

The Irish Catholic

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Plea for churches to remain open as millions tune in for online Masses from Ireland

Chai Brady, Róise McGagh and Aron Hegarty

Irish churches plan on staying open as places of prayer during the coronavirus scare, so long as authorities permit it. It comes as Pope Francis pleaded for churches to remain open for people.

Bishop of Waterford and Lismore Dr Phonsie Cullinan told *The Irish Catholic* that it is important for churches to stay open so people can “go in and find a quiet space and pray – that’s wonderful”. However, he said that parishes must be prudent.

“We draw a distinction between the health of the body and the health of the soul, we do have to listen to the medical people about these things and heed their good and prudent advice but we also invite people to reach out to go

and pray and reach out to others and be inspired by that faith in Jesus,” he said.

Fr Bill Dailey CSC of Dublin’s popular Newman Church said it is “very important” for people to be able to visit churches to pray.

He said that the “safety and well-being of our community is our first priority. That said, so long as we are permitted to keep these buildings open for quiet prayer and reflection, we must”.

Meanwhile, millions of people tuned in to weekend Masses online according to figures obtained by this newspaper.

MCN, which provides streaming services for many Irish parishes, confirmed that approximately 12 million people watched Masses online over the weekend using their platform. Joe Bran-

nigan, operations manager, said that this was up on the approximate half a million viewers they expect on a normal weekend.

Platform

ChurchServices.tv, which provides a similar platform, said it did not have figures but that that there was four to five times more people watching their live-streams compared to average figures.

At Knock Shrine, Fr Richard Gibbons said they saw the number of people watching online Masses rise by a third from 20,000 to 30,000.

“It’s an extraordinary thing, it took us by complete surprise. It’s great people are joining in in from our parish and all over the world.

“There was a great sense of solidarity. Even for our own par-

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Bud blooms for Lily Baptism



Fr Mícheal Murphy PP anoints Lily Grace Clavin with a cotton bud during her Baptism at St Mary’s Church in Clonaghadoo, Co. Laois. Pictured with their baby are parents JJ and Mary. The new Baptism measures were put in place to contain the spread of Covid-19 (coronavirus).

Catholic publisher to offer free books to parishes

Staff reporter

The publisher of Columba books and *The Irish Catholic* has offered free books and e-books to parishes so that parishioners can engage in spiritual reading while Masses around the country are disrupted during Lent.

“Beautiful books to lift your spirit’ is our motto and if ever people needed a lift it is now. Catholics are dispensed from Mass, but the churches are open and it’s a wonderful opportunity to catch up on spiritual reading because it’s also Lent and it’s time to reflect on life and its meaning,” according to publisher Garry O’Sullivan.

The books include titles from renowned authors such as Sr Stan, Donal Harrington, Finbar O’Leary and many more.

“The churches staying open is also a great sign of hope to the community and a reminder that there is a heart and a centre in the parish. This is why we are reporting from all over the country so Catholics can get reliable information on what’s happening,” he said.

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A St Patrick's Day like no other

With most Masses cancelled, this is the first St Patrick's Day since I was an infant that I was not physically at the Celebration of the Eucharist. And yet in tuning in to my parish's online Mass at Newman's University Church in Dublin I felt very connected and the ancient faith seemed very much alive.

Church leaders have correctly followed the advice from healthcare professionals that larger gatherings of people should not go ahead in a bid to slow down the spread of coronavirus. This is a painful time for Catholics, but it is also a time when we must accept that sacrifices have to be made for the common good: in this case, the elderly and vulnerable people who are most at risk of contracting the virus.

Solidarity

It is a time for solidarity with those who may be already suffering from Covid-19 and their loved ones, for people who are concerned or anxious about the current pandemic and for our health and critical care professionals and everyone working to overcome this crisis.

The most concrete form

of solidarity for people of faith is first and foremost prayer.

That's why it is so important so long as it is prudent for churches to remain open as sanctuaries of prayer and solace.

At times of crisis, the need for prayer in holy places – particularly before

the Blessed Sacrament – is profoundly felt. This is why the image on page three of Pope Francis going to pray in a Roman church associated with prayers to end the Plague is so moving.

The absence of public Masses is also a time for us to think of the many Catholics around the world

who – either because of the absence of a priest or indeed persecution – cannot regularly attend Mass or receive the Eucharist.

St Paul wrote that we can do all things through Christ who brings us strength. With prudence and prayer, we will overcome these current difficulties.



Editor's Comment Michael Kelly

Our 132-year record is your guarantee

This is an uncertain time for parish communities, and it is also an unprecedented time for *The Irish Catholic*. We are extremely grateful for all that you do to promote the newspaper and the value of bringing Catholic media into homes in your parish.

I appreciate that it will not be as easy to distribute the newspaper as it normally would, however most Churches will remain open and we ask you to leave *The Irish Catholics* on display so that parishioners can buy it. People are struggling to discern real news from fake news about this emergency and I would appeal to you to help us do what you can to ensure that people still have access to *The Irish Catholic* newspapers and its up-to-date news from our professional journalistic team.

If you would like a digital edition of the

newspaper emailed to you so that it can be distributed to parishioners who are ill or confined, we will be happy to provide it free of charge.

Some of you may also have concerns about unsold copies of the newspaper. Be assured that we will be absolutely flexible in this regard and there is no need to worry or cancel the newspaper.

If there is anything we can do to help make this uncertain time easier, please do not hesitate to contact us. We will continue to do what we have been doing for the past 132 years – delivering a high quality newspaper filled with news, views and inspiration.

For any further queries, please feel free to contact Mahak Verma on mahak@irishcatholic.ie or call 01-6874028 (Mon-Fri, 9.30am – 5.30pm).

Plea to keep churches open amid crisis

» Continued from Page 1

ish, neighbours and family are setting up computers for older people in their homes that wouldn't be tech savvy as it were and they can connect with it," he said.

In Wexford, Fr John Carroll said that prayer at a time like this is vital.

"I think it would be important to take the lead from the Pope: he said it's easier to get pizza in Rome than Holy

Communion.

"If people have the desire to go to a church and it is considered still safe, and it doesn't defy regulations, surely we should be respecting the deep felt beliefs of people and allowing them to draw strength from where they draw strength," Fr Carroll said. Ferns Diocese did not introduce a blanket ban, some parishes proceeded with Mass, others did not.

In Dublin, Fr Gerry Kane said that it

was vital for the Church to "co-operate with the principle of social isolation".

He said that his plan, for now, was to keep his Booterstown church open. "We also have a webcam so we can celebrate Mass and put it on the webcam.

"We'll probably look at other devotions that we have, Eucharistic adoration, maybe a live rosary, and keep the church open during the day for people to go to pray," he said.

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Don't believe 'lies' about coronavirus says bishop

Chai Brady

The Bishop of Ossory has called on people not to be fooled by "lies or rumours" regarding the coronavirus (Covid-19), at a time when several Government bodies have warned people of disinformation circulating on social media.

In a homily over the weekend Bishop Dermot Farrell encouraged the Faithful to keep their hope and that "lies and rumours" don't come from God.

"Genuine hope will keep us above the water as we face a range of difficult decisions and challenges. Don't lend credence to lies or rumours, or give in to panic. These do not come from God. We pray because we place our deepest hope in providence of God – in a goodness and in a power that transcends our own capabilities. Prayer is hope in execution," Bishop Farrell said.

Some of the misinformation includes claims that Japanese doctors were advising that keeping your mouth dry and sipping

water every 15 minutes washes the virus into the stomach, killing it. This has been proven to be false by the World Health Organisation and media organisations. There was also claims that Ireland would be put under 'status red' lockdown with the army patrolling the streets – a claim denied by Government officials.

Bishop Farrell said: "The challenge posed by this aggressive virus will require the deepest outpourings of faith, hope and love, and the most rigorous exercises of justice, prudence, resilience, self-control and courage.

"We cannot lose hope at this unprecedented time in our history. God's hope is in us, not just our hope in God.

Genuine hope will keep us above the water as we face a range of difficult decisions and challenges."

He asked that people pray for those who have died and their loved ones, those who are ill or facing financial hardship. "The coronavirus poses a threat that knows no borders. As people of faith, neither does our love and

concern for our neighbours," Bishop Farrell said.

"As we now enter the painful and prolonged uncertainty of grappling with the coronavirus, we pray that this will be a shared undertaking for the benefit of all humanity, a time when we realise that we are one family living in our common home."

Praying on empty streets in Rome...



Pope Francis walks down an almost deserted Via del Corso to pray at the Church of St Marcellus in Rome on March 15 as the city faced lockdown because of the spread of the coronavirus. Photo: CNS

US Dead Sea Scrolls are all fake

Staff reporter

Sixteen fragments in the Museum of the Bible in Washington DC are not from the ancient Dead Sea Scrolls but elaborate fakes, it has emerged.

Despite the fact that they were purchased for millions of dollars, they have now been exposed as worthless forgeries probably made from old shoe leather.

However, the hoaxers did such a good job that even scholars of the scrolls – which were found in 1946 and are priceless fragments of the Hebrew bible – were taken in.

The actual scrolls – 100,000 fragments of which are in Jerusalem – are one of the most significant archaeological finds of all time

Report

A report released at the weekend revealed that "after an exhaustive review of all the imaging and scientific analysis results, it is evident that none of the textual fragments in [the] Museum of the Bible's Dead Sea Scroll collection are authentic".

The forgers are believed to have used Roman-era leather, possibly from boots or sandals, to imitate parchment, and attempted to recreate the handwriting of ancient Hebrew scribes.

Publisher offers free books to parishes

Aron Hegarty

The publisher of Columba books and *The Irish Catholic* has offered free books and e-books to parishes, so that parishioners can engage in spiritual reading while Masses around the country are disrupted during Lent.

"Beautiful books to lift your spirit' is our motto and if ever people needed a lift it is now," says publisher Garry O'Sullivan.

"Catholics are dispensed from Mass, but the churches are open and it's a wonderful opportunity to catch up on spiritual reading."

He added: "The current crisis pares back all the nonsense and make us appreciate our health and loved ones."

Columba Books is the leading independent publisher of religious and theological books in Ireland. The organisation, which takes its name from the 6th-Century Irish saint, St Colmcille, covers a broad range of areas including pastoral resources, spirituality, theology, the arts and history.

Books being offered include titles from renowned authors such as Sr Stan, Donal Harrington, Finbar O'Leary and many more. "The churches staying open is also

a great sign of hope to the community and a reminder that there is a heart and a centre in the parish," says O'Sullivan. "We are reporting from all over the country so Catholics can get reliable information on what's happening."

He adds: "We are also giving free access to the digital edition of the *Magnificat* so people can have the daily readings, and our app Your-Parish App (available on App Store and Google Play) is also available for individuals who are looking for the daily readings and reflections."

For more information, visit www.columbapublishers.com

EASTER RETREAT AT KYLEMORE ABBEY - NOTRE DAME GLOBAL CENTRE

Join the Benedictine Nuns of Kylemore Abbey/Notre Dame Global Centre for the celebration of the Paschal Triduum 9th - 12th April 2020.

The liturgical services including the daily Divine Office on Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday will be led and interpreted by Fr. George Vakkachan OSB, Chaplain at Kylemore Abbey and Fr. Steve Gibson, Director at The Fr. Peyton Centre, Attymass, Co. Mayo.

The Retreat begins with Mass on Holy Thursday at 6.00 p.m. The Retreat ends with Mass on Easter morning at 9.00 a.m. followed by Brunch.

TIMES OF SERVICES:

Mass on Holy Thursday at 6.00 p.m. followed by Eucharistic Adoration.

Veneration of the Cross on Good Friday at 3.00 p.m.

Paschal Vigil at 9.00 p.m. on Holy Saturday.

Solemn Mass of the Resurrection on Easter Sunday at 9.00 a.m.

As usual, any visitors wishing to participate in any of the services, without being resident or accessing amenities, are very welcome.

Cost: Full residential at the Notre Dame Centre. €410.00

Non-residential participation. (meals and access to amenities during the day) €230.00

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MIDDAY PRAYER daily: 12.15 p.m.

VESPER Holy Saturday: 5.00 p.m. | Easter Sunday: 6.00 p.m.

For further details or to register for the Retreat please contact Mary Carroll on 095 52011 or email mary@kylemoreabbey.ie

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'Stay in touch with self-isolating elderly', says Alone charity

Aron Hegarty

Irish charity Alone has called on communities to maintain regular communication with older people in self-isolation during the coronavirus outbreak.

Grainne Loughran, Alone Communications Officer, is calling for "community co-operation" when it comes to reaching out to support vulnerable elderly who are on their own.

"There has been an increase in the number of calls as there has been an increase in the number of older people who are in isolation.

"It is important that communities come together and let older people know that support is available."

She adds: "We are asking people to stay in touch with relatives and loved ones."

Alone, which stands for 'A Little Offering Never Ends', launched a new national helpline on March 9 for older people facing increased difficulties due to the virus epidemic.

Advice

The organisation, founded in 1977, has also added and mobilised more volunteer support staff to give advice, outreach, collection and drop-off delivery services including post, meals and prescription.

"Many older people already live in isolated circumstances and this crisis will lead to further isolation and worry for them," says Ms Loughran of the demand to meet the needs of elderly people during the crisis.

"They are asking us 'Should I still be going out? Should I be going to Mass? Should I be seeing or visiting family?'"

Ms Loughran says the organisation has extended its opening times to weekends in order to assure older people that there is support for them every day of the week. "Our advice to those in self-isolation is to remain calm and know that support is available.

"Don't be afraid to reach out and ask for help. You are not alone, just call or speak to someone."

i The new Alone national support helpline is 0818 222 024.

Christian persecution must be 'major' for next Irish govt - FF TD

Chai Brady

The "frightening" extent of Christian persecution must be a "major part" of any new Government's foreign policy, according to Fianna Fáil's Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Brendan Smith TD told *The Irish Catholic* that whatever form Ireland's new Government takes the increasing amount of persecution against Christians around the world must be tackled.

"I think it would be preferable if the next Government adopts it as a major part of their international policy," Mr Smith said, "I think it would be important to highlight because I know that all of us at committee, irrespective of our political belief, or political party or no party at all...it's frightening the increasing level of abuse and persecution of Christians.

"I think that's an issue that we need to highlight to the general public as well and it needs to be continu-

ally highlighted with our EU partners and partners in the United Nations as well."

Mr Smith invited Church in Chains, a group dedicated to tackling Christian persecution, to an Oireachtas Committee on Foreign Affairs to highlight "the abuse of Christians in so many countries".

He added: "I think the issue of persecution of Christians has not been given the attention, there is not enough awareness of the huge issue of the persecution of Christians. I would sincerely hope that this will be an issue on the agenda again for the next Foreign Affairs committee."

This comes after Mr Smith asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Travel, Simon Coveney, in the Dáil earlier this month the outcome of discussions at recent EU Foreign Affairs Council meetings in relation to the persecution of Christians in many countries throughout the world.

Mr Coveney replied saying Ireland

"strongly condemns all forms of persecution on the basis of religion or belief, irrespective of where they occur".

"We regularly advocate for effective action to counter the persecution of Christians and other religious minorities in all relevant international fora..."

The Director for Aid to the Church in Need, Dr Michael Kinsella, described his response as a "platitude".

"What Simon Coveney said in the Dáil was a serious of thought terminating clichés. It was an insult to persecuted Christians, it was an insult to the intelligent of those who work on the ground with persecuted Christians."

He added: "The vast majority of people who suffer persecution are Christian. There is very little specialness, or sense of a unique case of what's happening to persecuted Christians that comes through in Simon Coveney's words."



Former Bishop of Kerry, Bill Murphy, Fr Niall Howard and Cathedral Sacristan for over 50 years Tadhg Fleming, celebrated Mass in St Mary's Cathedral, Killarney, behind closed doors on Sunday. As with churches throughout the country, Mass went ahead but without a congregation in light of the present health crisis. Photo: Valerie O'Sullivan

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Church bells ring around Waterford for prayer and solidarity

Bells were rung in churches throughout Co. Waterford on St Patrick's Day as a call to prayer and social solidarity.

The Bishop of Waterford and Lismore Phonsie Cullinan dedicated the prayers to those affected by the coronavirus (Covid-19) and asked Our Lady to "intercede for us".

"The bell ringing is a call to prayer and a reminder of the faith that has sustained the people of our island throughout the centuries," he said.

"The bell ringing is also an expression of social solidarity, an encouragement to care for one another, and for all of us to be inspired and remain hopeful at a difficult time."

Online resource for students on Magdalene heritage launched

An online resource for schools which aims to help the next generation understand Ireland's Magdalene history has been developed by researchers at Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT).

'Exploring Waterford's Magdalene Heritage: An activity & resource pack', developed by Dr Jennifer O'Mahoney and Dr Kate McCarthy, was released at www.waterfordmemories.com on March 13.

The 60-page pack, developed in consultation with survivors' testimonies, addresses many important themes such as human rights and social change via the case study of Waterford's Magdalene Laundry.



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Open church is a symbol

As I left Mass last weekend, one of the parishioners came after me to say – “There will be no more Mass now for four weeks.” Actually, it could be longer. In Kent, where I am presently sequestered (and sequestered is the word), the authorities are talking about compelling all older people to remain in self-isolation for four months. Quite a stretch.

It’s obvious that we all have to do the responsible thing to contain and deter the coronavirus as much as possible. We have to protect ourselves in order to protect other people.

And yet, my thoughts went back to the Penal times in Ireland when despite all the deterrents and punishments, people sought out Mass on wild rocks or down by the seashore where the authorities could not follow.

In England itself, Catholic priests risked being hung, drawn and quartered – and some were – if they said Mass for secret Recusants. They willingly took that risk.

Electronic means

Circumstances are different today. Nobody is closing churches to persecute faith. And Mass can be accessed via electronic means – the Vatican itself plans to “stream” the Easter ceremonies.

But still, it’s all pretty sad



Mary Kenny



In Penal times, Faith survived without a church.

to lose that connection with the real presence, and with the community too. There is a tradition of the hermit in

Christianity, but few of us have the calling to be hermits.

The open church is such a symbol of spiritual comfort

and a place of peace to all. In Dublin, I pass Donnybrook church regularly on the bus, and each time I look, that portal is open.

“Perhaps it will make us appreciate many things we didn’t appreciate before – including the life of the Faith community”

Perhaps, on the other side of the coin, this crisis is also a message to us to ‘love our neighbour’, and to be as altruistic as we can in thinking about the impact on others.

Perhaps it will make us appreciate many things we didn’t appreciate before – including the life of the Faith community.

It’s also an opportunity for priests to exercise pastoral care in other, alternative ways. I hope they can show that care, and that spiritual and moral leadership too.

Walking away from weekend Mass, for the last time for a long time, was a kind of valediction. Who knows when I shall dip my finger in that font again?

A poignant thought for Mother’s Day...

It was the anniversary of my mother’s death on the Ides of March, nearly 30 years ago, and it’s often a day of bitter self-recrimination. The weather had been bad in the months leading up to her death, and I had put off travelling to see her. How stupid, selfish and heedless I had been! I was so wrapped up in my own busy life, I didn’t even anticipate the fact that, at 89, she might so easily depart this world.



I recall it all so well: I was at the dentist when I got a message to call my uncle. He gave me the news. I lay down on my bed, sort of stunned, and read a favourite poem of hers, Goldsmith’s *The Deserted Village*.

I know we should consign the past to the mercy of God, but regret is one of the most painful of all emotions. And blessed are those who are there for their mothers at the departure.

That is my thought for Mother’s Day, this Sunday.

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Bishop sends out message of hope amid isolation

Róise McGagh

Bishop Phonsie Cullinan is sending a message of hope out to Irish people as many parishioner's self-isolate in the wake of Covid 19

He has been making a video every day since March 13 on the Facebook page of Waterford and Lismore diocese. Each video contains a message of hope for his diocese.

"This is a small effort by me to try and reach out to people to let them know that they are not forgotten. That God has not abandoned them, that he is still with us and it is a message of hope that I'm trying to put across and it is a way of reaching out," he said.

He said that he was impressed by priests in northern Italy in how they have been able to keep close to their people. Pope Francis, in his midday Angelus address thanked these priests for their

creativity and all they are doing to keep the faith alive.

"So much news arrives to me from Lombardy about this creativity," Francis said.

"Priests [there] who think," he reflected, "of a thousand ways to be close to the people, in order that the people do not feel abandoned; priests with apostolic zeal, that understood well that in times of a pandemic."

Sense of meaning

The bishop feels that while the virus will make life difficult, it will hopefully urge people to search for a sense of meaning, he said: "I think it's going to bring a lot of good out of people, I think people will see the deeper things the things that we can really count on, and ultimately its only God."

The videos have gotten a very positive response with comments of thanks flooding in and 51 shares on the first video.

"There is confusion and there is a sense of isolation, as I said this morning on a radio programme, to quote Dickens, 'It is the worst of times but it is also the best of times.'"

Bishop Phonsie said if St Paul were here now, he would be using technology to spread

his word. "This epidemic has spurred me on to start using those media much better."

A blessing across the internet



Fr Paul Dunne celebrating Sunday Mass in Our Lady Mother of Divine Grace Church, Raheny, Dublin via webcam. Photo: John McElroy

Falling faith in overseas aid 'could be solved' by Irish missionary structure

Staff reporter

A recent report showed that trust in the effectiveness of Irish overseas aid has dropped by 4% since 2017, but Matt Moran ex-chairman of Mísean Cara feels that the missionary structure could improve this. The 2019 survey by Kantar Survey of Public Attitudes towards Overseas Aid is now in its third year. It is jointly-funded by partners including Christian Aid, Oxfam, Action Aid, Self Help Africa, Plan International, Concern, Trócaire, Vita and Dóchas.

It shows that 83% of Irish people believe that overseas aid is effective in improving lives in poorer countries and 94% of Irish people believe it is important to support poorer countries through overseas assistance.

Mr Moran said that there has recently been discussion on 'Doing Development Differently'. Duncan Green, a strategic advisor to Oxfam

UK and self-proclaimed atheist has pointed to the work of missionaries for an example of a different way of doing development. "That may be impacting to some degree on that 4% fall. But certainly, on the missionary side, I'm not aware of any evidence that would show any decline in the perception of its effectiveness due to the nature of it," said Mr Moran.

According to the report, 31% of people named support to overseas missionaries as one of the efforts the Irish government makes in helping people in poorer countries.

Mr Moran says that due to the way missions are run they have a more effective, all round holistic approach, "These are people who bring particular qualities of accompaniment and solidarity and dignity of the person. They bring that sort of added value; they're living amongst the community they know the needs they can easily identify the needs."

Charity offers online 'sanctuary' after cancelling meditation classes

Aron Hegarty

An Irish charity is offering free online meditation classes to "everyone and anyone" after suspending all public classes and scheduled courses due to the coronavirus outbreak.

The Sanctuary, based in Dublin city centre, is looking to promote social change over the web having been forced to close its doors last week.

"We are offering free online mediation classes to anyone and everyone, both members and non-members," says Jane Megrych, Managing Director of The Sanctuary.

"There is a link posted on our website, Facebook and Instagram pages where you can click and join a virtual meeting on Zoom for the classes.

