

The Irish Catholic

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Vulnerable may die if people refuse vaccine - Bishop Doran

EXCLUSIVE

Michael Kelly

A senior bishop has warned that if a significant number of people refuse to get the Covid-19 vaccine, more people may lose their lives to the virus.

Bishop Kevin Doran – who has been one of the most outspoken pro-life voices in the Church in Ireland in recent decades – insisted that “Vaccination, as an aspect of preventive medicine, is recognised and encouraged by the Catholic Church as an essential element of the mission of healthcare professionals”.

Writing in *The Irish Catholic* this week, Dr Doran reassures the Faithful that there is nothing in Church teaching to prevent them from taking the vaccine, even if it was developed using cell-lines from aborted babies.

“Catholics are free,” he writes, “to use any Covid-19 vaccine that is approved for clinical use, on the understanding that they themselves do not approve of or consent to abortion for the purposes of biomedical research”.

While Dr Doran acknowledges that “Everyone is obliged to follow

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‘Onward Christian Soldiers...’



Orthodox Christian men sing and dance in the icy waters of the Tundzha River to celebrate the feast of the Epiphany in Kalofer, Bulgaria. In the Orthodox Church, Epiphany celebrates the baptism of Jesus rather than the arrival of the Magi. Photo: CNS/Stoyan Nenov

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Vital voices of survivors need to be heard

There is no simple or singular story of the treatment of unmarried mothers in mother and baby homes and county homes. At the outset, I acknowledge that many former residents reject the use of the word 'home'. The report of the commission investigating the treatment of the mothers and their children in the period from 1922-1998 makes for difficult reading.

The more than 3,000 pages attempt to tell a complex story that often reflects badly on Church and State. But families and individuals are also under the spotlight as are the societal attitudes that saw the conception of a child – even in circumstances that one might wish to be otherwise – as something akin to a crime to be hidden away and shrouded in shame.

Report

This report will make for grim if compelling reading for the many people who are still alive who were either born in these homes or gave birth to their children there. The success of television programmes like *Who Do You Think You Are?* points to the reality that the deepest and most enduring questions for each and every one of us are ones like "who am I?" or "where do I come from?" or "who are my people?"

Above all the headlines and the soundbites, it is the voices of the former residents that we need

to hear. Some people report dreadful experiences marked by great cruelty while other people have spoken of the small kindnesses that made life more bearable in what was undoubtedly a harsh environment.

“There is an all-too-easy temptation to find blame for a culture that was unacceptable and wrong”

The story of the homes is a story of young women who were often abandoned at the time when they needed support most. Undoubtedly, the institutions were established with the best of intentions and to respond to a felt need where many young women who became pregnant outside of marriage were left to fend for themselves by their families. Individuals and communities were so petrified of petty gossip in what was an Ireland of 'the valley of the squinting windows' that institutions became the solution.

There is an all-too-easy temptation to find blame for a culture that was unacceptable and wrong. And, there is much blame

to be attributed to both Church and State. But, mother and baby homes – in their various guises – were not peculiarly Irish or peculiarly Catholic. They were a feature of many countries including places dominated by secularism or Protestantism.

Cruelty

In reflecting on 20th Century Ireland and the cruelty that marked our treatment of those we deemed to be less worthy, we must excavate the societal attitudes that allowed such behaviour to be the norm. It would be easy to reduce the entire period to one of a nasty coalition of Church and State that had nothing to do with the prevailing culture.

As Irish people we rightly take pride in the fact that we are – by and large – a welcoming people. But, when we're apportioning blame we need to accept and acknowledge that there were long periods of our history when we weren't that welcoming to people who we felt didn't fit in.

A lot of attention will understandably focus on the religious sisters and other people who worked in the homes. Depressingly, some of them betrayed their evangelical calling. Instead of being the face of Christ to those in need, some of our religious made the lives of some of the most

vulnerable people in their care a life of living hell.

This is something that the Church must continue to seek forgiveness for. But we must also acknowledge the heroic work of the many men and women religious who gave up everything to try to make the lives of those they served better. The good work – while obviously overshadowed and tainted by the bad deeds – must never be entirely obscured. To do so would be to compound injustice.

“The more than 3,000 pages attempt to tell a complex story that often reflects badly on Church and State”

There will be many column inches written in coming days and weeks about the report. This is important and hopefully will add more light than heat. Above all, it is vital that the voices of the former residents are heard. Behind every page is a human story, and that should never be forgotten.

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Bishop Doran warns vulnerable relatives may die if people refuse vaccine

» Continued from Page 1

his or her well-informed conscience". He insists that "In the context of a global pandemic, it is important to consider that vaccination is not simply a private matter.

"If significant numbers of people chose not to be vaccinated, for whatever reason, it would prove very difficult to achieve the required levels of immunity in the population. The result could be significant loss of life and serious illness in the community and especially among those who are most vulnerable, as well as long-term damage to social and economic life, which would impact on the population as a whole.

"This reality must inform any judgement of conscience. Any person who wishes to signal his or her rejection of the use of foetal cell-lines should consider whether there are other ways of doing so, than by refusing to avail of the vaccine," Bishop Doran writes.

It comes after Pope Francis criticised those opposed to a coronavirus vaccine. In a weekend interview on Italian television, the Pope described such opposition as "suicidal denial".

"I believe that ethically everyone must take the vaccine. It is an ethical action, because you risk your own health, your life – but you also risk the lives of others," the Pontiff said.

See Pages 19-22.



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*Names changed to protect identities.

ENDING EXTREME POVERTY WHATEVER IT TAKES

Cardinal Pell to the Irish youth: 'Step up to the plate'

Jason Osborne

Australian Cardinal George Pell has exhorted the Irish youth to lead the Church, lest it continue to sink.

The cardinal, exonerated following a lengthy trial and imprisonment in his native country, addressed the young people of Ireland during an interview with EWTN's Colm Flynn. Asked what he would say to them, he said: "I'd say to the young Irish people: the situation is very, very simple. A goodly percentage of you know how important Christ is, how important the Church is.

"The situation is very simple: either a number of you come forward to lead, or the whole show continues to sink. It won't die, but continue to sink. So step up to the plate."

Asked why young people should want to be part of the Catholic Church when all the coverage in Ireland has "dissolved away their hope and their faith", Cardinal Pell answered:

"You've also got to look not just at the headlines and what the anti-religious press say, but look at the things we've done in history. Look at the contribution we've made to human welfare. It's enormous, enormous.

We also have a glorious history. See what Christ says, read what he says, have a look at the Gospels. He's the person we're following, not the ex-archbishop of Melbourne or Sydney."

The cardinal expressed his optimism for a resurgence of the Catholic Faith in Ireland, saying "of course it will", but not unless people "step up to the plate".



Removed RTÉ God sketch receives record number of complaints

Chai Brady and Jason Osborne

An RTÉ sketch which depicted a man described as God being arrested for sexual assault received a record number of complaints, rising to 7,000 this week.

The sketch was created by satirical website Waterford Whispers and was broadcast on New Year's Eve. Last week RTÉ announced that it did not comply with their own standards and regulations.

Since January 1 this year up until Monday afternoon this week, RTÉ received approximately 5,328 emails and 1,540 calls regarding the sketch segment in the RTÉ One New Year's Eve countdown programme.

RTÉ confirmed to this paper that this is a record number of complaints for 2020.

Statement

In a statement, the national broadcaster said its Editorial Standards Board found that the sketch was not in line



Gardaí stand at the entrance of RTÉ's headquarters in Donnybrook, Dublin as people gathered to protest the sketch. Photo: Twitter/Shout Digital News

with a number of their provisions.

These included Section 39 (1) (d) of the Broadcasting Act 2009 and the BAI Code of

Programme Standards in relation to material that causes "undue offence".

It also did not show "due respect" for religious beliefs,

according to provision of Principle 5 in the above Code, which deals with 'Respect for Persons and Groups in Society'.

The RTÉ Editorial Standards Board also found that the sketch was not in compliance with the provision in the RTÉ Journalism and Content Guidelines concerning sensitivity to people's religious beliefs.

On the back of this, RTÉ decided it will make a disclosure of non-compliance to the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland and engage with the authority in the process.

The Editorial Standards Board is required to review the processes involved in the broadcast and report on them. RTÉ will also remove the sketch from the RTÉ Player.

In the statement, RTÉ said its view was that satire "is an important part of the offering to our audience".

It added: "However, satire, no more than any other aspect of our output, must adhere to our own standards and the standards set out in the Broadcasting Act 2009 and the BAI Codes."

Corrie star proud to be pro-life



Jason Osborne

Coronation Street star Kerri Quinn has expressed her pride at having the opportunity to represent the pro-life community in an upcoming BBC drama *The Awakening*.

The drama is set to deal with the relaxation of abortion laws in Northern Ireland, with the Belfast actress

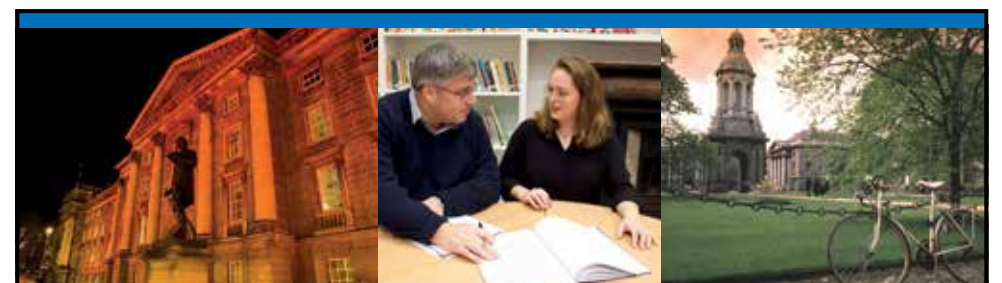
playing a pro-life activist. A cause close to her heart, Ms Quinn explained how important the subject is to herself and her family, having lost her brother, Kevin, at three years of age.

Speaking to the *Belfast Telegraph*, she said: "I play a pro-lifer which I was delighted about because my whole family are pro-life, so it was a role I really

wanted to portray and portray properly.

"It was great to have the opportunity to represent that point of view and represent it well," Ms Quinn said.

The actress, most famous for her role as Vicky Jefferies on *Coronation Street*, said she believes the show will create important conversation on the topic of abortion.



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Faith groups in Ireland fare poorly in leadership poll

Jason Osborne

Faith groups ranked poorly after the public were polled regarding the sector demonstrating the best leadership in Ireland.

Leadership

LIFT Ireland – an initiative to develop the level of leadership nationwide – polled 1,000 members of the public on their attitudes towards leadership standards and asked them to rank the sectors and professions they believed demonstrated good leadership over the past year.

Healthcare professionals were perceived as having demonstrated the greatest levels of solid leadership, while faith-based groups received the lowest rating, with 4% of respondents stating they demonstrated good leadership. This sat just below politicians, with 5% of respondents

considering their leadership to be adequate.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, priest-theologian Fr Eugene Duffy of Mary Immaculate College reacted to the findings, outlining poor leadership, an aging Church profile, and a lack of faith formation as problems contributing to the Church's weakened leadership in Irish society.

Community life

On a local level, he suggested that the GAA has replaced the Church as the centre of community life, particularly in rural Ireland.

"I'm struck by the fact that I think its role has been replaced by the GAA in many situations. While a lot of good work was done by voluntary groups obviously, Church-based groups as such, during the pandemic, I would think the GAA did tremendous work in the kind of social outreach," Dr Duffy said.

Highlighted

Dr Duffy also highlighted potential paths forward, including greater risk-taking in decision making and an emphasis on faith formation.

"I think one of the issues we have to seriously address is the issue of faith formation. That's an issue. I think we have, by the appointment of bishops generally, we've got poor leadership," Dr Duffy said.

"People are not appointed to those posts by virtue of their capacity for leadership, au contraire. I think we are genuinely, not just being cynical in saying that, I think we are reaping the harvest of that. Safe people, who are not going to disturb the status quo and therefore aren't going to generate initiatives that are imaginative, creative, they're not risk-takers and we'll have to be prepared to take risks."

» See pages 12 and 13

NEWS IN BRIEF

'Great spirit' after chaplains vaccinated in Tallaght

The Director of Pastoral Care in Tallaght University Hospital in Dublin has heralded the Covid-19 vaccine as an "extra shield" to help in their ministry after the whole team were vaccinated last week.

Fr John Kelly said there's a "great spirit" despite the "dangerously high" Covid numbers. All staff in the hospital are due to be vaccinated by the end of the week.

"The vaccine obviously comes as an extra strength to us, an extra shield to guard us and protect us as we carry out the work because we're still living in an environment where there's no families allowed to be with their loved ones unless in exceptional circumstances, on compassionate grounds, it's great that it's arrived," Fr Kelly said, adding that he was feeling fine after the vaccine.

"There's a great spirit, we are actually in a very difficult period at the moment and maybe we don't have quite as much fear of the unknown that we had back in March," he said, however Fr Kelly added, "we're aware that the numbers are increasing and hospitals are filling, the numbers are dangerously high."

Online theology course to be launched this month

Chai Brady

The Loyola Institute is moving its 'Faith Seeking Understanding' course online, making it more accessible to a wider audience across Ireland and the world, in order to help those who want to become more "literate about their Faith".

The four-week course in theology

is intended to introduce participants to the wealth of theological insight available in the Catholic tradition. Delivered via Zoom, and held on Wednesdays from 5.30pm to 8pm starting on January 27, the cost for the four weeks is €20.

Organisers said: "It is intended to meet the need, expressed by some, to be more literate about their Faith.

Very often our understanding is more intuitive than explicit and our ability to deal in an informed and enlightened way with many of the complex religious and moral issues that arise can be quite limited. We sometimes wish we had more to draw on so as to be better able to explain how we see things."

The series is organised by the

Loyola Institute, School of Religion, Trinity College Dublin and Jesuit Education Trust in association with the Le Cheile, Spiritan and Loretto Education Trusts.

Tickets can be purchased for the lecture series on Eventbrite via this link: <https://www.eventbrite.ie/e/faith-seeking-understanding-2021-tickets-131006739685>

Schwarzenegger asks for 'servant's heart' from politicians

Jason Osborne

Arnold Schwarzenegger referred US elected representatives to Catholic teaching in a video released on his Twitter page last weekend.

The actor and former Governor of California referenced his Catholic upbringing in a video posted in the wake of and in response to the events in the US Capitol last weekend, which saw the Capitol building breached by crowds of Donald Trump supporters.

"I grew up Catholic, I went to church, went to Catholic school. I learned the Bible and my catechism," Mr Schwarzenegger says in the video. "And from those days I remember a phrase that is relevant today: a servant's heart."

The actor explained that the phrase means to serve something larger than yourself, saying that what is needed right now is "a public servant's heart".



Pope Francis greets actor and former California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger during his general audience in Paul VI hall at the Vatican in this 2017 file photo. Photo CNS.

We were in a middle-class bubble

Since I am of the generation who grew up in Ireland in the 1950s, I've received messages on social media saying I – or we – must have been aware of the neglect, malnutrition and cruelties of the mother and baby homes which have been brought to light this week.

Astonishing

It may seem astonishing to say this, but I didn't even know that such institutions existed until a single friend of mine stayed in one for a time in the 1970s. As it happens, the home itself was in the north of England, not in Ireland. She chose to go there herself because she didn't want her father in rural Ireland to know about her pregnancy, although she confided in her mother. Her father was a good man who held public office, but he had high moral standards and she couldn't bring herself to tell him of the situation. From what she told me, the home 'for unmarried mothers' was a bit basic and there were some restrictive rules, yet it was useful to her while she settled herself, and she moved on – keeping and raising her child herself. But her father died without knowing about his grandchild.

“We have always known of [the unmarried mothers'] suffering but we turned our eyes and did nothing”

This must have been a not unusual situation in its time, and almost certainly more anguishing 20 years previously, when the unmarried mother really was stigmatised.

But it now rather shames me to think that I had no idea that such institutions existed: shaming that middle-class society lived in such a bourgeois bubble that probably didn't wish to know about what was hidden. Although I certainly remember compassion for 'the poor', and charity being



Mary Kenny



exhorted. The marginalised then meant the travelling people, whose conditions were often dire.

The nearest we came - in the Dublin 4 milieu where I grew up - to any mention of the unmarried mother was some vague gossip about someone who 'had to get married', which was in itself something embarrassing. 'Having' to get married was the euphemism for a pregnant bride, and it was the only remedy that the respectable middle-classes accepted for an out-of-wedlock pregnancy. Get hold of the father and make him do the decent thing. There were jokes, too, about 'the shotgun wedding'.

Report

In a wide-ranging report in the *Irish Independent* on Tuesday, Nicola Anderson wrote: "We have always known of [the unmarried mothers'] suffering but we turned our eyes and did nothing." Eyes were certainly turned from what was considered, at best, an unfortunate situation, and

at worst, a social disgrace, we didn't always know about the plight of these women. And the newspapers of the time didn't inform us, either.

We now need to know a lot more - not just of the findings of the commission on the homes, but more details of how and why each individual woman was committed there. Was it poverty? Social - including Church, and priestly - pressure on the family? Were there other social problems involved? Or was it a range of factors which added up to a very wretched and distressing picture indeed?

● "Anyone who proposes to do good must not expect people to roll stones out of his way - but must accept his lot calmly even if they roll a few more upon the way." This week's inspiring quotation from Albert Schweitzer, theologian, physician and Nobel prize winner.

Facing up to cruel facts

The death toll in these homes was shocking - one in seven infants died, which added up to 9,000 deaths between 1922 up to 1998.

Infant mortality generally was a huge problem in Ireland in the early years of the state. J.J. Lee wrote in his magisterial *Ireland 1912-1985*. In a 1927 Poor Law Report it was noted that Dublin's infant mortality rate was one of the worst in

Europe - 120 infants per 1,000 died. The rate of infant mortality, particularly in inner-city areas, did not improve substantially for another 30 years.

A Scottish doctor I know, now in his 90s, remembers being a young houseman in the Coombe in the 1940s, and meeting with so many stillbirths and infant deaths. Yet what impressed him was the stoical acceptance of so many of the Dublin mothers.

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Pro-life activists decry ‘truly shocking’ fall in Down Syndrome births in Europe

Ruadhán Jones

The fall of nearly 50% in Down Syndrome births between 2011-2015 is “horrifying”, but not a surprise, the Life Institute and the Pro-life Campaign say.

They also criticised the “complete cloak of concealment and silence around abortion in Ireland”, which means we do not know how many children with disabilities are being aborted.

Their statements come in the light of a report published in the *European Journal of Human Genetics*, which examined the years 2011-2015 to determine the number of babies born with Down Syndrome across all countries in Europe, and compared those numbers to estimates of how many babies would have been born with Down Syndrome had they not been aborted.

The study found that 54% fewer babies with Down Syndrome were born during that period in the United Kingdom than estimates would have expected – a figure roughly in line with the European average. In Spain and Italy, the percentage of reduction was 83% and 71%, respectively.

Niamh Uí Bhriain of the Life Institute called the figures shocking and said they lay out starkly “how appalling abortion is”.

“There’s a line from the study where they say that, in Europe between 2011-2015, they estimate they were 8,031 live births of children with Down Syndrome and there should have been 17,331,” she said.

The figures in 2011 were already on the way down, Ms Uí Bhriain explained, warning that “we’re going to be looking at Iceland or Denmark

being the norm right across Europe I think, where people born with Down Syndrome will be incredibly rare. What a tragedy that is for every country where this is happening”.

She concluded, saying that the Irish people were “warned during the referendum and they looked the other way. People need to ask themselves a question – do they actually care about a future where there will be no children with Down Syndrome anymore?”

Eilís Mulroy of the Pro-life Campaign said that the report was “very sad”, adding that it should be a reminder to pro-life people to work harder.

“We should never stop being surprised at the fact that there’s a push always to seek to eliminate people with Down Syndrome,” she said. “We have to work even harder to make

sure people with Down Syndrome... are protected by law and society.”

Ms Mulroy also criticised the lack of any statistics on abortions taking place in Ireland, saying that “it’s because the reality is that it would highlight some of the darker elements of what’s behind the abortion legislation”.

Both Ms Mulroy and Ms Uí Bhriain highlighted that countries with more liberal abortion regimes – such as the UK – “at least” keep accurate statistics.

“It’s actually astonishing that at a time when you hear buzzwords around transparency and openness so often that there is a complete cloak of concealment and silence around abortion in Ireland,” Ms Uí Bhriain said. “It would be very difficult to get a proper understanding of what is happening from the figures being released by the Irish Government.”

NEWS IN BRIEF

Ireland human trafficking record ‘level with third-world’ says nun

More vigilance and effort is needed to tackle human trafficking in Ireland, said Sr Eilís Coe RSC, as Ireland’s human trafficking record is on par with some third-world countries.

Nearly 500 victims of human trafficking have been identified in Ireland since 2013. However there have been no convictions holding anyone responsible.

“More vigilance is needed at the airports and the sea-ports – more proper processes,” Sr Coe, who has been fighting for better protection and support for victims of trafficking for years, said on Newstalk.

“The other thing we have to tackle is the demand: these people would not be coming in here if men were not buying access to their bodies,” she continued. “There’s a huge demand in Ireland.”

‘Don’t be afraid to talk’ says Bishop Nulty to domestic abuse victims

Staff Reporter

Bishop Denis Nulty, president of Accord Catholic Marriage Care Service CLG (Accord), has urged domestic abuse victims to seek help as the pandemic continues to affect relationships.

“I feel in the lockdown in this highly restrictive area that issues like domestic abuse come to the fore even stronger,” Bishop Nulty told *The Irish Catholic*. “All agencies dealing with domestic abuse

have reported a high level of calls.

“The Accord phone-line is there and people can make a phone call. But obviously, sometimes it’s not even easy to make that phone call.”

Bishop Nulty urged people not to “be afraid to make that call, seek that help. Don’t hesitate whatsoever to lift that phone and make that call”.

The bishop’s comments come as Accord launches a multi-channel advertising campaign to bring “hope (support) to individuals, couples and

their families, where relationships are experiencing tension, anxiety and stress during this time of pandemic”.

Accord established a phone line specifically for the pandemic in April 2020. They have received 1,128 calls from members of the public experiencing distress in their relationships up to January 2021.

To contact Accord, you can call 01 5313331 Monday-Friday, 8am-9pm.

Feeling jovial before the festival



Rev. Steve Stockman and Fr Martin Magill promote the 4 Corners festival, which goes online this year. Photo: Bernie Brown.

Irish Archbishop Eugene Nugent appointed Nuncio in Kuwait and Qatar

On January 7, Pope Francis appointed Archbishop Eugene Nugent Apostolic Nuncio in Kuwait and Qatar, previously Nuncio in Haiti.

Archbishop Nugent, aged 62, originally from Scariff, Co. Clare (diocese of Killaloe) has spent the last six years in Haiti and will transfer to Kuwait mid-February.

A graduate in Celtic Studies from the National University of Ireland (Maynooth) and subsequently in theology and canon law at the Gregorian University in Rome, Archbishop Nugent also studied diplomacy and international relations at the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy in Rome. He was ordained a priest in Scariff on July 9, 1983 for the diocese of Killaloe.

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The Irish Catholic

Breda O'Brien

The View



Looking at Confirmation positives during bleakness of Covid-19

It is profoundly disappointing, not to mention scary if you are what the French call a 'certain age' to be once again in lockdown.

It is heartbreaking to see it sweeping again through nursing homes, including places where it was successfully kept out in previous waves.

Impacts

Young people may not be as badly affected as older people on a physical level, although there are exceptions. Everyone has a story of a previously fit and healthy young person who was very ill.

There are other impacts on young people, too, including that so many young people remain unconfirmed. Confirmation ceremonies have been cancelled for months on end. It is impossible to know the numbers but it may be as high as 50% of young people in urban areas.

“Without saying a word, these girls demonstrated that their faith was important enough to them to invest time in it”

At the risk of being accused of being Pollyannaish, this may represent an opportunity. I recall with great fondness a family many years ago who had been abroad. Three of the daughters were not confirmed as a result. They chose to be confirmed and as one of the RE teachers in the school, it was my privilege to organise it.

