

The Irish Catholic

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Campaign hopes to overcome negative reactions to pregnancy

Jason Osborne

A leading support organisation for pregnant women has launched a campaign to promote more positive reactions around pregnancy after clients reported experiencing negative reactions.

Crisis pregnancy organisation Gianna Care decided to launch the initiative following reports from client of off-putting and derogatory comments from family members, friends and work colleagues.

Gianna Care Director Carolyn O'Meara told *The Irish Catholic* that the campaign "is something that's come to my mind a lot" in recent years, inspired by her interactions with clients, as well as her own experiences.

The clients "often say to us that they dread telling certain people or they dread the reactions and the negative comments from certain people," Ms O'Meara said, explaining that this can lead women to question the pregnancy itself rather than enjoying the experience.

She described "women being so distressed at the thoughts of the negative reactions they say they'll receive that they contemplate abortion and some have even aborted because of that reason."

Sharing some of the reactions they've received to the campaign,

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Give a dog a hug...



Niamh O'Sullivan with puppy Effie at the Dundrum Town Centre in Dublin at an event organised by the Dublin Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (DSPCA) to help those who have adopted dogs during lockdown and need support in training and socialising their pups. Photo: Leon Farrell/Photocall Ireland

'Cautious confidence' as schools re-open

Ruadhán Jones

Catholic schools have rigorous protocols in place to remain open after they return next week, despite concerns about Covid-19, parents have been assured.

"We've been here before, we're used to dealing with this particular situation," Seamus Mulconry of the Catholic Primary Schools Management Association (CPSMA) told *The Irish Catholic* this week.

He said that "cautious confidence is the overriding feeling" among staff and students, adding that schools have the necessary protocols in place.

"The advice we're getting is to keep doing what we did in June," Mr Mulconry continued. "The health measures worked, so keep applying them rigorously and we should be ok."

The CPSMA's general secretary said there is some trepidation as well, and urged parents to "err on the side of caution" when it comes to sick children.

"Parents have an important role to play in this," Mr Mulconry added. "If parents err on the side of caution and schools stick to the guidance, we're very confident we can keep schools open."

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Michael Kelly's Editor's Comment will return next week

OnlyFans ban on explicit content welcomed by Catholic youth workers

Jason Osborne

The online subscription site 'OnlyFans' announced late last week that it will ban sexually explicit photos and videos from its site from October 1, a move which has been welcomed by Catholic youth workers in Ireland.

People will still be able to post naked content to the site, but it will need to be in line with OnlyFans' policies, marking a real change in the service's operations, and will result in less explicit content on the site.

Content

The London-based social media site allows 'creators' to post a range of content, from cooking to fitness videos, but in recent years has come to be best known for pornography.

The site enables those who upload such content to charge users 'tips' or a monthly subscription, with OnlyFans taking a 20% share of all payments in return for hosting the material.

OnlyFans said the change had

come after pressure from banking partners, and that the move was made to "ensure the long-term sustainability of our platform".

Pastoral manager at Queen's University Belfast, Shannon Campbell, said the culture is "already over-sexualised and often young people, especially females, are the victims of this".

Consequences

"This can have hugely negative consequences for their long term mental and spiritual wellbeing. Any moves on the part of companies to limit the use of the internet for these purposes is to be welcomed."

Executive Director of NET Ministries Ireland Tony Foy also welcomed the development, saying if sexually explicit content can be limited "on one platform, it can be done on all platforms".

Mr Foy said a proper "vision" or understanding of sexuality "has just been lost from us," and that a lot of young people "just don't know any better".

200 farm fatalities since 2011 a reminder of job's risks, says campaigning priest

Ruadhán Jones

After a report on workplace deaths from 2011-2020 showed that 40% took place on farms, Fr Paddy Byrne urged farmers to be "cautious and careful" during the harvest season.

Fr Byrne, who leads an annual prayer service to commemorate farm deaths, said that deaths on farms are "unfortunately much too frequent in Ireland".

"There is greater awareness of this now," he said. "Particularly in the season of harvest, I would urge people to be cautious and careful."

"Farming is a necessary business, but it carries its huge challenges."

The report also shows that a majority of deaths involve people aged 65 and over. Fr Byrne said this

highlights the fact that retirement is a "relatively new thing" for farmers.

Meanwhile, Norma Rohan of Embrace Farm, a support network for those affected by farming accidents, said this is a reminder that "farming is the most dangerous occupation in this country".

"A farmer is everything in one," she said. "They're the financial person, the business person, they're doing everything."

"It's an isolated job, the machinery has gotten huge - there are many factors."

Advances have been made, Ms Rohan said, especially in the appointment of a dedicated minister, highlighting the new focus on the welfare of farmers.

Belfast students' Lough Derg retreat



Some members of Queen's University Belfast's chaplaincy embark on a four-day retreat of Lough Derg, August 23. Pictured at Lough Derg are (from left) Mark McDonnell, Michael Ward, Gerard Scullion, Ruairi Crummey, James McKenna.

Campaign hopes to overcome negative reactions to pregnancy

» **Continued from Page 1**

one woman said she "worries" about telling people about her pregnancies, "what people will say, what the neighbours will think, what reaction I will have this time from family members".

Another woman said that during her most recent and seventh pregnancy, the doctor, instead of offering "con-

gratulations, I was asked if it was what I wanted and was then told there are ways out if I wasn't sure".

Ms O'Meara said that while Ireland has come a long way in terms of mental health awareness, "there is not an awful lot done to protect mothers who are in a very unique and vulnerable position".

"We're just asking for people to be

aware of their reactions here and now to pregnancy - to welcome pregnancy," Ms O'Meara said.

"Mothers are a group of people that should just be totally supported. Even if the circumstances are bad, let's try and change the circumstances and not view the new life as something negative," she said.

See page 16

Spirits lifted by Limerick's All-Ireland win, says Bishop Leahy

Ruadhán Jones

The bishop of Limerick congratulated the hurling team on their win, adding that there are many lessons outside of sport to be gleaned from their achievements.

In a statement, Bishop Brendan Leahy praised the "profound" message coming from the squad and the back-room staff – that together "we can climb mountains".

"For me, there was a deeper life-lesson from them, captured brilliantly by Cian Lynch in his post-match interview when he talked about the team ethic," the bishop continued.

"He talked about the last 18 months, how they were always able to depend on each other and how every man was 'on the next man's shoulders'."

Bishop Leahy highlighted

Mr Lynch's statement that, "for any young girl or boy aspiring to represent your county in any sport, be a team player and keep driving on".

This is a "lesson that can be translated to family, to the workplace, to friendship and can stand us in such good stead in challenging times and, no doubt, there were those along the journey for this team too," the bishop of Limerick continued.

"The message we can take from this is that we can only do so much on our own in life but together with others, we can scale mountains, just like this Limerick team."

One parish in Limerick, Patrickswell, Ballybrown, were delighted by their team's success, especially as five players from the parish were in the squad.

Fr Mike Cussen told *The Irish Catholic* that, more than the win, it was "the gift of sport" that really came through the team's performance.

"I've spoken to a number of parishioners living on their own who have spoken about how it has united people.

"The spirituality of sport is not about the winning, it's the way it binds people together," he said.

Priest who played Gaelic football as Sam Maguire remembered as 'colossal figure'

Staff reporter

Fr Ignatius McQuillan, who secretly played for Fermanagh after his ordination, has died aged 90.

Fr Iggy – as he was known – was a county footballer at the time of his ordination in 1955.

As was customary at the time, he was asked to cease his career, but he continued playing under the name Sam Maguire.

When Fermanagh reached the 1959 All Ireland junior final, Fr Iggy, as Sam Maguire, was named team captain.

The ball was thrown in for the final by Fr Iggy's bishop, Dr Neil Farren who later admitted he recognised his priest but decided to turn a blind eye.

One of the north's foremost educationalists, Fr McQuillan was one of the driving forces in Catholic education in the Derry diocese.

Derry diocesan spokesman Fr Michael Canny told *The Irish News* that Fr Iggy was a "colossal figure" in education and sports.

"He was also a gentle and caring priest of uncompromising sincerity who didn't believe in fuss or title and involved himself in all aspects of parish life," he said.

"As an educationalist... he always sought the highest standards and strove for what he believed to be best for the welfare of students and staff."

Pride in the county



Sr Máire Bríd of the Redemptoristines Dublin, proudly shows off her Cork colours, although the All-Ireland final against Limerick didn't go their way, August 21.

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Taliban's victory will embolden Islamists, warns ACN Ireland

Ruadhán Jones

The Islamist terror group's return to power in Afghanistan will embolden extremists worldwide, the director of Aid to the Church in Need Ireland has said, putting vulnerable Christians at even more risk.

The failure of the US and its allies in Afghanistan "validates" the ambitions of Islamists worldwide, Dr Michael Kinsella said.

"Other Islamists will think, if these backwoods boys can fight the most militarily powerful state on the planet, we

can," Dr Kinsella told *The Irish Catholic*.

He expressed concern that the Taliban's victory will "push the centre of Islamic thought and jurisprudence towards the extreme".

"If you want Sharia Law [Islam's legal system], its emboldening that the Taliban won, and return to power stronger than they were.

"They now have some of the most sophisticated machinery in the world, and won't be removed from power – they have Russia and China's backing."

As the US and its allies withdraw from the central

Asian state, the Taliban have rapidly returned to power in the past weeks.

"This will have a demonstrable and rapid effect on the expression of religious freedom in Afghanistan," Dr Kinsella continued.

He warned that under Sharia Law, "open expressions of religions outside of Sunni Islam can, according to the caprice of the Sharia courts, involve imprisonment, torture or death".

"It's as capacious as it needs to be to enforce strict social and religious norms."

However, he added, this internal policy is unlikely to

create an "ideological cleavage" with the Taliban's allies in China, Pakistan or Russia: "Let's face it, there's a lot of trade needs building up, and they're not going to make Sharia Law contingent on this."

But he finished by warning that "you're going to see Russian and Chinese military aircraft entering into Kabul airport soon – there's no way the Taliban are going to allow US rule beyond the grave.

"Whatever hope they had of influencing Afghanistan's foreign policy, it's over," Dr Kinsella said.



Church whistleblower calls out clericalism

Jason Osborne

A Church whistleblower has taken aim at clericalism in a recent book, and says that it's the "abuse of power" that enables and condones other

forms of abuse in the Catholic Church.

Author of the new book, *Cardinal Sin: Challenging power abuse in the Catholic Church*, and abuse survivor, Brian Devlin says that a

"new model" of the Church is required to prevent abuses going forward, one that emphasises the role of the laity.

Mr Devlin was one of four men who brought out the abuses of Scottish Cardinal Keith O'Brien, which saw the then-prominent churchman stripped of all but his title as cardinal.

A better model than the

current "pyramid" or "triangle" structure, which sees "the Pope at the top, then all the layers of cardinals and archbishops, bishops, priests, and right down at the bottom are the billion or so laity," would be a "Venn diagram", which would see the clergy on one side and the laity on the other, making decisions in an equal manner.

"When they cross over in

the middle, that's where the governance of the Church is. It's a participatory model. It does the opposite of what's happening just now. It's transparent, it's built on, there's a theological phrase, *sensus fidelium*, it's 'the sense of the people,'" Mr Devlin said.

Mr Devlin also said that the current understanding of "scandal" in the Church has to be overhauled, as people

initially accused him of scandalising the public and the Faithful with his accusations towards Cardinal O'Brien.

"The scandal wasn't what we did. The scandal was what O'Brien did. I think that the Church needs to totally deconstruct this notion of scandal," he said.

See pages 20-21.

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Dublin archdiocese launches 'Families walking together in hope'

Staff reporter

Dublin archdiocese yesterday launched the 'Families walking together in hope' initiative, which provides "simple" and "achievable" ideas for families and parishes in support of the Faith in the home and parish.

"The 'family of families' (parish) will be encouraged to reconnect the 'holy' to the home by suggesting rituals of faith in the home with parish rituals," the initiative's description reads.

The goal of the initiative is to "celebrate moments of hope and joy in family life", and will provide resources

that are suitable for "learning, living, and leading faith" that are complementary to the way families live today.

An example of the activities families are invited to take part in is "connecting the kitchen table to the Eucharistic table," in an attempt to bring faith further into the home.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Church can't bend to suit culture – bishop

Bishop Donal McKeown has warned that the Church cannot be renewed by compromising on difficult teachings.

In his homily at the weekend in St Eugene's Cathedral, Dr McKeown insisted that "renewal in Christ's Church has never come through those who want to modernise the Lord's message to avoid uncomfortable truths that society finds intolerable.

"It has come through radical young people who

have taken seriously the Gospel call to poverty, community, service of the poor, contemplation and self-denial.

"The hidden persuaders of today's self-indulgent orthodoxy have planted cuckoo thoughts in the hearts of so many young people. To many, the demands of faith are portrayed as unreasonable and too demanding.

"But there are also groups of young people who are prepared to

stand on the margins and go where young idealistic saints have always gone," the bishop pointed out.

"Like young people in every generation, they will make mistakes and say things that they will later modify. But Jesus always looks to the radicals who inspire others to rebel, rather than to those who would demand that our idealists sacrifice their dreams on the altar of banal unquestioning conformism," he said.

'Cautious confidence' as Catholic schools re-open

Continued from Page 1

He encouraged stakeholders to "keep a close eye on the situation" for the first two months, to make sure the system is strong enough to handle the new Delta variant.

With regard to pregnant teachers returning, he said schools "understand the concerns that people have.

"Pregnancy is a time when people feel uniquely vulnerable, we're conscious of that," Mr Mulconry stressed.

The majority of pregnant teachers will be in, he added, and said that they will "all be applying the health guidance" provided by independent experts.

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The Irish Catholic

A Muslim woman defends the Taliban...

Khola Hasan (pictured) is an academic lawyer and scholar at the British Islamic Sharia Council, and she caused controversy last weekend by defending the Taliban on a BBC religious programme.

She said that Muslims in Britain – “every single Muslim” she knows – were celebrating the Taliban victory in Afghanistan; and that the victorious Taliban should be given “a helping hand”, instead of being demonised. “Give them a chance,” Mrs Hasan told the radio faith programme *Sunday*. “They have been ruled by foreigners for



Mary Kenny

40 years; let the people of Afghanistan rule their own country and determine their own fate for a change.”

