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Merger of dioceses already underway – Papal Nuncio

EXCLUSIVE
Michael Kelly

The Pope's representative in Ireland has said that the process to streamline and merge Ireland's dioceses has already begun, despite opposition from some quarters.

In an exclusive interview with *The Irish Catholic*, Papal Nuncio Archbishop Jude Thaddeus Okolo confirmed that "the process of amalgamation has already started".

Following the high-profile 2010-2012 Vatican investigation of the Church in Ireland, one of the themes that emerged was a strong desire from many people to reduce the number of dioceses from 26 to as few as a dozen to streamline bureaucracy and reduce red tape.

It was felt that a leaner structure would make the Church more fit for mission in an increasingly secularised Ireland. However, it is under-

stood that some senior bishops deeply oppose the move, opting instead for the *status quo*.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* in an extensive interview to be published December 19, Archbishop Okolo said: "All I can say is that the process of amalgamation has already started".

"It will be slow and steady – to avoid hurts, shocks, and surprises. Everyone implicated in the matter will be involved. The people will effect the amalgamation, work out the details of the cohesion, and inform the Holy See," he said.

Process

Dr Okolo insisted that Rome wants the process to proceed from local consultations rather than imposing a top-down solution. He also said that the Holy See is conscious of the local sensitivities.

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Collared for *Dancing with the Stars*



Best known for his wonderful voice, Fr Ray Kelly will show another side of his talent when he takes part in RTÉ's *Dancing with the Stars*. See story Page 3.

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Keeping God present in the bits and pieces of life

This weekend marks the Third Sunday of Advent – Gaudete Sunday. While Advent no longer has the penitential feel it once did, this weekend is a break from the sense of expectation and an invitation to rejoice in God's presence amongst us.

The Solemnity of the Nativity of Our Lord is still two weeks away, and already many people are fatigued by Christmas in the marketplace. Some department stores have had their Christmas sections open since August, and one can only but spare a thought for staff who've been hearing about Rudolph's red nose for months now.

Retail experts tell us that shops make more in the busy Christmas period that they do in the rest of the year. This is not to be scoffed at. Many jobs in the service sector that are full-time could well be part-time or merely seasonal were it not for the splurge in spending at Christmas.

Excess

Nor should people of Faith blithely fall back on finger-wagging about Christmas becoming too commercial. While there is excess – and the Church is right to call attention to this particularly when some people have so little – there is also a rightful place for feasting and present-giving.

The Incarnation – God becoming man – teaches us many things: and one of them is that there is something fundamentally good about matter. And so, exchanging gifts and extending kindnesses is of the essence of our Christian Faith.

But, of course, it's not all there is. And this is what is forgotten in the commercial celebration of Christmas where ostentatiousness rather than humility become the yardstick by which we measure gifts.

Christmas stripped of meaning is a dreary run on a treadmill. Jesus becomes a bystander in his own birth, and God's salvific entry into time and history a quaint story from long ago.

As the late Fr Michael Paul Gallagher once put it: God is missing



Editor's Comment Michael Kelly



but not missed. It is becoming harder and harder to find a place for talk of God in contemporary culture – and even the cultural references are changing at a rapid pace.

“People of Faith have to work hard to keep traditions and religious references part of everyday life”

Philosopher Charles Taylor traces the shift as one which takes us from a society in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God, to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others.

The removal of religious and traditional cultural references in the public sphere is part of this shift. Like when the saints names were removed from hospital wards in Wexford or when some public institutions

decided to ban the Christmas crib for fear of offending secular-minded people.

Sometimes, it is as crass as rebranding rather than a dispensing with tradition *per se*. Take Dublin's Grafton Street, for example. For as long as anyone can remember, pedestrians on the street were greeted at this time of year with an illuminated sign which read 'Nollaig Shona Duit'. That has now been replaced by the drab 'Welcome to Grafton Quarter' leaving people in no doubt that what is going on has nothing to do with Christmas, and everything to do with filthy lucre.

People of Faith have to work hard to keep traditions and religious references part of everyday life. Some will say phrases like 'God Bless' and 'Merry Christmas' are just trite platitudes. But, they are much more than this – they are gentle reminders of God's presence and action in our world, even in the Grafton Quarter.

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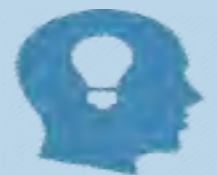


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'If I dance as well as I can sing, I'll be doing well!' – Fr Ray Kelly

Chai Brady

Well-known singing and now dancing priest Fr Ray Kelly has said he hopes his surprise appearance on RTÉ's *Dancing with the Stars* will delight his parishioners and show people that priests are "ordinary guys".

The parish priest based in Oldcastle in Meath, originally from Tyrrelspass, will line up alongside reality TV celebrity Yewande Biala – who appeared on *Love Island* – and Olympic gold medallist Michael Carruth.

Fr Kelly first gained fame when a video of him singing Leonard Cohen's 'Hallelujah' in 2014 went viral, receiving over 70 million views on YouTube, he subsequently performed on *Britain's Got Talent* and at the World Meeting of Families in August last year.

Speaking to this paper he said: "As I was saying to my dancing teacher the other day, if I can put that same emotion and feeling now that I can put into a song, if I can do that with my legs I'd be doing very well."

Bringing light

The priest said he enjoyed watching RTÉ's dance show as well as BBC's *Strictly Come Dancing*, saying they bring light into people's lives, which is something he wants to do as well.

"I know my whole parish here

are all excited about it and going to be clued in, we're in the bleak months of winter and if they know their local parish priest is going to be on TV on a Sunday, dancing and maybe making a fool of himself... but whatever it's okay to do that too," he said.

Competition

Asked whether he hoped his participation in the competition might help to encourage priestly vocations, he said: "I think it would take an awful lot more than dancing to encourage priestly vocations.

"But I think some priests play their golf, their tennis, I have my music, singing, and dancing now, I think it's an essential element for any priest to have some outlet like that anyway. It would be great if people could see that just because I'm a dancer it doesn't mean I can't be a priest. We're crying out for vocations all the time.

"I'd like to think that young people would see [the priesthood] as more approachable. Certainly I would like to think that people would see us as ordinary people. That we're out there to help people, not to criticise, not to knock down, to journey with people and help them on the journey of life."

He has a hectic schedule preparing for Mass, weddings and dance lessons, but he is in no way deterred from following his vocation as well as his hobbies.



Fr Ray Kelly on set preparing for *Dancing with the Stars*.

Music business is a cold house for Faith says Johnny Duhan

Claire Fitzpatrick

Irish folk musician Johnny Duhan [pictured] has revealed that he feels unable to speak openly about his Faith with fellow musicians in the industry.

The spiritual world and the music world "don't go that well together", he said in an interview with the Christmas edition of *Intercom*.

"Most of the people in the music business in today's world aren't sympathetic towards faith," he said.

Mr Duhan described feeling alienated from music culture because of his beliefs, and that the alienation he has experienced has led to his disillusionment with the business.



Importance

He also reflected on times he was told his songs would not be successful because of the Faith-based values they presented, like with his song 'The Voyage', which he was told would not be successful because the importance of family "was a dying or dead institution". The song went on to be a hit for Christy Moore and has rarely been out of the iTunes folk top ten.

However, Mr Duhan also believes his Faith may have held him back.

"Someone in the business once asked me if I realised that the reason I hadn't become successful in the Irish music scene is that I'm openly Catholic. Prior to that, I sort of knew there was some prejudice, but he was adamant that that was the bottom line," he said.

However, this has not deterred him. "I've benefitted so much from my Faith," he said.

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Low living standards, little access to Faith: calls for Direct Provision Centre in Limerick to close

Róise McGagh

Doras has called for Mount Trenchard Direct Provision Centre in Limerick to be closed immediately due to the unsuitable living conditions.

These conditions make it very difficult to practice religion according to John Lannon director of Doras.

"It would be extremely difficult to attend mass or engage in any kind of religious services because ironically while it is an old convent there isn't access to mass or any prayer services there," he said.

"Particularly then if we take people who would be practicing on Sundays," as transport from the centre only runs Monday to Thursday.

Research

The non-profit human rights organisation made recommendations in July to the Department of Justice's Reception and Integration Agency, now the International Protection Accommodation Service. Since research for the recommendations took place in Spring 2019 there has been no improvement.

"Many of the issues raised in this research were raised

in the 2015 McMahon Report" said John. "Despite this, the living conditions and standards in Mount Trenchard remain largely the same."

The issues identified were the safety and well-being of residents, the location of the centre, physical living conditions, and operational and staff issues.

Fr Seamus Enright is on the board of Doras and said the centre is very isolated. According to John this makes it very difficult for residents to interact with people in the community, even the people that come in and give direct support.

"The problem is people are there for years and years, they become institutionalised and they're trying to cope with mental health problems, their wellbeing is very affected. There's isolation, there's social exclusion and there is lack of access to services like social and legal."

The effect of these issues is prominent in the testimonies from residents released with the research from Doras. "In this place anybody normal come, after one year he is not normal.

One resident said: "He's braindead, he's not normal."

Papal nuncio accepts award for Pope in Carlow



The 2019 St Columbanus Medal was awarded to Pope Francis on December 6 in Carlow College. The award was in recognition of his love for and marginalised, in particular for highlighting the plight of migrants through his writings, vocal support and practical assistance and was accepted on his behalf by Archbishop Jude Thaddeus Okolo, Papal Nuncio. Carlow College also presented a hamper of local goods to the Nuncio.

Galway Mass to reach Europe

Róise McGagh

The Galway Cathedral Christmas Eve Mass will be broadcast live at 11pm. It will be available to view on RTÉ and other channels across Europe on December 24.

"Our Christmas Eve Mass is always a very busy session at Galway Cathedral," said Fr Martin Whelan, curate at Galway Cathedral. "It is incredible to think that millions will be looking in on Galway this Christmas Eve."

The Mass will be broadcast through Eurovision which will make it available in all 44 European countries.

It will begin an hour later than usual. The Cathedral Choir will sing carols on the half hour lead up to the Mass which is open to the public. To facilitate the broadcast the congregation will be seated by 10.45pm. Bishop Brendan Kelly will be the chief celebrant.

The broadcast is being run by Kairos Production Company. Producer Finbarr Tracey says "around two million tune in for this each Christmas Eve".

The Live Crib at Galway Cathedral will take place from 11.30am until 4pm on Tuesday December 17.

Religious children more respectful of other faiths – survey

Chai Brady

Children who believe in God are much more likely to be tolerant of other religions than those who are atheist, while the vast majority of teens believe religious education is "beneficial" according to a major Irish study.

A book launched this week, *Religion and Education, The Voices Of Young People in Ireland*, found that after surveying 1,000 teenagers 63% of atheists agreed that 'we must respect all religions', while 81% of theists agreed with the statement.

One of the editors of the book, Prof Gareth Byrne, Director of the Mater Dei Centre for Catholic Education at DCU Institute of Educa-

tion said: "The young people who say they believe in God they tend to be much more positive towards religion as you would expect, but also towards other people's religion and towards the need to be respectful of diversity in society."

"It's interesting that the children who have that sense of God are also generous towards their understanding of others and the need for everyone to listen to each other. So there's something important there about peer to peer, being able to help young people to be reflective and to be respectful."

He added that RE was seen as "really important" for 85% of 3,000 13-15 year old pupils that were surveyed.

Merger of dioceses

» Continued from Page 1

"I want to be discreet about it, in order not to go ahead. Because if I say it has begun, and the people will say, 'but we don't know about it.' Yes, it has begun."

"The amalgamation begins from the grassroots. The communities, the meetings. In all the dioceses today, there are consultations going on...some don't want to hear it," he said.

In the interview in next week's newspaper, Dr Okolo also speaks about speculation on the next Archbishop of Dublin, his disappointment about some aspects of the reporting of the visit of Pope Francis and his wider impressions of the Church and wider Irish society.

The archbishop also speaks about the huge influence of Irish missionaries on his native Nigeria.



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Leave law making with those elected

Lord Jonathan Sumption is a well-respected British judge and historian, who has served as a Justice of the Supreme Court. But what he now says about the increasing power of lawyers in the interpretation of the law is deeply significant.

I have been much impressed, this year, by his short book *Trials of the State: Law and the Decline of Politics* in which he warns that the law, including the European Convention of Human Rights, is appropriating law-making which rightly belongs in national parliaments.

Democracy

He particularly criticises the way in which judges and lawyers have effectively bent abortion law in Northern Ireland, with scant reference to parliamentary democracy. In a democracy, he writes, the pub 'own' the law: it should go through the due process of parliament, not handed down to the people by lawyers and judges.

He has no desire to



Mary Kenny



● Modern European royals are often inter-related – the Danes to the Greeks, the Belgians to the Swedes – but most recent pattern is to marry 'out' of royal clans. Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands, Harald of Norway, Victoria of Sweden and Felipe of Spain have all married 'commoners' – middle-class spouses with no royal or aristocratic background. As has young William [pictured] of Great Britain.

This is surely a welcome development for health, and probably for society generally.

defend the prohibition on abortion in Northern Ireland, he writes, but he was disturbed that the judges of the current British

Supreme Court thought that no weight should be given to the "democratic judgement of the Northern Ireland Assembly" (which

had decided against liberalising the law). The President of the Court, Lady Hale, declared that courts were in a better position to "weigh the evidence, the legal materials and the arguments in a dispassionate manner, without the external pressures to which legislators may be subject".

In other words, lawyers should make decisions without any input from the electorate or the people!

Opinion

As Jonathan Sumption stresses, abortion is not a technical, legal question: "It is a profound moral issue between different bodies of opinion in Northern Ireland." The lawyers have no business changing the law in this way, or even having an opinion on what the law

"should" be.

Lord Sumption, who is carefully neutral about his own views, explains how the European Court of Human Rights (which is separate from the EU) has consistently expanded its remit in a manoeuvre of "mission creep". It was originally set up to rule against torture and genocides.

But Article 8 of its Convention has expanded to every area of personal 'autonomy', and many other highly disputable cases where human rights are asserted. The 47 signatory countries to the ECHR do not always realise that the judges in Strasbourg are gradually making more law for citizens than their own parliaments.

This is a truly important issue.

● If anyone should wonder why marriage between cousins is usually prohibited by canon law they need only look at the case of the Spanish Habsburgs' family tree.

An analysis of portraits of 15 members of the Spanish Habsburgs (from the early 1500s to the early 1700s) has shown a strong correlation between ill-health, facial deformities and a habit of inbreeding.

The famous lantern-sized 'Hapsburg jaw' is evident in the portraits of Philip IV of Spain, Ferdinand II of the Holy Roman Empire and the afflicted Charles II, the end of his line.

Charles's parents were consanguineous uncle and niece.

He was his parents' son, cousin and great-nephew. By the age of 35, he was senile, lame, epileptic and infertile.

This inbreeding was always known about, but the genetic research has now been scientifically examined, published by Francisco Ceballos in the *Annals of Human Biology*.

Alone and penniless...the sad demise of Kathleen's son

● During the autumn, I wrote briefly about Kathleen Dolan, who was probably the most famous radio voice in Ireland during the 1940s and 50s. She died in 2003.

Now her son, Randal MacDonnell has died, too, in Morocco, aged 69. The obituaries describe his life as being extremely racketsy – he

assumed fantasy identities and was accused of stealing Georgian silver from Luggala, the Guinness mansion in Wicklow.

I met Randall a couple of times and instinctively felt he was spinning me wild yarns. Yet he did write a fine architectural book called *The Lost Houses of Ireland*.

Sadly, he died alone and penniless and his remains, in a Tangiers mortuary, were left unclaimed.

The MacDonnells of the Glens of Antrim became Catholic in the 1930s. However, the Anglican church in Morocco is raising funds to bury Randal.

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Archbishop calls for the return of 50:50 recruitment in PSNI

Chai Brady

A return to 50:50 recruitment of Catholics and Protestants into the Police Service of the Northern Ireland (PSNI) is needed to halt expected decline in Catholic officers, according to the Archbishop of Armagh Eamon Martin.

Following a meeting of Church leaders with Chief Constable Simon Byrne of the PSNI, the archbishop said that while he is pleased 32% of the PSNI are Catholic, he has "concerns" about the future balance of community representation. He is calling for Catholics to consider the "noble vocation" and for communities to encourage and support them.

The Patten Report paved the way for 50:50 recruitment to address the under-representation of Catholics, it was introduced in 2001 when the police were 92% Protestant.

Archbishop Martin told *The Irish Catholic*: "Because Patten's target of moving towards a police service that is representative of the society that it polices, I feel that in recent years it has reached a bit of a plateau and I would be concerned about that."

After a review in 2011 the policy was ended, with the number of Catholics at 30%.

Speaking about the current figures, Archbishop Martin said: "It's almost 20% short of the percentage of young Catholics who are out there, if you think of that age group of young people in Northern Ireland, almost 50% of those young people are Catholic and I think it should be a matter of concern – not just for Catholic communities, but for the whole community, because if we do not have a police service which is representative of the society that it polices you begin to run into accusations that the police service is not friendly to Catholic people, or you allow a vacuum to be created which allows others to exploit intimidation and fear in communities."

United effort

"That's why I think this is a matter of concern for all of us and it's something that I think with a united effort across the community, we could make a big effort to try and increase that percentage well up."

Dr Martin said Constable Byrne told Church leaders

the number of Catholics in the PSNI was in decline and "it's going to decline further".

"I think that if Patten's criteria were applied today I think there would be grounds for let's say a further five years with a united support across the community, for the 50:50 to return to give it that push up beyond the threshold figure so that communities then would say this is a representative police service and we should encourage our young people to join up."

With PSNI being about 700 officers short of a full complement, there will be a recruitment drive coming in January.

"I think now to have that visibility of policing as a legitimate noble career at our careers fairs and days in schools and also of course in our parish bulletins and to let people know that this is something that has the support of your church and hopefully then also other community leaders and political leaders will weigh in behind as well. I think that it's a united effort of all of us to try to really lift the recruitment of young Catholics into the police," Dr Martin added.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Former St Pat's head to lead DCU

Prof. Dáire Keogh has been confirmed as the new President of Dublin City University.

Prof. Keogh – a noted historian – was President of St Patrick's College Drumcondra from 2012 until 2016 when the college was incorporated into DCU. He has published extensively on the history of popular politics, religion and education in Ireland.

He is currently Deputy President of Dublin City University and a Professor of History.

Prof. Keogh said he was delighted to take up the position from next July. "I am highly honoured to be invited to lead DCU to its next stage. DCU is an incredible place, it was the first university to introduce an access to education programme and it is a beacon of excellence setting a standard for universities in terms of innovation, engagement, and opportunity".

Prominent pro-life barrister dies

The death has occurred of the well-known pro-life barrister and columnist Paul Anthony McDermott after a short illness. He was 47 and leaves behind a wife and two small children aged four and two.

Paying tribute to him this week, Fr Bill Dailey CSC of Newman's University Church in Dublin described Mr McDermott as "a devoted parishioner, member of the parish pastoral council, a lector and a faithful guardian of his two small boys in their double stroller."

"We will miss his gentle presence and wise counsel, and our deepest sympathies and most fervent prayers are with his family in light of his death," Fr Dailey said.

Dr Valerie Morris, who worked with him on pro-life causes, praised Mr McDermott for "passionately defended the unborn during the abortion referendum."

"He was well known within the pro-life community, a fellow parishioner at Newman University Church, devoted husband, loving father and esteemed barrister," she said.

British govt the political

Nuala O'Loan

The View



There has not been much publicity for the current government consultation on abortion in Northern Ireland. It closes at 11.45pm on December 16. Responses to the consultation should inform the new proposals for the provision of abortion in the North. Readers will know that law was passed in Westminster last July requiring the introduction of abortion. This consultation now follows that legislation.

Those who believe, like me, that abortion is wrong should respond to this consultation. It is the last and only opportunity to challenge what is proposed.

The consultation document is available to those who use the internet – you can get it on line on the Northern Ireland Office website. If you don't use the internet, the only way to get it is to write to the NIO asking for a copy of the document. You can't phone and request one.

For those who are unable to access a computer, and who suffer from a disability which restricts mobility or eyesight for example, there appears to be no special provision. There is no provision for those who have literacy difficulties. There has been no publicity after the initial announcement. One could be forgiven for thinking that Government is not over eager to receive responses.

Importance

Yet this is a most important consultation.

Despite its importance, however, it is framed in vague language. There is no specificity. It has 15 questions. It does not have the normal provision for answering 'yes', 'no' or

'either' or some alternative response. The person completing the consultation can fill in a box in which they can write anything, however the default position is that one answers 'yes' or 'no' to this series of questions.

For example, the first question is whether abortion should be available on demand up to either 12 weeks or 14 weeks.

This should not be the question. It presumes that one accepts that abortion should be available on demand up to either 12 or 14 weeks.

One is then invited to answer 'yes' or 'no' to that question. The law under which the consultation is being conducted does not require abortion on demand at any stage.

“It does not allow for the fact that there are right-thinking members of society who do not believe that killing unborn children is justified, other than in situations in which the mother cannot survive”

There is no opportunity to answer what should be the first question – “do you want abortion on demand?” – simply by saying 'no'.

Threat

The government asks whether abortion should be available to 21 weeks and six days or 23 weeks and six days if “the continuance of the pregnancy would cause risk of injury to the physical or mental health of the

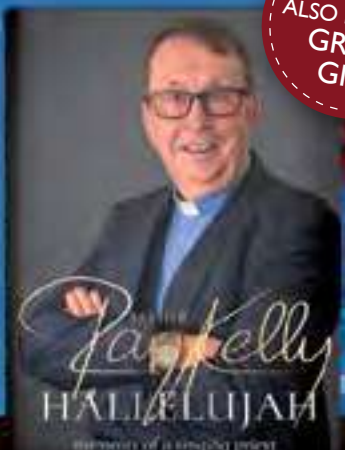
“Those who believe, like me, that abortion is wrong should respond to this consultation. It is the last and only opportunity to challenge what is proposed”

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must act to leave abortion to representatives of the North



A pro life rally in Belfast earlier this year.

pregnant woman or girl, or any existing children or her family, greater than the risk of terminating pregnancy". It does not define or qualify that risk, even in the case of a situation in which it suggests that pregnancy might be a threat to the health of family members.

Again, the assumption is that people will choose either effectively 22 weeks or 24 weeks and can understand the implications of the proposed ground for abortion, which is so vague as to be almost incomprehensible.