It was a tremendous experience. They took part in preparation with me and it was possible to discuss all sorts of things that normally would be met with a yawn

“In the very early church, adults prepared for entry into the Church and therefore, Baptism, Confirmation and first reception of the Eucharist were all part of the same ceremony”



in class. On the day, their friends came along. Without saying a word, these girls demonstrated that their faith was important enough to them to invest time in it.

It was a beautiful ceremony. It had a funny postscript. Never having been involved in a Confirmation before, I never thought about registering the Confirmation in the local parish and neither, let it be said, did the bishop who carried it out. Years later, I got a letter from one of the girls asking me to confirm, if you will pardon the pun, that she had been confirmed, as the bishop had gone to his eternal reward.

Witness

As you cannot get married without proof of being confirmed, I was suddenly a very important witness. I was, of course, delighted to play even a small role in facilitating the nuptials.

If young people are not automatically confirmed at 12 because of Covid-19, should we wait to confirm them until they are at least 16? Transition year would seem to be the ideal time to make a decision like this.

In the very early church, adults prepared for entry into the Church and therefore, Baptism, Confirmation and first reception of the Eucharist were all part of the same ceremony. As the Christian faith became established,

the practice of baptising infants came about. In the Eastern Church and indeed, in the West, it was common to give communion to babies after they had been baptised and confirmed, except in the Western Church it was administered as the Precious Blood only, whereas it was given (and is given) under both species in the Orthodox Church.

“Candidates are baptised as babies, receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation around seven to eight as preparation for Confirmation and first Eucharist around eight”

The age of Baptism and Confirmation gradually changed until it was more commonly celebrated around the age of seven. However, it was felt that more preparation was needed for confirmation so gradually, the order changed. Pope Pius X in 1910 said that children could receive the Eucharist by the age of reason, at the time, generally taken to be seven. Although he was silent about the age of confirmation the custom

of later confirmation grew even more common.

Some bishops have been so concerned about the lack of right order of the sacraments, such as Most Reverend James Sean Wall of the Archdiocese of Denver, that they have restored the original order but retained the age of eight for reception. Candidates are baptised as babies, receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation around seven to eight as preparation for Confirmation and first Eucharist around eight.

Sacraments of initiation

I see the reasoning. As it says in a Denver document on the sacraments of initiation,

“Contrary to widespread misconception, Confirmation is not the sacrament of adult commitment to the faith. It is a cause of spiritual maturity, not recognition of physical maturity.”

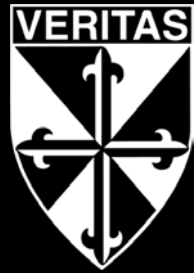
“We are all suffering from the lack of receiving the Body and Blood of Christ at the moment”

Although teachers and priests do their best, I am not sure that our current practice in Ireland is much more than a passing out parade, or a day out, or a rite of passage.

The correct order of the sacraments is a serious consideration and I would find it hard to force children to wait until 16 to receive the Eucharist. We are all suffering from the lack of receiving the Body and Blood of Christ at the moment. However, I still believe that later confirmation could have a positive impact on the seriousness with which young people might participate in this vital Sacrament.


Community

Given that numbers would be smaller, it would be a marvellous opportunity to build a real sense of community among candidates if the preparation took place in the parish.



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Report lifts lid on harsh and unforgiving attitudes towards unmarried mothers



The commission doesn't shy away from laying blame at the foot of families as well as Church and State, writes Chai Brady

The responsibility for the "harsh treatment" of unmarried mothers "rests mainly with the fathers of their children and their own immediate families", according to the commission investigating the institutions.

The report – which runs to over 3,000 pages – was published on Tuesday afternoon. It investigated the treatment of unmarried mothers and their children in 18 institutions from 1922–1998.

It found that "Ireland was a cold harsh environment for many, probably the majority, of its residents during the earlier half of the period under remit". The commission found Ireland was "especially cold and harsh for women".

The report led by Judge Yvonne Murphy stated that the mistreatment of unmarried mothers "was supported by, contributed to, and condoned by, the institutions of the State and the Churches". At the same time, the commission found that "it must be acknowledged that the institutions under investigation provided a refuge – a harsh refuge in some cases – when the families provided no refuge at all".

There were about 56,000 unmarried mothers and about 57,000 children in the mother and baby homes and county homes investigated by the Commission. The greatest

number of admissions was in the 1960s and early 1970s. It is likely that there were a further 25,000 unmarried mothers and a larger number of children in the county homes which were not investigated; admissions to county homes were largely pre-1960. While mother and baby homes were not a peculiarly Irish phenomenon, the proportion of Irish unmarried mothers who were admitted to mother and baby homes or county homes in the twentieth century was probably the highest in the world.

“However, 80% were aged between 18 and 29 years and this was remarkably consistent across the larger mother and baby homes”

The women who were admitted to mother and baby homes ranged in age from 12 years old to women in their



Aiden Corless lights candles in the middle of artwork made up of clay children's shoes at the site of a home for unmarried mothers in Tuam.

forties. However, 80% were aged between 18 and 29 years and this was remarkably consistent across the larger mother and baby homes. 5,616 women, 11.4% of the total for whom information about their age is available, were under 18 years of age. The Commission has not seen evidence that the Gardaí were routinely notified about pregnancies in under-age women.

It also revealed that some pregnancies were the result of rape; some women had mental health problems, some had an intellectual disability. However, the majority were indistinguishable from most Irish women of their time.

The commission said "the only difference between the women in mother and baby homes and their sisters, classmates and work companions was that they became pregnant while unmarried". It continued: "Their lives were blighted by pregnancy outside marriage, and the responses of the father of their child, their immediate families and the wider community."

On the issue of infant mortality, the commission says while the first report of the Irish Free State highlighted the appalling excess mortality of children born to unmarried mothers and subsequent Department of Local Government and Public Health reports noted the fact, that there was little evidence that politicians or the public were concerned about these children.

"No publicity was given to the fact that in some years during the 1930s and 1940s, over 40% of 'illegitimate' children were dying before their first birthday in mother and baby homes.

Denominational rivalry it says was not unique to Ireland but it appears to have persisted for a longer time than elsewhere and impacted on Irish mother and baby homes until the 1940s.

"The main motivation behind the British and Irish Catholic charities who were involved in repatriating Irish women from Britain, either pregnant or with their newborn infant, was to prevent these children being 'lost' to Catholicism through adoption into Protestant families.

Concerns, however far-fetched, that state-regulated adoption would result in Catholic children being adopted by parents of a different religion were a factor in delaying the introduction of legal adoption in Ireland until 1952.

“The commission also found children in Mother and Baby Homes were subjected to vaccine trials”

It notes that Ireland was the second-last country in western Europe to legislate for adoption.

Judge Murphy found there were a small number of complaints of physical abuse. Many women suffered emotional abuse and were often subjected to denigration and derogatory remarks. Little kindness was shown to them and this was particularly the case in childbirth.

Between 1922 and 1998, 1,638 children, who were resident in mother and baby homes under investigation, were placed for foreign adoption. The vast majority, 1,427, were placed for adoption to the US. There was no regulation of foreign adoptions. Allegations of large sums of money being given to institutions and agencies in Ireland that arranged foreign adoptions are impossible to prove or disprove, the Commission finds.

The commission also found children in mother and baby Homes were subjected to vaccine trials without the consent of their parents or guardians. It identified seven such trials between 1934 and 1973 and found they were not compliant with regulatory and ethical standards of the time due to lack of consent and the failure to have necessary licences in place.

However, it found no evidence of injury to the children involved as a result of the vaccines. The trials all involved either the Wellcome Foundation or Glaxo Laboratoires, both of which are now part of GlaxoSmithKline. They included trials for a measles and a "Quadravax" for polio, diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus.

The Commission recommends that there be a right for adopted people to access their birth information, including their birth cert and other records even though it is "acutely conscious of the concerns expressed by some birth mothers about this".

It says redress is a matter for the Government and recognises that it may not be possible to provide financial redress for all the wrongs in the past. Its report states that it is arguable that unmarried mothers not in the homes and who reared their children without State assistance have as good a case for redress as those in the homes paid for by the State.

A redress scheme, if it is being considered, could be modelled on the two comparable schemes, the Residential Institutions Redress Scheme, which would be for the children, and the Magdalene Laundries scheme which could be used for mothers. Redress for children in certain named homes does not arise, the Commission finds, however those children resident in county homes without their mothers should all be eligible for redress, it states.

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Mother and baby homes are not an Irish or Catholic invention



None of us are served unless we have a debate that is rounded and looks at attitudes in other countries, writes **David Quinn**

Much of the commentary down the years about the mother and baby home has focussed on the role the Church played in creating harsh attitudes towards unmarried mothers and their children. The clear implication is that were it not for the Catholic Church, we would have been much kinder in our treatment of both groups.

It was the Church's obsessive attitude towards various sexual sins, especially sex outside marriage, we are told, which created the climate that led to the mother and baby homes, which are the subject of a massive official report that was published this week.

And certainly, it is true that Catholic morality at the time was often harsh and condemnatory, aimed more at keeping people in line and sometimes punishing them, than at showing mercy.

Removed

But if the Catholic Church had been totally removed from Irish society would attitudes towards unmarried mothers and their children have been very different? The answer is, almost certainly not because we find very similar attitudes at the time almost everywhere, whether it be in Asia, Africa, Muslim countries, Protestant countries, or indeed secular countries like Sweden.

“After all we have learnt about fighting Covid, nursing homes remain very vulnerable”

Indeed, in much of the world to this day, those harsh attitudes still often exist, driven usually by economic factors because there is a very strong link between punitive attitudes towards unmarried mothers and ‘illegitimate’ children, and poverty.

Conversely, as a country becomes richer, its attitudes in this regard tend to soften.

Mother and baby homes are neither an Irish invention, nor a Catholic one. They were very wide-



Peter Mulryan, a former resident of the Tuam mother and baby home walks away after laying flowers before a 2018 service at the site. Photo: CNS/Clodagh Kilcoyne.

spread in Britain, for example, and only about one in ten was run by the Catholic Church.

Children were commonly adopted out. The peak year in England was 1968, when 16,000 were placed for adoption, sometimes against the will of the mother.

Note that in the previous year, England's abortion law had been liberalised. In addition to British society becoming richer, and the Welfare State more generous as a consequence, abortion began to displace both adoption and the mother and baby homes.

Mother and baby homes were also very widespread in the United States. It was the same in Australia, Canada and New Zealand, none of them Catholic countries.

But perhaps religion was to blame, not Catholicism per se, and if we take religion out of the picture, things improve. This isn't true either, as we can see from the example of Sweden.

The mother and baby homes report covers the period from 1922 until the 1990s when the last of them closed, although numbers in them greatly abated from the 1970s as attitudes changed and Ireland became richer.

But if you take the period when they were at their peak, from 1922 until the 1960s or 1970s, in many other countries a philosophy of eugenics was being widely promoted that sought to ‘better’ the population through measures like sterilisation, so that the ‘unfit’ could not breed.

Targets

One of the targets of those programmes was unmarried mothers and eugenics was particularly strong in countries like Sweden which was ruled continuously by the Social Democratic party from the 1930s until the 1970s and ran a sterilisation programme through that time which targeted women in 90pc of the 60,000 cases, some of them unmarried mothers.

As Cambridge historian Professor Véronique Mottier writes, among the victims of these policies were “socially deviant groups such as unmarried mothers”.

It was the same in Switzerland.

This totally destroys the notion that countries dominated by secular, ‘scientific’ thinking would have been more humane. The opposite was the case. In fact, in those countries it was often the Catho-

lic Church which mostly strongly fought against eugenics.

Mortality rates in the mother and baby homes were higher than among the general population. Infant mortality rates were about twice as high in them, and the general infant mortality rate was high to begin with.

“We saw a very high number of deaths from or with Covid-19 in our nursing homes last April and May”

But a key reason for the high number of deaths in mother and baby homes was the fact that they were congregated settings.

We saw a very high number of deaths from or with Covid-19 in our nursing homes last April and May, far higher than among older people in the general population. Why? Because it is very easy for infection to spread in in those homes, and that is what happened, especially when elderly people were switched from hospitals to nursing homes without being tested for Covid, when staff didn't have enough PPE, and when

the HSE was competing against them for nursing staff. When will this merit more public outrage?

Even now, after all we have learnt about fighting Covid, nursing homes remain very vulnerable. In a pandemic, they are the worst places to be because they are extremely difficult to completely protect.

In the mother and baby homes, we can see from death certificates how the infants and young children died. It was frequently from very deadly (to children) infections like measles. Once measles got into a home, the children would often die in clusters because it spread so easily.

The reason nursing homes remain so vulnerable to Covid is because we had no vaccination against it. With a vaccination now being rolled out, hopefully the death rate in nursing homes will plunge.

It was only when vaccinations against diseases like measles were invented, plus antibiotics, that the infant mortality rate in mother and baby homes, and society at large, really began to plunge. That was from the 1950s in particular.

Almost all of the deaths in the homes occurred before this time.

How much of this will be pointed out in commentary about the mother and baby homes now that the report is out? To judge from past performance, almost certainly very little. We don't believe in having a fully rounded discussion of the issue.

“If the Catholic Church had been totally removed from Irish society would attitudes towards unmarried mothers and their children have been very different?”

Married priests, but who will be the bride?



Some priests might find the prospect of getting married attractive, but what about their would-be spouses asks **Ruadhán Jones**

In 2018, when the World Meeting of Families came to Ireland, it gave me a chance to reconnect with a priest-friend from Romania. He holds the unique spot in my life as the only married priest that I know. A Byzantine Catholic, one of the Eastern Rites of the Church, he married straight after seminary and has one child.

Papal Mass

He and his wife are quite a lively pair and as we walked towards Phoenix park for the Papal Mass, my friend would barter with street-vendors for Pope Francis hats and scarves (as well as supposed holy water from St Francis' well). None of the vendors knocked down their prices, but my priest-friend enjoyed it. As he moved on, he would give them a blessing. All this caused his wife much embarrassment, and she would

drag him away saying, "No, no, they do not want to be blessed!"

“In that sense, he seems to confirm the prevailing belief that marriage can be a panacea for the vocations crisis”

It is quite an odd dynamic, but a very human one. When I first met them, their relationship had an extra layer of strangeness as here before me was that creature much vaunted in sections of the Irish press and Church – a married priest.

In a recent interview, Archbishop-elect of Dublin Dr Dermot Farrell suggested he would be open to an Orthodox (as in the churches) approach to priestly celibacy. He's not alone in that view, and perhaps he would be interested in the life and ministry of my friend.

I know I was interested and still am. He is, if one can make such judgements, an excellent priest – one in the mould of Pope Francis. He is deeply involved in his local community – he recently completed construction on a small school and orphanage – and is devoted to the liturgy. On top of this, he is also a loving father and husband.

In that sense, he seems to confirm the prevailing belief that marriage can be a panacea for the vocations crisis. But of course, this doesn't 'prove' anything – other than the excellence of one man – and many have pointed out the obvious pitfalls of such an approach.

Speaking to my friend's wife, she highlighted an issue which I hadn't thought of. Women don't necessarily want to marry priests. She told me that young seminarians who want a wife are struggling to find one – the prospects their life offers simply aren't attractive enough to young women. The priest's vocation is a difficult one, a sacrificial one which cannot promise suburban bliss.

While the lives of our own society's heroes – doctors, firemen, sportsmen and the like – are no doubt demanding, they can at least provide what most today consider a 'good' life for their families. Equally, the priestly vocation is perhaps more demanding because they are set apart in a way these people aren't. A priest is simply not going to be as well paid or to able live as freely as the above-mentioned heroes.

Eastern Churches

It shouldn't be a surprise then that Eastern Churches have real titles for the priest's wife – *presbytera* or *pani matka* or *khouria*. To be a priest's wife is to respond to a calling of one's own and with it comes certain expectations. What woman is likely to put up with the challenges of a priest-husband-father, knowing that he has to be 'on call' effectively every weekend of the year, knowing that his pay is likely to be low, knowing that you could just be putting down roots when his bishop asks him to move parishes?

Of course, modern women are well entrenched in the workforce and can have lives and means of their own. But that cannot change the fact that your husband 'belongs' to another, to a whole community, in a way that is radically different from any other profession.

Come and See

The Sunday Gospel

Fr Silvester O'Flynn OFM Cap.



If you have access to a streamed Mass this Sunday, you will notice that we have returned to the green vestments of Ordinary Time. Green is the colour of growth and we can call it the default colour of the year when our journey is inspired by the teaching and events of the public ministry of Jesus.

“They were familiar with the sacrificing of lambs, and with their memory of when their forefathers in Egypt were saved by the blood of a lamb sprinkled on their houses”

Today's Gospel (John 1:35-42) starts with John the Baptist passing the torch to Jesus. John had made it known that he was preparing the way for someone coming after him. As Jesus passed by, John stared hard at him. He said to two of his followers, "Look, there is the Lamb of God." It might not mean much to us, but to these Jewish lads it was a title loaded with meaning. They were familiar with the sacrificing of lambs, and with their memory of when their forefathers in Egypt were saved by the blood of a lamb sprinkled on their houses. Some years later it was at the very time when lambs were being sacrificed in the temple that Jesus was crucified.

Where do you live

The two followers of the Baptist then trailed after Jesus who noticed them and asked them, "What are you looking for?" They answered, "Master, where do you live?" This was a nice way of saying that they would like to have a chat with him. It wasn't his postal address that they sought but what one might call his spiritual home, where and how he lived in relationship with God.

Come and See

"Come and see", he replied and so they went with him and stayed with him the rest of the day. We are told that it was the tenth hour. In those days before mechanical clocks there were 12 hours from sunrise to sunset and 12 from sunset to sunrise. The tenth hour was two hours before nightfall. A man home from the missions in Africa informed me that whenever they had a long journey, they wanted to arrive two hours before sunset to allow time to unload and freshen up before the evening meal. So, the tenth hour represents journey's end. The searching soul has found home with the Lord. What is important thereafter is to spend time with the Lord. St Augustine was a man who searched down many roads before he found his home with God. "You have made us

for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee."

Space and Symbols

Years ago, I read a good introduction to prayerfulness called *Make Space, Make Symbols*, by an American Capuchin, Keith Clarke. The invitation of Jesus is to come and see. A symbol is something that links us up with a bigger reality. But first we have to organise life so as to have space for God's invitation to come and see. It's not easy today because our minds are invaded by noise, new gadgets, things we must have and the urge to test and taste everything. Many people have to begin with breathing exercises and muscular relaxation in order to create space for God.

Having created this space or room for God, where is our symbol or way of connecting with God? The beauty of it is that there are any number of connections, many ways of prayer. If you have a favourite way, stay with it. It may be a friendly chat, the rosary, a favourite mantra, a visit to a church. Personally, I draw my prayer from pondering on the Gospel of each day. What word or phrase enlivens me? What does it say about God? Where does it connect with my life this day?

Morning and Evening

May I suggest two simple exercises that I find helpful? Start each day by thanking God for refreshing sleep and the gift of a new day. May it be a good day, a day of helping others. Take a few deep breaths and invite the Holy Spirit to fill your lungs with God's love. You may be under pressure of time but this morning prayer will only take a minute or so.

“The fact that you are alive, a nice meal, something beautiful that you saw or heard, a helpful shop assistant, a funny moment, good example”

Then, at the end of the day, it's a grand form of prayer to sit quietly and reflect on the day. Don't concentrate on your faults or what wrong you did. Rather, recall the good things, the blessings of the day. The fact that you are alive, a nice meal, something beautiful that you saw or heard, a helpful shop assistant, a funny moment, good example. The list is endless but we are not sufficiently aware of these blessings. End the day on a note of thankfulness. Perhaps, make a note of one blessing in your diary.

Prayer

"Come and see...follow me". Lord Jesus, we hear your words of invitation addressed to us personally. Grant us the grace to be at home with you in prayerfulness. May we experience prayer as a time when you are looking at us as we are looking at you...friends, enjoying your presence, happy to spend time with you.

We pray for those who do not know you. Break through the clouds that darken their lives. May your face shed its smile upon them and draw them to follow you.

Church leadership has to change to be seen



An ailing Church needs to be bold if it's to return to leadership, hears Jason Osborne

The Church in Ireland has been ailing for some time, and the results of the 2021 LIFT index ought to provide the Faithful with food for thought.

LIFT Ireland – an initiative to develop the level of leadership nationwide – polled 1,000 members of the public on their attitudes towards leadership standards and asked them to rank the sectors and professions they believed demonstrated good leadership over the past year.

While it's of note that healthcare professionals were perceived as having demonstrated the greatest levels of solid leadership, of more interest to the Church is the fact that faith-based groups received the lowest rating, with 4% of respondents stating they demonstrated good leadership. This sat just below politicians, with 5% of respondents considering their leadership to be adequate.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, UCD Professor Emeritus of Sociology, Tom Inglis offered some thoughts as to the societal changes taking place which have seen the Church relegated to a back-seat.

“As well as this, the Church of the future is going to have to be ‘smaller’ and more ‘intentional’”

“For most of the heyday of the Catholic Church, there was a big, if you like, buy-in to that – buying into the Church's explanation of the meaning of life, and the Church's models as to how to live a good life. It was basically unquestioned, and it was part of the air they breathed each day. It was shared, it was almost universal, it was unquestioned and that went on for ages. Then it began – that hard shell began to fragment. Now it fragmented primarily through, if you like, the homogeneity and isolation of Catholic Ireland, that began to be eroded by the forces of globalisation, secularisation, the media, the market and so forth. That led to that hard shell being cracked. The

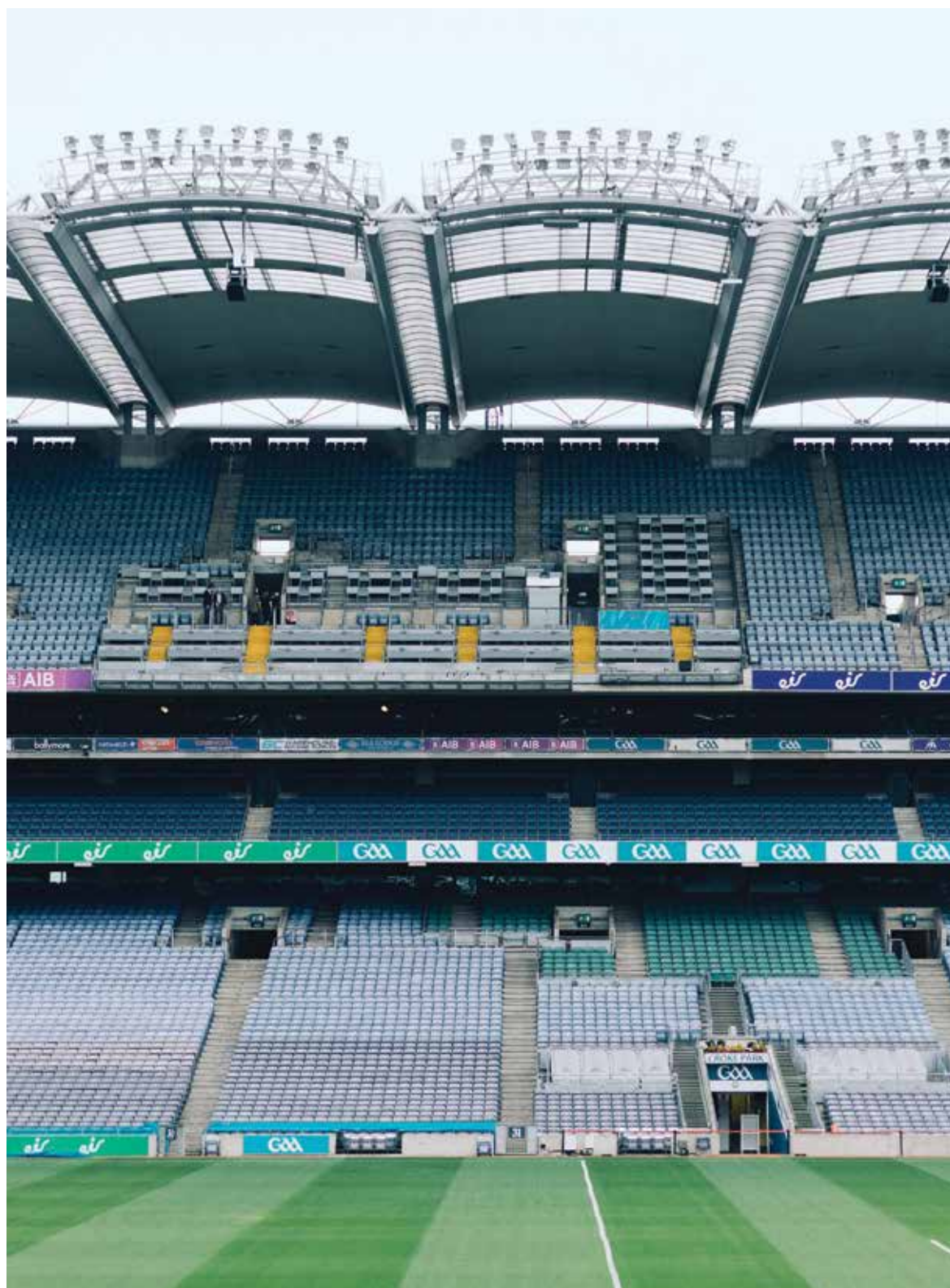
problem was that inside that hard shell there wasn't really a very strong yoke based on reading.”