Honest

To be totally honest about the situation, Khola Hasan's views of the Taliban are not very different from the attitudes of Irish freedom fighters in the War of Independence a hundred years ago. The IRA in the 1920s

could be pretty brutal (as could everyone else involved in the conflict) yet the motives expressed were identical: let the native people determine their own fate.

The sentiment even appears as a charmingly soppy line in the song *Galway Bay*: “The strangers came and tried to teach us their ways/And blamed us for being what we are.”

Khola Hasan doesn't speak for all British Muslims – Dr Taj



Khola Hasan

Hargey, an Imam at Oxford has strongly condemned what she says. Many will disagree with her view that the Taliban have learned to be good boys and will rule justly – especially those who feel they must flee from Kabul for fear of the new regime. But there's a parallel with Ireland here, too: in the 1920s, departing boats were also full of those who felt it safer to flee – especially those who had worked with the British military or police.

Judge

Ms Hasan serves as a judge within the British Sharia Council. She is married to a GP and they have four children. She wears the hijab as an expression of her religious identity – just as a Christian might wear a cross, she has

explained – and modesty of dress is important to her.

She raises her children to be religious Muslims, but admits that “it's hard to bring up children in a secular society where all religion and values are mocked”. Her kids used to like watching American TV channels “but I had to ban them because they show a lack of respect for teachers and parents, bad language, lots of encounters with the opposite sex, and a world where designer clothes are more important than working hard.”

Khola Hasan's views on the Taliban won't be shared by many: yet her general values are not so very different from those traditionally held by Irish Catholics.

• The Everly Brothers – the surviving brother, Don, has just died – sure were a soundtrack to my teenage years, especially *Dream, Dream, Dream*, which plays so strongly to adolescent fantasy.

But I wonder how many songs of that period might be frowned on today, since they don't imply ‘consent’? “I can make you mine” is what modern feminists call ‘rapey’. The lyrics of other popular ditties like “I'd like to get you/On a slow boat to China”, could be dubious, and another catchy number “What do you want to make those eyes at me for?” threatens “I'll get you alone some night/And maybe you'll find/You're messing with dynamite”.

In an innocent age these seemed harmless, but in a sexualised society, there's a darker agenda. Not even sure if Cliff Richards' *Living Doll* would pass muster.

Accepting temperance

Now that social life seems to be resuming, little by little, I notice a welcome change in hospitality habits. It used to be a little awkward to explain that I don't now drink alcohol, when kindly offered an *apéritif* or a glass of wine. Sometimes there was a ‘Mrs Doyle’ tendency (from the very pressing housekeeper in *Father Ted*) to say “ah, go on, go on, you will, you will”. Sometimes, people would even say something slightly reprimanding like, “ah, don't be a stick-in-the-mud – have a jar”.

But manners and customs seem to have changed. There appears now to be a much

wider acceptance that it's also normal not to imbibe alcohol, and almost no Mrs Doyle-type insistence that you should. Or is it just that the people I know tend to be more accustomed to non-drinkers?

One friend did remark to me that it was always nice just to have an ‘ice-breaker’ – one drink, to break the social ice, when meeting people. I do see the point. But I call to mind some encouraging words my late husband said to me: “Mary, you're quite effervescent enough without an alcoholic drink – you don't need alcohol.” So, it's “sláinte”, accompanied by the elderflower water

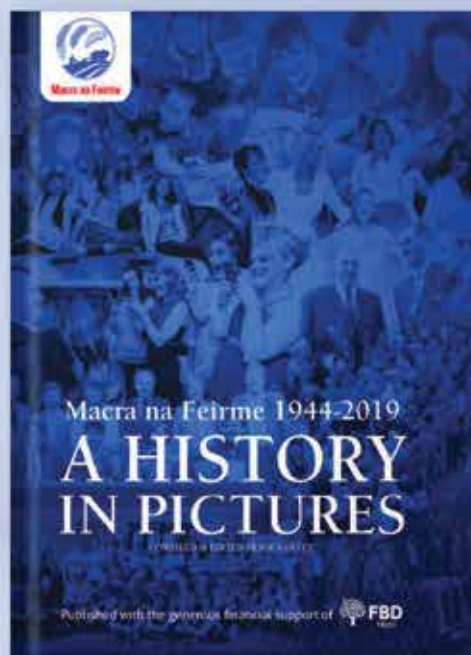
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Plea for priests to be central to post-Covid parish recovery

Staff reporter

Archbishop Michael Neary has appealed to priests not to lose heart, despite the fact that their pastoral ministry has been curtailed by Covid-19 restrictions.

Speaking as the Tuam priests gathered for their delayed Chrism Mass, Dr Neary insisted that "to lose heart would be to forget the treasure with which we have been entrusted and focus on our own fragility".

He also appealed to priests to begin anew the work of co-responsibility

with parishioners. "While people rightly expect many things of a priest, surely and most fundamentally of all, they expect us to be men of deep faith, people who pray and struggle to live according to the Beatitudes.

"In our priesthood we need the support, the correction and the ongoing challenge of our people who by their patience and perseverance help us to recognise our responsibilities and opportunities."

The Archbishop of Tuam also said that he believes priests have a vital role in

helping parishioners post-coronavirus. "As priests we are challenged to be agents of hope, enabling and encouraging our people to recover and move on from the crisis which, in different ways, has left many of them shattered.

"In doing so we need the courage to live with unpopularity; the ability to keep going despite opposition, envy, false accusation and setbacks."

Dr Neary said that priests must resist the temptation to be pigeon-holed.

"It will always be tempt-

ing to try to slot priesthood into the straightjacket of the socio-political. In our pastoral ministry we seek to journey with people, be available to them, make allowances for their resistance, and yet, perhaps without saying in words, indicate that we are dedicated to Christ, we are not embarrassed by Him, and that we are willing to share Him with all.

"We have to listen to their stories, understand their reaction and be men of courage who are prepared to speak but always in a spirit of fraternal love," he said.

Senator concerned over Maynooth collaboration with pro-abortion lobbyists

Ruadhán Jones

Senator Rónán Mullen sent a letter to Maynooth's president, questioning the ethics of their collaboration on a survey about "anti-choice protests".

The university is collaborating with Together for Safety, a pro-abortion lobby group who are gathering information on "protests" outside abortion facilities.

Mr Mullen called the group's survey the "antithesis of objective academic research". He added that the lobby group appears to be carrying out the research "for the sole purpose

of furthering their existing campaigning position".

"How can Maynooth University support such a departure from the standards of objectivity which it would rightly expect in other areas," the senator wrote in his letter.

He finished the letter by asking a series of questions, including whether it is "ethical for Maynooth University or any other institution to promote or sponsor academic research" where the research is "manifestly being conducted" to further a "political campaign to change the law".

NET Ministries gears up for full return to mission

Jason Osborne

NET Ministries is looking forward to a return to "face-to-face" mission following a year of limited in-person missionary work, according to Executive Director of NET Ministries Ireland, Tony Foy.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Mr Foy said the coming mission year is a "different approach to last year", but that they're equally

eager to get out and "re-evangelise" Ireland.

"A lot of the work we did last year initially was online, and as the restrictions eased, we got more face-to-face," Mr Foy explained, continuing "However, this year we're going in with the expectation that it'll be face-to-face, in schools, with youth groups. I think we can get 50 people together and that's not a problem for our numbers.

"For the purpose of youth ministry, we can

get 50 people together...we can work in the parishes as well, so it's really, really good."

Padraig O'Laimhin was a missionary during the pandemic last year and is joining the staff this year in support of the missionaries. He described his experience with NET Ministries last year as "brilliant" and "beautiful", acknowledging that this year promises to be a very different experience.

"It was very different to what a usual expe-

rience would be, but that was my first year as a missionary, so it was the only experience I had and I absolutely loved it. Despite all the difficulties that were there, God really did bless the year," he said.

NET expects to see 30 missionaries participate in their work around Ireland this year, supported by 20 mission staff, which will allow them to form one more team than last year.

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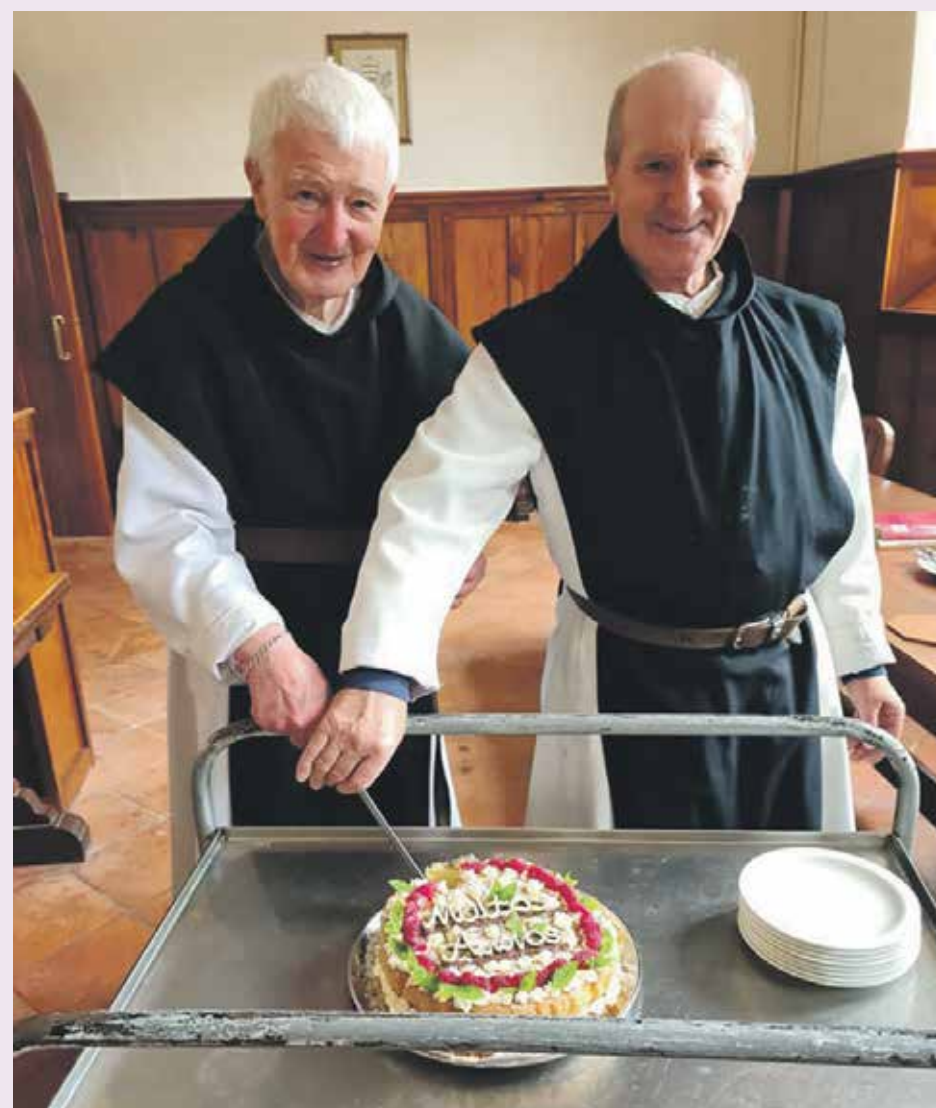
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Ad multos annos!



Abbot emeritus Fr Lawrence Walsh OCSO of Mount St Joseph Cistercians, Roscrea, celebrates 75 years of entering the monastery, while Fr Anthony O'Brien OCSO celebrates his Golden Jubilee of profession with some cake.

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Breda O'Brien

The View



Enriching our parishes by truly including single people

Single people have played a very important role in my life, beginning with my much-loved aunt, Kathleen O'Brien, who died at the early age of 71. Kathleen was a fascinating figure to me as a child. She had spent the years of the Second World War in Sweden as, I think, a kind of governess to relatives of Count Bernadotte's. This makes her seem awfully posh but she was a down-to-earth daughter of a Waterford farmer. She was in Sweden in part because she had health challenges and the air there was supposed to be healthy. In her late 60s, she was re-learning Swedish through tactics like reading the *Reader's Digest* in Swedish. She also visited Poland at that time because it was the only European country that she had not been in.

Her last job was as manager of what used to be the Polio Rehabilitation Centre in Stillorgan, which as the incidence of polio declined, moved more into services for people with intellectual disabilities. She was still working full-time when she died.

She was an amazing woman, a gifted organiser and manager but also interested in all of her nieces and nephews, even the awkward, shy ones like me. She was like the hub of a wheel. She kept all the spokes of our family in touch because they were all in touch with her. It was only when she died that I realised how important a role she played in our extended family.

Influence

Kathleen was not the only single person to influence me. There was Annette Monaghan, formerly secretary to a CEO. She then worked for the Dublin archdiocese in the communications office and finally, for the Capuchins. Like my aunt, she was both efficient and extraordinarily kind. Some of my most dedicated teaching colleagues

over the years have been single women, beginning with Patsy Kinsella, my first deputy principal. She always stoutly declared that there was no such thing as a vocation to the single life. Life just turned out that way.

I think there is such a thing as a vocation to the single life but for many people, it is not chosen. Some are single by choice but many are single through bereavement, abandonment or other crosses. Some selflessly look after older family members and lose the opportunity to found families of their own. Some people are single but also parents.

“As Catholics, we often focus almost exclusively on married families with children and this can be difficult for the many who do not fit into this category”

Singleness is sometimes a transition stage. For example, many of the 1,544,862 single people aged 15 and over (41.1% of the Irish population) counted in Census 2016, will marry. Some of those may then be widowed or divorced and become single again. There were 196,227 widowed persons in 2016, comprising 5.2% of the population aged 15 and over.

Across the EU, the demographics in 2016 were even more startling. Single-person-households are the most common household type at 33%, with over 50% of households of Sweden composed of one person. Ireland has the highest population of married households with children, at 28%.

As Catholics, we often focus almost exclusively on married families with chil-

dren and this can be difficult for the many who do not fit into this category. Marriage is a great blessing but given that so many people will spend either all of their lives or a large portion of it as single people, we should be paying more attention to them, not just in terms of outreach but to acknowledge their valuable contribution to parishes and communities.