"Our classes will be on Mondays at 10am, Wednesdays at 7.30pm and Thursdays at 1.15pm, all free of charge."

The organisation, founded by Sr Stan Kennedy in 1998, says the online incentive has far-reaching consequences that can help those in self-isolation to overcome loneliness and bring people closer together during the crisis.

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*'Be not afraid,
I go before you
always.'*

DEUTERONOMY 31:8



*'Dear friend,
I pray that you may
enjoy good health.'*

JOHN 3:1



In response to the grave challenges facing our Church and our world, Holy Mass will now be live-streamed daily from the ACN Ireland website on acnireland.org/mass

Every Friday, a priest from the suffering and persecuted Church will also celebrate Holy Mass for the health and welfare of all benefactors of ACN Ireland.

Please feel free to forward your special prayer intentions to info@acnireland.org and prayer communities across Ireland will pray for you, your family and our country - especially frontline healthcare and pastoral workers.

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ACN Ireland calls on all Catholics to unite in prayer through the most Holy Rosary, asking our Blessed Mother to intercede for us before Her Son for the life and health of the Church and the World.



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Nuala O'Loan

The View



Focus on coronavirus as abortion stalks lives in Northern Ireland

The world is a very strange place today. Whereas a couple of weeks ago we were focussed almost entirely on Brexit, wondering how everything would work out, today, it seems to me we are in an entirely different world. Outwardly it looks the same; but it is utterly changed.

Now we are becoming paralysed by the fear of this new coronavirus, Covid-19. It is something which we cannot see, cannot hear, cannot feel. We may not know when it has touched us and we have been infected until we become ill, and all that time we will be capable of infecting others. We now recognise an invisible enemy, against which we have no defence. If we get it, we must suffer its symptoms until they pass; for some of us it will become a fight for life, and already people are losing that fight.

How did it happen? How did it happen so quickly and what can we do? This faceless, odourless, invisible enemy has already stopped us in our tracks. The world is struggling to create a vaccine, a suitable antiviral drug, and to keep its factories open, its supply chains moving and its people fed.

The answer we are told is isolation – if we are not in contact with those who carry the virus, we will not get it. It is all very alarming and in some places it must be terrifying. In the diocese of Bergamo alone, in Italy, many people have died, among them six priests; 20 priests are in hospital fighting the condition, men who went out among their sick parishioners.

Responsibility

We have much to do to keep ourselves healthy so that we can look after those for whom we have responsibility and those who have no one to look after them. Prolonged isolation seems to be being recommended for the elderly, yet we are by nature social, convivial creatures. Loneliness will be the consequence of isolation,



and loneliness can be very, very hard to endure. It will be critical that we all do all we can. Above all, we must pray for healing, for grace, for generosity and compassion at this terrible time.

“The NHS, which cannot cope with all the demands already made on it, will not be able to cope with abortion on top of coronavirus”

While all this is going on, while we are trying to equip ourselves for an uncertain future, other things are happening in Northern Ireland (NI): things which, I

think, people hardly know: matters, too, of life and death. Inside the next week or so the UK Government will table new abortion law for NI. The preparation of this law, following the flawed consultation which suggested grounds for abortion way beyond those required by the Act passed by Parliament in July, has been a very strange and secretive process.

Government has seen the results of the consultation. It has even responded to it. No one else has seen either the results or the Government response.

The Northern Ireland Executive has not been consulted about the provisions of the new law, nor has the Northern

Ireland Assembly. The Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Justice, Peter May, said recently: “No-one has seen any of the proposals which are being brought forward.” Nobody has, as is normal, shared draft regulations with stakeholders for comment. Nobody knows exactly what it is going to say.

Why? We understand it has been referred to a



Minister Robin Swann.

committee in Parliament, but still we, and I as a member of the House of Lords, do not know what it says.

It seems likely that we will be presented with abortion on demand up to 12 or 14 weeks, abortion up to 22 or 24 weeks where the physical or mental health of the woman, her existing children or her family would be adversely affected if the pregnancy continued, and abortion up to birth if the baby has a disability.

Such a law would go way beyond what is permitted in England and Wales or in Ireland.

In addition to this the consultation indicates that other medical professionals will be able to carry out abortions and that there will be no requirement for a registered doctor to be present. Such a law would also go far beyond what was required by the Act passed at Westminster last summer.

The law will come into force when it is tabled in Parliament. No vote will be necessary. No change can be made to that Law once tabled. It could be “prayed against” in an attempt to reject it completely. It is unlikely at this stage that the Westminster Parliament would reject the whole new abortion law.

It is as if the newly-returned NI Assembly did not exist. Yet the NI Assembly and especially Minister Robin Swann will have to provide the whole abortion service.

There has been no impact assessment, no preparation (because nobody knows what is coming), no training of staff, no allocation of ringfenced budget to pay for the anticipated 1,000 new procedures a year: procedures for which the NHS in England

and Wales pays private providers between £400 and £600 a time. So, a budget of some £500,000 should be allocated. I have not seen any sign of any budget allocation.

All this is happening in a health service described just two months ago by striking nurses as ‘broken’. It is happening at a time when Covid-19 is affecting thousands across the country, when it is known that we do not have the resources and staff to provide treatment for all who may be affected. In Italy doctors are already choosing who to treat because they cannot treat everyone. There is a terrible fear that that will happen in NI.

The UK Government can only seek to fight Covid-19, to try to stem the loss of life and to heal those who suffer.

The doctors, nurses, physios, pharmacists will, I am sure, give their all to the fight against the virus. They will do this in the context of a health service which was broken before the coronavirus struck, which could not even then, provide surgery and medical care for all its people.

The NHS, which cannot cope with all the demands already made on it, will not be able to cope with abortion on top of coronavirus, and there is a terrible irony, at a time when the medical and nursing professions are struggling to preserve life, that government should be set on inflicting on us legislation designed to end the life of unborn babies; legislation against which the people of Northern Ireland have campaigned, protested and fought in their tens of thousands.

“There has been no impact assessment, no preparation (because nobody knows what is coming), no training of staff, no allocation of ringfenced budget to pay for the anticipated 1,000 new procedures a year”

Teacher college must reverse bioethics course decision



MIC is there to inform on issues like this, **David Quinn**

Mary Immaculate College in Limerick is one of the few Catholic teacher training colleges in the country. Given that more than 90% of primary schools in Ireland are still Catholic, and about 70% of secondary schools are also in this category, these colleges are obviously of vital importance.

We live in a country where the Catholic ethos of institutions, including schools are under serious pressure. Outright hostility to Catholicism – which is very real – is only part of the problem, and not even the greatest part. An even bigger challenge is the rise of indifference, and ignorance.

A lot of parents who send their children to Catholic schools, sometimes because there is nothing else available, do not practice. Some don't practice because they have a principled objection to Catholicism, but many other don't because they are following the new convention, which is not to go to Mass, except on special occasions, and to give Catholicism no real thought.

This attitude can extend to teachers. How many teachers in Catholic schools go to Mass regularly, and how many believe, or understand, what the Church believes on a range of issues, especially those pertaining to human sexuality and relationships?

It is very hard to maintain the ethos of a Catholic schools when many of the parents don't really believe in it or understand it, and the same thing applies to some teachers.

Friendly

Catholic schools thrive when they exist in a friendly, hospitable environment, the same way we thrive in fresh



Mary Immaculate College.

air. When the atmosphere surrounding Catholic schools is no longer so friendly, and can even be toxic, Catholic schools will find it extremely hard to be truly Catholic.

Catholic teacher training colleges exist in this fast-changing environment. It can sometimes be hard for them to find lecturers who are fully on the same wavelength as the Catholic Church, and they are teaching students who are often, in practice, secular, or adhere to what amounts to 'Catholicism lite'.

Bishops and other people in positions of authority and responsibility in the Church look to these colleges for intellectual support. This is why Mary Immaculate College was approached by hospital chaplains who want to gain a better understanding of Catholic bioethics.

Those chaplains find themselves working in environments that often offer a very different understanding of bioethics than the Catholic version.

An obvious example is in the area of abortion. It is not simply a matter of being clear that direct abortion is wrong, but, for example, what kind of spiritual care should a Catholic chaplain offer to a woman about to undergo an abortion, or who has just had one?

Obviously, no impression can be given that what she is about to do is correct, but if she asks for guidance,

“The need for a bioethics course which busy chaplains can attend is clear, especially now that they are often working in hospitals that carry out abortions”

what can be said to her that is both sensitive, and true to Catholic teaching? And afterwards, what support can she be given without seeming to condone what happened?

A few years ago, a priest who worked in the Netherlands told me that one day he was phoned by a man who asked him to come and pray for his father who was going to die tomorrow at 3pm. How could he possibly know this? It suddenly dawned on the priest; the man's father was going to be given a lethal injection, albeit at his own request. Euthanasia and assisted suicide are legal in the Netherlands.

“It is exactly the sort of course a college that takes its Catholic identity very seriously would go out of its way to run”

Again, what should a priest (or chaplain) do in this situation? Again, whatever he (or she in the case of some chaplains) might do should not be seen to condone the action.

The list could go on and on. What do you say to a couple who want to use IVF, which the Church opposes? Using IVF might seem pro-life, because a child could result. But one

big problem is that spare embryos are created that might be indefinitely frozen, or worse, destroyed. How many chaplains currently know how to explain this properly?

In other words, the need for a bioethics course which busy chaplains can attend is clear, especially now that they are often working in hospitals that carry out abortions.

Demand

They may not have the time to do longer, more demanding diploma or degree courses, but a one-year certificate course could suit them well.

Some doctors and nurses might also want to avail of such a course.

That is why Mary Immaculate College was asked to run a one-year bioethics certificate.

Unfortunately, it refused. As reported by this newspaper, which broke the story, it did so on the grounds of a lack of resources. Frankly, this isn't good enough.

What is much more

important than pleading a lack of financial resources for a course that would not be very expensive given its short length, and the fact that it not aimed at a large potential number of students, is building up the intellectual resources of people doing very important work.

It is exactly the sort of course a college that takes its Catholic identity very seriously would go out of its way to run.

Mary Immaculate College, which does excellent work, and has some superb lecturers, needs to reverse its decision and agree to run this course. It was requested for a reason.

And maybe such a course would actually make it easier for the college to raise money, both here and abroad.

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Chai Brady

Hundreds of school students took part in a “fun and Faith-filled” concert in the Helix on Dublin City University’s campus, with the last of four nights being cancelled due to the coronavirus (Covid-19), due to the guidelines issued by Government.

This was the 14th Emmanuel concert, with 20,000 school students taking part over the years. The aim is to improve liturgical music in school and students can take part in a variety of styles of music which they perform in the Helix with an orchestra.

Pastoral Co-ordinator for the Archdiocese of Dublin Gerard

Gallagher told *The Irish Catholic*: “It’s a fantastic, fun-filled and Faith-filled musical evening and a joy to be part of. The first three nights were brilliant. It’s a non-competitive event, hence many schools really enjoy taking part in it.”

The event ran from March 9-12, with the Thursday night being suspended after new guidelines were given to the public by the Department of Health regarding the coronavirus.

Many students take solos, play in the orchestra and some participate as speakers. Among others Emmanuel is made possible by Fr Pat O’Donoghue, the diocesan musical director, and the musical director on stage Ian Callanan.



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The Church as a pioneering ethical leader

On May 3, 1983, some 247 Catholic bishops of the United States gathered in Chicago to issue their pastoral letter on war and peace and the use of nuclear technology. The immediate context was the ongoing nuclear arms race between the US and the Soviet Union.

That letter is now considered to be one of the most insightful moral assessments ever published on the dangers that can emerge when the use of powerful technology becomes untethered from basic human goods.

The letter is also notable for the way in which it incisively and pragmatically applied fundamental insights from the Catholic ethical tradition to a pressing issue of enormous global concern.

Now, 37 years on, something similar has also occurred with respect to the dangers and potentialities within another scientific and technological arena—that of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

I am referring specifically to the signing last month of a Vatican-inspired declaration that has been named the

Confronted with eye-watering technological developments Catholics have an important role to play, writes **David Mullins**



'Rome Call for AI (Artificial Intelligence) Ethics.'

Among the first signatories were the president of the Pontifical Academy for Life, Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, along with Microsoft president Brad Smith and IBM executive vice-president John Kelly.

Of course, the immediate geo-political and military context of the Rome Call declaration is nothing like the explicitly apocalyptic one that formed the backdrop to the US bishops meeting in 1983.

Attention

Nevertheless, it has drawn considerable attention from the media and the wider AI industry—not least because

of the apparent novelty and incongruity in witnessing the Vatican and two of the world's largest computer technology firms embark on such a collaboration.

Microsoft's Brad Smith hinted as much when he acknowledged that at least on the face of it the collaborators made "strange bedfellows".

This initiative is being enthusiastically supported by Pope Francis; who has repeatedly voiced concerns around how an unjust application of technology may widen the gap between rich and poor, increase online exploitation and lead to the violation of the ecological integrity of the earth.

In fact, during an address



to participants in the congress on child dignity in the digital world last November, Francis spoke of how "the ethical development of algorithms" or more simply "algor-ethics" could be used to identify and eliminate illegal and harmful images from circulation on the internet.

The declaration itself proposes six key principles, which it says should shape the application of artificial intelligence and the development of 'algor-ethics':

- Transparency;
- Inclusion;
- Responsibility;
- Impartiality;
- Reliability;
- Security and privacy.

While there is limited space here to provide a broader outline of how the declaration understands these terms, the following is a key paragraph from the text that fairly summarises the basic rationale and the motivation in prioritising them: "Now more than ever, we

must guarantee an outlook in which AI is developed with a focus not on technology, but rather for the good of humanity and of the environment, of our common and shared home and of its human inhabitants, who are inextricably connected. In other words, a vision in which human beings and nature are at the heart of how digital innovation is developed, supported rather than gradually replaced by technologies that behave like rational actors but are in no way human."

For those who keep a close eye on these matters, the 'Rome Call' is perfectly consistent with a number of other actions that the Church and in particular, the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE) has initiated within this sphere in the last number of years.

A fairly recent example is the publication by COMECE in 2019 of its reflection, Robotisation of Life – Ethics in view of new challenges.

That specific document also set out to reaffirm the primacy of the human person while promoting "a rights-based and person-centred approach in reviewing the main principles that define the relationship between human persons and robots".

So, between the ethical vision of the COMECE document and the Rome Call declaration there is significant common ground.

“The document has consolidated the ethical leadership that the Church has demonstrated”

That being said there also significant differences.

For while documents like the US bishops' 1983 pastoral letter, and the COMECE document both situate the human person within a distinctly Christian anthropology, the Rome Call declaration makes no mention of God or Creation whatsoever.

On the one hand this is perfectly understandable given that the intention is not to sign up the likes of Micro-

soft and IBM (or even Facebook) to a distinctly 'religious' ethical charter. The point is to lay down clear ethical parameters for the development of AI that can enjoy the widest possible consensus and garner the greatest level of 'industry' support.

On the other hand, we can also accept that at a deeper level the very language of person-centred rights and human dignity, which the Rome Call's declaration is steeped in, are concepts that are dependent on the Catholic philosophical tradition for their coherence.

Indeed, acknowledgement of the debt which the western ethical tradition and modern-day human rights discourse owes to Christianity and to Catholicism in particular is enjoying something of a renaissance lately.

This is especially clear in the historical and scholarly work of people like Tom Holland and Larry Siedentop.

The Rome Call for AI Ethics can be seen then as but the latest example of how the application of science and technology can be shaped and informed by the vast historical richness of the Catholic intellectual tradition, while losing nothing of their own legitimate autonomy.

Through such a process all sides can emerge enriched and rejuvenated.

It can only be lamented therefore, that this point, which has been clearly grasped as almost self-evident by the likes of Microsoft and IBM, would doubtless receive a distinctly frostier reception in the current intellectual environment of 'modern Ireland.'

Ultimately, however, The Rome Call for AI Ethics has consolidated the pioneering ethical leadership that the Church has demonstrated in this field over the last number of years.

We should celebrate this ongoing contribution as an exciting adventure in the moral and ethical imagination of humankind.

i David Mullins is a bioethicist.

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The consequences of population decline will be seismic unless we act quickly, writes **Ray Kinsella**

Once upon a time, when Ireland was less self-obsessed, issues like the financial burden of getting married and starting a family were the lifeblood of elections. No longer.

Our skewed fiscal system discriminates against marriage and starting a family. Instead of fixing this anti-marriage bias, recent governments have exacerbated it. None of the main political parties see this – which is bad – or they don't want to see it, which is even worse.

Europe is confronted by an existential demographic challenge every bit as pressing as climate change. EU member states are projected by the UN to experience population decline by 2050. The impact is already evident in eastern and south-eastern Europe, where, according to Eurostat, ten EU member countries recorded an absolute decline in population in 2018. The equivalent of small cities are disappearing every year.

The consequences of falling population – of low birth rates, rural decline and the emigration of young educated adults – are deeply negative for any economy. They include a contraction in the tax base and in the Labour force – with a loss of intellectual capital and, therefore, the capacity for future growth of the 'knowledge economy'. Ireland's foreign direct investment 'business model' is vulnerable.

Impacts

The societal impacts of population decline are equally far-reaching: an aging population, increase in dependency rates and a sapping of the energy, enterprise and social solidarity of young and growing families across a country. Ireland's present birth rate reflects our former attitudes to marriage and traditional preference for large families.

The aggressive State secularisation of Ireland's Christian democratic

Hungary's 'family friendly' response to the EU's demographic crisis

The consequences, like it or not, will be seismic.

The current Croatian EU Presidency has put tackling Europe's population decline at the very top of its agenda. The *Financial Times* recently reported that "Croatia is asking the EU to weigh up a host of family-friendly policies...as it seeks ways of reversing dismal birth rates".

Perhaps the most innovative societal response to the EU's demographic crisis has been in Hungary. The Hungarian economy, like Ireland's, came through a torrid banking and economic crisis. Its recovery has been impressive, with GDP growth of between 4% to 5%, low inflation and unemployment around 3%. Its debt ratio is down to around 70%, with the economy in budgetary as well as external balance.

But what makes it different to Ireland is that Hungary has rejected secularism. The overriding focus is on supporting marriage, family and household formation. Its government continues to systematically extend this 'Hungarian Model' transforming the country into a 'family friendly' nation. Some 5% of its strong growth – twice the EU average – is allocated for family friendly supports and incentives.

Hungary defines marriage and family the way Ireland did until a few years ago. In fact, both countries changed their constitutions at more or less the same time – but in totally opposite directions.

“The focus of policy is not just on reversing population decline...it's on enabling women and young couples to marry and to enjoy the experience of

The extent, and the practicality, of Hungary's fiscal supports encouraging marriage and household formation are striking. Women who have four children are exempt for life from personal income tax. Every married couple is eligible for a €30,000 interest free loan where the mother is between 18-40 and expecting a child.

“It's the single most important and productive investment any country can make in its families”

There are subsidised loans, with interest rates capped at 3%, for married couples building and purchasing their home and grants to encourage grandparents to participate in caring for their grandchildren where one or more of the parents are going back to work.

The backdrop to the Hungarian model is simple. Hungary is one of the EU countries most severely impacted by the political burden of low birth rates (well below replacement rate) a legacy of communism followed by a liberal socialist regime prior to 2010.

The focus of policy is not just on reversing population decline – now an EU imperative. It's on enabling women and young couples to

marry and – the government underline this point – to enjoy the experience of rearing their family.

In other words, to help alleviate the financial pressures and time pressures that deter many couples here from getting married: pressures which can so easily lead to breakup, with all of the stress that this entails, and the growing costs of state interventions to try to mitigate the collateral damage.

Hungary's policies are working – marriage is at a record high, birth rates are rising and there has been a significant decline in abortions.

Katalin Novacks, Hungary's innovative Minister for Family and Young Adults, is an economist, deeply-versed in European politics, languages and culture. She is also very clear that her most fulfilling role is being a young wife and mother. She wants that option – marriage and a young family as well as professional aspirations – to be accessible to other young couples.

But, a family friendly economy on these lines costs money. Currently, Hungary allocates 5% of its GDP to support and extend this model.

Auction politics

Mrs Novacks insists that this is not an economic expenditure and she is, of course, correct. Instead, it's the single most important and productive investment any country can make in its families and in its future. The contrast with the billions pledged in election promises in Ireland's auction politics could hardly be greater.

The Hungarian model represents a radical renewal of what was once

social and economic mindset – the social economics of Konrad Adenauer's Christian Democracy which rebuilt post-war Germany.

A European Union confronted by a demographic crisis is having to re-learn the strengths of family-

friendly policies. It's the political X-factor that's missing from our endless talk about coalition options.

Ray Kinsella was formerly Professor of Banking and Financial Services at University College Dublin.

Fisherman's Bastion within Buda Castle and, inset, Hungarian President Viktor Erban.

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In a world of division, remains a model of



After Jean Vanier, how can L'Arche go forward creating places of belonging for those whom society rejects, asks **Dr Liam Waldron**

In a YouTube video recorded in 2018 to celebrate his 90th birthday, Jean Vanier, the founder of and inspiration for the international network of over 150 intentional communities, known as L'Arche, spoke about his 'ten rules for life'.

In reminding us that one day we must all die, he says: "I'm not the one who's the king of the world and I'm certainly not God. I'm just somebody who was born 90 years ago and will die in a few years' time and then everybody will have forgotten me".

Until recently, Jean Vanier, who died in 2019, was likely to be remembered chiefly as the inspirational figure who taught us how to love our brothers and sisters with disabilities. Sadly, we now have another reason to remember him with the news reported by L'Arche International that, "on the balance of probabilities", Jean Vanier had abusive relationships with a number of women "under conditions of psychological hold", relationships which broke "the bond of trust expected of those providing spiritual accompaniment to others".

These revelations have been met with disbelief and great sadness and have caused much pain to those who regarded Jean Vanier as a 'living saint'.

Loneliness

I heard Jean Vanier speak twice while carrying out research for my PhD dissertation which was a theological study of the problem of loneliness among people with learning (or intellectual) disabilities.

On both occasions, I listened spellbound to his insights on belonging and brokenness and loving friendship, delivered as they were in his characteristically soft and calming tones. If theologians have heroes, and they frequently do (often other theologians!), then I had found mine.

At the second conference, I approached him and he gave me 15 minutes of his valuable time.



I asked him how people who appeared to have differing starting points for conversations about disability could find common ground. While some use primarily the language of personal rights and equality and inclusion, others use the language of vulnerability, and brokenness and fragility, which was Mr Vanier's own language. For some, success was to be found in overcoming the limitations that disability imposes on us, while for others, Mr Vanier included, people are beautiful the way they are.

Did he think these were mutually exclusive positions? How could they be reconciled given Mr Vanier's insistence that all human persons, with or without a disability are fragile and vulnerable, language many dislike in the context of disability? It was an inspiring conversation, full of warmth and of hope, for which I am grateful.

Given then the recent evidence that Jean Vanier acted contrary to the values of the organisation he founded, how can L'Arche go forward with confidence in living its mission of creating places of belonging for those whom society rejects? It would be tragic if

L'Arche, which now mourns the death of a particular image of its founder, were to lose courage. In her book, *Gateway to Hope: An Exploration of Failure*, Sr Maria Boulding writes that "at the heart of our bitterest experience of failure, there is an open doorway to the joy of God".