Identity

“To me, a lot of Irish Catholics have continued to, for a sizeable minority, I would say around a third go to Mass once a week, but of those, I think a lot of that is about tradition and a lot of it is about identity and a lot of it is about cultural heritage. It's part of what they grew up with and in the same way as there are rituals of Christmas and Easter and their old rituals of going to Mass as a way of bounding family. While that was happening, while those rituals were maintained, there was a fragmentation of belief in the sense that the certainty of life after death began to, certainly in relation to Hell, began to fragment. Then the certainty of what life after death was, what Heaven was, what happened in Heaven, who got into Heaven – and then even, down to things like the divinity of Christ – those had been completely unquestioned and now, if you like, those doubts became – they grew and became more intense.”

If doubt played a role in the decline of the Church's influence in Ireland, then certainty has played a role in the replacement of the Church as the ‘voice of authority’ in Irish society. Dr Inglis suggests that, in the specific context of the pandemic, scientists have filled the void that the Church left in terms of offering an understanding of the world.

“There was nobody that even came close to something like Professor Luke O'Neill. So, he became, if you like, the prophet. He became the guru who would explain all of this and so, if you like, science went up enormously in people's knowledge and understanding and awareness of science, and religion, in terms of providing an understanding and explanation, went



The GAA has taken over from the Church as the main social hub in many communities around Ireland.

down. In a way, I was even taken aback by, if you like, the lack of presence of faith leaders, generally, in saying something relevant and meaningful that would provide comfort and consolation to those really hit, and most of us were hit.”

Downfall

Analysing the downfall of the Church's influence in Ireland as the product of a habitual faith that was exposed to eroding forces and creeping doubts prompts the question; if the Church used to serve as a hub of community, what has taken its place? Dr Eugene Duffy of Mary Immaculate College believes, perhaps surprisingly, that the GAA has usurped the Church's role as the social centre.

“I'm struck by the fact that I think its role has been replaced by

the GAA in many situations. While a lot of good work was done by voluntary groups obviously, Church-based groups as such, during the pandemic, I would think the GAA did tremendous work in the kind of social outreach.

“I think one of the issues we have to seriously address is the issue of faith formation”

“For example, doing messages, or doing the shopping, or looking in on elderly people, maybe collecting and delivering prescriptions, that kind of thing. I don't think that Church groups were as prominent as one might expect. One of the

reasons I think is that our pastoral councils maybe are not functioning as well as they might. In other words, pastoral councils are maybe more inward looking in terms of ecclesial life so for example, they will help in organising liturgical events and things that happen immediately around the church building as such. But in terms of the active, outward focus, in terms of charitable works to use that phrase; our social outreach may be better. They're not as strong, generally speaking. Obviously, there are exceptions to that, but they're not maybe as proactive in that regard as they might be,” Dr Duffy says.

Dr Inglis echoed this sentiment, saying:

“Well, I'm living in – I lived all my life in Dublin and I've retired and I'm living outside Coothead which is in Roscommon, and when the pandemic struck, there's a fairly vibrant parish in Coothead, but when the pandemic struck, it was the local GAA club who organised and they were the ones who organised deliveries for those people who couldn't get into the

“There was a fragmentation of belief in the sense that the certainty of life after death began to, certainly in relation to Hell, began to fragment”

supermarket. They would do shopping. But it's not only that – ok, there's a level of attendance at Mass on Sunday's – I'd say it's close to the national rural average, which is probably around 40%, but the GAA club has huge attendance, and that's because it's linked into the schools and all the parents who would bring their children increasingly to the GAA. Therefore, and I've written about this elsewhere, but in terms of bonding and belonging, I think that throughout Ireland, particularly in rural areas, the GAA has surpassed the Church."

“With the GAA providing much of the social leg-work in Ireland, Faith leaders, both lay and religious, have many questions and problems to address if they are to attract people back to the pews”

The GAA's dominance at a local level has in many cases rendered the parish obsolete, but it wasn't always the way. Dr Duffy explained the original unitive purpose the parish structure used to serve.

"I suppose looking at it more from a rural perspective, parish identity in this country has – historically, while the parishes were, if you like, revived in the early/mid-19th century, their identity was bolstered by a whole lot of factors. Once the parish church was built, other things built around it, like the post office, the RIC barracks, the creamery, then the Gaelic League and the GAA and so on, used the parish as its most fundamental unit or cell. All of these things helped to bolster up the parish identity right through the 19th and well into the 20th century. Now I think the Church's position in that has faded and probably most of the other features as well aren't nearly as significant as they were because people are so mobile, so therefore they're not congregating in the same kind of concentrated way. But, the GAA I think has trumped the Church as the organisation which gives that territorial unity, its identity. I think it's fair to say."

Social leg

With the GAA providing much of the social leg-work in Ireland, Faith leaders, both lay and religious, have many questions and problems to address if they are to attract people back to the pews. Dr Inglis believes one of the factors which allows the Church to retain people is the lack of alternatives for marking important moments in life – a weak thing for the Church to rely on.

"That question as to whether sport is replacing religion, and specifically is the GAA replacing the Catholic Church... At the level of a sense of community, a sense of bonding and belonging, definitely. And I think that the GAA, it used to be quasi-religious, but now it's quite secular. And indeed, there's, you know, the Church used to go bananas when the GAA started organising matches or training on Sunday morning, which was



Worshippers wait for Pope Francis to celebrate Mass at Phoenix Park in Dublin, August 2018. The aging profile of the Church in Ireland is a reality that must be addressed. Photo: CNS/ Paul Haring

competition, but that competition is even gone.

"But still, there is a, you know, ok, less than half of weddings are now in church – I don't think that's going to happen with funerals, and still there will be confirmation and communions, but I think the engagement in those rituals is still embedded, particularly in rural communities, and they will survive, mainly because nobody has come up with an alternative. I mean, if a loved one dies, try, in this area, to organise a funeral, in non-pandemic times – I mean the Church still has a monopoly over major rituals – it quite rapidly lost the wedding one. But also when it comes to those rituals of transitions, of Communion and Confirmation – nobody has come up with an alternative to those. Families, they're either too busy or too lazy to think of organising something else. But certainly, in times of tragedy and death, I mean, in rural areas to find a celebrant to provide a non-denominational grave and organising crematoriums, it's very difficult," Dr Inglis says.

If the Church is to move beyond mere survival and begin to thrive, Dr Duffy believes a couple of steps have to be taken.

Issues

"I think one of the issues we have to seriously address is the issue of faith formation. That's an issue. I think we have, by the appointment of bishops generally, we've got poor leadership. People are not appointed to those posts by virtue of their capacity for leadership, *au contraire*. I think we are genuinely, not just being cynical in saying that, I think we are reaping the harvest of that. Safe people, who are not going to disturb the status

“The neglect of faith formation, evangelisation and catechesis is wrapped up in an over-emphasis on liturgy as the sole heart of the Catholic Faith”

quo and therefore aren't going to generate initiatives that are imaginative, creative, they're not risk-takers and we'll have to be prepared to take risks. The current Pope says we're much better doing something and making a mess than doing nothing, and I mean that's where we've landed ourselves with the kind of leadership we've got. That's certainly a major factor.

“When the pandemic struck, it was the local GAA club who organised and they were the ones who organised deliveries for those people who couldn't get into the supermarket”

"I think there is a lack of faith formation for people for leadership roles and that's across the board. You find it in the education sector and you find it in the parish. Parishes as well. Diminished capacity for leadership or leadership qualities. I think there's need for serious formation there."

As well as this, the Church of the future is going to have to be "smaller" and more "intentional":

"I think we're going to have to look maybe at concentrating on smaller units and forming more

intimate faith communities in a way, smaller faith communities, more intentional communities, more intentional faith communities. And I don't know at what level you might organise those. I think the parish still has a certain usefulness probably for something like that – it still has an identity, even though it's not the Church that's giving it the primary identity right now. But nevertheless, it is certainly in the rural part of the country an identifiable territorial area, so probably within that you'd have to do some of your organisation."

Maintaining

"The other side of it though is in terms of maintaining the whole parish edifice that we have there, including the church and local priests and presbytery and all that – that's not going to last much longer because we're simply not going to be able to afford it and the population, certainly in rural Ireland, is going to be too small to support them realistically. They couldn't even be expected to support what we have there as an infrastructure. That's going to be a painful process. Talk about divesting of schools – I mean, we must start divesting ourselves of some of these churches... I think we're going to have to look at smaller, intentional communities, and we're going to have to give far more attention to the word of God. To scripture-based prayer and reflection. And I think out of that,

we build up the liturgy. We've put too much emphasis, I think, on the liturgical life at the expense of basic faith formation, basic evangelisation and catechesis that needs to go on. That has been very badly neglected."

The neglect of faith formation, evangelisation and catechesis is wrapped up in an over-emphasis on liturgy as the sole heart of the Catholic Faith – a notion which Dr Duffy believes to be mistaken. "I think the pandemic has accentuated this problem, which is that our identity with being Christian or being Catholic is more around liturgical life than the broader issues of witnessing to our Faith in terms of values and social commitment and so on," he says.

“I think we're going to have to look maybe at concentrating on smaller units and forming more intimate faith communities in a way”

With the Church's leadership and position in serious doubt in Ireland, faith leaders will have to be bold in offering a sense of meaning, purpose and community, as well as in their efforts to restructure the Church for effective evangelisation in the world of today.

Welcoming the unknown and building



Respecting and supporting migrants and culture is key to protecting against racism, **Chai Brady** hears

Racism is sadly part of every society, mostly due to fear of the unknown, although fortunately it exists relatively to a lesser extent in Ireland as the country is more tolerant than many others according to a Jesuit sociologist and author who has spent decades researching the topic and promoting pluralism, but there is still a long way to go and some “serious” problems to tackle in order to create a society that puts everyone on an equal footing.

Fr Micheál Mac Gréil SJ tells *The Irish Catholic* with a growing migrant population, particularly since the Celtic Tiger, there must be an emphasis on housing and tackling ghettoisation. Currently living in Mayo, Fr Mac Gréil has a doctorate in sociology and spent time as a lecturer in St Patrick’s College, Maynooth and UCD. He has published several books about social issues and attitudes in Ireland.

“If a westerner goes to another country he is always looked upon as a missionary”

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, he said: “In my understanding having looked at the whole situation since 1973 in Dublin, we are a relatively tolerant society but there are elements in our society who make expressions which are not tolerant.

“We have become a pluralist society ever since the Celtic Tiger and we have become an attractive society to a lot of minority people and it’s a pity if anything should in any way interfere with that.

“There are a few things I don’t like at the moment, not enough attention is being paid to the accommodation of minority people coming into the country and we have to avoid anything like ghettos, now at the same time we must respect pluralism. I believe the final solution is integrated pluralism.”

Fr Mac Gréil explains that the idea of integrated pluralism he endorses is based on three pillars: acknowledging difference – religious or cultural – supporting it and facilitating it.



Regarding housing scarcity, which has become an issue for everyone in Ireland, Fr Mac Gréil said it is a “very serious problem” as the minority is becoming bigger and “we have to make room for them”.

“Now we’re lucky enough that we have respect for Muslims, for example, we have a pluralistic hierarchy in the various Churches and that is most wonderful to see, that people are not being defined as heretics and things like that so there’s an awful lot of positive things going on,” he said.

Barriers

Coming from an area in Dublin that has a large migrant population, one missionary priest says they are trying to bring people together and break down barriers.

Originally from India Fr Binoy Mathew SVD of Mountview and Blakestown parish, who has spent 10 years in Ireland, tells this paper he has experienced a few prejudiced and/or racist incidents in Ireland but overall has felt very welcome.

When he was based in Arklow, Co. Wicklow, people would regularly think he was the cleaner when he answered the door to the parochial house when parishioners visited. Fr Binoy said: “But I’m not blaming anybody, I’m saying they are used to a surplus of Irish priests and to see somebody from a foreign country as the full-time priest, it’s something beyond what they can understand initially. More or less the country has treated me fairly well.

“We are here to give birth to something new and that is our approach”

“The first wedding I was supposed to do the couple asked the parish priest they wanted the priest to be changed because I was a foreign priest, I knew straight away, the parish priest was trying to communicate that news with me but I accepted it.



Fr Binoy Mathew SVD.

I had no issues and then after a year, one day the parish priest told me, ‘You remember that incident? That was nothing but pure racism,’ he said, and I told him I knew straight away. But I’m not complaining, the country has treated me well, I am a naturalised citizen here, I have lots of good memories of the country, the way it has treated me, the way it has welcomed me,” he said.

Despite some challenging circumstances during his ministry

due to his ethnicity, Fr Binoy says it’s an element in everyone’s life, with all people experiencing their own tribulations due to societal issues. “What we call in India the caste system, here this is the class system. That element is part and parcel of every society,” he says.

Marriages

As time went on, Fr Binoy says people in the parish began asking him personally to celebrate their marriages and he was “delighted”.

“What I feel is that once they get to know us people have changed their opinions, the way they approach us, initially the fear of the unknown is there in everybody’s mind.”

Fr Binoy is a Divine Word Missionary, an order which was one of the first to reach a consensus that Europe was missionary ter-

“In Dublin, we are a relatively tolerant society but there are elements in our society who make expressions which are not tolerant”

a Church in Ireland which is universal



With more and more migrants coming to Ireland the Church here is becoming more diverse, as demonstrated earlier this year when 20 catechumens and two candidates of various ethnicities were presented by their parishes to Archbishop Diarmuid Martin at the Rite of Election ceremony in the Pro Cathedral, Dublin on March 1, 2020. Photo: John Mc Elroy.

ritory. One of the most challenging things Fr Binoy finds is that Irish people find it difficult to see priests like him as missionaries.

“If a westerner goes to another country he is always looked upon as a missionary, whereas it is beyond people’s comprehension that somebody else from another part of the world could be a missionary in Europe,” he explains.

“I feel is that once they get to know us people have changed their opinions”

“We are here to give birth to something new and that is our approach. If it’s to maintain a structure, you know anybody can do it, we’re trying to do things that will help us help the local Church, our focus is not on anybody else, not on the migrant community or anything, we would like to see everybody together as one Church in the sense of an integrated Catholic family parish.”

Seeds

“What we’re trying to do is sow some seeds of it and gradually hopefully it will take shape and root, the celebratory mode which the African and Asian communities offer to the Irish local Church I think it’s very, very vital.

“Being Church is more about a celebration, being part of a community that supports and celebrates faith and life, I think that’s how the Africans and Asians would see the Church. But here, it’s like the spontaneity here is thrown out the window, being a faith community here, it’s more formal.

“So therefore, other than being together as worshipping community, what kind of personal connection, attachment and all are they gaining from being a community? I’m not sure what people are gaining.”

Due to the vast change that has occurred over the past several decades in Ireland, people are still trying to grapple with this new reality, Fr Binoy says, “we cannot force that to grow, it has to emerge as something new very, very gradually”.

Integration

Regarding the integration of migrant communities here he says it is a long-term process. “Now you see when you walk into a school or when children go out of the school, they are mixed nationalities, they play around and you see all these good elements”.

“The migrant community in Ireland may not be very old, it’s only in the last 15-20 years it has taken shape so actually when these children grow and when they’re children come, the second generation, things will become more integrated so for that what we need will be more and more initiatives and reassurances to both sides, we are here as a nation, we are here – from the Church point of view – as one faith community working together.

“That kind of constant project I think is important. Even for parents to educate their children, we are one nation, we are one faith community and therefore the colour, the language, they are not determining factors.”

He adds: “I can see the other as somebody who brings richness to my life then at the same time I can also see others as a kind of a threat to my existence

and so on. The Irish people have migrated a lot, it’s not a concept that is new to them – that you know lots of family members who have travelled abroad. It’s not a concept that Irish people are not exposed to, but when it’s home, it’s difficult for people to accept it, that’s it.”

Fr Mac Gréil also brought up the fact that Ireland is a country where historically there was huge amounts of emigration. When asked about the growing sentiment and subsequent political movements with negative views regarding immigrants and immigration in other European countries, and if this could lead to similar large-scale movements in Ireland, he said: “Ireland has been an emigrant country, until very recently it’s become an immigrant country, it was an emigrant country for years and years and years. We’re the last in the world to be putting objections to people. People went to England or America, anywhere, to get work, it wasn’t to avoid persecution, and now we should do the same for people coming in.”

“Due to the vast change that has occurred over the past several decades in Ireland, people are still trying to grapple with this new reality”

The first movement to promote integrated pluralism in Ireland Fr Mac Gréil says, is the ecumenical movement and was a huge success in how it changed hearts and minds particularly regarding Catholics and

Protestants who went from “killing each other 100 years earlier, to loving each other now”.

Pluralism

“So that’s what integrated pluralism does, enemies become friends. If I was to make a last will and testament for Ireland it is to do everything to bring in integrated pluralism and to avoid forced assimilation.”

When it comes to the Black Lives Matter Movement in the US, Fr Mac Gréil says he did research in the 60s and 70s in Kent State, Ohio and Ann Arbor in Michigan. “America has disimproved in many ways but it’s improving in other ways, I think this election is one of the best things that’s happened in America. The US is copping on at the moment, the US should be hopeful.”

When asked about prejudice and how to confront it when it may be subconscious, Fr Mac Gréil says: “Most people have prejudices that they’re not aware of. A prejudice exposed is a prejudice undermined.” For that reason he believes that intergroup relations should be taught in the senior cycle of every secondary school.

“The colour of your skin is as important as the size of your boots. The Christian message, if properly understood, is totally pluralist,” he says.

“I think we have to have a complete look at how we are integrating the minorities in society and we are not doing it properly at the moment and we’re not doing it properly enough. The classic example of course is the Travellers whom I would define as Ireland’s apartheid – that is a quotation I got from the late Professor Liam Ryan.” “I think with all our faults we’re

one of the best but it’s a pity to see – we have a high standard – but when you see a breach in a place of high standard it’s worse. If we were just a racist society you would ignore it and say they’re at it again but we can not allow that now. You cannot, according to the law, incite people to hatred.”

“People in the parish began asking him personally to celebrate their marriages and he was “delighted”

Fr Binoy, in his ministry in Ireland, says that despite differences in ethnicity and race the universal Church speaks a much louder truth. Part of his charisma, as a Divine Word Missionary, is that of internationalism, of bridging the divide between nations no matter what the geographic barriers; bringing people together to celebrate the faith that is universal to all human beings.

Fr Binoy says: “The more and more we speak about it – this has to be out in the open – even maybe Irish people taking the lead recalling their own experiences abroad, and that, I think, could give a good insight, or maybe remind ourselves that we were migrants on a different land and how we were treated. Now people are coming over here, how can we become a community that welcome other people?”

“People come with different intentions but I think a lot of people come with good intentions looking for a better life, a better future and I think people should be guided and helped to achieve that noble, noble cause.”



Out&About

Protesting ban on Mass



LIMERICK: 200 people protest the ban on Masses outside the Sacred Heart Church in Limerick.



LIMERICK: Sarah Ryan, (centre), School Principal, St Brigid's Primary School, Singland, making a presentation to two retiring teachers, Mary McElhenney (left) and Fiona Morrissey (right), retiring school principal.



CAVAN: Mr Edge King, Chairperson of the Board of Management of the Kilmore Diocesan Pastoral Centre, assists Bishop Martin Hayes planting trees as part of the ongoing programme of upkeeping the grounds surrounding the Kilmore Diocesan Pastoral Centre.

IN SHORT

Ni faces a year of 'tremendous uncertainty' says Bishop Treanor

Northern Ireland faces a year of "tremendous uncertainty" due to Brexit and the centenary of the Partition of Ireland, the bishop of Down and Connor Dr Noel Treanor said in a statement.

Bishop Treanor said that he is praying "the coming year may build upon and nurture the foundations of peace and reconciliation" already established.

Drawing attention to the challenges and opportunities that 2021 will bring, Bishop

Treanor said that Brexit and the centenary will "generate discussion and reflection on identity and identities, on cultural heritage and on the foundations and societal structures of Northern Ireland. We are all aware that the combination of such circumstances creates uncertainty. Fuelled by fear, this uncertainty can also amplify fault lines and create tension across communities."

Dr Treanor continued, saying: "For these reasons, more than ever, a culture of care as a pathway to peace is necessary. All of us, political leaders, educators, citizens and faith leaders should make a concerted effort to build upon the legacy of peace, achieved through sacrifice and constructive dialogue."

Education in Sierra Leone badly impacted by pandemic, Concern report shows

The closures of schools as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on learning, with girls disproportionately affected and exposed to protection risks.

Head teachers interviewed for the report agreed that the Covid-19 epidemic has a negative impact on the wellbeing of children.

The report – 'Covid-19 sub-study: 2020' – was released January 4 as part of an ongoing study into the effectiveness of the Safe Learning Model in combatting School Related Gen-

der Based Violence (SRGBV).

The report suggests that schools were "little prepared or "not prepared" for closures, while government communication was perceived as being poor. Schools receiving Government support for continued learning were more likely to stay in contact with pupils and engage in small learning groups.

Head teachers largely agreed (62%) that boys and girls were affected equally by school closures, with 36% saying they thought girls were more affected than boys. Qualitative interviews suggest that closures resulted in girls having "more responsibilities in the household resulting in disproportionate increases in workload and concerns about the greater risk of violations of child protections rights due to school closure".

Edited by Ruadhán Jones
Ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie



Events deadline is a week in advance of publication



CLARE: Caoimhin and Callum Enright present a homemade Christmas candle to Fr Joy Njarakattuvely as a welcome gift to Doora-Barefield parish.



CORK: Baby Hannah Nyhan, Gurraneigh, Lissarda, was the first baby baptised at Enniskeane Church in 2021. She is seen with her parents John and Máire, her sister Maggie, Godfather Jerry Nyhan and Michelle Nyhan who represented her Godmother Geraldine Hurley. Photo Fr Tom Hayes



◀ CARLOW:

Bishop Denis Nulty of Kildare and Leighlin celebrating Mass outdoors in Askea Parish over the Christmas period.

▼ CARLOW:

Mr Murray (right) of Presentation College Carlow presents a cheque for €400 on behalf of students and staff to Fr John Dunphy (left). The funds were raised for St Clare's Hospitality.



DERRY: Kayla, Kelsi and Ava carry the baby Jesus to the altar on Christmas Eve at St Brigid's church, Carnhill, Derry.

Events

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

Bullet-ridden chapel on River Jordan holds first Mass since Six-Day War



What was once a closed military zone has now been opened to pilgrims, writes **Michael Kelly**

One of the highlights of any pilgrimage to the Holy Land now is a visit to the Qasr al-Yahud site in the West Bank where Jesus was baptised in the River Jordan. I first visited the site in 2007, but back then needed a military escort to ensure that I didn't stand on any of the landmines that then littered the site. At the weekend, Mass was celebrated there in the Church of St John the Baptist for the first time in 54 years to mark the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord.