It does not allow for the fact that there are right-thinking members of society who do not believe that killing unborn children is justified, other than in situations in which the mother cannot survive and treatment to keep her alive necessarily means that the unborn baby will die – these very tragic circumstances in which either the mother dies or she receives treatment and the unintended consequence is that the baby dies are exceptionally rare.

Many obstetricians go through their careers without encountering such an extreme situation.

Perhaps most shocking of all is question four which asks whether abortion should be available up to birth "where there is a substantial risk that the foetus would die (in the womb) or shortly after birth or where the foetus would suffer a severe impairment, including a mental or physical

disability which is likely to significantly limit the length or quality of the child's life."

Again, there is no definition about what constitutes a severe impairment. We know that in England and Wales 90% of babies with Down syndrome are aborted to birth.

There are many conditions which might significantly limit the length or quality of a child's life, but that does not mean the child should be killed in the womb.

* * * * *

It has never been said in human rights law that a child has no right to life. Children in the womb who suffer from any disability should be treated, not killed. Their parents should be helped to look after them, for every life is precious, and we can see what happens when society facilitates the abortion of unborn babies – in England and Wales alone over 200,000 babies were aborted last year.

“In the space of just over a weekend in July more than 20,000 people in the North signed a letter asking the Prime Minister not to facilitate this legislation”

The government ask also whether any law to protect

conscientious objectors – those medical and other practitioners who have an objection in conscience to being involved in abortion – should reflect the practice in the rest of the UK.

The law as it now stands in Britain does not protect medical practitioners from being involved in abortion. It effectively provides only that they do not have to be involved, in theatre, in any surgery to abort a baby.

In all other aspects of the abortion they have no protection. So, a nurse manager would be required to manage, organise and provide general care for a woman who has an abortion.

Of course, all medical practitioners must respond when a woman is in a dangerous situation – perhaps bleeding out after an abortion – and that is right. But it cannot be right to make a practitioner participate in any manner in something which is designed to kill a baby.

The basic principle of all medical care has been “first do no harm”. For those who recognise and acknowledge the harm inherent in the deliberate killing of a child in the womb there should be a right not to be involved at any stage.

These are just a few of the questions. In the space of just over a weekend in July more than 20,000 people in the North signed a letter asking the Prime Minister not to facilitate this legislation. Over 20,000 marched up to Stormont

to protest against the legislation, saying ‘Not in my name’. Tens of thousands of

others attended protests in Custom House Square and other places.

Unborn babies now need everyone who cares about them, and wants to protect them from abortion, to respond to this consultation pointing out how flawed and wrong it is.

It won't take long to answer the 15 questions and to prevent these shocking and terrible proposals becoming law. It has to be done by 11.45pm on December 16.

There are clear signs that the Northern Ireland Assembly is about to go back to business after three years – if it doesn't do so by January 13 it faces another election. I think they will be back.

The British government should move at the very least to withdraw this flawed consultation document, repeal the new law on abortion and leave the matter to be dealt with by the Northern Ireland Assembly.

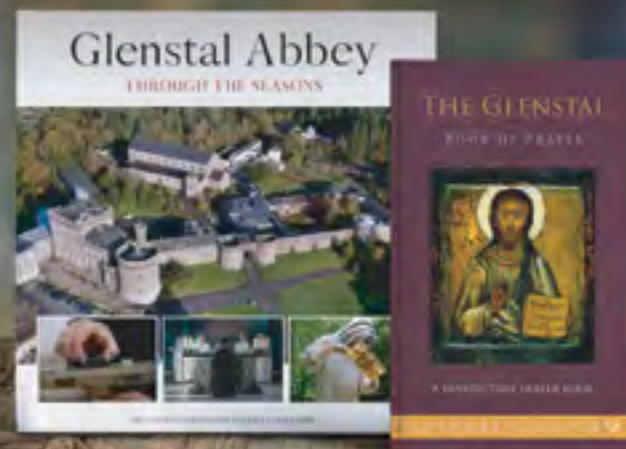
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IC readers split on plan to take sacraments from schools

Staff reporter

Readers of *The Irish Catholic* are almost evenly split on whether taking sacramental preparation out of schools is a good thing.

It comes as the Archdiocese of Dublin confirmed a story in this newspaper last week which first revealed the plan put forward by the Council of Priests. It would see parishes take on a central role in preparing children for sacraments like First Confession, First Holy Communion and Confirmation.

The role of the school would become secondary and parents would be encouraged to be key players in the process rather than passive participants.

In a letter to priests, Archbishop Diarmuid Martin said “the proposal is not something that will be accomplished overnight; it cannot however be put forever on the long finger.

“It will take some time to put in place an effective development of parish capacity to implement this initiative. We need however to begin immediately with the preparation and training of voluntary lay catechists and the development of resource materials,” he said.

Readers of *The Irish Catholic* on Facebook were split down the middle on whether they supported the plan or not. In the online poll, 49% of respondents said they felt that it was a good idea, while 51% said they disagreed and thought it was a bad idea.

‘Search conscience’ priest asks soldiers involved in Ballymurphy Massacre

Chai Brady

A parish priest has reiterated calls this week for soldiers who killed victims in the Ballymurphy Massacre to admit what happened, and to “search their conscience”.

The final oral submissions of the inquest into the deaths of 10 civilians over three days of violence in Ballymurphy, August 1971, took place in a Belfast court on Monday. The events took place immediately after the introduction of internment.

Fr Patrick McCafferty PP of Ballymurphy described the day as “emotional” for the families involved.

“Please God early in the New Year the families will have some closure in all this, as far as there is closure, they will get the justice that they have sought and that they have been denied for nearly 50 years,” he said.

“It was a very emotional day for the families in the court. The calling upon British soldiers to search their conscience is very apt and very appropriate.

“Again, more than likely it will fall on deaf ears, because some have clearly made a decision they’re not going to co-operate.”

Unarmed

The court has heard from the victims’ families who say their loved ones were killed unlawfully while they were unarmed,

while the barristers for the Ministry of Defence has said the soldiers opened fire only when there was a perceived threat.

On Sunday morning, Fr McCafferty’s parish held a Month’s Mind for Fr Des Wilson who was involved in the parish and with the families for five decades, followed by a procession for those killed in Ballymurphy.

The priest said: “On Sunday evening the annual procession for

the victims of the Ballymurphy, Springhill/Westrock massacres from the church we processed up to the memorial garden.

“We’re certainly hopeful now that the inquest is winding down, it’s almost finished. It may be January before a few more loose ends are tied up.

“Please God the verdict will give the families what they’ve always known, that their loved ones were innocent and were unlawfully

killed,” he added.

Many soldiers have testified since the inquest began in November 2018, but only one has admitted his bullet hit someone.

No new evidence was heard on Monday.

Barristers from the MoD urged members of the IRA to step forward and account for what they were doing in the area during the time of the massacre.

140 reasons to celebrate Hospice’s work



Broadcaster Ryan Tubridy with, from left, Chairman Brian Murray, CEO Audrey Houlihan and Eleanor Flew, Director of Fundraising and Communications celebrating Our Lady’s Hospice and Care Services in Harold’s Cross’ 140th anniversary of providing care in the community. The Hospice was established by the Religious Sisters of Charity in 1879 in response to an overwhelming need for dignity and care for the dying poor. Photo: Mark Stedman

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Hierarchy appoints new secretary

Staff reporter

The hierarchy has announced the appointment of Clogher priest Msgr Joe McGuinness as the body’s new executive secretary.

Msgr McGuinness will succeed Dr Gearóid Dullea who has served in the post for a number of years.

The executive secretary is responsible for organising how the work of the conference is prepared, arranged and carried out. He also ensures that the secretariat is at the service of the conference and its members, and works under the direction of Primate of All-Ireland Archbishop Eamon Martin.

Msgr Dullea – who has held the position since 2010 – will return to minister in his home Diocese of Cork and Ross.

Remember the hungry at Christmas

Bishop Denis Nulty has called on people across the Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin to ‘Share with the hungry’ as they make their preparations for Christmas and do their Christmas shopping.

The bishop was speaking ahead of the annual Reach Out that takes place in parishes across the diocese this coming weekend, December 14-15. For the past 15 years, on the third Sunday of Advent parishioners have

invited to take home from church, for themselves and for someone else, a Christmas card with a greeting from the Bishop and a gift from the parish. The gift this year is a trolley coin keyring with the message ‘Share with the hungry’.

Bishop Nulty said: “I want to encourage people’s generosity and ask people, as they do their shopping, to remember and support the St Vincent de Paul.”

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Back to the era of chaperones

There is a scene in iconic film *The Quiet Man* when John Wayne and Maureen O'Hara go on a date. This being 1950s Ireland (in the imagination of the movie's director, John Ford), they must take a chaperone along with them in the shape of Barry Fitzgerald to ensure all the proprieties are observed and nothing gets out of hand.

In these more liberated, less repressive times, chaperones are no longer needed. Or so we think. Couples go off on dates on their own without anyone having to accompany them, and at dances and nightclubs the only supervisory adults are the bouncers in case there is trouble. What could go wrong, after all? Plenty, as it turns out, which is why some companies have turned to ensuring that at their Christmas parties individuals known as 'sober chaperones' are present. Yes, you read the correctly.

One company that recently announced it would have 'sober chaperones' at its

The feminist movement is full of contradictions in terms of its attitude towards sex, writes **David Quinn**



Christmas parties this year is the major accountancy firm, BDO.

The *Financial Times* reports that two assigned staff at parties will be told not to drink alcohol so they can "be responsible in an emergency situation" and "ensure everybody can get home safely".

The firm's chief operating officer Andy Butterworth told their 3,700 staff: "I know these precautionary measures might sound slightly excessive to some, but I think they are sensible for the wellbeing of our people."

Another accounting giant, KPMG has announced a similar policy.

They are attempting to ensure that when staff become drunk, they do not drink and drive, they do not do something stupid at the party that other staff record on their phones and then put on social media, and above all that no staff are sexually harassed.

Problem

The #MeToo movement has made many firms acutely aware of the problem of sexual harassment. Some companies have gone so far as to ban even consensual sexual relationships between junior and senior staff, that is, the boss-secretary affairs of old. For example, fast food giant, McDonald's, recently sacked its chief executive because he had a relationship with an employee.

He later said that even though the relationship was consensual, he had "violated company policy" and shown "poor judgement".

Why would a company ban even consensual relationships? One reason is the power imbalance between senior and junior staff. When a man is in a position to affect a junior female colleagues' career for better or worse, she may feel coerced at some level into entering a sexual relationship with him. They might be no impropriety as such, but even the appearance of impropriety must be avoided.

Last year Intel's CEO Brian Krzanich stepped down for having a consensual relationship with an Intel employee, which was also against company rules.

What is clearly happening is that companies, fearful

“In addition, a number of actresses have come forward to say they felt very uncomfortable being asked to do nude scenes for movies or television series”



of huge lawsuits and reputational damage, are cracking down on the sexual behaviour of their employees. Their actions range from 'sober chaperones' to the outright ban on relationships between junior and senior staff just mentioned.

We are entering an era in which some certain chickens are coming home to roost, which is to say, when the sex revolution rebelled against the sexual restraints of the past, it naively believed there would be no negative consequences, and that men and women could be thrown together at drunken office parties and all would be well. Any 'hanky-panky' might be embarrassing for all concerned but it wouldn't amount to much more than that.

Allegations

The curious thing is that the new sexual restraints are not being introduced in the name of the older, traditional form of morality, but in the name of feminism. The #MeToo movement is feminist. Its name comes from all the women who have gone public with their experiences of sexual assault and harassment and said, 'me too'.

The movement erupted after the sexual abuse allegations against

Hollywood producer, Harvey Weinstein become public.

Allegations of a similar nature have been made against the financier Jeffrey Epstein who took his own life in prison recently. Britain's Prince Andrew has now been damaged by his public association with Mr Epstein.

“One way or the other, what we are seeing is a recognition that sexual behaviour needs to be regulated”

In addition, a number of actresses have come forward to say they felt very uncomfortable being asked to do nude scenes for movies or television series.

One is Emilia Clarke of *Game of Thrones* who first began acting in the hit series when she was only 23 and was asked to appear naked in certain scenes. She says she was very young and inexperienced and didn't want to say 'no' and maybe jeopardise her career.

She is "a lot more savvy" now. She said recently: "I've had fights on set before where I'm like, 'No, the sheet stays up!'"

So what we're seeing, again in the name of feminism rather than traditional morality *per se*, is the return of a certain modesty.

The feminist movement is, of course, full of contradictions, paradoxes and internal arguments in terms of its attitude towards sex. For example, it tells women that they are free to have sex with who they want, when they want, but at the same time is increasingly strongly in favour of policing sexual behaviour in the ways described above, including by introducing measures such as 'sober chaperones' that seem to belong to an earlier time.

One key difference between the new feminist sexual morality and the older traditional sexual morality is that the former puts a lot of responsibility on men to act properly and threatens them with legal and social sanctions if they do not, while the latter was more likely to punish women.

One way or the other, what we are seeing is a recognition that sexual behaviour needs to be regulated in ways that the first generation of sexual revolutionaries naively believed was not necessary. Human nature has a way of teaching us old lessons all over again.



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Sr Consilio hailed for belief in 'inherent dignity' of each person



Sr Consilio



Staff reporter

Sr Consilio Fitzgerald, founder of Cuan Mhuire, which provides addiction treatment services and residential rehabilitation to 3,000 people a year was presented with the Fifth Oireachtas Human Dignity Award at a ceremony in Leinster House on Thursday last, December 5.

The Human Life, Human Rights and Human Dignity Award is presented annually by the Oireachtas Human Dignity Group to a person or group whose commitment to the promotion of human dignity has been exemplary.

Presenting the Award, Leas-Cheann Comhairle Pat 'The Cope' Gallagher said that "belief in the inherent dignity of each person is what drives Sr Consilio's work", and that this "has had a transformative effect on the 100,000 people, and counting, who have benefited from how Cuan Mhuire has put this ethos into practice."

Sr Consilio, a Mercy Sister, began Cuan Mhuire over 50 years ago in a room in the Convent of Mercy, Athy, in 1966. A trained nurse and midwife, she had been moved by the plight of the 'men of the road' she encountered during her work as a nurse. Today, Cuan Mhuire has five treatment centres, including a women-only facility in Cork, and seven transition facilities



Sr Consilio addresses the gathering, watched by Senator Rónán Mullen and Pat the Cope Gallagher TD.

Sr Consilio Fitzgerald, founder of Cuan Mhuire which provides addiction treatment services and residential rehabilitation to 3,000 people a year, was presented with the 5th Oireachtas Human Dignity Award at a ceremony in Leinster House today. Here, Sr Consilio Fitzgerald chats with Senator Rónán Mullen of the Oireachtas Human Dignity Group who proposed Sr Consilio for the award. Photos: John McElroy



Sr Consilio Fitzgerald receives her presentation from Leas-Cheann Comhairle Pat the Cope Gallagher (left) and Senator Rónán Mullen.

throughout the country.

Paying tribute to Sr Consilio and her team, Senator Rónán Mullen of the Oireachtas Human Dignity Group noted that this was just the latest in a long series of awards received by the Mercy Sister and her team.

"These awards are all trying to say the same thing, which is, 'We greatly value you for what you've done for us. And we want you to keep going because your work is more important than ever.'

"As the Leas-Cheann Comhairle rightly points out, addiction is both a consequence and a cause of suffering. And not just

of suffering but of injustice at individual, family and community level. Our society is at risk as never before from the prevalence of addiction and its links to unhappiness, suicides, pressure on the health service and criminality," according to Senator Mullen.

Addiction

Acknowledging the award, Sr Consilio noted that people at every level of society were struggling with addiction.

"We will keep going. The challenges are great. Demand for our service far exceeds our capacity to help people. But we trust in the

Lord and in the great people who support our work every day," she said.

As well as the presentation in Leinster House, Sr Consilio's Human Dignity Award will be marked by a celebratory fundraiser in support of the new centre. Previous recipients of the Human Dignity Award were Barney Curley, founder of Direct Aid For Africa; Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow, founder of Mary's Meals; Gina Heraty of Our Little Brothers and Sisters Orphanage in Haiti; and Bro. Kevin Crowley and the Capuchin Day Centre.



Sr Consilio (centre, front row) holds her award as she is joined by friends, colleagues and public representatives.

Fr Ray Kelly creates a song and a dance...



Fr Ray Kelly holds a copy of his book at its launch in Oldcastle. Photos: Paddy Traynor



Parishioners Eilish Smith, Nuffy Curran and Brigid Flynn with Fr Kelly at the book launch.

Chai Brady

Meath-based priest Fr Ray Kelly has launched his autobiographical book in his parish of Oldcastle this week.

Father Ray Kelly Hallelujah – Memoirs of a Singing Priest chronicles his life, humble upbringing and subsequent rise to prominence as well as the importance he places on his priestly vocation.

The launch took place in St Brigid's Church on Monday and was attended by parishioners, Fr Kelly's family and Bishop Emeritus Michael Smith.



Bishop Emeritus Michael Smith congratulates Fr Kelly on his new publication.



Fr Kelly with Bishop Emeritus Michael Smith.



Fr Kelly poses with family including sister-in-law Olive and his brother Joe, at the back is his niece Amy and her Dad and Fr Kelly's brother in law Seamus.



Bishop Emeritus Michael Smith launching Fr Kelly's book.

Ireland remains at war with its past



The opportunity to honour Gay Byrne's impressive life's work was exploited to impose a revisionist narrative of 20th Century Ireland, writes **Fr Andrew McMahon**

In a column in the *Sunday Press* almost 40 years ago author and critic Desmond Fennell spoke of "the Manichaeon notion of the Dublin liberals that our society is divided, radically, between light and darkness".

He believed it "a powerfully propagated myth" within 1980s Ireland where those advocating what he termed a 'libertine' approach on social issues and a British-friendly line on the Northern question did not just challenge but habitually demonised those opposing them.

"It follows that disagreement with Dublin liberals is not, in their view, an occasion for liberal tolerance" Mr Fennell concluded "but rather a sin against the light" while "victory over the liberals by their opponents (the dark, inhuman forces) is a grievous moral disorder".

This paradigm of 'light' versus 'darkness' later featured in John Waters' account of the Dublin in which he worked as a journalist. Exploring that vanguard of liberal advocacy, then characterised by the label 'Dublin 4', Mr Waters wrote in 1991 "it wanted no truck with the dark, irrational, priest-ridden place it called 'rural Ireland'.

Irritation

For 'Dublin 4', this place was just a bad dream, a mild irritation on the periphery of its consciousness, a darkness on the edge of town...the new tribe defined Ireland on radio



and television, the old listened with growing incomprehension to this strange definition of the country it had imagined itself to inhabit."

Enthusiasm for the 'liberal' agenda within Ireland has long since spread beyond its Dublin 4 origins, and that once identifiable capital-country divide has, in consequence, been rendered obsolete. While by no means the only factors, Irish radio and television have undoubtedly been highly influential forces in this nation-wide development. Media awareness of this was much in evidence when the father figure of Irish broadcasting passed away recently.

It was wholly reasonable that Gay Byrne's death should engender reflection on the media's role in modernising Ireland and on RTÉ's critical position within that process. But it was also predictable that the reflection might be a touch triumphalist given the success of the liberal agenda in recent years and the media's identification with it.

What appeared less reasonable, however, was the disparaging

nature of assumptions made throughout about the Ireland in which RTÉ came to function – with the commentary choosing to revive those concepts of darkness and light which Mr Fennell and Mr Waters had encountered decades earlier.

“It was also predictable that the reflection of Mr Byrne's death might be a touch triumphalist given the success of the liberal agenda in recent years and the media's identification with it”

Soon after Gay Byrne's passing on November 4, an RTÉ television special news bulletin appeared to set the tone for the wider reaction which would follow. It contained a brief discussion in which the newscaster, Ray Kennedy, attempted to evaluate Mr

Byrne's significance with the help of the network's Arts and Media Correspondent Sinead Crowley. Shortly into the discussion, Mr Kennedy proposed: "He shone a light in many dark corners of a very dark Ireland at that time". Ms Crowley cohered: "He really did".

Mr Kennedy continued: "He gave people a voice at a time when they were silenced."

"This is it", agreed Mr Crowley – adding that women especially had "told him their innermost secrets". While this was all, perhaps, arguable from a certain ideological standpoint, it seemed remarkably opinionated stuff for a State broadcaster. Who, for example, had deemed the Ireland in which RTÉ had been born to be a 'very dark' place? News editors at RTÉ, presumably. Had they conclusive evidence? Could it, therefore, be appropriate comment at a critical and influential moment in national news?

By next morning the *Irish Times* appeared to have followed suit. Its front page was given over to an opinion piece by Fintan O'Toole who believed that Ireland needed

“Who, for example, had deemed the Ireland in which RTÉ had been born to be a 'very dark' place? News editors at RTÉ, presumably. Had they conclusive evidence? Could it, therefore, be appropriate comment at a critical and influential moment in national news?”

someone "to disarm it into opening its dark places, to make it say in public what it could not even admit in private".

Mr O'Toole's core thesis was that Gay Byrne had held the key "to a nation's locked room of secrets." What's more, these themes would not only recur across a variety of media outlets, in subsequent days.

'Voice for all'

Leading public figures would reiterate them too. President Michael D. Higgins, for instance, would declare that Mr Byrne had "challenged Irish society and shone a light not only on the bright but also the dark sides of Irish life". For Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, Mr Byrne had "changed Ireland for the better in so many ways".

"Uncle Gaybo," the Taoiseach elaborated, "provided a voice for all those who had been silenced, or were afraid to speak up, and helped us confront things that needed to be changed."

It all seemed strong stuff! With secrets, locked rooms, darkness and the 'silenced', it would have been tempting to imagine – if one had not known otherwise – that the country, pre-RTÉ, had been something akin to Stalinist Russia.

In this way, the opportunity to honour Gay Byrne's impressive



Gay Byrne chats with Bono.

crass and objectionable and had told their host as much at the time. Virtually every review, on the other hand, had misgivings about Mr Byrne's interview with Annie Murphy – reflecting precisely how feminists, liberals and letter-writers to the *Irish Times* had reacted to it.

“It is hard to identify any other nation – certainly none in the English-speaking world – where its present day commentariat consider it necessary to collectively thrash their forebears”

Mr Byrne's finest radio hour, meanwhile, was generally reported to have been the reading, on his show, of letters from Irish women, forwarded in response to the traumatic deaths of teenager Ann Lovett and her baby in 1984.