Opportunity

L'Arche has the opportunity now to enter through this open door and enter into a new phase of witnessing to the importance of every human person.

L'Arche is a worldwide federation of intentional Faith-based communities where people with intellectual disabilities (the core members) and assistants share their lives through living and

working and celebrating together.

The organisation, which now has a presence throughout the world, began in a small house north of Paris in 1964 when Jean Vanier invited Raphael Simi and Philippe Seux, two men with intellectual disabilities, to leave the grim hospital where they had been placed to come and live with him. The three men did everything together – worked, laughed and celebrated life.

The core members and assistants in L'Arche today do just that, and they are a living sign to the world that a life worth living does not require us to be successful in the widely accepted meaning of the word, but rather involves the embracing of our own fragility and vulnerability which is what

leads us to become more fully human, echoing the title of one of Mr Vanier's books. L'Arche could be said to be an example of what the theologian Werner Jeanrond calls, "an institution of love".

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Love must be at the heart of all relationships for a Christian, and institutions of love, which can include clubs, associations, churches, parishes and all manner of partnerships, are places where love is practiced according to the traditions or priorities of the institution.

The traditions of L'Arche, which include solidarity, hospitality and true friendship are practiced in the everyday ordinary activities of their communities – working, eating, and celebrating – to the extent that, as Mr Vanier once said, it was not possible to really know who is helping whom.

These traditions represent what L'Arche is all about, namely communion and belonging which is what distinguishes it from some other institutions that provide care 'for' people with disabilities. Rather, L'Arche is where people who have perhaps experienced

“The organisation...began in a small house north of Paris in 1964 when Jean Vanier invited Raphael Simi and Philippe Seux, two men with intellectual disabilities, to leave the grim hospital where they had been placed to come and live with him”

the L'Arche community

true solidarity

Pope Francis visits a L'Arche community in Ciampino, Italy, on May 13, 2016. Photo: CNS. Inset, Jean Vanier.



terrible loneliness and isolation in their lives find their home in an atmosphere of true friendship – that is, friendship understood as a ‘mystery’ reflecting the common origin of all in God.

So, what can we learn from L'Arche?

● SOLIDARITY

L'Arche witnesses to the importance of solidarity – of standing with and for others. These others, particularly those with disabilities are not ‘clients’, in the common understanding of the word.

Rather, in L'Arche, each is a brother or sister and neighbour of the other. Solidarity is not, in the words of Pope St John Paul II, merely “a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far.

On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all”.

Solidarity is achieved in L'Arche when each puts himself or herself at the service of the other. Pope

“Pope Francis too reminds us of the necessity of sharing our very selves when we act in solidarity with others”

Francis too reminds us of the necessity of sharing our very selves when we act in solidarity with others; without faces and stories, human lives become statistics, and we run the risk of bureaucratising the sufferings of others. Bureaucracies shuffle papers; compassion (not pity, but com-*passion*, suffering with) deals with people.

L'Arche is not just a fellowship of people who are nice to one another. At its heart, it understands and embraces human suffering and vulnerability, and it is that very fragility which draws people together into communion. There is solidarity between core members, assistants, and the wider L'Arche family, blessed by the God who, as Jurgen Moltmann writes, “humbled himself and takes upon himself the eternal death of those perceived as worthless, of the godless and the godforsaken, so that all those the world sees as worthless, and

all those who see themselves as godless or godforsaken can experience communion with him”.

In a world of division, L'Arche is a model of true solidarity.

● RADICAL FRIENDSHIP

L'Arche began with the question, ‘will you be my friend?’, and since 1964 the answer continues to be ‘Yes’. The daily loving encounters between its members confirms it as a place of radical friendship. Jesus said he came that we might have life in abundance.

This fullness of life comes to us through loving and being loved and is the mark of the life lived in L'Arche. Reflecting its Christian heritage, L'Arche practices this type of loving friendship that finds its source in Christ and his radical love of ‘the other’.

In this way, we become true brothers and sisters of each other. Such fraternity is the mark of the shared life in L'Arche. Indeed, Pope Francis writes that “the

basis of fraternity is found in God’s fatherhood, and in God’s family, and where all are sons and daughters of the same Father, there are no ‘disposable lives”.

Such friendship is not based on superficial similarities in interests or temperaments however. Rather it is about learning how to give and receive love.

Through this friendship practiced in L'Arche, humanity’s true nature is revealed, namely that we are brothers and sisters of each other which is the antidote to the terrible loneliness that is so widespread in our society today. This fraternity, expressed in radical friendship, has an even greater benefit where the love and acceptance that marks it can renew the spirit of those who experience it to the extent that they regain the hope they had lost.

Friendship of this kind involves a risk - that of dying to the self for the sake of ‘the other’, and L'Arche witnesses to this in its life and work.

● HOSPITALITY

L'Arche practices hospitality in the way it practices solidarity and radical friendship – with a special concern for those who are rejected or lonely. One of the most familiar expressions of hospitality is the sharing of a meal. It is food that provides nourishment for the body, while conversation and the sharing of stories renew the spirit.

I remember vividly the two occasions on which I had the great pleasure of visiting L'Arche and sharing a meal with the core members and assistants. I remember it because I have rarely experienced such joyous hospitality. L'Arche’s way of showing hospitality has the feel of a celebration to me. Nothing was rushed and we all took our time eating, telling stories and listening to stories from others.

There were arguments and disagreements too, but I learned that true hospitality is about opening the heart to the other, even if at first we feel that we have little in common with that ‘other’.

It is about forging relationship through the sharing of our time and our stories, and paying loving attention to others, and being open to receiving all of that in return.

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Christine Pohl, writing about the practice of hospitality, comments that those who are hosts “make room for those with no place, sharing themselves and their lives rather than only their skills. They offer hospitality in response to the people and needs they have encountered – need for nourishment, place, safety, justice, friendship, and the knowledge of God’s love and grace”.

It was difficult to distinguish host from guest at that dinner table. It was as if each was both host and guest.

One of my favourite stories about the transformation of loneliness and fear, into hope and joy, centres on a meal. In

the story of the walk to Emmaus in Luke’s gospel we meet Jesus’ followers, lonely and despondent, encountering a stranger on the road.

Their conversation made their hearts “burn within them”, and they invite the stranger to stay and eat with them. Through the sharing of this meal, where the bread is blessed, broken and shared, Jesus’ followers, until that point filled with sadness, have their eyes opened and are renewed.

The recognition by the disciples of their Lord in the breaking of bread sends them back to the city full of joy which they want to share with everyone. L'Arche, in its practice of hospitality where bread is broken and shared witnesses to the hope that loneliness and rejection can be transformed into joy.

“We have to give the experience time to come home to us before it can become a motive for hope and a promise of fuller life”

L'Arche should be proud of its quiet witness to the sacredness of every person, irrespective of ability or disability. Many of our brothers and sisters with disabilities who find a home in L'Arche had previously lived in hospitals and institutions where they were ignored and forgotten. Some had even been rejected by family, unwilling or unable to care for them.

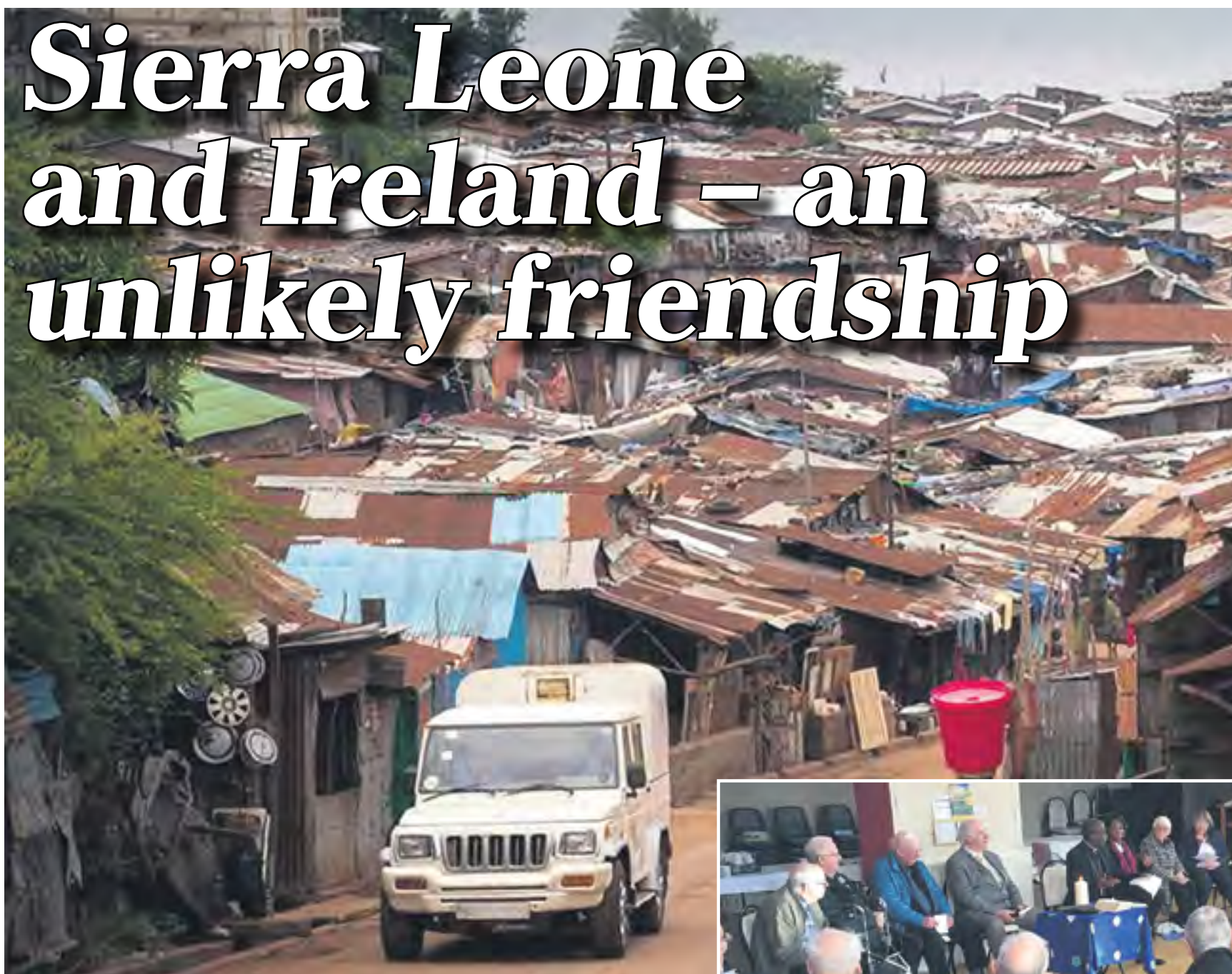
The presence of L'Arche in a world that understands and values success in a manner that would exclude many with disabilities offers hope to those who are so often cast aside and ignored.

Since the publication of the recent report, many in L'Arche are now in mourning. Reflecting on loss and death, Sr Maria Boulding writes that we need time to come to terms with it. “We cannot short-circuit human processes,” she writes, “we have to give the experience time to come home to us before it can become a motive for hope and a promise of fuller life.”

That the life of someone with a disability, regarded by many as being of little value, can indeed be a life lived to the full, is what L'Arche gives witness to, and my hope and prayer is that it continues to do so. L'Arche is necessary, and we should support its work in whatever way we can.

Dr Liam Waldron is a pastoral theologian, writer and lecturer. His PhD dissertation was a theological treatment of the problem of loneliness among people with intellectual disabilities. He writes about and speaks internationally on issues related to disability and health care from a theological perspective.

Sierra Leone and Ireland – an unlikely friendship



The after effect of Ebola, education equality and evangelisation of Sierra Leone are all in a day's work for the Bishop of Kenema, writes **Róise McGagh**

Bishop Henry Aruna of the Kenema Diocese in Sierra Leone on his visit to Ireland was reunited with schoolteachers of his from the Holy Ghost Missions.

Today known as the Spiritans, they have been present in the west African country for 156 years. During these years an unlikely bond has formed between the people this small green aisle and dry lands in Sierra Leone. The Irish missionary movement brought men and women of all denominations to this foreign land.

Now, the Church in Sierra Leone is maintained by indigenous clergy and faithful, who are moving it forward and integrating it into their own culture.

Fr Henry Aruna became the first Sierra Leonean bishop of Makeni. He went on to become the Bishop of Kenema, his home place.

Missionaries

His life was heavily influenced by Irish missionaries who worked in Kenema, the third largest city in Sierra Leone.

"My education is really down to the fact that the Irish missionaries established a school there, many of whom would be my teachers," said Bishop Aruna to *The Irish Catholic*.

He attended St. Paul's primary school, Kanike, Fadugu and Kabala in the 1970s, all Roman Catholic schools. He got his secondary education at Holy Trinity in Kenema.

Bishop Aruna came to Ireland on the invite of the Sierra Leone Ireland Partnership (SLIP), who hosted a seminar in Maynooth on strengthening education for girls and young women in

Sierra Leone and then a conversation in Kimmage about missionaries now and then. He was also welcomed by Archbishop Diarmuid Martin at his residence in Drumcondra.

SLIP helps support Sierra Leone through projects in Ireland and provides advice for people travelling there. They aim to keep Sierra Leone in the thoughts of the Irish government, business people and development agencies.

Dr Staneala Beckley, chair of the Teaching Service Commission of Sierra Leone was also invited to speak on the topic.

Two or three of those at the SLIP events were Bishop Aruna's teachers. "One of the Irish missionaries, Fr Ray Barry actually took me in as a mission boy," he said.

"I stayed with him in the parish house until I finished my schooling and then eventually, I went to the seminary, I was also taught by Austin Healey and Tom Wheelan."

At the time of his schooling, many young people still went abroad as missionaries and there was a community of Irish people in the area, a mix of priests, nuns and lay missionaries.

After his final exams and then a year at St Kizito's Pre-Major Seminary, Henry Aruna went into St Paul's Major Seminary in Gbarnga, Liberia in 1985.

On April 16 1993, he was ordained to the priesthood in Kenema. He then went on to work in the Diocese of Kenema from 1993 to 1994, the then Archdiocese of Freetown and Bo for the next year, then in the Kankan Diocese in the Republic of Guinea from 1995 to 1996. He returned to Sierra Leone and worked from 1996 to 1999 in the Diocese of Makeni.

In between his studies he served in various capacities in the pastoral field. He entered the priestly formation ministry in 1996 at St Paul's Major Seminary, Makeni and Free-

town. Bishop Aruna lectured in the seminary; in History and Systematic Philosophy. He also was a Director of Pastoral Work, Dean of Students and Seminary Bursar in the seminary.

As well as these pastoral and seminary duties he was the in charge of the Blessed Michael Tansi Catholic Community at Goderich barracks in Freetown.

Sierra Leone in 2020 is a place of opportunity, but also many hardships and challenges. Bishop Aruna said he hopes to do his best to help the local community face these challenges.

He said his main duty was of course, Church evangelisation but he "would also want to continue the tradition of improving on education. We have so many Catholics schools, I want to focus on the ethos and standards trying to maintain the ethos of the Catholic Faith."

Curriculum development



and the school environment is also important to the Bishop as keeping high standards of education has been an issue for many schools in Sierra Leone.

"There are advocacy issues, justice issues in Sierra Leone. Our peace and justice apartment want to strengthen that and play a key role in advocating for justice for the people of Sierra Leone especially in my Diocese of Kenema, for example gender issues, more males will have access to education, I want to bridge that gap" says Bishop Aruna.

Education has been a topical issue since schools reopened after the Ebola crisis that hit the country in 2012.

It was the world's worst recorded outbreak of the disease. The issue of gender inequality is prominent in plans to move education opportunities forward.

Schools were closed for nine months, but with help from the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) 2,700 schools were disinfected and 5,970 schools were cleaning supplies and hand washing stations. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) assisted the government to run two shortened academic years with an accelerated syllabus so that there was no loss in opportunity for students to be educated.

Education up to secondary

“Curriculum development and the school environment is also important to the Bishop as keeping high standards of education has been an issue for many schools in Sierra Leone”



A conversation about missionaries then and now in Kimmage with Bishop Henry Aruna of Kenema Diocese and Dr Staneala Beckley, chair of Teaching Service Commission of Sierra Leone.

qualified teachers, gender inequality persists in the country as opportunities to be educated are not granted pregnant women.

There was a large spike in teenage pregnancies of (18,000 girls) during the Ebola outbreak according to the UN Population Fund (UNFPA). Rape, abusive relationships and prostitution contributed to the increase.

Pregnant girls are barred from attending school. The education ministry felt that exposing these women to classmates would humiliate them and encourage others to become pregnant.

Only 56% of girls aged 15 to 24 are literate, compared to 73% of boys in the same age range, according to the United Nations. Around 15% of girls get to secondary school. The crisis highlighted the need for work on equality.

"Although there are many more girls coming into school now, because of cultural factors, many of them don't continue until the end because of early marriage.

"I would say they have gone a long way, for those who stay on, they do very well but nowadays they don't want to go into the teaching profession. Long ago there were many more women teachers than male teachers, but I think in a way we should not bemoan that fact too much because it shows that the girls empowerment is working, girls are now going into faculties of law, medicine. The girls don't see themselves as limited anymore to being teachers or nurses," said Dr Staneala.

The Ebola crisis not only impacted education but had a huge effect on the community in Sierra Leone. "It was quite the devastating," Bishop Aruna tells *The Irish Catholic*. "Ebola was quite devastating we never knew it; we were never explained such.

"People are very ignorant of Ebola and the precautions to take against the spread of Ebola. They were very ignorant about that and people were also very superstitious."

He said that the cultural aspect of burials in Sierra Leone where bodies are washed caused a lot of trouble. "People lost their lives and of course that influenced the economy."

Projections

According to projections in 2014 from the World Bank Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone lost an estimated \$2.2 billion of their GDP in 2015. Sierra Leone is only now beginning to recover from this blow.

"Eventually we got our act together and we partnered with agencies to sensitise people on the precautions to take. The no touch measures that helps to combat Ebola



Ciaran McGoey (left) and Eddie Finnegan (right) present Bishop Henry Aruna with a €21,200 donation for Yengema Secondary School in his Diocese of Kenema, Sierra Leone.

but I can tell you it was very devastating.

"Families were wiped out. We have a lot of orphans know who lost their families, their parents. Of those who survived, the after effects of the medicine that we used cause some to have eye problems, some to go blind, or have other health related issues."

He said it is a very difficult task to care of and puts pressure not only on the communities but also the government.

“I don't think it would be easy for families to rise up against each other but not impossible, we have to keep an eye on things”

Bishop Aruna said people come to the Church for support and guidance, "They think we hold the answers to everything every problem, problems with school fees, problems of hardship, problems of illness, problem of relationships, relationship problems."

Sierra Leone is also still feeling the affects of unrest in the country from 1991-2002. Dr Stanaela stated: "The challenges have lived with us although we are trying to overcome them, since we finished the civil war we are still feeling the effects in that we lost a lot of our human resources in all fields because people left the country and their spaces were filled by people who are less competent

"But now we were trying to build a capable work force. The good thing is that people are slowly returning to the country and young people are coming as well."

Sierra Leone is rich in natural minerals including diamonds, rutile, bauxite, gold, iron and limonite. However, Bishop Aruna feels that the country has been left for poor by the multinational companies who come in and mine. "I want to see that the citi-

zens benefit from the minerals not only the multinational companies who exploit it because they have the capacity to mine."

Another issue, that has recently been prominent in some parts of Africa, namely Burkina Faso, is the threat of extremism. The Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone has estimated that of Sierra Leone's population, around 77% population are Muslim, 21% are Christian, and 2% follow traditional African religions.

Bishop Aruna feels that the country currently manages the balance between religious groups well. "I'm confident that it would be very difficult to succeed in destroying this relationship. It's not impossible but difficult because each family is mixed up. In my family there are Muslims there are bishops.

"So, I don't think it would be easy for families to rise up against each other but not impossible, we have to keep an eye on things.

His parents became Catholics and attended catholic schools themselves. The Bishop says there used to be little signs of any extremism but they are slowly creeping in.

"When I was going to school, I never saw women dressed in all black in Sierra Leone but now we can see them. They are very much in the conservative Islamic dress with the hijab covering up the head.

Extremism

These are signs of extremism and we want to respect them but also want to be very attentive to them."

Bishop Aruna told *The Irish Catholic* that his week in Ireland was a welcome and relaxing break. He says he is saddled with a lot of these issues as people come to the church for guidance and as a source of hope.

On his visit the bishop received a cheque for €21,200 towards restoration of Yengema Secondary School in the Diocese of Kenema. The Fr Liam Lawton Concert at St

Mel's Cathedral Longford on October 25, together donations and marathon sponsorship, raised the funds.

Ciaran McGoey, a native of Abbeyshrule now living in Carlingford, taught the Spiritan-founded school, in the late 1960s along with Fr John Flavin as Vice-Principal, Paddy McDermott, Joe Prior, Paddy Daly and Eddie Finnegan, as part of an international teaching staff. They are all now members of SLIP.

The founding Principal of the school was the late Fr Ray Barry from Drumshambo. Ciaran, assisted by his niece Kathryn Keenan and his old colleague Paddy McDermott, arranged the fundraising concert in tribute to those deceased Spiritan Missionaries of the Ardagh and Clonmacnois Diocese.

Around 70% of the total raised will be placed in a trust fund account for the school, administered by Bishop Henry Aruna for improvement of the school's Catholic ethos, teaching, learning and curriculum enrichment once new and more reliable administration and leadership are in place, planned for the start of the new School Year 2020-21.

The rest, with an additional €6,000 from the Finnegan Family Fund, will be donated to Kenema's Diocesan Pastoral Centre to be administered by Bishop Aruna, specifically for courses in Catholic school ethos and Catholic Social Teaching for young women teachers, as a means of restoring gender-balanced teaching staff for the co-educational Catholic schools of the Diocese.

"It's really heart-warming to know that there are people here who worked in Sierra Leone and who still have a passion for the country despite the terrible things that happened to us," said Dr Stanaela.

"Personally, I owe a lot to the Irish missionaries for my education and where I am now," said Bishop Aruna who returned to Kenema on March 10.

school in Sierra Leone became free in 2018. Dr Staneala spoke about the Teaching Service Commission's efforts to improve the standards of teaching and training. She said she was inspired by people who talked of possible improvements to the Sierra Leone education system.

"Going forward I would like to see a stringer partnership between Ireland, the education institutions and our institutions."

Eddie Finnegan from SLIP raised the point that often senior teachers are "snapped up by National and International NGOs in need of well-

educated Country Reps, Field Officers, etc. on salaries they can never make in the classroom or even as principals or headteachers".

"Nobody would say that every good teacher must spend their lives in the classroom but there's an irony in finding struggling schools bereft of the best and brightest just because World Vision, Concern, PLAN, GOAL, or even CAFOD, Trócaire, CARITAS Internationalis or CARITAS-SL need competent and culturally fluent readymade reps at minimal cost in training or wages... schools should never suffer in the name of development."

