed understanding of how people in homelessness are dying.

“Absolutely, the more information we have the better,” he says. “The more information we have that may point to a gap in services that could be filled absolutely. We’d be all for that.

Service provision

“There are reasons that can be identified as to why that person died, or maybe that have contributed to their death, and we want to know if there’s some way that could be addressed in the future. Is there a gap in service provision that is contributing to people’s deaths? Certainly we’d be very open to that.”

Peadar Tóibín agrees it is essential that the deaths be recorded, though for slightly different reasons. For him, recording deaths is a means of getting to the heart of the homelessness crisis.

“There’s a rule in Government – if you can’t measure it, you can’t manage it,” Mr Tóibín explains. “If you don’t

Photo: CNS.



know how big a problem is, it’s not likely that you will respond properly to it or how to respond to it. In another situation, we got 20 TDs to write a letter into the minister in terms of measuring the number of people who die in direct provision in this country and the cause of those deaths. That’s not been done either.

“Each area – the lack of houses, the number of deaths, the number of people in homelessness – bleeds into the other”

“This country has had investigations and reports written into people dying and how they died in other institutions in the history of this nation. And rightly people have been shocked and horrified by the content of these reports. Yet in the society we live in today, there are people dying in institutions, such as direct provision. And there are people dying on the streets from homelessness. There’s no efforts made by Government to record all of those figures or to understand why it happened so that we can figure it out.”

For the Meath TD, it is imperative that everyone knows what is happening with regard to homelessness in order that the full

breadth of the problem can be addressed. Each area – the lack of houses, the number of deaths, the number of people in homelessness – bleeds into the other.

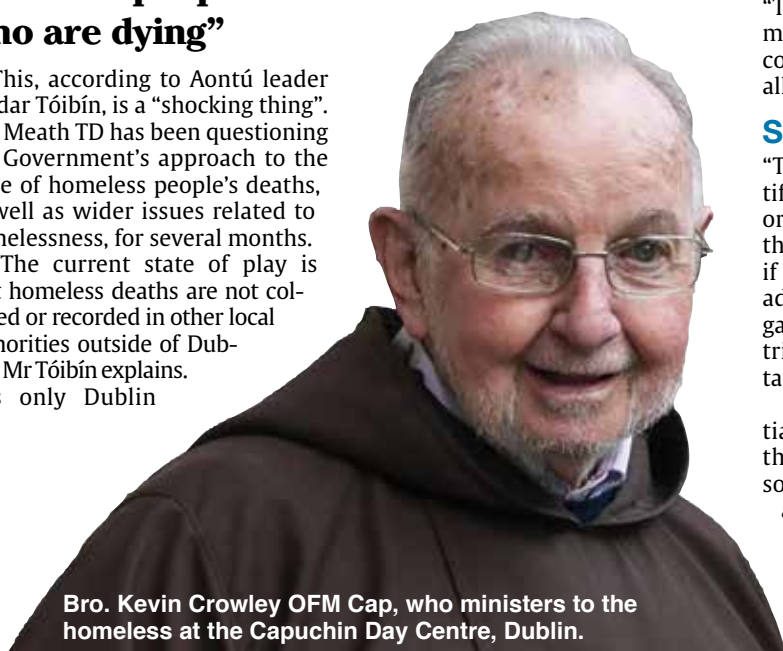
“I think the housing department in each local authority should be recording this information, it should be collating this information and passing it on to the minister for housing,” Mr Tóibín said. “The minister for housing should have monthly reports on what’s happening so that the minister can see if there’s any changes happening throughout the country, if its localised to particular regions.

“It was strange that the minister himself didn’t seek to do this. One of the aspects the minister has been dragging his heels on the issue of homeless deaths. Another, which I raised in the Dáil, is the fact that if you’re homeless in Dublin but not from Dublin, you are being refused support in Dublin and told to go back to your own county.

Primetime

“I raised this in the Dáil and nothing was done about it. It was only when primetime held the RTÉ investigates show into homeless deaths that it was acknowledged by the minister and efforts were made to resolve that. Yet I’ve had reports since that the situation has occurred again, people having been denied homeless services in Dublin because they’re not from Dublin and told to go back to their own local authority.”

Since speaking to Mr Tóibín, another investigation by RTÉ has revealed that Dublin City Council



Bro. Kevin Crowley OFM Cap, who ministers to the homeless at the Capuchin Day Centre, Dublin.



has reversed its decision and is now offering its services to homeless people from outside Dublin.

Mr Sheehan agrees that clarity is needed and more information on homeless deaths in order to help those most in need.

Homelessness

"We know that people experiencing homelessness die younger," Mr Sheehan says. "Obviously, it's particularly those who are chronically homeless and I think the last statistic I saw was the average age of death for a chronic rough sleeper was 42. Rough sleeping is a significant factor. That is being addressed. Anybody who looks for an emergency bed these days will get one."

"But there are those who choose for whatever reason not to avail of social services and that's a group of people that we need to pay particular attention to. Usually its related to poor mental health or some trauma in their childhood that leads to chronic mistrust, whatever the case may be. But it's a group of people that needs our attention."

There is also a moral component to our failure to acknowledge the deaths and lives of people in homelessness. The bare minimum we owe to the homeless dead is this recogni-

tion, Peadar Tóibín believes.

"In many ways the lack of recording or understanding what's happening, it may be a measure of the value that the state puts on them to a certain extent," Mr Tóibín says.

When asked if we have failed those who die in homeless, Paul Sheehan argues that it is not us, but the State who have "failed every person who has become homeless first of all."

“There is another element in play which often goes amiss – who buries the homeless dead?”

"Well, you know, I think it's a stretch to say we've failed," Mr Sheehan says. "I think the State has failed every person who has become homeless first of all. I think we should be starting from that premise. Again I would say when somebody is using homeless services dies – and it may not be when they're using homeless services – there are contributing factors to that and was their homeless-

ness a contributing factor?

"Unless we have we have a clear view of that, we couldn't say that people using the services, whatever services they're using we've failed. Everything that could be done may possibly have been done. That's a bit of a leap too far maybe."

Capuchin Day Centre

There is another element in play which often goes amiss – who buries the homeless dead? As part of their ministry to homeless people in Dublin, the Capuchin Day Centre owns a plot in Glasnevin cemetery where people without families can receive a decent burial.

"We would occasionally be contacted, maybe a person was found dead in whatever accommodation they had, they'd no one belonging to them," Bro. Kevin Crowley OFM Cap explains. "And we would take care of them. Recently, we were contacted about a person found in accommodation who, when we contacted the police, they weren't in a position to contact anyone belonging to them. Those are the type of people who we would take care of, we have a plot up in Glasnevin where we bury them."

On the question of addressing homeless deaths, Bro Kevin recognises that it's a difficult, multi-faceted issue. For the Day Centre, what they seek to do is ensure those who come to them receive the best treatment they can give.

"I suppose you see the thing is you're always going to have homeless people deaths, and for various reasons," Bro. Kevin says. "You'll have sudden death, you'll have people living in their own accom-

modations. Sometimes we'll get a call that people who are coming in here to the centre and they would be living maybe in the – they wouldn't just be on the streets like.

"Our main concern here is to make sure that everybody is fed, to make sure that everybody is seen by our doctor, to make sure that everybody is seen by our dentist, our chiropodist. We always make sure they get the necessary medical attention.

“I heard last week that the local Dublin authority removed a load of tents from a part of Dublin”

"Our other primary concern is respect for those who have died, who have no one belonging to them, we make sure they get a dignified burial, one which creates some dignity."

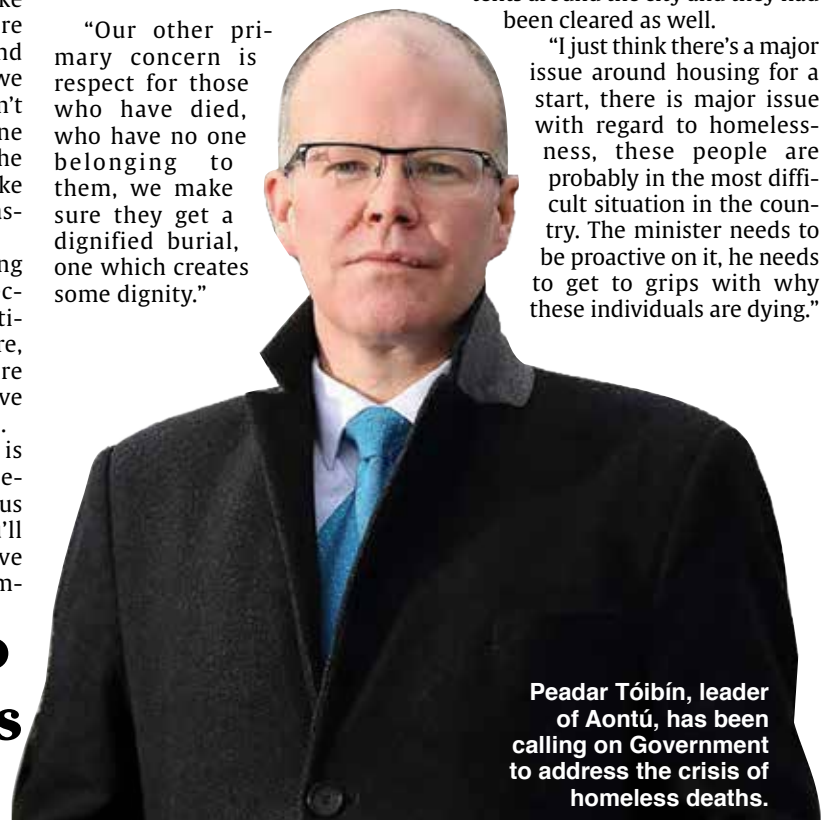
While the issue of homelessness is not going anywhere fast, there are small and simple ways we can begin to address it. The first step, as with a struggling alcoholic, is to admit there is a problem. The next step is to find out why, what, where and how. To answer those questions regarding homeless deaths means the Government needs to gather information and not bury its head in the sand. We owe it those in homelessness, that their dignity is not undervalued in death.

Reactive

"I get the sense that the Government sit on their hands and are not proactive but reactive," Peadar Tóibín says. "I heard last week that the local Dublin authority removed a load of tents from a part of Dublin. A lot of homeless people had erected tents around the city and they had been cleared as well."

"I just think there's a major issue around housing for a start, there is major issue with regard to homelessness, these people are probably in the most difficult situation in the country. The minister needs to be proactive on it, he needs to get to grips with why these individuals are dying."

“There is also a moral component to our failure to acknowledge the deaths and lives of people in homelessness”



Peadar Tóibín, leader of Aontú, has been calling on Government to address the crisis of homeless deaths.

A proud tradition, looking towards building for the future



Many Catholics know little about the good work of the Knights of St Columbanus. The incoming leader tells **Michael Kelly** he is keen to redress this

When the Order of the Knights of St Columbanus was established in Belfast in 1915, it was a very challenging landscape. Many businesses in areas like Belfast were effectively 'closed shops' where Catholics had no chance of employment.

The shipyard – which just a few years earlier had built the ill-fated RMS *Titanic* – was a case in point. The few Catholics who occasionally managed to find work there were routinely expelled once their religious affiliation was clear.

It was in this cultural context that the need was established for a Catholic fraternal organisation that would both support men in the exercise of their Faith and also to provide a space where knights who were



Supreme Knight Brendan McCann (right) with Supreme Communications Officer Colm O'Farrell in the order's Dublin headquarters Ely House. Photos: Chai Brady

getting ahead could give their brethren a hand up.

More than 100 years later, the context has changed but the challenge of the order – to restore all things in Christ – remains the same. Members are now engaged in an ambitious drive to encourage younger Catholic men to take up the task of evangelising their fellow young people.

Elected

Co. Armagh man Brendan McCann was recently elected Supreme Knight and he says the challenge is clear: if more

young men are not attracted to the values of the order then the knights are in trouble.

One green shoot that Mr McCann points to is the recently established council at Queen's University Belfast (QUB) where more than 20 young students are now members engaging in charitable and other outreach work across the city.

It is a model he is keen to roll out to other universities in Dublin, Cork, Galway, Derry and other centres of third-level learning.

"You can't do it in hours, days, or months. It probably is years in the making," he says of the Belfast venture. "But what we are seeing now is the fruits of that, and the fruits of that could be substantial for the Church in Ireland going forward."

Perhaps the best-known of the knights' initiatives in the annual Christmas Day dinner in Dublin where hundreds of homeless and other vulnerable people are given a dinner and a Christmas gift to brighten their day. It is just one of the more high-profile events, but members of the order are engaged in charitable and other evangelisation work wherever they find themselves.

Projects

Mr McCann says that in his home parish in Portadown "one of the outreach projects that we're involved in is Radio Housebound, where we give

devices to people who cannot attend church. They could be CB radios that receive the audio, or actually tablets so people can watch Mass".

In Belfast, the QUB knights are very engaged with homeless people offering practical and material support like food parcels.

“What we are seeing now is the fruits of that, and the fruits of that could be substantial for the Church in Ireland going forward”

"We're not afraid to get our hands dirty," Mr McCann says of his fellow members.

He said he has been heartened by the reaction at QUB to know that the values of the order are being embraced by a new generation of young Catholics. "They grabbed it with both arms. People like to be involved in a fraternity and talk about their faith, so that is good to see," he says.

He said that the third level

initiative is aimed at giving young men a space where their faith can grow together.

But, what about the challenge of Covid-19, I wonder. If a key part of the ethos of the knights is fraternity, how do social distancing rules and a ban on gatherings affect this? "Initially it was a huge challenge," Mr McCann admits. "We had to convince people to speak online. But, we got over that hurdle and in some ways it has brought us closer to the monastic roots of our patron."

Members

He insists that members in councils across Ireland "are now praying more than they ever did before" with some councils embracing weekly rosaries online and others taking on *lectio divina* via zoom.

"We're also using this time as an opportunity for reflection: Where are we? Where are we going? How do we attract a new generation? It's a very healthy reflection," he says.

Mr McCann says it gives him and his fellow members of the new executive time and space to "examine our current model and see where the

weaknesses are and where our strengths lie to move forward," he says.

In short, the knights have had to adapt. He cites the example of funerals where family members of knights have died where other members of the order would have in the past formed guards of honour. "Now, we are supporting people in different ways. A knight whose mother died recently told me he had been overwhelmed by all the messages and prayers he was receiving from knights – the fraternity lives on, just in a different way," Mr McCann says.

He believes that the mission of the knights in helping members stand up for their faith is as vital as ever. "We're proud to be Catholic, and it's important to say that... maybe some people might not like that, but we have to have the courage of our convictions," he says.

Mr McCann sees the knights as having an important part to play in the work of evangelisation. "You can't batter the people into the Church. You have to show them that the Church is a welcoming place, and a place for children and a good place to grow up," he says of trying to



Supreme Knight Brendan McCann discusses plans for the future.

“Mr McCann sees the knights as having an important part to play in the work of evangelisation”



Colm takes time out to play snooker while Brendan looks on. Fraternity is key to the order.

encourage people in the Faith.

Mr McCann is keen to shine a light on the order, not to gain praise and affirmation but to show to a new generation the benefits of such an organisation. "I think in the past we were a bit too discreet in what we did so people weren't even aware that the order was doing anything," he admits.

One of the ways that the order has been engaging with young people in recent years has been the highly-successful public speaking competition aimed at getting second-level students to have the confidence to talk about their faith and Church teaching in public.

“We’re giving you that option to come and talk about your faith in comfortable surroundings”

The pandemic has made that impossible this year, and so it has morphed in to an essay-writing competition instead (see right).

Another Co. Armagh man Colm O'Farrell has taken on the task of Supreme Communications Officer. It is his responsibility to ensure that the knights are better known both within the Church and the wider society.

"I think the order, for too many years, has kept its light under a bushel. I think part of the problem was the knights were very happy doing great charitable work, but were not great at promoting this work.

"That's one of the problems that we're actually facing now: many people don't know the great works that go on behind the scenes," he admits.

Task

Mr O'Farrell is clear in the key task ahead. "One of the biggest challenges that we have now

at the moment is to try and encourage young men to come and be part of the order, and to give something back.

"And really – that's what the order is about: it's about giving something back, it's about living your faith through works of charity."

"The biggest challenge for us is to try and get the message out there. We're a brotherhood, we're a fraternity. We're giving you that option to come and talk about your faith in comfortable surroundings. And make friends, it is ultimately a fraternity," Mr O'Farrell says.

That sense of fraternity is key to people feeling comfortable, Mr O'Farrell believes. "As men we are terrible about talking about our faith...It's almost seen as not a manly thing when you talk about your faith. But, when you look at other faiths – you look at Islam, different faiths like that – it is very much the men who are the forerunners, the leaders of promoting the faith," he says.

Backseat

He believes that too many men in Ireland have traditionally taken a backseat in the transmission of the Faith with disastrous consequences. If I'm a young Catholic man and I'm growing up in the Faith and want to talk to someone about my faith, my options are very limited," Mr O'Farrell says.

This is something that he believes passionately that the knights can offer. "It's a great outlet, a great faith outlet. We're a community of brothers within the order that will come together and openly discuss everything that you might be almost afraid to talk about even inside your own home," Mr O'Farrell believes.

It's almost like there is a crisis in Catholic masculinity, I put it to him. "Absolutely. I think one of the greatest problems that we have is – and let's face it – the fact that fathers have stopped going to Mass...And

once a father stops going to Mass, their children generally follow. The mother can go to Mass, but the chances are that the children will drop off.

"The father is still seen as the head of the household in many respects, and once that bond between the Church and father is broken we're in trouble," he says.

Both men are confident and articulate in speaking about their faith. To what extent, I ask, has the order been instrumental in building this confidence?

“The third level initiative is aimed at giving young men a space where their faith can grow together”

Mr O'Farrell takes up the point: "Hugely, because in my own personal return to my faith back in 2008 – after being absent from it for many years – one of the things that I started was to study theology. But I couldn't find an outlet or, who to talk to. "Outside of Mass on a Sunday, my options were really limited. There were different charitable orders I became part of, but there was really very little on offer for me as a male Catholic. That's where the order came in and I knew on my introduction to the knights, I had found a home of like-minded men and brothers throughout Ireland that was really a breath of fresh air for me," he says.

Mr McCann agrees. "It's not for the 'holier than thou', we are from every background. I'd say to any young man, if you are serious about your faith and want a place where you can do good work but also talk about your faith and grow in your faith the order is for you."

For more information email: koc@knightsfstcolumbanus.ie



THE KNIGHTS OF ST COLUMBANUS

Senior Cycle All-Ireland Essay Competition 2021

By way of supporting religious education and literary endeavour, the Knights of St Columbanus invite senior cycle students (transition-, fifth- and sixth-year students in the Republic and years 12, 13 and 14 in the North) in all secondary and post-primary schools throughout the island of Ireland to participate in a unique essay competition.

PRIZES

Prizes for the top three essays from each school:

- ★ First Prize: €50
- ★ Second Prize: €30
- ★ Third Prize: €20

In addition, the following All-Ireland prizes will apply:

- ★ First Prize: €250
- ★ Second Prize: €150
- ★ Third Prize: €50

The length is at the discretion of each student's religious education or other supporting teacher but must be a minimum of 750 words and not exceed 2,000 words.