Anna Broadway, an American Christian who is single, spent nearly 18 months visiting 41 countries across six continents and interviewed more than 300 people in one-on-one or group conversations from the three main Christian traditions - Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant.

Difficulties

Ms Broadway had thought that the difficulties she had in her own church were particular to American culture but to her surprise she found nearly all the communities she visited struggled to integrate singles into community life. She found the tendency to regard singles as 'yet to marry' made Christian communities overlook those who most likely would never marry - even the elderly and people with disabilities.

She did not find that any denomination had a ministry to single people that stood out but individuals were making real efforts. For example, a Protestant pastor invited single people to accompany his family on holiday.

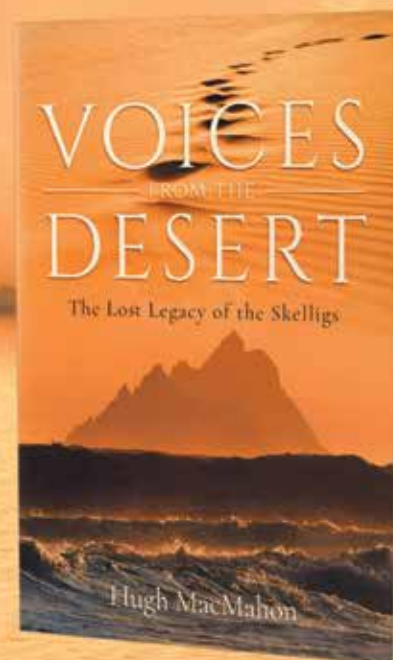
Fr Frederick Oraegbu, a Nigerian Catholic priest whom she met in Valencia, expounded to Ms Broadway on the passage from Genesis which says that it is not good for man to be alone. This is often applied to marriage but what, he wondered, would happen if more churches took this as a mandate for all their members? I believe that it would enrich all of our lives if we saw community as being for everyone, not just traditional married families.



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“I think there is such a thing as a vocation to the single life but for many people, it is not chosen”

Prayer is No. 1 medicine for fed up prisoners



The Church's overseas prisoners outreach says Government must work harder to get Irish inmates repatriated, writes **Michael Kelly**

Almost six out of ten Irish prisoners in jail overseas said that prayer and spirituality were their top 'go to' when it came to dealing with Covid-19 stress.

The Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas – the Church's agency to support Irish inmates abroad – undertook a global survey of its 1,100 people supported, which is made up of Irish citizens imprisoned overseas.

The survey aimed to provide feedback of first-hand accounts and testimonies of the experience of prison abroad, with all the additional challenges that that entails. The ICPO described the response rate of 114 replies to the survey as "very high".

“All of this is Trojan but unheralded work, and bears real witness to the Gospel mission to love God and to love one's neighbour as oneself”

The results reveal that when prisoners were asked what helps when they feel stressed or anxious, 57.9% said prayer or spirituality. While 19.3% said they turned to yoga or meditation, 43.9% said they found the gym helpful when stressed or anxious and 28.1% said that mindfulness was their 'go to'.

Key findings

Other key findings included:

- 60% of respondents reported experiencing mental health difficulties whilst in prison. A significant proportion of respondents reported feelings of isolation and having little time outside of their cell (a feature exacerbated by Covid-19);
- A range of other difficulties and adverse impacts were identified from the pandemic including lack of visits, 23 hour lockdown in their cells, concern for their own health in a confined setting, delays in legal hearings and inability to access educational and offender behaviour courses;
- More than 70% of respondents said their primary concern arising from



Inmates embrace as Pope Francis prays at the Paliano prison outside of Rome during a visit to celebrate Holy Thursday Mass in 2017. Photo: CNS/Vatican Media

Covid-19 was not for their own health but for the welfare of their loved ones at home;

- 42% of prisoner responses indicated they didn't know what their plans were after their sentence overseas was completed;
- The majority of respondents were in regular contact with ICPO with 23% in contact at least monthly and a further 50% contacting ICPO at least a few times a year. The survey responses indicate that Irish prisoners overseas view ICPO as a trusted source of information and support;

Survey

Commenting on the survey findings, Bishop Denis Brennan, chair of the ICPO said, "Our survey highlights the mental health difficulties experienced by Irish people who are in prison abroad. While it is widely accepted that such problems are a reality for many in prison at home, in the case of a citizen in prison in a foreign country these are exacerbated by time; distance, especially from loved ones and family; finance; isolation; language,



Bishop Denis Brennan

“Our findings complement the ongoing feedback we receive as to the importance of outreach to people on the margins of society”

and a myriad of potential cultural barriers.

"Our findings complement the ongoing feedback we receive as to the importance of outreach to people on the margins of society," he said.

Dr Brennan added that he is: "concerned by the relatively high number of survey respondents indicating an absence of a clear sense of direction after their release from prison.

"It seems that such uncertainty is a consequence of resettlement supports being withheld from foreign national prisoners in a number of countries and the inability for many to access educational, resettlement and offender behaviour courses during the pandemic.

"It also serves to highlight the value of the resettlement work undertaken by ICPO staff – something which became increasingly significant throughout the pandemic period.

"I wish to commend the tireless commitment of the small ICPO team which is in regular contact with approximately 1,100 Irish citizens in prison in 30 countries around the world," he said.

Bishop Brennan revealed that in 2020 alone this work involved 10,000 letters, phone calls, emails and prison visits made to, from or on behalf of Irish citizens overseas.

Trojan

"All of this is Trojan but unheralded work, and bears real witness to the Gospel mission to love God and to love one's neighbour as oneself," he said.

The survey asked questions under a number of different headings: 'Life

in Prison Overseas' (including during Covid-19), 'Resettlement', and, 'The Services and Supports you Receive from ICPO'. The following are the key findings and conclusions:

The survey findings concluded that restrictions imposed in prisons during the pandemic led to considerable hardship for prisoners. Whilst some restrictions may remain necessary on a country-by-country or prison-by-prison basis, access to physical, educational and certain social activities should be provided to the greatest extent possible within national health guidelines.

“Our survey highlights the mental health difficulties experienced by Irish people who are in prison abroad”

The ICPO said that coronavirus-related restrictions in prisons should be lifted as soon as it safe to do so warning that "they should not be permitted to become the 'new normal'".

It said that, for example, access to video-calls should continue to be permitted when restrictions are lifted but should not be used as a replacement for physical visits from family and friends.

The report found that prison authorities must ensure that appropriate supports are in place for prisoners who are experiencing mental health difficulties. The lack of adequate mental and physical healthcare in prisons

in some parts of the world highlights the importance of prisoners having an advocate whether it is family, ICPO or an Irish Consular official.

Urgency

It was recommended that a well-resourced, transparent, fair and expeditious repatriation system should be put in place as a matter of urgency. This will ensure that those prisoners who wish to do so can, if eligible, return to Ireland to serve the remainder of their sentence in Ireland close to their families and be better supported in preparing for release.

"While long awaited draft legislation has now been published in relation to prisoners in EU states, it will be insufficient without further amendments to existing legislation and adequate resources to process applications efficiently," the report said.

The ICPO was established by the bishops' conference in 1985 to work for Irish prisoners overseas wherever they are and in that time it has supported prisoners abroad from every county on the island of Ireland, and it makes no distinction in terms of religious faith; the nature of a prison conviction or of a prisoner's status.

It is estimated that, at any one time, there are up to 1,200 Irish people in prison overseas in approximately 30 countries around the world. A significant majority are in prison in Britain, with relatively high numbers in the USA, Australia and throughout Europe.

Has belief really vanished in Ireland?



The Church must reach out and be prepared to be more of a community than a building, writes **Dr Gladys Ganiel**

Archbishop of Dublin Dermot Farrell has made headlines with his assertion that “evidence of Christian belief in Ireland today has for all intents and purposes vanished”.

Dr Farrell made the comments in an interview with *Síolta* (Seeds), the journal of the national seminary in Maynooth.

“A 2018 Pew Research Centre report ranked Ireland the third most religious country in Western Europe”

Archbishop Farrell painted a bleak picture of declines in vocations, financial free-fall, and a younger generation increasingly lost to faith. His remarks were covered in major news outlets like *The Irish Times* and *Irish Independent*, but readers had to persevere to the end of the articles for a surprise ending: Dr Farrell claimed that he was “not pessimistic” about the future of the Church, adding: “This time of reduced numbers may well afford us an opportunity to be creative and to reimagine the institutional Church. We have not been abandoned by God. God is to be found in this situation.”

Those comments reminded me of the words of American Methodist theologian Stanley Hauerwas, who once asserted that the Church in the West wasn’t dying. God was killing it. For Dr Hauerwas, this was because the churches had become so caught up in exerting power that they had neglected their mission of love and service.

While Archbishop Farrell is right that Christian practice in Ireland has declined rapidly, it is something of an exaggeration to claim that belief has ‘vanished’. Ireland still ranks among the most religious nations in Western Europe.

A 2018 Pew Research Centre report ranked Ireland the third most religious country in Western Europe.



And a study of European Social Survey data among 16 to 29 year olds found that Irish young people were among the top four of 22 countries for regular religious attendance. Rates of religious attendance and affiliation in Northern Ireland have dropped but remain higher than in the Republic, so when an all-island approach is taken religious decline is more nuanced.

Abuse scandals

This may be cold comfort for the Catholic Church, which is still struggling to recover from the stunning loss of trust caused by the abuse scandals. But the stubborn persistence of the faithful few may form the basis for Dr Farrell’s cautious optimism. Faith in Ireland has not completely vanished, and to say that it has is probably something of a disservice to those who still care about it and may be called on to rekindle it. It also is possible that Dr Farrell overlooks the untapped potential of women to help renew

Christian ministries.

In addition, religious practice has been impacted by the pandemic, with many church services moving online during lockdown. Some clergy and churches have used online resources with energy and enthusiasm, reframing them as an opportunity for renewed mission and a chance to make inroads in a secularising society.

But some churchgoers still have not returned to in-person services, and it is not clear if they will do so.

Last month, an Iona Institute survey of pre-pandemic Massgoers in the Republic found that 54% had not returned, up from 64% who had not returned in September 2020. Among the top reasons people had not returned were (see below).

Moreover, one in five of those who were attending Mass regularly before coronavirus say they do not know if they will be back. This figure remains roughly unchanged from when the same question was asked in September 2020.

“Moreover, one in five of those who were attending Mass regularly before coronavirus say they do not know if they will be back”

The Iona Institute survey also confirmed that financial contributions are down. Among regular Massgoers before Covid-19, 36% are contributing less, 46% the same, and 9% more, with nine percent who don’t contribute to collections.

Institutional Church

Trends of reduced attendance and financial contributions will certainly force churches to be “creative and to reimagine the institutional Church”, as Dr Farrell says. I titled a report on my own research among Irish clergy during the pandemic ‘Something Other than a Building’ to capture an emerging shift in mindset away from the church as a building to a group of dedicated people serving

others in the wider community. I think Archbishop Farrell is getting at something similar.

It remains to be seen if the Irish churches – Catholic and Protestant – can adjust to changes in religious practice emerging from the pandemic, ministering to the Faithful and reaching out to serve the community beyond. The stakes are high: vanishing or flourishing.

Gladys Ganiel is a Reader in Sociology at Queen’s University Belfast. She also blogs on religion and politics at www.gladysganiel.com This article first appeared on sluggero-toole.com and is republished with permission.

Why have you not returned to Mass? July 2021

Concerns about Covid-19 and public places	62%
The restrictions on numbers and the need to wear masks etc., are off-putting	33%
I prefer to watch the Mass on TV, online or on the radio nowadays	19%
My faith isn’t as strong as before Covid-19	6%
I have health or other issues that prevent me from returning to Mass	6%
Other	12%

Pope Francis: Climate change ‘causing immense hardship for the most vulnerable among us’



Photo: Apsatou Bagaya / Concern Worldwide.

Extreme weather causing widespread droughts and floods, destroying crops and food supplies in world's most vulnerable countries.

The Pope expressed concern over the increasing intensity and frequency of extreme weather phenomena and the desertification of the soil. With climate change related hunger and malnutrition increasing, Pope Francis warned, “We have caused a climate emergency that gravely threatens nature and life itself, including our own.”

The Pope made his comments as part of a written appeal for the ‘World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation’.

Worldwide, droughts and floods have more than doubled since the early 1990's with Africa particularly badly affected.

An increase in droughts – combined with ongoing conflict and unemployment – means dry spells have an increasingly destructive impact on people living in already vulnerable communities. Such as those in Niger, Western Africa where 80% of the population relies on agriculture for their livelihoods.

This year droughts and floods have already caused a 12% drop in cereal production in Niger compared with the already poor yields of 2018/19. 2.7 million people are now projected to be in severe acute food insecurity – urgently needing food if they are to survive.

“Listen to the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor, who suffer most because of the unbalanced ecology.”
– Pope Francis

Since 1968 Irish charity Concern Worldwide has worked around the world helping alleviate hunger caused by natural or man-made disasters. Over this period climate change has become one of the key drivers of hunger.

In 2019 alone, Concern helped 28.6m people in 24 of the world's poorest

countries – including Niger.

Concern doesn't just provide emergency food to those affected by hunger. The charity continues to work alongside communities so they are able to feed themselves long into the future.

People's lives are transformed when they are equipped and empowered to do it for themselves. This is how real progress is made.

One of Concern's most vital funding sources – on which it absolutely depends – is gifts in the Wills of its supporters. These gifts ensure Concern will always be there for people in need of a helping hand.

What Concern's help looks like

In Niger life is a *constant* struggle for survival. A struggle which becomes almost impossible during the annual ‘hunger gap’.

Causing untold suffering, the annual hunger gap is a desperate period. Food from the last harvest has run out and it will be months until more is available.

During this time, normal life grinds to a halt. Children leave education to help with agricultural chores at home. Adults travel anywhere they can to find work to earn even the smallest amount to support their families.

Every day becomes a terrifying battle to find food.

The hunger gap used to last 3 months, ending when the harvest was ready. But *climate change has made this terrible problem much worse*, with infrequent rainfall and rising temperatures drastically reducing crops.

As a result this torturous period now lasts 5 months from April to September, with people spending almost half their year struggling to stay alive.