Highlighting the plight of women with crisis pregnancies, in such a sensitive manner, was undoubtedly something of

immense value. Recollections of this tragedy, however, did not acknowledge concerns that it may have been exploited – reinforcing stereotypes of a benighted 'rural Ireland' and furthering related ideological agendas.

Gay Byrne was a remarkable broadcaster, whose skill, dedication and longevity deserve to be celebrated. Leading the way in earlier times, he widened debate in a rather paternalistic and inward-looking culture. In the longer run, though, he seemed to succumb to a newer establishment, increasingly playing to its ever-expanding demands.

Given the environment, Mr Byrne likely had little choice. His passing comes at a time when that establishment appears at the height of its powers, with conformity to its agenda ubiquitous in Irish public discourse.

The very framing of Mr Byrne's story over recent weeks is further testament to this.

When the time for mourning Uncle Gaybo has eventually passed, this should remain a cause for sadness within the Ireland he has departed.



Gay Byrne with Anne Murphy.

“Practically every outlet gave emphasis to the same *Late Late Show* highlights, from ‘the Bishop and the Nightie’ of early notoriety to the undermining of Pdraig Flynn near the end of Mr Byrne's tenure”

life's work was effectively exploited to re-impose a popular revisionist narrative of 20th-Century Ireland. Mr Byrne – we were asked to accept – was the product of a dark, ignorant and uncaring country.

He had somehow managed, nonetheless, to leave behind a new, enlightened and compassionate

land. It is hard to identify any other nation – certainly none in the English-speaking world – where its present day commentariat consider it necessary to collectively thrash their forebears, in order that their own pretensions to righteousness might be sustained.

Mr Byrne's many-sided

broadcasting life, meanwhile, was portrayed in that largely uniform fashion so typical of Irish media today. Seldom, indeed, did the print or broadcast media diverge – in either content or analysis – from that account of his career which *RTÉ News* had promoted on the evening after his death.

Practically every outlet gave emphasis to the same *Late Late Show* highlights, from ‘the Bishop and the Nightie’ of early notoriety to the undermining of Pdraig Flynn near the end of Mr Byrne's tenure and the exposing of Charles Haughey's ‘affair’ on his second last show – three cases, notably, in which traditional scourges of Dublin 4 were the public losers.

A common approach was also evident in how items from the *Late Late Show* were recalled and evaluated. Mr Byrne's treatment of Gerry Adams in 1994, for example, was invariably described as “controversial”.

Commentators seemed unprepared to admit that it was prejudiced and partisan as well. Holding forth a condom while on air, and illustrating its workings, was hailed indicative of Gaybo's daring style.

Certain members of his audience, though, had found it



Pdraig Flynn.



It's time to end the sacramental production line

For the vitality of our parishes we need the courage, wisdom and right judgement to forge a new path, writes **Bairbre Cahill**

I may as well lay my cards on the table from the outset – I would take sacramental preparation out of Catholic schools. That may seem drastic, so why am I suggesting it? At the moment we have a production line system where virtually every baptised child in a Catholic primary school will go through the sacraments irrespective of whether Faith is a living reality in their lives outside of school.

This is undermining the integrity of sacramental preparation and the Catholic ethos of our schools. Moreover, the reality is that a production-line system of sacramental preparation is inappropriate if we want to take our children's Faith journey seriously. This is certainly not the fault of the teachers but of a system tries to deal with sacramental preparation disconnected from a life of Faith. Moving sacramental preparation into our parishes would encourage – indeed demand – a re-animation of our parishes as communities of Faith and places of evangelisation.

We are all familiar with the scene – a lovely Saturday in May and ninety children from the local school receive their First Holy Communion. Sunday morning comes and there are ten of those children at Mass and there may well be a homily from the parish priest which contains a few barbed and frustrated comments on the fact that most of our First Communion children have disappeared.

Scenario

It is the same scenario played out in parishes around the country every year. We complain that 'it is only a day out for them' – and yet we do not address the underlying issues. We keep doing the same thing in terms of preparation and expect different outcomes.

For many years I have been working with families whose children are preparing for the sacraments. My aim is to get parents talking about their own Faith, why they had their child baptised, what difference they want Faith to make in their child's life, how they see their own role as



parents and the role of the family in the preparation of their child.

Together we create a space in which the opportunities and challenges, the strengths and doubts about Faith and about sacramental preparation can be aired. I am very clear with parents that they have a choice here – to reaffirm their Faith or to decide not to take that next step in terms of sacramental preparation if it does not ring true for them as a family. I invite them to be honest with themselves and with what they are asking of their children.

I want parents to reflect on their own lives, their own experience. I invite them to think about how their home is a holy place, how through the daily business of family life – cooking meals, helping with homework, setting boundaries, loving, laughing, being together – God's own love becomes a reality, becomes incarnate, in that family.

“We have parents who are quite negative about Faith and Church but who feel that they are part of a production line system in schools so therefore do not really have any choice and so they go with the flow”

I'm inviting them to see the echoes of Eucharist in their daily lives – how they forgive each other and rebuild relationships, how they share their lives, gather round the kitchen table for dinner, send their children out into the world, how they pour themselves out in love for their children – just as Jesus gives himself to us utterly and completely in the Eucharist.

Foundation

What I really want to do is empower parents to know that they are the first teachers of Faith and without them there is little or no foundation.

First teachers of Faith – that is a phrase we throw around as if saying it is enough. But what have we done to actually enable parents to take ownership of that role? Some years ago, I did research with parents of children preparing for First Holy Communion. I discovered a number of challenging issues.

We have parents who are happy with the *status quo*. We have parents who are involved in and committed to their Faith but feel the school is taking over and side-lining them with regard to sacramental preparation. We have other parents who are completely disconnected and see it as entirely the school's responsibility and view the sacramental celebration itself as little more than a social occasion or 'coming of age' celebration.

We have parents who are not currently involved in their Faith but don't want to walk away. They are open to exploring their Faith, perhaps to re-engage but the system at the moment is offering little opportunity for that. We have parents who are quite negative about Faith and Church but who feel that they are part of a production line system in schools so therefore do not really have any choice and so they go with the flow.

A one-size-fits-all approach is inadequate to address the variety of needs and challenges these families present.

There is the real issue with the 'production line' attitude towards the sacraments and the fundamental weakness of school-based preparation. It does not encourage honesty, ownership and commitment. If anything, it undermines them, and that is something that many teachers are very aware of and frustrated by.

I have also worked with children who are preparing for the sacraments, particularly Confirmation, running days of retreat for them in a variety of schools around Donegal. I have now come to a point where I am not prepared to do any more school-based retreats. Why? I have had an increasing sense that I am involved in a process of forcing square pegs into round holes. Probably 60% of the children in any group I work with have little to no experience of Faith as a living reality outside of school.

As an ice breaker to get them talking, I use a game called Agree Middle Disagree where I pose a statement and they take up a position in the room agree, middle or disagree. It is eye-opening to see what comes out in that context.

What do you do when you have children making it very clear that they do not pray at all outside of school?

When children say they don't think Faith has anything to offer them?

When children say they don't think the Holy Spirit has any influence within their lives?

When a child goes so far as to say: "I don't believe in the Holy Spirit, I think it's a really stupid idea"

And yet, we are confirming all



family, should I make my son get confirmed?" there were replies ranging from "sure do it now and he can change later" to "if you aren't religious I don't know why you would bother to be honest".

And honesty is the key here. We need to have courage and honesty to open up that conversation and inevitably it will be heated. We have seen it before, where changes are suggested and there is a reaction of "my child has the right to these sacraments".

“So, what is the solution? It has to be an invitation into relationship – offered again and again, always open, always welcoming”

I would suggest that we have bought into a consumer culture – that people are reacting to the church as they would to any other service provider, like consumers with consumer rights rather than as citizens of a Faith community with responsibilities.

I have huge regard for the teachers who are involved in school based sacramental preparation. They work hard and offer children the best they can and many are deeply frustrated with their experience of working in a vacuum, left in many cases to form children as Catholics without any foundations of Faith in the family. Teachers rightly ask: "Why are we the ones to carry this responsibility?" And the reality is, it's not working. In too many cases we are not forming people of Faith, but are teaching people to be cynical about Faith. A herd mentality approach places no value on the sacraments.

There is a lack of connection, a lack of relationship. We have children who have no experience of being part of the parish other than whatever they encounter at school. We are confirming children whose day to day reality beyond school, is lived without any reference to God or Faith. Family is where Faith takes root. Without that family input it is a real struggle. So, no matter how good the teachers are, how committed the school is to its Catholic ethos, there is no depth, no roots.

Is it the fault of parents? Some parents have had their child baptised and may have done little since but what have we done to engage with those parents? How have we helped them to understand their responsibility and capacity to be the first teachers of Faith? What experience of a living Faith community have we offered to that family? Have we simply told them that they are expected to attend Mass?

We have prepared squads of children to receive the Body of Christ without offering them a true experience of being part of the body of Christ. And one, disconnected from the other,

doesn't make any sense.

We are facing two crises here – one is a crisis of catechesis, that many people have little understanding of Faith and little opportunity to explore their Faith beyond the age of 12/13. The other is a crisis of the Faith community. Again, we have fallen into the consumer model – we provide sacraments for the religious consumer but we have not cultivated authentic Faith communities.

So, what is the solution? It has to be an invitation into relationship – offered again and again, always open, always welcoming. Baptism is an initiation into the Christian community – but it is only a beginning. How do we engage with families to invite them in, to help them feel part of the Faith community? The Eucharist is the core of who we are but we also need to find other ways to nurture that community so that we can say, "come and be part of us, and when your child is approaching the time for the next step on the Faith journey we will accompany you".

We need to invite families into the life of the parish – which means parishes need to be much more than where we 'get Mass'. Perhaps it is through a family Mass or Children's liturgy group and the absolutely vital cup of tea after Mass. But we also need to tap into people's interests be that music, environment, Faith and justice, parent and toddler groups, parenting programmes, youth groups, book clubs, social events, parish celebrations, sacramental preparation and anything else that helps us build relationships. As Pope Francis reminds us "Growth in holiness is a journey in community, side by side with others" (GE141).

We need family, parish and school side by side, supporting each other but with a shift in emphasis so that ownership and responsibility are put back in the hands of the family. The parish Faith community is the context for sacramental celebration, with that Faith nurtured and supported through our Catholic schools.

“Some parents have had their child baptised and may have done little since but what have we done to engage with those parents?”

It is certainly challenging for our parishes to be that welcoming engaging place and to give people options as to how they can get involved. This is truly about evangelisation, about mission rather than maintenance and not something that a priest can do alone. It takes a community to be a community. Yes, we need to train catechists for this but we also need to involve the people of the parish in the process, expect people to be involved.

Will we have fewer people

coming forward to celebrate the sacraments? Yes, probably, but we need to move away from the idea that our strength is in numbers. Perhaps our strength is in honesty and integrity. This is not about a bunker mentality or a holy huddle either. It is never about cutting ourselves off or excluding people. It is always about saying "come and see" and encouraging people to make space in their life for Faith. It is about valuing the journey, believing that sacraments reflect a relationship with God and each other and asking people to respect that.

* * * * *

What of our Catholic school then? Without the emphasis on sacramental preparation the focus is much more on the everyday. A school with a strong Catholic ethos is a place where children grow up believing and knowing that life is full of the presence and action of God. They develop a reflective, discerning heart and know for themselves that God is the one in whom we live and move and have our being.

So, the question becomes: "How are we living the Gospel today?" How are we offering children an experience of prayer – not simply saying prayers? It is about linking in our work for the environment, for justice, for charity with the message of Jesus, the message of Pope Francis."

It is about helping children to make the connection between their everyday lives and the love of God. And it is about always issuing that invitation – if you want more, if you want to celebrate the sacraments, if you want to be part of the Faith community then the parish is waiting to welcome you.

Teachers know, families know and society knows that what we are doing at the moment is not working. Sacramental preparation has to be moved out of our schools and into the parish Faith community.

Change is difficult. It can provoke quite an allergic reaction in people but at this moment I believe we are called to a new way, called to humility, integrity and courage. It is a call to be the Body of Christ and not simply to talk about it. No parish can do this alone. It is a decision that needs to be made at the very least at diocesan level but really it is a conversation that we need to have at national level in the Church here in Ireland. We can only do this with strong and courageous pastoral leadership.

For the sake of the integrity of our sacramental preparation, the ethos of our Catholic schools, the vitality of our parishes as communities of Faith and the respect we owe the Faith journey of our children we need the courage, wisdom and right judgement to forge a new path.

these children.

Then there are other children who are very clear about how important prayer is to them, how it supports them, how Faith has kept their family going in tough times or through bereavements. There are children who have a wonderful, simple eloquence about their Faith. Within a couple of months all these children will be confirmed together. And we would have to ask, confirmed in what?

I am deeply uneasy with what we are doing. I would go so far as to say we are doing harm to the integrity of all these children.

For the child who sees no connection between what they are doing in school RE classes and their own life we are asking for a commitment which doesn't make any sense to them.

In effect, we are telling them that as long as they sign up and go through the process that is all that matters. The kids themselves can see the lack of integrity in this

What about the children who are engaged in Faith, who value prayer or at least are attracted to that experience of Faith even if there isn't much practise of it at home? Basically, we are telling

them that we don't value their commitment, that whether they engage with their Faith or not is of little consequence because we are happy to confirm the whole batch.

In effect, I think we are undermining the Faith commitment of these children as well as giving them a clear signal that commitment is cheap.

Confirmation

I remember at my daughter's Confirmation a local priest who didn't know the children but could address the Bishop in Irish stood up and verified that these children were all good candidates for Confirmation, that they had been well prepared and were all practising Catholics. Even our 12-year-old knew that wasn't true and that the priest had spoken about things he personally had no knowledge of.

There is a glaring lack of integrity here. We know it, the children know it, the public knows it – but we seem reluctant to have that conversation.

That conversation is happening on social media already. When a mother recently asked on Facebook: "We aren't a holy joe

“A one-size-fits-all approach is inadequate to address the variety of needs and challenges these families present”

Bolivia turmoil is dividing



Chai Brady speaks to an Irish missionary about the tense situation in embattled Bolivia

An Irish lay missionary who is serving the local community in Bolivia is living through a political fiasco which has led to protests and violence that kicked off in October after a disputed presidential election.

Anne Reilly of Viatores Christi was shocked at the “turmoil that erupted” after October 20 elections which were disputed over their legitimacy. As a result ex-President Evo Morales resigned on November 10.

Coming to Bolivia in January this year and assisting with two Church-run projects, she describes it as “the most turbulent time in their history”.

In one of South America’s poorest countries, Morales served as the first indigenous president for 14 years and was seen as a defender of the poor and marginalised. He controlled the executive, legislature and judiciary, as well as the electoral authority, police and army.

Asylum

It took 20 days of protests after the elections before he decided to leave the country and seek asylum in Mexico.

This occurred in spite of a 2016 referendum in which the Bolivian populace voted against Morales running for a fourth term, the Constitutional Court overruled the people’s decision, on the grounds that it constrained his ‘human rights’. This allowed him to run for



A demonstrator is detained by riot police during a protest in La Paz, Bolivia on November 21.

president once more but on the election night the vote count was suspended for 24 hours just as the trend seem to point the president wouldn’t have a 10% lead against his opponents, which in turn would ensure there would be no runoff vote and Morales would secure a victory.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Ms Reilly says: “We had the voting and as the results were coming in on the TV we had a ‘blackout’, mainly because it was so close and to win it had to be by 10%. Of course, the next morning Eva Morales

claimed victory by the barest of 10% and there were calls from the opposition of ‘fraud’.

“It took two weeks of protests, blockades, waiting on the results of an international enquiry before the situation reached boiling point.”

Ms Reilly first left Ireland in the 1980s after a disaster in Ethiopian was shown on the news. She remembers wondering: “How can I help these peoples? Thinking, I will do anything, whatever needs to be done.”

She says: “It was a very primal response from a

very naive young woman in her early 20s from a small country parish called Balbriggan, Co. Dublin, so began my missionary journey.”

* * * * *

After this, she left for Benue State in Nigeria to teach English and do office administration with the Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary.

“On my return I found myself wondering, questioning and searching out answers to the big questions: “Why do some people live in such extreme

poverty while others enjoy an affluent lifestyle...?”

“I perused studies in development issues and completed a degree in theology, at the Mission Institute Kimmage Manor. To help me with my knowledge, understanding and Faith questions.”

In 2015 after an earthquake, Ms Reilly went to Peru to help, and lived there for a year where she got involved in parish life and helped out with a women’s group. It was in 2018 that, after taking classes in Spanish, she engaged Viatores Christi in

Phibsboro in Dublin, and after a training course was sent to serve in Bolivia.

Division

When Morales resigned he no longer had the support of the police or the army. Ms Reilly described her experience at the time saying: “Then we had massive street protests, huge blockades, it became difficult for the people to get to work, transport came to a standstill, cities were cut off from each other. Public transport buses were burnt out in La Paz, over 60 of them. It just was not safe,

“Eva Morales claimed victory by the barest of 10% and there were calls from the opposition of ‘fraud’. It took two weeks of protests, blockades, waiting on the results of an international enquiry before the situation reached boiling point”

communities



Children are seen outside their home during a food and fuel shortage because of the political crisis in La Paz, Bolivia, on November 21.

he fought for.

For this reason her commitment to pacification seemed to fall flat, particularly as it wasn't the effect. Ms Reilly says the announcement of the new interim president "inflamed the situation and the police and army were deployed onto the streets to maintain 'law and order' and the protests continued and over 30 people have been killed".

"It has been a tough few weeks after the elections on October 10, between the street protests, blockades, huge boom noises from bangers going off 24/7, the not knowing when and where the different protesters groups would be in confrontation with each other.

“Transport came to a standstill, cities were cut off from each other. Public transport buses were burnt out in La Paz”

"The menacing faces covered with scarfs and pipe brandishing motorcyclist groups, meeting them from time to time leaves an uneasy feeling that 'this is going to erupt!'"

"Food shortages and price rises were inevitable because of the city blockades, this

is where cities like La Paz, Cochabamba, Sucre, Santa Cruz, etc. were all cut off from each other, a deliberate ploy to enhance the fear of the peoples, never mind starve them.

"Because transport was affected by the blockades, fuel could not get through to the different parts of the country, people could not work. The food in the markets, basic foods like meat, potatoes, veg and fruits were either scarce or the prices had risen beyond peoples means. I saw queues for milk, cheese and dairy products, that I had never seen before.

"Schools closed, because teachers came from different parts and could not get to schools. Children's education has been badly affected. Normally the schools close at the end of November for the summer holidays here, but they closed three to four weeks earlier."

* * * * *

A lot of ex-pats, particularly US citizens Ms Reilly says, were advised to leave with the volunteer/lay missionaries in her house dropping from seven to two.

"I would say it has been a turbulent, anxious time for everyone, but for the Bolivian people it has been horrendous, not unlike a civil war atmosphere, where neighbours, colleagues,

friends became conflicted as Bolivia became a divided country," she says.

Saviour

Indigenous people and 'city people' were pitted against each other, Ms Reilly explains, because the former President Evo Morales was "so loved by the indigenous Bolivian, who saw him as their saviour because of the centuries of oppression here by the Spanish", this led to "a local indigenous union leader becoming the first Indigenous president".

"Morales and his party Movement for Socialism (MAS) brought about the nationalising of the gas/petrol against big wealthy interests (national and international), cut off diplomatic relations from countries like the US.

"Evo wanted a plurinational state [coexistence of two or more sealed or preserved national groups within a polity] that respected all the different cultural, religious, spiritual dimensions of Bolivian peoples and society. So, he fell out with the Catholic Church here. Yet, when he, Evo called for dialogue to negotiate a way out of protests and killings he asked for the EU and the Catholic Church to be negotiators?"

One of the two projects she assists with is run by

the Christian Brother El Centro Hermano Manolo in the heart of Cochabamba, a city in the centre of Bolivia, in the biggest market area called La Cancha. The centre he runs helps street children who work in the market area, who can be as young as 6-7 years old up to teenagers, both boys and girls.

The other is in the south of Cochabamba in one of the most deprived areas called Nuevo Vera Cruz with the Maryknoll Fathers from the USA, again helping out in their after school programme and with small children.

“These are very complicated times for the whole of Bolivia but I am hopeful”

Ms Reilly says: "The year here has opened my eyes and heart to the daily reality of people living from hand to mouth. They are mostly market peoples, selling anything and everything from fruit to clothes.

"They are very hard working peoples, up at the crack of dawn, travelling long distances and spending the day trying to sell enough to feed, clothe and shelter their families. Poverty is a daily reality for the people in both of the areas I help out at.

"What can I say, it has been a privilege to have been welcomed into the lives of many, encouraged and supported in my poor language skills, they have great patience and I have received so much more than I could ever give in time and energy."

Speaking about the Church's involvement in the crisis, she says it has been

an "honest broker" that has helped to facilitate dialogue and public forums.

"One must remember there are over 35 different cultural groupings in Bolivia, so not all would respond to the Catholic Church's invitation to dialogue. I attend a local Franciscan Church here in Cochabamba and have been impressed when it came to the homily and prayers of the faithful, the priests never shied away from relating the Gospel to the reality we were all living with and through, on a daily bases, calling for listening hearts and dialogue within the community," Ms Reilly says.

Speaking about the run-up to Advent, Ms Reilly describes how last week Cochabamba was returning to some resemblance of normality. The centre, El Prado, was transformed into a "beautiful Advent/carol concert of song and dance".

"The children sang, parents came with their children and lots of fun was experienced, a real reclaiming of what was a beautiful area, especially for tourists and locals alike. I really enjoyed the atmosphere and felt quite at home again here in Cochabamba after the turmoil and fear.

"These are very complicated times for the whole of Bolivia but I am hopeful, these are very resilient peoples, respectful, dignified and open, and I pray that justice, equality and peace will come with the new elections," she added.

It is unclear what the future holds for Bolivia, but it is believed the interim government will begin the countdown for the next elections on December 23, which are reported to be set for March 2020.



Staff at Manolo Centre established by the Christian Brothers with Anne Reilly (second from left), Sandra, Eduardo, Alberto and Francisco.

the country was divided for and against the former president."

Interim president and long-time critic of Morales, conservative leader Jeanine Añez was chosen in line with the constitution and addressed Bolivians outside the government palace for the first time in her new role on November 12 holding a Bible and committing to pacify the situation.