The essay must be submitted as an A4 Word document via email to Mr Seamus McDonald | spsc2015@gmail.com

The essay title must appear at the top of the first page, and at the end of the essay every entrant must include the following sentence: I confirm that this essay is my own work, that no part of it has been written by another person or taken from another source and that all quotations are attributed to their authors. In addition, it should include: their full name; their year; the name and address of their school; the name of their religion teacher or another teacher who has supported and encouraged their application and participation.

WHAT WILL THE ADJUDICATORS BE LOOKING FOR?

- Clarity of expression;
- Some exploration of the topic from a religious, spiritual and/or faith perspective;
- Inclusion of insights from Church and/or other sources, e.g. a relevant bible quotation, Church teaching documents, quotes from Pope Francis or another religious leader, a journalist/broadcaster of international standing, e.g. David Attenborough on the environmental question;
- Use of literary techniques in support of arguments, opinions expressed etc.;
- A willingness to communicate one's own opinion having considered the issue;

ESSAY TITLES

Social media and the Gospel

1. "The web and social networks have created a new way to communicate and bond" - Christus Vivit. Discuss.
2. "We can't develop as moral agents on social media" - Rabbi Jonathan Sacks. Discuss.
3. "There is the dangerous phenomenon of young people becoming 'social hermits' who risk alienating themselves completely from society" - Pope Francis. Discuss.

Justice and Peace

4. "Migrants remind us of a basic aspect of our faith, that we are strangers and exiles on the earth" - Hebrews 11:13. Discuss.
5. "We have to realise that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" - Laudato Si'. Discuss.
6. "Abolishing the death penalty worldwide would reflect the brave and hope-filled belief that crime can be dealt with without capital punishment and that a criminal should be given a chance to reform" - Archbishop Paul Gallagher. Discuss.
7. "On the one hand, it is essential to find a cure for this small but terrible virus, which has brought the whole world to its knees. We must also cure a larger virus..." - Pope Francis. Discuss.

Living the Christian Life

8. "We should have a profound respect for one another, and this should be

- reflected in the way we speak and behave," – Bishop Declan Lang. Discuss.
9. "Please, brothers and sisters, let us make an effort not to gossip. Chatter is a plague more awful than Covid!" – Pope Francis. Discuss.
 10. "We cannot tolerate or turn a blind eye to racism and exclusion in any form and yet claim to defend the sacredness of every human life" – Pope Francis. Discuss.
 11. "It is a time to get our lives back on track with regard to you, Lord, and to others" – Pope Francis. Discuss.

Young Christians

12. "I also call on the younger members of our parishes to step forward in helping us manage the transition back to full parish life and celebration of the sacraments" – Archbishop Eamon Martin. Discuss.
13. "That is why I constantly urge young people not to let themselves be robbed of hope; to each of them I repeat: Let no one despise your youth" Christus Vivit. Discuss.
14. "Work is an expression of human dignity, a path of development and of social inclusion" - Christus Vivit. Discuss.
15. "Give your passions and dreams free rein, and, through them, offer the world, the Church and other young people something beautiful...Make your voices heard" – Pope Francis. Discuss.
16. "Every human being has the right to live with dignity and to develop integrally; this fundamental right cannot be denied by any country" - Pope Francis. Discuss.



Pope Francis walks with Romanian Orthodox Patriarch Daniel during a meeting with members of the Orthodox synod at the patriarchal palace in Bucharest, Romania in 2019. Photo: CNS.

Shedding light on priests and their families



For better discussions on married priests we would do well to look to the Eastern Rite Christians, writes **Peadar Laighleis**

Debates on married clergy have gone on as long as I can remember. Most people used the Protestant denominations as examples. Few referred to Eastern Churches - Catholic or Orthodox - though Catholic theology of holy orders and marriage is much closer to the Orthodoxy. Irish Catholics may find the Eastern Churches exotic, but they are consistently the fastest growing religious body in the Irish State in recent censuses, so Ruadhán Jones' article on the Romanian Catholic clerical couple he knows (*Irish Catholic*, January 14) is timely.

Candidate

In brief, a candidate for either the priesthood or diaconate in the Eastern Churches who wishes to marry must do so before ordination to the sub-diaconate. This must be both his and his wife's first marriage. If the priest or deacon is widowed afterwards, he may not remarry. For this reason, the expression 'as precious as a priest's wife' is common in Slavic languages. A married priest may never become a bishop. Widowed priests have served as bishops, but this is rare as most Eastern bishops are monks. It is also almost unknown for a priest's widow to remarry, though this may be tradition rather than law. This is broadly the regime for married deacons in the West and convert married Anglican and Lutheran ministers who become Catholic priests, though their widows are not forbidden to re-marry.

As Ruadhán Jones points out, to be a priest's wife is a vocation in its own right and there was once privilege attached. Seminary rectors would interview their students' girlfriends. One of the questions is whether she has priests in her family. The reason is someone from a priest's family understands what the life involves. Though a nega-

tive answer does not disqualify the young lady, most clerical wives are daughters, nieces or sisters of priests. Clerical couples can be descendants of several generations of priests. In many of these societies, the seminarians' parents traditionally engage in matchmaking among other clerical families on their sons' behalf.

“If the priesthood is now less prestigious in the world, few regard a priest's wife's position as a prize”

This is also true of deacons' families - the Eastern permanent diaconate is a parallel ministry. In many instances, the deacon acts as a sacristan and parish administrator in addition to his major role in the Sunday liturgy. In the West, the deacon's function at the extraordinary form High Mass gives a better clue to what the Eastern deacon does than a typical Sunday Mass would. Unlike in the west, Eastern priests never act liturgically as deacons after priestly ordination which gives the deacon an importance we are not familiar with. Remarkably, this role is liturgical rather than sacramental.

If the priesthood is now less prestigious in the world, few regard a priest's wife's position as a prize. Both in North America and in Eastern Europe, there is a growing tendency for priests' wives to work and it is usually her income which supports the family. Wives tend to hold down nine-five jobs and as the priest is at his busiest on evenings and weekends, it has not been unknown for priests' wives to write appointments for themselves into their husbands' diaries to discuss important family matters. This is an unenviable position which few understand better than priests' daughters. The children of the clergy grumble at some problems - mainly their fathers' absence at weekends and the fact they are held up to a higher standard of conduct than other parishioners.

Puzzled

If many readers are now puzzled and wondering how this evolved, the answer is that it developed parallel to the celibate priesthood in the apostolic period, taking much of its reasoning from the regulations of the Aaronic priesthood in the Old Testament. The seriousness with which the Catholic Church takes her relationship with the Eastern Churches is illustrated by the dialogue with the Polish National Catholic Church

in America which has no doctrinal difference with the Catholic Church. This ethnic Polish group broke away from the Catholic Church in the late 19th Century and St John Paul II prioritised its reconciliation. He didn't succeed. The stumbling block was disciplinary.

“Clerical couples can be descendants of several generations of priests”

The Polish National Catholics allowed their clergy marry after serving two years as celibate priests and also ordain married men. Most of the Polish National Catholic bishops are married and many of their priests and bishops are Catholic seminarians or priests originally. Married bishops, priests married after ordination and former Catholics serving in the higher clergy was too much of an obstacle to heal the schism. The problem is that small, schismatic groups of recent origin lack the authority to make unilateral innovations on key disciplines such as celibacy while disregarding canons in existence since apostolic times. The presence of former Catholics among their clergy indicates allowing priests to marry did not draw sufficient vocations from within their own flock.

I have heard many arguments in favour of married priests, but few consider the Eastern Churches, even less think of clerical families. The situation is far from simple.

“Eastern priests never act liturgically as deacons after priestly ordination which gives the deacon an importance we are not familiar with”

Irish Christian artist sets her sights on the Grammys

Grammy award nominee and Spirit Radio presenter Victoria Johnston is looking forward to the awards on March 14. Photo: Glen Byrne



Ireland's 'next Enya' tells Ruadhán Jones how her faith and music have always been intertwined

"I'm a true believer that God can accelerate our plans quicker than we can possibly imagine through prayer. He has raised my expectation of what he can do through me and my music," says Victoria Johnston. She is as well placed as anyone to make that statement – her debut singles, *Tar Liom* and *You Are the Peace*, have been shortlisted for the Grammy's in the Best Song category. At the start of the new year, she was already seen by many as being a successor to Irish singer-songwriter Enya.

But as the Spirit Radio presenter and musician tells *The Irish Catholic*, her success didn't come from nowhere. Self-managed and self-promoted, Victoria says a lot of hard work went into the launch of her solo career – hard work and prayer.

"I had the songs ready from 2019 and I'd always planned to launch the debut singles in 2020," she says. "It was the 13 March, that was the release date. No one could have pre-

dicted the pandemic would arrive in 2020 and Ireland went into lockdown the exact same day I released my debut singles. I'm just really thankful that they went to number one and did so well.

“But I was really just praying on what God wanted me to write, what He wanted me to release, what would bring people's hearts in hearing the music closer to him”

"It was a bit of an unusual day to release them. But obviously that was part of God's plan and it's been really pleasing to get feedback about the support the songs have given people under lockdown. If I can be doing that for people, I'm doing my job right with music."

Prayer

Victoria knew for some time that she wanted to pursue a career in music. How that career might look exactly, she was less certain. At the start of 2019, she explains, she spent a lot of time in prayer, seeking guidance as to where she would go next.

"I was really kind of praying in terms of song writing and composition what I should be writing and what God wanted me to write," Victoria says. "But I was really just praying on what God wanted me to write, what he wanted me to release, what would bring people's hearts in hearing the music closer to him. It was really through a lot of prayer that *Tar Liom* and *You are the Peace*

came about and the arrangement of that.

"I got a fabulous introduction to Denis Woods, who's a Grammy nominated producer who has worked with the likes of Clannad. I think that collaboration was a really good match. I always say he helped me bring them from an acoustic arrangement that I might sing at church to a 3 Arena, big stadium sound and arrangement. I've really enjoyed the collaboration process with him. I'm a firm believer that through prayer and God putting the right people in front of you – for me that was really special."

When asked if Enya is a conscious influence on her work, she considers it for a moment before responding: "I suppose anyone in Ireland has probably grown up listening to Enya's music. But I never have an agenda, with my song writing it's really just what musically and creatively comes out of me when I sit down at the piano. It's just a style that comes out of me that ends up suiting my voice. The arrangements, being Irish, have that Irish element to it, that Celtic element or world sound, but there's also a lot of classical music and pop music influences as well stemming from my classical music background."

Roots

Music is in Victoria's blood, going back at least to her great grandmother, and the female line all the way down have a classical piano background. At the age of nine, Victoria entered the Royal Academy of Music and that set her on her way. She went on to study at the DIT Conservatory of Music, before completing a masters at Trinity, where she also sung with the chapel choir. In a sense, this brought her back to her roots.



"From a young age, I grew up singing in my church's junior choir and through that I suppose it was my first introduction to choral singing," Victoria explains. "Church music, I just love it. One of my earliest memories is my mum playing all the hymns in the church hymn book which I would have grown up listening to and I think the influence of that is for sure in *You are the Peace*."

"I love singing that in churches and the acoustic, but obviously with the pandemic there's a lot of live performances on hold. It has been a strange time, releasing my debut singles and there's no opportunity to sing them live in the gorgeous churches and cathedrals around the country."

Faith continues to have an influence on her music, and vice-versa: "Certainly my faith influences my music, in terms of lyrical writing," she says. "I always pray before I compose a new song, praying that God will put into my heart and my musical output what will connect with people. So yeah, definitely my faith influences my music."

Faith

Speaking about the role it plays in her faith-life, Victoria says, "I think there's such power in music and I

really feel through worship, through singing worship and through song that it can be a really strong form of prayer in itself. I feel really close to God when I sing and when I try ground myself in the performance singing to him. Because you know that's what it's all about, he's given me this incredible gift that I'm extremely grateful for."

“I just trust that God will keep putting the right people in front of me, the right opportunities in front of me”

For Victoria, there are three great passions in her life – faith, family and music: "Yeah, Faith is number one. It comes first before all the number one singles! It's my faith first, my family and my music – I couldn't do without any three of them. It's been a really huge part of my life from a really young age."

For Victoria, as for many other performers, 2020 has been a year without an audience. Among her hopes for 2021 is a return to live performances – and, perhaps, recording her first album.

"I'm working on a debut album – I would like to record that this year, but I would like to release it when live music is back," she says. "I'm keeping my head down, writing, writing, writing and enjoying that process and the time we've all been given. I just trust that God will keep putting the right people in front of me, the right opportunities in front of me. I'm just really excited about what he holds for me in 2021."

Out&About

European Eucharistic chain against Covid



ARMAGH: Archbishop Eamon's Mass as part of a "Eucharistic Chain", joining the Church across Europe in Prayer for the Victims of the Pandemic, March 3.



CORK: Wilton PP Fr Michael O'Leary SMA presenting a cheque for €1,000 to Denis Morley, a representative of Bishopstown Meals on Wheels, which serves many of the elderly in the local area, February 26.



CORK: Fr Luuk Jansen OP works behind the scenes to get St Mary's Dominican's conference on prayer underway, February 27.

IN SHORT

Justice and Peace Europe join call for peace in Myanmar

The executive Committee of the Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions (JP) express solidarity with peaceful protestors in Myanmar and join Pope Francis in calling for "harmonious and democratic collaboration".

In a statement, signed by JP President Bishop Noel Treanor, expressed "support [for] the people of Myanmar in their defence of democracy and to express our solidarity with peaceful protestors".

The JP's executive committee urged the Myanmar military to "release all political prisoners" and supported "the call of the Catholic Bishops of Myanmar to the military authorities to refrain from violence and seek reconciliation".

In the statement, JP said they are "concerned by the reports reaching us in recent days indicating a significant increase in violence and the casualties and suffering arising for society and citizens".

They called for "a peaceful and swift reinstatement of power to legitimate democratic institutions".

Nolan sisters get behind 'Daffodil Day' for cancer

Music legends Anne and Linda Nolan have opened up about their experience of cancer during Covid-19 as they urge people to get involved with the Irish Cancer Society's Daffodil Day on March 26.

"We're proud to be ambassadors for Daffodil Day. Charities through this pandemic have been hit so hard. People think it will be fine and it will pick up next year, but Daffodil Day raises millions of euro and we want to remind people that

the Irish Cancer Society services are still here and we still need your generosity," Linda said.

The sisters were diagnosed just days apart in the early part of the pandemic and have shared how their experience of cancer has been made all the more difficult due to the impact of Covid-19. There are still a number of ways people can get involved this year, including: hosting virtual fundraisers and collections, purchasing items from the Daffodil Day online shop, or making a donation at cancer.ie.

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



KERRY: The Franciscan friars of Killarney enjoy a jaunt in the mountains, March 1.



WESTMEATH: Elaine Byrne, a parishioner in Taghmon/Turin parish continues to enjoy her copy of *The Irish Catholic* every week.



◀ **CARLOW:**
The boys and girls of Killeshin National School settle in on their first day back to school, March 1.

▼ **CARLOW:**
Smiling faces as students return to St Fiacc's NS, Graiguecullen, March 1.

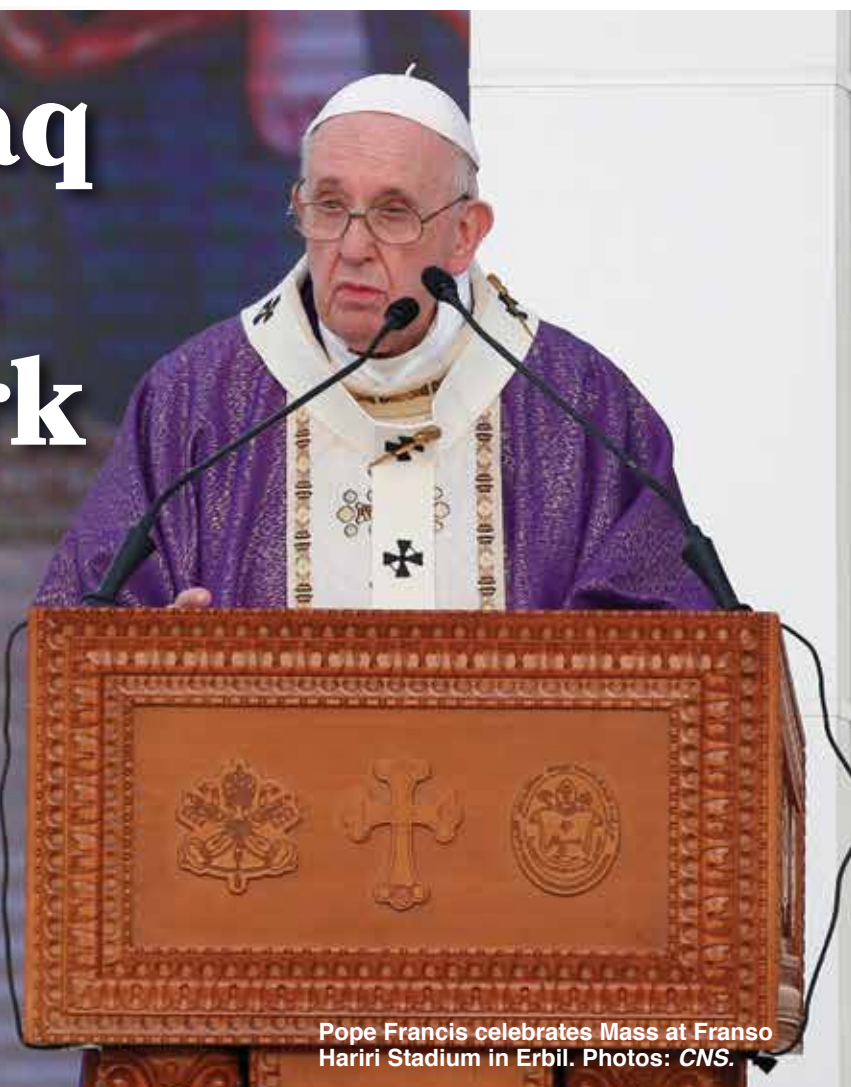


KILKENNY: Sixth year students Ciara, Claire and Abby enjoying their break time cookie after returning to Presentation Secondary School Kilkenny, March 1.

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.

'The Church in Iraq is alive and Christ is alive and at work in his holy and faithful people' - Pope Francis



Pope Francis celebrates Mass at Franso Hariri Stadium in Erbil. Photos: CNS.

Amid the rubble and bombed out remains of four churches destroyed by Islamic State militants, Pope Francis paid tribute to Iraqi Christians who endured persecution and even death.

But visiting Mosul and Qaraqosh in northern Iraq on Sunday, he also urged the Christians to live up to their faith and honour the sacrifice of those who died by promoting peace and reconciliation.

Much of Mosul's old city centre remains in ruins or under reconstruction. And Pope Francis stood in Hosh al-Bieaa, church square, facing some of those ruins: the remains of the Syriac Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Syriac Orthodox and Chaldean Catholic churches all destroyed between 2014 and 2017.

His message was clear: "If God is the God of life – for so he is – then it is wrong for us to kill our brothers and sisters in his name.

"If God is the God of peace – for so he is – then it is wrong for us to wage war in his name.

"If God is the God of love – for so he is – then it is wrong for us to hate our brothers and sisters."

In Mosul, 250 miles north of Baghdad, Pope Francis listened to the stories of Christians forced to flee, the fear many have to return and the encouragement of Muslim neighbours committed to making the city a thriving, multicultural metropolis again.

Choirs

But he also heard choirs of children singing in welcome, women ululating to honour his arrival and the cheers of young people waving flags.