And Covid-19 has further exacerbated an already dreadful situation. Restricted movement and border closures are impacting supplies to local markets, pushing prices up. Now even those who manage to work can't buy food because it's too expensive. Seeds for next season's crops are also being affected by these shortages. This means the pandemic's

deadly effects will be felt next year too.

Vulnerable families, who already have little to eat, are in grave danger.

But thanks to gifts in Wills, Concern is able to immediately support families in desperate need and equip them to support themselves long into the future.

For families affected by climate change in countries like Niger, one of the ways this is achieved is by providing communities with drought-resistant seeds, *proven* to yield more food ... the tools needed to farm their land ... and training to adopt climate-smart techniques. For example, crop rotation and composting to keep the soil in the best condition. And methods to capture and keep as much rain as possible.

Thanks to generous people leaving Concern a gift in their Wills, families can now grow their own food in their own vegetable gardens. The food they're growing now will feed them this year. **The knowledge and skills they gain will make sure they have enough food to eat every year from now on.**

Chawada Aboubacar is a mother of five. Thanks to her own hard work and support from Concern, she now has a thriving kitchen garden of her own. Her family own a small piece of land where they grow the grain, millet. When it runs out between harvests, it used to be a struggle to provide the food they needed to survive.

But Chawada now grows tomatoes, onions, cabbage and carrots in her kitchen garden. This garden will provide nutritious food for her family this year and for years to come. Keeping her children safe from hunger so they can thrive.

“We will start eating cabbage, carrot and lettuce in one month and then the onion in about six weeks. This garden helps me and my family. It makes me happy.”

– Chawada Aboubacar

Having enough food prevents life threatening malnutrition, meaning Chawada and her children have the opportunity to live long and happy lives. What's more, any surplus food from

the kitchen garden can be sold, giving the family money to buy other nutritious food and essential items.

Best of all, a regular, dependable source of food means Chawada's children don't have to work on the

Your gift ensures your legacy lives on, supporting Concern to help people like Chawada and her family long into the future.

Many who do leave a gift in their Will have been so affected by the suffering of



With Concern worker Mounkaïla's help, Chawada can now grow food to help her family survive.

land and can go back to school. Getting the education essential for a brighter future for them.

By passing on the skills she has gained to her children, Chawada is ensuring they will be self-sufficient in the future; able to provide for both their own families and the wider community – helping to pull everyone out of poverty.

Be part of a world without hunger

“What would induce anyone ... only to be remembered for their inability to take action when it was so urgent and necessary to do so?”

– Pope Francis

As you've just seen, gifts in Wills transform lives both immediately and long into the future.

Won't you help Concern fight poverty and hunger – to end it in some of the world's poorest communities – by leaving a life changing gift in your Will?

To receive your free, no obligation booklet – in complete confidence – please contact Concern's Legacy Manager, Siobhán O'Connor. Call **01 417 8020**, email **siobhan.oconnor@concern.net**, or visit **www.concern.net/bequest**



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WHATEVER IT TAKES**

Open to change

The Sunday Gospel

Fr Silvester
O'Flynn OFM Cap.



Jesus was deeply disturbed by the travesty of a religion enmeshed in legalism. "You put aside the commandments of God to cling to human traditions." Rules about ritual purification had sucked the beauty out of true worship. Pope Francis wrote that certain customs not directly related to the heart of the Gospel are no longer properly understood or appreciated. Think of a bishop's residence being called a palace or how trappings of power which were meaningful in their time but are off-putting for people today. The Church is not meant to be a museum of dead fossils. Jesus set up a Church to be missionary, to be with the people, giving them meaning, hope, direction, compassion and God's love above all. We must not be afraid to let go of obsolete customs or rules in order to be more relevant to the needs of our time. The guiding challenge must always be, what would Jesus do? What would Jesus say? Would Jesus recognise the Church today as the Church that he set up?

Divine instructions

Human regulations may be changed but there are divine instructions which are valid for all time. The Letter of St James reminds us that with regard to what comes down to us from the Father of light, there is no such thing as alteration or

shadow of change.

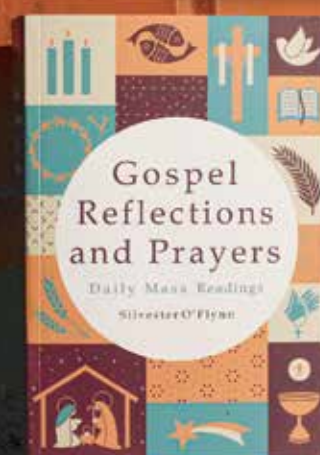
In today's Gospel Jesus mentions 12 serious sins: fornication (sexual intimacy outside of marriage), theft, murder, adultery, avarice, malice, deceit, indecency, envy, slander, pride and folly (denial of God's existence). It sounds like the advertisement for a popular novel or film! Some of the teaching of Jesus would not be regarded as politically correct in certain quarters today. Would he change the list because of changed times? After all this is the 21st century! Time changes many things but inner truths and moral principles stand forever. Modern permissiveness does not like firm directives and clear statements. Permissiveness thrives in grey areas.

“Lord, who shall we go to? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe”

The teaching of Jesus is a solid foundation for life. Life built on his teaching stands firm in the face of storms and floods. As St Peter said in last Sunday's Gospel: "Lord, who shall we go to? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe."

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Both Christian and 'human rights' missionaries face the same dilemmas

If we think we can make the world a better place, standing on the side-lines is not an option, writes **David Quinn**

In the science fiction series, *Star Trek*, there is something called the 'Prime Directive'. It instructs that no contact should be made with another civilisation until it has reached a certain level of advanced technological development. The civilisation must be allowed to develop in its own way without the intervention of outsiders until that point.

Should we have a similar directive here on Earth? That is, should we leave other societies and cultures alone until they reach a particular level of development, or until they reach out to us?

The question seems pertinent in light of developments in Afghanistan. For 20 years the West, led by the United States, has been trying to remake that country in its image.

The American-led invasion, which took place in October 2001, following the September 11 attacks on the US, overthrew the Taliban, which presided over the most extreme form of Islamic (Sharia) law on the planet. Women in particular suffered, but so did anyone who was not a Muslim. The Christian presence in Afghanistan is tiny because converting to Christianity can easily result in your death.

Status

The Americans were determined to raise the status of women in Afghan society, even introducing gender quotas into certain sectors. Humble rural councils had quotas. Many aid organisations descended on the country intent on Westernising it (because that is what it amounted to). Several dozen Irish people worked for these organisations. Their bravery and dedication cannot be doubted.

But now, suddenly, the Taliban are back in power, America has been humiliated in the eyes of the world, and aid workers, as well as the local allies of the Western powers are scrambling to get out of the country.

The question arises; should we have ever been there? Yes, perhaps the overthrow of the Taliban (from the Arabic word,



US soldier Sgt Michael Webb, left, from 549th MP Company Task Force Bronco and a translator are silhouetted as they talk to each other at a joint US military and Afghan police checkpoint in Nangarhar province in eastern Afghanistan before the US pull out. Photo: CNS.

'talib' meaning 'student') was justifiable because they provided a haven for Osama Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda. But after that, what?

After that, the Western power begin to nation-build, that is, to try and turn Afghanistan into a cohesive, democratic country which adheres to the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. If that meant overturning centuries, if not millennia of local traditions, and transforming their understanding of Islam, then so much the better.

“In a place like Afghanistan, you are dealing with a deeply tribal society, where nearly all the loyalties are tribal”

I used to believe in nation-building. Naively, I thought it was possible to turn countries like Afghanistan, Libya or Iraq into shining beacons of democracy. How wrong that was. It turns out that you can overthrow an existing status quo, one that might have been extremely bad, and actually make things worse.

Nation-building has actually succeeded sometimes, for example in Japan and Ger-

many after the war. But those countries were absolutely smashed to pieces first, especially Germany, and anyway, the American victors were building on strong, pre-existing foundations. Germany was a Western country, a product of Western civilisation, and Japan had industrialised in the 19th century in order to try and match the power of the West, which it did, and also enabled it to wage war on its neighbours.

Tribal society

But in a place like Afghanistan, you are dealing with a deeply tribal society, where nearly all the loyalties are tribal. That is a very different thing entirely.

Does this mean we should foreswear trying to change societies like Afghanistan at all? Should we simply leave them alone entirely?

This is a question that concerned Christian missionaries long before it ever concerned UN-type human rights activists. Should we bring the Gospel to people who never heard of it? Why not leave them with their own religion?

For most of Christian history, the answer was never in doubt; of course we should tell them about Christ. He told us to 'make disciples of all nations'. It is an explicit command from the Lord himself.

But now we are full of doubts. We know that sometimes Christianity arrived in

a region by force, such as in South America, or Africa, with the colonisers.

Should the Church have kept its missionaries at home or sent them into these new mission fields? But the thinking was still that these newly encountered people were better off with the Gospel. The alternative was to let the likes of the Aztecs continue with mass human sacrifice uninterrupted, or else leave them to the 'tender mercies' of the most brutal of the Spanish Conquistadors.

“The Taliban are back in power, America has been humiliated in the eyes of the world”

The fact is, Christianity has a universal message ('Catholic' means 'universal', which is to say, the Catholic Church is the universal Church). In a similar vein, Christianity believes everyone is my neighbour and ought to be helped.

Liberal, secular humanism is also a universal creed. It is built on a Christian foundation. Like Christianity, it regards everyone as my neighbour, and it believes human rights (as the West defines them) are universally binding. This human rights 'Gospel' must be extended to the whole world,

ern conquerors into places like Iraq and Afghanistan, or should they stay as far away as possible?

Conquerors

But even if they don't follow conquerors, much of the time they can only access a given country because of Western power, often in the form of money. Western aid to developing countries frequently comes with 'human rights' strings attached, which can include abortion.

“Aid workers, as well as the local allies of the Western powers are scrambling to get out of the country”

So, should we adopt something like the Prime Directive instead and avoid contact with any place that hasn't reached modernity on its own, or hasn't invited us in?

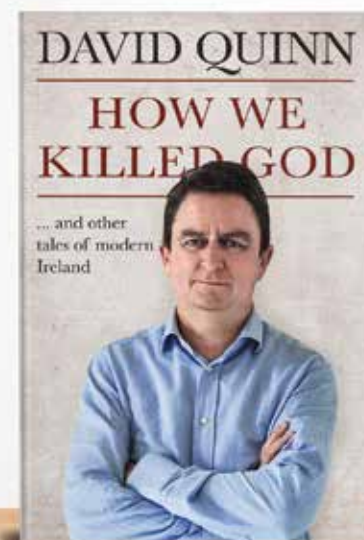
We can't really do that either. If we think we can better the lives of people, if we think our human rights creed (however we define that), or the Gospel will objectively improve their conditions, then it would be immoral to stand back, unless we think we will make things worse, which is very possible.

The best answer is sure to engage, but to do so with maximum delicacy and sensitivity rather than clumsily, or worse, with force.

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Religious leaders can play an important role in peacebuilding



Promoting a truth recovery process without fear of prosecution would provide information to the many unanswered questions of victims and their families in the North, writes Fr Aloysius G. Lumala

The role of the Church in peace-making and reconciliation is based on the fact that social and political disturbances in society contradict the most fundamental principles of the Gospel. The Church's initiatives for reconciliation are anchored on the concept that peace is the tranquillity that flows from right order. This mission is founded on the biblical command to make peace and do justice. So, the Church should not be afraid to draw from the message of Jesus who demands that faithful witness must be taken seriously especially by treating others as you would like them to treat you. When we follow Jesus in trying to put right order into the structures of our society, the tranquillity that results is peace.

In countries where disputes become a norm, no political system can flourish, and the economy cannot thrive leaving the people to suffer and face the consequences. So, by reason of her essential mission, the Church feels an obligation to go to the roots of the conflict in order to bring healing and to re-establish, so to speak, effective and true reconciliation. For the Church to be effective in facilitating peace and reconciliation, at whatever level, this calls for truth and transparency especially by trying to trace the source of the conflict or tension.

Challenges

In contemporary society, we shall always have challenges to building a peaceful and inclusive society. However, it is good and necessary to reach out to all those who have been affected by a troubled past. In that regard, Church leaders and indeed all Christian people need to be part of a system which supports the victims of violence so as to help them rediscover the meaning of life. The focus should be on making a positive contribution towards sowing seeds of hope to everybody. This could help to break the cycle of trauma, hatred and anger as people work committedly together to bring about healing and reconciliation.