As well as a lack of fully



The untold story of Jews forced to flee Arab states

Edwin Shuker is an Arab Jew from Iraq with a truly remarkable story he wants to share with the world, writes Aron Hegarty

His story is the unheard narrative of the Jewish refugee, whose history of being the original people in Middle Eastern countries – dating back more than 2,000 years – risks being forgotten about.

After fleeing in 1971, Mr Shuker uses a long-awaited return to his homeland to inspire the next generation and offer hope of a future in Iraq, where Jews and Arabs can co-exist once again.

The Iraqi national attended Trinity College Dublin in January to promote the screening of *Remember Baghdad* which was followed by a talk on the film and his life.

Remember Baghdad, directed by filmmaker Fiona Murphy, traces the 64-year-old's journey back to the country of his birth after decades of war and instability, to buy a home and give hope that Jews can return to live there.

Ahead of the event in Dublin, Mr Shuker spoke to *The Irish Catholic* about the documentary, his life, the history of Arab Jews and acceptance of all faiths.

Tensions

Born in Baghdad in 1955, Mr Shuker recalls how he and his family managed to flee Iraq amid rising tensions: "It took us two and half years to find a way to escape through the northern Kurdish mountains. There the Kurdish population helped us cross the border into Iran in August 1971."

At the age of 16, he and his family arrived in the United Kingdom as United Nations refugees.

Mr Shuker graduated from Leeds University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Mathematics then moved to London, where he established himself as a prominent businessman. He later became the Vice President of the Board of Deputies of British Jews.

Despite being far away from his native Baghdad, it was a random encounter while he was living in England that brought Mr Shuker closer to home.

"We rebuilt our lives and then one day, someone in the audience who heard my story told me 'this is fascinating, I didn't know there were Jews in Iraq?' and that became a sentence which changed my life.

"I saw with my own eyes that a legacy of 2,600 years was disappearing and we were being written out of the narrative of the very places where we were the indigenous population. The Jewish community across these countries had been living there 1,200 years before Islam and Arabs came out from the Arabian desert into these lands."

He reflected: "To think that in my lifetime, having being an eye witness, having lived in these places that our history is no longer taught anywhere.

"That our language is dying and our cemeteries – where my grandfather is buried – in Iraq are disappearing literally in front of my eyes.

"I made a promise that if I could push that to even one more generation – to show my own children where they came from – who knows what will happen?"

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Mr Shuker, who also served as Vice President of the European Jewish Congress, helps to maintain Jewish shrines and sites in order to keep the connection between his native Iraq and its displaced Jewish community intact.

He hopes documenting his return to Baghdad will prove to be a watershed moment in the history, and future, of Arab Jews.

"After the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, I made sure I was there in Iraq," said Mr Shuker.

"I was the first Jew to go back to Baghdad to look for my old house, my school, the cemetery and that was then followed by further visits in 2004 and 2005.

"Then in 2015, I was convinced and persuaded by a director (Fiona Murphy) – who was making a documentary about Iraqi Jews – to go back to Iraq to film and get pictures that would add hugely to the film.

"The documentary is 69 minutes long and tells the story of me, how I went back to Baghdad, looked for the house I grew up in, found it and later bought a house to prove a point as a symbolic gesture to say: 'I'm not done here, there's unfinished business'.

"That is the story of the film and it ends on an optimistic note suggesting that maybe in 10, 20 or even 50 years' time this house will be the beginning of a reconnection



Edwin Shuker.

between the Jews and their homeland...or it could die with me."

“It doesn't matter if the audience is in thousands or just six or seven because I want the narrative of my people to be heard”

As well as being a businessman, Mr Shuker is an international activist and public speaker on the Middle East. He has engaged in and supported many projects which promote human rights and freedom in the region.

Mr Shuker reportedly describes himself as an "Arabic and Hebrew

speaker" and says his first-hand accounts are what set him apart from other commentators.

"The talks that I give are a testimony, an eye witness account. It is a history, but not a history that has been adapted or interpreted; it is an eye witness which makes all the difference. It's the reason I take my story and the story of our people all over the world.

"It doesn't matter if the audience is in thousands or just six or seven because I want the narrative of my people to be heard and absorbed by as many people as possible.

"Everyone has heard of the Palestinian refugee, but very few people have heard of the concept of the Jewish refugee.

"My story is never to undermine the Palestinian narrative, but rather to say there is no monopoly

on suffering by one side. Both set of refugees have paid dearly for national conflict.

"But for decades the story of the Jewish refugees was not heard at all and, as I find myself getting older, I find myself saying 'I have to tell our story to as many people as possible'.

"The more people that hear about it from me directly, the more I will be giving gratitude to the legacy and history of the civilisation that my ancestors built."

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The earliest reference to Jews in Ireland was in 1079 in the Annals of Inisfallen, which recorded 'five Jews came over from the sea with gifts to Tairdelbach [King of Munster]'. A permanent Irish settlement

“Everyone has heard of the Palestinian refugee, but very few people have heard of the concept of the Jewish refugee. My story is never to undermine the Palestinian narrative, but rather to say there is no monopoly on suffering by one side”



A monument, 'Prayer', in Ramat Gan, in memory of the Jewish people who were killed in Iraq in the 1941 Farhud pogrom and in the 1960.

for Jews was established in the late 15th Century. The first of three synagogues based in Dublin was founded in 1660 with later ones built in Belfast and (until its closure in 2016) Cork.

The Jewish community in Ireland grew rapidly between 1871 and 1911 from 230 to 3,805. By 1946 there was a record 3,907 Jews living in Ireland.

However, the Jewish population on these shores has been in decline since then; dropping to a low of 1,581 in 1991.

There was a rise to 2,557 in the latest 2016 census, but today this figure is reportedly closer to the 2,000 mark ahead of the 2021 census.

Timeline

The history and timeline of the Jewish people in Iraq though goes back much further than most people realise, according to Mr Shuker.

"The Jewish community in Iraq is in fact the most ancient

community in the world and traces its roots back 2,600 years," he explained. "It started when the Babylonian King (Nebuchadnezzar II) attacked Jerusalem and destroyed Solomon's Temple then marched all the Jews to Babylon. There they sat by the rivers of Babylon reading Psalm 137 as they wept for Zion.

"After the temple was destroyed, they didn't know what to do. Judaism was based on a temple and suddenly they are now in foreign lands and don't know who to refer to.

"Fortunately, they were guided by Prophets such as Jeremiah, who said to them: 'What are you weeping about? Get up and start working, be faithful and pray for the peace of wherever I exile you. So there (where you are exiled to) you will find your own peace'.

"That was the marker for the next 2,600 years," continued Mr Shuker on his story of the Jewish community.

"Some decided to go back to

Jerusalem and establish a second temple, whereas many others stayed behind and developed a more mobile form of Judaism; wherein they could live with their Jewish identity without a temple or having to go back to Jerusalem.

"This carried them through and kept their identity until the middle of the 20th Century when three factors changed everything. The first was anti-semitism through Nazism in Europe, the second was Arab Nationalism and then the third was the establishment of the state of Israel.

"Arab armies attacked Israel on the day it was declared, but they were unsuccessful. The armies went back to their countries, feeling frustrated and demoralised, and they found almost 856,000 Jews living there and that was resented after the defeat.

"By 1951, over 90% of Jews who lived in those areas were displaced. Their assets were frozen, their nationalities were revoked and they were sent to Israel, which

"I have been working with all faiths to make sure that everyone realises that an attack on one faith is an attack on all faiths"

doubled in size over short period of time. They took in refugees then put them into transit camps for many years until they managed to build houses for them.

"People like my grandparents suffered a lot adjusting to a new country and language but the young people were already integrated," said Mr Shuker on Israel.

"The situation became worse as we approached another Israeli-Palestinian-Arab war and again the Jews who stayed behind in the Arab countries paid the price"

"There was a minority (7-8%) who did not go to Israel and stayed in these Arab countries; one of them was my father, the other was my mother. My father was finishing university, so he didn't want to go and then after graduating realised that it wasn't easy to integrate in a new country so he married.

"We stayed behind in Baghdad and life was good. In the late 1950s there was a king, there was order and there was a parliament in Iraq.

"But life changed in 1958," said Mr Shuker of living in Iraq. "The royal family was annihilated, a general took over and then in 1963 the 'bad' party came along for the first time.

"One of the first things they did was ask the Jewish community of Iraq to queue; bringing with us our Iraqi nationality and we did. I was eight years old at the time when I was standing waiting; we gave our identity cards and in return they issued us with a yellow card.

"This made us the 'other' (second, third class citizens) in our own country and you had to produce this yellow card for all financial dealings. Immediately you got earmarked as Jewish.

"The situation became worse as we approached another Israeli-Palestinian-Arab war (the Six-Day War of June 1967) and again the Jews who stayed behind in the Arab countries paid the price."

* * * * *

The annual Holocaust Memorial Day commemorations took place at the Mansion House in Dublin on January 26.

The event cherishes the memory of six million Jews and millions of others who were persecuted and murdered by the Nazis because of their ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, political affiliations or their religious beliefs between 1941 and

1945.

This year's theme for the Holocaust Memorial was for people to 'stand together' and focused on the role that other faiths have contributed to saving Jewish lives.

In addition, January 27 also marked the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz - Nazi Germany's largest concentration camp - where all faiths gathered in unison for a soul-searching exercise of reflection, confession and atonement for past mistakes.

Mr Shuker believes that Jewish people cannot fight anti-semitism on their own and will need the help of all religions to work together to protect each other from acts of hatred.

"We need all faiths to understand and stand by us," he said. "Therefore, we are building alliances with all people.

"I have been working with all faiths to make sure that everyone realises that an attack on one faith, is an attack on all faiths.

"One cannot stand by and watch a faith being attacked and stand aside because eventually the other faiths will suffer too, then there is no one to defend them.

"I have made sure that as Vice President (of the Board of Deputies of British Jews) we are more than inclusive; that we go out of our way to introduce ourselves to anyone that welcomes us.

Every faith group

"I am interested every faith group. For them to join our story and for us to join their story."

On the issue of contemporary anti-semitism, he commented: "If only those who advertise and promote (anti-semitism) would know that there is another side to the story, then the solution would be more fair, positive and accepting for all sides.

"You would get all sides co-operating rather than competing over who suffered the most."

Mr Shuker says Ireland is "very important" to him for its good relations in the Middle East and as a country which has generally accepted and shown tolerance to the Jewish community.

The much-travelled philanthropist hopes he can spread his story and build relationships with more trips to the 'Emerald Isle' in future.

"This is my second visit to Dublin," he said of his ties with Ireland. "The first time I came was two years ago when I gave a talk in the Mansion House, which was very well received.

"I succeeded here in passing the message to be absorbed and welcomed, and I look forward to the next opportunity to come back again."



Ruadhán Jones from Cork with Tessa Carizio from Michigan and Shane Jenkins from Denver who are both living in Dublin. Photos: Chai Brady



Speaker Liz Lev with Aisling Byrne from Kildare and James Bradshaw from Kilkenny.

Deciphering the Sistine Chapel at Newman University Church



John O'Carroll who lives in Dublin but hails from Kerry and Dominique le Goffe – living in Dublin but from Paris.



Oscar Benavides and Fernanda Flores, living in Dublin but from Mexico.

Dozens of people gathered in a Dublin church to hear more about the art that has made the Sistine Chapel one of the most famous places in the world in an event held last week.

Art historian and author Liz Lev travelled from Rome to discuss the Sistine Chapel and its special place in the worlds of both art and faith in Newman University Church at St Stephen's Green.

The free evening lecture was entitled 'Behind the Veil: Deciphering the Sistine Chapel' and was followed by a reception.



Matthias Conroy and Adam O'Neill from Dublin, Clare Driscoll who's staying in Wexford but from Indiana, Maddie Lottin, in Dublin from Georgia and Shannon Daley from Ohio.



Michael Donohue, Katherine Dunne and Deacon Ted Clement who is on loan to the Archdiocese of Dublin from South Carolina.



Brigit and Kathleen Hirsch from Conneticut and Laura O'Keefe from Canada, currently in Dublin studying in TCD.



Catherine O'Flynn, Alice Davy and Brian O'Flynn from Dublin.



Ciara O'Rourke and Ben Conroy from Dublin, David CJ Conroy from Kildare and Fr Bill Dailey CSC, the Director for the Newman Centre for Faith and Reason.



Columnist with The Irish Catholic David Quinn with his wife Rachael, lecturer Liz Lev and her husband Thomas Williams.



'The Last Judgment' by Michelangelo Buonarroti. Photo: CNS



Visitors tour the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican Museums on February 21. Photo: CNS



Out&About

St Joseph's celebrates 50 wonderful years



DOWN: St Joseph's PS Killough celebrated 50 years on their current site with a special Mass in St Joseph's church in the village. Fr Peter O'Kane PP officiated. Afterwards there was a reception in the school hall with a host of archive memorabilia on show.



DUBLIN: Students from Holy Child Secondary School in Killiney are presented with their Pope John Paul II Awards. Overall, 11 students received the award, four 6th Year students and seven 5th Year students achieved gold, silver and bronze medals.



LIMERICK: The Archdiocese of Cashel & Emy's Lourdes Fundraising Committee pictured at the launch of their annual draw as the archdiocese plans for its 50th annual pilgrimage.



TYRONE: Children take part in a candlelit Rosary procession in the Oratory in Newtownstewart. As each prayer was recited, a person bearing a candle processed up the centre aisle. As the parishioners arrived, they were directed to take up stationary positions. By the end of the Rosary recitation the congregation had taken the shape of Rosary beads. Photo: Nicky Canning



Edited by Chai Brady
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Events deadline is a week in advance of publication



ARMAGH: Archbishop Eamon Martin stands with Fr Peter McAnenly, Vocations Director, Sr Carmel Flynn, member of the vocations team, Fr Mark O'Hagan, Deacon Eric Cooney, Director of the National Vocations Office, Fr Willy Purcell, National Director of Vocations, Fr Sean McGuigan and member of vocations team Bredge Casey, after launching a brochure on priesthood in the Archdiocese of Armagh at a recent priests' conference.

► **CORK:** Bishop of Cork and Ross Fintan Gavin presided at the Rite of Election of Catechumens (RCIA) at the Cathedral of Ss Mary and Anne. The bishop is pictured with catechumens, Rahul and Christopher of the Cathedral parish, Remy from Ss Peter and Paul's parish, Paulo and Ivana from Bandon parish and Katerina from Bantry parish and Fr Charlie Kiely – the Director of Pastoral Planning & Development who coordinates the RCIA programme in the diocese.



◀ **DERRY:** Some of the 75 young people aged between 15 and 18 with organisers from across the Diocese of Derry who attended an all-night Sleep Out-Stay Awake in St Eugene's Cathedral. The event, organised by the Derry Diocesan Catechetical Centre, sought to raise awareness of, and money to prevent, homelessness. To date £3,700 has been raised. The money will be divided equally between five charities, Damien House, the Simon Community, De Paul Ireland, Ashmore House and Methodist City Mission.

IN SHORT

Cashel and Emly celebrate 50th Lourdes pilgrimage with 'Grand Draw'

The Diocese of Cashel and Emly is gearing up for a bumper 'Grand Draw' with the first prize being the tidy sum of €1,500 as part of fundraising efforts for sick pilgrims on their 50th annual Lourdes pilgrimage.

Fr Joe Tynan PP of Kilttealy and Dromkeen said: "While many make the journey with us each year, the assisted pilgrims are our main focus in making it possible for them to travel

to the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes. Approximately 100 assisted pilgrims travel on our pilgrimage. This is only possible because of the generosity of so many others who come as medical staff, male and female helpers, youth group, clergy.

"Many of the assisted pilgrims will be sponsored by their local parish Lourdes Committee but the archdiocese also has a very active fundraising committee too who work hard to help subsidise pilgrim and staff fares and meet the considerable costs involved in running our pilgrimage."

The main fundraising

event each year is the Grand Draw which this year offers €1,500 as the first prize as well as 16 further cash prizes. Archbishop Kieran O'Reilly was to launch the draw at a Lourdes Event in The Millennium Centre, Caherconlish on February 15 but Storm Denis was to intervene making him unable to travel. However, against the odds a crowd gathered and the draw was launched by the Pilgrimage Director, Fr Jimmy Donnelly.

Planning is well under way for their 50th annual pilgrimage to Lourdes which this year takes place from June 13-18. The draw will

be conducted in Lourdes on June 15. Booking details are available at local parish level or from JWT. Assisted pilgrims wishing to travel should contact the Assistant Pilgrimage Director, Fr Joe Tynan at 061-384213.

For the past 50 years the Archdiocese of Cashel and Emly has led a diocesan pilgrimage to Lourdes. The first pilgrimage took place in 1971 led by Archbishop Thomas Morris. From 200 pilgrims in 1971 to the height of 1000 pilgrims in the 2005, this year 500 pilgrims are expected to travel.

CLARE

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

CORK

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

A Pro-Life Mass is held on the last Friday of every month at the Poor Clares Monastery, College Road, at 7.30pm.

DERRY

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

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

DONEGAL

New Holy Face of Jesus prayer meeting: The oratory St Mary's Buncrana, Tuesdays following Rosary after 10am Mass. Contact: 085 252 5612.

DUBLIN

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

Adoration Hour for Healing during Lent in St Laurence O'Toole Church, Seville Place, Dublin 1 at 8pm every Tuesday in Lent. Periods of silence, reflective music, individual prayers for healing all in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament www.northwallparish.ie.

The Encounter: Join other young adults in their 20s and 30s for a night of live acoustic music, reflective prayer in adoration, with guest speaker on life, faith and purpose. Followed by socialising, pizza and refreshments on Friday March 20 at 8pm. For more info email: st.pauls@dublindiocese.ie or Instagram @theyoungchurchdublin

The Dublin Diocese youth pilgrimage to Knock will take place on Saturday April 25. There will be a youth programme with activities, prayer, games and more in the Hub from 11am-2:15pm. For more information and to book your place email st.pauls@dublindiocese.ie.

GALWAY

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

KERRY

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

KILDARE

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

KILKENNY

Traditional Latin Mass every Sunday at 5pm in St Patrick's Church, Col-

► **In the current climate, readers are advised to check with local organisers to ensure events will take place.**

lege Road, Kilkenny (opposite St Kieran's College).

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the Church of the Assumption, Urlingford, every first and third Friday, from 2.30-5.30pm.

LOUTH

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

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

MAYO

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

MEATH

Enfield Prayer Group meets every Monday afternoon from 2.30-3.30pm in the Oratory, Enfield, for Adoration, Rosary, Chaplet and petitions. Also once per month a Lay Apostle meeting.

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

Trim parish – 'Life in the Spirit' seminars continue Thursdays, 7.30pm, in the parish centre.

OFFALY

Clonmacnois prayer vigil in Lent at Cluain Chiarain prayer centre on Friday March 21. Begins with Mass at 9pm. Adoration and prayers follow until 2.10am. Enquiries Dave: 085-7746763.

ROSCOMMON

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

Eucharistic Adoration takes place in Drumboylan Church on the first Friday of the month from 9am-11pm.

TIPPERARY

Three Hour Vigil organised by the Fatima Apostolate in honour of Our Lady of the Annunciation in the Pallottine Chapel in Thurles, March 24, the eve of the Annunciation, from 7.30-10.30pm. Eucharistic hour: Fr George Ranahan SCA, Marian hour and Mass: Fr John Regan SCA.

WESTMEATH

Holy Face of Jesus prayer meeting: La Verna retreat centre beside private hospital Ballinderry, Mullingar. Thursdays at 7.30pm. Contact: 085 2525 612

WICKLOW

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



World Report

IN BRIEF

Church dismay at 'neglected' Indian schools report

● Church leaders in India have voiced concerns over a recent survey on education which found almost half of government-run schools have no electricity or playgrounds. In its report, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Human Resource Development (HRD) says 40% of government schools lack infrastructure – classrooms, libraries and laboratories.

"The government has repeatedly neglected education for unknown reasons," said Fr Joseph Manipadam, secretary of the Indian Catholic Bishops' Office for Education.

"Every year the government earmarks a huge amount of money for education and most times the funds are misused or underused, but with the new findings we hope things will improve."

New diocese created in Nigeria for bishop

● A new diocese has been established in Nigeria with the first appointed bishop being named by Pope Francis last week.

The announcement of the Diocese of Ekwulobia in Amambra State was presented at St Patrick's Cathedral in Awka and will be led by Bishop Peter Ebere Okpaleke.

The Ekwulobia diocese, according to Bishop Paulinus Ezeokafor of Awka, was formed from part of the territory of Awka diocese and would cover Akpu, Ekwulobia and Achina regions.

"It is a great relief," he said. "Here in Awka Diocese we have the highest number of priests and Awka is too big for one person to handle."

Philippine bishop asks Catholics to postpone pilgrim trips

● A Philippines Church official has made a plea to Catholics to rethink going on overseas pilgrimages due to the spread of the coronavirus.

Bishop Ruperto Santos of Balanga suggested last week that all pilgrimages should be postponed until the virus has been contained.

The government, who

recently declared a state of public health emergency in the country, are also calling on its citizens to avoid trips to the Holy Land and other religious sites.

"What we have to do is pray more," said Santos, asking the faithful to "be more cautious with our personal hygiene and always follow the medical directives of our government officials."

Canonisation process for parents of Polish Pope begins

● The canonisation process for the parents of St Pope John Paul II has started following an announcement by the Archbishop of Krakow Marek Jędraszewski on March 11.

The faithful are being asked to forward any documents, letters or messages concerning Emilia Wojtyła née Kaczorowska and Karol Wojtyła to the investigation Metropolitan Curia by May 7.

Fr Andrzej Scąber, canonisation officer, said there are "many texts that confirm that they were exceptional people" and that Pope Francis described the Wojtyła family as "saints from the neighbourhood".

The Polish Bishops' Conference and the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in Rome gave their approval last October.

New German Church leader supports ordaining women

● The new leader of the Catholic Church in Germany has made clear his intention to back women deacons as part of the synodal procedure for Church reform.

Bishop Georg Bätzing, 58, said he was convinced that the most important challenge of his six-year term as president of the German Bishops' Conference would be women's equality in the Church.

"That is where the Church really has a backlog," said Bätzing of the issue last week.

He mentioned if, at the end of the two-year procedure, members decided to apply to Pope Francis for a resolution in favour of women deacons, that he was prepared to "convey that to Rome".

UN report shows an increase of persecution of Christians in Sri Lanka

A Christian group has hailed the significance of the findings of a United Nations' special rapporteur's report on violations of freedom of religion in Sri Lanka.

The report, which was recently presented to the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), details how Christians and other religious minorities have suffered from extreme violations of freedom of religion or belief since Sri Lanka's civil war ended in 2009.

The British Pakistani Christian Association (BPCA) says the findings tally with its own book, 'UK Home Office Denialism of the Persecution of Christians in Sri Lanka', due to be published in May.

Authored by Desmond Fernandes, the book provides extensive documentation drawn from a variety of sources to support the special rapporteur's contention that religious minorities face restrictions in the manifestation of their religion.

BPCA trustee Juliet Chowdhry said the association's book was commissioned immediately after members met with Sri Lankan



A Catholic church destroyed in Sri Lanka.

community leaders following the 2019 Easter bomb attacks.