Fr Raid Adel Kallo, pastor of Mosul's Church of the Annunciation, told the Pope that he and many of his people left the city in June 2014;

at that point, he said, his parish had 500 families. "The majority have emigrated abroad," but 70 families have returned. "The rest are afraid to come back."

The 2003 invasion of Iraq by US and coalition forces battered the city but the biggest, most horrifying blow came in early June 2014 when militants of the Islamic State group launched an offensive. They controlled the city for three years, terrorising the population, executing hundreds and kidnapping, raping and selling women. They blew up major landmarks, both Muslim and Christian. They destroyed libraries and museums and tens of thousands of lives.

“this is the time to restore not just buildings but also the bonds of community that unite communities and families”

Offering prayers "for all the victims of war and armed conflict," Pope Francis said Mosul is concrete proof of the "tragic consequences of war and hostility."

"Today, however, we reaffirm our conviction that fraternity is more durable than fratricide, that hope is more powerful than hatred, that peace more powerful than war," the Pope said. "This conviction speaks with greater eloquence than the passing voices of hatred and violence, and it can never be silenced by the blood spilled by those who pervert the name of God to pursue paths of destruction.

Dr Rana Bazzoiee, a 37-year-old paediatric surgeon, who fled Mosul to Erbil in 2013, told reporters, "I don't like to remember that moment."

Before the Islamic State fighters came, "we were living here in Mosul



Pope Francis arrives to visit the community at the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Qaraqosh.

all together – Christians, Muslims" – and "we couldn't believe something like that would happen. I think nobody stayed here. All the Christians left."

Explaining that her Muslim and Yazidi friends helped her in those dark days, Dr Bazzoiee said she is not angry, and she hopes the Pope's visit will help the process of getting life back to normal.

"Why not?" she said. "We lived together for a long time in Mosul."

After the prayer service and a private visit to the ruined churches, Pope Francis took a helicopter trip about 20 miles away to Qaraqosh, a majority Christian city that also suffered devastation at the hands of the Islamic State group. Fewer than half of the city's inhabitants have returned since the militants were ousted in 2016.

Mounir Jibrahil, a 61-year-old maths teacher, said he came back in

2016, but only finished rebuilding his house last year.

Safer

"Now it's safer here," he said. "It's great to see the Pope; we never expected him to come to Qaraqosh. Maybe that will help to rebuild the country, finally bringing love and peace."

The largest crowds of the Pope's March 5-8 visit to Iraq lined the streets in Qaraqosh. While security concerns meant leaving the Popemobile in Rome and using an armoured Mercedes-Benz in the town, the Pope had the window down and the driver going slow enough that the police and security officers on foot did not even have to jog.

Bells pealed to welcome the Pope to the Syriac Catholic Church of the Immaculate Conception, desecrated during its use as a base by Islamic State fighters, who turned the courtyard into a shooting range.

While much of the city still needs to be rebuilt, Pope Francis said the presence of the jubilant crowds inside and outside the church "shows that terrorism and death never have the last word."

"The last word belongs to God and to his son, the conqueror of sin and death," the Pope said. "Even amid the ravages of terrorism and war, we can see, with the eyes of faith, the triumph of life over death."

With Muslim and Yazidi guests joining Catholics in the church, Pope Francis told the people that "this is the time to restore not just buildings but also the bonds of community that unite communities and families, the young and the old together."

And he thanked the international organisations, particularly the Catholic organisations, that are helping fund the reconstruction of homes, schools, churches and community halls in the city.



Pope Francis receives flowers from children during a welcoming ceremony with Iraqi President Barham Salih at the presidential palace in Baghdad.



An overflow crowd is seen outside as Pope Francis celebrates Mass at St Joseph Chaldean Catholic Cathedral in Baghdad.



Pope Francis and Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi smile after the pontiff arrived at Baghdad International Airport.



Members of the military attend Mass celebrated by Pope Francis at Franso Hariri Stadium in Erbil.



Men display a poster with an image of Pope Francis as they wait for him to celebrate Mass at Franso Hariri Stadium in Erbil.

Syriac Catholic Patriarch Ignace Joseph III Younan did likewise, specifically mentioning Aid to the Church in Need, the Knights of Columbus and L'Oeuvre d'Orient, a France-based charity.

And, on the eve of International Women's Day, Pope Francis paid special tribute to Mary – a photo of a decapitated statue of her from Qaraqosh made the news around the world – and to “all the mothers and women of this country, women of courage who continue to give life in spite of wrongs and hurts.”

Plea to honour martyrs by remaining faithful

Visiting a Baghdad cathedral “hallowed by the blood of our brothers and sisters” murdered in a terrorist attack that shook the world, Pope Francis said their sacrifice must motivate faith and a commitment to working for the common good.

The Syriac Catholic Cathedral of Our Lady of Deliverance, sometimes referred to as Our Lady of Salvation, is now a shrine to 48 Christian martyrs who died on October 31, 2010, when militants belonging to a group linked to al-Qaida laid siege to the church, detonating explosives and shooting people; 48 worshippers – including two priests – died inside and more than 100 people were wounded.

Photos of the dead, including a three-year-old, hang over the altar.

Attack

According to the Vatican, before the terrorist attack and the 2014-2017 war against Islamic State militants, some 5,000 Syriac Catholic families frequented the cathedral; now, it said,

no more than 1,000 families belong to all three Syriac Catholic parishes in the capital.

Pope Francis met in the church with the nation's bishops and a representative group of priests, religious, seminarians and catechists. They came from the Syriac Catholic community, but also Chaldean Catholic, Armenian Catholic and Latin-rite Catholic parishes.

The Pope told them that the memory of the 48 – whose sainthood cause is underway – and of the countless other Christians killed in the decade since, should “inspire us to renew our own trust in the power of the cross and its saving message of forgiveness, reconciliation and rebirth”.

“Christians are called to bear witness to the love of Christ in every time and place,” he said. “This is the Gospel that must be proclaimed and embodied in this beloved country as well.”

Syriac Patriarch Ignace Joseph III Younan welcomed Pope Francis to the cathedral, telling him the 48 “mixed their blood with that of the Lamb,” and showed “their oppressed, killed or uprooted brothers and sisters in Iraq and the Middle East” that the risen Lord continues to walk with his people.

Cardinal Louis Sako of Baghdad, the Chaldean Catholic patriarch, told the Pope that the Syriac Catholic cathedral and its martyrs are a poignant and powerful sign of what Christians throughout the country have endured and survived over the past decade.

“Pope Francis said the presence of the jubilant crowds inside and outside the church ‘shows that terrorism and death never have the last word’”

ples and living signs of the presence of God's kingdom of holiness, justice and peace,” Pope Francis said.

Zagharit

The women in the congregation responded several times to his speech with *zagharit*, an ululation of praise or honour.

With the representatives of the various Catholic communities wearing masks and socially distanced inside the church, the Pope also encouraged them to reach out to one another and to other Christians.

Pope Francis said they should think of a prized carpet. “The different churches present in Iraq, each with its age-old historical, liturgical and spiritual patrimony, are like so many individually coloured threads that, woven together, make up a single beautiful carpet, one that displays not only our fraternity but points also to its source.”

“God himself is the artist who imagined this carpet, patiently wove it and carefully mends it, desiring us ever to remain closely knit as his sons and daughters,” the Pope said.

But, being human and prone to sin, individuals and groups can create knots that stop the process of weaving, he said. The knots “can be untied by grace, by a greater love; they can be loosened by the medicine of forgiveness and by fraternal dialogue, by patiently bearing one another's burdens and strengthening each other in moments of trial and difficulty”.

“From this place, where faith was born, from the land of our father Abraham, let us affirm that God is merciful”

“This paternal visit of yours,” he told the Pope, “gives us the strength to overcome adversity, reassures us that we have not been forgotten and generates in us the confidence and enthusiasm to continue our journey of faith and evangelical witness.”

Pope Francis said he understood how the country's small Christian community, which has been present in the country since the first century, could lose its enthusiasm.

“We know how easy it is to be infected by the virus of discouragement that at times seems to spread all around us,” the Pope told them. “Yet the Lord has given us an effective vaccine against that nasty virus. It is the hope born of persevering prayer and daily fidelity to our apostolates.”

“With this vaccine, we can go forth with renewed strength, to share the joy of the Gospel as missionary disci-

Cleanse your hearts of anger, live the Gospel, Pope says at Mass in Erbil

Having witnessed or even experienced persecution for their faith, the Christians of Iraq must be careful not to harbour thoughts of revenge, Pope Francis told them.

After a full morning paying tribute to the victims of Islamic State violence, Pope Francis reached the last major event of his trip to Iraq: Mass on Sunday afternoon with some 10,000 people at Erbil's Franso Hariri Stadium. Many ignored the social distancing measures put in place, and few wore the masks they were required to have because of the Covid-19 pandemic.



Pope Francis meets Abdullah Kurdi, the father of 3-year old Aylan Kurdi whose body washed up on a Turkish beach in 2015, at the conclusion of the Mass at the stadium in Erbil.

“After blessing the altar with incense, Pope Francis blessed a partially restored statue of Mary from a parish in Karmless”

Erbil, capital of the Kurdistan autonomous region in northern Iraq, hosts Syrian refugees and hundreds of thousands of displaced people, particularly Christians, from Mosul, Qaraqosh and other towns that had been under the thumb of Islamic State militants in 2014-2017.

After blessing the altar with incense, Pope Francis blessed a partially restored statue of Mary from a parish in Karmless. The Islamic State militants decapitated the statue and cut off its hands. The restoration reattached the head, but left the hands dangling.

“Here in Iraq, how many of your brothers and sisters, friends and fellow citizens bear the wounds of war and violence, wounds both visible and invisible,” the Pope told the crowd. “The temptation is to react to these and other painful experiences with human power, human wisdom,” but the path of Jesus was to serve, to heal, to love and to offer his life for others.

Referring to St John’s Gospel account of Jesus cleansing the temple, Pope Francis said Jesus did not want his Father’s house to be a marketplace, and “neither does he want our hearts to be places of turmoil, disorder and confusion.”

“Our heart must be cleansed, put in order and purified,” the Pope said.

Cleansed

Anything that leads a person away from God or causes them to ignore the suffering of others must be cleansed, he said. “We need the baneful temptations of power and money to be swept from our hearts and from the Church.”

But, the Pope told them, “to cleanse our hearts, we need to dirty our hands, to feel accountable and not to simply look on as our brothers and sisters are suffering.”

Through his own suffering, death and resurrection Jesus “liberates us from the narrow and divisive notions of family, faith and community that divide, oppose and exclude, so that we can build a Church and a society open to everyone and concerned for our brothers and sisters in greatest need.”

“Anything that leads a person away from God or causes them to ignore the suffering of others must be cleansed”

“At the same time,” the Pope said, “he strengthens us to resist the temptation to seek revenge, which only plunges us into a spiral of endless retaliation.”

With faith in Jesus and the experiences of the past decade, Pope Francis told them, the Holy Spirit sends them forth “as missionary disciples, men and women called to testify to the life-changing power of the Gospel.”

At the end of Mass, Chaldean Catholic Archbishop Bashar Warda of Erbil thanked the Pope for traveling to Iraq during the pandemic, telling the pontiff he made real the saying, “Do not be afraid.” The archbishop said Iraqis must give life to the Pope’s message of peace, brotherhood and forgiveness.

Then Pope Francis addressed the crowd - and those watching on television: “Now the time I must leave for Rome draws near. But Iraq will always remain with me in my heart. I ask all of you, dear brothers and sisters, to work together in unity for a future of peace and prosperity that leaves no one behind and does not discriminate against anyone. I pray that members



Children wave Iraqi flags before Pope Francis' arrival for a memorial prayer for the victims of the war at Hosh al-Bieea (church square) in Mosul.



Pope Francis is greeted by Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, one of Shiite Islam's most authoritative figures.



People line the motorcade route for Pope Francis' visit to the community at the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Qaraqosh.

of the different religious communities, together with men and women of good will, cooperate to strengthen the bonds of fraternity and solidarity at the service of the good and for peace. *Salaam, salaam, salaam, shukran* and God bless everyone, God bless Iraq, *Allah ma'akum* (God be with you).”

Violence is a ‘betrayal of religion’ – Pope

Travelling to the birthplace of Abraham, Pope Francis urged believers to prove their faith in the one God and father of all by accepting one another as brothers and sisters.

From a stage set on a dusty hill overlooking the archaeological dig at Ur, Abraham’s birthplace about ten miles from modern-day Nasiriyah, the Pope called on representatives of the country’s religious communities to denounce all violence committed in God’s name and to work together to rebuild their country.

“From this place, where faith was born, from the land of our father Abraham, let us affirm that God is merciful and that the greatest blasphemy is to profane his name by hating our brothers and sisters,” the Pope told the representatives.

“Hostility, extremism and violence are not born of a religious heart: they are betrayals of religion,” he insisted.

Pope Francis arrived in Ur after a 45-minute early morning meeting in Najaf with 90-year-old Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, one of Shiite Islam’s most authoritative figures.

At the large interreligious meeting later, with the Ziggurat of Ur, a partially reconstructed Bronze-Age pagan temple, visible in the haze, Pope Francis insisted that when Jews, Christians and Muslims make a pilgrimage to Abraham’s birthplace, they are going



Choir members pose for a photo before Pope Francis' celebration of Mass at Franso Hariri Stadium in Erbil.

home, back to the place that reminds them they are brothers and sisters.

“Whatever the world takes from us is nothing compared to the tender and patient love with which the Lord fulfils his promises”

Representatives of Iraqi’s Shiite Muslim majority, its Sunni Muslim community, Christians, Yazidis and Mandaeans, a group that claims to be older than Christianity and reveres St John the Baptist, joined Pope Francis at Ur.

Delegation

Farmon Kakay, a member of a delegation from Iraq’s small Kaka’i community, a pre-Islamic religion and ethnic group related to the Yazidis, told *Catholic News Service*, “To see His Holiness is big news for me. We want the Pope

to take a message to the government to respect us.”

Faiza Foad, a Zoroastrian from Kirkuk, had a similar hope that Pope Francis’ visit would move the government and Iraqi society as a whole to a greater recognition of religious freedom for all.

Wearing a white dress trimmed in gold and decorated with sequins, Ms Foad told *CNS* that even though her religion is not an Abrahamic faith, participating in the meeting was a sign that all people are members of the one human family.

In fact, Rafah Husein Baher, a Mandaean, told Pope Francis that “together we subsist through the war’s ruins on the same soil. Our blood was mixed; together we tasted the bitterness of the embargo; we have the same identity.”

From the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 and through the reign of terror of the Islamic State group, “injustice afflicted all Iraqis,” she told the Pope. “Terrorism violated our dignity with



Pope Francis greets the crowd as he arrives to celebrate Mass at Franso Hariri Stadium in Erbil.



Pope Francis participates in a memorial prayer for the victims of the war at Hosh al-Bieaa (church square) in Mosul.

impudence. Many countries, without conscience, classified our passports as valueless, watching our wounds with indifference."

Just as Abraham set out from Ur and became patriarch of a multitude of believers in the one God, Pope Francis said, those believers must return to Abraham, recognise themselves as brothers and sisters and set out to share the news that God loves every person he created.

“Let us not allow the light of heaven to be overshadowed by the clouds of hatred!”

“We believers cannot be silent when terrorism abuses religion,” the Pope said. “Indeed, we are called unambiguously to dispel all misunderstandings. Let us not allow the light of heaven to be overshadowed by the clouds of hatred!”

Attachments

Called like Abraham to trust in God and to set out on the paths he indicates, believers must “leave behind those ties and attachments that, by keeping us enclosed in our own groups, prevent us from welcoming God’s boundless love and from seeing others as our brothers and sisters.”

No individual or group can live in peace or achieve progress alone, he said. “Isolation will not save us.”

The answer is not “an arms race or the erection of walls” either, the Pope said. “Nor the idolatry of money, for it closes us in on ourselves and creates chasms of inequality.”

The journey of peace, he said, begins with “the decision not to have enemies.”

It means spending less money on weapons and more on food, education and healthcare, he said. It means affirming the value of every human life, including “the lives of the unborn, the elderly, migrants” and everyone else.

Pope: Living the beatitudes can change the world

Pope Francis told Iraqi Christians that when they suffer discrimination, persecution or war, the Eight Beatitudes are addressed to them.

“Whatever the world takes from us is nothing compared to the tender and patient love with which the Lord fulfils his promises,” the Pope told the congregation sitting inside and outside the Chaldean Catholic Cathedral of St Joseph on Saturday.

“Dear sister, dear brother, perhaps when you look at your hands, they seem empty, perhaps you feel disheartened and unsatisfied by life,” he said in his homily. “If so, do not be afraid: The beatitudes are for you - for you who are afflicted, who hunger and thirst for justice, who are persecuted. The Lord promises you that your name is written on his heart, written in heaven!”

“Pope Francis told Iraqi Christians that when they suffer discrimination, persecution or war, the Eight Beatitudes are addressed to them”

According to the Vatican, the liturgy marked the first time Pope Francis celebrated a eucharistic liturgy, ‘the Holy Qurbana,’ in the rite of the Chaldean Church. While the Pope recited the prayers in Italian, Cardinal Louis Sako, the Chaldean patriarch, and members of the congregation prayed in Chaldean, a modern form of Aramaic. The Bible readings were in Arabic.

“Pope Francis and Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the influential leader of Shiite Muslims in Iraq, spent 45 minutes speaking privately”

Iraqi President Barham Salih and Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein attended the liturgy, which included a prayer for government officials, asking God to help them be “examples of honesty for the common good” and “know how to collaborate for a renewed world in which liberty and harmony reign.”

One of the prayers of the faithful, recited in Arabic, echoed the Pope’s homily. “Benevolent father, sustain your holy Church with the strength of the Spirit so that it would courageously witness to Christ and would be for our country a sign of reconciliation and solidarity among all the children of Abraham, our father in faith.”

In his homily, Pope Francis told the people that while “in the eyes of the world, those with less are discarded, while those with more are privileged,” it is not that way with God, which Jesus made clear in the beatitudes.

Worldly

Jesus overturned the worldly order of things, he said. “It is no longer the rich that are great, but the poor in spirit; not those who can impose their will on others, but those who are gentle with all; not those acclaimed by the crowds, but those who show mercy to their brother and sisters.”

“The poor, those who mourn, the persecuted are all called blessed,” he said, not the rich and powerful.

The beatitudes “do not ask us to do extraordinary things, feats beyond our abilities,” the Pope said. But “they ask for daily witness.”

“The blessed are those who live meekly, who show mercy wherever they happen to be, who are pure of heart wherever they live,” he said.

The beatitudes are not a call for a moment of heroics, but about imitating Jesus each day, Pope Francis said. “That is how the world is changed: not by power and might, but by the beatitudes.”

The Mass was the final public event of Saturday that saw Pope Francis travel to Najaf, a centre of spiritual and political power for Iraqi Shiite Muslims, and then to Ur, the birthplace of Abraham, about ten miles outside of Nasiriyah.