“Twenty-three years on from the Good Friday Agreement, paramilitary violence and criminality are still a challenge in both sides of the community”

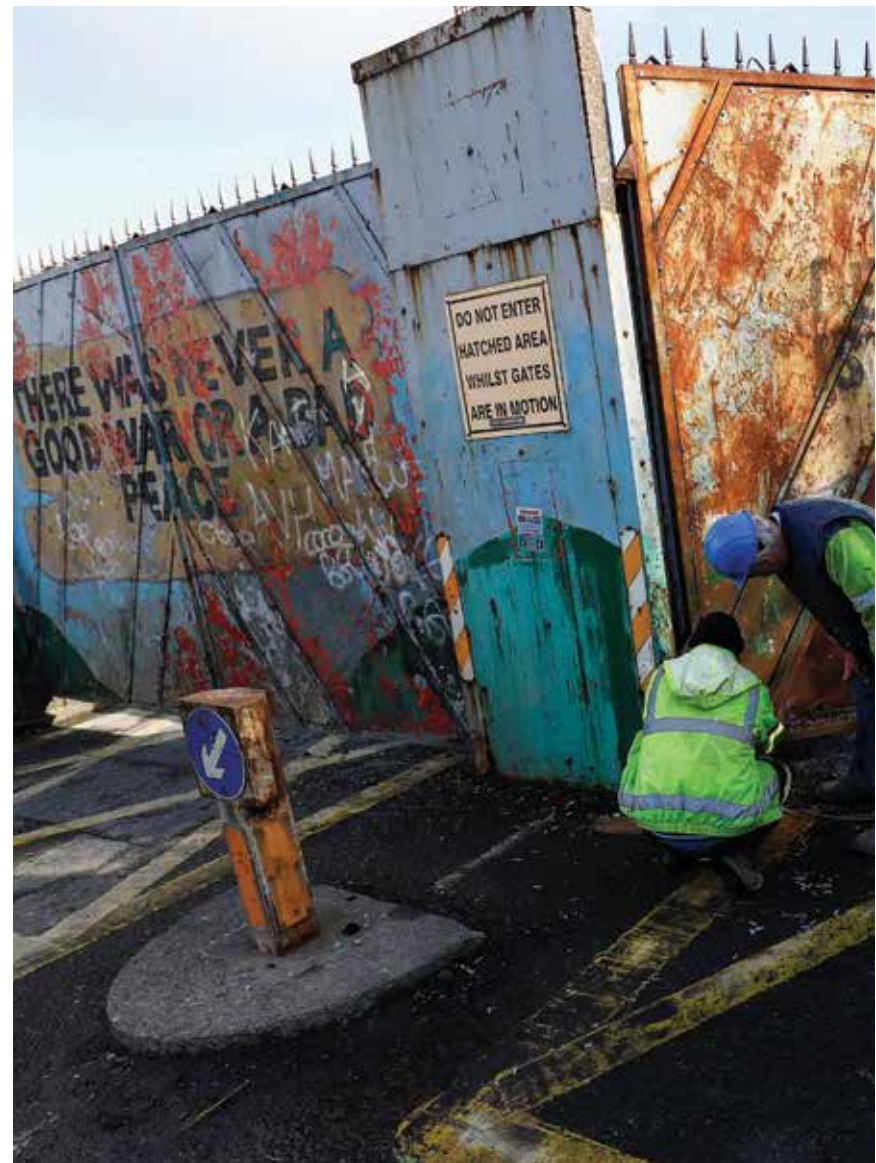
In the opinion of the African scholars Joe Teffo, Desmond Tutu and John Mbiti, the communal dimension of reconciliation which is termed as 'ubuntu' can be deemed as an effective way of uniting conflicting parties for the common good. This African philosophy of unity in diversity

stresses the unity or oneness of the whole of creation. The emphasis is on mutual respect for all persons with the understanding that “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am.”

The notion of ubuntu or communal approach to reconciliation calls for care and respect of other people with whom you might not agree. It seeks to restore humanity and dignity to both perpetrators and victims of violence, and to create a sense of mutuality among humans who have been alienated from one another. In fact, ubuntu is the force that can bridge the terrible rifts created by historic injustices and inhumanities. For instance, it is a force that helped to restore peace in South Africa after the evil of apartheid. This meant that all parties concerned were engaged. These included individuals, families, communities, races, political and religious leaders as well as victims and survivors. The turning point was the approach of working communally to achieve peace and reconciliation countering violence especially by stressing the importance of compassion, kindness and empathy – otherwise, revenge achieves nothing. Having honest and truthful dialogue ultimately facilitates the way to reconciliation with the intention of pursuing justice for all.

Paramilitary violence

Twenty-three years on from the Good Friday Agreement, paramilitary violence and criminality are



Workers make repairs on the peace wall gates at Lanark Way in Belfast in April following a week of violence. Photos: CNS.

still a challenge in both sides of the community, particularly those in some of the most disadvantaged parts of Northern Ireland. Given the desire for co-operation and engagement on all sides, there needs to be a genuinely fresh start – bringing a sense of hope to those who have suffered through paramilitary activity and also pointing to a better way for those who have been involved in paramilitary organisations.

Drawing from the ubuntu reconciliatory approach, there is evidence of success at attempts of

honest and transparent reconciliatory engagements by all parties concerned. Promoting a truth recovery process without fear of prosecution would provide information to the many unanswered questions of victims and their families. This though can work when it is inclusive of the British and Irish governments, ex-members of security forces and paramilitary bodies, lawyers, academics, religious leaders, victims and survivors. The focus would be to ensure that there is commitment from all concerned parties so that there is healing and taking responsibility for one's actions as well as necessary compensation. It is generally assumed that a mediator would be someone who is external to the conflict and therefore impartial, one who can be entrusted with the role of honest arbitrator.

“Drawing from the ubuntu reconciliatory approach, there is evidence of success at attempts of honest and transparent reconciliatory engagements by all parties concerned”

However, the challenge in Northern Ireland is the attempt to grant an amnesty without finding the whole truth of what really happened. This is not justifiable as Professor Mo Hume (daughter



A supporter of Ugandan musician-turned-politician Robert Kyagulanyi, also known as Bobi Wine, is detained by police in Kasangati last year. Clergy have been key mediators amidst different factions in the country.



of John Hume) strongly questions the British government's plans for a 'Troubles' amnesty (*The Irish News* July 31, 2021). She argues: "If you deny justice then you are denying people's histories, their losses, their pain. To do that is a huge, huge violence." I think it is wrong to allow perpetrators to get away with doing wrong as this might result in doing more. It is even worse for someone to decide never to admit doing wrong.

Religious leaders can play an important role as members of local civil society in peacebuilding. For example, in my home country, Uganda, the clergy acted as vital mediators during the insurgency of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebels against the Ugandan government, a conflict which lasted for nearly 18 years from 1987. Similarly, in South Africa, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Bishop Stanley Mogoba were very instrumental in facilitating the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) which helped to mediate the discord between the African National Congress and the Inkatha Freedom Party when they met Dr Nelson Mandela and Chief Minister Gatscha Buthelezi before the South African general elections in April 1994. Central to the TRC was the notion of forgiveness and restorative justice. This intervention was able to offer practical ways of healing and transformation of individuals and society.

Representatives

In both cases the Church representatives entered the negotiations with a particular perspective of promoting the interests of the

common good. How the Church perceives its role in a political conflict will determine the manner in which she becomes involved in conflict resolution. The Church's role is instrumental in situations where she is seen to be impartial. However, a serious problem arises when the Church seems to be taking sides with a certain political inclination. When this happens, it warrants consideration and reflection by the Church.

“The notion of ubuntu or communal approach to reconciliation calls for care and respect of other people with whom you might not agree”

No doubt even in Northern Ireland the role of the Catholic and Protestant Churches in mediation has been significant over the decades although their influence is still very much needed going forward. Some frame the conflict as ethnic, rather than sectarian in nature. Even so, the necessity of a continued involvement of both Churches in striving for peace reveals their importance to the process of offering reconciliation and justice to victims and survivors of the 'Troubles' as well as prosecution of serious offenders.

† Fr Aloysius Gonzaga Lumala is originally from Uganda and currently serves as curate in All Saints Parish, Ballymena, Co. Antrim.

Organised religion is a great cure for conspiracy theories



While some studies associate religiosity with conspiracy theories, organised religion is a bulwark for reason, writes **Ruadhán Jones**

The continuing prevalence of, even rise in, belief in conspiracy theories causes some incredulity in the intellectual elite and scientific communities. How could it be, that the age of reason has given way to an age of unreason? In trying to answer why, studies have been conducted and the evidence interpreted.

One of the conclusions reached is that belief in conspiracy theories - a belief that some covert, malign, but influential agency is responsible for an unexplained event - correlates with a distrust of scientific reasoning and higher levels of religiosity or superstitious beliefs.

This is simply what the facts show, and they hint at the truth. Without faith in reason, and trust in our institutions, irrational beliefs are bound to flourish. What the facts don't show, of course, is that the erosion of a belief in reason is a product of the attacks on organised religious faith, in particular Christianity, and the decline in true religiosity.

Historical period

We are living in a historical period that could still accurately be called the post-Enlightenment, or post-truth, era. It was in the age of Enlightenment that independent reason, atheistic and rationalistic, became the gold-standard for thinking men and women.

This standard set itself against religious or theological thought,

in particular as found in organised religion. The Church was vilified - in the conspiracy theories of the day - for inhibiting 'progress', for living in the dark, for being a bastion of irrationality and unreason in the age of reason. The idea of an accumulated tradition was scorned, and the virtue of reasoning as a community was an incidental victim.

Innovations

As the physical sciences flourished, producing remarkable innovations that led to improvements in the daily life of billions of men and women, so did philosophical and moral thinking flounder. As Catholic philosopher and Notre Dame Prof. Alasdair MacIntyre has spent his career pointing out, the words we used remained the same, but they were evacuated of all meaning having lost the context for their use.

“In the West, these intuitions were furnished with a tradition founded on Christian Revelation, and advanced through collective reasoning across centuries”

Appeals by the individual to objective reason were considered the only way to reach the truth, and yet no agreement could be reached as to what objective reason was or what it revealed. Decline followed as the fields of philosophy and morality became increasingly fractured and marginalised, especially today, with no way to resolve disagreement.

What rose to replace the appeal to objective reason was the primacy of the individual above all else. Certain institutions maintained a strong presence - the rise of the state or nation is one of the Enlightenment's products - but, increasingly, self-determination and self-discovery became our highest ambition.

As it continued, this fantasy of self-actualisation contributed to a sharp decline in trust for previously respected institutions. The proliferation of knowledge regarding the scandals within churches and governments exacerbated this trend, to the point that laws and institutions are now seen as inhibiting or restricting our freedom to self-actualise our own fate.

The proliferation of conspiracy theories is an effect of this declin-

ing faith in reason and in institutional knowledge. Now, the same type of 'conspiracy theories' that originally attacked the Catholic Church are turned on the modern institutions of government and the scientific community. In a desire to rid the world of the Church's reach, these same institutions have undermined their own basis for appeal; an institutionalised community that exists with a shared faith in universal reason.

“How could it be, that the age of reason has given way to an age of unreason?”

At its best, religiosity is the expression of a desire to understand the world to the fullest extent, and at the highest level. It incorporates our strengths - these being our powers of reason, our love of beauty, and our desire for goodness -, and our weaknesses - our fear of death and suffering, our uncertainty and frailty, our propensity for evil. Our rational and pre-rational intuitions find their flourishing in faith.

Intuitions

In the West, these intuitions were furnished with a tradition founded on Christian Revelation, and advanced through collective reasoning across centuries. Christianity provided a language and an institutional context through which the mysteries of the world could be explored.

As this understanding of religion was denuded, the age of reason created for itself a powerful and imaginary enemy; the backward, manipulative institution, responsible for blocking the individual person's path to true flourishing.

By failing to recognise the value of true religiosity and organised religion, the proponents of the age of reason attacked the foundation of reason as they knew it. And while the Church's ability to declare certain strains of thought or communities 'heretical' is still considered a means of the powerful silencing the weak, the inability of modern elites to eradicate modern 'heresies' is one of the defining aspects of our age.

The institutional Church isn't perfect, but its decline has robbed us of shared community by which we can explain the world collectively. And what we are left with are increasingly tribal communities who recognise no such thing as reason.

“We are living in a historical period that could still accurately be called the post-Enlightenment, or post-truth, era”



There is room to improve when it comes to pregnancy reactions in Ireland, writes **Jason Osborne**

Crisis pregnancy organisation Gianna Care is looking to raise awareness about positive pregnancy reactions with a new campaign, after Director Carolyn O'Meara noticed an overwhelming tendency towards negativity in today's Ireland.

"This is something that's actually come to my mind a lot over the last number of years," Ms O'Meara told *The Irish Catholic*.

"It's come about mainly because of the interactions with the clients that we've had, and also my own personal experience too. And talking to women that I know, friends and family regarding pregnancy, and how people reacted to their pregnancy."

Ms O'Meara says many of Gianna Care's clients are met with off-putting and derogatory remarks upon revealing their pregnancy, which often makes them question the pregnancy itself.

“Despite being in a ‘very stable and happy marriage and have a very loving and supportive husband’, people still ‘gasp’ when she reveals their number of children”

"So, for our clients, when they come in, they'll often say to us that they dread telling certain people or they dread the reactions and the negative comments from certain people. That can be just in passing and then they'll move on," she said.

Distressed

"But then we'll have the other extreme of women being so distressed at the thoughts of the negative reactions they say they'll receive that they contemplate abortion, some having even aborted because of that reason."

Pregnant women, particularly those who find themselves in an unexpected, unplanned, and sometimes unwanted, situation can be "extremely vulnerable", according to Ms O'Meara.

"Some of these women couldn't face the negative reactions. Particularly in early pregnancy, women can feel very, very vulner-

Persuading Ireland to react positively to pregnancy

able. The positive pregnancy test can come completely out of the blue, so they're totally shocked.

"They're in an unplanned situation. Emotions can be very high in early pregnancy due to hormone changes, they can have mood swings, crying spells, be really irritable, have anxiety and then they have to face the negative reactions of others," she explained.

Hostile

Aware of the effect that a hostile reaction to the news of someone's pregnancy can have, Ms O'Meara realised a positive pregnancy reaction campaign was something that would have to feature as part of Gianna Care's work.

"If you look at Ireland, I think we've made great strides with the mental health awareness, and I was just thinking about that, that we're much more open to talking about mental health and the importance of maintaining our mental wellbeing, but then I was thinking about pregnant mothers, and there's not an awful lot done to protect mothers who are in a very unique and vulnerable position," Ms O'Meara said.

"I think that even just starting the conversation can have a huge impact – just making people

aware that their reaction is actually really important, and not only to the pregnant mother who's in the situation now, but that mother who's going to be in that situation is hearing how you're talking about other people right now."

With this in mind, Ms O'Meara and Gianna Care are beginning a "public awareness campaign" in an effort to get people thinking about just the scenarios she described.

“For our clients, when they come in, they'll often say to us that they dread telling certain people or they dread the reactions and the negative comments from certain people”

"We shared this last week [through social media] just to try to get the conversation started and so many women resonated with this straight away. So many said in private messages to us that they felt a lot of judgment.

"It caused them huge anxiety before announcing their pregnancy. Often women will put it [announcing the pregnancy]

off for as long as they possibly can – we're talking months, until they're halfway through their pregnancy, to tell people."

Reactions

Sharing some of the reactions with this paper, one woman said she "always" dreads telling her family as "it's always negative".

She said she almost considered abortion for her first daughter, but "there was a prolife grandad speaking on the radio about how life was beautiful, how children are such a joy... thanks to this guy, my seven year old is here, beautiful, alive, she changed my life.

"Positive reaction to pregnancy announcement is so important," she concluded.

Another woman said she understands the need for the campaign completely. Despite being in a "very stable and happy marriage and have a very loving and supportive husband", people still "gasp" when she reveals their number of children.