"Assurances made for change made by the government of Sri Lanka never came to fruition and known perpetrators of war crimes have thus far escaped justice," she said.

"By withdrawing from the UNHRC co-sponsored resolution [to undertake accountability and reconciliation after the civil war], the Sri Lankan government has exhibited little or no passion to correct the wrongs of the past and it has been a devastating blow to campaigners.

Sustainable peace

"Moreover, societal divisions have persisted and persecution in the country is evidently increasing, leaving

minority people's hopes for sustainable peace at its lowest ebb. We continue to pray for Christians in Sri Lanka and within the whole of the South Asian subcontinent."

Ahmed Shaheed, the UN's special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, said in his report there has been no closure on several issues relating from the 26-year civil war.

"While there have been some elementary steps taken, lack of accountability and impunity remains a widespread concern, perpetuating a sense of insecurity among all religious communities," stated Shaheed in the report.

"The transitional period has been marked by simmering tensions between ethno-religious communities.

These challenges appear to be related primarily to the state-religion relationship which offers majoritarian privileges, undermining equal protection of the law for minorities.

"Moreover, there have been recurrent inter-communal violence and religious extremism in the past years before the Easter bombings in 2019."

Religious minorities face restrictions, their places of worship are desecrated and their religious activities such as worship are disrupted by locals and authorities.

"Aggressive campaigns by militant nationalist and religious groups against ethnic, religious and other minorities are particularly concerning," the report said.

Fernandes of the BPCA commented: "The minority communities are feeling extremely vulnerable with the constant threat of hate speech and hate crimes while they have no recourse for justice.

"Most of them have lost their faith in the state and law enforcement agencies after multiple traumas from the violence."

Venezuela bishops join pro-democracy marches against Maduro regime

Thousands of Venezuelans including clergy took to the streets in Caracas and other cities to demand democratic change last week, amid on-going economic, political and social crises in the country.

"Today [March 10] the Venezuelan people have returned to the streets demanding their rights and manifesting their desire for a change of direction in the economy and the political order to permit democracy," said Archbishop José Luis Azañe of Maracaibo.

"The deterioration in the quality of life, which has led us to get by as best we can, without electricity, without water, without just compensation for our work, without gasoline, without

peace, without family has created social instability and greater poverty."

The marches against the regime of President Nicholas Maduro were led by opposition leader Juan Guaidó, and organised to present to the National Assembly a call for free and fair presidential elections.

As Guaidó led the marchers toward the National Assembly building, they were blocked by security forces. Police used tear gas to turn them back before they reached the building.

Opposition party lawmakers held an impromptu, but legally valid, outdoor session of the legislative assembly in a nearby city square.

"Structural changes are needed

in politics, the economy and the leadership that go beyond ideological interests or to holding on to power at all costs," said Azañe.

"Hence the challenge to continue to build a citizenry that facilitates a more just and free society, which permits the promotion and protection of the dignity of the human person and encourages integral human development."

The president of the Venezuelan bishops' conference also expressed his dismay that an unnamed member of Maduro's government called for a "counter-march", and criticised those "who have had to bow to official purposes for different interests".

US Christian health groups ordered to cease plans

Two Christian groups in California have been ordered to shut down their cost-sharing health plans and cease conducting business by the State's Department of Insurance.

The State issued the Cease and Desist order against Alera Healthcare, Inc. and Trinity Healthshares, Inc., on the grounds that the two

faith-based cost-sharing health ministries are misleading consumers by operating outside of the laws regulating the insurance industry.

Healthcare Sharing Ministries (HCSMs) allow for members to pool their resources, so healthcare costs are paid by other members.

In addition to their lower costs, they are attractive to

their Christian members because they do not cover procedures such as abortion, contraceptives, transgender surgery and assisted suicide which they find morally objectionable.

However, the plans are not traditional insurance plans and do not come with a guarantee that healthcare costs will be covered.

"Consumers who bought these plans thinking they purchased comprehensive health insurance deserve the full protection of our laws," said Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara. "Consumers should know they may be able to get comprehensive coverage through Covered California that will protect their health care rights."



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Honouring Fr Grande



Catholic school students commemorate the 1977 murder of Jesuit Fr Rutilio Grande in El Paisnal, El Salvador. March 12 marked the 43rd anniversary of his death. Photo: CNS

Australia High Court defers Cardinal's final appeal

Cardinal George Pell has had his "leave to appeal" ruling deferred by the Australian High Court last week in what is a final attempt to have his conviction for sexual assault overturned.

Pell was sentenced last year to six years in prison for molesting two 13-year-old choirboys in Melbourne's St Patrick's Cathedral, while he was the city's archbishop in 1996.

Prosecutors took turns in presenting arguments to the High Court on March 12, which was the second and final day of the cardinal's bid for special leave to appeal.

The panel of seven judges then reserved its judgment at the close of the hearing, with no clear indication of when a decision will be released.

The priest's lawyers argue that an apparently truthful victim is not

enough to dispel reasonable doubt about guilt, and are appealing on two grounds.

The first is that the Court of Appeal majority made an error in requiring Pell to prove that the offending was "impossible" in order to raise reasonable doubt.

The second is that the majority made an error in concluding the guilty verdicts were not unreasonable.

Further questions

If leave is given, the judges may ask further questions of counsel then retire for a period, often several months, before delivering written reasons for their verdict.

They could send the case back to the Appeal Court of the Victoria Supreme Court, which decided in August to

uphold the original December 2018 guilty verdict.

The court will effectively hear Pell's appeal in its entirety before they can technically decide on whether they can entertain his appeal or not.

They could decide he does not have permission to appeal, or that he has permission to appeal but can be denied, or that he has permission to appeal and can be upheld.

The judges could also send Pell's appeal back to the Victoria Court of Appeals to be reheard by three other judges.

Pell is currently serving his sentence at the maximum-security Barwon Prison near Geelong, southwest of Melbourne.

Singapore restores public Masses and liturgical prayers

Singapore resumed public Masses and liturgical prayers at the weekend with government-issued directives and precautionary measures being taken.

The Archdiocese of Singapore, who had previously suspended all Church programs in February, announced their plan to resume religious services on March 14 and 15 last week.

The archdiocese said the

resumption of public gatherings for the city-state's 300,000 Catholics were "subject to guidelines" from the government's Ministry of Health.

Father Stephen Yim, who heads the archdiocesan task force on the coronavirus outbreak, said they would work hard to minimise risks at restored services.

"Our Catholic Medical Guild is reviewing develop-

ments and following the directives of the government," he said, advising any sick or elderly faithful to stick to watching online Masses, which are to continue until further notice.

Church leaders met with Health Minister Gan Kim Yong and Culture Minister Grace Fu, who encouraged the Church to resume activities with the necessary precautionary measures.

Precautionary measures taken at 32 parishes under the archdiocese include the installation of thermal scanners and thermometers for temperature screening.

They also planned to increase the frequency of cleaning in church buildings, reduce the sharing of common items and to continue awareness campaigns on personal hygiene.

Vatican roundup

Pope rules out East Timor visit, other trips doubtful

● The Vatican representative to East Timor says a visit by Pope Francis to the region has been cancelled due to the coronavirus, with other possible trips likely to be scrapped as well.

Msgr Marco Sprizzi, Chargé d'Affaires of the Apostolic Nunciature, told reporters in Dili that the Pope had previously indicated his willingness to visit there later this year. However, Msgr Sprizzi cited the Holy Father's concerns about large crowds attending, saying that "because he (Pope Francis) did not want his people affected by the coronavirus, he cancelled his visit".

The Vatican did not confirm that the Pontiff would visit Indonesia, East Timor and Papua New Guinea, but had previously been open to the possibility of traveling to South-East Asia at some stage this year.

The only foreign travel that the Vatican has confirmed for the rest of 2020 so far is a day-trip to Malta on May 31, which is also likely to be called off after Malta recently barred all air traffic to and from Italy.

The Vatican has adopted similar sweeping lockdown measures, which has been imposed throughout Italy in order to contain the spread of the virus.

Via Crucis meditations prepared by Padua prisoners

● Pope Francis has announced this year's meditations for the Way of the Cross at the Colosseum on Good Friday have been written by prisoners in the Italian justice system.

In a letter to the people of the Veneto region of Italy, the Pope has shared "a beautiful page of charity" for this year.

The Holy Father asked prisoners from the "Due Palazzi" penitentiary in Padua to compose the meditations for the Way of the Cross celebrated annually on Good Friday.

The Pope said he wanted the meditations

to be "a choral work", with contributions from all "the various faces of the world of prisons: victims, prisoners, guards, volunteers, families, judges, teachers, the Church, innocent people who at times are unjustly accused".

Prison, according to Pope Francis, is "a kaleidoscope of situations", where there is a risk of focusing on a single detail, to the detriment of the whole. He said: "The resurrection of a person is never the work of an individual, but of the community working together".

Vatican prays to Mary 'Health of the Sick' for protection

● The Church has entrusted to Jesus' mother Mary the suffering and anguish of millions of faithful affected by the coronavirus pandemic worldwide.

In a video message last week, Pope Francis prayed before a portrait of Our Lady of Divine Love, beseeching her to "deliver us from every danger".

"We entrust ourselves to you, Health of the Sick, who at the Cross were near to the pain of Jesus, keeping your faith firm," the Pope prayed on March 11.

"You, Salvation of the Roman people, know what we need, and we trust that you will provide for those needs so that, as at Cana of Galilee, joy and celebration may return after this moment of trial.

"Help us, Mother of Divine Love," he continued. "We seek refuge under your protection, O Holy Mother of God. Do not despise our pleas – we who are put to the test – and deliver us from every danger, O glorious and blessed Virgin."

The Pope's message was aired on TV2000, the TV channel of the Italian bishops' conference, and the Diocese of Rome's Facebook page. Cardinal Angelo De Donatis, papal vicar of Rome, celebrated Mass at Rome's Shrine of Divine Love after the Holy Father's broadcast.



Letter from America

Biden and Sanders eye up the Catholic vote



Christopher White

One of the more intriguing events that takes place during the US presidential election cycle every four years is the annual Al Smith Memorial Foundation dinner, which has traditionally brought together the leading two contenders with the Archbishop of New York sandwiched in between them, responsible for keeping the peace and attempting to bridge the divides in an increasingly toxic political process.

The white tie affair raises several million dollars for Catholic charitable programs throughout New York and it's a rare occasion in the heat of the political season for the two candidates to put politics aside for an evening, share a meal, and roast one another for a good cause.

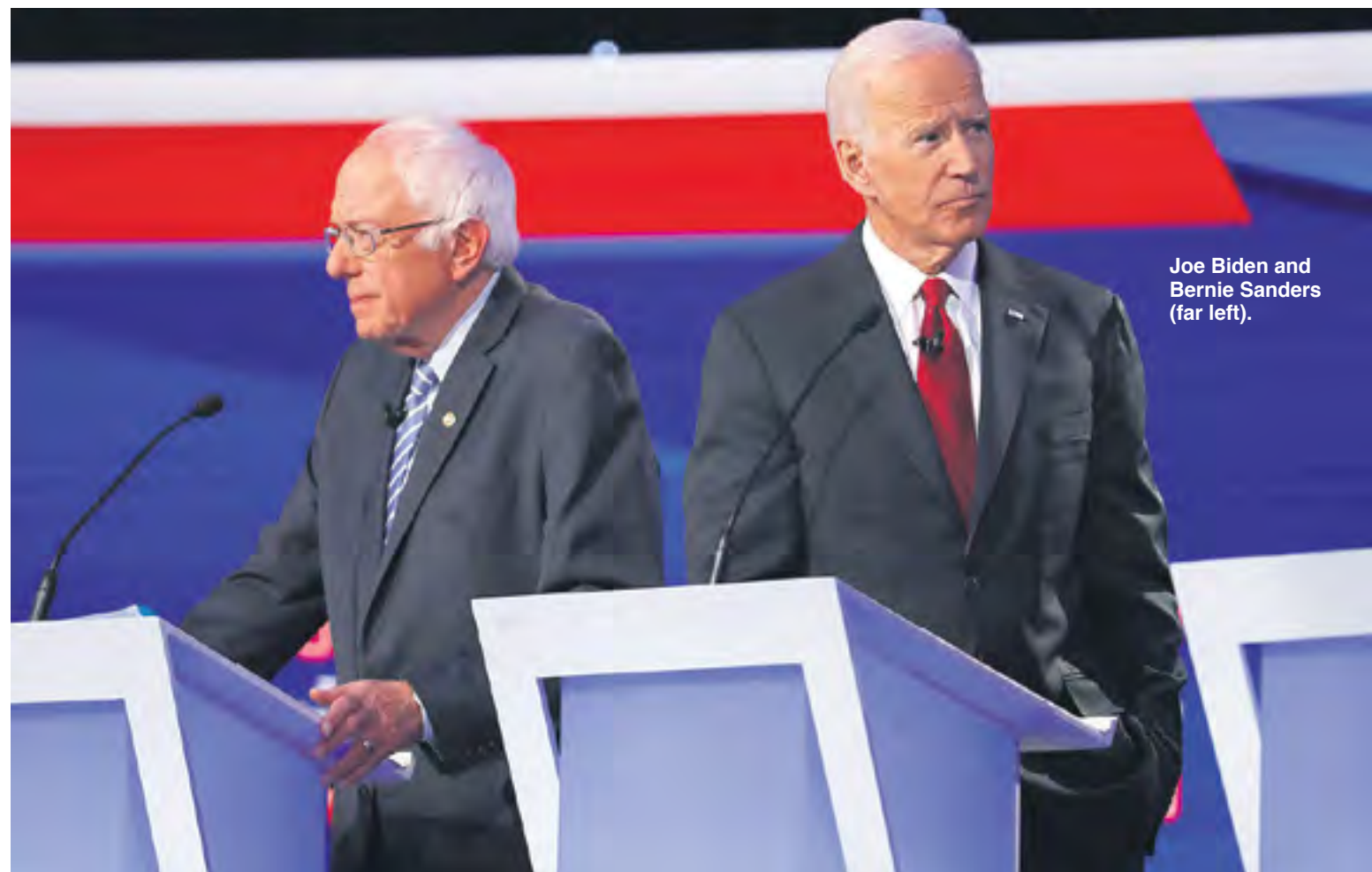
Smith, a four-time governor of New York, was the first Catholic to ever be nominated for the presidency in 1928 – no small feat at a time when anti-Catholic bigotry was part and parcel of American public life. This year's dinner, set to take place on October 1, is still over half a year away, but as the presidential campaign begins to take shape, it's instructive to consider how the candidates will intersect with the Catholic Church during what is most likely to be one of the more contentious elections in modern American history.

Popular

As the republican nominee, Catholics already have four years of experience dealing with President Donald Trump. As I wrote in last month's column, for single-issue pro-life voters, he remains widely popular and with the prospect that he'll be able to name two to three potential Supreme Court justices and shape the direction of the court for decades, he can easily count on their support.

The same goes with those primarily concerned with religious liberty. For Catholics wanting to ensure that the baker and the candlestick maker will have robust conscience rights protections, they're likely to ally with the president, if they have concerns over his own personal character flaws.

Such support, however, dwindles when it comes to Latino Catholics – nearly 20 million at the moment and climbing – who have taken serious issues with the president's hardline on immigration, and in particular, his efforts to end DACA, a program



Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders (far left).

which protects undocumented migrants who entered the country as minors.

In recent years, immigration has been the single issue, which has managed to unite the Catholic bishops in this country – and though their ability to witness in the public square has been severely damaged by the clergy abuse scandals, the fact that the US bishops are now led by a Mexican born immigrant adds further punctuation to the fact that the US hierarchy doesn't intend to back down on this issue.

On the other side of the aisle, the Democratic contest for the nomination has essentially dwindled into a two-way race between progressive candidate Senator Bernie Sanders and former Vice President Joe Biden as the establishment favourite.

Sanders, who is Jewish, has arguably quoted Pope Francis more than any other candidate in US political life.

In 2016, Sanders met with the Pope while participating in a Vatican conference and since that time, he's been quick to use his Twitter account to echo the Pope's messages regarding healthcare and climate change.

“Biden can almost certainly count on the full throated support of Nuns on the Bus – socially active religious sisters”

Despite the fact that his wife is Catholic, some Church leaders in his home state of Vermont have told me over the years that he's not been particularly enthusiastic about partnering with the Church on a local level. On the other hand, Catholic commentators, such as conservative *New York Times* columnist Ross Douthat, have argued that Sanders' message of

economic populism (which has certainly attracted the support of a number of US Catholics) would result in him steering clear of culture war issues in an attempt to push through the economic reforms that he's more passionate about, rather than say, focusing on abortion or transgender rights.

Personal loss

As for Biden, should he clinch the nomination, he'll be the only Catholic candidate in the race – something he's never been shy about discussing. Throughout his nearly 50 years in public life, Biden has frequently discussed his Catholic Faith – citing it was what has gotten him through tremendous personal loss or the motivation for his support for workers' rights and expanded access to healthcare.

If he is nominated, however, expect a potential repeat of the Communion debates that dominated the early 2000s as

Biden's support for abortion rights has already prompted one priest to deny him Communion while he was attending Mass while on the campaign trail earlier last year.

Despite such controversies, Biden can almost certainly count on the full throated support of Nuns on the Bus – socially active religious sisters who have toured the country by bus during recent election cycles and have made no efforts to hide their fondness of the former Catholic schoolboy turned politician.

Over the next eight months, there will be inevitable sharp divisions and disagreements between both the politician and potential voters and however the race shapes up and whatever its eventual outcome will be, most Catholics will be a bit like the archbishop during the Al Smith Dinner: often caught in between, expressing occasional agreement and laughter, but with a fair bit of cringing, too.

Christopher White is the national correspondent for Crux and The Tablet newspaper of the diocese of Brooklyn. Follow him on Twitter @CWWhite212.

“Some Church leaders in Sanders' home state of Vermont have told me over the years that he's not been particularly enthusiastic about partnering with the Church on a local level”



Five former Sodalitium members accuse founder Luis Fernando Figari of offenses of criminal conspiracy, kidnapping, and serious injuries, among others, they suffered during their time spent in the religious organisation, at the prosecutor's office in Lima.

Peru Cardinal Pedro Barreto Jimeno at a news conference for the Integral Ecology summit in Washington DC. Photo: CNS



Elise Ann Allen

Peru Cardinal seeks dissolution of religious group

Peruvian Cardinal Pedro Barreto believes the Sodalitium Christianae Vitae (SCV), a scandal-ridden religious lay group in the country, ought to be dissolved and says the Vatican feels the same way.

In a recent interview, Barreto said: "My personal opinion, which I believe is shared by some, is that I insist that this religious organisation should be dissolved and that those who are inside can be definitively helped to live with an authenticity of life."

"This is an issue which we completely share (opinions on) as the presidency of the bishops' conference," he said, and, indicating that they have been in contact with the Vatican about the dissolution of the SCV, added that they have found it difficult to make a move on the proposal.

"It's not that they don't want it, but they don't see a way to require it," he said, noting that there are clear rules in canon law for dealing with clergy who abused, but almost nothing for lay people or lay movements.

Controversial

One of the best-known and most controversial religious groups in Latin America, the SCV was established in Peru in the 1970s by Peruvian layman Luis Fernando Figari, who is accused of physical,

psychological and sexual abuse and was prohibited by the Vatican in 2017 from having further contact with members of the group.

Figari is currently living in Rome and has yet to return to the country's capital Lima to face numerous legal charges that have been raised against him, leaving many victims and Peruvian Catholics claiming that Figari is getting off easy, and leaving victims without justice.

Archbishop of Huancayo and vice president of the Peruvian bishops' conference, Barreto got his red hat from Pope Francis in March 2019 and was hand-picked by the Pope to help organise the October 2019 Synod of Bishops on the Amazon. He is widely viewed to have the Pontiff's ear.

In his interview, Barreto said that within the bishops' conference, "many of us are speaking about" the proposal to dissolve the SCV,

and "it's not that Pope Francis and the organisms of the Holy See are in disagreement".

“Eguren Anselmi... eventually dropped charges after facing blowback from the leadership of the national bishops' conference”

He noted that when a priest commits a crime, whether it be sexual abuse or financial crimes, he can be defrocked, whereas with the laity "we don't have this option. The only sanction is to excommunicate him."

Barreto stressed that there are many good people within the SCV, "and we cannot put everyone into the same box".

The problem, he said, is that Figari "is a perverted person, and a

person like this cannot convey the sanctity of life that Pope Francis himself, in an apostolic exhortation, has encouraged".

When it comes to an organisation like the SCV, which has had accusations of sexual abuse and financial impropriety since before the Vatican gave it official recognition as a "society of apostolic life", Barreto said his personal opinion is that "it must be dissolved," adding that as bishops, "we are on this path, and I know that the Holy See is on this path".

Barreto's interview on March 9 was made on the same day that Pope Francis met privately with the Archbishop of Lima, Carlos Castillo Mattasoglio, who is also president of the Peruvian bishops' conference, at the Vatican.

In a March 10 interview, Castillo said he agreed with Barreto's assessment of the SCV's situation. He called Barreto's opinion "very

opportune" and said that, given the prevalence of sexual abuse and financial obscurities, "it's necessary to dissolve it, but in a specific way", and that the decision of how will be taken by everyone.

"The situation is complicated," said Castillo, adding that "there must be a clear, profound and firm measure" taken.

In the past, Barreto has taken issue with the SCV for keeping its current name and has spoken out against one archbishop – who is a member of the SCV – for starting legal criminal proceedings against journalists reporting on the scandals.

Complaints

In June 2018, Archbishop Jose Antonion Eguren Anselmi of Piura filed two complaints of criminal defamation against journalists Paola Ugaz and Pedro Salinas, who are co-authors of the book *Half Monks, Half Soldiers*, detailing years of sexual, psychological and physical abuse inside the SCV.

Eguren Anselmi, who has continually insisted that his complaints against Salinas and Ugaz were related to other reporting and not the book they co-authored, eventually dropped charges after facing blowback from the leadership of the national bishops' conference, which at the time indicated that Pope Francis shared their concerns regarding his actions.

Since then, Ugaz has faced numerous legal threats and several other criminal defamation complaints from individuals and groups associated with the SCV – cases she said are meant to dissuade her from publishing a second book she is writing on financial impropriety within the SCV.

Elise Ann Allen is a Senior Correspondent for Cruxnow

“Archbishop Barreto noted that when a priest commits a crime, whether it be sexual abuse or financial crimes, he can be defrocked, whereas with the laity ‘we don’t have this option. The only sanction is to excommunicate him.’”

Letters

Post to: Letters to the Editor, The Irish Catholic,
23 Merrion Square North, Dublin 2,
or email: letters@irishcatholic.ie

Letter of the week

We must respond to virus epidemic responsibly as Christians

Dear Editor, I am pleased to see the result of your social media poll (IC 05/03/2020), that 85% of respondents are in favour of the Irish Church not cancelling Masses over coronavirus fears. The overall view, it was reported, is that Mass is needed now in Ireland more than ever.