Papal trip to Iraq influences Muslims beyond Iraq’s borders, analyst says

Pope Francis’ historic visit to the Middle East’s most conflict-riven nation gives hope and comfort to Iraqis of all faiths, and some would even say to Arabs beyond Iraq’s borders. “The Pope’s visit has been very well received by Muslims in the region. Did you see anyone on the news protesting against his visit? I myself am a Muslim, and we are very excited,” said Dania Koleilat Khatib, an analyst affiliated with the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut. “I think it’s well-received by most people. There is no survey, so I can’t say how many people, but this is an impression I have,” she told the *Catholic News Service* by phone from Dubai. Ms Khatib referred to a tweet by Sheikh Ahmad el-Tayeb, grand imam of al-Azhar University and a top authority in Sunni Islam, who wished Pope Francis well in Iraq. The sheikh welcomed Pope Francis’ “message of peace, solidarity and support to all Iraqi people” and expressed hope that “his trip achieves the desired outcome to continue on the path of human fraternity.” Many Middle Eastern newspapers, such as the *Saudi Arab News* daily, and satellite television stations ran live feeds of Pope Francis’ pilgrimage to Iraq, where he has urged interreligious tolerance and fraternity and rejection of violence and terrorism.

Pope and Shiite leader affirm importance of dialogue

In a low-key meeting followed closely in Iraq and beyond, Pope Francis and Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the influential leader of Shiite Muslims in Iraq, spent 45 minutes speaking privately.

The 90-year-old ayatollah, who turns down most meeting requests, issued a statement after his encounter in Najaf with the Pope on Saturday, saying that world religious leaders should work to hold “great powers” to account, calling upon them “to give priority to reason and wisdom, to

reject the language of war, and not to expand concern for their self-interests over the rights of people to live in freedom and dignity.”

Pope Francis “underlined the importance of collaboration and friendship among religious communities so that, cultivating mutual respect and dialogue, they can contribute to the good of Iraq, the region and all humanity,” the Vatican said in a statement.

“The journey of peace, he said, begins with ‘the decision not to have enemies’”

The meeting, the Vatican said, also gave the Pope a chance to thank the ayatollah and the Iraqi Shiite community, which “raised their voices in defence of the weakest and the persecuted, affirming the sacredness of human life and the importance of the unity of the Iraqi people” when Islamic State militants were on a rampage from 2014 to 2017.

In Iraq - like in Iran, Bahrain and Azerbaijan - more than 60% of Muslims are Shiite. Worldwide, though, Shiites are a minority, making up less than 15% of the Muslim community. Most Muslims are Sunni. The two communities, which share the fundamental beliefs of Islam, separated early in the religion’s history in a dispute over who should lead the community after the death of Mohammad.

For the Shiites, the obvious choice was Ali, Muhammad’s son-in-law, whom they believe was designated by Muhammad.

Imam Ali

Imam Ali, as the Shiites refer to him, is buried in Najaf, a sacred city and pilgrimage site for Shiite Muslims. Ayatollah al-Sistani lives near the shrine in a modest home, which is where he met the Pope.

As the Pope arrived, aides to the Muslim leader released doves in a sign of peace.

Unlike Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, his Iranian counterpart, Ayatollah al-Sistani does not believe his spiritual role should give him a political office, although his speeches and judgments often have political ramifications. During the offensive of the Islamic State militants, he urged Muslims - both Shiite and Sunni - to join forces to defeat them, and he has supported the rights of members of minority groups and religions to live in peace in the country.

Observers saw the Pope’s meeting with the ayatollah as a major first step toward creating the kind of understanding Pope Francis has with Sheikh Ahmad el-Tayeb, the grand imam of Al-Azhar, who is an authority recognized by many Sunni Muslims around the world. The Pope held a major meeting with the sheikh in Egypt in 2017 and, in February 2019, signed with him a document on human fraternity and interreligious dialogue.

In Pope Francis’ encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, on fraternity and social friendship, he wrote that he was “encouraged” by his dialogue with the Muslim leader and by their joint statement that “God has created all human beings equal in rights, duties and dignity, and has called them to live together as brothers and sisters.”



World Report

IN BRIEF

Bishops address concern over Johnson & Johnson vaccine's abortion link

● Use of the Johnson & Johnson Covid-19 vaccine, approved February 27 by the US Food and Drug Administration, raises moral concerns because it "was developed, tested and is produced with abortion-derived cell lines", the chairmen of two US bishops' committees said March 2.

The bishops concluded, however, that "while we should continue to insist that pharmaceutical companies stop using abortion-derived cell lines, given the world-wide suffering that this pandemic is causing, we affirm again that being vaccinated can be an act of charity that serves the common good".

Bishop Kevin Rhoades of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Indiana, chairman of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Doctrine, and Archbishop Joseph Naumann of Kansas City, Kansas, chairman of the USCCB's Committee on Pro-Life Activities, made the comments in a joint statement.

Diplomat's death draws attention to Congo insecurity

● As they mourned the killing of the Italian ambassador to their country, Congo's Catholic bishops said the nation's deaths, massacres, kidnappings and displacement underlined the toxic state of security, especially in the mineral-rich eastern regions.

The February 22 killing of Italian Ambassador Luca Attanasio and two others shocked the country and the

international community, but it also drew attention to the cycle of violence troubling regions rich in gems and minerals. "Total insecurity reigns here. If it is possible to kill a diplomat of this rank in such a manner, think about what can happen to ordinary villagers," Bishop Sebastien Muyengo Mulombe of Uvira told Fides, news agency of the Vatican Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples.

Filipino Jesuits ramp up education drive for tribal people

● Jesuits in the southern Philippines say they intend to increase the number of scholarships for their college and social entrepreneurship program for indigenous people living in Mindanao by 50%.

In 2017, Father Mat Sanchez, 85, and other Jesuits in the Bukidnon mission introduced a scholarship program to send 100 indigenous youths to a nearby college each year.

This year they said they will add 50 more scholarships using funds from the Philippine Jesuit Foundation, which provides financial assistance to Jesuit mission apostolates in the Philippines.

It is also funding a coffee project where indigenous people learn the business and art of coffee making and baking.

Jesuit Father Bros Flores, the project coordinator, said they aim to use the profits from this project to finance the tuition of the indigenous students.

Leading German bishop cautions priests against intercommunion

● A leading German Catholic bishop has cautioned priests against intercommunion with Protestants during an ecumenical event in May.

Bishop Georg Bätzing of Limburg said in a March 1 letter to clergy that they should only give Holy Communion to non-Catholic individuals if they requested it after examining their consciences.

CNA Deutsch, CNA's German-language news partner, reported that Bishop Bätzing issued the letter ahead of the third Ecumenical Church Congress in Frankfurt on May 13-16.

In the four-page letter, the president of the German bishops' conference told priests that there could be "no general, interdenominational reception of the Eucharist" or "new forms of Eucharistic celebration".

He wrote: "The prerequisite for a worthy reception of the Eucharistic gifts, for both Catholics and non-Catholics, is the examination of one's conscience."

'Close to 10,000' abuse cases in France, says commission head

Catholic clergy in France perpetrated more than three times as many sexual abuse offenses than previously thought, said the head of a bishops' commission whose report is due out in September.

Jean-Marc Sauvé, 71, a lay Catholic and head of the French Institute of Administrative Sciences, presented new data from the Independent Commission of Sexual Abuse in the Church. The commission of lawyers, psychiatrists, historians and theologians was established by the bishops in 2018.

"I received a Catholic education, and I knew certain abnormal, blameworthy things had happened – but I never imagined the reality would be so bleak and alarming," Mr Sauvé said in a March 2 interview with France Inter public radio.

"The great question we still have to answer is how all of this could have happened. This is very much our mission, knowing how the Gospels demonstrate the radically intolerable nature of sexual abuse within the church.

"The Catholic Church adopted a zero-tolerance policy, and we now wait to see whether this new orientation is being fully and systematically applied," he added. "Issues hidden for decades must be solved in a decisive, radical manner."

He told France Inter that the commission had received more than 8,000 victim testimonies since June 2019 in response to



The Notre Dame Basilica is pictured at sunset in Nice, France, October 29, 2020. Photo: CNS.

a public appeal, and he now believes "at least 10,000" abuse cases occurred after 1950 in the French church, rather than the 3,000 cited in a preliminary report last June.

He added that 62% involved boys and 38% girls, with half of all cases dating from the 1950s and 1960s, and 30% from the 1970s and 1980s.

"While there were systemic abuses within the church, there were also quasi-criminal enterprises, as in the rest of society, and extremely serious personal vices and faults in an institution that failed at all levels," Mr Sauvé said.

"Whereas girls and young women made up most victims

in wider society, most victims in the Church were boys. It was also characteristic that acts of violence and abuse were committed here not by unknown people, but by priests who were familiar with their victims and trusted by them."

Mr Sauvé said his commission had conducted investigations among France's religious orders and 94 metropolitan dioceses and had also circulated a questionnaire to 30,000 people to ascertain how abuse in the church compared with abuse in other sectors of society. He added that the commission had referred 30 clergy suspects to prosecutors over the

past two years, in line with civil law obligations.

A Catholic journal, *Témoignage chrétien*, said February 25 that disputes over the Church's responsibility for paedophilia and liability for reparations had caused a "crisis" at a February 22-24 online bishops' meeting, which heard testimonies from 30 abuse victims and pastoral workers.

It added that 95% of past abuse perpetrators were believed dead, making the "moral responsibility" for recompense unclear. It said the issue would be discussed further at the bishops' spring assembly at Lourdes March 22-26.

Cardinal Wuerl received \$2 million in 2020 for 'ministry activities'

Cardinal Donald Wuerl, archbishop emeritus of Washington DC who stepped down in 2018 amid scandal, received over \$2 million from the archdiocese last year for unspecified "ministry activities" an investigation has found.

A March 3 examination of the archdiocese's financial records by *The Pillar* found that Cardinal Wuerl was allocated \$2,012,639 for "continuing ministry activities" during fiscal year 2020.

The amount appropriated to Cardinal Wuerl is up from approximately \$1.5 million in 2019. The archdiocesan financial statement does not detail what

"continuing ministry activities" the funds facilitated.

In contrast, the amount the archdiocese allocated for "Formation of priests" declined slightly from \$1.1 million in 2019 to just over \$1 million in 2020.

Similarly, "Archdiocesan charitable giving" in 2020 was listed at just over \$401,000, down from just over \$651,000 in fiscal year 2019.

The Pillar confirmed that Cardinal Wuerl gave at least one retreat to a group of US bishops in January 2021. The archdiocese did not respond to *The Pillar's* questions about what other ministry

responsibilities, if any, the archdiocese had given Cardinal Wuerl.

Revelations during summer 2018 about the sexual misconduct of former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick raised questions about whether Cardinal Wuerl, McCarrick's successor, was aware of McCarrick's misdeeds.

Previous reporting by CNA, as well as the recent McCarrick Report, found that Cardinal Wuerl was made aware in 2004 of inappropriate conduct, apparently not of a sexual nature, on the part of McCarrick involving an adult.

Angolan bishops warn of deteriorating social situation

Catholic bishops said the Covid-19 pandemic is exacerbating an already grave imbalance in living conditions and opportunities, alongside an "unbridled race to exploit hydrocarbons" in its parks and nature reserves.

"We are concerned about

a degradation of the political discourse that threatens a collapse in the national unity, reconciliation, justice and peace, which have been under construction with so much sacrifice," said the bishops' conference of Angola and São Tomé.

"Our country's social situa-

tion continues to worsen, with high levels of poverty, hunger, unemployment, a sharp loss of purchasing power and the closure of businesses. The lack of rain has again raised the spectre of hunger, so we call on the authorities to create a contingency plan to help."

The message was issued after a February 24-March 1 conference meeting at the Marian shrine of Muxima, as Angola became the first country in eastern and southern Africa to receive vaccines under a COVAX program backed by the World Health Organization.



Edited by Ruadhán Jones
Ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie



In with a bang



Celebratory fireworks illuminate the sky after polls closed during the municipal and parliamentary elections in San Salvador, El Salvador, February 28. Photo: CNS

Canada bishops end partnerships with groups in conflict with Catholic teaching

The Canadian bishops' conference announced last Thursday that after a review of organisations that receive project funding from their international development agency, it will discontinue 24 partnerships over concerns about compatibility with Church teaching.

The Canadian bishops and the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace – Caritas Canada reviewed the CCODP's international partner organisations to which it gives project funding.

Out of 205 organisations, 63 were reviewed over "concerns that some of the non-financed activities and positions of international

partner organisations might be in conflict with the Church's social and moral teachings".

"In examining the partner organisations, the joint subcommittee focused its work around several questions, including whether the partner supported anything contrary to Catholic moral or social teaching, whether its actions might mislead others with respect to the same, whether the partner's professed values align with its actions online and on the ground, and whether the partner's actions could undermine the credibility of the bishops in Canada or in the host country," the Canadian Conference of Catholic

Bishops said February 25.

The investigation was carried out by a joint subcommittee, mandated in 2017, of the bishops' conference and the CCODP.

Several dioceses withheld funds from the CCODP beginning in 2018 over findings that the agency has partnered with organisations upholding policies contradictory to Church teaching, particularly on matters of abortion, contraception, and gender theory.

The bishops' conference said that "through a rigorous and thorough process, clarifications were sought" from the partner organisations and from the bishops of the dioceses in

which they are located.

Based on the subcommittee's recommendations, the bishops' conference and the CCODP agreed that there were no objections to 20 of the partnerships continuing, after "satisfactory clarifications [were] received from the partner"; 19 had already ended or were to do so soon, and were thus moot; and 24 will not continue.

The decision not to continue 24 of the partnerships follows in those cases "a lack of clarification to resolve serious questions regarding support for positions or actions in conflict with the Church's social and moral teachings".

Archbishop says Tanzania must admit Covid-19 exists, deaths increase

Archbishop Jude Thaddeus Ruwa'ichi of Dar es Salaam told *Catholic News Service* it was time for the country to accept that Covid-19 exists, noting that denying the truth has led to loss of lives and a lot of people getting sick.

"Covid-19 is still with us and we should stop being careless," he said. "Let us protect ourselves and stop spreading the virus. People should seriously start wearing face masks and washing hands with soap and water."

Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic a year ago, Tanzania's authority has repeatedly downplayed the virus and urged citizens to ignore preventative measures necessary to keep the virus from spreading.

Instead, on several occasions, President John Magufuli, a Catholic, has urged Tanzanians to focus on prayers, referring to the virus as demonic amid warnings that the nation is seeing a deadly resurgence in

infections. "May I ask religious leaders, just as you have been doing, keep insisting in prayers," Mr Magufuli told mourners in late February at a funeral for John Kijazi, chief secretary. "We will win. We won last year. We will win this year and years to come." The country of nearly 60 million people has not published data on the number of coronavirus cases since April.

Pope appeals for end to violence in Myanmar

● Pope Francis appealed for an end to deadly violence against protesters in Myanmar, calling on the military junta to free political prisoners and let dialogue and the journey toward democracy prevail.

Appealing to those now ruling the nation – the government was overthrown in a military coup February 1 – the Pope asked March 3 that "dialogue prevail over repression and harmony over discord".

He also launched an appeal to the international community, asking that they work to ensure that "the aspirations of the people of Myanmar are not stifled by violence".

When Myanmar's military took control of the country, it arrested political leaders and activists, including State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and President Win Myint.

Citizens have taken to the streets to protest in cities throughout the country, and military response has been increasingly violent. Many of Myanmar's journalists have gone into hiding, but international media reported the military shot and killed at least 13 protesters March 3.

Pope Francis asked that "young people of that beloved land be granted the hope of a future where hatred and injustice make way for encounter and reconciliation".

Vatican announces theme for World Day of Migrants and Refugees

● For the next World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Pope Francis wants Catholics to focus on greater communion and unity among all people.

The Vatican celebration of the World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2021 will be September 26 and the Pope's choice for a theme is: "Toward an ever wider 'we,'" said a February 27 statement from the Migrants and Refugees Section of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.

The dicastery said the theme will be divided into six sub-themes and emphasises "the importance of being attentive to the entire human family through an inclusive Church that

reaches out and is capable of creating communion in diversity".

The world day will also focus on the "care of our common home, which translates into care of our common family", the Vatican said.

To prepare for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, the dicastery said it would develop resources and a communication campaign to support the event.

The campaign includes "monthly multimedia aids, information material and reflections by theologians and experts that expand upon the theme and sub-themes chosen by the Holy Father", the statement said.

In interview, Pope says he will remain in Rome until death

● Pope Francis said he believes he will die in Rome, either in office or retired, and will not be buried in his native Argentina.

In an interview published in the Argentine newspaper *La Nación* February 27, the Pope said that while he thinks about death, he is not afraid of it.

"How do you imagine your death?" the Pope was asked by Argentine journalist and doctor Nelson Castro.

"As Pope, either in office or emeritus. And in Rome. I will not return to Argentina," he replied.

The interview was an excerpt from Castro's new book, titled *La Salud de Los Papas (The Health of the Popes)*, which details the health of the pontiffs from Pope Leo XIII to Pope Francis.

According to Mr Castro, Pope Francis encouraged him to write the book and agreed to be interviewed. The conversation took place in February 2019.

In it, the Pope spoke candidly about his mental health and told Mr Castro that although he had never undergone psychoanalysis, he did meet with a psychiatrist for six months during "the terrible days of the dictatorship".

Letter from Rome



John L. Allen Jr

An unusual sex abuse trial currently underway in the Vatican took a potentially explosive turn Wednesday, February 24 and the response may have a great deal to say about how serious the reforms launched by Pope Francis actually are.

Three witnesses testified that Italian Cardinal Angelo Comastri, who was relieved of his position as Archpriest of St Peter's Basilica Saturday February 19 by Pope Francis, or his aides, had been aware of sexual abuse allegations at a pre-seminary on Vatican grounds and took no action. Though the merits of that testimony have to be critically examined, at the very least it creates the basis for an investigation of the 77-year-old Cardinal Comastri, which, depending on the outcome, could lead to a charge of criminal negligence.

Alleged crimes

This isn't just a canonical issue about Cardinal Comastri's clerical status. In this case, the alleged crimes took place inside the Vatican itself, meaning that if Cardinal Comastri did something wrong, it's the Vatican's own legal system that has to supply civil justice.

To date, no senior cleric has ever been charged with a criminal offense in a Vatican tribunal, leading many observers to suspect that the system is designed to insulate such high-ranking figures from exposure. If no action is taken regarding Cardinal Comastri, those impressions may be set in cement; if the system does act, however, many observers might conclude that real reform finally has arrived.

To recap, the charge at the heart of this case is that a student at the Pre-Seminary of St. Pius X on Vatican grounds, today a priest named Gabriele Martinelli, sexually abused another student, who's been identified only by the initials "L.G.," while they were both minors between 2007 and 2012. At the time, L.G. was a year younger than Martinelli. Also charged is Father Enrico Radice, today 71, who was the rector of the pre-seminary at the time the abuse is said to have taken place, and who allegedly covered it up.

The case exploded in 2017, when Italian journalist Gianluigi Nuzzi, one of the protagonists of the Vatileaks scandals, published a book titled *Peccato Originale (Original Sin)* which contained a letter from a Polish former student of the pre-seminary named Kamil Jarzembowski, addressed to Pope Francis, in which Mr Jarzembowski claimed to have witnessed acts of abuse.

The Vatican tribunal has already heard from Fr Martinelli himself, who

Will the Vatican investigate a cardinal implicated in its own abuse trial?



Cardinal Angelo Comastri, Archpriest of St Peter's Basilica, leads a Marian prayer service in St Peter's Basilica at the Vatican March 11, 2020. Photo: CNS

February 24 was devoted to the testimony of four individuals called by the Vatican's Promoter of Justice, meaning they were prosecution witnesses

firmly denied the charges and suggested they're the result of internal tensions at the pre-seminary between progressives and traditionalists.