“After all this time, we have come back. This gives us hope for peace. For us, this is a sign not to lose hope, not to lose hope for peace”

The almost 100-year-old church and monastery were vacated in 1967 at the outbreak of the Six-Day War between Israel and some of its Arab neighbours, including Jordan, just across the River Jordan. After Israel won control of the area from Jordan, the area was laid with land mines by both the Israeli army and Palestinian gunmen who battled in the area in the 1960s and 1970s. It became for many years a fenced military zone, off limits to pilgrims.

The round

Today, the round, second-floor open-air chapel, with its two stairways curving around either side, is still riddled with bullet holes, as are the rooms in the small monastery underneath.

Fr Ibrahim Faltas, chancellor of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land, which cares for holy sites said the Franciscans first starting coming to this place in 1641 and began purchasing land in the area in early 1920 to build churches. In 1933, they built a chapel, which is now located on the edge of the river, and in 1935 built a larger St John the Baptist



A Palestinian works on the Franciscan Chapel of St John the Baptist at Qasr al-Yahud. Photo: CNS/Debbie Hill

Church, which was destroyed in an earthquake in 1956, and the existing chapel was built in its place.

Fr Faltas

“After all this time, we have come back. This gives us hope for peace. For us, this is a sign not to lose hope, not to lose hope for peace,” Fr Faltas said.

Clearing the area of land mines and making it possible for pilgrims to return has been a long process, with organised groups of pilgrims first allowed to come to the banks of the river in 1994 on the Epiphany and Easter holidays following the signing of the peace treaty with Jordan. A baptismal site was opened on the water's edge in 2011 for all visitors, who had to walk down a dirt road to the river, with fences and warning signs on either side admonishing them not to veer off the path because of land mines.

“The Israeli Ministry of Tourism administered the accessible area near the river as a national park”

Jordan completed demining its eastern bank of the river by 1999. There, Bethany Beyond the Jordan is recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, “believed to be the location where Jesus of Nazareth was baptised by John the Baptist”.

On the West Bank – part of the Palestinian territories which is occupied by Israel – the St John the Baptist Chapel, along with chapels and monasteries belonging to other Christian traditions, remained off limits behind the fences, in the middle of the mine fields. The Israeli Ministry of Tourism administered the accessible area near the river as a national park.

In 2016, Israel began clearing the area with the help of the British HALO Trust, and finally in October the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land and Christian churches were able to take possession of their properties.

Promised land

The Qasr Al-Yahud site is also revered by Jews as the crossing place along the River Jordan of the biblical Israelites into the ‘promised land’ after having wandered the desert for 40 years.

Pointing out the layout of the area on maps, Leonardo DiMarco – a civil engineer and the director of the technical office of the custody – noted that the chapel is located in the middle of two paths that form a cross and lead to the river. He said the Franciscans were in discussions with the Israeli army to retain the original design.

There are plans to rehabilitate the compound's walled garden, which over the years has been overtaken by the desert sands, and to build a number of smaller chapels inside the garden to allow for private group and solitary contem-



Franciscan Fr Ibrahim Faltas, chancellor of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land, talks to an Israeli soldier on the grounds of the Franciscan Chapel of St John the Baptist at Qasr al-Yahud, on the West Bank of the River Jordan. Photo: CNS/Debbie Hill

plation and prayers for pilgrims, said Mr DiMarco.

“The idea is that pilgrims can come here in preparation to go down to the river,” Mr DiMarco said.

He said he expects the restoration work to be completed by next year and, once travel is permitted again, the site will be open for pilgrimages.

Something special

“It is something special, the way the custody found the place is exactly in the same condition it was after so many years. Everything was left the same, the furniture, small objects, were found in the same place they were left in 1967 when the friars

had to leave in a hurry,” he said. He said the bullet holes would not be repaired, but would be kept as a reminder of the war.

“This is the past history of the place, you can't cancel those things. The door is full of bullet holes, the inside wooden doors. This will be part of the experience of the pilgrims. The place itself is telling something important,” said Mr DiMarco. “It is important; this is a religious place, but not only. It is also a place which was in the middle of a fight.”

Additional reporting by Judith Sudilovsky at Qasr al-Yahud.

Vaccines – an aid to forming conscience



If significant numbers of people chose not to be vaccinated, the result could be significant loss of life and serious illness in the community and especially among those who are most vulnerable, writes **Bishop Kevin Doran**

Early in December 2020, the Irish Catholic Bishops issued a statement welcoming the progress that has been made in developing a vaccine for Covid-19.¹ The statement encourages a generous response to the forthcoming vaccination programme on the part of Catholics and offers relevant ethical guidance. In this longer article, I hope to fill in some of the detail which could not have been included in a short statement. My intention is to present the teaching of the Church, against the background of what we know about vaccines in general and the Covid-19 vaccines in particular, and taking into account the reality of the Covid-19 pandemic. I hope this may be of help to people in making an informed judgement.

The prevention of illness and disease is an integral part of healthcare. Vaccination, as an aspect of preventive medicine, is recognised and encouraged by the Catholic Church as an essential element of the mission of healthcare professionals. Both the development of vaccines and the immunisation of whole populations are regarded as being “undoubtedly a positive step” when it comes to the prevention of infectious diseases.² Thanks to large scale childhood vaccination programmes in the 1960s many diseases like TB,

German measles (rubella) and polio have almost completely disappeared in Ireland.

As with any aspect of healthcare, it is important that vaccination programmes are developed and carried out in a way which serves the common good. Our moral responsibilities can be considered under three particular headings:

1. The development and production of a vaccine;
2. The manner in which the vaccine is tested;
3. The fair and equitable distribution of the vaccine.

The development of vaccines

a. The Development of Vaccines using Attenuated Viruses

While the idea of vaccination has been explored for many centuries, it was only in the late eighteenth century that scientists began to develop vaccines using animals. This practice was refined during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as researchers explored how vaccines could be produced using the live virus itself. The virus is ‘attenuated’ (or weakened) by being grown over a number of cycles in conditions which cause it to lose its capacity for causing serious illness, while remaining strong

enough to produce an immune reaction. This process requires a living biological ‘host’ in which the virus is grown. Over the years researchers have worked with cells taken from chicken or duck embryos, from rabbits, hamsters and monkeys.

“Vaccination, as an aspect of preventive medicine, is recognised and encouraged by the Catholic Church”

Since the middle of the twentieth century, many vaccines, including some of those most commonly used to prevent childhood diseases were developed and produced using human foetal cell-lines as the ‘host’. These cell-lines were developed using biological tissue taken from specific identifiable fetuses aborted in the 1960’s.³ This has, understandably, raised serious moral concerns and conscientious objections.

b. Developing Covid-19 Vaccines

The rapid global spread of the Covid-19 virus has given rise to a

great number of research projects aimed at producing a vaccine. The development of a vaccine which is safe, effective, and widely available represents the best chance of a return to normal living, for all of us, but especially for older people and those with serious underlying conditions. Alongside the technical and scientific questions, which tend to dominate, the concern has once again been raised that some of the Covid-19 vaccines make use of human foetal cell-lines.

Advances in science have given rise to significant variations in immunology, so that many vaccines today use cell-lines developed either from ethically sourced human cells (such as umbilical cord blood) or from animal cells (such as Vero monkey cells). The majority of the candidate vaccines for Covid-19 do not depend for their design, development or production on the use of human foetal cell-lines.⁴

For many years, scientists have been exploring an approach to the production of vaccines using messenger RNA (or mRNA). The Pfizer BioNTech vaccine and the Moderna vaccine, which are among the first Covid-19 vaccines to be approved, use this new cutting-edge technology. Instead of weakened strains of the virus itself, they use chemically produced mRNA which mimics the action of the virus and trains the immune system to respond. Neither of these vaccines involves the use of human foetal cell-lines or indeed animal cells of any kind in its design, development or production, though it is acknowledged that they made use of a foetal cell-line for one of the confirmatory lab tests. State-of-the-art immunology is becoming distanced from associ-

ation with abortion. The new mRNA vaccines may be the first in a whole new generation of vaccines.

c. A Note on the Morality of Using some Covid-19 Vaccines

What can we say about vaccines which do depend on the use of human foetal cell-lines? Does our use of the vaccines constitute some kind of immoral involvement with the original abortion, even if it took place many years ago? Does it suggest, even unintentionally, some acceptance of abortion or destructive research on human embryos as long as it is for a ‘good’ purpose?

“What can we say about vaccines which do depend on the use of human foetal cell-lines?”

In December 2020, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), building on previous Church teaching, published a doctrinal *Note*, supporting the principle and practice of vaccination and providing moral guidance on the development, use and distribution of vaccines.⁵ This clarification, authorised by Pope Francis, confirms the guidance given by the Irish bishops as well as other episcopal conferences earlier in December.⁶ The CDF *Note* deals specifically with the question of whether it is morally acceptable to use vaccines which have been developed using existing human foetal cell-lines derived from abortions performed in the past. It does

not set out to address the question of whether vaccines are safe or effective. This is an important question in its own right, which is primarily the responsibility of the scientific community and the health authorities of different countries.

Abortion itself is fundamentally immoral because it involves the taking of innocent human life. That remains true, even if the harvesting of foetal cells serves the purpose of medical research. But the question is not as simple as that. The Church has always made a distinction between formal (deliberate) involvement in an immoral act and material involvement, which may often be incidental and remote. Significantly, a remote material involvement, does not share in the immoral intention of the original sinful act. The recent CDF *Note* confirms previous teaching that, for those who are involved in biomedical research using foetal cell-lines, “there exist differing degrees of responsibility”, depending on the extent to which they have a voice in the decision.⁷

“In the context of a global pandemic, it is important to consider that vaccination is not simply a private matter”

In so far as there is a moral concern now, it does not relate primarily to abortions which took place in the past. The principal question at issue now is how our present choices might contribute to shaping biomedical research and development in the future.⁸ Catholics should, where possible, choose vaccines which do not depend on the use of foetal cell-lines. By expressing a clear, principled preference for “ethically irreproachable” vaccines, we make it clear that we do not want biomedical research in the future to depend on abortion or destructive research on human embryos.

The Church encourages producers of vaccines and health authorities, even those which continue to use human foetal cell-lines, to make it clear that they reject the act of abortion and

“to produce, approve, distribute and offer ethically acceptable vaccines that do not create problems of conscience for either health care providers or the people to be vaccinated”.⁹ The Pontifical Academy for Life states clearly, however, that “the burden of this important battle cannot and must not fall on innocent children and on the health situation of the population”.¹⁰

The CDF *Note* recognises that various factors may make it impos-

sible for doctors and their patients to actually choose a vaccine that is “ethically irreproachable”. The successful development of a safe and effective vaccine is just the first step. Other factors which may affect availability include transportation, storage, distribution and cost. Ultimately it depends on the decisions of individual governments to license and purchase such vaccines.¹¹ In this way, it can be seen that moral decisions always have to do with what is practically possible. Nobody is morally required to do the impossible.

“Before a vaccine is authorised for use in the general population, a series of trials takes place including, as a final stage, the testing of the vaccine on large numbers of people”

For all of these reasons, and taking into account the grave danger posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, the CDF *Note* states: “It must therefore be considered that, in such a case, all vaccinations recognised as clinically safe and effective can be used in good conscience with the certain knowledge that the use of such vaccines does not constitute formal cooperation with the abortion from which the cells used in production of the vaccines derive.”¹² Catholics are free, therefore, to use any Covid-19 vaccine that is approved for clinical use, on the understanding that they themselves do not approve of or consent to abortion for the purposes of biomedical research.

d. A Question of Conscience:

Everyone is obliged to follow his or her well-informed conscience. In the context of a global pandemic, it is important to consider that vaccination is not simply a private matter. The CDF *Note* stops short of

describing vaccination as a moral obligation. It does say, however, that “the morality of vaccination depends not only on the duty to protect one’s own health, but also on the duty to pursue the common good”.¹³ If significant numbers of people chose not to be vaccinated, for whatever reason, it would

prove very difficult to achieve the required levels of immunity in the population. The result could be significant loss of life and serious illness in the community and especially among those who are most vulnerable, as well as long-term damage to social and economic life, which would impact on the population as a whole. This reality must inform any judgement of conscience. The only alternative to vaccination is to restrict one’s

Cardinal Blaise Cupich receives a vaccine dose.



“Commercial logic would suggest that, in the first instance, vaccines would only be made available when an individual or a nation can pay for them”

contacts until the crisis has passed. Any person who wishes to signal his or her rejection of the use of foetal cell-lines should consider whether there are other ways of doing so, than by refusing to avail of the vaccine.

Vaccine trials

Before a vaccine is authorised for use in the general population, a series of trials takes place including, as a final stage, the testing of the vaccine on large numbers of people. The pharmaceutical trial must establish whether the vaccine is effective and also whether it is safe. Such trials are not without their risks. Because there is risk involved, the testing of a vaccine on a human subject presupposes that the person concerned is fully informed, competent to make a decision and consents freely.¹⁴

It is unethical to carry out biomedical research involving people who are not competent to give informed consent (for example, children or non-competent adults), unless there is a strong likelihood of personal therapeutic benefit which is proportionate to the health risk to the person in

question.¹⁵ Similarly it would be unethical to use coercion to test a vaccine on people whose freedom to refuse is limited, like prisoners. The fact that the vaccine is for the common good would not justify violating the human rights of the individual human subject.¹⁶

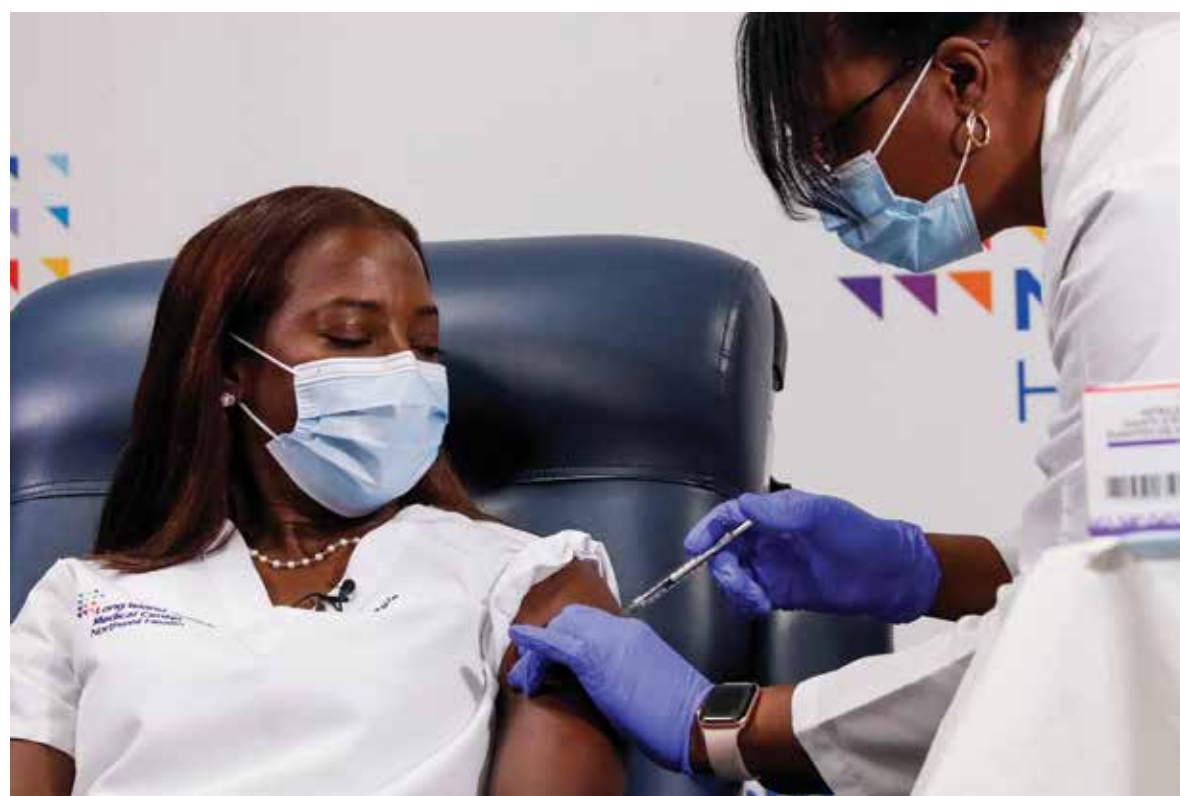
“Pharmaceutical companies must be held accountable for ensuring that there are no short-cuts in the testing process which would expose end-users to disproportionate risks”

For reasons of public health and the protection of the global economy, there has been an understandable urgency attached to the development of an effective vaccine for Covid-19. Pharmaceutical companies must be held accountable for ensuring that there are no

short-cuts in the testing process which would expose end-users to disproportionate risks. That is the role of the various regulatory authorities. Meanwhile, it is important for all of us to do our best to discern very carefully the reliability of any information that we find on social media, where opinion is so frequently presented as fact.

The distribution of vaccines

The costs of developing a vaccine are significant but the potential rewards are even greater. It is reasonable that pharmaceutical companies would wish to protect their ‘intellectual property’ investment. Commercial logic would suggest that, in the first instance, vaccines would only be made available when an individual or a nation can pay for them. In that scenario, consideration would only be given to the production of a ‘generic’ drug that is more readily accessible, after the pharmaceutical companies have covered their costs and begun to make a profit. At the time of writing, it is being reported that the vaccine developed by Astra-Zeneca and Oxford University is to



be made available on a not-for-profit basis, which is highly commendable from an ethical point of view.

As we have seen, in the management of the pandemic over recent months, the balancing of public health considerations with commercial logic can be difficult and controversial. Pope Francis

recently wrote: "The fragility of world systems in the face of the pandemic has demonstrated that not everything can be resolved by market freedom. It has also shown that, in addition to recovering a sound political life that is not subject to the dictates of finance, we must put human dignity back at

the centre and on that pillar build the alternative social structures we need."¹⁷

In a major public health emergency, it is the poor who are most likely to suffer. HIV first appeared in humans in 1920, but it only gained attention when it appeared in the US in the 1980s. It took 20

more years, before antiretroviral therapy began to be available to the poor in developing countries.

“In a major public health emergency, it is the poor who are most likely to suffer”

Speaking with particular reference to “natural disasters, epidemics, catastrophes, upheavals and various social scourges”, Pope John Paul II suggests that the world of suffering “which exists ‘in dispersion’...contains within itself a singular challenge to communion and solidarity”.¹⁸ In other words “we are all in this together” and our interdependence carries with it a moral responsibility.

Catholic Social Teaching, while in no way denying the importance of the free market for the common good, requires that essential medical treatment should be made available on the basis of need, not on the basis of the capacity to pay. Addressing this question, Pope Francis says: “The preferential option for the poor, this ethical-social need that comes from God’s love, inspires us to conceive of and design an economy where people, and especially the poorest, are at the centre. And it also encourages us to plan the treatment of viruses by prioritising those who are most

in need. It would be sad if, for the vaccine for Covid-19, priority were to be given to the richest! It would be sad if this vaccine were to become the property of this nation or another, rather than universal and for all.”¹⁹

The ownership of private property carries with it “a social mortgage”.²⁰ The desire for excessive profit contributes to the development of ‘structures of sin’. This is the term coined by Pope John Paul II to describe social structures which are rooted in sinful personal attitudes, such as the thirst for power and the desire for excessive profit.²¹ There is, therefore, an ethical responsibility on pharmaceutical companies, whose income is derived from the need of those who are sick or at risk, to moderate their desire for profit. Likewise, there is an ethical responsibility on governments, under the principle of distributive justice, to ensure that, both in their own societies and in the wider world, those who are most at risk are the first to receive the vaccine, whenever a safe and effective vaccine becomes available. Even if the moral imperative of justice did not lead them to do this, common sense would suggest that they do it out of a desire for self-preservation. Just as the poverty of the third world impacts global trade, so the spread of disease in the third world will ultimately impact global health.



“This decision became permanent in 2017 and has the potential, if implemented in good faith, to make a significant difference when it comes to the equitable distribution of any of the vaccines developed for Covid-19”

Many people may be unaware of the existence of an international trade agreement known as the TRIPS (Trade-related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) agreement. It is an annex to the agreement which established the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and deals with many aspects of the protection of intellectual property rights. A 2001 Ministerial Declaration on the TRIPS agreement states: “the agreement can and should be interpreted and implemented in a manner supportive of WTO Members’ right to protect public health and, in particular, to promote access to medicines for all”.²² Governments were, thus, free to provide for the production of generic versions of essential medicines for the domestic market under ‘compulsory license’ and without the permission of the patent holder.

In an intervention regarding the TRIPS agreement, which he made to the World Trade Organisation on behalf of the Holy See in 2002, Archbishop Diarmuid Martin applied the principle of the Universal Destination of Goods, which is central to the social teaching of the Church. He argued that there was a need to “reconcile two important values for our world community:

- Permitting governments to respond rapidly to urgent pub-

lic health needs of their people, though assuring access to essential medicines at affordable prices;

- Respecting the creativity and innovative possibilities offered by a rules-based international system for the protection of intellectual property.”²³

He expressed a particular concern of his delegation that it had not been possible to arrive at a consensus application of the Declaration for those countries that do not have the domestic capacity to produce their own medicines.

The following year, the member states of the WTO decided on a provisional basis that countries facing public health problems and lacking the capacity to produce generic drugs could seek such medicines from third country producers under ‘compulsory licensing’ arrangements.²⁴ This decision became permanent in 2017 and has the potential, if implemented in good faith, to make a significant difference when it comes to the equitable distribution of any of the vaccines developed for Covid-19.

+Kevin Doran is Bishop of Elphin and Chairman of the Council for Life of the Irish bishops’ conference.



Endnotes

¹ Irish Catholic Bishops Conference. “Welcoming Vaccines for the Common Good”, 10th Dec. 2020

² Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance to Healthcare Workers. New Charter for healthcare Workers. Philadelphia, NCBC, 2017, #69

³ Cf. Olshansky, and Hayflick. “The Role of the WI-38 Cell Strain in Saving Lives and Reducing Morbidity” AIMS Public Health 2017 Vol 4 127-38; cf. also College of Physicians of Philadelphia: “Human Cell Strains in Vaccine Development”, 2018 from <https://www.historyofvaccines.org/index.php/content/articles/human-cell-strains-vaccine-development>. Sourced on 3rd Dec 2020

⁴ Cf. J.L. Sherley and D. Prentice. “An Ethics Assessment of COVID-19 Vaccine Programs”, from <https://lozierinstitute.org/>

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⁵ Cf. CDF Note on the morality of using some anti-Covid-19 vaccines, 21st Dec. 2020. Also Pontifical Academy for Life. “Moral Reflections On Vaccines Prepared From Cells Derived From Aborted Human Foetuses”. Rome, 2005; CDF. *Dignitas Personae*, Rome 2008, #34-35.

⁶ These include the Bishops’ Conferences of England & Wales, Scotland and the United States. See also: National Catholic Bioethics Centre, Points to Consider on the Use of COVID-19 Vaccines.

⁷ CDF Note, 2020, #1

⁸ Cf. Pontifical Academy for Life (2005). See also: Consultative Group on Bioethics / Council for Healthcare. “Code of Ethical Standards for Healthcare”, Dublin: Veritas 2017, #8.11 – 8.17

⁹ Cf. CDF Note, 2020, #4

¹⁰ Pontifical Academy for Life, 2005. The Pontifical Academy comments in a footnote (15) that those who inappropriately refuse vaccines may find themselves responsible for the negative consequences that arise in the community from the transmission of a virus.

¹¹ CDF Note, 2020, #2

¹² CDF Note, 2020, #3

¹³ CDF Note, 2020, #5

¹⁴ Consultative Group on Bioethics, *ibid*, Part II #6.5

¹⁵ WMA. Declaration of Helsinki, 1964 (Revised 2013) # 28

¹⁶ Consultative Group on Bioethics, *ibid*. Part II, #6.6

¹⁷ Pope Francis. *Fratelli Tutti*. Rome: Libreria

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¹⁸ Pope John Paul II. *Salvifici Doloris*. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana. 1984, #8

¹⁹ Pope Francis. Address at General Audience, 20th August 2020

²⁰ Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana. 1987, #42

²¹ *Ibid* #39.