Añez, a proud Christian, immediately marked herself out from the former president who had got rid of religious oaths of office, saying: "God has allowed the Bible to come back into the palace. May he bless us."

Some commentators have said this would be extremely provocative for the indigenous population in the country, who would be staunch Morales supporters and whose beliefs and rights

MAKE 2020 A YEAR TO GO TO THE HOLY LAND

Next September and October will see two groups of pilgrims depart on an unforgettable trip to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. In recent years, these trips have become an integral part of The Irish Catholic year with hundreds of pilgrims making the journey from every corner of Ireland to take part in a unique opportunity to visit the sites associated with the earthly life of Christ. The pilgrimage also helps the Bible come alive for people as they visit Nazareth, Bethlehem and Jerusalem. Here are some highlights of this year's itinerary:



The Sea of Galilee.

Day One: Ireland to the Holy Land

Depart Dublin Airport in the evening for an overnight flight direct to Tel Aviv on El Al.

Day Two: Nazareth

Upon arrival in Ben-Gurion Airport, pilgrims will be met by a Marian Pilgrimages representative and guide before boarding our tour coach to Nazareth. En route we will see stunning views of the sun rising over the Galilee region – site of much of the ministry of Jesus. After breakfast, check-in to the four-star Legacy Hotel for five nights with dinner and breakfast.

After time to rest and freshen up, we will walk the short distance to the nearby Basilica of the Annunciation to celebrate Mass. On the lower level of the basilica we see the remains of Mary's house and where the Archangel Gabriel visited her.

Adjacent to the basilica is St Joseph's Church, where we will visit the site of Joseph's workshop and the house of the Holy Family. A short walk from the basilica is Mary's Well here you have the opportunity to draw water from the same well as the Virgin Mary followed by free time in Nazareth before dinner at the hotel.

Day Three: Mount Tabor and Cana in Galilee

After breakfast, we have a short drive to Mount Tabor to ascend by taxi for Mass at the Church of the Transfiguration where Jesus is transfigured and speaks to Moses and Elijah. There is time to enjoy the view of the Valley of Armageddon and the Jezreel Valley – bread basket of the Holy Land.

After time for lunch we take the short coach journey to Cana in Galilee. Here we visit the Wedding Church, the site of the first miracle of Jesus. Couples on the pilgrimage can take part in the special ceremony to renew their wedding vows and there is also prayers and blessings for spouses at home and deceased husbands and wives. In the lower level of the church, we will see artifacts from the site before having an opportunity to taste and purchase some of the famous wine from this sacred site before returning to Nazareth for dinner in the hotel.

Optional Eucharistic Adoration at the Basilica of the Annunciation at 8.30pm.

Day Four: The Sea of Galilee

This morning we make our way to the Mount of Beatitudes overlooking the Sea of Galilee where Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount, Capernaum and Tabgha. Visit the site of the multiplication of the Loaves and Fish at Tabgha, and the Church of the Primacy of St Peter.

After lunch on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, continue to Capernaum and see the old synagogue and the excavations of St Peter's house before taking a boat trip on the lake, with relevant Bible readings. Before returning to the hotel we visit Magdala, the home of Mary Magdalene, a prosperous fishing village at the time of Jesus.

Optional rosary at the Irish icon at the Basilica of the Annunciation at 8.30pm.

Day Five: Acre – the Crusader capital

We take the short coach ride to the coastal city of Akko, famed throughout history as the Crusader capital of the Holy Land. After Mass, we return to Nazareth for free time in the town of the Holy Family before dinner at the hotel.

Optional candlelit procession at the Basilica of the Annunciation at 8.30pm.

Day Six: Jericho and Bethany

We leave Nazareth and drive south along the Jordan Valley into Jericho. Here we can see the Mount of Temptation and the Sycamore tree of Zachaeus. Continue to the Dead Sea and enjoy a 'dip' near Qumran, where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. Drive by the Inn of the Good Samaritan, to Bethany to celebrate Mass at 16.00 and visit the Tomb of Lazarus. Continue to Qasr el Yahud, the baptismal site of Jesus on the River Jordan, here we can renew our baptismal vows.

After we drive to Bethlehem and check-in to the four-star Manger Square Hotel, located just a stone's throw from the Church of the Nativity for four nights, with breakfast and dinner.

Day Seven: Jerusalem

We drive to Jerusalem and enter the Old City to the Church of St Anne and nearby, see the Pool of Bethesda. Close by we begin the Via Dolorosa and follow the stations of the cross through the markets and narrow streets of the Old City to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the site of

Calvary where Jesus was crucified and His tomb. Here we will celebrate Mass at 11.00 and take some time to reflect at this sacred site. Enjoy some free time in Jerusalem for lunch before visiting the Western Wall.

We will then drive to Taybeh – a town where Jesus stayed before going to Jerusalem to endure the Passion. It is the last all-Christian town in the West Bank and here we will hear about efforts to keep the local Christian community vibrant, including local wine-making before returning to the hotel in Bethlehem for dinner.

Day Eight: Mount of Olives

Drive to the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem where we take our group photo and enjoy the view of the Old City below. We make our way to the highest point on the Mount of Olives to the Ascension Dome. Continue to visit the Pater Noster Church, Dominus Flevit, the Church of the Assumption and grotto and the Garden of Gethsemane.

In the afternoon we celebrate Mass at 15.00 in the Church of St Peter in Gallicantu or 'cock's crow', where St Peter denied Jesus

three times and see the dungeon where Jesus was held the night of Holy Thursday. We walk around Mount Zion and visit the church of the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Tomb of King David and the Room of the Last Supper. Return to the hotel for dinner.

Day Nine: Bethlehem

After breakfast we take the short walk to the Church of the Nativity and celebrate Mass. at 10.00. Here you can visit the birthplace of Jesus, and the Holy Manger as well as the chapels of St Joseph, St Jerome, the Holy Innocents and the Church of St Catherine.

Visit the Milk Grotto before lunch and meeting with members of the local Christian community in Bethlehem. Afterwards, we take the short drive to the Shepherds' Field and Ein Karem to the Church of the Visitation before returning to the hotel for dinner.

Day Ten: Emmaus

After breakfast at the hotel, we have some free time in Bethlehem before boarding the coach for the journey to Emmaus where we will have Mass and lunch before proceeding to the airport for the direct flight back to Dublin.

PRICING NOTES FOR THE PILGRIMAGE

The package on offer is all inclusive of the following:

Travel and accommodation

- Flight from Dublin to Tel Aviv;
- Transfer on arrival from Tel Aviv airport to the hotel in Nazareth with guide assistance;
- Five nights in the four-star Legacy Hotel in Nazareth
- Four nights in the four-star Manger Square Hotel in Bethlehem;
- Breakfast and evening meal served each day at hotels;

- Transfer to Tel Aviv airport for return flight;
- Flight from Tel Aviv to Dublin;
- Luxury air-conditioned coach throughout the itinerary;
- Guiding audio system (earphones for listening to the guide).

Tours and religious programme

- Full religious programme with a spiritual director including daily Mass;
- Services of Marian Pilgrimages representative.

- English-speaking guides throughout the pilgrimage;

- Full day guided tour of Jerusalem including visits to the Western Wall, Dome of the Rock, Church of St Anne, Via Dolorosa, Holy Sepulchre and Shrine of the Book;

- Complete programme of sightseeing and visits to sites of interest in the Holy Land;
- Boat ride on Sea of Galilee;
- Return taxi transfers to Mount Tabor.

Entrance fees included

- Dominus Flevit;
- Capernaum;
- Mount of Beatitudes;
- Muhrakha;
- Qumran.

Optional

- Travel insurance €25 for passengers up to 85 years. Please note that an additional insurance premium of €25 is charged for persons aged 86 to 94 years;

passengers 95 years and over should secure private travel insurance.

- Price per person sharing twin/double/treble rooms with private facilities. Passengers are entitled to check in one standard piece of luggage subject to airline's conditions. Single rooms are subject to availability at a supplement.

- Taxes, charges and government levies are included.
- Portage at hotels are included in the package price.
- All tips and gratuities everywhere are included.

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Combined effort for Alpha course



▲ WATERFORD: Combined parishes Newtown & Kill, Portlaoise and Ballyduff parishes take part in the Alpha Course. (l-r) Fr Richard O'Halloran PP, Monica Gilligan, Siobhan Crowley, Sr Shawn, Sr Carolyn, Mary Walsh, Bernie Crotty and Fr Martin Keogh PP. Photo: Michael Faulkner



▲ CAVAN: Annette O'Rourke, Chairperson of Kingscourt Parish Pastoral Planning Team, welcomes Oisín McConville as guest speaker at their Advent Mass on the journey of life and faith.

CARLOW: Bishop Denis Nulty welcomes students from St Leo's College to the Bishop's House to assist youth leadership peer ministry programme Meitheal with the packing of the Kildare and Leighlin's 'Reach Out 2019' campaign.



GALWAY: The first in a series of Advent talks takes place in the Galway Pastoral Centre, where Neása Flaherty Burke – a teacher and soloist – spoke about music and faith has shaped her life. (l-r) Rebecca Wall, Deirdre Broderick, Neása Flaherty and Janet Laffey.



KERRY: Parish Pastoral Councils from Allihies, Ballyheigue, Castlemaine, Duagh, Kilcummin, Knocknagoshel, Tarbert and Valentia parishes gather along with some priests from their pastoral areas in Killarney. (l-r) Knocknagoshel Parish: Bertie Hickey, (Chairman of the Parish Council), Norma Cahill (Parish Council Member), Catherine Brosnan (Parish Council Member), Deirdre Bell (Parish Secretary) and Marie O'Callaghan (Sacristan).

Edited by Colm Fitzpatrick
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Events deadline is a week in advance of publication



DUBLIN: Jacob Murray (centre) aged 8, and others from the Music Generation Choir from Holy Rosary National School, Wicklow Town help Trócaire reimagine the 50th anniversary of John Lennon and Yoko Ono's iconic War is Over 'peace campaign'. Photo: Mark Stedman



LOUTH: To mark the 350th anniversary of the appointment of St Oliver Plunkett to the See of Armagh by Pope Clement IX, Archbishop Eamon Martin launches *Not Force or Might - The Gift of the Martyr*, a book compiled and edited by Rev. Benedict Fee.



ANTRIM: Students gather in Queen's University Belfast Chaplaincy to celebrate Thanksgiving.

IN SHORT

Bishop launches Advent prayer card

In a bid to encourage more families to pray this Christmas, Tuam's Archbishop Michael Neary has launched a family prayer card this month.

In a pastoral message, the bishop said that in today's world family prayer is "very reduced" and that even he finds it difficult to pray.

"Contrast with years gone by, where there was no television, no internet, very restricted mobility, it was common for families to come together and pray the rosary" Bishop Neary said.

"Granted during the rosary, not all the focus was on prayer, we coped with distractions and little side shows as children and had to be corrected and called to order by parents."

To aid families in rejuvenating their spiritual life during Advent, Bishop Neary launched the prayer card to help us relate experiences with God.

"Through our experiences of prayer in the home it is hoped that when we come together to worship God as

a community at Mass we will bring with us a more meaningful experience of a God who is part of our daily life, interested in who we are, what we do and those with whom we interact."

The new prayer resource, Prayers For My Family, is available to download from <https://www.tuamarchdiocese.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Prayer-for-WEB-2.pdf>.

Priest appointed to new national role

Clogher priest Msgr Joseph McGuinness has been appointed to the post of Executive Secretary of the Irish Episcopal Conference, which he will take up early in the New Year.

Writing to the clergy of the diocese, Bishop Larry Duffy said: "I take this opportunity to congratulate Msgr McGuinness on his appointment to this important ministry in the Church in Ireland. I thank him for his outstanding service to date in our diocese and know that you will all join with me in wishing him every blessing in his new role."

Bishop Duffy added that Msgr

McGuinness will continue, as a priest of the Diocese of Clogher, to assist and support the life and work of the diocese in whatever ways are possible.

Msgr McGuinness informed parishioners of his new appointment at Masses in the Parish of Carrickmacross and said that it is in the nature of priestly vocation to respond to the call to serve.

"This always involves a degree of sadness, and this is especially so for me, given the warmth of welcome and the generosity of support which I have received from the people of Carrickmacross, Corduff, Raferagh, and Magheraclonoe," he said.

"I am deeply grateful for the many kindnesses afforded to me by the people of these parishes. I have greatly enjoyed my time as parish priest and administrator and will continue to hold the parishes and their people in great affection. Although my time here has not been as long as I had hoped, I am blessed to have many happy memories to take with me."

FERMANAGH

A Mass to St Peregrine for all the sick is prayed each Tuesday evening in St Patrick's Church, Derrygonnelly, at 7.30pm: www.churchservices.tv/derrygonnelly. There is also a St Peregrine Novena Mass in Holy Cross Church, Lisnaskea on Tuesday nights at 7pm. www.churchservices.tv/lisnaskea

CLARE

Cloughleigh Oratory will continue to pray the Novena Prayer to St Anthony every Tuesday morning at the 9.30am Mass.

Festival of Christmas Trees in St Columba's Church, Bindon St. on December 13-15 and 21-23. Open Friday & Saturday from 11am-6pm; Sunday 1pm-6pm.

CORK

Medjugorje prayer meeting in the Presence of the Blessed Sacrament every Wednesday night at 8pm in Holy Trinity Church, Fr Matthew Quay, Cork. Prayers for healing first Wednesday of every month.

A Pro-Life Mass is held on the last Friday of every month (except December) at the Poor Clares Monastery, College Road, Cork at 7:30pm.

DERRY

Dungiven Parish: Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Monday to Friday, 8-12pm and 3-9pm.

St Maria Goretti Prayer Movement: Prayer for healing for victims of abuse and reparation for the Church. First Holy Hour of prayer in the Immaculate Conception Church, Trench Road Derry at 8.15pm led by Fr Sean O'Donnell, on the third Tuesday of every month.

DUBLIN

Our Lady of Knock prayer meetings take place on the last Thursday of every month in St Gabriel's Nursing Home, Glenayle Road, Raheny, Dublin 5, from 8-9pm.

Ewe Thina: We Walk God's Way. Join other young adults (20's & 30's) for reflective hikes around Dublin Area. Monthly event. Contact st.pauls@dublindiocese.ie

GALWAY

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament at St Croan's Church, Ballymoe, every Monday, 10-11am and Thursday, 8-10pm.

KERRY

Weekly Monday prayer meetings led by Ben Perkins, from 8-9.30pm in the Ardferret Retreat Centre.

Killorglin Parish is to welcome Conor Prendiville, Tenor, a native of Killorglin, and the Comhar Vocal Ensemble, to St James' Church, on Thursday, December 19, at 8.00pm where they will present O Magnum Mysterium.

KILDARE

Praying, reading and sharing the following Sunday's Gospel in Resurrexit, Killeague, every Wednesday from 8-9.30pm. See www.resurrexit.ie for details, or ring 087-6825407.

The 12th International Youth Conference takes place in Clongowes Wood College, Clane, from December 27-29, ending at 4pm. Speakers include Archbishop Jude Thaddeus Okolo, Waterford

and Lismore's Bishop Phonsie Cullinan and Bishop of the Syro-Malabar Church Stephen Chpirappanth.

KILKENNY

Traditional Latin Mass every Sunday at 5pm in St Patrick's Church, College Road, Kilkenny (opposite St Kieran's College).

LIMERICK

Eucharistic Adoration takes place each Friday in Raheen church following 10am Mass until 10pm, Crecora on Thursdays, following morning Mass until 12pm and from 6-10pm, and in Mungret Church on Wednesdays, from 10-12pm.

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Adult Formation Course Level 1 Part 1 offered at St Saviour's Dominican Church from February 28 - March 3, 2020. For more information email: limerick@op-tn.org.

LOUTH

Mass in reparation to the Immaculate Heart of Mary will take place at 10.30am every first Saturday of the month in St Malachy's Church, Anne Street, Dundalk. Organised by the Legion of Mary, Presidium of Our Lady of the Listening Heart. Spiritual Director Fr Bede McGregor OP.

A Centre Prayer Meeting is held at Mount Oliver (near Ballymascanlon, Dundalk) every Wednesday evening at 7.30pm. Contact 00353 863623361 from the North of Ireland or 0863623361 from the Republic of Ireland.

MAYO

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place in the Church of St Joseph and the Immaculate Conception Bohola every Wednesday from 10am until 10pm.

MEATH

Enfield Prayer Group meets every Monday afternoon at 3pm in the parish centre; on the 2nd Monday of each month, the group meets on Mondays at 7.30pm for its Lay Apostle meeting.

Adoration in St Patrick's Church, Stamullen, after 10am Mass every Thursday until 5pm, and in St Mary's Church, Julianstown, on Wednesdays from 9am and after 10am Mass.

Advent prayer vigil in Cluain Chiarain prayer centre Clonmacnois, on Friday, December 20 Mass at 9pm. Adoration and prayers follow until 2.10am. Enquiries Dave: 085-7746763.

ROSCOMMON

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament at St Bride's Church, Ballintubber, every Wednesday, 7.30-8.30pm.

WEXFORD

Taizé prayer services every first and third Friday at 8pm in Good Counsel College Chapel, New Ross.

WICKLOW

The Glencree Parish Group hold a special Mass for healing in St Kevin's Church, Glencree on the first Saturday of the month.

St Patrick's Prayer Group, Wicklow town, meet on Thursdays at 7.30pm in the De La Salle Pastoral Care Centre.

World Report

IN BRIEF

US priest faces charges of having images of child abuse

● A Catholic priest is facing charges of possessing images of child abuse following his arrest at a suburban Cleveland parish.

Fr Robert McWilliams, 39, was being held on \$100,000 bond in Cuyahoga County Jail, a day after he was taken into custody at St Joseph Parish in Strongsville. Authorities charged him with four counts of possessing images of child abuse and one count of possessing criminal tools.

The Diocese of Cleveland said in a December 5 statement that the priest was immediately placed on administrative leave.

Officials with the Ohio Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force arrested Fr McWilliams while serving a warrant to search the living and office spaces of the priest at the parish, where he served as parochial vicar, the diocese said.

German bishop relieved of duties after money charge

● A German bishop has been relieved of all his diocesan responsibilities after being charged by prosecutors with taking more than \$140,000 (€127,000) from an elderly woman's account.

Bishop Johannes Bëndgens "left all offices" in the Diocese of Aachen following charges by state authorities in Cologne.

Last Thursday, the diocese, where Bishop Bëndgens has served as auxiliary bishop since his consecration in 2006, announced that prosecutors had filed charges in the district court of Kerpen on December 2.

Msgr Andreas Frick, vicar general of the diocese, released a statement confirming that the bishop has been accused of taking the money from a 78 year-old woman alleged to be legally unable to act in her own interests. Frick also confirmed that Bëndgens had been removed from all his positions in the diocese.

UK pro-life group decries abortion expansion suggestion

● A pro-life group in the UK has decried a report from a London-based medical association calling for women to be able to access abortion pills without meeting in-person with a doctor.

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) released a report entitled 'Better For Women'. The report said that 60%

of women cannot get an abortion locally. It recommended a nationwide expansion of abortion drug accessibility through the use of telemedicine.

The Society for the Protection of the Unborn Children (SPUC) lamented the recommendation, arguing that it underestimates the potential risks of abortion drugs.

Indonesian security deployed to protect churches this Christmas

● Nearly 160,000 security personnel will be deployed to try to make Christmas and New Year celebrations in Indonesia safe, reported *ucanews.org*.

This is an increase from last year, when nearly 90,000 security personnel guarded about 50,000 churches across the country.

An official of the National Police Traffic Corps told journalists that police, military personnel and members of government agencies will guard churches and vital tourism sites during the celebrations.

"These are our targets which we need to focus on. We want to make sure that everything will run peacefully there," he said.

Catholics pay tribute to German theologian Fr Johann Metz

● German-speaking Catholics paid tribute to Fr Johann Baptist Metz, the veteran theologian who died on December 2 in Munster, Germany, at age 91.

"He was one of the great fundamental theologians of the post-council period, with keen sensitivity for the signs of the times," said Schonstatt Fr Joachim Schmiedl, chairman of Germany's assembly of Catholic theology faculties. "He launched a whole epoch of theologians and ecclesiastical leaders."

Parishes rally behind Fulton Sheen for beatification go-ahead

The December 3 announcement by the Diocese of Peoria, Illinois, that the Vatican has decided to postpone the beatification of Archbishop Fulton Sheen has led to a grassroots effort to have Masses said all over the world to pray his beatification will go forward.

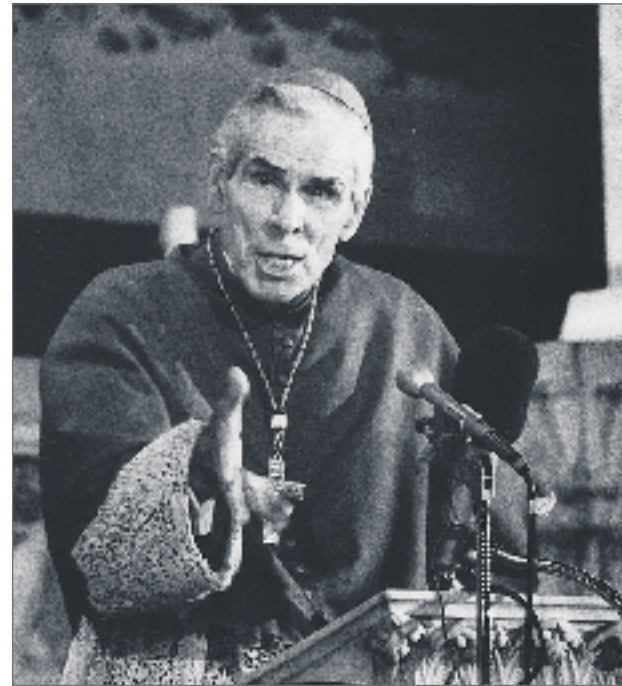
"We decided to respond in the most positive and prayerful way possible (to) the disappointing news that the Vatican has paused the beatification of Archbishop Sheen," Lo Anne Mayer, a New Jersey Catholic said. "The clergy who offer these Masses and the laity who attend the Masses will storm heaven for an end to this unfortunate situation."

Postponement

The beatification ceremony for Archbishop Sheen was planned for December 21 in Peoria at St Mary's Cathedral. The Peoria Diocese announced it was informed on December 2 of the postponement.