February 24 was devoted to the testimony of four individuals called by the Vatican's Promoter of Justice, meaning they were prosecution witnesses.

Unhealthy environment

Alessandro Flaminio Ottaviani, who spent a year at the pre-seminary between 2010 and 2011, described what he called an "unhealthy environment" full of "psychological pressures", including quips and verbal references about homosexuality, including giving certain students female nicknames based on their supposed homosexual inclinations, and also derisive references to "cardinals and bishops of the Curia" perceived to be gay.

Christian Gilles Donghi, who spent just a month in the pre-seminary in 2009 before leaving due to what he called a "trying" experience, described "extremely intense gossip", including about members of the Roman Curia, as well as mockery of students on the basis of their physical appearance or allegedly

effeminate traits.

None of the four people claimed to have directly witnessed the alleged abuse of L.G. by Fr Martinelli, but they did claim Fr Martinelli had "homosexual attitudes", which caused derisive references among students, and also to have witnessed Fr Martinelli making sexually inappropriate advances and gestures such as touching the genitals of another student. They also claimed that Fr Martinelli enjoyed authority among fellow students because of the favour shown by Fr Radice, with one saying Fr Martinelli was called the "little commander" because Radice allowed him to run various aspects of the pre-seminary's operations.

What's of special interest here is that three of the four witnesses claimed that Cardinal Comastri was aware of concerns about the pre-seminary, and specifically of the allegations about Fr Martinelli and L.G.

Mr Donghi said he was told by an official of the Italian Diocese of Como, which sponsors the pre-seminary, that Cardinal Comastri blocked an effort to remove Fr Radice as rector, describing the charges as "falsities".

Mr Ottaviani said he once saw Mr Jarzembowski leaving Cardi-

nal Comastri's office after having informed the cardinal of the accusations against Fr Martinelli.

Fr Pierre Paul, who conducts a choir in St Peter's Basilica and has frequent contact with students at the pre-seminary, said that Monsignor Vittorio Lanzani, Cardinal Comastri's deputy at the basilica, "knew about Kamil and L.G".

Moreover, all we have right now is the uncorroborated testimony of three people that Comastri or his subordinates knew about the abuse allegations

Given that Cardinal Comastri was removed from office just four days before the February 24 hearing, it's tempting to think Pope Francis knew what was coming and got Cardinal Comastri out of the way in advance. Whatever the case, an officially unexplained resignation, with no judicial follow-up, is hardly the full transparency and accountability that the pontiff and his aides have said is supposed to be at the heart of his reforms.

To be fair, it's not entirely clear what responsibility Comastri had for the pre-seminary. Over the years it's been a bit vague whether the order,

the diocese or the Vatican have operational control.

In testimony on February 25, the current Bishop of Como, Oscar Cantoni, told the court that he met with Comastri in 2017, who told him the Vatican was responsible solely for the service of students in St Peter's Basilica, not for the internal operations at the pre-seminary.

Uncorroborated testimony

Moreover, all we have right now is the uncorroborated testimony of three people that Cardinal Comastri or his subordinates knew about the abuse allegations. Exactly what he knew, and what, if anything, he did with that information, remains unknown.

Those are precisely the sorts of issues that ought to be addressed in a formal investigation by the Vatican's Promoter of Justice.

After all, the Vatican has decided to let the Fr Martinelli trial play out in full public view, in part to get credit for its commitment to transparency. The price of that credit, however, is that the Vatican must be seen to act on the information the process generates, even if the trail seems to lead to a Prince of the Church.

The ball's now in the Vatican's court, and much would seem to depend on how it reacts.

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



A woman reacts during a protest in Abuja, Nigeria, August 15, 2020.

Nigeria on the brink of civil war, nun says



Elise Ann Allen

After nearly 300 Nigerian schoolgirls were set free after being kidnapped two weeks, one nun has warned that nothing is being done to stop incidents like this from happening, and that unless action is taken soon, her country is headed for a catastrophe.

Irreconcilable

Referring to the violence and kidnappings that have ravaged Nigeria for the past decade, Nigerian Sr Monica Chikwe, a member of the Hospitaler Sisters of Mercy, said the situation is “getting out of hand. We are going to face another, second, civil war”.

Similar to Nigeria’s 1967-1970 civil war, which was marked largely by ethnic and religious tensions, Sr Chikwe said she fears current national instability created by the government’s inability to get the situation under control could fracture the country in way that’s irreconcilable.

She also criticised the silence of the international community on the situation, calling it “heart-breaking”. “Nobody is talking about this,

nobody. I say nobody. I am asking, where is the American power? Where is Amnesty International? Where is the UN? Are they waiting for the eruption of war and disorder?”

Sr Chikwe appealed to US President Joe Biden, all UN member-states, and Amnesty International to get involved before it’s too late.

“In recent years, a Boko Haram offshoot group, The Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP), has also unleashed violence in the country’s north”

The United States, she said, “are the lover of freedom, they are the lover of human rights... They defend the dignity of people, they defend self-determination, they defend the free expression, free movement”.

However, these rights are quickly deteriorating in Nigeria, she said, explaining that people can be killed for simply expressing an opinion.

“What I’m pleading for with the world powers, what I’m pleading for with the American president, what I’m pleading for with Amnesty International and the UN, is for them to intervene in the issue of Nigeria,” in whatever way they can, Sr Chikwe said.

For years, Nigeria has been gripped by violence as fighting an insurgency from radical Islamist group Boko Haram, which has killed tens of thou-

sands and displaced millions more. In recent years, a Boko Haram offshoot group, The Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP), has also unleashed violence in the country’s north.

Hundreds throughout Nigeria have been kidnapped and numerous churches burned, with Christians and their property often becoming targets.

In addition to the numerous priests and even bishops who have been kidnapped — and some killed — in recent months, school children have also routinely been targeted.

The level of violence

On Tuesday, March 2, 279 girls who had been abducted from the Government Girls Junior Secondary School in Jangebe Friday were released. The government said last week that 317 had been kidnapped. It was not clear if this was an error, or if some girls are still missing.

“The level of violence that is going on is indescribable, and this is bringing about a lot of killing, a lot of mayhem, a lot of displacement of people, a lot of violence everywhere: kidnapping, raping, assassinating,” Sr Chikwe said, placing most of the blame on what she said is Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari’s incapacity to handle the situation.

Sr Chikwe voiced her belief that the situation has arrived at the point of no return, saying, “There is no way with the level of violence, hatred, and the problems inflicted in various tribal groups, that they will talk of one Nigeria anymore. It’s a gone issue, because the wound is too deep to be healed”.

She accused Mr Buhari of complicity in the violence, both through his own inability to manage the situation, and by placating the requests of the “bandits” who carry out the kidnappings and killings.

“If you are the president of a country, you saw where the bandits are, you know where they are and what they are doing, but instead of arresting them or questioning them, you go and pay them, pay millions and billions of Naira (in ransom) ... What are you telling me? You are behind it!”

“A global silence over an issue that is really hurting and moreover, ravaging life, claiming a lot of lives... It’s really tough, and it’s hard”

She also voiced her belief, which is shared by other observers, that allowing militant groups to stay at large and paying hefty ransoms is done with the explicit purpose of Islamising Nigeria, whose population is roughly a 50/50 split between Muslims and Christians.

“Why is it that nobody wants to stay in unity in Nigeria?” she asked, noting that many are fed up, and the ties between Nigeria’s main tribal communities have begun to fracture, causing further conflict.

In order for the situation to be resolved, Sr Chikwe said the only solution is for Nigeria to return to its more tribalised status prior to the amalgamation of the country in 1914.

Right now, “everybody is at the verge of war... (tribes) are agitated, the military are going and killing innocent and poor civilians who are harmless. Many villages in the north are displaced,” she said, adding, “Let everybody go their separate ways if that will bring peace to the country.”

“To restore peace in Nigeria, people have to go back to how we were before the amalgamation... where the Ibos are on their own, the Yoruba’s are on their own, the Arewa’s are on their own, and there are people working and developing on their own, because this union is not contributing to anything,” she said.

Sr Chikwe suggested a national referendum be held to determine who wants to stay in Nigeria, and who wants to separate, which would allow the poor to also have a voice.

Unless something happens “immediately”, Nigeria will completely spin out of control, she said, adding, “the genocide going on in Nigeria is indescribable and is going to cost a lot of mayhem if some action is not taken and now”.

“How many people have died? Many people have been talking, but what amazes me is that how is it that the world is not talking about this. My question is why,” she said. “A global silence over an issue that is really hurting and moreover, ravaging life, claiming a lot of lives... It’s really tough, and it’s hard.”

i Elise Ann Allen, senior correspondent for Cruxnow.com

Letters

Letter of the week

Government is leaving people of faith 'screaming into the void'

Dear Editor, Fair play to the Minister for Mental Health Mary Butler for acknowledging the importance of Mass for people of faith's mental health [IC 04/03/2021] but to be honest it's too little too late. For a large part of the last year we have been denied the sacraments. I understand the reason for the bishops adhering to and promoting public health advice and being cautious at the beginning of the pandemic, we know a lot more about the virus now and dioceses and parishes have done so much to make sure our churches are safe.

It has been repeated ad nauseum that Ireland is one of very, very few countries who mandated that churches remain closed for public worship, despite this

unpopular and arguably unnecessary restriction, the Government has not budged from their current advice – barely even mentioning the issue. In Taoiseach Micheál Martin's address at the end of February regarding our new 'Living with Covid' plan he didn't mention religion or religious services once, how bizarre considering it's so integral to many, many people's lives. It just goes to show how out of touch with the public our Government is and why we seem to be screaming into the void. Of course people are at their wits end and mental health is at an all-time low. The horrific violent protests in Dublin recently are one of the signs of the madness caused by lockdown.

Regarding the dangers of returning to public worship, a point has been made that people tend to congregate outside the church for a chat sometimes before and after Mass (although chatting to people outside, two metres apart, isn't considered a dangerous scenario for transmission), surely most people will not do this due to our current situation and if they do couldn't the priest, volunteers or stewards who have made herculean efforts after the first two lockdowns to sanitise churches etc... just ask people nicely not to congregate?

*Yours etc.,
Donal O'Brien
Ringsend, Dublin*

Ministers must start earning their salaries

Dear Editor, Reading Minister Patrick O'Donovan's article that he is "planning to write to Stephen Donnelly" to have priests prioritised for vaccination [IC 25/02/2021] I thought 'hurrah!' Then in *The Irish Times* I read, the said Minister O'Donovan, attending the Fine Gael parliamentary party meeting, is faffing about regarding "elite athlete status" for GAA players. He also reportedly interrupted Minister Heather Humphries with a smart rejoinder. Presumably, Minister Donnelly was at the said meeting. Could they not talk? Is Minister O'Donovan capable of texting or even tweeting? Recently these people have received a raise in salary, now at €110k+. Do they receive this salary for procrastination? Similarly regarding the proposed phasing out of the direct provision accommodation scheduled for 2024 for which plan they are all taking a bow! No wonder vaccines are delayed or not there. It's time ministers started earning their salaries.

I'm furious.

*Mary O'Mahony
Crosshaven,
Co. Cork*



What evidence exists that Ireland's response to Covid-19 was correct?

Dear Editor, Where is the evidence that our Government was right in the way it responded to the Covid-19 virus? If we had examples of other countries that did not follow our Government's policy and had two, three, four or five times the death rate that we have had, then this would be good evidence. But this is not what happened.

Our politicians abdicated their responsibility for the

overall welfare of our people, to a group of medical professionals who focused solely on the virus and ignored other medical issues – physical and mental – and ignored economic and educational considerations.

Fortunately, we have Sweden as a basis of comparison. Sweden, so far, has had 29% more deaths than Ireland. Sweden has had 22% fewer deaths than the USA.

Sweden has had 33% fewer deaths than Britain. Does this prove that the lockdowns were the right course of action?

There is another example of a US state that did not lockdown: South Dakota. Their death rate is about 30% higher than the American national average. They have the lowest unemployment rate of all the States. Their economy is booming.

Keep in mind that the people who are dying are overwhelmingly old – median age of 84 in Ireland. What does this mean? It means that in any month, in any year, most of the people dying are old. So, a portion of those dying of Covid-19 in the last year would have died anyway of something.

*Yours etc.,
Patrick Slevin
Waterford City*

Pro-life movement shouldn't make same 'blunders' as Australia

Dear Editor, Having been involved with the pro-life movement in Australia for some 40 years, I would hope the Church in Ireland does not make the same blunders on this issue as have been made in the US and Australia.

Failure by the Church hierarchy to bring prominent figures to task over their promotion of abortion has seriously weakened the pro-life cause and contributed to the mindset that abortion is simply another choice. The lack of leadership of many bishops in the US and Australia has been, to put it bluntly, pathetic.

Many in the hierarchy have failed to realise that abortion is not just a moral issue but is, in our time, a principal weapon of Satan in his war against Almighty God – the author of all life.

What the bishops should have done and did not, was to make it clear that persons promot-

ing abortion may not receive Holy Communion. Make it clear to the Faithful that electoral support for political parties and candidates promoting abortion is not an option for Catholics in any circumstances. As a matter of policy, deny pro-abortion parties and candidates access to Church buildings and assets. Where the pro-abortion politician is in a position of leadership and flaunts his or her catholicity so as to be a cause of scandal to the Faithful, that person be the subject of excommunication from the Church.

Measures such as these may not turn the tide of abortion, but will at least deliver a modicum of backbone to the Church's position.

*Yours etc.,
Gavan Duffy
Edens Landing,
Queensland, Australia*

Man-made law on women's ordination is reformable

Dear Editor, I agree with your reviewer [IC 25/02/2021] that John O'Brien's book on women's ordination in the Catholic Church is scholarly, influential and insightful. I agree fully with Fr O'Brien's conclusion that the practice and presumption of the non-ordainability of women is a matter of ecclesiastical law and not one of divine precept. That man-made law is reformable. Women have been and can be ordained in the Catholic Church.

*Yours etc.,
Maureen Mulvaney
Dundrum, Dublin 16*

facebook community

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

Ireland must 'take a stand' against abuse of Uyghurs in China – prelate

I agree but I think we should also stand with all those Christians in the middle east Nigeria and elsewhere why are they forgotten about. – **Peter Mcnamee**

How does the bishop think the Irish Government's denial of the sacraments to the Irish people rates on the scale of human rights abuses? I guess it's easier to wring one's hands over abuses on the other side of the world than it is to fight abuses at home. – **William Broderick**

I would respectfully ask that comments do not miss the point. Bishop Alan has certainly been very strong on all these kinds of issues, including the matter of the ban on public worship in Ireland. Please allow him and *The Irish Catholic* this opportunity to do something for the very real suffering and abuse of this Chinese minority. Their religion or how far away they are from Ireland are irrelevant to our duty as Catholics to reach out in compassion. – **Neil Carmody**

If the politicians don't care about abortion and euthanasia in Ireland why would they care about Uyghurs in China? – **Eamon McAleavey**

Minister warns of toll on mental health due to continued ban on public worship

Worship is not just a private matter but is a coming together of the community so that "where 2 or 3..." The British prevented the public expression of our faith and now our own Government are doing it. The Church is above all this. Yet complicit in closing... – **Bernie Costello**

The Mass is not just important for older generations. The Mass is very important for every generation. The media continually try to make us believe that only the old go to Mass, nothing could be further from the truth. – **Bernie O Hara**

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

Fr McDonagh's devotion to Jesus was exemplary

Dear Editor, Fr Enda McDonagh was an exceptional man [obituary, IC 04/03/2020]. Fr McDonagh lectured in moral theology in Maynooth, and it was worth going to Maynooth just to have come into contact with him. He was civilized, intelligent, open-minded, and a Christian. His devotion to the person and example of Jesus Christ was exemplary. There was nothing closed about him; he was open to all possibilities; the ultimate sanction was conscience, an informed conscience. I recall one class with Fr McDonagh in 1965 where we had studied the theology of marriage in great detail. There was a discussion where the contrasting calling of virginity over that of the married state was discussed. I stated that I regarded them both as equal, much to the disapproval of my classmates. Fr McDonagh said again that we should remain open to all possibilities, and rescued me. He also added that he would not necessarily disagree with my view.

*Yours etc.,
Anthony Jordan
Sandymount, Dublin*

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



▲ **BRAZIL:** Children look on as relatives receive the Sinovac Covid-19 vaccine March 3, in Sao Gabriel da Cachoeira. Photos CNS
◀ **USA:** National Guard soldiers in Washington patrol the US Capitol March 4.



ITALY: The caskets containing the bodies of Italian ambassador Luca Attanasio and his bodyguard, Vittorio Iacovacci, are pictured in Santa Maria degli Angeli church in Rome February 25.



KAZAKHSTAN: The Soyuz spacecraft with the Arktika-M satellite blasts off from the launchpad at the Baikonur Cosmodrome, February 28.



MYANMAR: Muslim men pray next to the body of 19-year-old Aung Myint Myat during his funeral in Myanmar's Magway region, March 5.



PHILIPPINES: Demonstrators gesture while holding banners and placards on International Women's Day in Manila, March 8.



Opening our secrets to the light

You are as sick as your sickest secret! That's a wise axiom. What's sick in us will remain sick unless we open it up to others and to the light of day. As long as it's a secret, it's a sickness. However, perhaps the problem is not with what we keep secret, but that we keep it secret. Maybe the sickness is the secret rather than what we deem to be sick.

“We relegate our fantasies to a sickness when we believe they are something we alone suffer from, something sick, shameful, and unique to us”

We all have our struggles, and we can thank God for that. The image and likeness of God inside us is not simply a beautiful icon imprinted in our souls. It's fire, divine, insatiable, befuddling fire. By our very nature, there are complexities inside us that cannot make easy peace with the person we like to think we are. We all have wild fantasies and dark obsessions. Were our daydreams ever made public, they would reveal that we all nurse fantasies of grandiosity, of hatred, of vindication, and that we all are periodically caught up in the grip of various emotional and sexual obsessions. There are things in our daydreams about which we would be ashamed to speak. We all



Fr Rolheiser

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harbour fantasies that are wild, earthy, grandiose, and egotistical. So we keep them secret and deal with them either by pathologising them (relegating them to a sickness) or by denying them.

We relegate our fantasies to a sickness when we believe they are something we alone suffer from, something sick, shameful, and unique to us. They are something we never want others to know about us. As a result, our fantasies and obsessions become something to be ashamed of, a dark secret, a sickness beneath our normal self.

Denial

Another option is denial. We can consciously deny that we ever have these thoughts and feelings. Denial saves us from feeling shame, but we pay another price

“The problem is that we lack an understanding of the deeper part of our soul, our shadow, and believe there's some sickness inside there – and it's keeping this a secret that's the actual sickness”

for this in the end. Denying our thoughts and feelings is akin to living on the ground floor of a house and taking any garbage or anything else we do not want to deal with and simply tossing it down into the basement and closing the door. Out of sight, out of mind. For a while. Garbage doesn't cease to exist just because we have pushed it into the basement. Eventually it ferments and sends its poisonous gases up through the vents to contaminate the air we are breathing.

However, and this is the point, the complex yearnings, obsessions, and grandiosity inside our soul are not a sickness, nor something that we need to deny. Our soul, for all its wildness, is not sick. The problem is that we lack an understanding of the deeper

part of our soul, our shadow, and believe there's some sickness inside there – and it's keeping this a secret that's the actual sickness.