²² World Trade Organisation. “Declaration On The Trips Agreement And Public Health”. Ministerial Conference Fourth Session, Doha, 9 - 14 November 2001

²³ Archbishop Diarmuid Martin. Address at World Trade Organisation, 20th December 2002

²⁴ World Trade Organisation. TRIPS Factsheet. https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/trips_e/tripsfactsheet_e.htm Accessed on 3rd Sept 2020

Pope amends Canon Law so women can be installed as lectors and acolytes



Francis has opened up a new ministry while restating the Church's teaching that only men can be ordained priests, writes **Cindy Wooden**

Recognising “the gifts of each baptised person” - women and men - Pope Francis has ordered a change to Canon Law and liturgical norms so that women could be formally installed as lectors and acolytes.

“A consolidated practice in the Latin Church has confirmed, in fact, that such lay ministries, being based on the Sacrament of Baptism, can be entrusted to all the Faithful who are suitable, whether male or female,” the Pope wrote in his order changing Church law.

The document, issued *motu proprio* (on his own accord), was published by the Vatican on January 11 and changes the wording of Canon 230, paragraph 1.

The canon used to say, “Lay men who possess the age and qualifications established by decree of the conference of bishops can be admitted on a stable basis through the prescribed liturgical rite to the ministries of lector and acolyte”.

The updated canon will say, “Lay who possess the age and qualifications established by decree of the conference of bishops can be admitted on a stable basis through the prescribed liturgical rite to the ministries of lector and acolyte”.

“The decision to confer also on women these offices, which involve stability, public recognition and a mandate from the bishop, will make the participation of all in the work of evangelisation more effective in the Church,” the Pope said in a letter to Cardinal Luis Ladaria, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Dioceses

In most dioceses around the world - and at the Vatican as well - women and girls have been lectors at Mass and have served at the altar for decades. That service was possible, not as a formally instituted ministry, but under the terms of Canon 230, paragraph

2, which allowed for women or men to carry out the functions “by temporary designation”.

In his letter to Cardinal Ladaria, published with the document changing Canon Law, the Pope said that since the Second Vatican Council the Church has made “a clearer distinction between the attributes of what today are called ‘nonordained (or lay) ministries’ and ‘ordained ministries,’” such as deacon, priest and bishop.

Distinctions

Those distinctions, he said, make it “possible to dissolve the reservation of the former to men alone”.

Pope Francis repeated St John Paul II’s teaching that the Catholic Church “in no way has the faculty to confer priestly ordination on women” since Jesus chose only men as his disciples.

But with “nonordained ministries it is possible, and today it seems opportune, to overcome this reservation” of allowing only men to be formally and permanently instituted as lectors and acolytes.

The Pope’s letter also said the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments would oversee the implementation of the change and would need to modify parts of the Roman Missal and the rite instituting lectors and acolytes.

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* says: “The acolyte is instituted for service at the altar and to assist the priest and deacon. It is his place principally to prepare the altar and the sacred vessels and, if necessary, to distribute the Eucharist to the Faithful as an extraordinary minister.”

“A consolidated practice in the Latin Church has confirmed, in fact, that such lay ministries, being based on the Sacrament of Baptism, can be entrusted to all the Faithful who are suitable, whether male or female”

“The lector is instituted to proclaim the readings from sacred scripture, with the exception of the Gospel. He may also announce the intentions for the universal prayer and, in the absence of a psalmist, recite the psalm between the readings,” the instruction says.

The instruction also says that in the absence of persons formally instituted for those roles, any qualified lay person may be assigned those roles.

Pope Francis’ document and his letter to Cardinal Ladaria frame the question in the context of the gifts and talents given by the Holy



Pope Francis has ordered a change to the Code of Canon Law so that women may be formally instituted as lectors and acolytes. Photo: CNS/Gregory A. Shemitz.

Spirit “through the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist” to all members of the Church so that they can contribute “to the building up of the Church and to the proclamation of the Gospel to every creature”.

Installation

And, he said, quoting his 2020 apostolic exhortation, *Querida Amazonia*, a formal, public installation of women in those minis-

tries “would also allow women to have a real and effective impact on the organisation, the most important decisions and the direction of communities, while continuing to do so in a way that reflects their womanhood”.

“The priesthood of the baptised and service to the community represent the two pillars on which the institution of ministries is based,” the Pope said.

The change, he said, recog-

nises the service already carried out by many women, but will also emphasise for men preparing for priesthood - who also are formally instituted as lectors and acolytes - that those ministries “are rooted in the Sacrament of Baptism and Confirmation” that they all share and that the ordained priesthood and the priesthood of the baptised always should work together for the good of the entire Church community.



World Report

IN BRIEF

Sainthood cause of priest imprisoned by Nazis and communists advances

● The sainthood cause of a Catholic priest who was imprisoned by both the Nazis and the communists has advanced with the conclusion of the initial diocesan phase of the cause January 4. Fr Adolf Kajpr was a Jesuit priest and journalist who was imprisoned in Dachau concentration camp after publishing Catholic magazines critical of the Nazis. Five years after his liberation from Dachau in 1945, Kajpr was arrested by the communist authorities in

Prague and sentenced to 12 years in a gulag for writing "seditious" articles. The diocesan phase of Kajpr's cause was completed on January 4. As a journalist and a priest, Kajpr was committed to the idea that "the Gospel should be proclaimed on the pages of newspapers," Vojtěch Novotný, vice postulator of Kajpr's cause, said. "He consciously asked, 'How can we bring the whole, unadulterated message of Christ to the people of today?'"

Brazilian archbishop faces accusations of abuse of seminarians

● Archbishop Alberto Taveira Corrêa of Belém, an archdiocese with more than 2 million residents in the Amazon region in Brazil, faces criminal and ecclesial investigations after being accused of sexual harassment and abuse by four former seminarians. The accusations were disclosed by the Brazilian edition of the Spanish newspaper *El País* at the

end of December and became a high-profile scandal on January 3, when TV Globo's weekly news show *Fantástico* aired a report on the story. The names of the former seminarians have not been revealed. All of them studied at the Saint Pius X seminary in Ananindeua, in Belém's metropolitan area, and were between 15 and 20 years old when the alleged abuse happened.

Croatia's Catholic bishops give \$1 million in relief to earthquake victims

● The Croatian bishops' conference is donating over \$1 million in emergency aid to victims of the country's December earthquake. The money will go to help the most in need in the Diocese of Sisak and the Archdiocese of Zagreb, after a magnitude 6.4 earthquake struck eastern Central Croatia on December 29. According to the conference's secretary general, Fr. Krunoslav Novak, the bishops

will approve further monetary assistance at an upcoming meeting. The bishops are also setting up temporary housing for those whose homes were destroyed, in partnership with Caritas Croatia and the Order of Malta. "The church will not leave its faithful, even when the spotlight goes out, when new worries come," Novak told Croatian Catholic radio station *HKR*.

Sweden's pandemic reality check a 'time of conversion,' cardinal says

● Sweden's about-face in its response to the Covid-19 pandemic can give way to much-needed reflection and conversion in the country, said Cardinal Anders Arborelius of Stockholm. "I think this is a time of conversion for Sweden," Cardinal Arborelius told *Catholic News Service* January 8. "If we compare with the other Nordic countries, we must realize that we have not been able to

do what we were supposed to do." At the start of the pandemic, while countries around the world enforced lockdowns and social distancing measures, the Swedish government took a more relaxed approach. However, as of January 8, an estimated 9,262 people have died of the coronavirus, the highest of the Nordic countries, compared with 1,487 people in Denmark, 584 in Finland and 467 in Norway.

Australia's financial crime watchdog conducts 'detailed review' of Vatican transfers

Australia's financial crime watchdog said Thursday that it is conducting a "detailed review" of Vatican-linked transfers worth \$2.3 billion Australian dollars (€1.5 billion).

The Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre (AUSTRAC), a government agency, said January 7 that it was seeking to shed light on the mystery transfers in cooperation with the Vatican.

"AUSTRAC is currently undertaking a detailed review of the figures and is working with the Holy See and Vatican City State Financial Intelligence Unit on this matter," the agency said in a statement to the *Associated Press*.

Reports of a money transfer from the Vatican to Australia date back to October 2, when Italian media claimed that an alleged transfer was part of a dossier being compiled by Vatican investigators and prosecutors against Cardinal Angelo Becciu.

Allegations that Church funds had been sent to Australia at the behest of Cardinal Becciu for the purposes of influencing Cardinal George Pell's trial on charges of sexual abuse were raised in the Australian Senate October 20 last year. Becciu has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing or any attempt to influence Pell's trial.

Meanwhile, a source close to the Vatican told *The Catholic Weekly*, newspaper of the Archdiocese of Sydney, that it was "completely implausible" that the AU\$2.3 billion in Vatican funds



Cardinal Angelo Becciu in Rome, September 25, 2020. Becciu has repeatedly denied any attempt to influence Pell's trial after Italian media claimed an alleged money transfer was part of dossier being compiled against Becciu.

transferred to Australia from Rome between 2014 and 2020 were legitimate.

The source told *The Catholic Weekly* the Vatican did not have AU\$2.3 billion to spend. In October 2020, the Holy See released a detailed 2019 financial statement. It closed the year with a budget deficit of €11 million. The statement showed it had €307 million in revenues, €318 million in expenditures and a total of €1.4 billion in net equity.

The Vatican has said it does not know the origin or destination of the money, with a senior Vatican official telling

media the Holy See would seek details from Australian authorities.

Archbishop Mark Coleridge of Brisbane, president of the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference, told *The Australian* newspaper that the bishops may also ask the AUSTRAC to reveal whether any of the funds sent from Vatican City in 47,000 separate transactions went to Catholic organizations in Australia.

He said the bishops did not know about the transfers until December, were "astounded" at their scale and will request an investigation from

Pope Francis into how they occurred without the bishops' knowledge.

Since October, Australian Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells has pursued an alleged transfer of AU\$1.14 million from the Vatican to Australia at the time of the investigation into Australian Cardinal George Pell for historical sexual abuse offenses, of which he was later cleared by a unanimous decision of the High Court. The discovery of the mystery transfers, reported by the analysis centre in December, raises even more questions.

Covid-19 claims lives of over 200 priests in Italy since start of pandemic

Of the more than 76,000 people known to have died of Covid-19 in Italy the past 11 months, more than 200 were priests, according to the Catholic newspaper, *Avvenire*.

Already four priests have died since the start of 2021, the newspaper said January 6, adding that the cumulative toll amounts to about one death every one and a half days since the pandemic began.

Some 204 priests, many of whom were still actively serving their commu-

nities, have died in Italy as of early January, the newspaper reported.

While the majority of men were in their late 70s and 80s, one of the youngest to have lost his life was 58-year-old Father Alfredo Nicolardi of the Diocese of Como who died December 31. Hospitalized December 8, his condition worsened and, right before he had to be intubated, he asked a visiting priest for absolution "through the glass" separating them.

Vocationist Father Matteo Mpampanye, who was born in Congo and was

serving in parishes south of Salerno, died December 1 at age 51.

Meanwhile, residences for religious women continued to be hot spots for infection, in some cases, infecting almost all the residents.

For example, 104 out of 114 nuns living in a convent in the central Italian town of Bagnoregio tested positive for Covid-19 in mid-December. The breakout happened after the sisters attended a prayer gathering with another group of nuns, according to local reports.

Danish proposal on translating sermons gets pushback from bishops

A spokeswoman for Denmark's Catholic Church said draft legislation requiring all sermons and homilies to be translated into Danish will fuel ill-feeling and damage religious freedom.

"This law is directed primarily at Muslims – its proponents say they want to prevent

parallel societies and things being preached which no one else understands and could be used for radicalization and calls for terror," said Precious Blood Sister Anna Mirijam Kaschner, general secretary and spokeswoman of the Nordic bishops' conference.

"But all church congrega-

tions, free church congregations, Jewish congregations, everything we have here in Denmark – 40 different religious communities – will be placed under general suspicion by this law ... Something is happening here which is undermining democracy," she told Cologne-based *Dom Radio*

January 4. The legislation was scheduled to be debated in February in the country's parliament. Sister Kaschner said the law would require religious communities, including the Catholic Church, to translate and publish every sermon, posing "enormous personal and financial challenges."



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Bearing gifts we traverse afar...



A Three Kings parade in Castle Square, Warsaw, Poland, January 6, 2021. Scaled-down Three Kings parades were held in Poland to celebrate the Epiphany. Photo credits: Karol Darmoros/Polskie Radio and Orszak Trzech Króli.

Births of babies with Down syndrome in Europe fall sharply amid increased prenatal testing

The number of babies with Down syndrome who were born in Europe fell by half between 2011 and 2015 – confirming the fears of pro-life campaigners in the UK, who have long argued that increased prenatal testing for Down syndrome has led many women to abort their children.

Down syndrome

A study published during December 2020 in the *European Journal of Human Genetics* examined the years 2011-2015 to determine the number of babies born with Down syndrome across all countries in Europe, and compared those numbers to estimates of how many

babies would have been born with Down syndrome had they not been aborted.

The study found that 54% fewer babies with Down syndrome were born during that period in the United Kingdom than estimates would have expected – a figure roughly in line with the European average. In Spain and Italy, the percentage of reduction was 83% and 71%, respectively.

Notably, in the UK, non-invasive prenatal testing (NIPT) for Down syndrome has been available since 2012 to any woman willing to pay the £500 bill, the *BBC* reports. Right to Life UK, a pro-life group active in the country, has documented

several instances of women being pressured to abort their children as a result of the prenatal test, with one mother reporting that she had been “offered about 15 terminations”, including when she was 38 weeks pregnant. By some estimates, nine out of ten women in the UK who receive a diagnosis of Down syndrome abort their child.

Medical professional organizations

Increased use of NIPT have prompted several medical professional organizations in the UK, including The Royal College of Obstetricians and

Gynaecologists, to issue guidelines urging doctors not to apply pressure for abortion based on the results of the tests.

Last summer

An investigation last summer found that the number of births of Down syndrome babies has fallen by 30% in National Health Service hospitals that offer NIPT.

The UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has consistently criticized countries which provide for abortion on the basis of disability. In some countries, such as Iceland, the abortion rate for babies believed to have Down syndrome is close to 100%.

Chicago Fr Pflieger steps aside over allegation of abuse more than 40 years ago

Fr Michael Pflieger, a popular Chicago priest and outspoken advocate against gun violence, gangs, poverty and racism, has stepped aside from his ministry after the Chicago Archdiocese said it received an allegation that the priest had sexually abused a minor more than 40 years ago.

Chicago Cardinal Blase J. Cupich announced the move in a January 5 letter to Fr Pflieger’s parishioners at St Sabina and members of the

parish school, St Sabina Academy. The 71-year-old priest has led the historically African American parish since 1981.

“In keeping with our child protection policies, I have asked Fr Pflieger to step aside from ministry following receipt by the Archdiocese of Chicago’s Office for Child Abuse Investigations and Review of an allegation of sexual abuse of a minor more than 40 years ago,” the cardinal wrote.

In a January 6 post on Facebook, Fr Pflieger said, “I am devastated, hurt and yes angry, but I am first, a person of faith,” he wrote, urging people to trust God and to keep him and the parish of St. Sabina in their prayers.

A statement issued January 5 by the cabinet of St Sabina’s said they believe the allegations against their senior pastor “are unfounded” and they said they “boldly stand behind the integrity, passion, work and ministry” of Fr Pflieger.



Catholics and Lutherans reaffirm commitment to communion

● The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Lutheran World Federation underscored their commitment to walk together on their common journey from conflict to communion.

The Council and Federation recently announced the publication of the updated Italian translation of the historic ecumenical document called the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification.

A post on the Council’s website notes that by launching the updated document on January 3rd, the day this year when Catholics and Lutherans recall the 500th anniversary of the excommunication of Martin Luther, both the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity underscore their commitment to walk together on their common journey from conflict to communion.

The document, published first in 1999, signalled an agreement between Catholics and Lutherans on the Doctrine of Justification. Bishop Brian Farrell, secretary of the Pontifical Council, said the document is “very important” because it “goes to the very heart of the controversies that separated Lutherans and Catholics in the 16th century”.

Bishop Farrell added that publishing the document on the anniversary of Luther’s excommunication highlights “that we’re not in the same place”.

Pope Francis calls for peace in Central African Republic after disputed election

● Pope Francis called Wednesday for peace in the Central African Republic following a disputed election.

In his Angelus address on January 6, the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord, the Pope expressed concern about the turmoil following a December 27 vote to elect the country’s president and National Assembly.

“I am following carefully and with preoccupation the events in the Central African Republic where elections recently took place in which the people have manifested the desire to pursue the path of peace,” he said.

“I invite all of the parties

to a fraternal, respectful dialogue, to reject any form of hatred and to avoid any form of violence.”

Sixteen candidates stood in the presidential election. Faustin-Archange Touadéra, the incumbent, claimed re-election with 54% of the votes, but other candidates said the vote was marred by irregularities.

A Catholic bishop reported January 4 that rebels supporting a former president had seized the city of Bangassou. Bishop Juan José Aguirre Muñoz appealed for prayers, saying that children caught up in the violence were “very frightened”.

Caritas, Red Cross offer safe shelter for Rome homeless amid pandemic

● In an effort to provide immediate shelter and aid to people living on the street in Rome while also trying to curb the spread of coronavirus, the diocesan Caritas and the Italian Red Cross have started operating a testing and temporary holding centre for new arrivals before they go on to regular shelters.

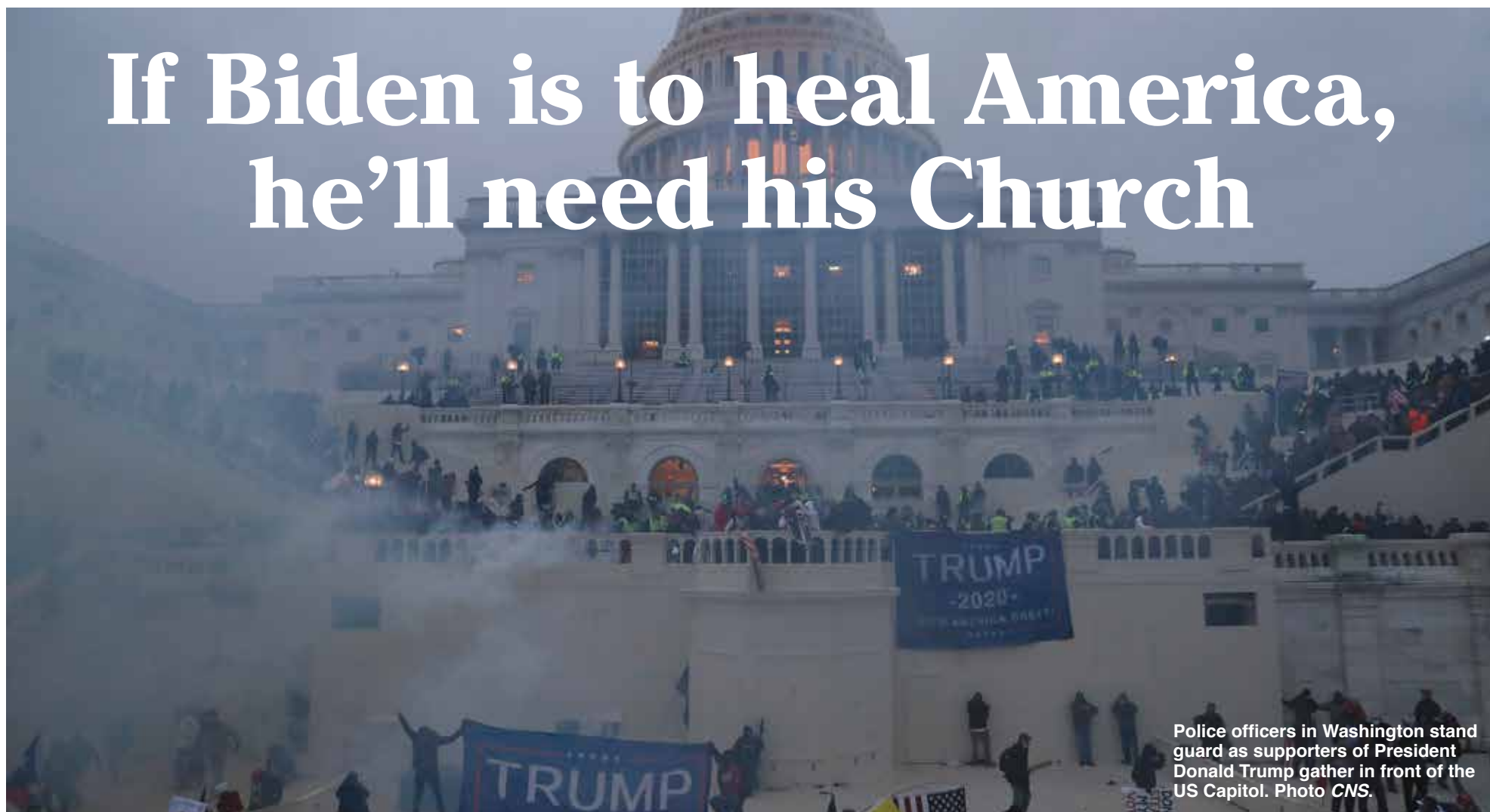
The new offering “represents an innovative service that works as a central hub, a missing link” for new referrals arriving off the streets, so that they have a safe place to be tested for Covid-19 and isolated if need be – services that cannot be guaranteed at Rome’s established shelters and facilities, said a January 7 joint press release.

This way, public health can be safeguarded while also safely taking in and helping people in extreme poverty, it said. The new “pre-welcoming” service, which started January 7, can house 60 people at a time. They can receive testing for Covid-19 and have safe, adequate shelter necessary for a 10-day isolation or quarantine before heading to longer-term shelters, hostels and parish-run centres.



Letter from Rome

If Biden is to heal America, he'll need his Church



Police officers in Washington stand guard as supporters of President Donald Trump gather in front of the US Capitol. Photo CNS.



John L. Allen Jr

By all accounts, President-elect Joe Biden is a sincere Catholic. He's spoken openly about how his beliefs have sustained him through personal pain and loss, and while there may be debate in some circles about how coherent his politics are with his faith, few contest whether he has faith in the first place.

In the wake of Wednesday's chaos at the capitol, Biden may need that faith more than ever.

Mob

Yes, the mob that stormed the Capitol Building was turned back, as were challenges to the outcome of the 2020 election. In two weeks – on my birthday, as it happens – Biden will become the second Roman Catholic president of the United States, with a joint session of the Senate and Congress having certified his victory at around 4:00 am in Washington.

But it would be naïve to think those results mark “closure” or “finality” in any-

thing other than an electoral sense. Arguably, not since Lincoln's first inauguration in 1861 has an incoming American president taken office facing such a divided nation. If Biden is to govern, he'll need to find a way to begin putting the pieces back together, and drawing on the resources of the Catholic Church may be among his better options.

Challenge

Let's not underestimate the magnitude of the challenge.

Not only did the rampage at the capitol yesterday capture the rage of some Trump supporters, but it's also generated a baying for blood among members of Biden's own party, many of whom now seem to be engaged in a contest to see how much retribution they can demand be imposed on Trump and his enablers. Once Trump leaves office, in all likelihood there will be calls for criminal sanctions. However warranted, such moves also will certainly further exacerbate the divides.

Somehow, America has to work out a new *modus vivendi*.

On the left, there needs to be an acknowledgment that one can support much of the Trump policy agenda, and can share Trump's skepticism of elites and establishments, without being an enemy of democracy or a racist bigot. On the right, there has to be a willingness to accept that “Ameri-

can” and “pro-Trump” don't mean the same thing, and, for that matter, that “God-fearing” and “Republican” aren't identical concepts either.

The snark, the dismissiveness, the presumption of righteousness and superior wisdom, has to end. If you can't grant that constituencies representing vast swaths of the American population even have a right to be heard, then force becomes the only option, and we saw yesterday where that ends.

“In the wake of Wednesday's chaos at the capitol, Biden may need that faith more than ever”

Inevitably, Biden will have to lead the way in this national reconciliation project. His greatest asset in doing so may turn out to be his Church – having seen him through personal tragedy, Catholicism may be poised to aid him in his defining public test.