"The smart comments become more smart with each pregnancy. As a result, we hide pregnancy from most people. Those that say 'you're mad' or 'have ye not enough already' or 'how can you afford another one' or 'where are you going to put this baby, you're

already squashed in that house', it goes on and on and on," she said.

Highlight

Ms O'Meara said that many women were quick to highlight the support they received from friends and family, but said that the "wider social circle", such as work colleagues, was where they felt the negative pressure.

“We're much more open to talking about mental health and the importance of maintaining our mental wellbeing”

"Sometimes women feel that it's a conversation, even for myself, that it's a free-for-all, that anyone can pass comment. When you walk by with the bump in work, they can say, 'Oh, how many is this now?' and 'You only have a baby that's how old?'

"Women often say that they feel really judged, like they're stupid or looked down upon.

There's this real negativity unless there's the perfect space in between your children, they come at the perfect time, with the right financial circumstances or whatever it might be, people can pass judgment on that and it causes huge strain and anxiety and I think that people just don't realise that. I think that by starting the conversation, it can hopefully make a wider societal change."

“Pregnant women, particularly those who find themselves in an unexpected, unplanned, and sometimes unwanted, situation can be ‘extremely vulnerable’”

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The Irish Catholic

We still speak about keeping the Faith as if it were



We failed to nourish Catholics with ongoing adult catechesis at the parish level and we're paying the price today, writes Fr Seán Smith

All this public attention the sacraments are getting was rolling about in my head, for a different reason, as I prepared my homily for the liturgy on the Sunday of the Year. I suddenly made the connection between who Jesus was addressing 2,000 years ago and the quality of sacramental celebrations today. As I proclaimed the Gospel, John 6:24-35, and broke open the word, I felt challenged to ask the question: "Are the sacraments social or faith celebrations?"

Many, priests, in particular, are asking the same question. Shortly before his recent retirement, Archbishop Diarmuid Martin warned us that "the sacraments risked being turned into 'social occasions' rather than celebrations of faith." The truth is that, in most cases, the risk is now the norm and reality that needs to be addressed.

“While Jesus had compassion for the physical needs of the people, he was no mere do-gooder or social worker

If surveys are any indication of the alarming state of things, about 90% of families, in this bracket, do not show up for the weekly celebration of the liturgy in the Republic. It may be lower in the North. We should not be surprised that for this group, the sacraments are more social than faith celebrations. The three communities in which I ministered confirm this. In one, with its own school, the turnout for weekly Mass was nil. The other two were below 5%. Let me be very clear: this is neither a judgment nor a criticism. It simply reflects the stark reality of where our Catholic people are right now and it is not their fault.

The Gospel was a continuation of the previous Sunday where Jesus fed the people. They witnessed the sign but missed the deeper meaning. They did the right thing but for the wrong reason. A 'sign' for John is never an end in itself but points to and leads to Jesus, to conversion



Altar servers prepare for Mass.

and discipleship. They failed to see this. Instead, they witnessed the spectacular, a secular Messiah with power who would drive out the Romans. So, they tried to make him their king but he eluded them.

Tracks

The same people pursue Jesus in the hope of more food, excitement, and entertainment but Jesus stops them in their tracks. Jesus engages with the people face to face; not via writing, emails, or text message. In any interaction with people, our 'non-verbals' speak louder than our words. He is totally honest and frank with them, challenging them to reflect on their motivation: "You are looking for me not because you saw the signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled". Their intentions were good but way off course. The previous miracle made no impact on their spiritual lives. While Jesus had compassion for the physical needs of the people, he was no mere do-gooder or social worker. His mission was to raise them to a new level of awareness of the meaning and purpose of life. They have long-term, spiritual needs, that are more important than short-term physical. Even today most live only

for this brief, fleeting life, ignoring the life that continues forever. Only Jesus can feed this life so we must turn to him for eternal life. It is to this level, to himself, that Jesus is calling the people in the Gospel.

My point here is that Jesus risked being unpopular and even rejected, by being open and honest with them. But they accepted his challenge. They didn't turn away like those who could not accept his teaching on the Eucharist. Bishops, priests, and catechists can fear acting like Jesus because we don't want to be unpopular.

“In the Gospel of John, faith is mentioned 99 times. Never as a noun but as a verb. A noun is static. A verb is dynamic”

The 90% or so of Catholics presenting their children for the sacraments is no different to the people in the Gospel. Like them, they are doing the right thing for the wrong reason, because they don't know any better. Sadly, they have the experience but miss the meaning.

While they mean well they are completely unfocused and in urgent need of guidance and direction. The sacraments will continue to be mainly secular celebrations devoid of faith unless we (bishops, priests, and catechists) have the courage, as Pope Francis says to, "smell the sheep". Meet with them, dialogue with them, exhort, instruct and enlighten them. To leave them in their ignorance is to be guilty of bad shepherding. Like Jesus, we can do this compassionately and respectfully. Our body language will reflect that we are serious, earnest, and urgent so we do not need to say much.

Clarify

It is important to clarify what we mean by 'faith'. My experiences of faith at home, school, and the seminary were heavily intellectual. The focus was to fill our heads with abstract knowledge about God like creeds, dogmas, and laws. I deliberately mention God because little was spoken about Jesus. It is primarily through the human Jesus that we can have a relationship with God and because he was neglected faith was abstract. We still speak about 'keeping the faith'

as if it were 'something' instead of a relationship with 'Someone.'

Faith, described in scripture is primarily relational. Abraham's head was not full of knowledge of God. Yet he is held up as the model of faith. He is the man of great faith because he put his trust in God and journeyed with God. To be in an active relationship with God is to be a faith-filled and faithful disciple of Jesus and we don't need a lot of knowledge for that. What we do need is to *know* Jesus in the biblical meaning which is intimacy, like that of a husband and wife. Faith is first and foremost relationship, and this is what we must teach.

“My experiences of faith at home, school, and the seminary were heavily intellectual. The focus was to fill our heads with abstract knowledge about God”

In the Gospel of John, faith is mentioned 99 times. Never as a noun but as a verb. A noun is static. A verb is dynamic. Faith for John is movement, discipleship, coming to a relationship with Jesus. When John the Baptist directed his disciples to Jesus, "The two disciples followed Jesus" (John 1:36). Seeking to know where Jesus lived, he invited them to "Come and see," so they went and "stayed with him the

“Archbishop Diarmuid Martin warned us that ‘the sacraments risked being turned into ‘social occasions’ rather than celebrations of faith’”

something instead of a relationship with Someone



Children after their recent First Holy Communion in Eskra, Co. Tyrone. Photo: Jason McCartan.

“Faith is not a product of our reflection; it is something new that we cannot invent but only receive as a gift”

rest of that day” (John 1:38-39). To come to Jesus is to believe in him. For John, to put one’s faith in Jesus is a total commitment to him, to be his friend, his companion, his disciple on the road with him.

Retired Pope Benedict XVI, gives an excellent definition: “Faith is not a product of our reflection; it is something new that we cannot invent but only receive as a gift; faith does not come from reading but from listening. It is a relationship with Someone. It implies an encounter with the proclamation; it implies the existence of the Other, whom it proclaims, and creates communion.” Unless bishops, priests, and catechists work at bringing our people to this level, to an experience rather than knowledge and, new insight into faith, sacraments will continue to be more secular than faith celebrations for the vast majority.

Interaction

Throughout his interaction with the people, Jesus keeps them focused on his Father and himself. Not on knowledge but a relationship. This is faith in action. This is what it means to believe. This is faith as a verb. As St James warns us, “faith without good works is dead”. The first and most important work is a living, personal relationship with Jesus. And resulting from this relationship is reciprocal love in action. The first and most basic good work (liturgy is work) is weekly worship of God through offering Jesus, our high priest, to the Father, in the celebration of the liturgy, the Paschal Mystery. This is the bare minimum response Catholics are called to make. Sadly, the majority, around

90% of parents and children, are not responding. It is impossible therefore that the sacraments are faith celebrations. I repeat, this is neither a judgment nor a criticism. Nor is it entirely their fault. For centuries, we sowed sparsely and now we are reaping thinly. The diet of religious knowledge imparted through the schools, cannot sustain an adult. We failed to nourish them with ongoing adult catechesis at the parish level. No wonder we are paying the price today. On top of this, Ireland is a radically changed country as secular and pagan as any.

“Throughout his interaction with the people, Jesus keeps them focused on his Father and himself”

Through personally engaging the people, Jesus stirs a response in them. Though they still hanker after the bread that does not last, he keeps them focused on himself. He doesn’t let them off the hook and he will not be sidetracked. He creates a hunger, a desire and, a yearning, unrest and, dissatisfaction in them for the food that will last. “What can we do to accomplish the works of God?” they ask. And his answer is “believe in the one he sent.” Notice he does not tell them to believe in things *about* himself (this is knowledge) but believe *in* him. This is faith. Accept him, embrace him, listen to him, be his companion and disciple. To believe in the one the Father has sent is to throw in your lot with him. It’s about a relationship with him. We see in Jesus the

qualities needed in a good catechist to bring our lapsed parents into a relationship with him.

Bread of life

Continuing to explain how he alone is the bread of life (not physical bread), the people cry out, “Sir, give us this bread always”. Now that they are more enlightened, they can distinguish between what lasts and continues, between the fake and the real, between knowledge and relationship, and very important, between the good and the best. Many of us are trapped in the good and feel comfortable. But the good is the enemy of the best.

Jesus’ response to them is, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst”. To “come to Jesus” in John is to become his disciple, and to believe *in* Jesus is to be his disciple. There is a difference between *believing* Jesus

and believing *in* Jesus. To believe *in* Jesus is to take him seriously. A better question to ask is not, ‘do you believe Jesus’ but, ‘do you take him seriously?’ There is also a difference between a follower and a disciple of Jesus. Mainly through knowledge, a follower believes she or he has arrived. There’s nothing more to learn. I *know* all about God. A disciple is always a learner and never arrives at a full relationship with Jesus because, as Fr Karl Rahner puts it, “all relationships are unfinished symphonies”.

“Jesus’ response to them is, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst’”

The present sad reality is that the vast majority of Catholic parents presenting their children for the sacraments, do not know that Jesus is the heart and core of *all* the sacraments. They speak about their children ‘getting’ the sacraments of Baptism, First Communion, and Confirmation without any serious reference to him. They are rituals to do, to get, to receive but not faith celebrations. Some see them as just hoops to jump through. It would be much more effective to put all our emphasis on Jesus, *the* Sacrament, rather than impart knowledge about individual sacraments. As it stands we are putting the cart before the horse.

As Jesus is the vine and we are the branches, likewise, he is the vine and the sacraments are the branches (cf. John 15). Jesus is the sacrament of God because he is God in our flesh (cf. John 1:14), and we are one with him in his divine nature. “Whoever sees me,” Jesus says to Philip, “has seen the Father” (cf. John 14:9). Since the sacraments are concentrated in him, he is the source of sacramental life. Strictly speaking then, there is only one Sacrament: Jesus. He then must be our sole focus, beginning with a sacramental encounter at the Sunday Eucharist, the Paschal Mystery. It is here, *the source and summit*, the journey to celebrating the other sacraments must begin. We have to break with the mistaken perception that preparation for First Communion

and Confirmation, begins a few months before the celebration.

The journey starts at Baptism. It continues with the weekly celebration of the Eucharist. With the children accompanying their parents from an early age, there is no better preparation for the celebration of the other sacraments. By the time they reach the age of seven, they have several years of solid formation and experience through the weekly sacramental encounter with Christ. Although they do not receive the Body of Christ, they do encounter him present in the Eucharist, in his word, in the congregation, and in the presider.

First step

The first step in turning things around is honest admittance that we have a major crisis in our parishes and dioceses. Consider the annual exodus of the newly Confirmed from the weekly celebration of the Eucharist. Many say that Confirmation is graduation from the Church. Let’s suppose a diocese has 1,000 Confirmations annually and about 90% exit from the weekly celebration of the liturgy. For the 22 dioceses in the Republic that is 19,800 children alone. Factor in parents and siblings, to an average of four per family, and the number is a staggering 79,200 who do not show up every Sunday. What makes this more alarming is that this age group of parents, between 25-45, form the base for the future growth of the Church. But this foundation has been crumbling for years and continues at a rapid rate.

“The journey starts at Baptism. It continues with the weekly celebration of the Eucharist”

St John Paul II, called for a ‘new evangelisation’ of Catholics. The core, he said, of this new evangelisation is a “fresh encounter with Jesus”. Not more programmes! Jesus *is* the programme. Present Jesus to the parents and children; preach Jesus; teach Jesus; but most important of all, *live* Jesus. “We must speak more about Christ than the Church, than the Pope, than law,” Pope Francis warns us. Elsewhere he says, “I never tire of repeating those words of Benedict XVI which take us to the very heart of the Gospel: ‘Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.’” Jesus is the event and the person. The prime place for this encounter is the weekly celebration of our salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Paraphrasing GK Chesterton, “It’s not that Jesus has been tried and found wanting. He just hasn’t been tried.” Try Jesus! For all in ministry, this calls for a paradigm shift from a static, maintenance, and administrative-style ministry to a dynamic, Jesus-focused, relationship, and a new evangelisation model.

Fr Seán Smith lives in Knock, Co. Mayo.



Tackling power abuse



Brian Devlin's experience of Cardinal Keith O'Brien's abuse of power is prompting his calls for reform and renewal in the Church, writes **Jason Osborne**

Faithful Catholics today are weary and browbeaten following the revelations in recent years of the deep rot of abuse that took place at the heart of parishes and dioceses around the world. Compounding and exacerbating these cases were the widespread efforts to cover up the abuse, as Church officials sought to save face and avoid scandal in a number of instances.

Church

No one is more frustrated with the abuses or the attempted cover-ups than those who endured them, though, and Brian Devlin is one such man. Author of a new book, *Cardinal Sin: Challenging power abuse in the Catholic Church*, Mr Devlin is seeking to take to task the institutional structures in the Church that allowed such abuses to be carried out – and power is at the centre of it all, he understands.