"Millions of people knew and loved Archbishop Sheen and remember his devotion to the good Lord and to the Holy Father," said Mayer, who is among those who knew the archbishop and greatly admire him.

"Anyone who witnessed



Mass offered by Archbishop Sheen could see and feel how deeply devoted he was to the Eucharist," she added. "What better way could we ask God's blessing than inviting people to join us at Mass for the intention of his canonisation?"

The reason for postponement of the Sheen beatification was given in a December 5 statement from the Dio-

ocese of Rochester, New York – which then-Bishop Sheen headed from October 1966 until his retirement in October 1969, when he received the title of archbishop.

The diocese has raised concerns over the prelate's role in priests' assignments and took those concerns to the Congregation for Saints' Causes. As a result, Vatican officials said they want to

give a further review of these records before the beatification goes forward.

"In our current climate, it is important for the faithful to know that there has never been, nor is there now, any allegation against (Archbishop) Sheen involving the abuse of a minor," the Peoria Diocese said in its statement.

Social media

The social media platform Catholic Connect and other Catholic online media outlets began spreading the word about the effort to have Masses said for Archbishop Sheen's cause midday on December 5 and within hours had nearly 300,000 'hits' from people wanting to pledge Masses in their dioceses.

Fulton John Sheen, a native of El Paso, Illinois, was ordained on September 20, 1919, at St Mary's Cathedral in Peoria. Perhaps he is best remembered for his popular television show, *Life Is Worth Living*.

He died in 1979 at age 84. His sainthood cause was officially opened in 2003. The Church declared his heroic virtues and he was given the title 'Venerable' in 2012 by Pope Benedict XVI.

Burkina Faso Christians facing 'unprecedented humanitarian crisis'

Following the death of more than a dozen Christians in a church shooting, a Burkina Faso bishop said Western governments have a responsibility to stop the flow of weapons to militants in the region. "The Western powers should stop those who are committing these crimes, instead of selling them the weapons that they are using to kill the Christians," Bishop Justin Kientega of Ouahigouya told Aid to the Church in Need.

At the beginning of the month, gunmen in the eastern Burkina Faso town of Hantoukoura attacked a

Protestant church service, killing 14 people, including several children.

"I condemn the barbaric attack against the Protestant Church of Hantoukoura in the department of Foutouri, which left 14 dead and several wounded. I offer my deepest condolences to the bereaved families and wish a speedy recovery to the wounded," President Roch Marc Kaboré tweeted late Sunday.

Bishop Kientega said the attack is part of an attempt by radical Islamists to "provoke a conflict between the religions in a country where Christians

and Muslims have always lived peaceably side by side".

Violence

Escalating violence among armed militant groups in Burkina Faso has drawn international concern, with the United Nations warning earlier this year of an "unprecedented humanitarian emergency" in the country. Nearly half a million people have been forced to flee their homes in the last five years.

More than 60 Christians have been murdered in the country this year, Aid to the Church in Need reports.

Mexico Masses cancelled amid violence fears

The Diocese of Cuernavaca has suspended evening Masses due to insecurity in the city and surrounding state of Morelos, a reflection of the violence raging in parts of Mexico and its impact on the Catholic Church.

Bishop Ramon Castro Cas-

tro of Cuernavaca said church services would not be celebrated after dark because people in the region just south of Mexico City did not want to venture out of their homes after dark.

Situations

"These are situations where people are scared. It's a fear

that paralyzes them," Bishop Castro told local media.

"There are many people I know who have nothing to do with organised crime, but find themselves affected by this violence and have changed their lifestyle," he said, adding church attendance is the southern and eastern parts of

Morelos – a small state that borders the national capital – has dropped due to insecurity.

Mexico has had high rates of violence and homicide over the past 13 years as the country launched a crackdown on drug cartels and organised crime.



Edited by Colm Fitzpatrick
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Chile balances on the edge



Demonstrators carry metal barricades near a riot police vehicle with a water cannon during a protest against the Chilean government in Santiago. Photo: CNS

Australian government listens to calls to amend religious legislation

The Australian government has decided to revisit its religious discrimination legislation after key religious groups – including the Archdiocese of Sydney – said they would withdraw their support.

“We made a commitment to Australians to address this issue at the last election, and we are keeping faith with that commitment in a calm and considered process. We’re about listening and getting this right,” Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said in early December.

After releasing an initial draft, the government received 6,000 submissions and is now in the process of writing an amended version of the legislation, which included a new bill and amendments to two existing laws.

Morrison said a second and final “exposure draft” would be released

before the end of the year and would “take account of issues raised and provide the opportunity to respond to the revisions made and fine-tune the bill before it is introduced next year”. With the long Australian summer break now underway, observers said this is unlikely to be until at least March.

Reversal

The government reversal came days after a group of religious bodies sent Morrison a letter that stated: “We take the view that it would be better to have no Religious Discrimination Act rather than a flawed one.” It said that, in their current form, the new laws would “diminish the religious freedom of faith groups in Australia”.

Besides the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney, signatories represented the Anglican Diocese of Sydney, the

executive council of Australian Jewry, the Australian National Imams Council and the Greek Orthodox Church in Australia.

Australian Attorney General Christian Porter has accepted one of the key changes to the original draft, lobbied for by the Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference: giving religious schools and aged care providers the right to hire and fire employees according to the tenets of their faith.

Morrison’s government only holds a majority of one seat in Australia’s House of Representatives and must rely on the support of three votes from minor parties in the Australian Senate; all legislation must pass both houses to become law.

The legislation has been controversial, particularly among human rights and LGBTQ groups.

Jesuit head clarifies controversial devil remarks

The superior general of the Jesuit order said that the devil is real, after making headlines in August by stating that Satan is a symbol, not a person.

Satan “is the one who stands between God’s plan and his work of salvation accomplished in Christ, because he has made this irreversible and free decision, and he wants to drag others to

reject the merciful God, who prefers to give his life to save instead of to condemn”, Fr Arturo Sosa, SJ, said last week in a meeting with journalists, according to a report from *Vida Nueva*.

Fr Sosa added that “the power of the devil...obviously still exists as a force that tries to ruin our efforts”.

His comments came amid

remarks he offered on the six Jesuits and two employees killed in November 1989 by Salvadoran soldiers at the University of Central America in San Salvador.

On August 21, Fr Sosa told an Italian magazine that the devil “exists as the personification of evil in different structures, but not in persons, because is not a person, is a

way of acting evil. He is not a person like a human person. It is a way of evil to be present in human life”.

The Catechism of the Catholic teaches that “Satan was at first a good angel, made by God: ‘The devil and the other demons were indeed created naturally good by God, but they became evil by their own doing”.

Vatican roundup

Remember the true meaning of Christmas – Pope

● Ahead of the Vatican Christmas tree lighting, Pope Francis expressed hope that the nativity scene in St Peter’s Square will serve as a reminder of what Christmas is truly about.

A nativity scene “is a genuine way of communicating the Gospel, in a world that sometimes seems to be afraid of remembering what Christmas really is, and blots out the Christian signs to only keep those of a banal, commercial imagination”, Pope Francis told an Italian delegation at the Vatican for the Christmas tree lighting ceremony.

This year’s Vatican Christmas tree comes from the northern Italian region of Vicenza, which was greatly damaged by storms in October 2018. The red spruce in St Peter’s Square is a little over 85 feet tall.

The Christmas tree lighting ceremony also revealed a life-size nativity scene carved out of wood with tree trunks from Vicenza placed in the background in memory of the storm.

“The wooden trunks, coming from the areas hit by the storms, which form the backdrop to the landscape, underline the precariousness in which the Holy Family was found on that night in Bethlehem,” Pope Francis said.

Vatican calls on UN to create ‘human fraternity’ day

● Members of a Vatican special committee met with the Secretary General of the United Nations on last week to deliver a petition on human fraternity co-authored by Pope Francis and the Sunni Islamic Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmed Al-Tayeb.

The committee was formed in August, under the auspices of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. The message from the two religious leaders requested that February 4 be declared the ‘World

Day of Human Fraternity’, and asked the United Nations, along with the Holy See and the Al-Azhar Mosque, to create a ‘World Summit On Human Fraternity’.

According to a statement released by the Pontifical Council on December 5, Dr Antonio Guterres, the secretary general of the United Nations, “expressed his appreciation and availability for the initiative”, and said that he believed it was important to work “at the service of all humanity”.

Pontiff ‘scandalised’ by anti-migrant rhetoric in Europe

● Pope Francis told Jesuits in Thailand he was “scandalised” by some of the anti-migrant rhetoric he hears in Europe, and he is convinced people are being manipulated into thinking the only way they can preserve their lifestyles is by building walls.

“The phenomenon of migration is compounded by war, hunger and a ‘defensive mindset’, which makes us think only from a state of fear and that by reinforcing borders we can defend ourselves,” Pope Francis said on November 22 when he met 33 Jesuits in Thailand.

The Jesuit magazine, *La Civiltà Cattolica*, published a transcript of the Pope’s responses to questions the Jesuits asked Francis during the meeting in Tha Kham, Thailand.

Pope Francis noted that the Bible and millennia of Christian teaching have encouraged welcoming the stranger. “But there are also many little customs and traditions of hospitality, such as leaving an empty chair on a festive day in case an unexpected guest arrives.”

“If the Church is a field hospital,” he told the Jesuits, “this is one of the camps where most of the injured are found.”

However, recalling the visit to Thailand in 1981 of Jesuit Fr Pedro Arrupe, then superior general of the order, Pope Francis said the work with refugees and any other social apostolate must be supported by prayer.

Letter from Rome



The cover of the Spanish edition of Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si'*, on Care for Our Common Home. Photos: CNS



Elise Harris

A little more than four years after Pope Francis published one of his most provocative documents, not to mention perhaps his most political, in the form of his eco-encyclical *Laudato Si'*, the Pontiff appears increasingly disappointed in the way the environmental manifesto been received.

In two separate messages published this week, Francis appeared to suggest that the global resolve to combat climate change and other ecological threats his encyclical hoped to produce is failing, due a lack of commitment from the parties involved.

Message

In a December 4 message to the UN Climate Change Conference summit in Madrid, he said: "We must seriously ask ourselves if there is the political will to allocate with honesty, responsibility and courage, more human, financial and technological resources to mitigate the negative effects of climate change."

Running from December 2-13, the summit, known as COP25, was intended to be a venue in which the UN identifies concrete strategies for the implementation of the so-called Paris Agreement of 2015, which provided a framework of climate action adopted in hopes of reducing

Pope vents frustration over lack of political will to implement *Laudato Si'*



Pope Francis meets with Jesuits in Tha Kham, Thailand during his apostolic trip to the Asian country. In his customary question-and-answer session with his Jesuit confreres, Pope Francis spoke about resistance to addressing climate change and about hostility to migrants and refugees.

greenhouse gas emissions enough to keep global temperatures from rising to a perilous degree.

Yet according to studies conducted by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, things are getting worse. Global temperatures and emissions, the study found, are still rising, making it difficult – if not impossible – to fulfil the goals of the Paris Agreement by 2020.

Similarly, in a conversation with Jesuits from East Asia during his recent visit to Thailand, Francis said the COP25 meeting was "truly a step forward" in the battle for environmental protection.

However, he lamented that conflicts bubbled up after *Laudato Si'* and the Paris agreement, saying "compromises" were made between "what was assumed and the purse, the economic interests of some countries".

He pointedly added that "some countries have withdrawn" from the agreement.

“Today it is the young people who are able to understand with their heart that the survival of the planet is a fundamental issue. They understand *Laudato Si'* with their hearts”

Though he did not name names, it's hard not to read the comment as a reference to US President Donald Trump, who is currently the only global leader who has announced plans to withdraw from the Paris Climate accord.

Trump initially announced the withdrawal during his first year in office. Technically, however, a country is unable to begin a withdrawal until three years after the agreement went into effect, which for the US was November 4, 2019. It is expected that it could take more than a year for the US to completely withdraw, and that the process might not be complete until after the 2020 US presidential elections.

Should Trump fail to be re-elected and his successor wish to rejoin the agreement, an application would be made and the US, or any other country that might withdraw, could be back in 30 days.

A highly anticipated document at the time of its publication, *Laudato Si'* became a defining moment for Francis, who in the text argued that climate change was an almost entirely manmade phenomenon; called for the elimination of fossil fuels; and pushed for the adoption of an "integral ecology" which defended respect for human dignity as well as creation.

“Global temperatures and emissions, the study found, are still rising...”

In the aftermath, there was a fair amount of blowback from some ecclesial circles, with some critics arguing that not only was the science behind the encyclical shoddy, but many collaborators in the document supported positions at odds with Church teaching,

such as support for population control and abortion.

However, that did not dissuade global political leaders from welcoming and supporting the pope's environmental efforts.

Though the Vatican has played a larger-than-usual role on the climate issue – retired Pope Benedict XVI himself was a major advocate for environmental protection – it has taken on a new push under Francis, who has been an active player in getting his climate agenda through via major international platforms, such as the United Nations.

Laudato Si' itself was largely published to influence global discussion on the climate issue, as it came out just before the COP climate summit in Paris. Since then, climate change has been a major talking point between Francis and most world leaders he meets.

Not only does he give a copy of the encyclical to every official or head of state he meets, but the climate issue frequently pops up in routine papal speeches.

In 2016, American actor Leonardo Di Caprio, a self-proclaimed environmental advocate, met with the Pope for a private audience at the

Vatican to discuss the issue.

In remarks to the 48 Jesuits present for the conversation in Thailand, the text of which was published on the Italian Jesuit-run newspaper *La Civiltà Cattolica*, Francis said that people are generally "much more aware" of the need to care for the environment, especially among youth.

Though he didn't name her specifically, he alluded to climate rallies led by Swedish teen Greta Thunberg and the student-led strikes she launched, saying the recent climate movements created by young people "are the road on which to walk" going forward.

"Today it is the young people who are able to understand with their heart that the survival of the planet is a fundamental issue. They understand *Laudato Si'* with their hearts," he said, adding that "we must continue to work so that the fundamental message that *Laudato Si'* intends to communicate is shared worldwide."

Elise Harris is Senior Correspondent of Cruxnow.com

Catholic theology loses a giant with a sense of humour in Metz



John L. Allen Jr

Catholic theology lost a giant last Monday with the death of German Fr Johann Baptist Metz, a disciple of famed Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner and the father of what was known as “new political theology”, at the age of 91.

I first encountered Metz more years ago than I care to remember, when I was a cub reporter for the National Catholic Reporter sitting in a newsroom in Kansas City, Missouri. There was a lot of Catholic news out of the German-speaking realm at the time (as there is today, of course), and because I'd picked up a smattering of German in grad school, by default I ended up keeping an eye on things.

In 1998, I covered a story centring on Metz, who was celebrating his 70th birthday. A number of friends in the theological guild had organised a symposium in Ahaus in Metz's honour, and to the surprise of many, a star guest had agreed to be the featured speaker: then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, at the time the Vatican's doctrinal czar and a sort of love-to-hate figure for many in Metz's circles.

Ratzinger's appearance raised eyebrows, and not only because he and Metz frequently had crossed theological swords over the years. (Among other things, Ratzinger saw the roots of Latin American liberation theology, and the distortions of it he faced during the 1980s, in Metz's work. As a point of fact, the Brazilian Franciscan Leonardo Boff, perhaps the most pugnacious of the liberation theologians, studied under Metz.)

Permission

The *animus* between Ratzinger and Metz was also personal. In 1979, when Ratzinger was the Archbishop of Munich, he denied Metz permission to accept a teaching appointment at the local university.

Later, Metz was among the signatories to a statement criticising Vatican attempts under Ratzinger to erode academic freedom, and Metz also signed the famed “Cologne statement” in 1989. Complaining that the collegiality called for by Vatican II was “being smothered by a new Roman centralism”, and predicting: “If the Pope undertakes things that are not part of his role, then he cannot demand obedience in the name



Fr Johann Baptist Metz.

of Catholicism. He must expect dissent.”

Thus when news broke that Ratzinger would go home to honour his longtime antagonist, it was generally applauded as a moving gesture of letting bygones be bygones. That sentiment, however, wasn't universal, including Swiss Fr Hans Küng, the enfant terrible of liberal German-speaking theology, who blasted Metz for agreeing to appear with Ratzinger without demanding reforms, including the nature and function of the Vatican's doctrinal office.

Küng's volubility on the subject had the effect of politicising what was supposed to be a happy

birthday celebration – which some saw as distasteful, but others as ironically fitting for the father of political theology.

As all this was unfolding, I reached Metz by phone at his home in Münster, where he had recently retired from the theology faculty after a 30-year career. I explained I was a reporter from the US, and, after modestly expressing surprise I was even interested in him, Metz agreed to discuss the situation.

Maybe it was just my good luck to catch him at a stage in life when he was beyond caring about the diplomatic implications of whatever he said, but Metz was remarkably candid. He confirmed in no uncertain terms, for example,

“Maybe it was just my good luck to catch him at a stage in life when he was beyond caring about the diplomatic implications of whatever he said, but Metz was remarkably candid. He confirmed...that he believed the way the Vatican's doctrinal office was functioning under Ratzinger was out of keeping with the vision of the Second Vatican Council”

that he believed the way the Vatican's doctrinal office was functioning under Ratzinger was out of keeping with the vision of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), and said he planned to bring that up with his longtime colleague when they were together.

“Anyone who ever spoke with Metz understood that for him, Faith came first and politics second, however indispensable he may have regarded politics to be”

Yet when I asked if he therefore agreed with Küng that he shouldn't have agreed to share a stage with Ratzinger, Metz was equally firm that he didn't.

Here was the money quote: “You know, sometimes Hans behaves like another magisterium,” Metz sighed. “To be honest, one is more than enough for me!”

In all my subsequent experiences with the man, there was always at least one fall-down-laughing quip like that, indicative of Metz's devastating

sense of humour. He had a little bit of the typical arrogance of the German Doktorvater, but it was always leavened by a capacity to laugh at himself, his colleagues, and the general situation in which he and the Church found themselves.

Born in Auerbach in 1928, Metz studied in Bamberg, Innsbruck (where he met Rahner) and Munich, and was ordained in 1954. He taught at Münster from 1963 to 1993, and after Vatican II he also acted as an adviser to what was then the Vatican's “Secretariat for Non-Believers”, which later evolved into the Pontifical Council for Culture.

Metz was also among the co-founders of the theological journal *Concilium*, which became the leading forum for the liberal wing of the reform camp at Vatican II in the years after the council. He was a key adviser to the West German bishops during their synod from 1971-75, which ended with a statement titled “To Our Hope” that carried Metz's signature.

Like Rahner, Metz regarded *Gaudium et Spes* as the summit of Vatican II's teaching: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.” He applied that thrust in the realm of politics, insisting that a Christianity not politically engaged on the side of the poor was inauthentic.

Ideas

It perhaps wasn't his fault that he was developing those ideas in the context of 1968, the Cold War, and the emergence of a modern politics of identity, in which it was far too easy for the “option for the poor” to be read in an ideological key. One could also argue that Metz, again like his mentor Rahner, was overly optimistic about what politics could achieve, insufficiently cognisant of sin – Hans Urs von Balthasar once actually accused Rahner of negating the necessity of the crucifixion.

Yet anyone who ever spoke with Metz understood that for him, Faith came first and politics second, however indispensable he may have regarded politics to be. He also never took himself or his work excessively seriously, trusting that over time things would sort themselves out as they should.

That's probably about the best epitaph one can provide for a theologian's life, so requiescat in pace, Johann Baptist Metz, and know that you will be missed.

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

Letters

Letter of the week

Murphy's law works well for so very few

Dear Editor, As a stranger visiting Cork earlier last week, I was dazzled by the spectacular glow of sparkling Christmas lights, both on the skyline and in the city centre itself.

On a bitterly cold crisp Tuesday night, members of a camera club were out in force, all muffled up behind tripods, learning the tricky skills of night time photography.

A few hundred metres away, on either side of St Patrick's Street, volunteers were also out in force, all muffled up and braving the bitter cold, this time behind 'soup kitchen' tables, focused on feeding the bodies and souls of hordes of homeless people.

The following night small teams of young people were making their

way through narrow streets in Cork, laden down with thermal flasks and foil-wrapped food, reaching out to the homeless.

On Thursday morning, a group of primary school children were carol singing and collecting money for FOCUS.

Close by, post-primary students were collecting for the ISPC. The Irish Cancer Society were out too, hoping for a share in the generosity of shoppers. Is this generosity of spirit unique to Ireland? I certainly have never before witnessed this level of charity work on streets, anywhere else in the world. Or is this, rather, a stark unedited picture of the ineptitude of our elected 'representatives' and the social justice issues which they seem

to be totally incapable of solving?

This, all in the very city where Fine Gael TD Dara Murphy resigned on Tuesday night from his €96,189 salary (plus €51,600 expenses) for 'work' as a back bench TD.

He is to receive an actuarially calculated settlement of €500k, of taxpayers money, while he moves on to a €150k salary per annum in The European Commission.

If only our elected 'representatives', like Mr Murphy, on fat salaries plus expenses would dare to look through the 'Christianity' lens, and focus on what truly matters in this country.

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

Your columnist missed my main point

Dear Editor, I refer to a statement by Mary Kenny in her article 'A new, non-clerical Church can't be just a happy, hippy democracy' (IC 14/12/19) in which she misquoted what I said in my letter which was published in *The Irish Catholic* on November 7. She stated: "Following the controversy about yoga, after Bishop Cullinan said it was "not of

Christian origin" (since it is essentially Buddhist), Eileen Gaughan, from Sligo notes in our letters page that yoga and Christian Meditation can work together."

I did not say that yoga and Christian meditation can work together. On the contrary, the main point of my letter was that "yoga exercises and a quiet still type of meditation often go

together".

Of this meditation I said it "repeatedly focuses on the breath, as in mindfulness, emanating from Buddhism, or on the sound of a sacred word as in Hinduism, to aid the closing down of mental activity".

I quoted St Teresa of Avila, who taught that Christians should not take it upon themselves to engage in

ways that close down mental activity in prayer, saying: "How is a person forgetful of self if he is so careful not to stir or even to allow his intellect or desires to to be stirred to a longing for the greater glory of God" (Interior Castle, IV 3:6).

*Yours etc.,
Eileen Gaughan,
Strandhill,
Co. Sligo.*

Aontú worthy of our support

Dear Editor, I was interested to read your analysis of the recent Dáil by-elections (IC 05/12/19). As you rightly said the success of the Peadar Tóibín and his new political party Aontú is largely being ignored by the media.