To begin with, Catholicism is the lone major religious group in America where both sides of the nation's political divide are roughly evenly represented. Overall, exit polls from the November election show that Catholics were almost evenly split between

Biden and Trump, and those realities are readily apparent on Catholic social media platforms as well as traditional Catholic media outlets.

On a personal level, I've got American Catholic friends who are passionate Trump supporters and friends who are equally fervid critics, and both groups are composed of people with great minds and even better hearts. We live in a polarised world, and these friends of mine are certainly capable of looking on the other side with scepticism and even derision, but that's them at their worst, not their best.

Imagine if the Catholic Church in America took on as a national pastoral priority to promote a campaign of healing – not “dialogue,” in the sense of fostering political debate, but the pursuit of friendship across tribal lines. Catholics are one-quarter of the national population, and when Catholicism in America moves with unity and purpose, the cultural landscape can shift.

Intentional

Imagine if every Catholic parish in America were to become intentional about creating spaces where members of the competing tribes could come together and do something constructive – launch a soup kitchen, for instance, or build houses for Habitat for Humanity, or reach out to elderly

Americans living in isolation and fear due to the Covid crisis, or to help meet any number of other urgent needs.

Over time, they might discover that someone's opinion on whether Dominion Voting Systems machines did or didn't delete Trump votes isn't really the defining feature of their humanity.

Cardinal Wilton Gregory of Washington, D.C., seemed to hint in that direction in his comment on yesterday's events, reminding believers they're called to “acknowledge the human dignity of those with whom we disagree and seek to work with them to ensure the common good for all”.

One hopes that, in the aftermath of yesterday's events, Catholics at the grassroots and at the top will take up this challenge, beginning with a pledge to avoid using the kind of public tone that stokes division. It was a Seventh Day Adventist, Senate Chaplain Barry Black, who closed the certification process with a prayer relevant for Catholics too: “These tragedies have reminded us that words matter, and that the power of life and death is in the tongue.”

Among other things, Catholic “influencers” out there – those with large Twitter followings, or TV audiences, or who help shape the conversation in other ways – would

need to accept that yesterday was a *reductio ad absurdum* on a culture of acrimony, and that coming up with the best zinger of one's ideological opponent in 280 characters is not a manifestation of virtue. Ordinary Catholics also would have to stop rewarding such displays with their eyeballs and their pocketbooks.

“The mob that stormed the Capitol Building was turned back, as were challenges to the outcome of the 2020 election”

Can all that happen? Maybe, maybe not, but if it proves impossible in the Church, where our very identity is supposed to be rooted in being “catholic,” i.e., universal, what hope is there for the broader culture?

Maybe it's providential that America is getting a Catholic president at a moment in which the ability to embrace diversity without division is especially crucial. In any event, if ever there was a potential “Catholic moment” in America, this would seem to be it.

Let's hope we make the most of it.

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

Central African Republic remains 'paralysed' by post-election violence



Inés San Martín

Bishop Juan José Aguirre of Bangassou, Central African Republic, says the city "is paralysed" by post-election violence.

"People have fled, they're in hiding," he told *Crux* via WhatsApp.

On January 6, Pope Francis expressed his concern for this war-torn country and invited "all of the parties to a fraternal, respectful dialogue, to reject any form of hatred and to avoid any form of violence."

The Spanish-born Bishop Aguirre is already in conversation with a local Evangelical leader to figure out who is "the brains" behind the military operation so they can begin a dialogue effort to kick-start the city.

"We won't lose anything by trying," Bishop Aguirre said. "Dialogue can help restore some activities, so that people can go to the market and children can attend school."

“Central African Republic seemed to be on the track towards peace – which encouraged Bishop Aguirre to start many projects in the mission he leads”

Government troops tried to hold the rebels off after an insurrection following the December 27 elections. The armed gangs today are a combination of foreign mercenaries and former members of two guerrilla groups that fought each other during a civil war between 2013 and 2019.

Recently, Central African Republic seemed to be on the track towards peace – which encouraged Bishop Aguirre to start many projects in the mission he leads, but most of them are back to square one.

The Catholic mission is like a beacon of hope these days, still standing despite the bombs and other attacks in the past few weeks. Bishop Aguirre and



Voters stand in line to cast their ballots during the national elections at a polling station in Bangui, Central African Republic, December 27, 2020. Photo CNS.

those who help him took in dozens of orphans.

Innocent

"They're innocent... You look them in the eyes, and they know nothing about rebels, mercenaries, power struggles. All they know is the sounds of the machine guns are scary," he said.

The mission also has a home for some 50 elderly, leaving little room for much else in the mission.

Bangassou is a "border town," separated from the Democratic Republic of the Congo by a river. Yet it's also a mining city in a country that has incredible mineral wealth.

"Central African Republic is a strategic country in the very heart of Africa," Bishop Aguirre said. "And it is a country that many countries would like to see as Muslim. In the world there are many Muslims who are very good people and fearful of God. But there are also those who want Central African Republic to be Muslim in order to control its

enormous mineral wealth."

The bishop is not the only one who thinks there's an extremist ideology behind the violence.

“The bishop is not the only one who thinks there's an extremist ideology behind the violence”

Maria Lozano, a Spanish lay woman who heads the international communications office of papal charity Aid to the Church in Need, told *Crux* that "jihadist want to ransack the country to have resources they need to deploy elsewhere. Many of the rebels are foreign from Niger, Chad or Sudan, who're fighting in a war that is not theirs for money".

"When I started working at the foundation more than ten years ago, I didn't even know that Central Africa was a country, the

world has ignored it for decades. However, sadly, it did not take long to get to know it. It's been too many years of violence, death and destruction, of power changing hands, and intrigues to dominate a country rich in wealth, but with people living in extreme misery," Ms Lozano said.

Coalition

The new "kings" of Bangassou are the rebel anti-government Coalition of Patriots for Change, made of up five war lords who have been ransacking the country for years. They contested the result of the elections even before polls ended.

In a joint statement released January 4, officials from the United Nations, the African Union and the European Union cautioned against disinformation and incitement to violence and hatred, including against international personnel, aimed at compromising the electoral process.

The officials also denounced election-related

violence and called on national authorities to investigate and bring to justice those responsible, while reminding all stakeholders of their commitments under the 2019 Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation. They urged the signatory parties to fully honour their pledges, in particular the cessation of hostilities.

“Bangassou is a ‘border town,’ separated from the Democratic Republic of the Congo by a river”

The officials invited them to "re-launch the peace process, in particular by emphasising consultation, strict compliance with commitments and accountability".

Beyond the efforts from the international community, Bishop Aguirre said individual Catholics

can help the situation in Central African Republic in three ways: By familiarising themselves with the situation, "without having their heads in the sand; by praying the rosary "for missionaries, the mission, and the people we help;" and by donating to organisations such as Aid to the Church in Need that have an active presence in countries in conflict and support the local religious people in their effort to strengthen and sustain the people.

"We're nothing without the Lord," he said. "It's very important to be close to the grapevine to be fruitful. Without the grace from God, we'd be nothing. Everything we are, we are because of him."

"When we set our eyes in the Lord, present for us in the tabernacle, we find the strength and the energy," Bishop Aguirre continued. "In living like he lived, in feeling what he felt, experiencing what he experienced, treating poor people like he did."

Letters

Letter of the week

Jokes about rape and God on RTÉ 'highly disrespectful'

Dear Editor, I am a very regular RTÉ viewer and a supporter for years. I have enjoyed many beautiful programmes over the Christmas season - and even watched repeats, with great pleasure!

However, I must object in the strongest possible way, to the sick joke re 'God's rape' of an individual on NYE. I had settled down in the midst of a horrible pandemic to watch something light and entertaining but was disgusted by those remarks.

Firstly, to joke about rape in a society so bedevilled by this outrage, and at a time when so much domestic violence has been reported over the Christmas period and in these pandemic times, must be very hurtful to victims.

Secondly, in case the two women presenters were not aware, the

Christian calendar celebrates the Feast of Mary, Mother of God on January 1 - exactly one week after Christmas Day, the Feast of the Incarnation - God-among-us. This Christmas Feast is foundational of all Christian belief. For your producers to make a mockery on Irish television of this tenet of my faith (and that of millions of others worldwide) is shameful, and very low form indeed. In fact, it is insulting, highly disrespectful and in very, very poor taste - no way acceptable.

I would feel equally angry and hurt were the basic tenets of any other world faith, such as Islamism, Hinduism, Judaism blasphemed - though that is less likely to happen on RTÉ, I know.

I appeal to the Director General of RTÉ to remove the item from RTÉ Player and offer a proper apology to the people of Ireland. The brief, last-minute item on RTÉ news (January 3) was neither fulsome or heartfelt. It came across as a duty to be executed. A warning (about what?) that "some people" may be offended is no substitute, suggesting that only the 'exceptions' might take offence! Well, I consider myself to be an ordinary, mainstream member of Irish society and I intend to make my voice heard when necessary. I encourage all other mainstream Irish people to do likewise. We deserve much, much better!

*Yours etc.,
Margaret McConalogue
Ballynagard, Derry*

Abhorred at blasphemous content on RTÉ show

Dear Editor, I was abhorred at the utterly offensive and blasphemous content of the RTÉ's NYE countdown show. It was incredibly insulting and hurtful to people of the Christian faith.

Insulting Almighty God and His Blessed Mother with content like such as that has absolutely no place on public television, and indeed has no place anywhere on a public or private forum - period. It is a mockery of the Christian faith and for practising Catholics, like myself, it is utterly degrading and contrary to our beliefs. And what's more there isn't an ounce of truth in it. Shame on anyone that insults our God in such a fashion. It is neither funny nor humorous. RTÉ need to remove this clip immediately from their player. It is sacrilegious and unfit for any public platform day or night. God shall not be mocked.

*Yours etc.,
Aisling Bastible
Clontarf, Dublin*



Charity runs both ways regarding sermons

Dear Editor, When I read Mr Dwan's letter on the quality of sermons [IC 24/12/2020], it reminded me of a story I heard (and have used on numerous occasions) which I thought I'd share with you.

A Churchgoer wrote a letter to the editor of a newspaper and complained that it made no sense to go to Mass every Sunday. "I've gone for 30 years now," he wrote, "and in that time I have heard something

like 3,000 sermons. But for the life of me, I can't remember a single stand out sermon. So, I think I'm wasting my time and the priests are wasting theirs by giving sermons at all."

This started a real controversy in the 'Letters to the Editor' column, much to the delight of the editor.

It went on for weeks until someone wrote this clincher: "I've been married for 30 years now. In that time my wife has

cooked some 32,000 meals. But for the life of me, I cannot recall the entire menu for a single one of those meals. But I do know this: They all nourished me and gave me the strength I needed to do my work. If my wife had not given me these meals, I would be physically dead today. Likewise, if I had not gone to church for nourishment, I would be spiritually dead today!"

When you are down to noth-

ing, God is up to something! Faith sees the invisible, believes the incredible and receives the possible.

Thank God for our physical and our spiritual nourishment. It can't all be gourmet quality. Most of our sermons speak of charity and surely that runs both ways.

*Yours etc.,
Brendan Madden
Willington, Dublin*

Archbishop Eamon Martin should be commended for warm words to Unionists

Dear Editor, Archbishop Eamon Martin is to be commended for his generous words of warmth to the Unionist community on the forthcoming centenary of the coming into being of Northern Ireland [IC 31/12/2020]. Also commendable is his criticism of many Nationalist and Republican politicians to engage with the process. Whilst the archbishop is honest and open about his nationalism and his anxiety to bring the unionist community along with him, he should also remember that he speaks first of all as a Catholic archbishop. As such, he must be aware that some of his flock may wish to retain the present constitutional position. They must not be

forgotten. In fairness to the archbishop he did not use the term Protestant in the context of unionism. Mother Church is neutral on political boundaries.

We should never forget the anguished words of Catholic Magistrate Thomas Travers to a predecessor of the archbishop which went along the lines of seeking words of comfort for those of his flock who wished to remain in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

*Yours etc.,
John O'Mahony
Renmore, Galway*

Government's Christmas 'gift' was to deny us the Eucharist

Dear Editor, Christmas Day brought a message of hope and joy as Christians celebrated the coming of the light of the world. In Ireland, the Government gifts to follow Christmas were not Gold, Frankincense or Myrrh but to prohibit church service attendance, to deny the sacrament of the Eucharist and to reduce the 'right to practice ones faith' to a non-essential service. Theirs was not a message of light and not the Christmas message.

*Yours etc.,
Judith Doherty
Dalkey, Dublin*

facebook community

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

Primate of All-Ireland condemns 'blasphemous, mocking' RTÉ NYE broadcast

Making jokes about rape on a national NYE countdown show is sick beyond belief. How did this end up on a so-called comedy show? The clip should be removed immediately from RTÉ Player. - **Declan Murphy**

RTÉ wouldn't dare mock other religions, we're not taking it lying down. RTÉ needs to apologise. - **Joan O Dwyer**

Boycott them permanently and that would solve the problem very simply. - **Catherine Hickey**

Disgusting and disgraceful to Christians. Someone edited it and let it be televised, that person should be sacked. - **Eamonn Phelan**

What's the matter with RTÉ? Has every one of them got a chip on his/her shoulder? Even at Christmas time their anti-religious bias/bitterness comes on our screens. We need to get rid of the license! - **Eileen Murray**

With all the pain the Church has caused who are they to lecture anybody on anything. - **Adam Sharkey**

Well done RTÉ standing up for free speech. - **Noel Stronge**

RTÉ has sunk to an incredibly low dept on this occasion. They seem to get a perverse pleasure out of mocking the Catholic Church and traditionally held beliefs. Time to withhold our licence fees! - **Brid Shaughnessy**

Pathetic response and apology from RTÉ. Boycotting the license fee would be a start in breaking their stranglehold on our country. - **Pat Brennan**

Time to get rid of RTÉ once and for all. It's completely outdated. Nobody watches the rubbish they have on or their grossly overpaid staff. - **Kieran Shannon**

Satire takes no prisoners. That's the whole point of it. If you don't like it change channels. There was enough censorship in Ireland in the past. - **Susan Dooley**

We can change channels yes, but we are forced to pay a licence fee for them to spew out this muck. - **Sinead Tracey**

I mistakenly watched it with my children and was horrified that they seen this clip and my 7-year-old was so confused because he believed it was the real news. It's outrageous! But it goes to show that RTÉ think we have left our religion so far behind us we would find this funny. Last time I checked people are still baptising their children, getting married in churches and having funerals. - **Linda Winstone**

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



▲ **BRAZIL:** People enjoy drinks at the outside area of a bar on January 7 in Rio de Janeiro during the Covid-19 pandemic. Photos: CNS
◀ **SPAIN:** People walk outside the cathedral in Madrid following snowfall.



USA: A woman in the Brooklyn borough of New York City holds a sign during the "Get him out! Defend democracy" rally January 7, one day after supporters of President Donald Trump breached the US Capitol.



BELGIUM: People walk past snow-covered trees at a nature reserve in Waimes.



ITALY: Members of the Missionaries of Charity, wearing protective masks, walk in Rome January, 7.



AUSTRALIA: A young woman prays the Rosary inside St Mary's Cathedral in Sydney.



What is love asking of us now?

“You can safely assume you’ve created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do.” Anne Lamott

Division

Those are words worth contemplating, on all sides of the political and religious divide today. We live in a time of bitter division. From our government offices down to our kitchen tables there are tensions and divisions about politics, religion, and versions of truth that seem irreparable. Sadly, these divisions have brought out the worst in us, in all of us. Common civility has broken down and brought with it something that effectively illustrates the biblical definition of the “diabolic” – widespread lack of common courtesy, disrespect, demonisation and hatred of each other. All of us now smugly assume that God hates all the same people we do. The polarisation around the recent USA elections, the storming of the USA Capital buildings by a riotous mob, the bitter ethical and religious debates about abortion, and the loss of a common notion of truth, have made clear that incivility, hatred, disrespect, and different notions of truth rule the day.

Where do we go with that? I am a theologian and not a politician or social analyst so what I say here has more to do with living out Christian discipleship and basic human maturity than with any



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

political response. Where do we go religiously with this?

“We may not disregard truth and let lies and injustices lie comfortable and unexposed”

Perhaps a helpful way to probe for a Christian response is to pose the question this way: what does it mean to love in a time like this? What does it mean to love in a time when people can no longer agree on what is true? How do we remain civil and respectful when it feels

“One of our contemporary prophetic figures, Daniel Berrigan, despite numerous arrests for civil disobedience, steadfastly affirmed that a prophet makes a vow of love, not of alienation”

impossible to respect those who disagree with us?

Via Negativa

In struggling for clarity with an issue so complex, sometimes it can be good to proceed via the *Via Negativa*, that is, by first asking what should we avoid doing. What should we not do today?

First, we should not bracket civility and legitimise disrespect and demonisation; but we should also not be unhealthily passive, fearful that speaking our truth will upset others. We may not disregard truth and let lies and injustices lie comfortable and unexposed. It is too simple to say that there are good people on both sides in order to avoid having to make real adjudications vis-à-vis the truth. There are sincere people on both

sides, but sincerity can also be very misguided. Lies and injustice need to be named. Finally, we must resist the subtle (almost impossible to resist) temptation to allow our righteousness morph into self-righteousness, one of pride’s most divisive modalities.

“Then truth can speak to power, to “alternative truth”, and to the denial of truth”

What do we need to do in the name of love? Fyodor Dostoevsky famously wrote that love is harsh and fearful thing and our first response should be to accept that. Love is a harsh thing and that harshness is not just the discomfort we feel when we confront others or find ourselves confronted by them. Love’s harshness is felt most acutely in the (almost indigestible) self-righteousness we have to swallow in order to rise to a higher level of maturity where we can accept that God loves those we hate just as much as God loves us – and those we hate are just as precious and important in God’s eyes as we are.

Once we accept this, then we can speak for truth and justice. Then truth can speak to power, to “alternative truth”, and to the denial of truth. That is the task. Lies must

be exposed, and this needs to occur inside our political debates, inside our churches, and at our dinner tables. That struggle will sometimes call us beyond niceness (which can be its own mammoth struggle for sensitive persons). However, while we cannot always be nice, we can always be civil and respectful.

Contemporary

One of our contemporary prophetic figures, Daniel Berrigan, despite numerous arrests for civil disobedience, steadfastly affirmed that a prophet makes a vow of love, not of alienation. Hence, in our every attempt to defend truth, to speak for justice, and to speak truth to power, our dominant tone must be one of love, not anger or hatred. Moreover, whether we are acting in love or alienation will always be manifest – in our civility or lack of it. No matter our anger, love still has some non-negotiables, civility and respect. Whenever we find ourselves descending to adolescent name-calling, we can be sure we have fallen out of discipleship, out of prophecy, and out of what is best inside us.

Finally, how we will respond to the times remains a deeply personal thing. Not all of us are called to do the same thing. God has given each of us unique gifts and a unique calling; some are called to loud protest, others to quiet prophecy. However, we are all called to ask ourselves the same question: given what is happening, what is love asking of me now?

Family & Lifestyle

The Irish Catholic, January 14, 2021

Personal Profile

Ireland's
best travelled
church-goer

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Keeping warm through winter



It may seem like a moot point but keeping warm is absolutely vital in the depths of winter. Working in an outdoors shop for a couple of months upon finishing college, I remember being told about the particular difficulties both Ireland and the UK pose their inhabitants when it comes to the challenge of keeping warm.

While other countries might register colder temperatures and see heavier snowfall in the winter months, oftentimes it's easier to feel warm there as you make your way to and fro. The Irish climate has a peculiar tendency to refuse you warmth, with many complaining to



Wrapping up properly is the key to wrapping up warmly, writes Jason Osborne

me of a chill they feel 'in their bones'.

A large part of this is because the Irish climate is a unique mixture of cold temperatures and damp conditions, which many dry-cold countries don't have to contend with. As we journey through another heavy, extended lockdown, and as we endure the

often-dismal months of January and February, we ought not to let nature have its way with us. The Irish landscape, whether it be urban parkland or rural wilds, has plenty to offer us rain, hail or cold, winter shine.

With indoor activities largely closed off to us, and outdoor gatherings prohibited for the most

part too, the only reprieve many of us face from the walls of our home is our surroundings, whether we venture forth alone or with our housemates.

While the cold itself doesn't make you sick, contrary to many a myth, it has long been theorised that succumbing to the cold has a negative effect on the immune system. Reasons for this may include less vitamin D intake, which researchers believe plays a key role in maintaining the immune system. Other research suggests that colds and cold-like illnesses replicate more effectively at lower temperatures, making the likelihood of catching or encountering one much more likely on a cold

and damp winter's day.

With all this said, it's time to consider the proper ways to wrap up and protect yourself from the encroaching cold.

Layers

Whether it's sitting at home or braving the chilly January wilds, layering effectively is the most important method with which to stay warm. Layering consists of wearing multiple layers of clothes in order to trap air against the skin, from a base layer to an outer layer, in order to keep you warm. While this might sound obvious, with most of us doing

» Continued on Page 33

Family News



AND EVENTS

PLAGUE MAY HAVE CAUSED DIE-OFFS OF ANCIENT SIBERIANS

Ancient people brought the plague to Siberia about 4,400 years ago, which may have led to a collapse in the region's population, new genetic analysis suggests. Evolutionary geneticists Gülşah Merve Kiliç and Anders Götherström, both of Stockholm University, led a team which extracted DNA from the remains of 40 human skeletons excavated in parts of Eastern Siberia. Among the collected samples was found DNA from *Yersinia pestis*, a bacterium that causes plague, in two of the Siberians, the researchers reported in the January 6 edition of *Science Advances*. One person lived around 4,400 years ago, while the other dated to roughly 3,800 years ago. It's unclear how the plague bacterium first reached Siberia or whether it caused widespread infections and death, Mr Götherström says. But he and his colleagues found that genetic diversity in their ancient samples of human DNA declined sharply from around 4,700 to 4,400 years ago, possibly the result of population collapse.

PUBLICATION OF NORTHERN IRELAND'S CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE 2019/20

The NI Department of Health published the 'Children's Social Care Statistics for Northern Ireland 2019/20' January 7.

The figures revealed that as of 31 March 2020, 22,414 children in Northern Ireland were known to Social Services as a child in need, and some 33,885 children were referred to Social Services during 2019/20, the largest proportion of these children being referred by the Police (33%).

The report also noted that as of 31 March 2020 2,298 children were listed on the Child Protection Register, with neglect and physical abuse the main reasons for a child being on the Register and accounting for over three quarters of all on the register (78%). Finally, as of 31 March 2020, 3,383 children and young people were in care in Northern Ireland. This was the highest number recorded since the introduction of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.

LIFTING WEIGHTS MAY HELP RELIEVE ANXIETY

A new study published in scientific reports suggests that lifting weights, along with other resistance training, may help to relieve anxiety. The study, which involved healthy young adults and a variety of exercises indicates that regular weight training substantially reduces anxiety.

Evidence already existed to support the notion that exercise helps alleviate depression, anxiety and other mental illnesses, while promoting feelings of happiness and contentment, but most of it focuses on cardiovascular exercise such as running and cycling.

The new study also did not delve into how weight training can affect anxiety directly, but co-author of the study Brett Gordon and his colleagues suspect increased physical and psychological potency figure in. The lifters became stronger over time and able to lift heavier weights, which may result in "feelings of mastery".

The findings are to be taken with a grain of salt though, as the study was conducted on those with good mental health, as well as being limited to a youthful group.

Tips to address acid reflux



One of the most commonly prescribed medications in Ireland are proton pump inhibitors which are used in the treatment of acid reflux and peptic ulcers. In fact, up to 20% of adults suffer with gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD) which appears to be increasing in prevalence and is more common in those of older age. GORD is commonly associated with lower quality of life, poor quality of sleep and decreased work productivity.

“There are several factors contributing to GORD including increased acidity of stomach contents and/or delayed gastric emptying”

It occurs when acid from the stomach regurgitates back up into the gullet giving rise to a variety of symptoms. The commonest is the sensation of 'heartburn' but vague chest discomfort or crushing chest pain identical to angina may occur.

It can also present with a sore throat, hoarseness, a dry cough or sticking sensation (when swallowing) if acid reflux affects the vocal cords or pharynx.