Mr Devlin's own experience of abuse came about through his proximity to the late-Cardinal Keith O'Brien, who later admitted to serial sexual misconduct following intense scrutiny. Cardinal O'Brien's charisma and good humour, coupled with a local link between the two, quickly saw a friendship form upon Mr Devlin's entry of St Andrew's College, Drygrange seminary near Edinburgh.

"Keith O'Brien had a different role [to the other priests at the seminary], he was the college spiritual director," Mr Devlin tells *The Irish Catholic*, continuing, "His role was to make a very intimate spiritual journey with seminarians to help them discern whether or not they had a vocation to the priesthood. He was extraordinarily charismatic, he was very good humoured, very positive."

Such access to the seminarians, and such intensity of relationship, provided a man of a predatory bent with all of the access he needed



New cardinals arrive in procession at a consistory led by Pope Francis for the creation of 13 new cardinals in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican Nov. 28, 2020. Photo: CNS

to those in his vicinity. Mr Devlin details in his book the disturbing progression of their relationship, which culminated in an incident in which Cardinal O'Brien demonstrated "very, very clearly his power over me".

“Banding together, their experiences as they tried to see him brought to justice would inform Mr Devlin's future attitudes towards the Church's accountability structures”

"He didn't rape me, and he didn't genitally abuse me or anything like that, but what he did do was demonstrate very, very clearly his power over me, and that's why the book is subtitled *Challenging power abuse in the Catholic Church*," Mr Devlin explains.

The event marked a sudden and swift turning point in Mr Devlin's trajectory, and this was solidified

when, following Mr Devlin's ordination to the priesthood, then-Fr O'Brien was announced as the upcoming Archbishop of Edinburgh archdiocese.

"After about a year, I left the priesthood because I knew that there was no way that I could be a priest with him as my bishop, because the relationship that a bishop has with a priest is probably one of the most intense relationships you can have," Mr Devlin says.

A predator

"He controls every aspect of your life, and I wasn't prepared to put myself in that position. I certainly didn't feel capable of even thinking about that. I had made a vow to be obedient to Cardinal Gray, but they had a successor who, it's now become clear, was a predator, a sexual predator whose predation included sexually inappropriate behaviour towards his priests and in my case, a seminarian."

Leaving the priesthood, it was only years later, through Facebook, that Mr Devlin connected with three others who had similarly inappropriate reports concerning Cardinal O'Brien. Banding together, their experiences as they tried to

“Dissatisfied by the official Vatican response, they decided to go public with their story, *The Observer* taking them up on it and making it an international talking point”

see him brought to justice would inform Mr Devlin's future attitudes towards the Church's accountability structures.

"What happened next was, we told the nuncio individually what had happened to us. The nuncio was a guy called Archbishop Antonio Mennini, in London. He had been forewarned by a go-between that this was happening. So, four priests make very strong accusations against a cardinal in Scotland, and we get feedback from the go-between that the nuncio had long suspected there was something going on in our diocese," Mr Devlin says, continuing incredulously, "They were able to tolerate a degree of sexual predation by a cardinal and just let it go by."

"So we wrote, thinking there would immediately be a response, but when you read about these

things and you talk to people, very often what happens is an abused person, a victim, or their victims' advocate, says this is what's happened and you're met with a wall of silence, and that's what happened.

"Nothing happened. So that in itself was an action. Choosing not to do something is an action. It's a very abusive, powerful action, really. So we pressed and we pressed and said if you don't do something, we will go public on this. And nothing happened."

Silence

Meeting silence and inaction on the part of the relevant Church authorities, Mr Devlin and his counterparts were further stymied when they saw Cardinal O'Brien on TV around the time of Pope Benedict XVI's resignation, "his usual, jocular self".

in the Church

"A few days later, there he was, in the news, being interviewed, explaining what the process was, on the TV that is, in a conclave. He showed one of the voting cards that cardinals use, and he was his usual jocular self. Then we pressed very, very strongly that this was ridiculous, to say the least."

Dissatisfied by the official Vatican response, they decided to go public with their story, *The Observer* taking them up on it and making it an international talking point. Cardinal O'Brien initially contested the accusations, but held his hands up a short time later, following a TV appearance by Mr Devlin in which he described what the reaction to their story had been like, as well as his experience as a "Church whistleblower".

“A few months later, it was announced that there would be an investigation by an amazing bishop called Bishop Charles Scicluna”

"A new bishop was appointed, Archbishop Leo Cushley, and we asked for a meeting with him. He told us that as far as the Holy See was concerned, that's it, it's done with, it's over now, and we said, 'No, it isn't'. We had no way of knowing the degree of predation that went on with O'Brien, we have no way of knowing whether O'Brien had been open to being blackmailed, we had no way of knowing whether or not there was any financial irregularity going on. We had no way of knowing whether people had

been appointed into posts because they'd had inappropriate relationships with O'Brien, and this all had to be investigated, and we'd had no apology," Mr Devlin says.

While the official responses were consistently found wanting, that's not to say that they all were – Mr Devlin's next point of contact was then-Bishop Charles Scicluna, with whom Mr Devlin was deeply impressed.

"A few months later, it was announced that there would be an investigation by an amazing bishop called Bishop Charles Scicluna. Scicluna did come. He spent two and a half days, I think, in Scotland. One day he spent with me and he came to visit me in my house, and we talked through my story. I think probably about a year later or so it was announced that a decision had been made to essentially remove all of O'Brien's faculties as a cardinal. So, he would retain the title, he could keep his red hat, but he could only wear it in the house. He was a cardinal literally in name only. He couldn't minister or anything."

Seeing a measure of justice doled out to Cardinal O'Brien, and having walked the trying path himself and his colleagues did, Mr Devlin's attention has turned now to reform – reform of the structures that allow power to corrupt and thwart justice. His experiences have given him plenty of material to reflect upon.

"I want to convey that I strongly do not believe that the Vatican would have had the ability to act as it's had towards [Theodore] McCarrick and other leading prelates, if we hadn't done what we did with O'Brien. They didn't have a process – we kept on being told, 'Sorry, only the Pope can deal with a cardinal,' which is totally unjust.

Allegations

"It's unjust to the cardinal, because he's got allegations against him and he's got nowhere to go. And it's certainly unjust to the people who are making the allegations. So I think that what we did with O'Brien, yes, in terms of what happened to him, that was momentous, but how it's changed the Church – it's changed the Church forever, because there is no hiding place no matter how important you are in the Church, the Church hierarchy, there's no hiding place for people who behave dishonourably or

immorally."

While the Church has changed, there's always more to be done. As Mr Devlin says in his book, organisations go wrong because "organisations are run by humans. And humans are flawed". However, he's been impressed by the focus Pope Francis has brought to the table during his tenure.

"I think that Francis has made the impact, but I think really what's going on here is there's a sense of impatience in the Church by the laity, who are saying that they're fed up, that they are disgusted with the behaviour of priests who have been committing abuse.

"They are appalled at the behaviour of bishops who have moved those priests from parish to parish, to allow them to spread and contaminate more and more parishes. I think that what we're seeing is the Holy Spirit at work. We have a Pope who sees this, who understands this, who's opposed, in his essence, to clericalism. We have a laity who are absolutely astounded by what's happened in their Church, and these are people who've given their lives, have given a huge amount of their money to the Church, and they see all that squandered now."

Mr Devlin has come to believe a fundamental restructuring, or re-understanding at least, of the Church is the only way to prevent abuses from being perpetrated and covered up again going forward, explaining the Church needs to become more a "Venn diagram" than its current "pyramid" structure.

“It's a mindset that bishops have, and it's a mindset that's right there in the Vatican, that we must not scandalise”

"One thing that I would like to convey is that, we need a new model as Archbishop [Dermot] Farrell is saying. If you were to look at the model of the Church just now, it's a triangle, or a pyramid. You've got the Pope at the top, then all the layers of cardinals and archbishops, bishops, priests, and right down at the bottom are the billion or so laity. I think a better model, actually, is a Venn diagram. So you have on one side the important role that bishops and cardinals and the Pope has. And then on the other side you have the laity, and in a Venn diagram, when they cross over in the middle, that's where the governance of the Church is.



Brian Devlin.

It's a participatory model. It does the opposite of what's happening just now. It's transparent, it's built on, there's a theological phrase, *sensus fidelium*, it's 'the sense of the people'."

Another particularly harmful element present in the Church, he says, is the current widespread understanding of scandal. He believes his very writing of the book may be seen as scandalous, but he's keen to emphasise that it was Cardinal O'Brien's behaviour that was scandalous – not their revealing of it.

Scandal

"The Church has a very specific understanding of 'scandal'. It's a theological understanding, which means that if you scandalise the people of God, then you risk them losing their faith. So in our situation, looking back on it, people tried to say those four men are scandalising the people of God, but the scandal wasn't what we did. The scandal was what O'Brien did. I think that the Church needs to totally deconstruct this notion of scandal. It's a mindset that bishops have, and it's a mindset that's right there in the Vatican, that we must not scandalise. So my book will be seen by some people as scandalising people – it's not, it's telling the

truth. I think that that can happen immediately," Mr Devlin says.

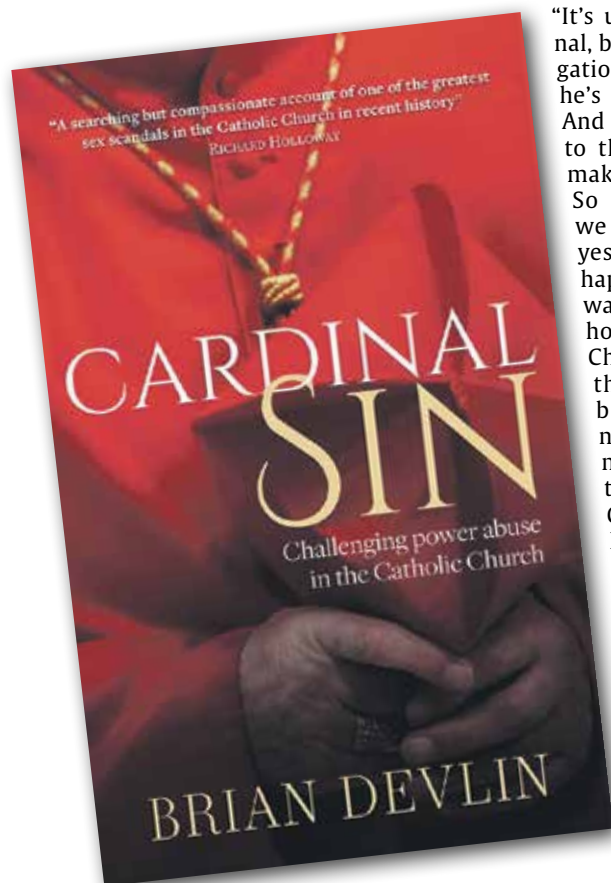
“That was like a slap in the face to me, because I don't hate the Church...I love the Catholic Church, that's my home”

Taking him two or three drafts to come to the book as it currently stands, Mr Devlin says that he was shocked to hear from a reader of an early draft that it seemed as though he hated the Catholic Church, such was the anger he was expressing as he tried to process the hurt he had experienced.

"That was like a slap in the face to me, because I don't hate the Church...I love the Catholic Church, that's my home."

While his formal relationship with the Catholic Church is not as close as it once was, he explains to me, he wrote the book "as an act of love for the Church", understanding that it's only when the disempowered voices are heard and the requisite changes are made that it'll be the Church it was created to be.

“He believes his very writing of the book may be seen as scandalous, but he's keen to emphasise that it was Cardinal O'Brien's behaviour that was scandalous – not their revealing of it”



Out&About

Housing the Lord for 250 years



ARMAGH: Archbishop Eamon Martin and Fr Brennan, Parish Priest of Kilmore, are pictured on the occasion of the 250th anniversary of the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Mullavilly, August 15.



DUBLIN: The Lord Mayor of Dublin Alison Gilliland (centre) visits Sundial House, one of homeless charity Depaul's services in Dublin, August 16.



LIMERICK: Gerald and Alice Higgins of Forth Mary Park celebrated the Diamond Jubilee of their marriage recently, pictured with Fr Des Mc Auliffe, Parish Priest of the Holy Rosary Parish. Gerald and Alice were married on the 3 August 1961 in St Mary's Church, Three Mile House, Co. Monaghan. Photo: James Dormer

IN SHORT

Clerical appointments for Cloyne diocese announced

Bishop William Crean praised "the generosity of spirit and commitment" of the dioceses' priests, as he announced the new appointments.

"Transition always brings its own demand," Bishop Crean said August 18. "Covid-19 adds to the list of adjustments that change demands. We pray the blessing of contentment upon them."

The Bishop of Cloyne also expressed his gratitude for the ministry of Fr Denis Kelleher and Fr Patrick Scanlan, who are retiring from the priesthood.

The appointments, which will come into effect from September 11, are:

Aghada: Fr Danny Murphy, in residence in Carrigtwohill appointed PP Aghada.

Ballyvourney: Fr John McCarthy, CC Mallow appointed PP Ballyvourney.

Charleville: Newly ordained Deacon Leonard Cleary is to serve in Charleville parish.

Churchtown: Fr Eugene Baker, PP Buttevant, and also Adm. Churchtown-Liscarroll. Fr Michael Leader, PP Ballyclough, will assist in Churchtown-Liscarroll.

Macroom: Fr John Keane, CC Macroom on sick leave, Fr Patrick McCarthy, CC Aghada appointed CC (*pro tem*) in Macroom.

Castletownroche: Fr Robin Morrissey,

PP Churchtown-Liscarroll, appointed PP Castletownroche.

Mallow: Fr Tommy Lane, in residence in Mitchelstown, appointed CC to Mallow.

Nazareth House: Fr Patrick Scanlan PE, to be Chaplain to Nazareth House.

Fr James Moore, Diocesan Secretary and also Coordinator of Mission and Ministry (*pro tem*).

Dublin's Lord Mayor praises 'unique service' of charity Depaul

Lord Mayor Alison Gilliland visited one of the homeless charity's services

in Dublin, Sundial House, to "gain an understanding of the great work taking place each day".

"It is great to get the opportunity to visit such a unique service, a service that when it opened was the first of its kind in the city," Ms Gilliland said.

"I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank Depaul and their dedicated staff for the level of support and care they provide to the most vulnerable in our society."

Sundial house opened 13 years ago, and provides long term accommodation for up to 30 residents at any one time.