What is our shadow? Popular literature has given us a one-sided notion of what makes for our shadow. The popular notion is that our shadow is some dark, fearful place we are afraid to go, an inner desert we want at all cost not to venture into, inner demons that we want consciously to avoid. While we might at times feel those fears in the face of our own shadow, our shadow is not a dark thing at all. The opposite.

“In a healthy person, dark secrets generally hide the things that emanate out of the excessive light, divine energy, infinite longings, and godly grandiosity inside of us”

Here's how our shadow forms. When a baby is born, it is luminous, wonderfully open and aware, looking around, simply drinking in reality. However, at this stage of life, a baby cannot think because it lacks an ego and thus lacks self-awareness. In order to form an ego and become self-aware, the baby has to make a series of massive mental contractions, each of which shuts it off from part of its own luminosity. First, early on

in life, it distinguishes between what is self and what is other; I am not my mommy. Soon afterwards, it distinguishes between living and non-living; a puppy is alive, a stone is not. Sometime after that, it distinguishes between mind and body; a body is a hard, solid thing, thinking is different. Finally, and this is the critical piece in the formation of our shadow, at a point in its life, the baby will make a distinction between what it can consciously face inside of itself and what is too overwhelming to consciously face. In doing that, it forms its shadow by splitting off a huge part of its luminosity (the full image and likeness of God inside itself) from its own conscious awareness.

Our light

Notice that our shadow is made up of our light, not our darkness. As Marianne Williamson aptly puts it (in a phrase Nelson Mandela used in his inauguration address) it is our light not our darkness that frightens us. In a healthy person, dark secrets generally hide the things that emanate out of the excessive light, divine energy, infinite longings, and godly grandiosity inside of us. When we bring these into the light, we see that they are neither dark nor sick. The sickness lies only in not bringing them to light.

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Running into shape



Watching our weight was the topic of last week's article, and what better way to do that than (with a few caveats) running?

Should I be running?

The aforementioned caveats include if you're recovering from injury or serious illness of any kind, or if it's been a while since you've been active. Running is a high-impact, weight-bearing form of exercise, which is to say that you're carrying your own weight (unlike when cycling or swimming), and that the weight will be striking the ground forcefully with each step.



Running is a mostly cheap, easy way to get into shape quickly, writes Jason Osborne

These could be thought of as "high-risk, high-reward" forms of exercise, as they can carry huge potential for both bodily injury and bodily development. Weight-bearing exercises are excellent for your bones as they force you to work against gravity and so strengthen your bones, but the high-impact nature of many of the exercises can be hard on joints like

ankles, knees and hips if you're not careful.

As a result, running should only be undertaken in good health, or if you're in suitable shape to do so.

Getting started

The hardest part about any sort of exercise is often getting started. Few people wake up to see Ireland's grey, rainy skies, and feel

motivated to exercise. What differentiates those who do so from those who don't is precisely that: motivation.

Identify or develop a sufficient reason for wanting to get in shape and cling to it: maybe you had a health scare recently and realised you'd best get in shape and make the most of the body God gave you, or maybe you simply want to be in as good a condition as possible for the big, post-Covid holiday. Regardless of the reason, find one and stick with it.

Some concrete aids to develop motivation can be useful, too. If there's a particular form of music that gets you moving, or if there's a friend with whom you can team

up to split the burden, do so. The prospect of a post-workout reward can be a big help too, whether it's taking half an hour to watch something of your choosing, or a simple bar of chocolate.

By connecting a run with something you enjoy immediately after, you will begin to draw an association between the difficulty of the exercise and a reward. This makes it easier to put in the hard work going forward.

Another tip to get you moving is to go somewhere that leaves you with no other choice but to exercise. In ordinary time, that might be the gym, as there's little you can

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Family News



AND EVENTS

JAPANESE BILLIONAIRE SEEKS EIGHT PEOPLE FOR MOON TRIP

Japanese billionaire Yusaku Maezawa has invited eight people to join him for a trip around the moon on a SpaceX flight, according to the BBC. "I want people from all kinds of backgrounds to join," he said in a video via Twitter, sharing a link to application details. The mission is called 'dearMoon' and is scheduled to fly in 2023. Mr Maezawa has already said he will pay for the entire journey, so those who join him will be flying for free. Those who apply must meet two criteria: they should advance "whatever activity" they are in to "help other people and greater society in some way" and must be "willing to support other crew members who share similar aspirations". The price Mr Maezawa paid for his ticket to the moon has not been disclosed, but according to Elon Musk, founder and CEO of SpaceX it was "a lot of money".

GLOW IN THE DARK SHARKS FOUND NEAR NEW ZEALAND

Scientists say they have found three deepwater shark species off the coast of New Zealand that glow in the dark. The species were found in the Chatham Rise, which is an area of ocean floor to the east of New Zealand. They were collected in January of 2020, according to the study. The kitefin shark is one of the species, and now holds the title of longest known luminous vertebrate, reaching up to 180cm (or 5ft and 11in). Bioluminescence, a phenomenon which sees organisms emitting light, was also confirmed in the blackbelly lanternshark and southern lanternshark. The three species were already known to marine biologists, but this is the first time bioluminescence has been identified in them. Many marine animals, and some insects such as fireflies, produce their own light, but this is the first time the phenomenon has been found in larger sharks. The scientists suggested that the sharks' glowing underbellies may help them to hide from predators or other threats beneath them.

MAYO BEACH NAMED ONE OF EUROPE'S TOP 20 BY LONELY PLANET

A beach in Co. Mayo has been named one of the best beaches in Europe according to famous travel publication *Lonely Planet*. Its latest round-up of beaches saw Keem Bay on Achill Island achieve the number 18 spot on the list. *Lonely Planet* has accrued a global following for its recommendations and travel tips. "No matter your taste in beach, Europe obliges", they wrote, "From the wild, wind-lashed shores of the Atlantic coast to mountain-fringed Arctic bays where whales raise their tails, and the sunlit, snuggled-away coves of Italy and Greece, we bring you the cream of the European coast with these top 20 beaches." On Keem Bay, the publication wrote, "Ireland's Wild Atlantic Way hides a crock of gold when it comes to dramatic coastlines – and nowhere more so than at gloriously remote Keem Bay at the far west of Achill Island."

The silent disease causing more fractures in older adults



Every year in Ireland, over 3500 hip fractures occur in older people most of whom have no prior diagnosis of 'brittle bones' or osteoporosis. While the term osteoporosis was first coined in 1835, it's a condition that has actually been identified in humans over several millennia. Today, an increased lifespan has been one of the main drivers in the exponential rise in cases. In fact, 50% of woman and 25% of men aged over 50 will sustain a low trauma fracture in their lifetime. Indeed, at least 25-30% of all cases of osteoporosis occur in males who account for a similar proportion of fractures. But it's not just a condition of older frail people, as it can affect all adults in the entire age spectrum.

Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is estimated to affect 300,000 people in Ireland, but in the majority of cases it is undiagnosed. This is largely because contrary to what is often thought, it does not result in pain (unless you fracture) and in the majority of cases there are no symptoms. This means you could be completely unaware of having osteoporosis and yet be at high risk of fracture. Furthermore, about 70% of all osteoporotic fractures in the spine are undiagnosed, as they don't cause pain and can occur spontaneously or with minimal trauma. However, they can result in a loss of height and a stooped posture.

But what are the main risk factors for osteoporosis? From the age of about 30, there is a gradual decline in bone density but this is quite marked in woman after the menopause due to a loss of oestrogen. Smoking and excess alcohol in a dose dependent fashion also causes bone loss. Poor diet with inadequate

Medical Matters

Dr Kevin McCarroll



calcium intake, vitamin D deficiency and lack of weight bearing exercise is also a factor, especially in some younger adults. Furthermore, as peak bone density occurs in the late 20s, a healthy lifestyle and diet is also very important earlier in life. Genetics also plays a big part and is strongly correlated with peak bone density. In fact, if you have a parent with hip fracture it also increases your risk of breaking your hip in later life. Finally, some medications, most notably steroids are very detrimental to bone and cause osteoporosis.

“However, a DXA scan is also indicated if you break a bone from a simple fall earlier in life or have strong risk factors”

Guidelines recommend a screening DXA scan to measure bone density in females aged 65+ and males aged 70+. Based on this test, it would be expected that about 25% of woman and 10% of men have osteoporosis. However, at least another 30% have a lesser degree of brittle bones called 'osteopaenia' which

also puts them at higher risk of fracture. In fact, about 50% of fractures occur in people with osteopaenia because other factors like falls play an important role. Indeed, about one third of those aged over 65 have a fall once per year and this rises to 50% in those over 80 – so knowing whether there is osteoporosis in this age group is very important. However, a DXA scan is also indicated if you break a bone from a simple fall earlier in life or have strong risk factors.

So can osteoporosis be cured? In general, osteoporosis is a chronic condition but



medications can substantially improve bone density and reduce fracture risk. For example, treatments will cut down the risk of hip fracture by about 40-50% and that of the spine by up to 70-80%. The mainstay of therapy are tablets but drug infusions, daily or twice yearly injections are also available as options, particularly for more severe cases. It's usual to stay on treatment for a minimum of 3-5 years which may be followed by a 'drug break' and later by further 'top up'

therapy. However, some will require more longterm treatment.

It's also important to ensure adequate daily intake of calcium (800 mg) and vitamin D (800 IU) and to drink alcohol in moderation as well as avoid smoking. Ideally, this should also be combined with regular weight bearing exercises, like brisk walking (about 30 minutes per day) which in particular can strengthen the hips.

“Falls though in later life often have multifactorial causes and are not just due to gait imbalance”

Finally, falls are at the root of nearly all non-spine fractures. So it's important for older adults to take great care to avoid slippery surfaces and wear good footwear. Falls though in later life often have multifactorial causes and are not just due to gait imbalance. For example, blood pressure drops on standing increase the risk of falls and hip fracture by about fourfold. Importantly, when falls are unexplained they should always be fully investigated. In conclusion, while osteoporosis is often thought of as a 'silent' disease the increasing number of fractures in older adults is a reminder of how common it is and of the importance of diagnosis and treatment.

i Dr Kevin McCarroll is a Consultant Physician in Geriatric Medicine, St James's Hospital, Dublin.

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do there but exercise, but that avenue is obviously closed to us for the foreseeable future.

A lockdown alternative is to go to your local park, beach or mountain, dressed for the occasion in runners, shorts and a suitable top, so that by the time you're there, you may as well do the exercise.

The right clothes

Wearing the right clothes for a run is usually an easy prospect; you can make it as complicated as you like, but any t-shirt, shorts and socks tend to do the trick. If you're going to put on an underlayer or jacket to supplement that, make sure it's breathable and not too heavy, as it doesn't matter what the temperature is like outside – you will get warm.

Winter running also necessitates high-visibility accessories, hats and gloves, so include or disregard them at your preference.

However, the one thing that does take considerable consideration are the shoes. Again, in ordinary time, it's worth going to a sports shop and having a shoe specialist help you to find the right pair, but this isn't possible at the moment.

“Cushioning around the ankle, heel and ball of the foot are particularly important”

Instead, it's worth browsing the depths the internet has to offer. Much of the advice a specialist would give you is available there, and the range of shoes on offer has never been greater. A couple of retailers to consider include: Lifestyle Sports, JD Sports and Elverys. Between these three, there should be something to suit you. If you have a preferred brand, you can always go directly to that brand's website and order straight from them, too.

Before doing so, it's advisable to check what the retailer's return's policy is, as there's no guarantee you'll get it right the first time.

With regards to what you're looking for, light and breathable is again

the name of the game. The heavier the shoe, the heavier your feet, which makes running twice as difficult.

While you want the shoe to be light, neither should it be threadbare. Cushioning around the ankle, heel and ball of the foot are particularly important. Cushioning doesn't mean you should be walking on pillows, though – it's important the shoe has some rigidity so as to give your foot support, and so that you have a suitable push-off platform.

A final word on this is not to worry about how they look. While it's nice to have a pair of good-looking shoes, in many cases today, the best looking shoes are not particularly practical. A rule of thumb I've found is that the higher the price of the shoe is, above a certain threshold, the less likely it is to make a good runner. You can reasonably expect to pay anywhere between €60-€120 for a good pair of running shoes, but rarely will they cost more than this. If you're looking at a pair more expensive than that, chances are you're in the realms of high-fashion and have left practical runners behind.

Get moving

Once the motivation has been accrued, and once the right gear has been sourced, there's nothing left but to get moving. Start off with a warm-up consisting of stretches and fast-paced exercises to get the blood flowing, like jumping jacks, jogging on the spot, or squats. This stage is often left out, but it's crucial if you're to avoid injury.

If you're new to running, it's best to keep it short and simple. Depend-



ing on your abilities, your first couple of sessions may be a hybrid of running and brisk walking (interspersed with breaks if needed). The distance you go is totally dependent on your own level of fitness. A kilometre or two may be suitable if it's been a long time, and that's just fine. Your stamina will develop over time.

“A good posture makes breathing easier and is less likely to result in some sort of injury in the long run”

Take it slowly at first, focusing on getting the basics right. Hitting a comfortable stride and breathing steadily. If you're doing distance running, you should not be sprinting for much of your run. Rather, it's a case of slow and steady winning the race. Speed will come in time, much as distance will. It's important to run with good posture, so head up, back straight, shoulders back and core engaged (that is to say, don't allow your upper body to sway all over the place as you run).

A good posture makes breathing easier and is less likely to result in some sort of injury in the long run.

Final tips

While there is an endless amount of depth to running properly, these simple tips are enough to get you going. A final point to remember is that the preparation is as important as the running itself, and this includes our eating.

Very heavy meals and drinking lots of water shortly before going for a run is a recipe for disaster. Rather, leave decent space between your last meal and your run, at least an hour. Instead of drinking a glass of water all at once, sip regularly throughout the day, saving the bigger drinks for afterwards, in order to replenish fluids lost through sweat.

With these basic boxes ticked, you're ready to get out there and hit your stride.

Dad's Diary

Rory Fitzgerald



Children have an amazing ability to escape into the present moment, far more easily than we adults do. Since my mother died, the children have spent plenty of time lost in sorrow and reminiscence, and enough time crying. Yet in just a few minutes, they can switch from being immersed in heartfelt sadness over a dream they had of her, to flying down the hill on a go cart, laughing hysterically. I encourage them to play, and to enjoy life as much as possible, telling them that nothing would make my mother happier, than to see them happy.

The kids have also taken practical steps to remember their beloved grandmother. They have devoted a section of our polytunnel to planting flowers from seed, so that they will have a ready supply of fresh flowers to bring to her grave. They have chosen her favourite flowers, in her colours, and they tend them carefully each day.

The first family occasion since my mother's death came just a fortnight after the funeral. It was my daughter's tenth birthday. The night before, the almost-birthday girl, my son and I were looking through old photos of her past birthdays. We contemplated beautiful images of her on the day she was born, and of happy birthdays spent on Sherkin Island, the Isle of Wight, Dublin and here at our old farmhouse, when she was just a little toddler.

It gave me deep joy to look back at the happy life we have had together. Then, a picture appeared on the screen which instantly devastated us all. It was of my smiling mother sitting next to my daughter as she blew out her candles on her birthday cake, just last year. It seemed like yesterday. This image hit us like a train, and made us realise afresh her absence, and the void in our lives left by infinitely warm and loving presence.

There were tears, which moved more sorrow though our freshly wounded hearts. We embraced each other. I told the children how their grandmother would have wanted them to be especially happy on their birthdays. They decided to try to have a happy day, as that would be the best way to remember their nana. I said it would be fine to be sad too, and that if they felt sad at any point they could always come

to us.

In the event, the big day went brilliantly. The birthday girl leapt out of bed early to find her presents beautifully wrapped on the dining room table. These provided much early morning entertainment. A special birthday breakfast followed, with a hot chocolate



and marshmallows for elevenses, followed by a birthday lunch. In true lockdown style, all her friends from near and far had recorded little videos wishing her a happy birthday, which had been edited into a lovely video, which overjoyed her. These virtual messages provided much delight to a girl who was now missing out on her second birthday party in a row, thanks to the pandemic.

Her brothers and sisters filled in admirably for a proper birthday crowd, making easily as much noise – and mess – as a party of 20 might. The party got into full swing in the afternoon, once the kids' scholastic duties were done. Much fun was had with games in the garden, before a birthday dinner and, of course, a large birthday cake, which contained a secret cavity filled with sweets! A sugar spike and e-numbers duly caused play to continue with increased hyperactivity long into the evening. By this point the packaging took its traditionally central role in play, as the boxes her presents came in were converted into a very complex and well made 'yellow submarine'. This provided hours of fun before, at long last, exhausted and happy children were herded towards bed.

Before long, we heard sobbing from upstairs. Once all the birthday excitement had died down, the profound sadness of our recent loss had hit the poor birthday girl. She came downstairs and we comforted her for an hour, before she finally fell asleep, remembering the warm love of her grandmother.

The last Irish Spiritan in Zambia

Personal Profile



Ruadhán Jones

In 50 years of missionary work in Zambia, Fr Michael Walsh CSSp. has seen the Church go from strength to strength. It is “unrecognisable” from the Church he first witnessed in 1971 when he arrived in the diocese of Monze after a spell as a missionary in Nigeria. Since then, the Church has tripled in size, so that now Catholics make up 25% of the population.

Spiritans

Fr Walsh is a member of the Spiritans, though when he first entered they were known as the Congregation of the Holy Ghost. He had considered a number of congregations before making his decision, as at least three or four came to his secondary school seeking vocations.

“I had almost made up my mind to go to Kiltegan (St Patrick’s Missionaries) when I suddenly changed to join the Holy Ghost congregation,” Fr Walsh explains. “That was through the influence of the vocations promoter, Fr Sheridan at the time. I believe, from what I’ve been told by my parents and my family, that from a very early age, I used to say I’m going to be a missionary. And that’s what happened.”

Ordained in 1965, he was posted to Nigeria in 1969, in a region then known as Biafra. His parish, Umuma-Isiaku, had no ordained priest or religious when he arrived. Now it has more than 40 local priests and religious sisters, while there are more Spiritans today from Nigeria than from any other country.

That being said, Fr Walsh remembers that the Church was thriving



Fr Michael Walsh CSSp. celebrates Mass on Palm Sunday, 2020.

when he first arrived.

“Demands for ministry were endless,” he recalls. “Numbers were massive. I spent Holy week – in the second parish I was in 1968 – I spent the full week in the confessional, from Monday to Thursday. On Thursday we had general absolution for our full Church after hearing confessions for the whole week.”

He briefly returned in 2019, and though he didn’t travel far, what he saw “was very impressive and what was most impressive was the recovery from wartime and the development of the growth in mission stations. The last parish I was in where I was ministering for about a year, had a small church. When I went back in 2019, I was amazed to see a massive, big church, with a full congregation and a packed church on January 1 2020.”

Fr Walsh was one of many mis-

sionaries who were expelled from the south-east region of Nigeria – Biafra – by the Nigerian army.

“Fr Walsh was one of those who responded to the call”

“The missionaries had been fully involved in the promotion of relief and alleviation of the suffering of starving Biafrans because they were hemmed in on every side by the Nigerian army. There were blockades on all roads. The problem was that the Nigerian army considered the relief that the Church was rendering was prolonging the war.”