There are several factors contributing to GORD including increased acidity of stomach contents and/or delayed gastric emptying. Weakness of the valve or sphincter that prevents acid regurgitating back into the gullet is also a common problem and can be due to a hiatus hernia. This results when there is herniation of part of the gullet (at the junction

Medical Matters

Dr Kevin McCarroll



where it joins the stomach) up into the diaphragm and is not uncommon in older adults.

Pressure

Obesity is also associated with reflux as it can result in increased intra-abdominal pressure. Indeed, rising levels of obesity are believed to account for a significant proportion of the increase in new cases of GORD. Similarly, for this reason acid reflux is also very common in pregnancy though hormonal changes may also reduce the gastro-oesophageal sphincter tone.

So what can you do if you experience symptoms of acid reflux? Firstly, there are a number of lifestyle changes that can help and indeed in some cases, will be all that is required.

In particular, avoiding or cutting down on foods that may increase stomach acidity or reduce the lower oesophageal sphincter tone such as coffee, chocolate, citrus fruits, tomato products, spicy foods, and carbonated beverages may help. Fatty foods are harder to digest, tend to remain longer in the stomach and are also associated with heartburn.

Always avoid lying down, bending, stooping, going to bed or doing exercise soon after meals (within three hours) as this facilitates acid regurgitation. Drinking fluid at meals may in

some cases promote reflux as can large meals.

Avoidance of smoking (which may reduce gullet sphincter competence) may also help. Importantly, if you are overweight then shedding some abdominal fat has been shown to improve reflux. It's best also to avoiding wearing tight fitting clothes around the waist.

If your symptoms are bothersome at night or suggestive of acid reflux higher up in your throat, then sleeping with the head of the bed elevated may be useful.

When there are ongoing symptoms despite addressing lifestyle factors, then over-the-counter remedies or prescription medications will be required.



For occasional symptoms, over the counter antacids work well but their effect is short lived. A more effective treatment is Gaviscon (available in liquid or tablets) that in addition to antacids contains alginate. This works by coating the gullet which protects it from acid as well as helping to disperse acid pockets in the stomach.

If symptoms of acid reflux occur twice or more per week and/or very troublesome then proton pump inhibitors can be used. There are five main tablets in this class on the market though in recent years two have been made available in pharmacies without needing a prescription.

They are potent inhibitors of gastric acid secretion and should

be taken about one hour before meals. In about 90% of cases, they will relieve symptoms of mild GORD though when taken over the counter, a typical course would be for about two weeks.

Visit your GP

If symptoms persist, you should visit your GP who may prescribe them on ongoing basis and also decide on whether you may need other investigations.

Chronic GORD is associated with an increased risk of damage to the oesophagus. In particular, in up to 5-15% of cases, longterm acid reflux can result in changes to cells in the lining of gullet (Barretts oesophagus) that predisposes towards cancer.

When present, the risk of transformation to cancer is about 0.5% per year and though small, is usually monitored with endoscopy (camera tests of gullet). In fact, the rise in cancer of oesophagus in recent decades has been in large part attributed to this.

Apart from acid reflux, dyspepsia or indigestion is also common and in up to 10% of cases may be due to peptic ulcers.

These are invariably associated with the bacteria, *Helicobacter pylori* which increases gastric acid secretion. If you have non heartburn dyspepsia or reflux symptoms non responsive to therapy you can check for this 'ulcer bug' with a breath test. It can be easily eradicated with a course of treatment that includes antibiotics.

If you have ongoing symptoms, don't suffer and make sure to go your GP and get checked out.

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

» Continued from Page 31



it every time we put on a coat or a jacket, doing it properly is a different strategy altogether.

In Ireland, the familiar claim I mentioned earlier, of a cold that people feel 'in their bones', often finds its source in the improper application of layers. Some people wear too much and start to sweat, becoming chill as a result, or they don't wear enough and suffer from the external cold and damp anyway. How does one straddle the fine line between these extremes? By paying attention to what the different layers consist of.

Base layer

Any layering system has to begin with a base layer – this is the clothing you wear next to your skin. Most of us toss a t-shirt or the like on in the morning and think nothing more of it, but this is to our peril if we plan on heading out for a bracing winter walk.

What you wear next to your skin is incredibly important, as this is the layer most responsible for regulating your body temperature and wicking away moisture. Your choice of base layer ought to be guided by what it is you'll be doing – obviously sitting at home calls for a different choice to walking up the neighbourhood hill.

If you're heading out to do something more active, the material has to be considered a little more closely. As mentioned before, if we're tightly swaddled and highly mobile, we're likely to sweat, which will just lead to a chill once the activity has slowed down. Herein lies the importance of a material that interacts well with moisture, such as merino wool or a synthetic fabric (usually made of polyester or a polyester blend).

As is the Irish way, we often throw on a cotton t-shirt as a base layer when we're heading out for a walk. The trouble is, cotton soaks and retains moisture, drawing heat away from the body, leaving the wearer feeling cold and uncomfortable, regardless of their other layers. It also doesn't retain heat very well anyway, so closer scrutiny of our usual base layer may reveal why it is we're always feeling cold.

As mentioned, both merino wool and a synthetic base layer provide much better alternatives. Polyester base layers are generally quick drying, lightweight and will wick away moisture from the skin to keep you dry.

They usually come in varying weights, so the one you use is tailored to whatever activity you're engaging in. Skiing in Austrian mountains would call for a heavier weight than running in Dublin, for example.

Similarly, merino wool is famed for its properties as a base layer. It does all of the same work as a synthetic base but also boasts being naturally antibacterial, meaning it can go for longer without needing a wash. Both are good base-layer options for wet, cold winters in Ireland.

Mid-layer

As with the base layer, the most important factor to consider is what it is you'll be doing. If you're sitting inside, any sort of jumper or fleece should cover you once you've got the base layer taken care of. However, if you've got a blustery walk in mind, your mid-layer is a little more important.

Light enough to fit beneath a jacket, yet warm enough to layer effectively, a fleece is generally the best option. Not a traditional woolly fleece, though – a microfleece. Thin and lightweight microfleece are a great mid-layer but are also suitable outerwear in milder weather. A microfleece will provide a low level of insulation whilst the breathable properties make them perfect for more active pursuits.

Genuine outdoors fleeces are usually made of a manmade synthetic fibre (normally polyester), making them an ideal companion to a synthetic or merino wool base layer.

Outerwear

In Ireland, we have a penchant for wearing the wrong jacket. We wear



heavy, down jackets for hiking in the rain, and we wear thin raincoats on their own. Wrong on both counts. Many of the big, puffy coats and jackets on display in outdoors shops are more suited to those dry-cold climates, such as Scandinavia, that I mentioned earlier. These are usually filled with down feathers, which provide the best possible insulation and therefore the highest warmth. The difficulty with wearing this as an outer layer in Ireland is that when it gets wet, which it often does, it loses all its insulation power – leaving you as wet and cold as if you hadn't bothered.

The best option is to opt for a thinner alternative to the big, bulky down-feather coat. It's the best insulation, but in the wet and wild Irish landscape, it needs to be paired with a raincoat. Most brands, such as Columbia, Rab and the North Face offer slim, tightly padded jackets to be worn under a rain layer. Both down feather and synthetic polyester do the trick in Ireland once they're protected from the rain.

A decent rain layer, coupled with a suitable base, midlayer and jacket, make for the best defence against the Irish cold. There's no way around it – they work together to retain your body heat and keep you dry, nullifying the cold and the damp. While less might work in another country, in simpler conditions, it won't work here.

The key to a suitable rain layer is to be sure that it's designated 'water resistant', sometimes referred to as 'showerproof', or fully waterproof. This information ought to be supplied on the label of the jacket in question. The best way to check whether it'll keep the water out is by pouring a drop onto the jacket – if it beads up and slides off, the jacket has been treated with a Durable Water Repellent coating (DWR), or a similar water repellent coating. This will ensure the rain stays out and doesn't tamper with your carefully-maintained layering!

As mentioned above, the key to staying warm in Ireland is layering properly, whether you're sitting at home or availing of the outdoors our island has to offer. It's just a matter of doing it properly.

Dad's Diary

Rory Fitzgerald



What is rare, becomes precious. During an Irish January, sunlight is perhaps the most precious commodity in all of nature. On this icy morning, it shines low and golden across frosty fields. Its light touches the soil, awakening snowdrops from their winter sleep. The sun causes stirs of life within the trees limbs, as furled leaves grow silently, tentative and tiny, within the wombs of thousands of buds. Each day now, the sun grows subtly in strength, as the Earth tilts serenely on its axis, back towards the sun.

I've been chopping logs and splitting them with an axe. The kids help me to stack them in the shed. It's satisfying work, and inherently hopeful. It will be a couple of years before the day comes when they are put in the fire to warm us. We cut the wood now in the hope that all will be well then, by our fireside and under our roof. Each freshly cut log tells the story of its years of life, each ring represents a season of growth and sleep. Some years show far more growth than others. In a year where the growing conditions are harsh, trees grow far less.

I wonder if this strange, long year of the coronavirus plague will be a time of greater growth for children, or one which stunts their growth. We normally have a full house on New Year's Eve, full of friends and family. On this unusually quiet New Year's Eve, I sat with the kids to look back through photographs of 2020. I wanted them to see that even in this strange year, there was much good. There were photos of them swimming in the sea, kayaking in the stream and playing on the beach. Birthday parties were smaller than usual, but loving and fun. To understand coronavirus from the kids' perspective, on the first day of Covid-enforced home school of 2021, I asked the older kids to write about the ways they grew, and were held back, by the pandemic in 2020.

My 11-year-old son Sean said that the downsides of 2020 for him were not having birthday parties, not seeing his friends as much, having school tours cancelled and

his teams' rugby and soccer matches abandoned. On the plus side, he said, "I have grown much closer to nature this year, spending so much time in the fresh air. I also loved sailing down the coast with the family and seeing dolphins swimming elegantly alongside



us. I have also grown even closer to my family this year. Normally, I would be really busy with school, homework and clubs, with little time for anything else. But this year I often had nothing to do but have fun with my family – it was brilliant!"

My daughter Rose, who is nine, said the negatives of 2020 were also not being able to see friends and family, and the limits on travel. Yet she also wonders whether, some aspects of the Covid-19 pandemic are a blessing in disguise. She wrote: "During this strange time, I've found that I've grown closer to my siblings, not only physically, but mentally too. Not going to school means that my brother and sisters are my only playmates. This means we do everything together. As well as playing together more often, we also help each other more."

When the pandemic finally passes, we must not forget these lessons. Modern life makes us hyperactive: kids are shuttled from one activity to another after school, weekends involve schedules of parties and activities while the holidays involve a frantic rush to the airport. Often a greater joy emerges when we slow down, and take more time to simply be.

Ireland's best travelled church-goer

Personal Profile



Ruadhán Jones

The lockdown has hit everyone hard, some more than others. For Fearghal O'Muineachain, the virus has cut into a pastime that is something of a passion – visiting churches. Since the age of 15, Fearghal has visited more than 1,100 Catholic churches, cathedrals and Abbey's in Ireland, as well as a handful of Protestant ones. He now runs 'Ireland's Churches, Cathedrals and Abbeys' Facebook page, which carries photos and short histories of all the churches he visits.

“Fearghal's trips have taken him to all 32 counties, from Cathedrals to parish churches, travelling by bike and public transport”

“I started visiting churches when I was 15,” Fearghal says, “and when I was 18, I took trains for longer journeys. I was very interested in the architecture and the geography, that's part of what inspired me. Normally, I would try and visit at least one Church every day, sometimes I've been lucky enough to visit five. Ultimately, I hope to visit every parish and church in Ireland.”

But this unlikely past time surprises many people, Fearghal explains: “People don't expect



Fearghal O'Muineachain stands in front of St Joseph's Church in Springhill in Glanmire, December 2020.

someone my age to be interested in the Faith in this way. And I go to places that are off the beaten track, places that wouldn't have outsiders visit them often.”

Journey

What Fearghal doesn't mention is that he travels using only his bike and public transport to get around. As a result, his journeys can be long and physically exhausting. He once cycled a 229km round trip, from Ballincollig to Cahir and back again.

Fearghal's trips have taken him to all 32 counties, from Cathedrals to parish churches, travelling by bike and public transport. He

documents his visits with pictures, posting them to his Facebook page, 'Ireland's Churches, Cathedrals and Abbeys'.

“I started the page back in 2016,” he says. “I had been visiting churches since 2012 and noticed that there wasn't a page dedicated to churches around Ireland. But I had all these photos and I wanted to share them. Few people noticed at the start, but now I get good feedback and people contact me from all over the world. I notice that whenever I post something about Waterford especially, I'll always get a few new likes and follows!”

There are a number of different interests that have driven Fearghal's

passion. The first of these is his Catholic Faith. Born in 1994, he was raised a Catholic by his parents, attending Mass regularly as he grew up. Although it was mostly in the background then, when he went to college his faith flourished. He is a mainstay of many of the Catholic groups around Cork, where his encyclopaedic knowledge, his devotion, and good nature makes him a popular character.

“He would collect them to copy out hand-drawn replicas and as part of his transition year he worked with Ordnance Survey Ireland”

“I was very lucky my friends went to Mass back then, so I never really had an issue going. I was an altar server and then a minister of the word, and a good chaplain at school kept me in touch with the faith,” Fearghal says. “But it became more important to me when I went to college. I was inspired by the example of the Catholics I met. It led me to join the youth groups around Cork, and I still go to a lot of them, like Youth 2000.”

For Fearghal, churches help him to keep in contact with and broaden his faith. Prayers and devotions differ from church to church and help him to find inspiration.

“It's hard to pick out anything specific,” he says. “I find churches from the golden era of Irish Church architecture especially beautiful. These would be churches from the 19th century. Many have beautiful statues and windows, and the Gothic architecture is very impressive.”

Fearghal's trips around the country combine a number of his interests: faith, geography, architec-

ture and cartography. Since he was very young, Fearghal loved drawing maps. He would collect them to copy out hand-drawn replicas and as part of his transition year he worked with Ordnance Survey Ireland. Armed with a new laptop and the freedom to move around, he was able to produce more and more detailed maps.

Passion

“Drawing maps is a passion I've had since a very young age,” he explains. “When we gave presents to teachers, I would give them maps of their home place. I've drawn maps of Cork, Belfast, as well as local maps like for Ballincollig. Right now, I'm keeping busy drawing maps out the back garden. I'm also planning drawings of St Mary's Dominican church and the North Cathedral here in Cork. Normally, I draw them using information from the internet, but if I can't find out anything online, I visit the places myself and mark the major features.”

Fearghal continues to post photos of trips he made before the lockdown. For now, however, he's confined to a five-kilometre radius, praying that the pandemic might be ended swiftly.

“Typically, I would take a trip outside of Cork at least once a month,” he explains. “I try to go every Monday if I can. April 2020 was the first month since 2011 that I haven't travelled beyond the Cork borders. It will also be the first month in my memory that I haven't been into Cork City Centre as it was beyond my 2km radius.”

“I miss the trips very badly now we're under lockdown. I've been going for two walks a day around my two-kilometre radius, visiting a very nice grotto to Our Lady in Curraheen. But it's hard to keep positive and keep the faith. Please God, once all this is over, I hope to get back to making my visits.”

Living Laudato Si'

Jane Mellet



Inspiration from Pope Francis and Greta Thunberg for 2021

Happy New Year everyone! This month the young Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg celebrated her 18th birthday. In August 2018, Greta sat outside the Swedish parliament, striking from school, in protest of the failure of world governments to urgently address the environmental crisis our world is facing. It takes great courage to do something like that alone. Little did Greta know that she had started a worldwide movement which would involve millions of people from almost every country in the world. It is a huge reminder of the power of one person to affect change and the ripple effects of actions for good in this world. The Fridays For Future movement oozes a Spirit-filled energy that inspires change. Greta has spoken so passionately to world leaders, including Pope Francis, to international

conferences, she has even sailed across the Atlantic Ocean to call for urgent and immediate action.

As 2021 begins, we are reminded through this deadly pandemic of just how connected we are as a global community, how fragile our ecosystems are and just how dependant human health is on those ecosystems. The New Year always presents an opportunity to rethink our lives! As you are considering what you might do to make 2021 a more positive experience, be encouraged by Pope Francis who writes: “Everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of global solidarity” (Laudato Si', 240). So, inspired by Greta and Pope Francis, here are some tips to start 2021 off on a Laudato Si' foot:

● Make one small change each week in your house, discuss with your family what you might do:

recycling, eliminate single-use plastics, think about rewilding for springtime, walk, run or cycle instead of using the car, spend more time in nature connecting more deeply with God's creation.

● Eco-Congregation Ireland is holding an online meet up on Saturday January 16 at 11am. This event will be for faith communities to share experiences and ideas with input from those who have received the Eco-Parish Award. Want to know how your parish can make a start? Register by emailing: info@ecocongregationireland.com

● During lockdown you could access the TED Talks 'Countdown' series and watch one per day. There are so many wonderful short documentaries about the environmental crisis and exciting solutions that are making a difference in our world.

We can all do something and who knows where it may lead, as Pope Francis says in Let us Dream: “For a long time, we carried on thinking we could be healthy in a world that was sick. But the [pandemic] has brought home how important it is to work for a healthy world ... The green and the social go hand in hand. The fate of Creation is tied to the fate of all humanity.”



TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



A revealing insight on the ordeal of Cardinal Pell

Well, 2021 came in with a bang, what with rapid escalation of Covid-19 infection rates, continuing upheaval in US politics and a rare apology from RTÉ.

Vocation story

In this context, I enjoyed listening to the more relaxed discussions on **The Leap of Faith** (RTÉ Radio 1, Friday). Michael Comyn spoke to Dr Dermot Farrell, the Archbishop-elect of Dublin - a nice chat before things get hectic for him. He gave some background on his upbringing and family, though I'd like to have heard about his vocation story. He reflected on the increasing secularisation since he was ordained in the 1980s. Yes, numbers of practicing Catholics were down, but he found those remaining more committed. If you are going to practice now, he said, you'll need to be able to defend the faith and you may be ridiculed by colleagues and friends. He welcomed questioning as a way of deepening one's faith. It was right that people should ask questions and get answers - this was "an adult way of doing business". He acknowledged the hurt and anger still carried by some Catholics, and was hopeful that after Covid-19 most churchgoers would return - people of faith will want to express it publicly. He found the recent controver-



Cardinal George Pell arriving at his trial in February, 2019. Photo: CNS/Daniel Pockett

sial 'God skit' on RTÉ offensive - there was a place for satire but not entertainment at the expense of others.

On the same show Prof. John Horne of Trinity College Dublin reflected on that New Year's Eve skit and the broader issues it raised. An atheist himself, he hoped we would all respect each other's versions of the sacred. He thought everything should be up for debate and criticism, but not in way that oppresses, or tears down people's faith and identity.

In another leisurely interview with a prominent churchman, Colm Flynn spoke to Cardinal George Pell in **Vat-**

icano (EWTN Sunday, now on YouTube). First we got a review of his now overturned conviction for sex offences, with news footage of baying mobs chanting at him coming out of court. After the successful appeal we heard a newsreader refer to the case as a "grotesque miscarriage of justice". I thought he understated the severity of what he had gone through, including the vilification and the 405 days in prison. He was "happy" to be free, found the experience to be "not pleasant", and prison to be "not too bad". In prison he felt powerless and found that nothing happened quickly. He found

some prisoners supported him as they argued over his guilt or innocence. He said his "ideological enemies" didn't believe he was guilty as they knew the busy set up at the cathedral event where the offences were supposed to have taken place. He said there was evidence but no proof that those who opposed his reform work with Vatican finances had some involvement with the charges, but hoped that didn't turn out to be true. He realised that "earthly reputation" was not the most important thing and felt for the sufferings of victims - their situations would never be served by

PICK OF THE WEEK

The Big Questions

BBC One Sunday January, 17 10.30am

Nicky Campbell returns to debate topical moral, ethical and religious issues.

RTÉ INVESTIGATES: STUCK IN THE ROUGH

RTÉ One Monday January 18, 9.35pm

RTÉ Investigates follows the lives of rough sleepers and homeless hostel users, examining the challenges they face and the difficulties in getting off the streets.

CATHOLIC LIVES

EWTN Wednesday January 20, 5.30pm and Thursday January 21 (night) 12.30am

David Kerr discusses faith and moral issues in modern Ireland with journalist and social commentator John Waters.

lies, only by the truth. After initially settling back into life in Sydney and his gardening, he was now back working in Rome. At around 25 minutes this was an edited version - I'd love to see the full version and get more insight into the person of Cardinal Pell. I suppose I could always read his book *Prison Journal*.

Capitol

I could write my own book on the upheaval last week in the USA. I was glued to live media coverage of the storming of the Capitol on the Wednesday night. The events were tragic, appalling, and worrying for US democracy as destructive and violent protestors roamed through the government buildings. I thought President Trump was irresponsible in his approach to the affair and it looks like he will pay dearly for it politically. Some media

coverage was over the top - I thought words like 'insurrection' and 'coup' were too flattering to the extremists. Broad references to 'mobsters' obscured the fact that some were just protestors exercising their democratic right (unwisely in the context) - those who remained outside the Capitol building.

I was amused to hear Newsmax complaining about Fox News being too hard on the protestors, and reports of CNN looking for Fox News to be taken off air and a CNN reporter cheering when Mr Trump was banned from Twitter.

A partisan and divisive media is not the least of their problems in the USA.

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[@boreganmedia](https://twitter.com/boreganmedia)

Film

Aubrey Malone



Looking at the legendary figures of yesteryear

Bono was sitting beside Sophia Loren on a plane once when a lightning bolt flashed through the sky. She leapt into his arms in terror. "Don't worry," the U2 frontman assured her, "That's just God taking your photograph."

It's hard to believe the 86-year-old star is still acting. The term "living legend" is over-used but it definitely applies to her. In *The Life Ahead* she plays a former fallen woman reaching a catharsis of sorts in the autumn of her life by taking care of an immigrant child from Senegal. Her son Edoardo Ponti directs.

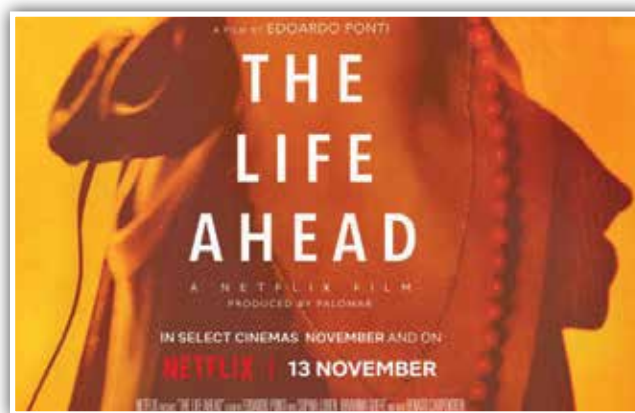
I was only a child when Muhammad Ali, or Cassius Clay as he was then known, beat Sonny Liston to win the

World Heavyweight Boxing Championship in 1964. I 'watched' it on the radio, being let stay up until the middle of the night for the first time in my life. That was when the transmission was going out because of the time lapse between Ireland and America.

Civil Rights movement

One Night in Miami is a 'what if' film featuring Clay discussing his victory as well as the Civil Rights movement of the time with fellow black-American icons like Malcolm X, Sam Cooke and Jim Brown. It's creative fiction along the lines of Nicolas Roeg's *Insignificance*.

I'm Your Woman is a crime drama set in the 1970s. It deals with a woman who



The Life Ahead.

goes on the run with her one-year-old baby after her Mafia-affiliated husband betrays his partners. Director Julia Hart namechecked *The French Connection* as an influence. You'll probably notice this

most particularly in the car chase scene everyone is talking about.

Orson Welles' participation in the screenplay of his 1941 masterpiece *Citizen Kane* has been the source of

much conjecture among film scholars over the past eighty years. It was once almost sacrilegious to suggest he wasn't the main contributor to it. In *Mank*, David Fincher gives his perspective on the situation with Welles' co-writer Herman J. Mankiewicz (Gary Oldman) taking centre stage in this monochrome retro piece.