This response echoes the statement by Bishop Pascal Roland of Belley-Ars in France, issued on March 4: "More than the epidemic of coronavirus, we should fear the epidemic of fear! For my part, I refuse to yield to the collective panic and to subject myself to the principle of precaution that seems to be moving the civil institutions. So, I don't intend to issue any specific instructions for my diocese. Are Christians going to

stop gathering together for prayer? Will they give up going to see and help their fellow man? Apart from measures of elementary prudence that everyone takes spontaneously to not contaminate others when you're sick, it's not advisable to add on more."

I think that we who are Christian should be very careful to respond to the coronavirus outbreak in an appropriate, balanced way, and not add to the media-generated hysteria.

We must not hesitate to serve and care for victims of the illness. In our prayers it is good to remember those dealing with the COVID-19 illness and the family members and healthcare workers who look after them.

We would also do well to remember the 25,000 people who die

every day as a result of hunger (the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations estimate); 13.5% of the world's population is battling hunger. And we must pray, too, for the unborn children whose lives are terminated by abortion.

Infectious diseases have always been a challenge to humanity, and Christians have always been bravely to the forefront in the service and care of victims.

I appeal to our priests to avoid prayers of the faithful which add to the impression that the virus is apocalyptic in its enormity. It isn't, and will cause a mild illness for most.

*Yours etc.,
Shane Hogan,
Bruff, Co. Limerick.*

The theological question most people avoid

Dear Editor, I think the most interesting theological question to ask someone is not whether or not they believe a God exists. But whether or not they want there to be a God.

This question gets to the root of the atheist's gripe with Christianity. This question gives us the deliberation between a meaningless chaos where

your actions have only their immediate consequences or an ordered universe where there is justice and there is hope.

Of course, the latter is the preferable scenario that a just person would idealise, but as we know there are people who would rather have the former. Their preference of a meaningless chaos shows their true

intentions in their rejection of God.

They know deep down – even if they won't admit it – that if there is a God to judge them, they won't fair well. The obligation to live a moral lifestyle is oppressive to them. They don't like 'the truth' of their actions; they prefer the concept of 'my truth'. They aren't on a truth quest, they are on a

happiness quest. To them these two concepts of 'truth' and 'happiness' aren't a perfectly overlapped Venn diagram. As G.K. Chesterton pointed out "the whole truth is generally the ally of virtue; a half-truth is always the ally of some vice".

*Yours etc.,
Ruairi O'Connell,
Cahirciveen, Co. Kerry*

Speculation on the next Dublin archbishop

Dear Editor, I very much enjoyed the article on the potential candidates for the next archbishop of Dublin (IC 27/02/2020). Although it could be described as idle speculation, the candidates seem to be well-chosen and seem like they have great credentials (although I would certainly be opposed to a few of them). Whatever happens, I hope and pray that our next archbishop has the courage and fortitude to make tough, innovative decisions in the coming years to set us on the right track. Archbishop Diarmuid Martin has done a lot for the archdiocese, particularly in how he handled the abuse crisis, for that I believe the faithful will be forever grateful. But it is time for new blood and it seems he also knows this to be true.

*Yours etc.,
Darren Casey,
Cherrywood, Dublin.*



Our Church must always protect the fifth commandment

Dear Editor, A quotation from the American letter (IC 5/03/2020) states 'The Church's job is not to discern which political, partisan or military force we should support in order for good to triumph'. However, surely it is the Church's job to point out that a Catholic in good conscience is never free to vote against the fifth commandment – you shall not kill.

Regarding abortion being one issue, it has to be said that it is the most important one as it denies the right to life, without which no other right may apply. It is so sad that so many

Church leaders seem reluctant to speak out loudly for the basic teaching of the Church. As happened in the abortion referendum, the majority of those who voted for abortion claimed to be Catholics despite their action being in total contradiction of a fundamental teaching of the Church.

Surely there should have been more comment on this from those who are charged with promoting the teaching of the Church. It is well to remember that Jesus said that those who do not point out an error are guilty as well. I hope and pray that President Trump

is re-elected as he is helping to stem the push for abortion. It is not necessary to agree with him on all matters but it would be wise to realise that the media in general have not a good record in accurately reporting on his activities, and the alternative Democratic candidate in the presidential election most certainly will be fully supportive of abortion, as such candidate will only be accepted if they do so.

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

facebook community

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

'Pray like St Patrick' says Primate as outbreak worsens

Pray for people to return to the true Faith not the *à la carte* faith they are used to getting by on. And if people are to observe the advice to curtail movement well then it will be necessary to stock up on food and medical essentials. This is an act of charity toward ones neighbour and the wider community. After all, a fridge or larder can only hold so much. – **Eilín Glynn**

Most public Masses in Ireland not to go ahead over coronavirus

I'm glad people were dispensed from the Sunday obligation (many never observe this, in any case, but the elderly, the most vulnerable, just might). This is sad, but I have read a good deal on Facebook today about entire dioceses cancelling public worship. – **Elizabeth Colette Melillo**

I would welcome suggestions as to how to keep attendances at funerals below 100. – **Peter O'Reilly**

In our church Mass will be said, as there is a webcam, but no congregation. The directives came from the government and HSE. – **Adeline Chapman**

Who attends Mass in the majority these days? It's the elderly. Who is most at risk from this virus? It's the elderly. Taking the obligation off them re Sunday worship alleviates any pressure that they might feel to attend. It's looking after the vulnerable. That is the whole mission of the Church. – **Donna Ní Laighléis**

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

Admiring Asia Bibi's response to persecution

Dear Editor, I have been following your coverage of the tragic story of the persecuted Catholic Asia Bibi who was released from almost a decade of incarceration on death row in Pakistan because of their vile blasphemy laws that target minority religions.

Now we see this brave woman saying she forgives those who treated her so badly and stole so much of her life (IC 05/03/2020). Asia is an example to all of us Christians that forgiveness is a powerful gift, not just for those being forgiven but also the person who has the courage to forgive.

May her life in Canada, where she and her family had to flee due to death threats in Pakistan, be peaceful and prosperous – she deserves so much for her powerful witness.

It also must be said that those fighting against these inhumane blasphemy laws, which carries the death sentence in Pakistan, should be supported.

*Yours etc.,
Deirdre O'Malley,
Tallaght, Co. Dublin.*

Letters to the Editor

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

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

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

📷 Around the world



▲ **ARGENTINA:** A nun prays during a pro-life rally outside the Basilica of Our Lady of Lujan in Buenos Aires. The Argentine bishops conference recently expressed opposition to government plans to decriminalise abortion.

◀ **TOGO:** People check for their names at a polling station during the presidential election in Lome. President Faure Gnassingbe was re-elected with 70% of the vote.



SRI LANKA: Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith of Colombo looks at the explosion site following a suicide bomb attack on a church. Ranjith says he will launch street protests if the government does not find the culprits. Photos: CNS



MEXICO: Joanely Martinez displays a sign during a women's march in Mexico City last week. Her sign claims the Mexican government 'does nothing' to protect women against violence and murder.



LEBANON: Employees from a disinfection company sanitise a bench as a precaution against the coronavirus in Beirut. The number of cases is steadily increasing in the country.



ITALY: A man wearing a protective mask walks by an empty St Peter's Square. The Vatican has closed the Square and Basilica to tourists until April 3 to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.



More tortuous than all else is the human heart, beyond remedy; who can understand it. The Prophet Jeremiah wrote those words more than 2,500 years ago and anyone who struggles with the complexities of love and human relationships will soon enough know of what he speaks.

Who indeed can understand the human heart, given some of the curious and cruel ways we sometimes have of expressing love.

For instance, Nadia Bolz-Weber shares something we all have a propensity for: "Inevitably, when I can't harm the people who harmed me, I just end up harming the people who love me." How true. When we've been hurt most every instinct in us screams for retaliation; but, most times, it's not possible, nor safe, to retaliate against the persons who hurt us.

Or, perhaps we aren't even clear as to who hurt us.

So, needing to lash out at someone, we lash out where it's safe to do so, namely, at those whom we trust will absorb it, at those with whom we feel secure enough to do this. We lash out at them because we know they won't retaliate. Simply put, sometimes we need to be really angry at someone and since we are unable to vent that anger on the person or persons responsible for it we vent on someone whom we unconsciously trust will safely accept it.

If you're a loving parent, a faithful spouse, a trusted friend, a true counsellor, a good minister or even just someone who with

An alternate expression of love and trust



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

integrity officially represents a moral agency or a Church, it can be good to know this. Otherwise it's too easy to misread some of the anger and recrimination that will come your way and take it too-personally and not for what it really is.

When someone whom you've loved is angry at you it's hard to recognise and accept that you're probably the object of that anger even though you aren't the cause of it, but rather are the one safe place

where this person can lash out without fear of retaliation and have his or her bitterness absorbed.

If you don't grasp the peculiar dynamics of love that are at play here you will inevitably take this too-personally, be torn up inside, lament its injustice and struggle to carry it with the love that's unconsciously being asked for.

But this can be very hard to accept, even when we understand why it's happening. This kind of love demands an almost inhuman

“As Christians we have a special admiration for Jesus’ mother as we imagine what she must have felt as she stood beneath the cross, watching her son, goodness and innocence itself, suffer a brutal, violent injustice”

strength.

For example, as Christians we have a special admiration for Jesus’ mother as we imagine what she must have felt as she stood beneath the cross, watching her son, goodness and innocence itself, suffer a brutal, violent injustice. Not to lessen in any way the pain that she would have been feeling then, standing helplessly as she did in that awful injustice, she did have the consolation of knowing that her son loved her deeply.

“When we’re hurt and unable to direct our anger and accusations against those who hurt us...we often end up harming the people who love us most”

Her pain would have been excruciating, as would be the pain of any mother in that situation, but her pain had a certain (dare I use the phrase) ‘cleanliness’ about it. She was free to fully and openly empathise with her son, knowing that his love was giving her permission to feel what she felt.

But many is the loving mother, loving father, a faithful spouse or trusted friend whose heart is breaking at the anger and accusation being directed at them by someone they've loved and to whom they've been faithful. How can they not feel accused, guilty, and responsible for the bitter crucifixion they're

experiencing? Their pain will not feel 'clean'.

In effect, what they're feeling is more what Jesus felt as he was being crucified rather than what his mother felt as she witnessed it. They're experiencing what St Paul refers to in his Second Letter to the Corinthians when he writes that, though innocent himself, Jesus *became* sin. That single expression, unless properly read, can be one of the most horrifying lines in scripture. Yet, understood within the dynamics of love, it powerfully highlights what love really means beyond fairytales. Real love is the capacity to absorb injustice with understanding, empathy and with only the other's good in mind.

Of course, sometimes the anger directed at us from persons we love is justified and speaks of our betrayal, our sin and our breaking of trust.

Sometimes the angry accusations directed at us validly accuse us of our own sin. In that case, what we're asked to absorb has a very different meaning. As well, we need to recognise that we also do this to others. When we're hurt and unable to direct our anger and accusations against those who hurt us, then, as Nadia Bolz-Weber so honestly shares, we often end up harming the people who love us most.

Love has many modalities, some warm, kind and affectionate, some accusatory, bitter and angry. Yes, sometimes we have strange, anomalous ways of expressing our love and trust.

Who can understand our tortuous hearts!

Family & Lifestyle

The Irish Catholic, March 19, 2020

Personal Profile

It is in giving that we receive

Page 34



Stressed out



“I am so stressed.” A statement you might flippantly repeat to yourself on the daily or consistently remind friends and family of. But what does it really mean to be stressed, and what kind of effect can it have on a person?

Stress is our natural reaction to things we perceive as a threat. It was once a good thing, as when we were out in the wild and we felt threatened, that rush of adrenaline would give us a surge of energy required to react to the situation and keep ourselves safe. The ‘fight or flight’ reaction.

Oftentimes when people are using the word stress they’re actually describing distress, this is when your inbuilt resources and energy are overextended.



Róise McGagh looks at what stress really is and the impact it can have on your body and mind.

We are built to be able to deal with some amount of stress.

Most people can deal with one stress at a time. However, if we get a number of stresses in our lives happening at once or we don’t feel as able to cope with a certain area of our lives, it can start to have a negative impact. Some people can be really good at dealing with financial problems but a relationship issue could be something they don’t feel as confident about.

This could leave you feeling stuck or fretful and rather than address the stress a common reaction can be avoidance.

Stress is meant to make you feel energised and alert, however this isn’t always a positive thing – it makes your heart beat fast, your breath quicken or your stomach churn.

There are also mental side effects, one is that you start to fast process everything that’s happening around you.

Martin Rogan, CEO of Mental Health Ireland says, “You’re inclined to interpret things as being dangerous, sometimes magnifying small threats as being life threatening. We’re inclined to catastrophise, sometimes those things lead to what we call avoidance mode, like an ostrich and it’s probably the most dangerous you can do.

“We encourage people to avoid avoidance so whatever you’re afraid of, think it through, talk to somebody about it. Whatever you’re afraid of if you can, without doing anything ridiculous, try and face it, expose yourself to the scary situation but with supports around you and in your own time.”

In less extreme situations people can simply become totally preoccupied with being stressed.

Fixating on the thing that is causing stress can cause people to ruminate and begin to lose interest in the things they once found enjoyable. “It becomes a bit isolating,” says Martin.

Some people may not realise how often their body is under too much stress; if they have become desensitised to the issue or have been coping with distractions like technology or substances. In Ireland people often use alcohol to cope, which is just replacing stress with a depressant.

If stress is left unchecked, eventually the body will start to show physical symptoms. It affects every person differently, but people can experience everything from cardiac problems, to nausea, cramps,

» Continued on Page 33

Family News



AND EVENTS

EASTER CAMPS

Looking to occupy kids over the two-week break for Easter? There are plenty of camps all over the country to choose from, some are one week long and others run for two. The break can be a great opportunity for kids to try out something new or spend time at a hobby. There's a camp to suit pretty much anyone. If you have someone interested in art the Royal Hibernian Academy (RHA) gallery in Dublin is hosting an art camp. All the materials are supplied, and kids can explore clay, plaster, collage, costume, painting, drawing, sculpture, nature and more. Kids Cook Cookery School in Meath will be running Kids Cookery Easter Camps for kids aged 5 to 13 years. Trinity Walton Club have an Easter S.T.E.M. camp for secondary school students who haven't done their junior cert. Canoeing Ireland Training Centre will run Kayaking Camps for children between 10 and 16 over the Easter holidays.

BED HEAD BAND

It's not uncommon to find it difficult to sleep, many people find it difficult to switch off after a stressful day or after looking at a computer for over eight hours.

AcousticSheep SleepPhones is a headband with ultra-thin, flat speakers that are comfortable enough to wear while lying down or sleeping on your side. Instead of wearing bulky headphones, getting tangled in earbuds or losing an Air pod, this can be used to listen to your sounds of choice: white noise, ocean sounds or maybe a podcast.

They could be really useful for bedtime as well as for travelling. Listening to sounds as you sleep. Listening to something while you sleep might even help if you have a bed partner or roommate who snores loudly or gets up a lot.

CRY IT OUT

Researchers have found that leaving infants to cry has no adverse effects on attachment to their mother and behavioural development but could help them develop self-control.

The debate isn't totally over though as Professor Dieter Wolke, a co-author of the study from the University of Warwick, said the result shows that parents shouldn't be too worried about what approach they take: "We may have made a mountain out of a molehill," he said.

The study followed 178 babies in the UK from birth to 18 months and the team explored how sensitive the mother was towards their infant at three and 18 months, by videoing their interactions. *The Guardian* reported that several experts don't agree that leaving babies to cry may help develop self-control. The researchers state: "We neither recommend leaving infant to cry out nor responding immediately". Prof. Dieter said their findings suggested parents know intuitively the best response for their child and this adapts over time.

Beauty in the eye of the beholder



Everyday philosophy Ben Conroy

I've been thinking a lot about art lately. I've been catching up on the excellent Risking Enchantment podcast, which discusses beauty in art and culture and its place in the Catholic faith. And I recently had the privilege of hearing the art historian Elizabeth Lev talk about Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel paintings. I don't know much about visual art, but Lev is a master speaker and helped even a novice like me to appreciate the aesthetic and theological depth of the work.

The whole thing had me thinking about a question in the philosophy of art. Aesthetics, the philosophy of beauty and art, has never really been my area, and so there are a lot of questions about it that I am going to steer clear of. I know nothing about whether beauty is a true transcendental in Thomistic philosophy, or even what beauty in art is in its essence. But I've long been interested in a narrower question: whether and to what extent beauty is objective or subjective.

“Nor does it seem wrong to fail to be enthusiastic about any given piece of art.”

The subjective side of the argument is the dominant one in the popular mind, and it has plenty of folk wisdom behind it. "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder", "De gustibus non est disputandum", etc.. There's a lot of intuitive strength to the position. There seems to be something doubtful about saying that a person is wrong to appreciate a particular piece

of art if there's nothing morally offensive about it. Nor does it seem wrong to fail to be enthusiastic about any given piece of art.

It's easy to make the 'beauty is objective' position look absurd. Does that mean that beauty is measurable, quantifiable, scientific? Can we count the beauty units? Can we, perhaps, place every work of art on some kind of ranked list? Is Beethoven's fifth symphony better than Jane Eyre? Are Monet's Water Lilies better than Breaking Bad? Objectivity about aesthetics can't be worth much if it turns discourse about art into the adult equivalent of playground discussions about which Pokémon would win in a fight. (Not, to be clear, that there's anything wrong with those.) Nor is there anything attractive about an art snob, sneering at the masses because they enjoyed the latest *Fast and Furious* movie.

All that said, I think objectivity about art and beauty is the correct position. But in order to think about things in the right way, it's worth drawing a bit of a distinction between what you like and what is good.

A useful place to start is with the 'Stupidity of Saying Shakespeare Sucks' principle. The principle is pretty self-explanatory: you can't say that William Shakespeare sucks without being silly. On the

other hand, you can say that you don't like Shakespeare. You can say that his particular kind of art isn't the one that speaks to you most, or even that it doesn't appeal to you at all. But you can't say "Shakespeare is a bad artist". The same goes for Mozart, or indeed Michelangelo.



On the other hand, to say that Dan Brown, renowned author of *The Da Vinci Code*, is a bad artist is quite OK. It's not that his books are necessarily bad (although they mostly are): it's that the possibility is legitimately up for discussion. You can even believe that Dan Brown's books aren't very good and still enjoy reading them.

If we don't acknowledge that William Shakespeare is really a better writer than Dan Brown, we're failing to notice

something about the world. Worse, we're making the world a flatter, less interesting place for ourselves. Much of the best art in the world, the art that will touch us the most, requires a certain amount of effort and thought to appreciate. If we convince ourselves that it's all subjective anyway, we might stop ourselves from putting in the effort to seek out the truly great stuff.

“You can even believe that Dan Brown's books aren't very good and still enjoy reading them”

None of this means we have to go back to a strict ranking scale (both Shakespeare and Tolkien are infinitely more rewarding than Brown, but it doesn't really matter which of those two is the greatest).

Nor does it mean that you should only seek out 'worthy' art and ignore your own preferences. Forcing yourself to spend lots of time engaging with art that you don't enjoy at all is usually a bad idea: by grimly slogging through a book that you hate reading because you know it's objectively good, you're likely to ruin the book for yourself forever. But if we challenge ourselves a little bit at a time, gradually pushing ourselves slightly out of our artistic comfort zone, we could ultimately come back to that book and find that its treasures are now accessible. Recognising that there is an objective element to beauty makes us better seekers after that kind of treasure.

» Continued from Page 31



gastro troubles, breathing difficulties, panic attacks or even physical skin rashes or hair loss.

The fight or flight reaction drains resources from other systems to large muscle groups so you can react. This can leave your immune system lowered or the digestive system slowed.

Stress often affects peoples sleep in that they find it difficult to get to sleep initially. Not being able to get up or waking up very early is more synonymous with depression.

“We have nothing to fear itself’ but sometimes these people forget what the initial thing they were concerned about was they’re so afraid of being afraid,” says Martin.

Feeling stressed or overwhelmed over a long period of time can burn up a lot of psychical energy and can have a wearing effect. It can have a really tiring effect on the body which can dissuade people from doing exercise and some might stop eating well. “Left unchecked a person can become very anxious or will actually become depressed if you burn up enormous amounts of psychological energy,” says Martin.

The other way it can be expressed is a person can find that they become short tempered, irritable and distracted. You could find yourself chewing the head off of a colleague because they did something small; but for you it was the straw that broke the camel’s back.

Due to some, or a large amount of your headspace being taken up by a stressor, people can experience being a bit befuddled, forgetting things, having accidents, getting distracted.

Stress is a natural alarm system, and Martin explains that we can’t shut it out or we will make the problem worse; he uses the metaphor of using pain relief for a toothache, continuously taking ibuprofen won’t get rid of an abscess, it has to be seen to.

Karen Belshaw from Stress Management Ireland says, “We’re time poor. We’re material rich.”

Our modern world has become increasingly digitalised and so we have begun to move away from our natural habitat. People who live within 600 metres of a green space or live below the 6th floor are less likely to have mental health problems.

“We have lost the old-fashioned community. When you think of from the community psychology point of view, we have lost the doing something in the village to help your community by volunteering, even taking it back to the idea of the Sunday meeting at church or mass or whatever your domination, it’s that kind of gathering where you check in with each other.

“We’re living in a world of social platforms where we don’t have that same connection,” says Karen.

Social interaction and feeling part of a community are important for good mental health. Martin’s main suggestion for dealing with stress is to talk to someone who makes you feel like yourself and to lay out the issues you’re having.

“It’s easier said than done but it can be hugely beneficial. If the person feels that they don’t have a



friend or a family member they can do this with then talk to your local GP where there’s any number of health helplines like Samaritans,” he says, explaining how having to lay out your problems in a logical manner to explain to someone else can be very clarifying for people. This can also be done through writing a journal.

Karen recommends doing one small thing every day to make yourself feel good, and even that can make a big difference to any stressful burden. Taking a minute to breathe, deeply, or going for a walk at lunch or popping into your local chapel to say a prayer – whatever you feel helps you – can provide a nice moment of reflection that can be calming.

Depression and Anxiety Disorders are the most frequently seen mental health issues in the country and these issues account for about a third of Ireland’s GP visits.

In 2002 Professor Corey Keyes from Emory University conducted research in a number of diverse cultures, including Ireland which found that approximately 17.2% of a population enjoy good mental health, 56.6% reported moderate mental health, a further 14.1% have a mental health diagnosis. The remaining 12.1% are described as languishing, not enjoying life.

This study was repeated with the same people a number of years later and the numbers of those with good mental health, moderate, ill and languishing did not change. However, the members had changed.

Martin says, “So just because you’re enjoying good mental health today doesn’t mean that you’re getting it light and you’ll never have a problem, it just means that it’s not your turn today and equally because you have a mental illness does not mean that you’re stuck.”

Faith — IN THE — family

Bairbre Cahill



The past few weeks have got me thinking about Lent as a spiral journey. I’ve written before about how we learn in a spiral rather than a straight line, how we come back to things to understand them more deeply, to gain a new perspective on them or simply to be reminded of what is important.

Prayer is not always easy. Sometimes it feels more like a chore. St Ignatius advised that when prayer is dry we should pray more not less – which is a great idea but isn’t always easy. I generally pray with scripture, usually the gospel of the day but for a good while I had been getting little pleasure or inspiration from it. It felt like I was doing little more than keeping the engine ticking over.