The missionaries were still in demand, however, and Zambian bishops appealed to the Spiritan hierarchy to send missionaries to their diocese. Fr Walsh was one of those who

responded to the call. When he got there, the first thing he had to do was learn the language.

“Firstly, we did a language course,” he says. “The conditions laid down by the bishop and agreed by the congregation was that 10 Spiritans would be sent to Zambia, some in education and some in pastoral work. I entered into the pastoral field after the language course.”

“My first appointment, which lasted for 10 years, was to a parish which had opened maybe nine months earlier. I went there in August in 1971. It was run by a Lancaster diocesan priest, so I joined him. He worked mainly in the town centre and very soon after arrival I started on activity in the village areas.”

“There were no Catholics in the village areas at that time but there were a lot of people who had some

experience of the Church. They had been connected with the united church of Zambia, they had got some instruction in the Bible and some help. So, some of them had some idea of Christianity.”

Fr Walsh’s pastoral work grew as time went on, and in 1994 he was asked to establish a Spiritan postulant. It opened in 1995 with five postulants. Later, in 2000, Fr Walsh started a charity to provide material assistance for the poor in the area.

“The situation of the Zambian Church has changed significantly in the 50 years Fr Walsh has been in Zambia”

“It extended to all the Spiritan parishes, rendering material assistance,” he explains. “Then it developed into assisting the school-goers and that became the prime objective quickly. The need of the children for education and the lack of money to pay for fees, that was found to be one of the big needs and demands at the time. From there we started to select orphans rather than just children generally. It became the orphans and vulnerable people’s organisation.”

The situation of the Zambian Church has changed significantly in the 50 years Fr Walsh has been in Zambia. The number of Catholics is now 25% of the population and the Church Fr Walsh says “has developed immensely”.

“From the parish point of view, the development of the parishes has changed immensely, establishing new mass centres and a number of parishes have been divided once or twice or more,” he says. “So the growth is phenomenal.”

“It is pleasing to see and very encouraging, there is a keen interest. The Catholic Church in Zambia is very much appreciated for the work it does and the voice of the bishops – the bishops have a very strong voice in the country.”

Living Laudato Si’

Jane Mellet



Stick your hands in the earth and avoid conspiracies

Lent has always invited us into a desert experience, but this year we are experiencing a real wilderness. The pandemic has forced us all into spaces where we are faced with big questions and worries. In Pope Francis’ new book, *Let Us Dream*, he says that to enter into crisis is to be sifted. Our ways of thinking are shaken up, our priorities and lifestyles are challenged. He says, “the basic rule of a crisis is that you don’t come out of it the same. If you get through it, you come out better or worse, but never the same.” When we are faced with difficult experiences, such as our present situation, our hearts are revealed. Some people give everything in service of those in need: healthcare workers, chaplains, teachers, parents, grandparents, those working in ministry of all kinds, those reaching out to others by phone, by webinars, through many

acts of kindness. Others retreat down a rabbit hole of conspiracy theories and violence.

Laudato Si’ reminds us that “every violation of solidarity and civic friendship harms the environment” (LS, 142) because it has consequences for the quality of human life and we are part of a wider web of life.

It is easy to become closed down, and God knows there have been days during this pandemic when that is all we had the energy for. But we cannot remain there. In *Laudato Si’* we are called to a deep interior conversion where our relationship with one another and with God’s creation is concerned. We are reminded just how interconnected everything is: concern for the poor, economics, politics, care for our environment and interior peace. During this Lenten season and these lockdown days, can we recover a sense of belonging to each other and to God’s creation? We cultivate this sense of belonging

by reaching outward to our family members and neighbours with small acts of kindness and mercy. We recover a sense of belonging to God’s creation by spending time, with awareness, in nature. These small acts have a ripple effect across our networks and communities.

So, in these remaining weeks of Lent, how can you and your family reach out to someone? Can you phone a friend, write a letter to someone, check in on a neighbour, pray for those on the frontline? And how can you connect more deeply with nature? Plant something. Anything. Herbs, flowers, veggies, stick your hands in the earth. Watch nature. Listen. At the end of each day ask yourself, where did I see God’s presence in nature today? Reaching out to others and caring for creation are interconnected, for we belong to each other, each of us part of this wonderful web of life. Our lives become most fulfilled when we acknowledge and build up these different dimensions in harmony.

Jane Mellett is the *Laudato Si’* Officer with Trócaire

TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



Appalled by the ill-treatment of a horse while ignoring the treatment of children

I can understand people getting upset about ill-treatment of animals, and I doubt that anyone who is cruel to animals would be kind to the human beings in their lives.

However, I do think the reaction to the picture of trainer Gordon Elliott sitting on a dead horse two years ago has been excessive. Sports Minister Jack Chambers on **Morning Ireland** (RTÉ Radio One, Tuesday) said it was horrific and appalling. It was certainly ill-judged, but the horse was dead, so while it was disrespectful and thoroughly off-putting, it wasn't on the face of it any evidence of cruelty. On **It Says in the Papers** (RTÉ Radio One, Wednesday) it was reported that sports journalist Eamon Dunphy had said it would be disproportionate if the trainer lost his livelihood over this and I couldn't disagree with that. Later that morning on **Today with Claire Byrne** (RTÉ Radio One) there was a strong sense of support for the trainer from texters, though nobody was defending the trainer's action.

What galled me the most over the week was the outrage of politicians who facilitated the abortion legislation that led to the deaths last year of 6,666 little human beings.



The Prime Time debate included Fine Gael TD Neale Richmond and John McGuirk from Gript.

Now there's something to be outraged about. But the silence in the media is deafening, while the dead horse story was prioritised on the **Nine News** (RTÉ One) last Friday night, reporting that the trainer received and accepted his sanction.

One of the big disappointments in the abortion-related repeal campaign was the support it got from Amnesty International, an organisation that was once a source of pride for defending prisoners of conscience. On **Moncrieff** (Newstalk, Monday) law professor Ronan McCrea criticised Amnesty's "mission creep" – distracted and diverted by causes far removed

from its "foundational goal". This was in the context of Amnesty no longer supporting Russian dissident Alexei Navalny as a prisoner of conscience because he is supposed to have made anti-immigration statements 14 years ago!

The violence at a recent anti-lockdown protest in Dublin was objectionable on so many levels – such events, whether from left, right or middle are dangerous in a pandemic. The topic featured on **Prime Time** (RTÉ One, Tuesday) when gript.ie editor John McGuirk was interviewed with Fine Gael TD Neale Richmond TD. As often happens there were more grounds for agreement than

was evident from the prickly nature of the debate. Both had no time for the violence at that protest, which was welcome. Mr McGuirk sought to understand the reasons behind it, referring to the frustration of people who were out of work for months due to the lockdown. He had actually spoken to some of the protestors. He got in a dig at media coverage, pointing out that the filmed report that preceded the discussion contained no interviews with any of the protestors. Mr McGuirk suggested that part of the problem was the fact that when there were moderate objections to official Covid-19 strategy, they were often shut down – he instanced a doctor and a barrister who were harshly treated by arms of the State for expressions of opinion that didn't tally with the mainstream narrative. A useful point, though **Prime Time** has been better than most current affairs programmes in giving airtime to dissenting views – they featured contributions from some who have challenged the prevailing Covid-19 narrative (including that doctor referred to).

By contrast **The Pat Kenny Show** (Newstalk) has been obsessed with far-right

PICK OF THE WEEK

EWTN NEWS IN DEPTH

EWTN Sunday March 14, 9.30am

In-depth interviews that examine and analyse important issues, news, and events from an authentically Catholic perspective.

A WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING II - THE GENDER AGENDA

EWTN Sunday March 14, 9pm

Liberal and progressive influences shaping society's attitudes on gender and human sexuality, and how this threatens the Biblical understanding of marriage and family.

Celebrate St Patrick 2020

RTÉ One Tuesday March 16, 11.25pm

A mixture of secular and sacred music with readings from St Patrick's own words, from sites of spiritual and historical importance including his first church and grave.

conspiracies, while the far-left seems to get a free pass. Last Thursday I thought they were going to redress the balance – it was still about the protests in Dublin, but the promos told us that roving reporter Henry McKean was going to speak to some of the protestors. The item was laughable. The few protestors didn't impress though one could sympathise with the man that had been out of work for months – he said he had stayed quiet for the first two lockdowns, but this one was too much for him. One man said he'd be the only one working after a while because the rest of us

would be dead from taking the vaccine! One said people were being 'literally' crucified for their opinions!

Newstalk didn't trust its listenership to come to its own conclusions – they had Dr Lucy Michael, a 'professional equality and diversity issues' and anti-racism campaigner after each interview clip, as if we needed an interpreter – such a condescending and paternalistic attitude!

✉ boregan@hotmail.com,
[@boreganmedia](https://twitter.com/boreganmedia)

Film

Aubrey Malone



Family problems in a variety of forms

The Luminaries did nothing for me. If you sewed my eyelids open and strapped me in front of the television I still wouldn't have been able to watch it. But I enjoyed all six episodes of *Behind Her Eyes*, Eve Hewson's latest outing on Netflix. As no doubt you know, she's Bono's daughter. It can be a poisoned chalice being related to somebody as famous as this but she seems to have a good head on her shoulders.

Astral projection

Most people I know have been giving out about it. Okay, so the astral projection bits are clunky but it's not as bonkers as is claimed. (A character being bonkers doesn't make a mini-series

so.) Hewson's eyes haunt.

If you can put up with the terrible dubbing in the Argentinian film *The Crimes That Bind* it's also worth watching. Nothing is more disturbing than a film about a woman who kills her baby but here the emphasis is more on what drives her to it than the gross nature of the act.

It's a complicated story. Her mother-in-law's loyalties to her son are tested to the limit. In the end justice is meted out as it should be. Until we get to that point this is a kind of "whodunit" that intrigues with its twists and turns.

An equally interesting Argentinian film is Ulrike Kofler's "What We Wanted."



Behind Her Eyes. Photo: Netflix

It deals with a couple who can't have a child. On a vacation in Sardinia they become friendly with another couple who do have children.

Tensions escalate as a result. Then a tragic incident changes everything. In the end, I think, this is a film about acceptance of one's

lot. I highly recommend it. It makes its points in a quietly impressive way.

I used to think Adam Sandler was a negligible talent when he was mired in all those juvenile comedies but *Reign Over Me* changed my view of him. In *The Meyerowitz Stories* he again gives a thoughtful performance. He's the crumpled son of an ageing sculptor (Dustin Hoffman) who's decidedly scatty.

Whimsical story

It's a Woody Allen style film directed by Noah Baumbach. What Baumbach film doesn't have Woody's fingerprints over it? Never mind. This whimsical story about an eccentric Jewish family uniting in New York for a celebration of Hoffman's work has lots of interesting performances and quirky

asides. Sibling rivalry is the link.

Hoffman is good but it's a one-note performance. He's the same in every scene: amiably cranky. Ben Stiller is better as another one of his sons, the successful one. I loved his line: "I'm fed up apologising for having made it!" Elizabeth Marvel is the daughter.

Inheritance is another Netflix offering you may enjoy. Starring Lily Collins (Phil's daughter) it has a heap of surprises in the storyline. Collins' father dies. She's left with an inheritance that isn't what it seems. The storyline rides its luck with maybe one too many convolutions and incongruities. It will leave you scratching your head.

BookReviews

Peter Costello



A neglected figure in the history of the arts in Ireland

Thomas MacGreevy and the Rise of the Irish Avant Garde

by Francis Hutton-Williams (Cork University Press, €39.00)

Peter Costello

I have long thought highly of Thomas MacGreevy, who managed to be both a Catholic poet, a Parisian friend of James Joyce, an apostle of modernism in Ireland - indeed in Europe - as well as head of our national gallery and leading authority on art in general. In a then conservative country he was eager to embrace and praise the new while preserving the past.

I discussed his poetry at length in my study of the literature (and hence the psychology) of the revolution appearance in my book *The Heart Grown Brutal*, and from time to time lines and images from his poems still come into my memory on appropriate occasions (the current search for the grave of Red Hugh O'Donnell in Valadolid, for instance).

Aware

But though I was aware in a general way of the later stages of his life, the connecting tissue needed more teasing out than I was able to give it. So I suspect that I am not the only one who will be delighted to see this book by a careful young scholar which manages to pull together into a unity not only the patriot, the poetry, the Parisian literary man, but also the art expert critic and administrator, as well as the deep background of Catholic culture. He fills in countless aspects of art and culture in the years down to the advent of the Arts Council and the Government's discovery of not only the cultural but also the economic value of the arts in Ireland. Perhaps that is an era the author might now turn to.

Francis Hutton-Williams having studied in Ireland, Cambridge and Oxford now teaches English at Dulwich College. His book is dense with new information of all kinds, but one would have liked it to have been imbued with a bit more personal warmth by the author. In some books these days one longs for something more than the scholarship. But that is probably a personal taste, for the book fills out much that one would like to have known in the past and which will prove of immense

value to others now and in the future.

Revives

In a hundred pages or so he revives a man, a poet, and an art lover of determined views, which is a great achievement. (Alas the price, at €2.50 for every page of narrative, seems a little steep. These days readers and reviewers feel that about so many academic books: they are aware, of course, that the



Thomas MacGreevy in later life

volume is aimed at the libraries and not the private shelf; ultimately the taxpayer meets the bill.)

I would think there are many who would love to read this book, but the price places it beyond the reach of many. It is a puzzle to me that Cork University Press, has no wish to reissue classics of our culture - either literary or critical - but only new books that will all too often be seen only in college libraries.

In McGreevy's case his collected poems, even in the annotated academic edition from the Catholic University Press of America, have long passed out of print. So as MacGreevy grows in critical esteem, his poetry withers away in the memory of his country.

From Homage to Jack B. Yeats:

I meditated,
Feared,
The thought experience sent,
That the gold years of
Limerick life
Might be but consecrated
Lie,
Heroic lives
So often meant
The brave stupidity of
soldiers,
The proud stupidity of
soldiers wives.

Thomas MacGreevy

St Columcille at 1,500

This year marks the 1,500th anniversary of the birth of St Columcille according to tradition

To commemorate this significant date in the history of Ireland and Scotland, a group of supporting institutions and authorities have come together to encourage a wide range of events of all kinds across Ulster and Alban, from Derry to Inverness, and to other places with which the saint's biography and legend have connection. Of course, the present sanitary conditions may well interfere with some of the great ideas already proposed, and it seems others are still coming into the organisers.

Alone

Almost alone, thanks to his first biographer Adomnán, St Columcille emerges as a real person of religious and personal complexity. He is not a pale figure of traditional piety, but a personality that comes off the pages with a powerful presence.

“One summer afternoon, long, long ago, my brother and I took the ferry across the Mull and Iona”

True that in his times we still seem to be in a world of piety, mysticism - and even a brief introduction of an 'aquatic beast' in the River Ness - but there is also an impression of nation-building, with the Irish stretching out to conquer and colonise the south west of Scotland and come in conflict with the Picts. As the Picts soon vanished from history a cloud hangs over their decline and disappearance, though some

would say they were simply extirpated by the incoming Irish who on the ruins of the old tribal lands established a new nation, not just a fragment of Dál Riada, but of the Scottish nation ('Scots' being then the word for Irish) began as an Irish imperial adventure. The Irish in the role of invaders, colonists, and imperialists is not one that we ever dwell on.

On this island the focus will be on the city of Derry. But there are many other things to look out for too in a great many other places that intended to be enjoyed free of restriction.

Display

Though most people connect Columcille with Iona and with the *Book of Kells*, in the Library of the Royal Irish Academy (in normal times) can be seen on display (free of charge, entry merely by ringing on the doorbell) *The Cathach of Columcille*, the saint's 'battle book' which miraculously survived the hazards of faith and war. Though not the magnificent work of art like the volume kept in Trinity, it is in some way a more moving historical relic.

Back in 2002, the *Cathach* was published in CD-ROM format by the academy. Each vellum page of the *Cathach* has now been digitised for the *Irish Script on Screen* project for publication online later in 2021. In August and September the RIA will be organising a lecture series exploring for the public it and other manuscript materials relating to the saint's life (details in due course from the academy's website).

It may well be that these events will stimulate both unionist and republican interest in the emergence of Ulster and Scotland as nations, and their centuries-old connections.

When the people of Co. Antrim and Co. Down speak about 'the union' they do not have in mind a union with Surrey and Sussex (which they hardly ever think about), but with Clydeside and Argyll. Can a new basis of a larger union be built on these foundation between Ulster today and Scotland, who knows?

“Some would say they were simply extirpated by the incoming Irish who on the ruins of the old tribal lands established a new nation”

The steering group 'Columcille 1,500' will be overseeing all the events from the mountains of Co. Donegal eastward. These are all being arranged as required for internet participation. The schedule, as it stands now, and as it will develop, are worth exploring.

Lockdown

If lockdown persists we may not be able to travel in person, but there will be quite unlimited scope of the imagination, for those who have already visited Iona, scope for memory.

One summer afternoon, long, long ago, my brother and I took the ferry across the Mull and Iona. The brief voyage was like floating in air over a silver strand some 20 feet blow, so clear was the water. It was quite magical, like some forgotten scene out of the *Voyage of St Brendan* (who indeed came here too): entrancing and delighting the heart and soul.



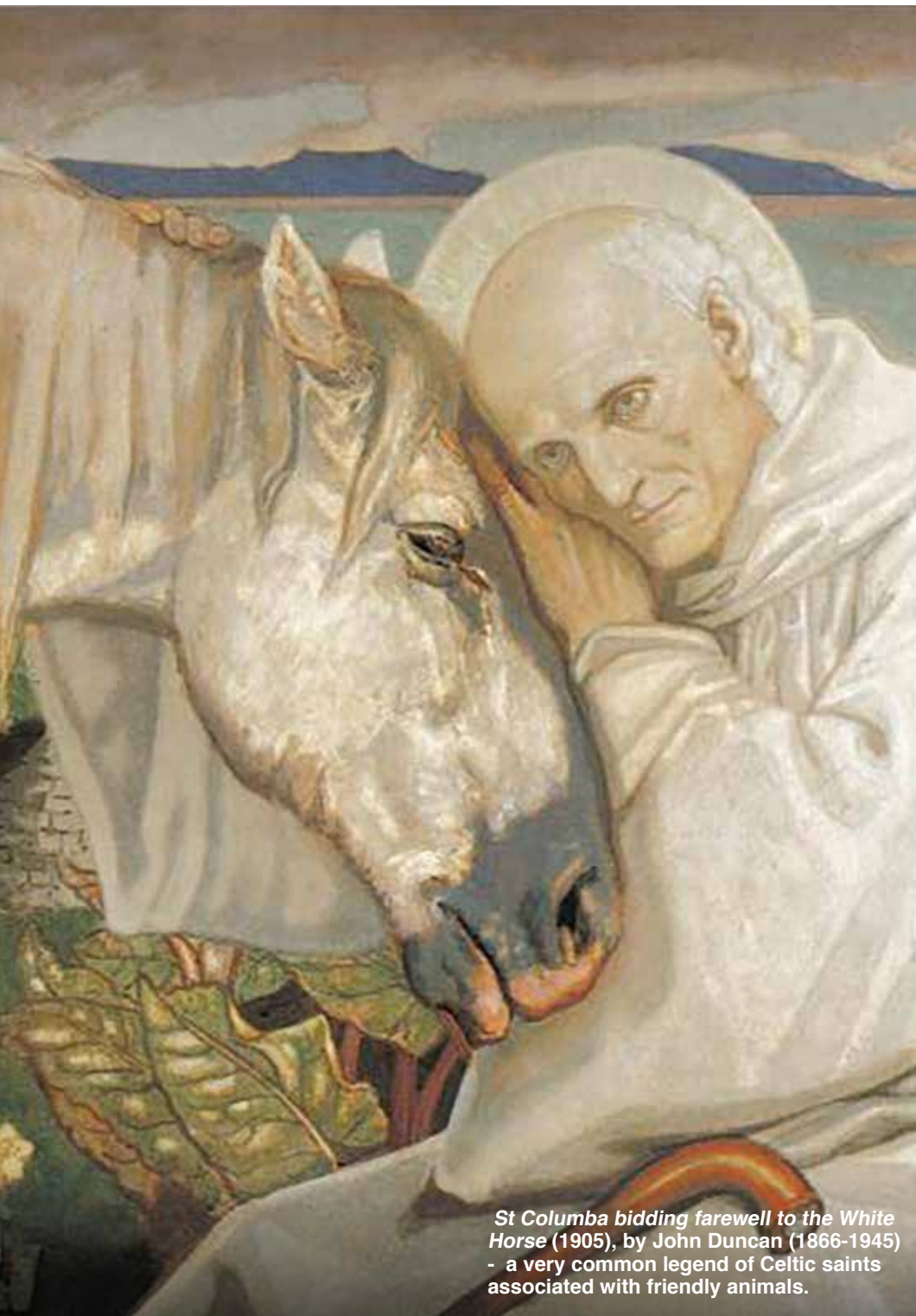
Let's hope health and weather this summer stay fine for us.