Rumours

Crock of Gold: A Few Rounds with Shane MacGowan had to be subtitled for overseas viewers. They had difficulty making out what Shane was saying. He's not the man he used to be but rumours of his demise have been exaggerated as Mark Twain might have said. In this documentary the folk-rock pioneer

(perhaps the only sense in which the term "pioneer" could be applied to him) is still rolling along, three wheels on his wagon.

Jack Charlton, who died last year after developing dementia, was someone else who gravitated between Ireland and England in a tumultuous career. *Finding Jack Charlton* is an affectionate tribute to the man who took us to the top of the football tree. He even had the Pope praying for us to do well when we reached the quarter finals of the World Cup in 1990.

As if that wasn't surprising enough, the team we were drawn against at the time was, you've guessed it...Italy.

BookReviews

Peter Costello



Days of Darkness in 1950s' Wexford

Derek Hand

Snow, a Novel

by John Banville
(Faber & Faber, £14.99/€17.50)

Abandoning the *nom de plume* of Benjamin Black – the name under which appeared a highly successful series of crime novels – John Banville has finally embraced as his own the thriller genre with this murder mystery *Snow*.

The creation of this mask and the sleight of hand it entailed, setting up a gap between the high art of Mr Banville and the mere entertainment of the Quirke novels will be, no doubt, a story in itself, a story for literary scholars to argue over in the future. One thing is clear though, the weight and density of the Banville novels were replaced with a lightness of touch in the Benjamin Black work. This is further developed in *Snow*, delightfully so.

“With Detective Inspector Strafford, Mr Banville has given us a character that can only develop in a multitude of interesting ways”

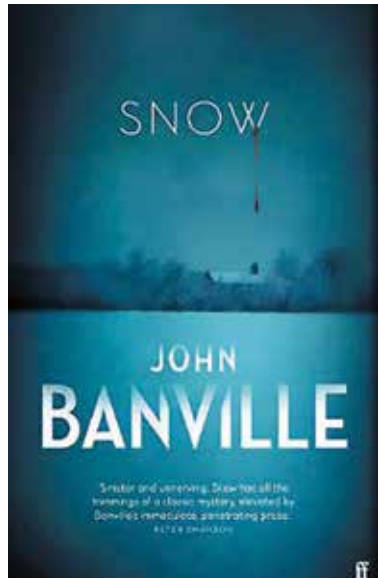
Set in 1957, it is a simpler time when the Church and State loomed larger in citizens' lives than they do now. A priest, Fr Tom Lawless, has been murdered in an Anglo-Irish 'big house' of the Osbornes in Co. Wexford and Detective Inspector Strafford (with an r as he continually corrects people), last seen in *The Secret Guests*, has been dispatched to investigate.

The county is caught in the grip of heavy snowstorms, the very whiteness of the world itself a sign that all is not well and that the patterns that Strafford seeks which may lead to the discovery of the killer cannot be so readily discerned.

Thriller

As it ought to be in a thriller, the crime itself – gruesome as it is – is at times an excuse to develop characters and observe them up close and personal. Mr Banville's eye for detail – filtered through his detective's necessary observations – highlight the absurdities of life. The wry knowingness of a Cluedo game, or the name-checked Agatha Christie, with the body in the library amuses the reader, as it does the world-weary detective.

The locals' idiosyncrasies – Reck the butcher and inn-keeper



– full of Shakespearian quotes and biblical allusions, and Matty the toothless old man who knows everything that is happening, are presented for our amusement. It is a very theatrical world, with everything and everyone acting out a role, at once seemingly predetermined but hopelessly, and comically, off-script.

Grandeur

The image of the Irish big house in decline allows for a broad commentary of mid-century Ireland. Anglo-Irish life's fading grandeur throws up a contrast between an independent Ireland where the bumbling Colonel Mustard-types are now replaced with bumbling gardai and a coldly sinister Archbishop John-Charles McQuaid who makes a cameo appearance in the novel. As in all of Mr Banville's work, the grand sweep of history appears beyond the machination of all too human foibles. Every person is out of place here, some humorously so, including Detective Inspector Strafford himself.

But, beneath the pristine cover of white snow lurks a darker reality, a tale of child abuse and vengeance. There is, as well, as might be expected, a twist or two in the tale to keep the reader on their toes.

With Detective Inspector Strafford, Mr Banville has given us a character that can only develop in a multitude of interesting ways. He is intelligent and aloof, but his profession means he is thrown into the word and forced to navigate its choppy waters. We get snippets of his back-story, his loves and his disappointments, and this reader was left wanting more.

Dr Derek Hand is Head of the School of English in DCU.

Keeping control of the Nation's money



Ciaran Casey

No Complaints: A Memoir of Life in Rural Ireland and in the Irish Public Service

by Maurice O'Connell; edited by J. Anthony Gaughan
(Kingdom Books, €15.00)

Former ministers for finance have demonstrated a welcome readiness to publish memoirs in recent years. We now have offerings from five of the

seven office-holders from the period at the mid-1980s to the turn of the millennium.

Contrast

By contrast, former officials from the department have become much more reticent, with Kevin Cardiff as the only notable exception. This can be partially explained by the role of the civil servant, and the core values of discretion, loyalty, and never upstaging the minister.

For the historian, however, it leaves a frustrating gap in the literature. While ministerial careers are generally relatively brief, civil servants are often witness to key events for decades. Former officials tend to be guarded in print, since any harsh criticisms of erstwhile colleagues or ministers can be considered a bet grayal. Nonetheless, any new insights are invaluable, and such memoirs should be carefully parsed.

Maurice O'Connell's memoir opens with refreshing self-efface-

Finding a spiritual way forward

Peter Costello

The Art of Spiritual Direction: a guide to Ignatian practice

by Jos Moos SJ, with a foreword by Paul Nicholson SJ
(Messenger Publications, €19.99/£18.99)

Most of us recognise in areas of our life and leisure that training is important, and that practice is needed to keep in trim. Yet when it comes to matters of the mind and spirit many are

apt to think that they can muddle through without training or practice at all. That the insights will come anyway. But this is not the case. This is where spiritual direction is essential.

Fr Jos Moos, a Belgian Jesuit of great experience in the field of spiritual guidance at several levels, intends his book not only to those who are spiritual directors, but also those taking direction, for it will help them too to better understand the process.

We have to remember that when the Society of Jesus came into being it was modelled on mil-

itary discipline, the army having been St Ignatius Loyola's profession. But military disciples consist not in actual fighting, but in the steady long term preparation. It is indeed akin to learning tennis or golf, the more one plays the better you become, the better prepared eventually to meet a challenger.

Catholic viewpoint

The author emphasises the point that though his text is written from a Catholic viewpoint, it will be found useful by Christians of other persuasions. Of course, it is intended not be used alone, but

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.



few books in any genre could be accused of being too succinct.

What is more questionable, however, is the allocation of space to the different periods of Mr O'Connell's life. Over a third of the core text is devoted to his childhood in Moyvanne, Co. Kerry. This section of the book will be of interest to those who knew him, or are particularly interested in life in rural Ireland in the mid-20th Century. But, for many readers, the space here could have been better spent. A more unusual episode is his stint at Maynooth, training for the priesthood. His realisation that he was unsuited to the vocation was palpably a difficult one, but Mr O'Connell is characteristically understated.

His tenure at finance was punctuated by two stints in its 1970s departmental offshoots: The Department for the Public Service (1973-1987) and the Department for Economic Planning and Development (1977-1980). Mr O'Connell's recollection that returning to finance from the latter was a bruising experience is significant, and adds colour and weight to what is heavily implied in the official files.

“ Maurice O'Connell's memoir opens with refreshing self-effacement, suggesting that he led an unremarkable life and could make no claim to literary talent”

ment, suggesting that he led an unremarkable life and could make no claim to literary talent. He sets low expectations for a book he describes as “no more than a jumble of reflections on the world around me”, wryly predicting that it “will not generate queues at the booksellers”.

Brevity

One of the immediately striking things about the book is its brevity, at only 134 pages. This should be welcome to most readers:

in the course of spiritual development framework. For this reason it can be highly recommended.

The last chapter of the book is focused on ‘vocational discernment’. These days Catholics speak of falling vocations and an ageing clerical cohort. In fact I have long suspected that many still hear a call, but unlike the 1950s and earlier, they answer it in other ways: in social work, in development campaigns in developing countries, in marriage guidance, and such like. They focus their skills. Yet there remain others who hear the call in a more pastoral, priestly way. But they will be older, more mature, and not straight out of school as they

once were. These make for better priests.

But this point shows us that what actions we take do not blindly have to follow tradition. They must be appropriate to the times we live. In the coming social change involved in a post-pandemic world, the world will have need of these approaches and skills. Fr Moons' book will help many Christians, I suspect not to make things ‘normal’ again, but to make a new world, which as so often we are told is the true call of the gospel: a world new every day then, an new day for all and not just for some. A book like this suggests a way ahead in the coming post-pandemic world.

dearth of political will to support a crackdown is astute and of vital importance. The narrow tax base necessitated high rates, which in turn encouraged further evasion and lobbying for exemptions. Breaking this spiral was one of the key political requirements of the period, and the delay in doing so must have been a source of acute frustration to officials.

“ One of the most interesting parts of the book is his account of the collapse of the first Garrett FitzGerald government in 1982”

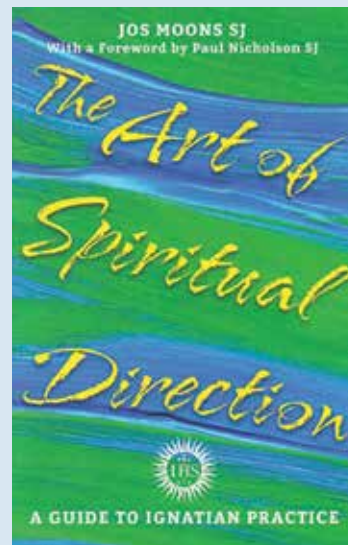
It is exactly this type of episode that leaves the reader wanting more, particularly of Mr O'Connell's insights into the culture of the institutions in which he worked and how they interacted with each other and with government. Nonetheless, there is plenty of food for thought here, and the book makes a valuable contribution.

Crucial

Mr O'Connell's tenure as Governor of the Central Bank at a crucial juncture in its history is allocated only 12 pages. Having presided over the introduction of the Euro, Mr O'Connell does recognise that its architectural defects were a fundamental cause of Ireland's ‘great recession’. In essence, the common currency allowed the Irish banks to lend vast sums of money at low or even negative real interest rates. Again, the reader is left wanting more reflection and inside knowledge.

This is an important book, but one would hope that future memoirs from those who helped shape Ireland during a transformative period in its history will add more to our very incomplete collective knowledge.

Dr Ciaran Casey, an historian of Irish financial affairs at UCD, is working on a history of the Department of Finance, from 1959 to 1999.



Following Newman's Way



Peter Costello

The Gentle Saint: A pilgrimage to Oxford, Dublin and Rome in the Footprints of Saint John Henry Newman

by Patricia O'Leary
(Gracewing, £12.99)

To many readers Patricia O'Leary will be a familiar name, as she contributed a column to this newspaper for some 14 years. By *metier* a Cork-based journalist, she also studied catechetics and scripture at University College Cork and pastoral care at Cork University Hospital. She received a master's degree from the University of Limerick and spent a year at Blackfriars Hall in Oxford studying Cardinal John Henry Newman.

So, having grounded herself in Newman's life and writing, she sets out in this book on a pilgrimage across Europe that follows the young Anglican gentleman to his last days as a monument of Catholic intellect and piety.

Sensitive

Any one sensitive to the special atmosphere of places will find this both a charming and insightful read. With these islands and Europe under extensive lockdown and travel controlled, this winter may not seem to be a time to go anywhere.

But nevertheless we can all travel in our minds and imagination. So many ‘bucket list’ places are so crowded with vast numbers of visitors that no pleasure can be gained from them at all. There is no time and silence to absorb the place.

How better then to go along with a writer like Patricia O'Leary, and following through her observations the varied world of John Henry Newman. Our imagination alone with the saint and the writer will I assure you be a keener and more insightful pleasure that can had these days on the path to Rome.

Given her own background and outlook, it is inevitable that Ms O'Leary devotes much of her space to Newman's period in Ireland. This was not a happy time; nor were the Irish bishops truly kind to him. They did not want a replica of the Oxford he loved, where laypeople would be taught. They wanted a replica of Louvain; they did not want to have laypeople perhaps, but only priests.

But coming from an English publisher, this author's focus may serve a good purpose, for it is these very years that English writers about Newman often glide over.

For those who want to know more about Newman this is an excellent book. It will lead its readers down interesting paths, none of them byways.

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Your heart for the homeless

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— Pope St Pius X, June 4, 1912

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When you remember Trócaire in your Will, you bring hope to people living in the world's poorest places

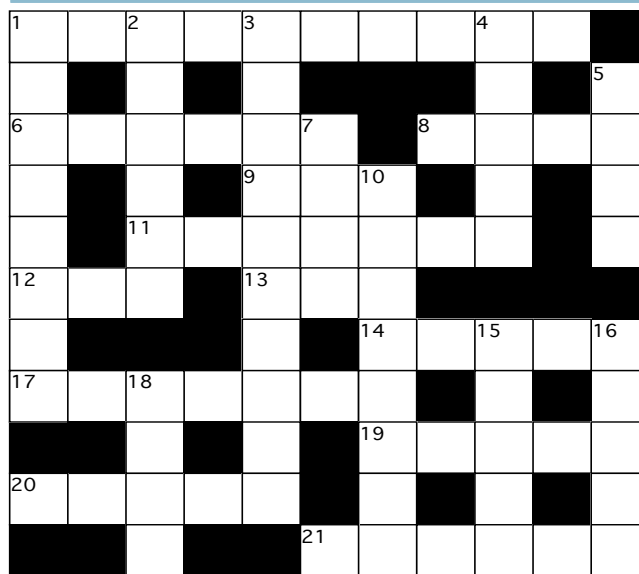
Trócaire

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 365



Across

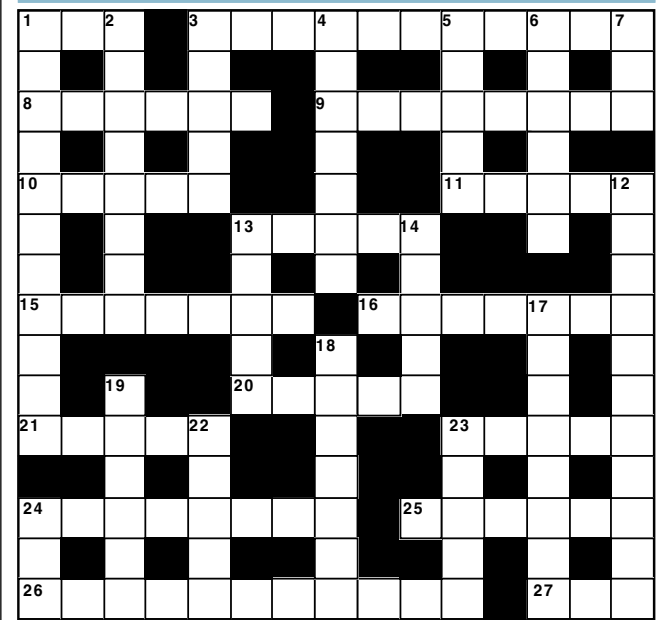
- 1 A cover for what you lay your head on when you go to bed (10)
- 6 Fluffier, less hard (6)
- 8 Sound made by a happy cat (4)
- 9 An acorn, perhaps (3)
- 11 Coming from London or Manchester, perhaps (7)
- 12 1, 3, 5 and 7 are ___ numbers (3)
- 13 You'll usually find a foot at the end of it! (3)
- 14 Two fours make this (5)
- 17 Bring a letter or parcel to the address intended (7)
- 19 Run after (5)
- 20 Makes bread (5)
- 21 Not at school (6)

Down

- 1 Something you say to get in - like 'Open Sesame' (8)
- 2 Raised, picked up (6)
- 3 They protect your hands if you want to take out a hot roast (4,6)
- 4 This direction is opposite to North (5)
- 5 Boast (4)
- 7 Have control, as a queen or emperor might do (4)
- 10 Baby striped cat (5,3)
- 15 One of a bunch which may be used to make wine (5)
- 16 Something nice - often unexpected (5)
- 18 Matthew, Mark, ___ and John wrote the four gospels (4)

Crossword

Gordius 490



Across

- 1 The novice gets surgery - to become a rabbit! (3)
- 3 Change the red cep order - it must be documented before being sent out (3-8)
- 8 & 15a Must one enlist the services of an ecclesiastic motor mechanic to have this worshipful gathering? (6,7)
- 9 Dampness (8)
- 10 Used some gardening equipment (5)
- 11 & 23a Where do you get the energy? It's out of this world! (5,5)
- 13 It's legally sound to provide Virginia with cover (5)
- 15 See 8 across
- 16 Sporting venue (7)
- 20 Yobbo (hot-headed) found in the Wee County (5)
- 21 Fight off (5)
- 23 See 11 across
- 24 The cheapest travel option can make the bullock grow old (8)
- 25 Atomic cores (6)
- 26 Being cowardly, Jagger identifies an American National Park (11)
- 27 Go to court with little

Down

- 1 This great architect re-designed our cribs, Lee (2,9)
- 2 Being more courageous, one is quietly more fortunate (8)
- 3 Walked up and down, nervously (5)
- 4 Tyre made from chopped emu? Lord! (7)
- 5 Fertile places in a desert (5)
- 6 & 14d Netherlandish? Hollandish? It makes no sense to me! (6,5)
- 7 Come to the end of one's life (3)
- 12 The movie scorer is upset with what hotels provide (4,7)
- 13 Outspoken (5)
- 14 See 6 down
- 17 Dip your pens into these (8)
- 18 Smelly male comedian (7)
- 19 A soft ring has its attraction (6)
- 22 Musical instruction - slowly, in dignified style (5)
- 23 Could Father avail of a respite like this? (5)
- 24 State that's part of Ramsay Street (3)

SOLUTIONS, JANUARY 07

GORDIUS NO. 489

Across - 1 Bid 3 The Creation of Adam 9 Marmoset 10 Dogma 11 Dalek 13 Moist 15 Gesture 16 Acerbic 20 Least 21 Gloss 23 Union 24 Al fresco 25 Scroll 26 Poltergeist 27 Moa

Down - 1 Brodningnag 2 Draughts 3 Tiara 4 Camogie 5 Aimed 6 Insult 7 Nut 12 Kitchenalia 13 Moral 14 Tacit 17 Benidorm 18 Barcode 19 Joyful 22 Siege 23 Uncut 24 Asp

CHILDREN'S No. 364

Across - 1 Dishwasher 7 Agent 8 Lucky 9 Dormouse 11 Steam 14 Asia 16 Leap 17 Nil all 18 Pisa 19 Passenger

Down - 1 Dealer 2 Speed 3 Waterfall 4 Salmon 5 Excuses 6 Dye 10 Banana 12 Talks 13 Melon 14 Apple 15 Snap

Sudoku Corner

365

Easy

4		1	7			2		6
		7	6		3			
8					9		4	5
	6	2		1			5	8
			8		4			
7	8			3		9	6	
1	7		3					4
			4		8	6		
6		5			1	8		3

Hard

6								9
					5		7	
8	3	7			2			
5		4		6				
3		1				8		2
				7		3		5
				3			9	5
	9		4					
2								1

Last week's Easy 364

1	9	3	4	2	5	7	8	6
4	5	8	3	7	6	9	2	1
2	6	7	9	8	1	5	3	4
8	2	5	7	3	4	6	1	9
9	3	6	5	1	2	8	4	7
7	1	4	6	9	8	2	5	3
3	8	9	2	4	7	1	6	5
5	4	1	8	6	9	3	7	2
6	7	2	1	5	3	4	9	8

Last week's Hard 364

2	8	1	3	4	6	5	7	9
9	6	7	1	8	5	4	2	3
4	3	5	9	2	7	6	8	1
7	1	8	4	6	2	9	3	5
6	2	9	5	3	8	1	4	7
3	5	4	7	1	9	8	6	2
5	4	2	8	9	3	7	1	6
8	7	3	6	5	1	2	9	4
1	9	6	2	7	4	3	5	8

Notebook

Fr Vincent Sherlock



Making sacrifices to protect against an invisible enemy

On Saturday evening I felt a sadness in my heart. I knew it was around going to an empty church to celebrate Mass as I have done for much of the past nine or ten months. It is not the ideal, and like many, I have questioned the need, given that our churches are large buildings and well ventilated – not always by design but more through cold drafts! That said, in the interest of safeguarding health, protecting human life, and getting to the other side of this pandemic, I accept the direction and have an appreciation of the need, for now, to avoid even limited and controlled gatherings.



Our history of Mass Rocks and watching people leave us in no doubt that times were difficult. The enemy was at large, was dangerous and hostile but could be seen coming in the distance and evasive action was taken. Tragically escape was not always possible and all too often a heavy price was paid.

Genuine

There are genuine people who understandably find it difficult to accept this. Some feel they have been let down by Church leadership who should challenge the decision. In some cases, there is rhetoric around the suppression of the faith and links with Penal Laws are made. I believe we need to be measured in any attempt to link what we are going through now with suppression of the freedom to worship or those dark days of Penal Laws. In those times the enemy was clearly identifiable.

Sadly, the enemy around us now is not so clearly identifiable. Indeed, the enemy hides itself, unbeknownst, among our closest friends and family members, even in our very selves, and strikes with deadly accuracy, transferring itself from one person to another, without need for gunfire or bayonet.

We have been repeatedly advised that this enemy is real, deadly and makes no distinctions around where it strikes or who or when.

This enemy strikes at will and has wreaked unprecedented havoc on our world for close on twelve months now.

Close

Businesses have had to close their doors, some of them sadly never to re-open. Graves have been opened and filled, often without the next of kin laying eyes on those buried. Hospitals and their staff have been stretched to the limits and beyond. Nursing homes, often the last refuge for our elderly and vulnerable have become no-go areas and heartbreak ensues. We have heard of grandparents, if lucky, getting to see their children's children through double-glazed windows, wave at them from afar

and from behind masks that soak their tears.

We are asked to make short-term sacrifices in the interest of the lasting wellbeing of all. For parishes this means we are not celebrating Mass together under the same roof and, for many people, that is an understandable and regrettable loss. So too for priests, we are meant to be with people and at our best when people are with us, but this is part of the sacrifice we are asked to make. Thankfully, for many, we can connect via webcam and on-line platforms. May the abiding strength of the Eucharist empower us for this hour and lead us, as one, through it.

These days will pass. Nobody is locking doors or turning backs. Let us mind one another.

The enemy is Covid-19.

HAVING SAID THAT...

In NPHET and Government announcements, I believe there should be room for acknowledgement of the sacrifice being made by people of Faith throughout the country. Parishes and Church groups of all denominations have done so much to promote the welfare of people and, it seems without much recognition or acknowledgement. There must exist a voice somewhere that could put words around encouraging people of faith and inviting them to pray for the wellbeing of our nation. 'On-line' worship is a welcome avenue, but it is not possible in all parishes due to poor infrastructure and broadband service. Again, this could at least be acknowledged and, where possible, addressed.



COULD YOU HELP TO SAVE A POOR HELPLESS CHILD

The Little Way Association receives numerous requests from missionaries throughout the world asking for help to feed, support and educate needy, deprived children. Due to COVID-19 they are faced with many sufferings. They tell us of orphaned children left alone with no one to love or care for them, of families so poor that they cannot afford to send their children to school, and of street children, totally abandoned, hungry and homeless, experiencing much anguish and hardship during their most tender years. The whole future of these children often depends upon whether a missionary can find sufficient funds to care for them.

Your New Year's gift will mean a chance of health and happiness for a deprived child



"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

We wish all our friends and benefactors a very happy and peaceful New Year.

May St Therese reward you in a special way for the sacrifices you make to support our work, and may she obtain many graces for all our benefactors during 2021.

In our modern age of materialism and selfishness when so many are searching for an authentic spirituality, Therese's little way of simple love for God and others has a powerful appeal. Perhaps we too can join her on the 'little way'.

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€..... **MASS OFFERINGS**
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Thank you, and may God reward your generosity.