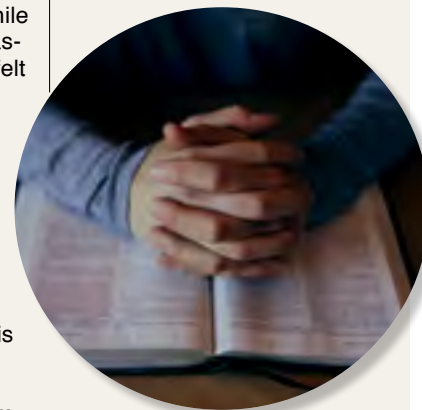
One day the gospel was the woman with the haemorrhage (Mark 5:25-34). Now I’ve often prayed with that piece of scripture before and found it rich in meaning and inspiration. This time however the image in my mind was of being stuck in a crowd, at a distance from Jesus and, being rather short, finding it impossible to work my way through the crowd to him – frustrating.

“Prayer is not always easy. Sometimes it feels more like a chore.”

Ignatius advises us to go back again to pray with scripture which has provided us with some consolation, insight or challenge. Ignatius understood the spiral. I found myself going back to the image of this woman with the haemorrhage, not because I wanted to but because the image stayed with me. Some days it was the image of just about holding on to the end of a tassel on Jesus’ cloak. Other days it was of holding a thread in my hand – a reminder that there had been times when holding on to his cloak had come easily to me.

Ash Wednesday coincided with us getting some work done at home. The place was upside down and I found myself sitting down to pray on a couch we had moved into the kitchen. It is strange how things come together. Being Lent I had decided

to go off Facebook and the news updates on my phone so that morning I had none of that social media noise buzzing in my brain when I sat down. Praying in the kitchen reminded me, I realised later, of being in Loyola Hall, the Jesuit retreat centre in Liverpool. I had spent a lot of time on retreats there often staying in a little cottage with a couch in the kitchen. It was a place where I had experienced prayer and the presence of God in a very powerful way. Somehow, I reconnected to that in my own kitchen – there’s that spiral again.



At Mass later in the Cathedral, out of nowhere, I had an image of not just being close enough to hold on to Jesus’ cloak but of being wrapped up entirely in it, his arm around me, pulling me close, reminding me of his presence. What had shifted me through the crowd, moving me from frustrating distance to wonderful closeness? That gospel story kept drawing me back in, despite my frustration with it. Physically being in a space which reminded me of times when prayer was rich and meaningful sparked something within me. Stepping out of the buzz of social media created space in my mind and my body. I know that Facebook and a constant diet of news messes with my equilibrium. I know that and yet I seem to need to learn it again at regular intervals.

So, you can see why that image of Lent as a spiral journey makes sense to me. It gives us space to remember, to understand, to reconnect. For me it’s a couch in a kitchen and a woman trying to catch a hold of Jesus’ cloak but what is it for you? What is the place, the Gospel, the image, you need to rediscover this Lent?

It is only in giving that we receive

Personal Profile



Róise McGagh

“There is great joy and fulfilment in being interested in and touching the lives of other people in some small way, however small. ‘It is in giving that we receive,’” says Anita McTernan, a volunteer nurse in a Sisters of Mercy, Mission Hospital in Mutomo, Kenya.

Anita is not a Sister of Mercy but a committed Mercy Associate. She is a lay volunteer who “decided to fulfil a dream that I had since I was a student nurse in London”. Mercy Associates follow the Ethos of the Mercy Sisters.

Anita is originally from Dromahair in Co. Leitrim and has been working in Kenya for over 20 years; she is due to retire this year at the age of 70. “When I arrived in 1999 I honestly thought I have come full circle to my second childhood. No electricity, no telephone, no water and no tarmac roads. That’s what I experienced as I grew up and that is what I found here.”

In 1999 the community, like the rest of sub-Saharan Africa was badly affected by HIV and AIDS. The majority of the hospital beds were occupied by HIV infected patients and about 500 people died of AIDS every day according to estimates by UNAIDS, the United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS. “We decided that we needed to do something on prevention and so with funding from APSO (Agency for Personal Service Overseas) we set up a Youth Group of 120 members

and we trained them on HIV Prevention using ‘Behaviour Change Process’.

“We went to all the Secondary and Primary Schools in the sub-county with the youth educating youth principle for the next 6 years,” says Anita about their hugely successful campaign. She is now the co-ordinator of the HIV Programme at Our Lady of Lourdes, Mutmo Hospital and its 7 outreach satellite clinics. “Our HIV program has a total of 225 children who are living with HIV and most are orphans.” She also co-ordinates a Healthy Hearts Programme.

Malnutrition is also responsible for many deaths in this community still, particularly in children.

“The most awful experience I had had here is watching a child die of hunger. She was dying on admission and it was too late for us to save her. She kept saying as she was dying ‘give me bread, give me

bread’ despite the fact that we were giving her the bread.”

Anita says she has also been able to help many people in this position. She said one of her best experiences was saving a malnourished child that she spotted in a community as she was distributing food. “She was gasping in her mother’s arms, 15 months old and weighing only 3 kgs. I provided transport for her to hospital immediately and she was found to have TB among other problems including severe malnutrition. The doctor came and told me ‘we will not be able to save this one Anita’.

“But we did and today she is almost through primary school. I met her mother recently when she was telling someone that I had saved Pauline’s life. It was good to hear that positive comment.”

Anita said she has never regretted her decision and has been

greatly encouraged and impressed by the work that had been done by the Sisters of Mercy in the previous 30 years “They built a hospital and provided primary health care in the community - they founded a primary school and a secondary school for girls not to mention the part they played in evangelisation in this part of Kitui.”

Last year 700 baptisms took place in the mission and 170 young people were confirmed. The community have Church weddings where 12 to 15 couples might get married at the same time. They also have an active Pontifical Missionary Children programme.

“My experience in Kenya has been very positive and very fulfilling throughout, despite living in a hardship area which was very remote and impoverished for the first 10 years,” she says.

This hospital is the only one in the area caters for a region with

180,000 people in the diocese of Kitui about 250 Km from Nairobi the capital of Kenya. The hospital has a staff of 107 people, all Kenyans except for Anita.

Due to a chronic shortage of water it is stored in 65 tanks when it becomes available and on occasions has to be trucked in from elsewhere in Kenya. Anita’s personal allowance is one bucket a day.

“**Malnutrition also responsible for many deaths in this community still, particularly in children.**”

Since Anita arrived in Kenya life expectancy of AIDS victims has been improved due to new drugs and the risk of babies being born with AIDS has been minimised. Due to the work being done in the local area AIDS only affects 2.1% of people compared to 6.2% overall for Kenya. Those suffering from AIDS have a high risk of dying from TB.

African goats cost around €25 to €30 euro and are supplied to the carers of AIDS families. The family uses the milk and the only condition of supply is that the first kid born is supplied to another AIDS family.

In the Social Centre, in the Mission grounds local girls learn hairdressing and needlework thereby empowering them to be a source of income for their families.

“While our core focus is health care delivery, I also coordinate an education programme to give needy youth a chance to go to school, principally secondary school,” says Anita. For the past 8 years, with the help of friends she has supported 40 students per year through secondary school. “These are mainly girls who would never have had a chance to go to school and would have ended up in early marriages as second wives. Education will minimise that risk for them.”



Wendy Grace

A better way to start your day

With the pressure of everyday life, I find myself constantly starting my mornings on the wrong side of the bed. How can I start my mornings better?

It is one of the modern day problems that we are all so ‘busy’ all the time. For most people this starts in the morning, usually with your head spinning because you look at your phone and your work day begins far too soon. This then has a ripple effect on the rest of the day. The more you rush, the more you stress and cross words are probably exchanged before you are even out of your pyjamas.

A good morning needs to start with a good night’s sleep. Are you going to bed early enough? Have you cut out electronic devices for at least an hour before bed? Have you prepared as much as you can for the next morning?

The next thing to do is look at how you start your day. Don’t start it by looking at your phone. Why not start it with a short simple prayer, at the moment I am enjoying listening to the Dynamic Catholic 3-minute Lenten reflections. The next stress eliminator is for

you to have yourself ready before your children. This probably means getting up half an hour early, but it is worth it. Have yourself washed dressed and ready to go, prepare all you need for school and breakfasts the night before, and always give yourself 15 minutes of breathing room to allow for meltdowns, spillages and lost keys!

Saint Benedict talked about how daily routines were really important in terms of how your day plays out, a bad routine can lead to impatience, inefficiency and ultimately everyone being unnecessarily frazzled. It’s about making priorities, planning your day and week to figure out what are the things that are important, and what are the things that can wait? If you’re starting your day with things that make you feel impatient or stressed, then these are things that you need to look at cutting out or moving to another time in the day. For many families Monday’s are the techiest, so

give yourself and your children even more time on a Monday morning to be ready for the week ahead.

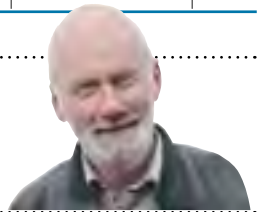
Reflect on how you spend your time in the morning, do you take 20 minutes trying to decide what the children and you should wear? Decide on everyone’s clothes the night before. Of course, you starting your day wrong doesn’t just impact you, children pick up on stress and you probably find there are more arguments about getting ready and out the door. It’s also really important that your children have a clear routine of who does what in the morning. Make sure older children have specific jobs, remember whatever they are capable of doing for themselves they should be doing for themselves.

When leaving the house try giving each other family blessing for the day, even if things have not gone according to plan at least you can reset as you pray for a happy healthy day for everybody.



TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



Odd times as celebration stays behind a mask

Well, it was a strange St Patrick's Day for sure – a more sombre and sober one than we're used to. Maybe, despite Mass cancellations, it was a more spiritual celebration than usual. At least that option was certainly on offer. The media, social and otherwise, played their part by broadcasting streamed religious services across a range of platforms.

One of the religious programmes that caught my attention was a new film, **I Am Patrick**, that landed on Netflix last Thursday. Regular readers will know I'm not a fan of docudrama (two stools and all that) and this film didn't cure me of that prejudice. I was glad that the film makers (Christian Broadcasting Network) relied almost exclusively on St Patrick's own writings, the *Confessio* and the *Epistola*, using the translations of Fr Pádraig McCarthy and Thomas O'Loughlin, so there were no snakes scurrying away. The drama sequences were naturalistic for the most part and the visions the saint spoke of were there but rather low key.

Three actors played Patrick at different stages in his life – I was particular impressed by Jonathan Rhys-Davies (Gimli in *Lord of the Rings*) as the older Patrick. He added a certain gravity to the part, a certain modesty and dignified

Jonathan Rhy-Davies stars in *I Am Patrick* (Netflix).



tiredness as he settled down to write his *Confessio*, partly to defend himself and his ministry against accusations from Church authorities in Britain.

I'd like to have seen more focus on this role as the rest of the dramatisation was somewhat stilted. The cultural setting was well done and the cinematography succeeded in capturing the rugged Irish landscape – much of it from Clare and Mayo and hardly changed since the saint walked those paths.

I found the documentary sections more engaging, including interviews with Dr Tim Campbell from the St Patrick Centre in Co. Down, Dr Elva Johnston and Dr Charles Doherty from UCD, biographer Thomas O'Loughlin

(*Discovering St Patrick*) and Fr Billy Swan who concentrated on the saint's close relationship with God following the line of his book *The Experience of God in the Writings of St Patrick*.

Of course what made it an odd feast day this year was the ongoing coronavirus crisis which dominated news and current affairs programmes during the week. I've rarely seen a story where situations changed so quickly.

Last Thursday morning soon after 10am, Archbishop Diarmuid Martin was interviewed on **Today With Seán O'Rourke** (RTÉ Radio 1) explaining the Catholic Bishops' latest guidelines on dealing with the coronavirus – modest enough proposals about sensible practices at

funerals, Baptism and Mass. By 11.30am the axe had fallen on schools, colleges and gatherings of over 100 people indoors, so the bishops had to revise their guidelines when the virtual ink was barely dry on the first lot.

Challenges

It has been useful to keep in touch with media coverage in the UK as well, especially as authorities there were taking a somewhat different approach. Last Saturday morning on the **Today** programme (BBC Radio 4) there was a sympathetic interview with Cardinal Vincent Nichols who spoke of the challenges facing priests in the current outbreak, especially as their duties included tending to the sick and dying.

PICK OF THE WEEK

MASS

RTÉ1, RTÉ Radio 1 Extra/LW252, Sunday, March 22, 11am

Mass on the fourth Sunday of Lent, Mothers Day, celebrating the work of Trócaire, with a congregation and choir from the Athlone Franciscan Friary. The celebrant is Fr Gabriel Kinahan.

IN CONCERT: FAURE REQUIEM – PAAVO JARVI AND L'ORCHESTRE

EWTN, Monday, March 24, 6am

The Orchestra of Paris performs Gabriel Faure's *Requiem*.

PILGRIMAGE: THE ROAD TO ISTANBUL

BBC2, Friday, March 27, 9pm

Seven celebrities of differing faiths and beliefs tackle the 2,200km Sultans Trail by road and on foot in a modern-day pilgrimage across Europe to the historic city of Istanbul.

He expected priests would still be able to do those visits to bring comfort and assurance of the afterlife "which awaits us all", but subject to precautions and norms of nursing homes and except in the most extreme circumstances. He said that government advice to Churches was mediated through a few experts who understood both Church life and the public health needs. He urged a balance between being determined and not panicking, and cautioned against extremes of fear or selfishness.

At that point the cardinal was preparing for the phase that had already hit the Republic – the cancelling of services. But, he said, he didn't envisage the closing of churches as these were important spaces.

Later that morning on the **Brendan O'Connor** programme (RTÉ Radio 1), psychologist Tony Bates emphasised the need for the ordinary and the routine to help get us through calmly, despite the fact that we might have a desire for big gestures – we want guns at high noon, he said, but we get suits at six in those daily briefings.

Fr Brian D'Arcy urged a greater focus on prayer, and urged priests who are or will be celebrating Mass via webcams not just to run through it quickly, but to speak to their new online congregation.

Sound advice.

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[@boreganmedia](http://boreganmedia.com)

Film

Aubrey Malone



Revisionist version pioneering physicist's life

Radioactive (15A)

Camille Paglia once said: "There's no female Mozart because there's no female Jack the Ripper." The comment was inaccurate but typical of her penchant for sensationalism. (I liked Julie Birchill's comment: "The 'g' is silent in Paglia. It's the only thing about her that is.")

Something else that's often said to be in short supply – again inaccurately – is female inventors. That's why we should champion the ones we have, especially those like Marie Curie, who's celebrated in this biopic.

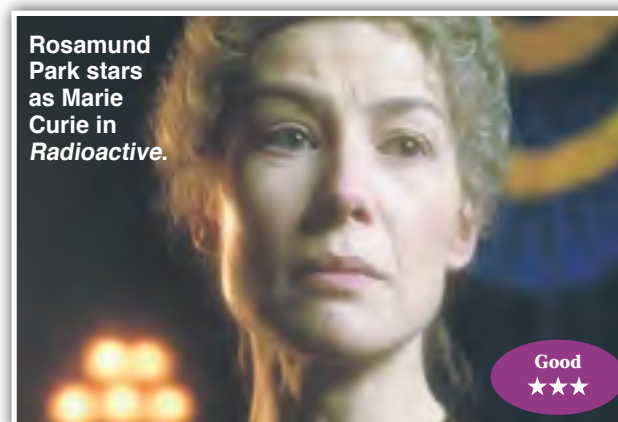
Greer Garson played her in 1943 in a film directed by Mervyn LeRoy called, simply, *Marie Curie*. Here, more fit-

tingly, a woman is behind the camera, the French-Iranian director Marjane Satrapi. Satrapi likes directing films based on graphic novels (check out *Persepolis* and *Chicken with Plums*). She does so again here, though she hasn't written this one, unlike the other two.

It's narrated in flashback. There are some disconcertingly prescient flashforwards as well (to Hiroshima and Chernobyl) and also a use of Satrapi's familiar animation.

Rosamund Pike as Marie Curie is spikily effective. Satrapi said: "She has eyes like razor blades and a smile like sunshine." *Gone Girl* isn't totally 'gone'.

Some parts of the script are didactic and some pat-



Rosamund Park stars as Marie Curie in *Radioactive*.

Good
★★★

ronising. Neither do I think it was wise to portray Curie as a crusader for sexual liberation. She acquires the tag after her husband is trampled to death by a galloping horse and she begins a relationship with a married man.

She was also castigated on racist grounds – she was Polish, but lived mainly in Paris – and even anti-semitic ones (despite not being Jewish).

And she was criticised for exposing people to radioactivity. The nucleus she

invented caused cancer as well as curing it. She herself was the main victim of this.

Her main fight, though, was against the prevailing chauvinism of the time. The Nobel Prize she won was originally only awarded to her husband Pierre (Sam Riley). He insisted on having her included in it. She was eventually given a second Nobel Prize. Her daughter would go on to win one as well (for inventing artificial radioactivity).

"I have been haunted my entire life trying to understand the impossible," she declared. She had a fear of hospitals caused by the early death of her mother but didn't let this deter her from her research. Her seismic break-

through came when she isolated radioactive isotopes to create polonium and radium. She named the former after her native country.

The script is written by Jack Thorne. He also penned *The Aeronauts*, another film about a pioneering woman. I praised it here recently. This is less satisfactory. The flashbacks and flashforwards detract from one's involvement in the plot. A more linear approach would have been preferable.

Curie had a great mind – we could do with her to fight the coronavirus – but Pike's claims to iconic status for her are sometimes a bit too strident. Messages are better when they unfold rather than being pushed at you.

BookReviews

Peter Costello



Reflections for a season of pain

A selection of books for Easter selected by the **Books Editor**

This year, as Eastertide approaches, our society is faced with the uncertain outcome of what would once have been seen as a plague. These days we try in a way to tame it by calling it a “pandemic”: giving it a scientific name is very close to controlling it.

But nothing could underline more the uncertainty of modern life. That for all the vaunted advances of our day – albeit that they have left many people uncared for and displaced the world over – life has such dangers in store for us all that a dimension of faith and spirituality becomes an even more essential resource.

Easter, the central event of the Christian year, is one of the times when books appear which try to focus the mind and spirit on the meaning of faith and spirituality in a special way.

Here is a selection of some recent titles.

Return to Me with All Your Heart: Daily Reflections for Lent by Gerard Gallagher (Veritas, €7.99)

Gerard Gallagher, the author



‘Passover approaching, Jesus goes up to Jerusalem’, by James J. Tissot, after 1886.

of several earlier books aimed at aiding the Faithful, especially young people, to get more from their religious

devotion. This little book is what he calls “a thought-provoking selection of scriptural readings and reflections

designed to accompany the reader through the season of Lent”.

In seven chapters it moves

week by week towards the climax of Easter Week. It is arranged in a simple but effective way each day open-

ing with a reading not always from the scriptures, followed by a section to read, to reflect on, and then to respond to.

A Catholic view of modern ‘success’

The decadent society: How we became the victims of our success by Ross Douthat (Avid Readers Press / Simon & Schuster, \$US27.00 / £20.95)

Frank Litton

“We live in a time of unprecedented change.”
Do we, really?

My Grandfather was born in 1875 and died in 1950. I reckon he experienced far more radical changes in his span of life than I have in mine: motor-cars, aeroplanes, electricity as a widely available form of energy, telephones, the collapse of Empires, two World wars, an independent Ireland and massive increases in human productivity.

You could argue that I have missed the point. The

changes that he saw were beginnings; what we have been living with are their transforming consequences.

Certainly, we have lived in a story of continuous economic growth, technical innovations, and increasing productivity. That story is finished.

This the theme of this intriguing book, written by Ross Douthat, a noted Catholic journalist, who is the conservative in the *New York Times* stable of columnists and editorial opinion writers.

Decadence

The term ‘decadence’, summons up a world of self-indulgence, deaf to the call of duty, we luxuriate in the sensuous.

Douthat uses the term in a different sense. “Decadence,” he writes,



Ross Douthat.

“deployed usefully refers to economic stagnation, institutional decay and cultural and intellectual exhaustion at a high level of material prosperity and technological development.”

He makes the case that this is our condition, reviewing a wide range

of evidence across several fields. This is an example of high-class journalism at its very best, written with style and wit.

The case for economic stagnation is the best known. The case here is that the economic growth that started with the industrial

revolution is coming to an end. The low-lying fruit that boosted productivity has all been harvested. We cannot expect any significant increases in productivity anytime soon.

Birth rates are falling world-wide. WEIRD (white, educated, industrialised,

rich, democratic) countries are not reproducing themselves. The fact is well known though its cases and consequences seldom receive the discussion that its seriousness merits.

“Politics, for example, proceeds with angry slogans that mask a dearth of ideas”

Douthat reviews the evidence and discusses the issues. Culture belongs to the complex of factors that might explain the trend. We may be better off in many ways than the generations that preceded us.

Yet, somehow, we have lost the relish for the human project that

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.

and great joy

This may all be familiar. But consider: there is a sense in which the season of Lent is essentially something that should last through the year, and these books which we have all read many over the years, are not to be put away after Easter Monday. They can still be dipped into through the course of the year. Then they will continue to provide a stimulus to reflection, and it is reflection that leads eventually to a deepening of a sense of faith and spirit. This is essential in times like these.

Among the many stimulating ideas embedded in this book, here is one which is very striking, or so this reviewer thinks: "Consider planning a family meal, just to celebrate family and faith." What an attractive idea many may find there, an idea of value for all the year round.

Hearers of the Word: Praying and exploring the Readings Lent and Holy Week: Year A

by Kieran J. O'Mahony (Messenger Publications, €12.95 / £12.95)



Keiran O'Mahony, is an Augustinian who works as co-ordinator of biblical studies, is a noted Biblical scholar. So, by contrast, this Lenten book takes a more analytic approach than the Gallagher

book. But this in a sense provides more food for thought, more stimuli to applying what we read to the way we live.

“This sense of religion as a matter of a temporal culture, which will change over time”

He adds a dimension too in that that he draws out what the Easter actions of Jesus meant for the Jewish community of his time – this is a matter on which may people are vague – but also, and just as essential what they mean “for Christians of all times to come”.

This sense of religion as a matter of a temporal culture, which will change over time, with truths that have an eternal verity makes this a book which will again last the year for readers. Christian rituals, especially at Eastertide, are intended to dramatise the facts of religion, but those facts have still to be internalised and understood in relation to the way we now see the cosmos and the way we live today.

Vulnerable and Free: An encouragement for those sharing the life of Jesus

by Fr Paul Farren, foreword by Timothy Shriver (Paraclete Press, £7.90/

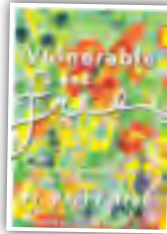
\$US12.99)

Paul Farren is a priest of the Diocese of Derry. It goes almost without saying that he has in his time seen a lot of life and death. He is already the author, with the Rev. Robert Miller, a Protestant minister, of an important little book, *Forgiveness Remembers* (2017), which suggests that rather than “forgive and simply forget”, we should in fact recall the terrible events of the past, yet while still remembering, still find forgiveness in our hearts.