These are the contact details for Columcille 1,500: Foras na Gaeilge, 2-6 Queen Street, Belfast; +44 (0)28 9089 0970.

Foras na Gaeilge, An Chrannóg, Na Doirí Beaga, Gaith Dobhair, Co. Donegal, F92 EYT3; (+353) 074 9560113/9560114.

“Almost alone, thanks to his first biographer Adomnán, St Columcille emerges as a real person of religious and personal complexity”

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.



St Columba bidding farewell to the White Horse (1905), by John Duncan (1866-1945) - a very common legend of Celtic saints associated with friendly animals.

Free your mind and imagination to roam at home

Though people complain about the health regulations due to Covid-19, the response by many of our cultural institutions has been wonderful. The leading art galleries - for instance - all have active sites which have virtual exhibitions of all kinds. The National Library of Ireland (NLI) and many others too are exploiting their collections to display them in novel ways.

Now is the time, with all this enforced leisure to explore areas that you have longed to do.

No one is forcing you to watch the latest boxset



from Netflix. Turn to things that will not be forgotten by next year, or even next week with some of them. If you are trying to engage your children in new things in the cause

of their education, bear in mind that many things are also provided for you. Seize the moment to experience and enjoy something new, albeit at a distant remove.

Was it needless death?

The Dead of the Irish Revolution
by Eunan O'Halpin and Daithí Ó Corráin
(Yale University Press, £50.00 /\$65.00)

Felix M. Larkin

The stated objective of this book is to answer "an elementary question: how many people died as a result of Irish-related political violence between 1916 and 1921?" It does that, and much more. It puts flesh and blood on the bare statistics by identifying the people who died and giving details, where possible, of their backgrounds and their deaths. A mammoth exercise, it has taken almost 20 years to complete.

The authors, Prof. Eunan O'Halpin of Trinity College and Dr Daithí Ó Corráin of Dublin City University, are to be commended on their achievement. This book will be an indispensable source for historians of the period of the Irish revolution, as well as a reminder to us all of the cost of the revolution in terms of lives lost. Understandably, the authors do not address the question: was it worth the cost? Even W.B. Yeats had his doubts: in his poem *Easter 1916* he writes, "Was it needless death after all?"

Statistics

Let us consider the statistics. The authors count some 2,850 dead - covering civilians, police, British army personnel and rebel combatants. Of these, 504 died as a result of the 1916 Rising - of whom 276, over half, were civilians. Of those killed after 1916, 523 were police - approximately

two-thirds of them Irishmen, giving the War of Independence something of the character of a civil war; the other third were Black and Tans or auxiliaries. The dead on the rebel side, including those killed in 1916, number 575.

It will come as no surprise to anyone conversant with the history of the period that the highest number of fatalities during the War of Independence, both in absolute terms and in proportion to the population, was in Co. Cork. The counties with the next highest death rates as a proportion of population were Tipperary, Clare, Limerick and Kerry - all Munster counties.

“Understandably, the authors do not address the question: was it worth the cost? Even W.B. Yeats had his doubts

The first deaths recorded in this book are of three young Irish Volunteers who died in Killorglin, Co. Kerry, on April 21, 1916, three days before the Rising broke out. They were on a mission to contact the German ship *Aud*, which was due to land its cargo of arms off the Kerry coast. The car in which they were travelling took a wrong turning and drove off Ballykissane Pier in the dark just before ten o'clock in the evening, and the three were drowned. The next fatality, the first person to die in the Rising, was James O'Brien of the

Dublin Metropolitan Police who was killed in cold blood as he tried to close the main gates of Dublin Castle to prevent the rebels - in this instance, men of the Irish Citizen Army - gaining access at midday on Easter Monday.

Volunteer

The final entry in the book refers to the death of a 19-year-old volunteer, killed on December 31, 1921 when a rifle was discharged accidentally in the guardroom of Gilhooly Hall in Sligo. It is noted that "the bullet passed through his face, wounding another volunteer". The killing and dying did not, of course, end on December 31, 1921 - but that is another story, outside the scope of this book. It is to be hoped that other scholars will compile a similar volume bringing the gruesome statistics of political violence in Ireland up to the end of the civil war.

Included in the book is an introduction by Prof. O'Halpin, discussing the authors' methodology and drawing some general conclusions from the data they have assembled. Among the interesting observations that he makes is that "it is impossible to assign sectarian or ethnic motives as the primary reason for individual killings between 1916 and 1921 in most areas". Allegations of such motives, particularly for the killing of Protestants in Co. Cork, surface from time to time. Those who make these allegations will find no supporting evidence in this book.



Monument to executed 1916 leaders in Arbour Hill cemetery

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Dear Heart of Jesus,
In the past I have asked for many favours.
This time I ask for a special one. (mention here)
Take it, dear Heart of Jesus, and place it within your own broken Heart where your Father sees it.
Then, in his merciful eyes, it will become your favour, not mine. Amen.
Say this prayer for three days.
V.M.

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The Miracle Prayer

Dear Heart of Jesus,
In the past I have asked for many favours.
This time I ask for a special one. (mention here)
Take it, dear Heart of Jesus, and place it within your own broken Heart where your Father sees it.
Then, in his merciful eyes, it will become your favour, not mine. Amen.
Say this prayer for three days.
J.C.

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– Pope St Pius X, June 4, 1912

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www.mscmissions.ie

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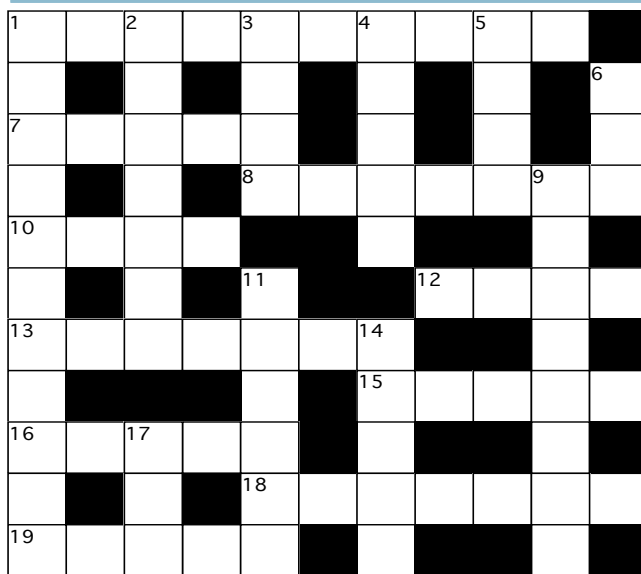
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Crossword Junior

Gordius 373



Across

- 1 In Irish legend, this tiny person knew where to find a pot of gold (10)
- 7 A jet, maybe (5)
- 8 Ireland's longest river (7)
- 10 You wear a shoe on it (4)
- 12 Travelled by plane (4)
- 13 What an acorn will grow to be (3,4)
- 15 The third month of the year (5)
- 16 People are worried about the _____ Layer (5)
- 18 Hit this ball in hurling or camogie (7)
- 19 Started a fire again (5)

winning an important race (3,2,6)

- 2 This bird displays a very colourful tail (7)
- 3 You see with these (4)
- 4 The President sits in the _____ Stand at Croke Park (5)
- 5 'Once _____ a time' (4)
- 6 Depending on its type, it's where you put your rubbish, or things you want to recycle (3)
- 9 You wear it on top of your other clothes when you go out (8)
- 11 He says Mass (6)
- 14 A message sent on the internet (1-4)
- 17 Harry Potter's pet, Hedwig, is this kind of bird (3)

Down

- 1 An athlete might run this after

SOLUTIONS, MARCH 4

GORDIUS NO. 497

Across – 1 Mob 3 Cliff-hanger 8 Church music 9 Compline 10 On cue 11 Cheap 13 Broad 15 Oppress 16 Apparel 20 Lough Ree 21 Chasm 23 Flash 24 Augustus 25 Nassau 26 Pipe cleaner 27 Due

Down – 1 Microscopic 2 Blue chip 3 Cache 4 Fiction 5 Aspic 6 Glider 12 Public house 13 Basil 14 Depth 17 Relapsed 18 Fuchsia 19 Hang up 23 Flair 24 Amp

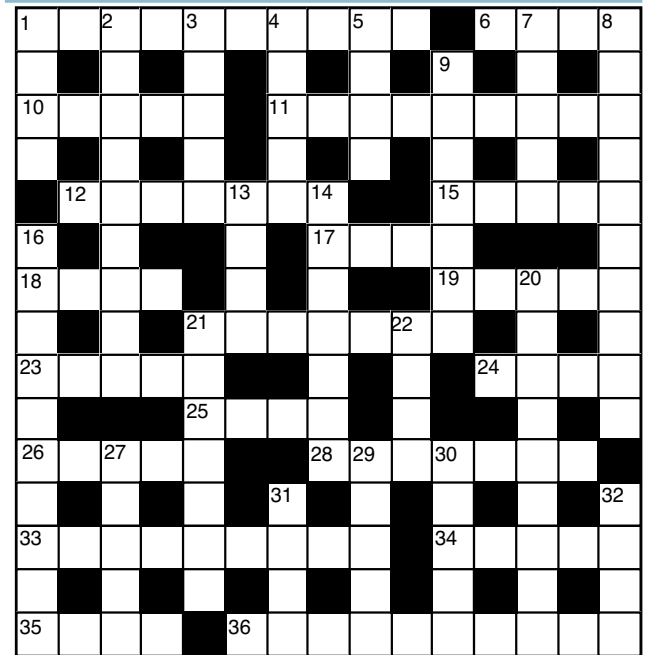
CHILDREN'S No. 372

Across – 1 Passport 7 Lifts 8 Steeple 11 Ruth 13 Younger 14 Letter 15 Riddle 17 Noise 18 Played

Down – 1 Polar bear 2 Safety 3 Pass 4 Rose 5 Supermarket 6 Hop 9 Tangle 10 Election 12 Holiday 16 Ill

Crossword

Gordius 498



Across

- 1 An Asian preparation makes Old Mumbai get out of the way! (6,4)
- 6 Panorama, vista (4)
- 10 Man-made waterway (5)
- 11 In the red (9)
- 12 Formal meal, or a drink that has been drugged? (4,3)
- 15 Versatile Mediterranean fruit (5)
- 17 Attractive young man (4)
- 18 & 19 That a cube made him world-famous is very puzzling! (4,5)
- 21 Evil criminal (7)
- 23 Start a rally in a game of tennis (5)
- 24 Introduce a baby to a solid food diet (4)
- 25 Tears roughly (4)
- 26 Supply more weapons (5)
- 28 Warm a bird for the pagan (7)
- 33 Gene tries out a huge African ecosystem (9)
- 34 Native American accommodation (5)
- 35 See 30 down
- 36 Latin hymn from the Great Mount (6,4)

Down

- 1 Male rabbit, or a dollar (4)
- 2 Moon rings spell out an

ecclesiastical form of address (9)

- 3 The God of Islam (5)
- 4 Male honey bee (5)
- 5 Use your teeth before you swallow (4)
- 7 Coming from Baghdad or Basra, perhaps (5)
- 8 From the German, a prodigy (10)
- 9 Postpone legal proceedings (7)
- 13 Cab (4)
- 14 Do away with (7)
- 16 It meets the standard, having kilos and metres aloft, it seems! (8,2)
- 20 Apiarist (9)
- 21 America's Green Mountain State (7)
- 22 Notion (4)
- 27 Spring month (5)
- 29 Survive, have being (5)
- 30 & 35a Native American structure (5,4)
- 31 Helen of Try's mother is lost in the dale (4)

Sudoku Corner

373

Easy

9		3	6		5	1		2
2			3			6	9	
6	8				2			
7		2						
3	6	4				2	7	8
						5		6
			1				6	5
	3	6			8			1
5		9	2		6	8		3

Hard

		8					2	
					5			4
2	9				8	6		3
		6	5		8			
1	7	5					6	8
					1	9	3	
	1		3	2			4	8
3				9				
		2					1	

Last week's Easy 372

3	8	1	5	4	2	6	7	9
6	4	7	9	1	3	2	5	8
5	2	9	8	6	7	4	1	3
1	3	4	7	5	6	9	8	2
8	6	5	4	2	9	1	3	7
7	9	2	1	3	8	5	4	6
2	1	6	3	8	4	7	9	5
9	5	3	6	7	1	8	2	4
4	7	8	2	9	5	3	6	1

Last week's Hard 372

4	9	8	2	7	6	1	5	3
7	6	1	5	3	4	2	9	8
2	3	5	8	1	9	6	4	7
9	5	2	1	4	7	3	8	6
3	7	4	6	2	8	5	1	9
1	8	6	3	9	5	7	2	4
8	1	9	7	6	2	4	3	5
5	2	7	4	8	3	9	6	1
6	4	3	9	5	1	8	7	2



Fr Vincent Sherlock

Notebook

Birthdays bring us back to the beginning

I'M A YEAR OLDER! This week I turned 58. When I was ordained, a priest in his fifties seemed a lifetime away from me. Now I'm nearer 60 than 50 and I wonder where the years have gone. The big difference, and I'm sad to say this, is that there are no 24-year-old priests in our diocese looking at Sherlock and thinking "he's getting up there - wonder what I'll be like when I'm as old as him?" The upside, and I am searching for upsides, is that I am still regarded as one of the younger priests in the diocese. Imagine that, at 58 to be regarded as young!



Ordination

I was ordained in 1987, part of an ordination class of 42 - 36 of us for Irish dioceses and six for religious and missionary orders. Six years earlier, 75 of us entered Maynooth College in the belief that we had been called to priesthood. Along the years some left, took time out or maybe moved to other seminaries but on that September day in 1981, all had somewhere within them the desire to serve God and the church as priests. It was an exciting place to be, beginning a new chapter of life, uncertain and nervous for sure, but a good feeling

too - that something rooted deep in you, was taking shape.

Forty years later - in 2021, I'm happy to be here - to have the chance to be a priest in a parish in Co. Mayo and to still feel an excitement around that. The years have had their say - I like to tell a story of meeting a woman one time when I was saying Mass in another parish - filling in for the local priest - she asked me who I was and when I told her, she looked at me from head to toe, shook her head and said: "Fr Sherlock, I'd never know I laid an eye on you", to which I replied "Yes, the years have not been very kind!" Another head-to-toe scan

brought the killer blow: "Well they have not!"

In many ways, the years have been kind. People, in the main, are so encouraging and appreciative of any effort that is made in the name of ministry and this has been especially to the fore in the past year of Covid uncertainty. The online world, that many of us are living in and seeking to minister from, allows for feedback and contact that maybe the verbal did not facilitate. Thumbs up! Praying hands, thank you messages and contact from people saying how much they feel connected are undoubtedly helpful. There's the occasional angry face too

- the first one threw me! I wondered what I could have done to annoy someone whilst celebrating Sunday Mass. I clicked on the angry face to see the name of a 92-year-old parishioner whose family bought him a smartphone so that he could tune into Mass. If I knew anything for certain, I knew the angry face was a mistake. He is decent to the core, faith-filled to the brim and a man who does not do anger in the real world, never mind the virtual.

Beginning

Birthdays bring us back to the beginning, a remembrance for those who made life possible for

us and a lasting gratitude. Another year is a gift and, though the past year has been difficult for us all and especially difficult for those who lost loved ones through Covid-19, we still search for moments of gift, kindness and grace that were part of the year too.

Am I wiser? In some ways, it is fair to say "yes" - wiser insofar as I realise even more how fragile we all are. Wiser in realising that my world - our world - has become smaller and that we do well not to take people, places or freedom for granted. Wiser in knowing that I do not have to be running here, there and everywhere to make sense of my life. Wiser in knowing more the need for gratitude in my life. There is, of course, scope for upping the wisdom level but, for now, I am hoping to give it a go, in the words of the old song - "one day at a time..."
Let the year - let us, be kind!

Getting older

● She sat in a doctor's waiting room and noticed the name on the brass plate. She knew a boy the same name when they were in school. She wondered might it be him. He was so good looking, one of the brightest in the class and she could easily imagine him becoming a doctor. When called in, she was shocked to see an old man, balding and grey, a bit overweight and smiled to herself as she thought: "My God, that's not him, look how old he is, thank God, I've kept myself better than that". Later, in their conversation, it emerged he had been in her school and she said she had been there during a certain timespan. He said he had been there too, at the same time. And she said, "Do you know, I think you were in my class". He looked at her and asked: "What did you teach?"



PLEASE GIVE LENTEN ALMS FOR THE WORLD'S POOR

Your gift can make a life-and-death difference for desperately poor families and for sick and needy people living on their own in the midst of the present covid crisis. The Little Way Association has received many urgent appeals from bishops, priests, sisters and missionaries asking for help for those in their care.

They tell us of how already-struggling families and communities are experiencing real additional hardships. It is hard to see how the world can easily return to normal, let alone how the homeless, sick and deprived can build a new life. The Little Way Association tries to respond favourably to all the many requests that we receive for the poor and needy but, without our supporters' generosity we would be powerless. This Lent, please can you spare a donation, large or small, for the suffering people in mission lands in desperate need of help.

Every euro that you donate goes intact to provide basic sustenance, water, medicine and housing for the children, families and individuals who need them.



In 1893, St Therese of Lisieux wrote to her sister Celine: **"Jesus wills that we give alms to Him as to one poor and needy. He puts Himself, as it were, at our mercy. He will take nothing but what we give Him from our heart. The very least trifle is precious in His sight."**

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www.littlewayassociation.com

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€..... **NEEDS OF MISSIONARIES**
€..... **MASS OFFERINGS**
(Please state no. of Masses _____)
€..... **LITTLE WAY ADMIN EXPENSES**

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Please tick if you would like an acknowledgement

Name (Rev. Mr. Mrs. Miss)

(Block letters please)

Address

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All our donors are remembered at Masses offered for their intentions and the missionaries always promise prayers for their benefactors.