Aontú are the voice of those who want values and principles and accountability from our Government, sadly lacking these days.

We need to support Peadar Tóibín and his party in every way possible before it's too late. We may not always have a political party which represents the starved voice of one third of the population.

Let's get behind Peadar Tóibín and Aontú!

*Yours etc.,
Anne McGrath,
Rathfarnham,
Dublin 16.*



Couldn't families and schools work together on preparation?

Dear Editor, I'm in two minds about whether to remove sacramental preparation from schools as I really think both sides of the argument are very strong. On the one hand, spiritual formation in schools isn't working effectively.

Parents often show no interest in the religious aspects of the event and simply use the school

to tick a box. After their Confirmation, most children won't return to Mass. On the other hand, it's the sheer lack of interest from unwilling parents that should be the motivator for schools to prepare children. If the parents aren't going to do it, then who will?

I think the demographic who are going to suffer the most

from this potential change are the hundreds of children who will never be exposed to the grace of the sacraments. Perhaps a solution where both institutions – the family and the school – play a role in formation is the way forward.

*Yours etc.,
David Gallagher,
Newry,
Co. Down.*

The wonder of the nativity

Dear Editor, I'm always taken aback when I read the nativity story at this time of year. How incredible is it to think that the creator of the world became human and cried out for his mother. It's a strange paradox acting as a reminder that the God we believe in is not far away but intimately knows, understands and loves us.

*Yours etc.,
Margaret McGrath,
Limerick City, Co. Limerick.*

facebook community

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

Take Sacraments out of schools, Dublin priests advise

At a time when we have fewer priests, no vocations, poor Mass attendance, we're going to get the parishes to do what Catholic schools should do? With no money or people to deliver it? – **Christopher McCamley**

What's even the point of having Catholic schools then if they're not assisting the spiritual development of children? The Council of Priests are an embarrassment. – **Tom Jones**

Welcome move. Needs to happen all over Ireland. – **Robert Nugent**

'Catholic' schools in Ireland are not run by religious anymore. They are practically secular. No Mass, little daily prayer. No Confessions at all in practically all of them. Archbishop is right to remove preparation of the Sacraments from schools. It should be in the parish over a year. All the family should be involved and all the family go to weekly Mass. – **Catholic Kingdom**

The Archbishop is getting things wrong. What he should be doing is making Catholic schools Catholic again and not abandon them to the state. – **Peter Killeen**

What is more central to our religious practise than the Sacraments? Or a bigger source of grace? – **Elizabeth Melillo**

Rightly so – should have been out of the schools long ago. Parishes should have someone to do the work in preparation with the priest or priests of the parish. – **Thomas Keane**

Sacraments are handled by the Church here in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Parents have to attend sessions the same time as the kids do at the church. Nothing in the schools. – **Jennifer Reid**

It's very sad to think this will happen. I didn't think it would, not in my lifetime anyway. But I can see where the thought has gone into such a decision. The lack of respect towards the Eucharist by some children is truly heartbreaking and they learn that from parents. They use these Sacraments for "a day out". I'm afraid to say they just couldn't care less. Some Confirmation candidates wouldn't have seen a church since Holy Communion. – **Eadaoin Delaney**

Bring in Sunday schools, like the Protestants. Might bring the parents back to Mass. – **Thomas Carty**

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

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



▲ **HONG KONG:** Riot police officers charge toward anti-government protesters during the the 'Lest We Forget' rally.
◀ **VATICAN:** The Christmas tree sparkles after a lighting ceremony in St Peter's Square. Photos: CNS



MEXICO: A bullet hole in the town hall of Villa Union, is seen near a sculpture of Jesus. To the south, the Diocese of Cuernavaca has suspended evening Masses due to insecurity in the city and surrounding state of Morelos.



SOMALIA: A girl jumps over a road washed away by flooding after heavy rains in Mogadishu. Caritas, the relief arm of the Catholic Church, has delivered food aid to Muslims in Somalia, who are currently facing floods and living in a fragile peace environment due a prolonged Islamist insurgency.



USA: A New York City police officer is seen standing next to a 32-foot balsam fir following the Diocese of Brooklyn's annual Christmas tree-lighting ceremony. The tree is decorated with 17,000 red lights and 2,500 red bows to draw attention to the ongoing persecution and martyrdom of Christians around the world.



PHILIPPINES: A displaced family gathers at an evacuation centre in Manila in the aftermath of Typhoon Kammuri.



We're all familiar, I suspect, with the difference between justice and charity. Charity is giving away some of your time, energy, resources, and person so as to help to others in need. And that's an admirable virtue, the sign of a good heart. Justice, on the other hand, is less about directly giving something away than it is about looking to change the conditions and systems that put others in need.

No doubt, we're all familiar with the little parable used to illustrate this difference. In brief, it goes like this: a town situated on the edge of a river finds itself confronted every day by a number of bodies floating downstream in the river. The townsfolk tend to the bodies, minister to those who are alive and respectfully bury the dead.

They do this for years, with good hearts; but, through all those years, none of them ever journey up the river to look at why there are wounded and dead bodies floating in the river each day. The townsfolk are good-hearted and charitable, but that in itself isn't changing the situation that's bringing them wounded and dead bodies daily.

Complicit

As well, the charitable townsfolk aren't even remotely aware that their manner of life, seemingly completely unconnected to the wounded and dead bodies they're daily attending to, might in fact be contributing to the cause of those lost lives and dreams and that, good-hearted as they are, they may be complicit in something that's harming others, even while it's affording them the resources and wherewithal to be charitable.

The lesson here is not that we shouldn't be charitable

Justice and charity – revisited



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

and good-hearted. One-to-one charity, as the parable of the Good Samaritan makes clear, is what's demanded of us, both as humans and as Christians.

The lesson is that being good-hearted alone is not enough. It's a start, a good one, but more is asked of us. I suspect most of us already know this, but perhaps we're less conscious of something less obvious, namely, that our very generosity itself might be contributing to a blindness that lets us support (and vote for) the exact political, economic, and cultural systems which are to blame for the wounded and dead bodies we're attending to in our charity.

“When we live with unjust systems ...we can feel good about ourselves because our charity is helping those who have been violated”

That our own good works of charity can help blind us to our complicity in injustice is something highlighted in a recent book by Anand Giridharada, *Winners Take All: The Elite Charade of Changing the World*. In a rather unsettling assertion, Giridharada submits that generosity can be, and

often is, a substitute for and a means of avoiding the necessity of a more just and equitable system and fairer distribution of power.

“The lesson is that being good-hearted alone is not enough. It's a start, a good one, but more is asked of us. I suspect most of us already know this”

Charity, wonderful as it is, is not yet justice; a good heart, wonderful as it is, is not yet good policy that serves the less-privileged; and philanthropy, wonderful as it is, can have us confuse the charity we're doing with the justice that's asked of us.

For this reason among others, Giridharada submits that public problems should not be privatised and relegated to the domain of private charity, as is now so often the case.

Christiana Zenner, reviewing his book in America, sums this up by saying: “Beware of the temptation to idealise a market or an individual who promises salvation without attending to the least among us and without addressing the conditions that facilitated the domination in the first place.”

Then she adds: when

we see the direct violation of another person, a direct injustice, we're taken aback, but the unfairness and the perpetrator are obvious. We see that something is wrong and we can see who is to blame. But, and this is her real point, when we live with unjust systems that violate others we can be blind to our own complicity because we can feel good about ourselves because our charity is helping those who have been violated.

For example: imagine I'm a good-hearted man who feels a genuine sympathy for the homeless in my city. As the Christmas season approaches I make a large donation of food and money to the local food bank.

Further still, on Christmas day itself, before I sit down to eat my own Christmas dinner, I spend several hours helping serve a Christmas meal to the homeless. My charity here is admirable, and I cannot help but feel good about what I just did. And what I did was a good thing! But then, when I support a politician or a policy that privileges the rich and is unfair to the poor, I can more easily rationalise that I'm doing my just part and that I have a heart for the poor, even as my vote itself helps ensure that there will always be homeless people to feed on Christmas day.

Few virtues are as important as charity. It's the sign of a good heart. But the deserved good feeling we get when we give of ourselves in charity shouldn't be confused with the false feeling that we're really doing our part.

QUESTIONS of faith

Each week Colm Fitzpatrick looks at interesting and sometimes controversial questions people have about Catholicism...



Do Catholics worship statues?

It's commonly asserted – namely from those in the Protestant tradition – that Catholics commit the sin of idolatry by worshipping statues. It's an intriguing claim, namely because the Bible couldn't be more explicit about the worship of graven images.

“You shall not make for yourself a graven image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: you shall not bow down to them or serve them” (Ex. 20:4–5).

It's true that churches across the world are replete with statues and many people pray and bow down before them. So, how is a Catholic to defend this practice?

Reminder

The key is to recognise that this claim is based upon ignorance – the Church explicitly forbids the worship of false idols, which includes statues. Faithful see statues not as objects of worship, but as sources of inspiration and as reminders to pray to God. Statues, like other material items, have no intrinsic power, but merely move us to contemplate God.

Indeed, in the Bible, God frequently commands the making of statues as a means to deepen one's Faith.

“And you shall make two cherubim of gold, of hammered work shall you make them, on the two ends of the mercy seat. Make one cherub on the one end, and one cherub on the other end; of one piece of the mercy seat shall you make the cherubim on its two ends” (Ex 25:18).

The explicit biblical command to construct statues indicates that there is no theological reason to condemn their use as a means to develop one's

relationship with God.

When it comes to statues, problems only begin to arise when people replace them in place of God. This is evident in Scripture when the Israelites direct their worship towards the golden calf at the bottom of Mount Sinai (Ex. 32). As a result of their idolatry, they received the wrath of God's judgement.

While Protestants and Catholics could agree that constructing religious statues has biblical precedent, the issue of bowing down before statues of kissing them still remains – isn't this a form of idolatry?

“Statues, like other material items, have no intrinsic power, but merely move us to contemplate God”

Catholics hold that such acts are in no way akin to worship; kneeling down while holding a Bible doesn't mean that one is worshipping it. In reality all of these religious images are used as theological devices to improve one's spiritual life.

Faithful do not pray to statues, but use them as aesthetic tools to better pray to God. Any sacred art can help us venerate the saints and motivate us to ask for intercessory prayers.

In conclusion, the constructing of statues or religious art is mandated in the Bible – and while Catholics don't pray to these material items, they can be used to remind us of a saint of the past, and move us to pray.

Got a question or comment? Email colm@irishcatholic.ie

Family & Lifestyle

The Irish Catholic, December 12, 2019

Personal Profile

Telling an old story
in a new way

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A drama-free Christmas

Movies and adverts tend to idealise Christmas day; it's thought that families come together to exchange hugs, presents and kind words in a charitable environment of love and understanding. The only tiffle there might be is over who gets more turkey on their Christmas dinner.

However, this image of a family get together during the festive period isn't based in reality. Family units are complex and while it would be nice for siblings and extended relatives to get along all the time, this is rarely the case.

The Church is acutely aware that families face immense struggles. In 2015, Pope Francis quipped: "Families



Arguments tend to arise at Christmas so try avoid them before they ruin the day, writes Colm Fitzpatrick

have difficulties. Families – we quarrel, sometimes plates can fly, and children bring headaches. I won't speak about mother-in-laws."

Christmas time is fertile ground for unresolved tensions to flare up given that it's probably the only time the whole family has been together during the year. A day that's

supposed to celebrate kindness and generosity can be reduced down to hours of endless bickering, and in more serious cases verbal or physical abuse.

Indeed, a YouGov survey of the British population last year revealed that one in three people expect to have an argument during Christmas. The most popular reasons for

a family dispute in ascending order are:

- Long-standing family tensions
- Sibling rivalries
- Money
- Games/family activities
- Drinking too much
- The cooking
- Politics generally
- Brexit
- Someone's future plans
- Other
- The food itself

Given that there are so many reasons to argue over the Christmas period, it might feel futile to make an attempt at preventing it. Although giving up and accepting the fate of the day is tempting, there are ways to avoid family disputes ruining the special day.

Bite your tongue

One of the most effective ways to have a peaceful Christmas is to speak to family members separately before they all come together on the day. If you have a sneaking suspicion that a particularly tense issue may be raised around the dinner table, inform those who would be responsible that talking about it is off the cards. If they're coming to your home, remind them that's your house and you'd like them to respect your wishes. During the conversation, emphasise that you're not taking sides but simply want to steer far away from a discussion that could potentially create division. If you speak in an understanding but firm tone,

» Continued on Page 33

Family News

AND EVENTS

A LULLYMORE CHRISTMAS

With the kids off school for the Christmas holidays, why not treat them to a magical trip to Lullymore Heritage and Discovery Park to celebrate the festivities?

The Kildare event which runs until December 23 includes a memorable visit from Santa and a special gift from the busy elves in their workshop. You can welcome him and his merry friends as they arrive on the Lullymore Christmas Express Road Train at 10am on weekends and 2pm from Wednesday to Friday. The Lullymore Christmas Express will also take you on a trip through ancient woodlands, glassy lakes and a beautiful peatland landscape.

Animals such as donkeys, goats and miniature horses will be in paddocks beside the Indoor Centre. This is the perfect family trip this Christmas and no booking is required, with half-price adult admissions on weekdays.

HEARTY TEETH

Brushing your teeth daily helps to maintain a healthy mouth and gums – but it turns out good oral hygiene is also beneficial for the heart.

A new study that appears in the European Journal of Preventive Cardiology has suggested that cleaning your chompers regularly may reduce the chances of contracting heart failure and atrial fibrillation (A-fib) – a type of arrhythmia.

Dr Tae-Jin Song of Ewha Womans University in Seoul and team examined atrial fibrillation's associations with both heart failure and poor oral hygiene, using data from 161,286 people.

The research revealed that brushing your teeth three times or more a day was linked with a 10% lower chance of developing A-fib and a 12% lower risk of heart failure. "Improved oral hygiene care was associated with decreased risk of atrial fibrillation and heart failure. Healthier oral hygiene by frequent toothbrushing and professional dental cleanings may reduce risk of atrial fibrillation and heart failure," the authors conclude.

COVERING ALL BASES

Driving to work in the dark, early morning hours of winter is a difficult enough task, but it can become even more daunting when you have to scrape snow or frost of your windscreen before heading off. Not only does it waste precious time, but will leave you shivering. One



way to stop this problem is by getting your hands on a magnetic windscreen cover. The cover quickly attaches to the car with padded magnets and protects your front window from the freezing winter elements. There are also inbuilt flaps to keep it secure from theft and it can be easily removed and stored in seconds. This is a practical solution to a problem that millions of people face everyday and should make your morning commute hassle free. They cost under €20 and would be the perfect gift for the early worker.

Tackling faith questions at Christmas



As we celebrate the feast of Christmas, it's time for this column to tackle the question of faith.

This is a philosophy column, and so I'm not going to get into the precise nature of supernatural faith, or anything else that specifically depends on God's revelation to us. But there's a widespread idea out there that there's something unreasonable or counter to reason about faith: and it's not just an idea that you hear from atheists. I've heard believers say – almost proudly – things like 'you can't be rational about everything.' There's this idea that faith is incomprehensible and beyond argument, and that whether or not to accept it is almost arbitrary.

“Supernatural faith goes beyond reason, in that through it we learn things that we could never have figured out through reason alone.”

Now, as is usually the case with mistakes, there's a version of this idea that has truth in it. Supernatural faith goes beyond reason, in that through it we learn things that we could never have figured out through reason alone. But that doesn't mean that an act of faith can't also be a reasonable, rational act.

As I've said, I'm not going to demonstrate this with a deep dive into the precise nature of faith. I'm going to keep my



Everyday philosophy Ben Conroy

ambitions modest, and talk a bit about something that faith is like, one way in which it can be useful to think about it. I'm going to make a comparison between faith and trust.

The Anglican philosopher of religion Basil Mitchell once made a beautiful case for this comparison. He argued that professing Christian faith was like being a soldier involved in a resistance against an oppressive regime, who one day meets a mysterious stranger. That stranger claims to be the undercover leader of the resistance, and makes a deep, lasting impression on the soldier. The stranger says that he has a plan to ensure the ultimate victory of the resistance, but that the workings of this plan won't always be obvious: sometimes he will appear to be working for the evil regime, and undermining the goals of the resistance. But he promises that however things appear, he will always be on the soldier's side. The soldier decides to trust the stranger.

Sure enough, the stranger's actions are ambiguous. Sometimes he appears and leads the resistance to decisive victories, but at other times he seems to be handing over conspirators to the police.

What is the soldier to make of this? What would prove the soldier's trust rationally untenable? Mitchell says that there are no hard and fast rules.

No one action of the stranger's can decisively count against continuing to trust him: after all, he has told us that his ways are mysterious. The soldier cannot put him to the test. But this isn't a case of irrational unfalsifiability either. Perhaps eventually the soldier's trust in the stranger will fail and he will lose his faith. But if he does so it



will be because he has rejected the whole story that the stranger tells in favour of some other narrative that explains his actions (that the stranger is actually an agent of the enemy or just a liar).

There is no automatic test of falsification, no set of rules that he can draw up in advance

which will determine whether the stranger is trustworthy. Mitchell says that whether the soldier keeps or breaks trust will depend on a lot of factors, including the nature of the impression created by the stranger in the first place.

How does the analogy apply to faith? At some moments, the universe appears to us as though it was obviously created by a benevolent creator. But when we consider great tragedies or terrible atrocities – the Indian Ocean tsunami or the gulags of Stalinist Russia, or even personal disasters or bereavements – it's hard to see God's purposes. Sometimes it might seem as though he isn't present, and that the more plausible story is the atheist one. But the Christian story includes promises like the ones made by the stranger to the soldier: that God will always be at our side, even if, as the book of Job demonstrates, His ways are not ours. That Christ will in the end redeem suffering and conquer evil.

Is it rational to accept those promises? To accept the Christian story? It is, if we trust the storyteller.

That is one of the many reasons the incarnation is the central event in Christian faith, and it's part of what people mean when they say that our faith is not primarily in statements or propositions, but in a person. The person we trust is the incarnate Christ, whom we encounter through the scriptures, the sacraments, and through sacred tradition. It is in Him that we place our faith. Merry Christmas.

» Continued from Page 31



then the chances of an argument on the day will be significantly reduced.

Beware of booze

Irish festivities are notorious for excess alcohol consumption and this practice is especially prevalent over the Christmas period. There's no harm in a glass of wine or a swig of eggnog but drinking beyond your limit is a recipe made for disaster. Numerous studies have shown a strong correlation between violent crime and too much booze – and in an environment where a high proportion of people are drinking, the chances of conflict drastically increase. Those who don't normally drink throughout the year may also be pressured into consuming more than usual leading to out-of-character behaviour. If this prospect worries you, try to keep alcohol availability down to a minimum and pour fizzy drinks instead.

Rent, don't rant

With the whole family in the house for Christmas, the place can quickly become very cramped whether it's because of your brother's snoring that you've forgotten about or the make-shift sofa that you're losing sleep on. A lack of personal space can leave the sanest person irate, ultimately killing the Christmas mood. If it's an option for you this year, try renting a house or hotel room close by so that you have your own base to return to at the end of the day. Not only should it reduce the chances of a Christmas squabble, but it will also take the pressure of your hosts to accommodate you.

Kitchen control

The phrase goes: "Too many cooks spoil the broth" – and this advice couldn't be any truer during Christmas. The festive dinner is one of the highlights of the day, leaving

“By creating an atmosphere where those carrying out a particular duty can do it freely and peacefully, there'll be a smaller chance of an emotional outbreak.”

immense pressure on the chef or cook to get it right. To make this huge delicacy, all of the kitchen space is needed, so make use of other rooms in the house and avoid the cooking space completely. That's not to say you shouldn't help out – it's important to ask the chef(s) if they need assistance. Even setting the table can alleviate the stress of those who are preparing the dinner. By creating an atmosphere where those carrying out a particular duty can do it freely and peacefully, there'll be a smaller chance of an emotional outbreak.



Relax

Christmas is a rare time in our calendar where we can take a few days off and celebrate the year gone by. During this time, it's vital to switch off, forget about work and be grateful for all that you have. By letting go, you'll feel more relaxed and less on edge. If you suspect that an argument or issue of conflict is beginning to brew, step outside and take a deep breath. If what you have to say isn't helpful, constructive or kind, then it's probably best that you say nothing at all. In this way, you won't be goaded into making a comment that you could later regret.

Christmas can be a stressful time for many reasons, but family feuds don't have to be one of them. This year, take the right steps towards making sure the festive holidays are a positive experience for everyone. While there may be unresolved tensions in the household, Christmas is not the time for fights or arguments. In fact, the Christian celebration reminds us to forgive and reconcile with one another. As Pope Francis said last year: "My thoughts go in particular to the families who are reunited in these days: may those who live far from their parents return home; may brothers and sisters strive to be together again... At Christmas it is beautiful and important to be together as a family."

Faith — IN THE — family



Bairbre Cahill

It echoes through the first Reading, the Acclamation and the Gospel for the Fourth Sunday of Advent – Emmanuel, God with us. In the Gospel for the Vigil Mass on Christmas Eve we are reminded that Jesus is embedded in history. We are given, as my father used to say, the "seed, breed and generation" of Jesus, so that if anyone should ask who he was we would be able to say: "Sure you know his people!"

Then in the Gospel for Mass during Christmas day we are thrown a total curve ball with the proclamation that this same Jesus is the very Word of God, with God in the beginning and through whom all things came to be.

It is mind-blowing! What are we to make of it? Perhaps what we need to hang on to are those first most comforting words – Emmanuel, God with us. Then and now, God at the heart of our humanity and our humanity at the heart of God. It is worth pondering.

God's desire to be with us is given form in the birth of this little babe – one who, later, at that last supper with his friends would quite clearly put himself utterly in their hands, "this is my body, this is my blood". For now, he lies within the arms of Mary – and she must have wondered: "How can this be?"

When it comes to faith, we too have our questions and our struggles but perhaps this Christmas is a time to lay those to one side and instead, to ponder on those words – Emmanuel, God with us.

What does it mean for us to say that God is here among us? We could go rummaging in a few theology books but I would suggest a much more fruitful approach would be to practise some Christian mindfulness this Christmas. What would it be like to approach this Christmas prepared to ponder the idea that here, now, in Donegal or Dublin, Roscommon or Roscrea, in the midst of all the glitz and glitter is God, in whom we live and move and have our being?