In this new little book he deals with a topic that comes right home to the theme of Easter week.

The subject is personal humiliation, this is what in a supreme way Jesus faced on the Cross, the deliberate humiliation by the powers that be of an individual. But in writing of how we can face the lesser humiliations in everyday life, Fr Farren celebrates these moments of personal vulnerability, encouraging us to walk through them in the company of Jesus.

Thus they are turned from unwelcome events, into an opening to a way forward, refocusing the message that after Good Friday there will be an Easter moment.



Resistance to tyranny – Tudor style



Shrine of St Philip Howard in Arundel Cathedral, West Sussex.

The Noble Martyr: A Spiritual Biography of St Philip Howard by Dudley Plunkett, with a foreword by the Duke of Norfolk (Gracewing, £9.99)

Peter Costello

This book is published at a very timely moment. With Hilary Mantel's final novel in her Tudor trilogy, *The Mirror and the Light*, climbing up the best seller lists, it is good thing that those readers should remind themselves of other aspects of the era of Tudor tyranny.

This book focuses on what it means not just to be a saint, but to be a martyr. And though the gross nature of martyrdom is largely a thing of the past across Europe, in parts of Africa and Asia it is an everyday threat, a daily reality for the Christian minorities in several cultures.

Service

Compared with say Edmund Campion, John Gerard or Henry Garnett, Philip Howard may well be an unfamiliar name. As there has been no full length biography since 1857, or any modern editions of his writings, this is hardly surprising. Dr Plunkett has done a service to readers

far beyond the Diocese of Arundel in rescuing the saint from near oblivion.

This small book is not of course a full biography, but a “spiritual biography”, which draws largely upon St Philip Howard's own prison writings and his poetry. The author (who studied at Oxford, LSE and Chicago University), and who has several other books to his credit (including *Queen of Prophets: The Gospel Message of Medjugorje*) takes the view that though many, if not most, English people conformed to the new religious regime introduced by the Tudors, they did so in the way many conform these days to the largely secular society of our time.

Yet such are the curious contradictions of English life that the foreword is written by the Duke of Norfolk, the Earl Marshal of England and the country's premier Catholic peer, who could be said to lead the Catholic interest in the House of Lords. Thus the saint's family remain at the heart of the British establishment.

But this book wishes to draw the reader into the saint's interior castle, into the nature of his own spiritual experiences. From this he arrives at his

conclusions regarding the enduring relevance of his witness, and the need to fully reclaim all the Forty English Martyrs for modern devotion.

In some ways the author is impatient perhaps with the average Catholics of today whose witness takes other forms. But it enables Dr Plunkett to write about those who have on principal resisted the whims and furies of tyranny.

“For Irish readers it provides a comparison with our own martyrs”

This is a very useful addition to the small library of books dealing with the English martyrs which are accessible to ordinary readers, and will be welcomed as such.

For Irish readers it provides a comparison with our own martyrs. Most of Ireland confessors and martyrs are clustered into the years of the republican Commonwealth, a reminder that removing a monarchy does not remove from some democratic leaders the temptation towards tyranny; though these days that tyranny may well disguise itself as a call to a truer way.

inspired them to move forward in economics, politics, and culture.

A stagnating economy is matched to a stagnating culture. Politics, for example, proceeds with angry slogans that mask a dearth of ideas. Trump is not an exciting, albeit disturbing, turn in politics.

He shows up the exhaustion of political parties unable to engage with the problems of the day. The decline in support for Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael has not opened up a new chapter with fresh ideas and new projects.

Irish readers can only agree that our culture stagnates when they contrast the lively debates on matters of public concern on the *Late, Late Show* in the 60s and 70s with the procession of celebrities

and would-be celebrities of recent decades.

It is not only in politics that we find evidence of disengagement. Outhit reports how the expanding possibilities for virtual reality facilitate retreat.

Virtual sex dispenses with the troublesome engagement with the wishes, aspirations, foibles, of another person, while computer games deliver spills and thrills, defeats and victories, free from bruising engagements.

Secular trends

Douthat is a well-known American Catholic who has published two books on religious topics (*Bad Religion: How we became a Nation of Heretics* and *To Change the Church: Pope Francis and the Future of Catholicism*). Religion,

however, figures only in a small, though significant way, in this survey of current secular trends.

Those troubled by the declining influence of Christianity can be intimidated by the apparent strength of the secular whose onward march appears unstoppable. Dothan's survey gives them cause for hope.

In a world in which we have, as Outhit writes: “A conservatism with no vision of how to revitalise itself”, and “a liberalism that doesn't recognise how little it satisfies the human heart, how vulnerable it would be to real challenges should they ever arise”, the resources of the Catholic tradition are far from redundant.

Classifieds

The deadline for advertising in the classifieds is 10.30am, the Friday before publication. Contact the Classified Team on 01 687 4094 or email advertising@irishcatholic.ie



Merchants Quay Ireland
Homeless & Drugs Services

A beacon of hope to shine, because of you...

For Ireland's homeless and hungry, Merchants Quay Ireland's Riverbank Centre is first to open in the morning and among the last to close at night. Those with nowhere to turn can find a good meal, medical care, a helping hand, and a fresh start, thanks to donations and legacies.

Come for Tea and a Tour, in private while Riverbank is closed for a couple of hours. See confidentially how Merchants Quay Ireland uses donations and legacies to bring relief and hope. All welcome, bring a guest if you wish.

Ring Emma Murphy at 01-5240965 to be included on the guest list for the April 9th Tour.

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To learn how, call

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The Miracle Prayer

Dear Heart of Jesus,
In the past I have asked for
many favours.

This time I ask for a
special one. (mention here)

Take it, dear Heart of Jesus, and
place it within your own broken

Heart where your
Father sees it.

Then, in his merciful eyes,
it will become your favour,
not mine. Amen.

Say this prayer for three days.

S.M.

Inspired by the vision and passion of Sr. Stan, many people are choosing to leave a loving gift in their will to support people who are homeless to find safety and a place they can call home.



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The Secretary
Retreat & Conference Centre
Dromantine
Newry,
Co. Down BT34 1RH

Tel : 028-3082 1964 ; (From Rol 048)

DROMANTINE RETREAT & CONFERENCE CENTRE



SILENT PREACHED RETREATS

Fri 22nd May 2020 6pm – Thurs 28th 2pm

Rev. Ruth Patterson
Listening for the Divine Whisper

Scripture reveals to us that God delights to work in unexpected, everyday, little ways and through unknown people. In this retreat Ruth will look at some of those who heard the whisper, responded and became a vital part of the ongoing purpose of God.

Mon 8th June 2020 6 pm – Sat 13th am

Fr. Denis McBride, CSsR
Jesus - an unfinished portrait

Christians are asked to love their founder, Jesus, as he surely loves them. We reflect on the life and teaching of the one we worship as Christ the Redeemer.

Tues 1st Sept. 2020 6pm – Mon 7th 2pm

Fr. Des Corrigan, SMA
Growing in years, peace and contentment;
A Spirituality of Ageing

Reflecting on positive attitudes and outlook, this retreat will outline a spiritual approach to assist us as we grow older. It will offer some guidelines to help us to let go of any regrets and to harvest the fruits of our lives, so that the final stages can be lived in peace, fulfilment, and trust.

Fri 2nd Oct. 2020 6pm - Thurs 8th 2pm

Fr. Gerard McCarthy, SVD Praying with the Psalms
Familiarity and repetition can sometimes lead to an indifference to the insights that the Psalms offer us. In this retreat we will revisit a number of the Psalms and experience how they can invigorate our relationship with God, self and others.

6 DAY DIRECTED RETREATS

Fri 22nd May 6pm – Thurs 28th 2pm

Fr. Frank Downes, OP Fr. Des Corrigan, SMA

Tues 1st Sept 6pm – Mon 7th 2pm

Sr. Mary Connellan, SSL, Fr. Dermot Mansfield, SJ

4 DAY DIRECTED RETREATS

Fri 22nd May 6pm – Tues 26th 6pm Fr. Frank Downes, OP Fr. Des Corrigan, SMA

SHORT RETREATS / SEMINARS

LENTEN RETREATS

Sat. 14th March; 9.30 am - 5.00 pm

Fr. Damian Bresnahan, SMA

"Lord, Open My Heart As Wide As It Can"

Sat. 28th March. 9.30 am - 5.00 pm

Fr. John Gallagher, SMA

"Remember - You're Worth It!"

Holy Week Retreat; 8th April – 12th.

The Dromantine community invites you to join in reflectively celebrating the Easter Triduum, beginning with the Seder meal.

2nd May 9.30 am – 5 pm

Fr. Joe McGee, MSC

Spirituality of the heart as a pathway to accepting self and others.

As we explore the Spirituality of the Heart, we will discover that, once we experience the unconditional love of God in Jesus we can learn to accept ourselves and find the courage to forgive others.

26th Sept. 9.30 am – 27th 4 pm

Sr. Nellie McLoughlin, RSM

The Wonder of Creation: Our Common Home.

Privilege and Responsibility. In contemplating the wonder of our Common Home and current threats to its integrity, we will attempt to identify and assume our collective responsibility, especially regarding alarming biodiversity depletion and global climate crisis.

Sat. Oct.17th 9.30 am – 5 pm

Ms. Briege O'Hare

Renew-refresh-revive

Time to slow down, space to rest in the beautiful setting of Dromantine and a chance to feel the freshness of God in your own life. Blending stories from Scripture with light-hearted stories from daily life, Briege O'Hare will lead you into gentle ways of praying.

Sat. 14th Nov. 9.30 am – 5 pm

Fr. Jim Cogley.

Loss and Recovery.

This seminar will explore loss in its many facets and how it is also an invitation to wholeness. "While the heart grieves for what it has lost, The Spirit dances for that which it has found"

ADVENT RETREAT

Fri. 4th Dec. 6 – Sun. 6th Sr. Anne Morris DHS
'Advent: the other purple time in the Church's year'

Through Scripture, images and poetry, we take time to reflect on the God who came, who comes, and who will come again. We prepare for Christmas by dwelling on this mind-blowing event.

Leisure time

Please pray for the beatification of

Little Nellie of Holy God

“May God enrich with every blessing all those who recommend frequent Communion to little boys and girls proposing Nellie as their model”

– Pope St Pius X, June 4, 1912

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When you remember Trócaire in your Will, you bring hope to people living in the world's poorest places

Trócaire

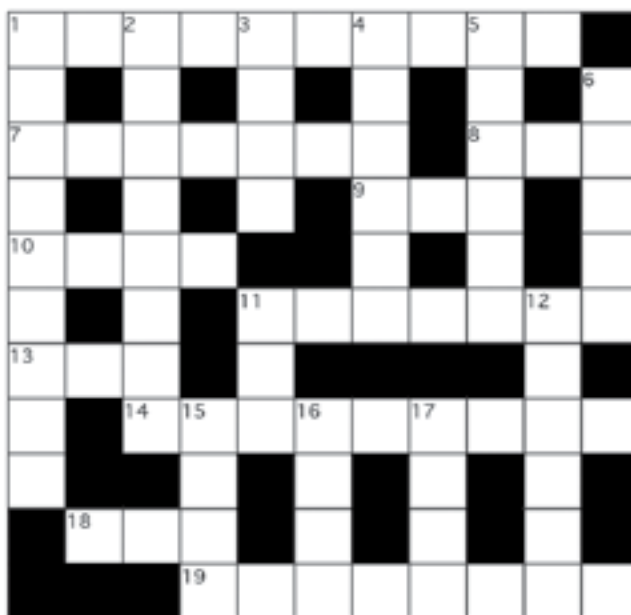
It's easy to get started, and we'll help you every step of the way. Call Grace Kelly on 01 629 3333, email grace.kelly@trocaire.org or write to me at Trócaire, Maynooth, Co Kildare.

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 324



Across

- 1 "I didn't buy it new, I got it _____" (6-4)
- 7 In the story, he was involved with forty thieves (3-4)
- 8 Part of the foot (3)
- 9 Creature that followed the Pied Piper (3)
- 10 The coming and going of the sea (4)
- 11 You might have ice-cream at this part of the meal (7)
- 13 It's a bit like wheat, and you can make bread and crackers from it. (3)
- 14 Horrible dream (9)
- 18 This one of the Seven Dwarfs wore glasses (3)

- 19 Time of vacation from school (8)

Down

- 1 Thrown all around (9)
- 2 Boys and girls (8)
- 3 Close to (4)
- 4 Red suit in cards (6)
- 5 This plant might sting you (6)
- 6 "Beauty and the _____" (5)
- 11 Made a hole with a spade (3)
- 12 Hardly ever (6)
- 15 One twelfth of a foot (4)
- 16 Cry like a wolf (4)
- 17 Repair, fix (4)

SOLUTIONS, MARCH 12

GORDIUS No. 446

Across – 1 Tie the knot 6 Epee 10 Salad 11 Afterlife 12 Incense 15 Catch 17 Cuba 18 Hail 19 Drawn 21 Abridge 23 Treen 24 Vole 25 Tips 26 Pesto 28 Erosion 33 Hollywood 34 Whine 35 Pare 36 Grenadiers

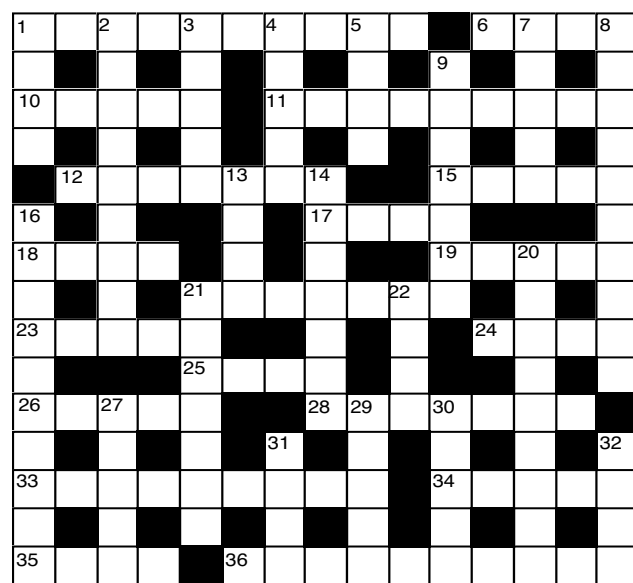
Down – 1 Toss 2 Eglantine 3 Hedge your bets 4 Keats 5 Oats 7 Point 8 Even-handed 9 Brocade 13 Numb 16 Shut up shop 20 Apologise 21 Antonym 22 Giro 27 Solar eclipse 29 Rodin 30 Sewed

CHILDREN'S No. 323

Across – 1 Duckling 6 Open 7 Faster 8 Often 9 Oil 11 Elephants 14 Left 16 Salmon 18 Tot 19 Little 20 Course
Down – 1 Daffodil 2 Castle 3 Lie 4 Golf ball 5 Repeat 10 Apostle 12 Letter 13 Singer 15 Echo 17 Moth

Crossword

Gordius 447



Across

- 1 The next emetic will possibly create a thrilling feeling! (10)
- 6 Get bigger (4)
- 10 It's a grand reading stand for a dance! (5)
- 11 Make the moron cart away the seabird (9)
- 12 & 28a The Napoleon of Antarctic birdlife? (7,7)
- 15 The king gets to engrave a boat (5)
- 17 Baking compartment (4)
- 18 See 7 down
- 19 Tore a Muse asunder (5)
- 21 It is LXX in Roman numerals (7)
- 23 What you do when you chow down! (3,2)
- 24 Recess found in a church (4)
- 25 Sparkling wine which is a central ingredient to a pastille (4)
- 26 Member of the community esteemed for their great age (5)
- 28 See 12 across
- 33 Rich cop I'm misdirecting to part of a computer (9)
- 34 Girl's name - the Spanish for 'pretty' (5)
- 35 Northern poem, identifying a lump (4)
- 36 It's best physically that his athlete is moved (10)

Down

- 1 Deciduous trees (4)

- 2 Soft cheese has made the member act strangely (9)
- 3 Dig up this and upset the voter (5)
- 4 Some Alabama choirmasters may be ostentatiously virile (5)
- 5 Obsessive type of the computer world (4)
- 7 & 18a The main dish of many a meal - made from boars' feet? (5,4)
- 8 A turret of timepieces? Jehovah's Witnesses get to look at it (10)
- 9 Make the rooster turn up eastern money for the Londoner (7)
- 13 Empire of rare old military Etruscan origins (4)
- 14 Ship ore over and get a wild fruit (7)
- 16 See a sailor as a beam leans over (4,6)
- 20 Electrical machine such as a fridge (9)
- 21 The bird can practise fighting before the fight (7)
- 22 Urban area (4)
- 27 Chopped into cubes (5)
- 29 Throw out part of a latex pelmet (5)
- 30 Ravine encountered during a Mogul chase (5)
- 31 Item of footwear (4)
- 32 Forego food? Rapid! (4)

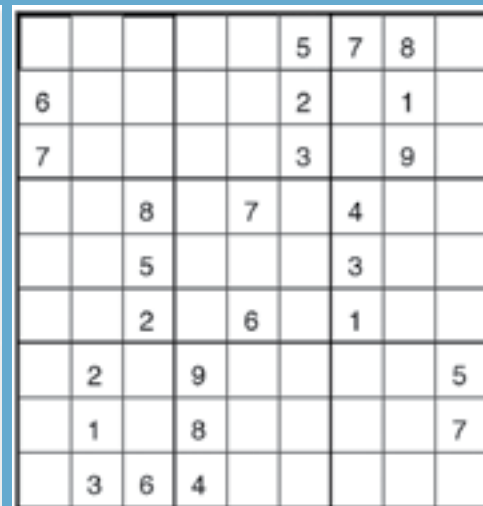
Sudoku Corner

324

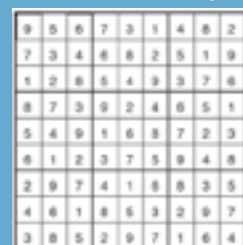
Easy



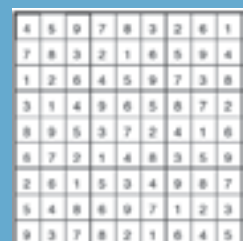
Hard



Last week's Easy 323



Last week's Hard 323



Notebook

Fr Martin Delaney



When goodwill goes viral on a cruise ship

DURING ALMOST 34 years of priesthood I have had many memorable experiences, some of them very sad and heart-breaking, many very joyful and inspirational. Two weeks ago, I had one of the most memorable and certainly most uplifting 'pastoral assignments' ever!

Over a year ago, I was approached by a lady in the US called Gertrude Byrne and asked if I would be willing to be a chaplain on a cruise she was organising in February 2020 from San Diego California down the Mexican Riviera. Wow! How could I refuse? She must have known that my friends, and indeed some who are not, sometimes call me Martin of Tours!

Stars

Gertrude has been operating this Irish charter cruise for almost 30 years and the unique feature is that the entertainment on the ship is provided by the current stars of Irish country music. This year's line-up included household names like the gas boiler consultant from Kincasslagh, Nathan, the young heartthrob from Ireland's biggest city, Liverpool (!), Michael English, Mike Denver, Declan from



Drumlish, Jimmy Buckley, Brendan Shine, Dominic Kirwan, John McNichol, Mark Roberts and a host of other veteran and upcoming stars.

One of the other unique features of Gertrude's cruise is that there is Mass every day hence the need for not just one chaplain but two. And if you can cope with any more name dropping, my colleague on this floating assignment was fresh in from Buckingham Palace where he had just received an OBE from the Queen – Fr Brian Darcy. To be honest, when I first realised that I

would be working alongside Brian I felt a little intimidated. These musicians and entertainers are his people, his parishioners. And yes he has a unique connection and genuine bond with so many in the Irish entertainment and media industry after more than 40 years of ministering to them and their families.

“By the end of the week I felt I had been on a retreat in the most unique setting imaginable”

But I need not have worried – Brian and I worked very well together. The daily Mass on the ship was quite memorable. Upwards of 800 people came each morning and so many turned up on Sunday and Ash Wednesday that we ran out of Communion hosts.

Speaking of Ash Wednesday,

what a way to begin Lent surrounded by every food imaginable. I had been tasked with bringing the ashes from home. When they arrived from the supplier they were all in little plastic sachets just like packs of cocaine except black. Fearing an interrogation at US customs I emptied all the ash into a plastic container and it passed through multiple checkpoints without a question.

Many of the entertainers turned up to sing at Mass despite having been on some stage into the early hours. I met extraordinary people from the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere, many of whom had left Ireland in difficult times and had made successful lives for themselves and their families. Their stories were sometimes sad, sometimes happy but always inspirational.

By the end of the week I felt I had been on a retreat in the most unique setting imaginable. As we flew home from San Diego word was breaking of Covid 19 hitting Ireland and also on another cruise ship off the coast of California.

A week later and my memory of this unusual 'working' holiday might have been very different.

● **HUMOUR IN A CRISIS:** Irish people have an innate ability to create humour even in the most serious times of national crisis. Here is one of the recent messages on my phone: "This morning at the post office. While I was in line two people with masks entered. There was TOTAL PANIC. Then they said: 'This is a robbery'...and we all calmed down."

A timely blessing

A blessing of healing hands for all our healthcare workers:

*Yours are the hands full of experience and skill.
Yours are the hands reaching out with compassion,
Taking time to show care, swiftly taking action.
Yours are the hands gently touching your patients.
You touch families, too.
Yours are the hands that show you care.
You lift the hearts of those who suffer.
Your hands celebrate the joy of healing.
Your hands bless all they touch with the spirit of compassion,
Thank you for sharing your abundance and gifts,
For touching lives and lifting spirits.
Blessings and thanks for the many works of your hands.*



Please give Lenten alms for poor children

Countless missionaries throughout the world ask The Little Way Association for help to feed, clothe and house deprived children. They tell us of orphaned children left alone with no one to love or care for them, and of street children, totally abandoned, hungry and homeless, experiencing much anguish and hardship during their most tender years. Many of these children's future depends upon whether a missionary can find sufficient funds to care for them.

Shocking as the facts of child poverty are, things would be even worse were it not for the generosity of people like yourself.

Could you save the life of one child by giving alms this Lent? Simple measures such as providing a proper diet could avoid many tragic deaths.

Your Lenten gift will be gratefully received and sent WITHOUT DEDUCTION to the missions, to enable a missionary priest or sister to carry the love, care and compassion of Christ to a deprived, abandoned or orphaned child.



In 1893, St Therese of Lisieux wrote to her sister Celine: **"Jesus wills that we give alms to Him as to one poor and needy. He puts Himself, as it were, at our mercy. He will take nothing but what we give Him from our heart. The very least trifle is precious in His sight."**

The three pillars of Lent are prayer, fasting and almsgiving. The Catechism says: **"Giving alms to the poor is a witness to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God."**

In Lent, we can serve Christ and help the destitute with our almsgiving.

The Little Way Association uses the world's network of missionaries to help those in the direst need. Priests, Sisters and Brothers work in some of the world's poorest areas and in political trouble-spots. Our policy is never to deduct anything from donations earmarked for the relief of poverty or for missionary work.

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