Mindfulness is an invitation to be present. I often spend the run up to Christmas in a frantic tizzy. I want to slow down this year, to go and visit friends, not rushing in like a hyperactive elf depositing a gift of caramel squares and wheaten bread on the table before running out again, but sitting down, talking, accept-



ing the offered cuppa – being present. In the Incarnation Jesus entered into relationship with us and in doing so opened up every relationship to the possibility of the sacred, to being a place of encounter with God.

Jesus, God with us, was nurtured at his mother's breast and then by the food she made him gathered round a table almost certainly made by Joseph. I want to taste every bite of my Christmas dinner not fuss over who has what and what may be needed next. I want to appreciate and give thanks for the work of others which went in to rearing a turkey, growing the veg, making a cranberry sauce that has just the right tartness, growing the luscious grapes to make the full-bodied red wine in my glass. I want to notice and I want to acknowledge that without God's good fertile earth these things would not happen.

I want to sit amongst my family and simply delight in their presence. Our Advent wreath has looked a little lost on our big kitchen table where only two places are set for dinner these evenings. I look forward to the noise, the craic, the energy of a full house – and to know that here, Emmanuel, God is with us.

Telling an old story in a new way

Personal Profile



Young people will open up to God if we bring the message to them, Colm Fitzpatrick learns

With an increasing number of young people no longer formally and institutionally identifying with the Catholic faith, being in the business of evangelisation can be a tough job. What's needed are novel and captivating approaches that bring the Gospel story to a new generation who are growing up in an Ireland apathetic towards Catholicism. It's a big mission, but for youth worker Tony Silcock, bringing that message of hope is all in a day's work.

Tony is CEO of Youth Initiatives – a Belfast-born organisation that draws together Christian youth workers to help young people in marginalised communities to develop socially, mentally and spiritually.

"We work with highly disadvantaged young people, young people on the margins. We work massively across the ages and the classes with unchurched young people and try and find a way to reengage them in a conversation of faith," Tony explains.

The organisation began in 1991 and continues to thrive, reaching out to young people not only in the Colin Area of West Belfast but

also East Belfast, Downpatrick, Banbridge and Derry.

Belfast has seen profound change over the last 30 years with the sectarianism and violence of the past no longer as prominent as it once was during the Troubles. Tony was born in Belfast in 1977 and lived out his "early and teenage years" during that tumultuous time.

"It was hard, that's for sure. Lots of British army, police patrols, checkpoints – not able to go into town without having your bags checked, you car checked, continuous stories of people being murdered or bombs going off or even they moved you out of your house because there were bombs going off," Tony says.

He adds that while the North

has "moved on" in the greater sense of the word especially since the implementation of the peace process, the last few years "have been a bit of sticking point" given that Stormont has remained dormant for last three years and Brexit is throwing up all kinds of uncertainties about identity.

But these aren't the only problems Tony sees.

"There's a lack of vocations, we have a Church where not many people have had a personal encounter with Jesus. I think there's absolutely a significant lack of investment in youth.

"I think we've shifted our priorities to being in safeguarding and health and safety and management of buildings, not

that those are not important but I think we are missing telling the story of Jesus."

For Tony, there is room in the lives of young people to embrace Christ because although they're not religious, he believes they're still spiritual.

"I think they're interested in truth and being challenged to think about that, but the faith of their parents that has been offered to them or passed down is often superficial. Do they know actually know Jesus? And that in one sense can actually transcend Church - do they know Jesus?" Tony says.

“For Tony, Youth Initiatives is one of many ways of achieving this aim as it brings the Church to young people rather than the other way round.”

He adds that as Christians and evangelisers, we have to stay true to the message of the Gospel but present it in a "more creative way that young people can engage with".

For Tony, Youth Initiatives is one of many ways of achieving this aim as it brings the Church to young people rather than the other way round. He got involved with it as teenager and saw something different in the way they connected with the youth.

"These churches weren't doing faith work with young people, these guys were but they were doing it in such a way that was creative, dynamic, informal and relational. They were doing it through prayer gatherings, drama, football and GAA," he says.

Inspired by his experience there, Tony travelled to Detroit to do some missionary work and

"became really awoken to what the Holy Spirit was doing" while there. He later worked for a law firm for eight years but during this time really felt God calling him to be more active in his faith and work alongside the Church to bring about a sense of renewal.

"I essentially started off as junior youth worker walking the streets, engaging with young people, going into schools, delivering RE and Learning for Life and Work classes, doing personal social development, mental health and emotional well-being, looking at how we can develop resilience," he says, noting that he eventually became part of the management system. In 2017, he was appointed CEO of Youth Initiatives.

Alongside this role Tony is also Chairperson for the largest gathering of Catholic youth ministry workers in the North of Ireland called 'Encounter'. This is a movement that strives to build unity among the Church and provides a space for ministry workers to dream, grow in relationships and be inspired for the mission of the Church. He also sits on the diocesan pastoral council for Down and Connor which is led by Bishop Noel Treanor.

"I've worked here for 13 years; I've never felt that I've had a day of work. I love coming to work, I love the mission...I love the way it sits alongside our Church in developing young people and evangelising young people.

For more information about Youth Initiatives, see youthinitiativesni.com.



Sweet Treats

Laura Anderson



Lebkuchen - a soft and chewy German Christmas treat

This German gingerbread has the perfect balance of sweet and spiced. This version is even tastier as the biscuits are filled with raspberry. Other flavours like apricot or cherry, also work really well, or you can keep it simple and not fill them at all! Heart-shaped lebkuchen look extra decorative and would make perfect gifts this Christmas. If they're covered in chocolate they will keep in an airtight container for a couple of weeks.

Ingredients

Makes about 12 biscuits

- 225g plain flour
- 85g ground almonds
- 1 tsp baking powder
- □ tsp bicarbonate of soda (bread soda)
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1 tsp ground ginger
- 1 tsp mixed spice
- □ tsp ground nutmeg
- □ tsp ground cloves
- 1 tbsp cocoa powder

- 85g unsalted butter
- 185ml runny honey
- Zest of □ lemon
- 1 tbsp lemon juice

To begin, prepare the dry ingredients by sieving them all into a large bowl. Then on a low heat, melt the butter into the honey, lemon zest and lemon juice. Once the butter has melted take it off the heat and let it cool slightly before adding to the dry ingredients. Using a wooden spoon mix the ingredients to form a sticky dough, making sure to incorporate all the flour. Cover and leave to cool in the fridge for half an hour. This will also help the flavours develop.

To prepare for the next step, line a large baking tray and preheat the oven to 180°C/160°Fan/Gas mark 4. Turn the dough out onto a floured work surface and roll it into a large

rectangle about 0.5cm in thickness. Using a cookie cutter about 6cm in diameter cut out as many biscuits as possible. Remember you need multiples of two. You will have to reroll the scraps to get the most out of your dough.

On half of the biscuits place a small teaspoon of jam in the centre and then put another biscuit cut out on top to sandwich it. Seal around the edges of the jam filling by pressing lightly with your fingers. Place the filled biscuits on the baking tray leaving at least an inch between each biscuit. You may need to work in batches.

Bake the biscuits in the oven for 15-18 mins until they are risen and don't leave an imprint to the touch.

Leave them for a few minutes to cool on the tray and then carefully transfer them to a wire rack using a palette knife to cool fully. They can be eaten as is but they also taste great with a thin layer of icing on top or dipped in chocolate.



TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



Conflict abounds on the 'right to die'

The 'right to die' cause is a strange one – we're all going to die eventually so that right will be vindicated by everybody anyway. It's not about the freedom, as distinct from the right, to commit suicide as that is no longer illegal, so it's really about the right to kill, but that's rather off-putting so campaigners tend to avoid the 'k' word, as they conveniently did during the campaign to repeal the Eighth Amendment.

When **The Tonight Show** (Virgin Media One) on Wednesday of last week discussed the issue, presenter Matt Cooper proposed the classic pro-choice line ("individual right to choose"), presumably what got suicide decriminalised years ago. He said, naively I thought, that it "was not being made compulsory" (sound familiar?). This freedom argument was countered by Peadar Tóibín TD who gave the example of the woman in Holland euthanised forcibly, and similar examples abound in countries that have legalised assisted suicide.

I have no doubt that if it was legalised here, elder abuse would spiral and freedoms would disappear pretty quickly as campaigners and politicians from the elastic band school of ethics would demand that doctors' freedoms be taken away, that they would be forced to co-operate or refer, would be denigrated



TV presenter Sarah McInerney.

as 'conscientious obstructors', if they didn't, wouldn't get employment unless they were willing to be involved.

David Quinn made the most urgent point, about how the elderly and vulnerable would be under pressure, and he pointed out, giving personal examples from present practice, of how palliative care enables people to die peacefully and with dignity and how it relieves suffering, even if death as a result comes a bit earlier, but he made the clear distinction between that and deliberate killing.

Guest co-presenter Sarah McInerney pointed out the rising numbers availing of assisted suicide in the Neth-

erlands as new norms became accepted and suggested a contradiction between society disapproving of suicide and running mental health campaigns to reduce it, while at the same time considering the legalisation of assisted suicide.

Newly elected TD Malcolm Byrne (FF) disappointed, warning the pro-life side against 'scaremongering' and suggesting we deal with the issue via yet another Citizens' Assembly (can-kicking, buck passing). Has he not got enough confidence in the citizens' assembly he has just joined?

Like David Quinn, journalist Ian O'Doherty usually has no time for the excesses

of political correctness, but he was strongly in favour of assisted suicide from the point of view of human freedom, but again that was more a case for not making suicide illegal, rather than legalising assisted suicide. He criticised how euthanasia in places like Belgium had gone too far, but I thought he seemed blissfully unaware of, or in denial about, the damaging social consequences of a euthanasia regime.

Music events

In much more positive territory, **The Leap of Faith** (RTÉ Radio 1) last Friday night was in Christmas preparation mode. Evelyn Grant of Lyric FM enthused about the music of Christmas as she outlined a huge range of Christmas music events coming up in the lead up to Christmas. She was particularly a fan of 'O Holy Night' and 'O Come All



Miriam O'Callaghan (RTÉ).

PICK OF THE WEEK

SINGING THE MESSIAH

BBC2 NI, Sunday, December 15, 9pm

Composer Neil Martin and his Ards community choir face the challenge of performing Handel's Messiah in Ulster-Scots.

IN CONCERT: CHRISTMAS IN VIENNA

EWTN, Tuesday, December 17, 9.30pm

Celebrate Christ's birth with a special concert of international music by the Vienna Symphonic Orchestra, Singing Academy, and world-famous Vienna Boys Choir.

FILM: THE BISHOP'S WIFE

BBC2, Friday, December 20, 3.30pm

(1947) An angel assumes human form to help a bishop repair his marriage and build his dream cathedral.

Ye Faithful'.

The programme also featured Sr Colette of the Poor Clares in Nuns' Island Galway. She spoke to presenter Michael Comyn about their popular prayer book *Calm the Soul* and how they had recently, with the help of musician and composer Ian Callanan, produced a song and music video of the same name, which is raising funds for the support of persecuted Christian communities around the world.

They don't have a vow of silence, but are a cloistered order. They keep in touch with the goings on in the outside world and receive messages from the public, intercessions which feed into the prayer lives of the sisters.

On **Sunday With Miriam** (RTÉ Radio 1), Bro. Kevin of the Capuchin Day Centre in

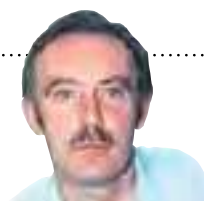
Dublin spoke of prayers he made before the Blessed Sacrament – he said to the Lord that if he was supposed to feed the poor he'd have to have assistance. Since then "fantastic benefactors" and a small amount of government money has kept the service going.

He was particularly saddened to see children homeless, and was critical of the Government for not building sufficient houses. Presenter Miriam O'Callaghan seemed particularly moved and inspired, and hopefully the listening public will feel the same and donate leading up to Christmas at capuchin-daycentre.ie

📧 boregan@hotmail.com,
@boreganmedia

Film

Aubrey Malone



Comic road movie mixes tenderness and farce

The Last Right (15A)

A Clonakilty man living in Boston transports the body of a man he only met for a few minutes to his final resting place in Rathlin Island with the police on his tail for corpse-snatching.

It's the kind of situation most of us find ourselves in sooner or later, right?

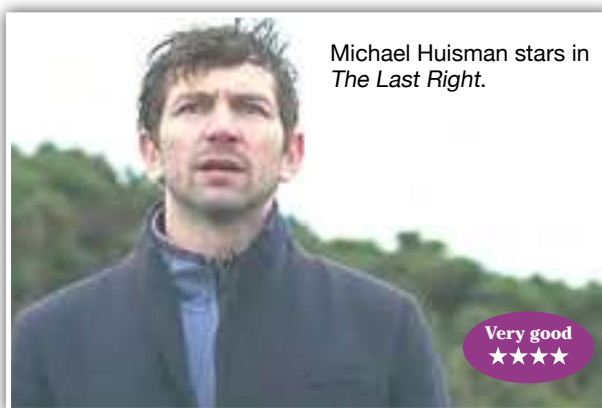
Writer/director Aoife Crehan moves seamlessly from road movie to black comedy to rite of passage parable with some relish in a film that almost tips into farce (the chip shop stand-off) before becoming a tale of friendship, responsibility, making the right choices,

atoning for the past and finding one's own best 'resting place' this side of the great beyond.

Daniel Murphy is flying home to Ireland to bury his mother when the man in the seat beside him (Jim Norton) drops dead. For reasons best known to himself he names Daniel as his next of kin.

The film now segues into a comedy of errors and a (sort-of) love story, with a helter skelter set of unpredictable interludes thrown in for good measure.

Rainman and Bonnie and Clyde are namechecked but as we move from picaresque sitcom to some deeper areas we should probably be thinking more of films like *Waking Ned* and *Manchester*



Michael Huisman stars in *The Last Right*.

Very good
★★★★

by the Sea for a trope source.

Daniel's brother, Louis, is autistic. When he speaks – like a computer spewing out data – the parallels to *Rainman* become more obvious. But there's a backstory to Louis. It gives

the film its biggest surprise. His troubled relationship to Daniel (guilt, diaspora, etc.) underscores the plot.

The performances are excellent. Michiel Huisman is Daniel, the reluctant journeyman. Niamh Algar

plays Mary, the quirky lass who invites herself along for the ride. Samuel Bottomley is Louis, the troubled teenager who'd prefer to stay in 'Clon' than study mathematics in Boston with Daniel.

Some years ago a man called Tony Hawks wrote a very funny book called *Round Ireland with a Fridge*. It was exactly what the title said. The journey became of national interest. Gerry Ryan even got in on it. This is like *Around Ireland with a Coffin*. It's no less funny. Joe Duffy stands in for the late Gerry.

Crehan treads a fine line between comedy and drama (I believe the term is 'dramedy') in a film that has, however, some confusion in its unfolding. Huisman tells

Norton he grew up in Boston, for instance, but he didn't. Why the lie?

Brian Cox plays the priest who officiates at the funeral. The fact that he can range effortlessly from Winston Churchill (*Churchill*) to this is a testament to his versatility.

Eleanor O'Brien is the rookie cop thrown in at the deep end, wearing a uniform about three sizes too big for her.

You hardly need to be told who turns up as her boss. Yes, inevitably it's Colm Meaney doing yet another Ballymagash style role. Begob and begorra.

Advisory content for parents: language and sexual material.



BookReviews



Peter Costello

Christmas Books

Our Books Editor Peter Costello makes recommendations for you to place in someone's Christmas stocking...

Hey Grandude

by Paul McCartney (Puffin Books, £12.99)

This is a fun book which granddads of a certain age will enjoy reading with the grandchildren. It is odd to think of Paul McCartney himself as a grandfather – how times flies, but this book was inspired by and written for his own small clan, and will be widely enjoyed.

The President's Surprise

by Peter Donnelly (Gill Books, €18.99)

This is the third in this surprising but delightful series by artist Peter Donnelly. Here his Excellency goes out for a walk in the Park while final preparations are underway in the Áras for his birthday.

A cup of coffee, a bit of yoga and various other diversion delay his return to home. But, as might be expected, all turns out well. Lovely and amusing stuff. It says a great deal about Irish life today that such books sell so well. Let us hope the President himself buys lots of copies

Ordinary Joe, Joe Schmidt

(Penguin Ireland, €25.00)

What with the rugby ups and downs that were in the year, it is inevitable that this book is one of the dominant books for Christmas. It is all very fine and will be greatly enjoyed, but there is a feeling perhaps that there is a great more than might be said about the inner life and thoughts of the man, and his leadership style. So we can expect more to come in future years.

But for now his book will be read by many with pleasure.

Irish International Grand Prix 1929-1931

by Bob Montgomery (Dreoilin Publications, €49.99)

RIAC archivist Bob Montgomery tells a tale of international stars performing in the Park.



He recalls in loving detail the famous races in the Phoenix Park, which recall in their way the Gordon Bennett races of an earlier era. This was an all-Ireland event, however, which de Valera's Fianna Fáil government would not support – was motor racing seen as some kind of “foreign game”. Other such races, such as the

Monaco Grand Prix, prospered and continued, but not Ireland's.

Glenstal Abbey: Through the Seasons

Photos by Valerie O'Sullivan (Columba, €24.99)

A lovely combination of fine photography and graceful writing about what monastic life is like, and what it aspired to.

So many people these days find the very idea of a monk's life so strange, they never pause to ask themselves might they, in some corner of their lives, have something to learn from the Benedictines, such as the idea that work is a form of prayer. But this is also about a famous Irish institution of Ireland, which in its time as been and remains very influential.

Agent Running in the Field

by John Le Carré (Viking Penguin, £20.00)

The latest book from a hardy litterateur of espionage and intrigue. This one though in the present day is bubbling with anger about such things as Brexit, but all the old skills are as well honed as ever. Will be greatly enjoyed as the work of a master craftsman still on top of his skills.

Irish Countrywomen's Association, Book of Bread and Baking

(Gill Books, €22.00)

The ICA is a good thing, and its members present here recipes straight from the rural (and perhaps not so rural) kitchens of Ireland for all kinds of baking treats. Brown bread and soda bread are joined though by recipes for sourdough bread – so popular now with mashed avocado for a weekend brunch.

Rick Stein's Secret France

(BBC Books, £26.00)

Rick Stein is an old favourite ours, and we have followed



him around the world over the years. Unlike so many of the cooks and chefs that clutter our book shops and television screen, he has always been ready to learn from those he encounters on his travels.

How often have we seen him in earnest conversation with local cooks, his note book in hand, taking down what they have to say, rather than showing them how to cook their own local dishes.

Here he is on the by-ways of the Hexagon in search of French treats, seeking out 120 recipes that reveal “real French home cooking”.

Into the Deep by Wolfgang Dreyer

illustrated by Ainnike Siems (Prestel, £18.99)

The future of the world depends on the much abused ocean, where life began millions of years ago. This book is suggested for readers seven and up, but the lovely accurate illustration and the authoritative text by the director of Kiel Zoo are informative for any age. Saving the planet starts this moment, and here is a way to enroll your children in the crusade to save creation.

As Time Goes By
by Alice Taylor (O'Brien



Press, €19.99)

Alice Taylor is one of the great phenomenons of Irish literature. Her success over the decades has been exceptional. She evokes a world of yesterday, and yet in her own life is a fully functioning business woman, mother and local activist. A truly great woman, who is always a joy to read.

Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind

by Tom Holland (Little, Brown & Co., £25.00)

There is a great deal of negativity around about religion, and about Christianity in particular. Here, in his latest popular exposition of history, Tom Holland reminds us just what Europe, and beyond that



world cultures actually owes to Christianity.

Even our forms of disbelief have been shaped by Christianity. This is a book which hopefully a lot of people will enjoy, letting his clear style fill out for them a story which has become so confused for many.

Metaphors for Change: Essays on State and Society

by Sr. Margaret MacCurtain (Arlen House, €25.00)

As a teacher, historian, activist and nun, Margaret MacCurtain has been a leading personality in shaping aspects of thinking and public discourse. In these collection essays the essentials of her outlook on

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.



life, society and history are to be found. She is one of the historians who have worked to reveal "the hidden Ireland" in which generations of Irish women have lived. Certainly a book not just for Christmas, but for the coming year.

Unsung Hero: Tom Crean – Antarctic Survivor

by Michael Smith (Gill Books, €19.99)

This is a reissue after two decades of an already well known book. Though Tom Crean was not in fact as forgotten as the author makes out, he was certainly neglected in Ireland.

The nature of his heroic exploits somehow did not fit into the ideals of the "new Ireland". However today, the story of his true endurance a over a century ago with Shackleton in the Antarctic is now widely admired, and provide an ideal of courage and leadership which can not only be admired, but imitated. Here is the whole tale for a younger generation.

William Dalrymple The Anarchy: The East India Company, Corporate Violence, and the Pillage of Empire (Bloomsbury, £30.00)

Many will read this fascinat-



ing account of the East India Company activities in 18th Century India and contrast them with Ireland in the same century.

The narrative is cast in a chillingly up-to-date account of ruthless colonial exploitation. But it should also be said that India has always been a country in conflict. It remains one, given the attitudes of many Hindus to the minorities of all kinds in the subcontinent (including Buddhists, Muslims and Christians). The Mughals and the

British brought some good things to India, as many Indians will admit.

Hallelujah: Memoirs of a Singing Priest

by Fr Ray Kelly (Columba, €16.99)

The Irish over the years have always loved singing priests. Perhaps it is the seeming contrast between the expected piety and the priest's real aim to enlarge people's lives through "mere" entertainment. Since his breakthrough in 2014 Fr Ray Kelly

has become a familiar voice, singing popular songs, and here he tells the story behind his performing life. Never discount the power of music, all music, to move and change people.

Funny Ha, Ha: 80 of the funniest stories ever written

Selected and introduced by Paul Merton (Head of Zeus, £25.00)

Dead-pan comedian Paul Merton is something of an authority on English humor-

ists since Victorian times. In this book he collects some of his all-time favourites. Other surprises await the reader in these very varied pages. The ideal bedside book for those who have sleepless nights.

Though it is a surprise to find Somerset Maugham, unusually thought of as having a rather grim view of the world, in this gallery. But then Merton's selection is more about the humours of the human condition than mere rib-tickling.

Return to Sender by Paul Kelly

(Gill Books, €19.99)

Those who are devotees of the famous postcards of John Hinde will delight in this book. The bright sunshine of Hinde's warmed up Ireland (lots of red, lots of sunshine in every image) will also reveal the changes over the decades. Author Paul Kelly mixes his own family's unusual history into a tour of rural Ireland as it was – and as it is today. Enchanting, but also a little saddening.

Stuff that Changed the World: The extraordinary history of ordinary things

by Simon Tierney (Red Stag, €14.99)

Radio (or should we say wireless in this context) will have made Simon Tierney's style familiar to many. This is a fascinating book filled with curious information and exceptional characters – inventors are always interesting to read about.

One caveat: he depends too much on American sources; the history of invention looks very different when written about in German, French or even British English. Industrial intellectual

theft began in America, as the conflict between Edison and Swan 1880s about who really invented the electric light bulb showed so well.

But this is a very enjoyable book all the same, which will inspire budding inventors of any age.

An Urban Sketcher's Galway

by Róisín Curé (Currach Books, €22.99)

This may be for many a book to catch up with. Anyone who knew or knows the City of the Tribes will enjoy this drawing and the text.

Róisín Curé is right on the button about what this thriving, happily active city is like today. In all of Ireland this is the place to go, whatever people from Derry, Cork or Belfast tell you.

Let's hope she does more books like this. Her publisher should send her to Kilkenny for the New Year.

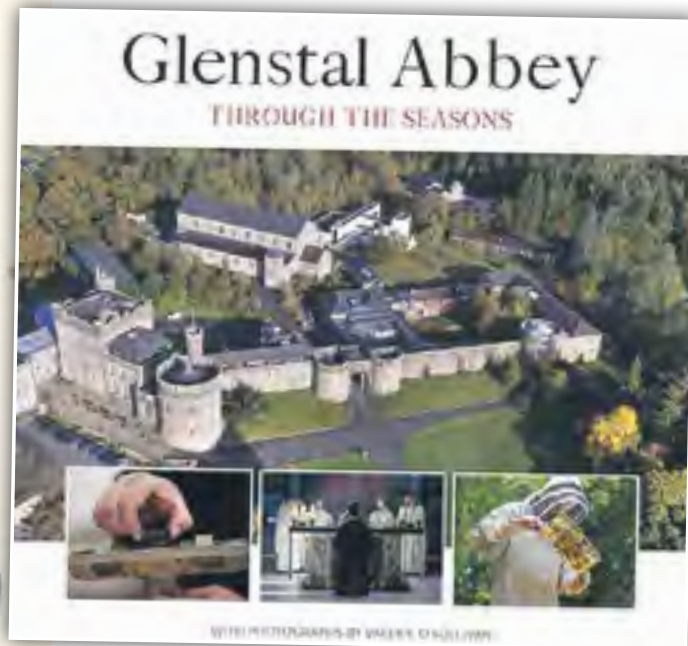
Sending Positive Vibes

Fr Bryan Shortall (Columba, €12.99)

Christians and the New Year should, like this book, promote a positive feeling in everyone, whatever their outlook.

This little book will provide readers of many ages with something meaningful to carry into the coming year and the new decade, and so perhaps leave bedding the rancour and division that has mounted up around over the last few years. Fr Shortall's message too is one of "Peace on Earth, and goodwill to all people".

A Happy Christmas and Joyful New Year to all the readers of these book pages.



Classifieds

The deadline for advertising in the classifieds is 10.30am, the Friday before publication. Contact the Classified Team on 01 687 4094 or email advertising@irishcatholic.ie



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LITTLE FLOWER PENNY DINNERS

Little Flower Penny Dinners have been providing meals and services to the homeless and the elderly for over 100 years. Please help us continue and donate what you can on our website www.LFPD.ie or by phoning us with your credit/debit card details or by post to Little Flower Penny Dinners, 11 Meak St, DB. Phone 01 4538621 or 01 4546795 e-mail: seligid@littlflower.ie

Inspired by the vision and passion of Sr. Stan, many people are choosing to leave a loving gift in their will to support people who are homeless to find safety and a place they can call home.



To join in Sr. Stan's vision please contact eve.kerton@focusireland.ie or phone 01 881 5917

FOCUS Ireland



Please remember GOAL in your Will

42 years on we continue to deliver lifesaving support to the most vulnerable people in our world. Leaving a gift in your Will is priceless.

Contact Courtenay on 01 2809779 or via email at cpollard@goal.ie

Registered Charity No. 20010980; CHY 6271

Classified ads

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BROWN Scapulars & rosary beads – direct to you post free. The brown scapulars are made from pure wool and last for many years. €1.00 each. With miraculous medal attached €1.30. (inc postage). Information leaflet also supplied. Any quantity. Rosary beads are excellent quality in glass / lustre in all colours. Also wooden Padre Pio beads. €1.00 each inc postage. Rosary leaflets supplied. Any quantity. Phone (00353) 087 9381997, info@theopendoor.ie

MISCELLANEOUS

RADICAL, new government school RSE sex-ed proposals. No school ethos, parental opt out. See LetKidsBeKids.ie, for more information.

THE THIRTY GREGORIAN MASSES

THIS IS the ancient custom, instituted by Pope Gregory the Great, of having 30 Masses said for one deceased person for release from Purgatory. Can also help in healing family tree. For information please phone 087-9381997.

SERVICES

ALL UNWANTED home waste removed. Cookers, fridges, beds, suites, wardrobes, carpets etc. Removed and disposed of in a proper manner. No job too small or big. Contact Tommy, 087 6406015.

CATHOLIC CONNECTIONS

SADDENED to be single at Christmas? Let 'Heavenly Partners' change that for you by helping you find your soulmate. Call the Christian introduction specialists today. Call 01 568 6558

OUR PARISH IS REMOVING A CHURCH ORGAN FROM ONE OF OUR CHURCHES.

It stands approximately 17 feet high, 11'9" wide and 9'2" in depth. The organ currently plays but is in need of renovation. This organ is free to any interested parish but must be dismantled and removed at your expense.

You can view pictures of the organ at: www.ballycallan.com/gallery and click on the church organ link.

If interested contact Fr. Liam Taylor P.P. 056 776 9894/086 818 0954 or email ballycallan@ossory.ie

NOTICE GET YOUR MESSAGE THIS? OUT TO 90,000 READERS!

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.

LEGACY

Help evangelize Ireland by remembering The Irish Catholic in your will. Since 1975 we have been Ireland's leading Catholic weekly. Your help will grow subscriptions to schools and parishes. For more information contact us on 01-687-4020

Please remember

THE IRISH HOSPICE FOUNDATION

when making your will so that everyone in Ireland will have access to hospice care one day.

Contact: Anna Sadlier at 01 679 3188 or anna.sadlier@hospicefoundation.ie www.hospicefoundation.ie



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STATE UNDER WHICH HEADING YOUR AD IS TO APPEAR: _____

Minimum charge of €24.60 (inc. VAT) for 5 lines (25 words). Extra lines €4.92 each.

No. of insertions: _____ weeks
Miracle Prayer €40

Please print your advertisement in the coupon, placing ONE word in each space. Below, please print your name and address. Do you require a Box Number? YES NO (Please tick ✓) Box Number €6 extra.

1					
2					
3					€24.60
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6					€29.52
7					€34.44

Name and contact detail form MUST be filled out

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I enclose Cheque/PO: €..... I wish to pay by Visa Mastercard Laser
My Visa/Mastercard/Lasercard number is: _____
Expiry Date: _____ Signature _____

The Irish Catholic, 23 Merrion Square North, Dublin 2. Phone: 01 687 4094

Leisure time

Please pray for the beatification of

Little Nellie of Holy God

“May God enrich with every blessing all those who recommend frequent Communion to little boys and girls proposing Nellie as their model”

– Pope St Pius X, June 4, 1912



Everything Family & Life does to save babies and strengthen the family relies on you and our other generous friends. This work has never been more needed.

A gift in your Will ensures that the most effective pro-life / pro-family organisations will continue working for the kind of society we all desire, and will leave a loving mark on countless lives for years to come.

For further advice or to avail of our Solicitor's free Wills service, please contact us today on

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Family & Life

26 Mountjoy Square, Dublin 1
Ph: 01 8552790 | email: fandi@iol.ie

www.familyandlife.org
www.prolife.ie

Will the MSC Missions

Missionaries of the Sacred Heart bring hope to the poorest people living in over 48 countries worldwide.

Please help us with a gift in your Will

Contact:

MSC Missions Office, PO Box 23 Western Road, Cork.

Tel: 021-4545704 Email: info@mscmisions.ie

www.mscmissions.ie

When you remember Trócaire in your Will, you bring hope to people living in the world's poorest places

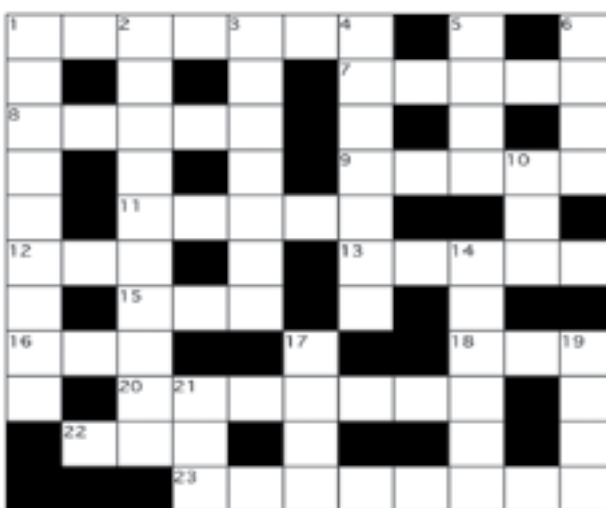
Trócaire

It's easy to get started, and we'll help you every step of the way. Call Grace Kelly on 01 629 3333, email grace.kelly@trocaire.org or write to me at Trócaire, Maynooth, Co Kildare.

One day, parents and their children will tell the story of how your legacy of love changed their lives. Thank you for considering a gift to Trócaire in your Will.

Crossword Junior

Gordius 312



ACROSS

- You might give it to a baby to suck on. (7)
- Huge sea. (5)
- You roast meat or bake bread in them. (5)
- Holds onto, doesn't give away. (5)
- 'I'm all _____, there's no-one with me.' (5)
- You wear it on your head. (3)
- What numbers add up to. (5)
- Plant that grows up walls and trees. (3)
- How many in a pair? (3)
- You might carry your shopping in this. (4)
- Not man-made. (7)
- Donkey. (3)
- People who are sick stay

here while being cured. (8)

DOWN

- In the story, she met seven dwarfs. (4,5)
- A surgeon does these in a 23 across. (10)
- In this, we learn about the past. (7)
- You might see them blast off into space. (7)
- In this place. (4)
- Finishes. (4)
- Vegetable which grows in a pod. (3)
- Pill. (6)
- Baby wolves or bears. (4)
- She will grow up to become a woman. (4)
- Common tree. (3)

SOLUTIONS, DECEMBER 5

GORDIUS No. 432

Across – 1 Tour de France 7 The Book of Kells 9 Iced 11 Zinc 14 Caber 15 Rearm 16 Oboe 18 Abram 21 Dukas 22 Alibi 23 Hop it 24 Call 26 Stubs 29 Oath 33 Gloria 34 Hiss 36 You 37 Tenant farmer

Down – 1 Tic 2 Undo 3 Debt 4 Fiona 5 Abode 6 Etui 8 Ecclesiastes 9 Introductory rites 12 Jackal 13 Amish 14 Clasp 17 Bridle 20 Marks 27 Tulsa 28 Beret 30 Taut 31 Cava 32 Whim 35 Sir

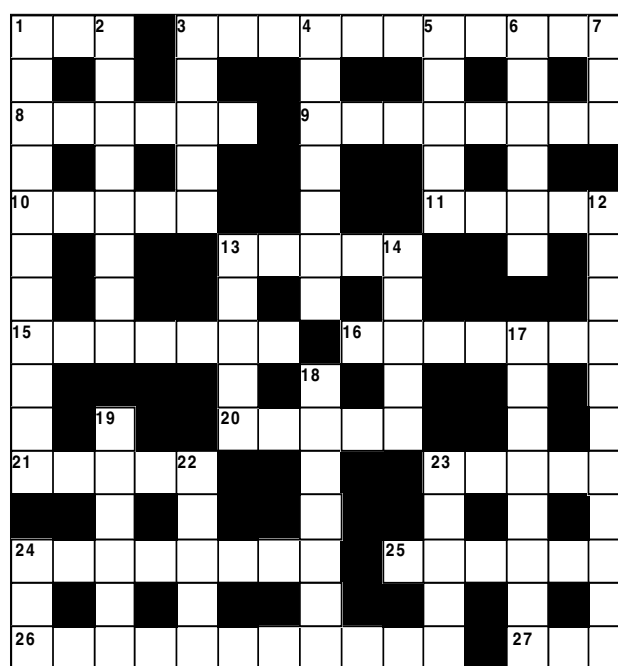
CHILDREN'S No. 311

Across – 1. Taxi driver 7. Scream 8. Outlaw 10. Doubt 12. Beehive 14. Knees 16. Trawler 17. Lava 19. Cone 20. North

Down – 2. Accidental 3. Ice cube 4. Remote 5. Vest 6. Lawn 9. Lovely 11. Best 13. Heaven 15. Fresh 18. Ace Fire

Crossword

Gordius 433



ACROSS

- Espied (3)
- The raft showily moves round a Scottish inlet (6,5)
- 8 & 5d Comedienne Dawn uses the pan to make chips (6,5)
- 9 & 24a This REM song asserts that being unsuccessful is my worshipful philosophy, it seems! (6,2,8)
- Assesses (5)
- Item of bed linen (5)
- 13 & 24d Where did Eve come from - some dim Arabs? (5,3)
- A bouquet for Judy (7)
- Health-related (7)
- Not so much the Flying Doctors Service as the Flying Obstetricians Service? (5)
- Storage facility (5)
- It could, by chance, make you a millionaire! (5)
- See 9 across
- The accountant gets a right rubbish incentive (6)
- The volume's hot, pixies - these are responsible for a hold-up of volume! (11)
- Some Hindu outcasts? Just a couple (3)

progress to date is satisfac-

- tory (2,3,2,4)
- Grappler (8)
- Garments for the feet (5)
- Two animals combine to find some old tungsten (7)
- See 8 across
- Rue finding the right bird (6)
- Dried grass (3)
- But will this restaurant booking allow for more than a pair of chairs? (5,3,3)
- Female relatives (5)
- Meat comprising Southern hardwood (5)
- Ran at a moderate pace as ten raced around (8)
- Army rank (7)
- In some LA pool, he's divine! (6)
- River that reaches the sea near Lisbon (5)
- Jumps (5)
- See 13 across

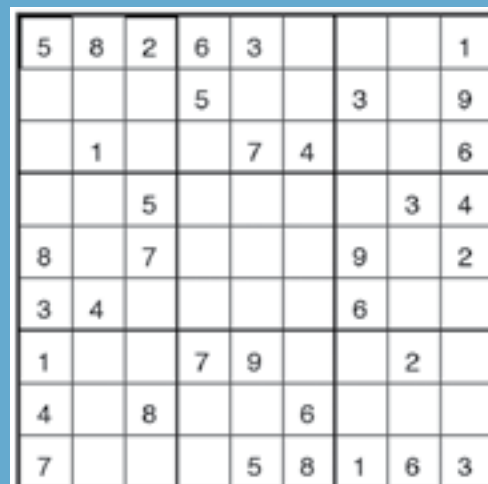
DOWN

- How one might declare that

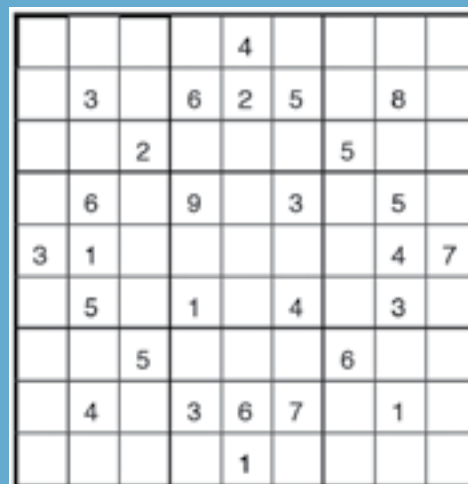
Sudoku Corner

312

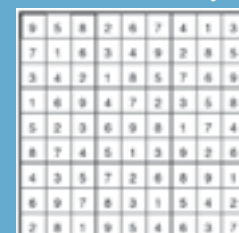
Easy



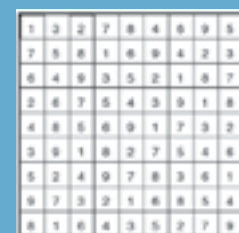
Hard

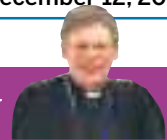


Last week's Easy 311



Last week's Hard 311





Notebook

Fr Bernard Healy

Santi Quattro Coronati...a striking jewel-box of sacred art

CHRIST TELLS US, “nothing is hidden but it will be made clear, nothing secret but it will be made known and brought to light” (Luke 8:17). That’s not a bad meditation for Advent when we reflect both on the Word of God making himself visible to us in the stable in Bethlehem and his coming at the end of time when all that is secret will be laid bare.



One particular church in Rome strikes me as the epitome of the hidden being brought to light. I mean the Basilica of the Santi Quattro Coronati [pictured], which stands behind the Pontifical Irish College. Named for four ‘crowned saints’, i.e. martyrs, who died under the Emperor Diocletian about 1,700 years ago, the building is about as unassuming as they come.

basilica was rebuilt as a fortified monastery, a small castle, in the early 12th Century. Defence rather than aesthetics was the priority.

Although experts can look at the brickwork on the outside and identify some of it as dating back to the original 4th Century foundation, to the casual observer the building looks more like some kind of dilapidated brick barracks than a fine church.

However, this unprepossessing exterior conceals a jewel-box of sacred art. Firstly, the church itself, hidden within the defensive walls of the monastery, is small but striking.

This is easily explained by the history of the place – following the destruction of this part of Rome by the Normans in 1084, the

Exploration

Whilst parts of it date back to the 12th Century, it is dominated by an astonishing 17th Century fresco above the altar showing the four crowned saints entering into

heavenly glory. A little exploration discloses other artworks and architectural features, each precious in their own way. Then, a nondescript door on the left of the church leads to the beautiful monastery cloister, one of the most peaceful and prettiest places in all of Rome.

Resident

Just outside the church, but still within the brick walls, is found the chapel of St Sylvester. To visit, you pass a donation through a hatch to one of the enclosed Augustinian nuns who have been resident here since 1564, and receive a key to enter the most gorgeous little chapel with 13th Century frescoes telling the story of St Sylvester, the Pope at the time of Constantine.

But that’s not the only secret hidden inside Santi Quattro Coronati. In recent years the removal of whitewash from one of the monastery rooms has uncovered what is known as the Gothic Hall.

For centuries a series of frescoes commissioned by the cardinal who lived there in the 1240s was hidden and then forgotten. So beautiful is this work that it has revolutionised our

understanding of medieval art in Rome and so it is called the ‘Sistine Chapel of the Middle Ages’.

There is another way in which the Monastery of the Santi Quattro Coronati bears witness to the uncovering of what was once hidden. During World War II, Jews and other fugitives found refuge in the religious houses of Rome.

However, the question is asked as to what precise role Pius XII played in these concealments. Given the danger of reprisals, renewed persecution and the overrunning of the Vatican by German troops, the Pope chose a policy of public silence and ostensible neutrality.

This has led some to conclude that the mercy shown by the religious of Rome was done in opposition to the Pope! A recently-discovered wartime diary of the Santi Quattro Augustinian nuns helps refute this thesis. It recounts how the Pope ordered the Mother Superior to allow Jews and other fugitives to receive shelter even inside the monastic enclosure.

Not only did the Pope approve, he gave direct orders for the religious to do everything they could.

Great gifts of the Augustinians

The fullness of monastery life is always hidden; with the exception of their singing at the public liturgy, the Augustinian nuns work, pray and live behind closed doors. However, this enclosed life, and in particular the prayer of the sisters, brings great gifts to the Church as a whole.

One of these gifts was made visible by Pope Benedict XVI in Holy Week 2011, when the meditations of Sr Maria Rita Piccione of the Santi Quattro monastery were used for the Papal Stations of the Cross at the Colosseum – a public reminder of the hidden prayer of our monastic brothers and sisters.



YOUR CHRISTMAS GIFT COULD SAVE A CHILD’S LIFE



Crossed POs and cheques should be sent and made payable to:

THE LITTLE WAY ASSOCIATION
 Sacred Heart House, 119 Cedars Rd, Clapham Common, London SW4 0PR
 (Registered Charity No. 235703) Tel 0044 20 76 22 0466
www.littlewayassociation.com

I enclose €..... to be allocated to:

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If you wish to give by credit or debit card please log onto www.littlewayassociation.com and click on ‘donate’.

Name (Rev. Mr. Mrs. Miss) (Block letters please)

Address

IC/12/12

Across the globe untold numbers of children are orphaned or alone with no one to care for them. Street children, totally abandoned, scavenge on rubbish tips for anything edible, or labour for long hours for a few euros. Each day children die of hunger and disease.

The Little Way Association receives numerous requests from missionaries throughout the world asking for help to feed, support and educate needy, deprived children. The whole future of these children often depends upon whether a missionary can find sufficient funds to care for them.

Your donation today will help a missionary to relieve a child’s suffering. IT COULD SAVE A LIFE.

As we prepare to welcome the Christ child at Christmas, please consider making a gift to The Little Way Association’s fund for children.

Every euro you send will be gratefully received and sent **without deduction** to enable a missionary priest or sister to carry the love, care and compassion of Christ to a deprived, abandoned or orphaned child. Thank you, and may God reward your generosity.



“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, and the very least trifle is precious in His sight.”
 - St Therese

YOU CAN HELP REPAIR A MISSION CHAPEL

The Little Way Association has a long history of providing humble places of worship for far-flung parishes in mission countries. Nature can take its toll on these simple buildings, and we receive requests from priests for help with repairs.

We humbly ask that you allocate some of your Christmas giving to our chapels fund. By ensuring that these small but dignified churches are in good repair, you help to make possible the offering of Holy Mass in needy Catholic communities.

The clergy and people overseas who benefit from your generosity invariably promise to pray for their benefactors’ intentions.