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



CAVAN: Kingscourt Parish had a busy weekend August 14-15, with two couples getting married. Ciaran Coady and Sarah Campbell (left) celebrated their wedding, while Colm Smith and Laura Condon completed their nuptials the same weekend.



WESTMEATH: Lorraine Flanagan and Mayo native Fr William Coleman, PP Rochfortbridge, celebrate the result of the All Ireland semi-final, where Mayo beat Dublin, August 14.



▲▼ GALWAY: Fr Damian Casey OFM recently celebrated his first Mass with the Poor Clares Galway, having been ordained earlier this year. Afterwards he gave the sisters his first blessing.



WICKLOW: Fr David Vard of Portlaoise parish is pictured with his niece Sophia, shortly after her Baptism in St Patrick's Church, August 13.



Events

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



World Report

IN BRIEF

Faith leaders concerned over online censorship of religious speech

● YouTube's blocking of a theologian's talk on the Christian view of sex as a "content violation" raises serious concerns that "religious speech is being censored online", San Francisco's archbishop and Focus on the Family's president said in a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed they co-wrote.

"Today's sexual politics function as a new kind of fundamentalism, one that presents a deep problem to a diverse and democratic society. ... Social media enables the new fundamentalism, enforced by the mysterious rules of big tech's quasi-monopoly," wrote Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone and Jim Daly.

In their August 12 op-ed, they explained that twice on August 7 a live broadcast by the Rev. Carl Trueman, a scholar, best-selling author and Presbyterian minister, "was booted off the air".

Campaign for euthanasia and assisted suicide steps forward in Italy

● Campaigners in Italy have passed the first hurdle in an effort to legalise assisted suicide and euthanasia.

Both assisted suicide and euthanasia are illegal in Italy, where the criminal law says, "anyone who causes the death of a man, with his consent, is punished with imprisonment from six to fifteen years".

Since April, pro-euthanasia activists have

circulated a petition with the hope of bringing to vote a referendum to remove part of the law, which would effectively decriminalise assisted suicide for adults.

The Italian bishops' conference has expressed "serious concern" about the petition, stating that "there is no expression of compassion in helping to die".

Arrest made in relation to fire at Glasgow parish

● A man has been arrested and charged with wilful fire-raising after a Catholic church in Glasgow was destroyed last month.

The arrest was announced August 17. The man arrested has not been publicly identified but is described as being 24-years-old.

In Scotland, the charge of "wilful fire-raising" refers to

when a person deliberately starts a fire that is intended to damage property.

St Simon's, Partick, a 163-year-old church in Glasgow, was reported to be on fire in the early morning of July 28. The church was destroyed and the fire was extinguished. One person was rescued and there were no injuries.

Spanish diocese provides shelter for those evacuated due to fire

● The Diocese of Avila is providing shelter at its retreat house and school for local residents evacuated due to a fire that started August 14 Saturday and so far has devastated more than 29,000 acres.

A fire broke out between the villages of Navalacruz and Cepeda de la Mora in Spain's Ávila province. The fire began when a vehicle caught on fire. Its progress has slowed, but it is not yet under control.

The Bishop José María Gil Tamayo of Avila offered the facilities to the local authorities and currently 80 people are housed in both buildings, including firefighters battling the blaze and area residents.

Bishop Gil asked for prayers for the prompt containment of the fire, "which is causing so much damage and suffering" and has necessitated the evacuation of more than 1,000 people.

Terrified Christians in Taliban Afghanistan brace for attacks

Afghanistan's terrified Christians are bracing for a new round of persecution in the wake of the Taliban's takeover of the country, Christian leaders and aid organisations warn.

"We are telling people to stay in their houses because going out now is too dangerous," one Afghani Christian leader told the aid organisation International Christian Concern (ICC.)

The man, whose name was withheld for security reasons, said Christians in the country fear that Taliban attacks on Christian communities would start soon.

They fear that it is only a matter of time before the attacks happen. "It will be done mafia style," the Christian leader said. "The Taliban will never take responsibility for the killings."

He added: "Some known Christians are already receiving threatening phone calls. In these phone calls, unknown people say, 'We are coming for you.'"

Afghanistan is over 99% Muslim, with the majority being Sunni. There are small groups of Christians, including about 200 Catholics, as well as Buddhists, Hindus, and Bahá'ís. There is one Jewish man remaining in the country.

Afghanistan's Christian community, which is estimated to be between 10,000 and 12,000 people, is comprised mostly of converts from Islam and is the country's largest religious minority group. Due to persecution, the Christian



A boy is processed through a checkpoint during an evacuation at Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul. Photo: CNS

community remains largely closeted and hidden from the public eye.

Under sharia, including in Afghanistan prior to the Taliban takeover, apostasy from Islam is punishable by death. Converts to Christianity are the frequent target of Islamic extremist groups.

Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, fell to the Taliban August 15. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani fled the country the same day.

The Taliban previously controlled Afghanistan from 1996 until 2001. During that time, a strict interpretation of sharia was imposed. The playing of musical instruments, among

other things, was banned, and girls were not permitted to go to school.

Life under Taliban rule will be very difficult for Christians, said the community leader. He said that when the Taliban takes control of a village, they would require all households to go to the mosque to pray in an attempt to out any Christian convert.

The ICC report said that in some northern parts of Afghanistan, the Taliban have already enforced their strict interpretation of sharia, and that "Men are required to grow beards, women cannot leave home without a male escort, and life is becoming more dan-

gerous".

"Many Christians fear the Taliban will take their children, both girls and boys, like in Nigeria and Syria," the Christian leader said. "The girls will be forced to marry Taliban fighters and the boys will be forced to become soldiers."

"It's a heart-breaking day for the citizens of Afghanistan and an even dangerous time to be a Christian," read a statement from the field director of Open Doors in Asia, a non-denominational mission supporting persecuted Christians.

"It's an uncertain situation for the whole country, not just for secret believers," the statement added.

German bishops concerned prenatal Down syndrome test will become routine

German bishops are concerned that a decision guaranteeing German health insurers will pay for pregnant women's blood tests to detect Down syndrome will lead to abortion.

Matthias Kopp, spokesman for the German bishops, said that already about 90% of cases in which an embryo has an extra chromosome result in termination of pregnancy, reported news agency KNA. He expressed concern that the prenatal test eventually would be applied on a routine basis.

"We as a Church are observing with

concern that the new, noninvasive prenatal diagnostic test procedure very often does not follow therapeutic aims," Mr Kopp said. "On the contrary, in the view of the Church, these tests promote an alarming trend in the direction of a regular selection."

What was needed was early information, counselling and support in which the issue of termination of pregnancy was not the focal point, he said.

A joint federal parliamentary committee gave the approval for the change, which is expected to take effect in the

spring of 2022, KNA reported.

Criticism of the decision has not just come from the Catholic Church, KNA also reported.

Peer Brocke, spokesman for Bundesvereinigung Lebenshilfe, a national association involved in supporting people with disabilities, expressed his concern about an increasing discrimination against people with impairments. He said that the new regulation contradicted the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Brazilian bishop resigns after leak of explicit video

Pope Francis accepted the resignation of the Bishop of São José do Rio Preto last Wednesday, five days after a sexually explicit video of the bishop was shared on the internet.

Bishop Tomé Ferreira da

Silva, 60, led the Diocese of São José do Rio Preto from November 16, 2012, until August 18. His resignation was announced by the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil.

"The Apostolic Nuncia-

ture informs that the Holy Father accepted the request today of resignation from the pastoral government of the Diocese of São José do Rio Preto, presented by His Excellency," said the CNBB's statement.

On August 13, a minute-long video of Bishop Ferreira da Silva on a video call with another man began making the rounds on social media. In the video the bishop, wearing a striped polo shirt, is seen masturbating.



Edited by Jason Osborne
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Come all who are weary



People arriving from Afghanistan make their way through the Friendship Gate crossing point at the Pakistan-Afghanistan border town of Chaman. Photo: CNS.

Caritas Pakistan plans for humanitarian crisis at Afghanistan border

Caritas Pakistan has alerted its diocesan units bordering neighbouring Afghanistan to help refugees fleeing the Taliban's takeover of the country, reported ucanews.com.

Thousands of Afghans have entered Pakistan via the Chaman border crossing, one of the most active trade and travel routes between the countries, according to media reports.

However, Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmad claimed August 18 there were no refugees entering the country, nor has Pakistan made preparation for Afghans seeking refuge.

Amjad Gulzar, executive

director of Caritas Pakistan, told ucanews.com more than 200 families have already arrived in urban areas of Quetta.

Caritas Pakistan staffers in Quetta and Islamabad-Rawalpindi "have positioned themselves so that we can respond to the emerging humanitarian crisis", he told ucanews.com.

"Pashto-speaking staff may be engaged in both field offices. Refugee crises are often protracted and require strategies that reflect both short-term needs – water, first aid, immunisation – and mid- to long-term challenges such as mental health, trauma,

chronic diseases and education. Staff have been alerted to avoid any controversial social media posts about the Taliban," Mr Gulzar said.

Caritas Pakistan has had a meeting with the Afghan Refugees Commissioner Office in Peshawar to pledge its cooperation.

In a statement issued August 17, Aurat (women) March urged Pakistan to open its borders.

"Pakistan has a moral obligation to open its borders to our neighbours in need and to ensure the rights of refugees as per its international law obligations. We must agitate

to reform our policies toward existing and new refugees," it stated.

Pakistan is not a party to the 1951 Geneva Convention, nor the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. However, Caritas Pakistan worked with Afghan refugees in the '70s, '90s and early 21st Century.

According to the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, 1.4 million Afghan refugees still live in Pakistan, with more than 300,000 in the southern sea port of Karachi. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in the north has 43 refugee camps for Afghans.

40,000 Catholics make pilgrimage to Our Lady of Czestochowa in Poland

Nearly 40,000 Catholic pilgrims journeyed on foot, by bicycle, and on horseback to arrive at the Marian shrine of Jasna Góra in Czestochowa, Poland this summer.

The traditional walking pilgrimage to venerate an icon of the Black Madonna of Czestochowa housed in the shrine dates back to the 17th century.

Among the pilgrims to make the historic trek was Bishop Marek Solarczyk of

Radom, Poland who helped to lead his diocese's 43rd annual walking pilgrimage.

In addition to caring for the pilgrims' spiritual needs, the bishop assisted with the morning wake-up call by playing his horn each morning of the roughly 100 mile journey.

Another pilgrimage group travelled to the Marian shrine on horseback. The 22nd annual cavalry pilgrimage travelled 250 miles over the course of 11 days from

the village of Zareby Koscielne in eastern Poland.

"We rode through our towns and villages, with an unfurled banner bearing the image of Our Lady of Ostra Brama, the patroness of the regiment. It was one big prayer," Fr Andrzej Dmochowski told the Jasna Góra Press Office.

In total, 185 cycling groups, 133 walking groups, and 13 running groups made a pilgrimage to Jasna Gora this summer.

Vatican roundup

Pope Francis saddened by attack which killed nuns in South Sudan

● Pope Francis has sent his condolences after a violent attack on a group of Catholic religious sisters and others in South Sudan left five dead last week.

"His Holiness Pope Francis was deeply saddened to learn of the brutal attack on a group of Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus," the August 17 message said.

A road ambush along a highway in South Sudan August 16 resulted in the deaths of five people, including Catholic nuns, Sr Mary Daniel Abud and Sr Regina Roba.

The two were among a group of seven Catholic sisters traveling in a bus to Juba, the capital of South Sudan, from Assumption of Our Lady Parish in the city of Nimule, about 120 miles to the south.

Pope Francis' message said he "offers heartfelt condolences" to the families and religious community of the sisters who died from "this senseless act of violence".

"Trusting that their sacrifice will advance the cause of peace, reconciliation and security in the region, His Holiness prays for their eternal rest and the comfort of those who grieve their loss," the telegram, signed by Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin, said.

Pope Francis and Ad Council collaborate to promote Covid vaccines in the Americas

● Pope Francis, along with six cardinals and archbishops from North, South, and Central America, worked in collaboration with the Ad Council to produce a public service announcement promoting Covid-19 vaccines.

The announcement is the first Ad Council campaign designed for a global audience, and will be distributed in English, Spanish, and Portuguese.

The PSA is part of the Ad Council's Covid-19 Vaccine Education Initiative to encourage vaccination against the coronavirus.

"Covid-19 vaccines are safe, effective and save lives," the Ad Council stated in an August 17 release.

In the PSA, Pope

Francis is heard saying, "Getting the vaccines that are authorised by the respective authorities is an act of love. I pray to God that each one of us can make his or her own small gesture of love, no matter how small, love is always grand."

"To the world's billion-plus Catholics, the Pope is one of the most trusted messengers and holds unparalleled influence," said Lisa Sherman, president and CEO of the Ad Council, in the release. "We are extremely grateful to him and the cardinals and archbishops for lending their voices and platforms to help people across the globe feel more confident in the vaccines."

Pope Francis will not offer a public Mass during Scotland visit

● Pope Francis will not offer a public Mass during his short visit to Glasgow in November, according to the Scottish bishops' conference.

"I can confirm that the Scottish bishops are not planning a public Mass with Pope Francis in November," Peter Kearney, spokesman for the Scottish bishops, told CNA on August 17.

"The Pope will visit as a guest of the UK Government who will be responsible for the arrangement details. We understand he will only be a few hours in Scotland to attend the COP26 gathering and expect he will have only a very short part of this time to meet with the Scottish bishops," he said.

The Pope is expected to attend the "world leaders summit" in the opening days of the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) taking place in Glasgow on November 1-12.



Letter from London



Jonathan Luxmoore

In a gallery of The British Museum, light plays on an array of medieval crosses, reliquaries and manuscripts, as an audio-visual display reenacts one of English history's most notorious crimes.

At the centre, three stained-glass windows, painstakingly transferred from Canterbury Cathedral, convey images from the fabled afterlife of St Thomas Becket (1120-1170), next to badges and keepsakes left by generations of pilgrims at his place of martyrdom.

Becket's journey

When the exhibition, "Murder and the Making of a Saint", opened in May, as England's coronavirus lockdown was relaxed, the curators said they hoped to depict Becket's journey from a humble clerk to one of Europe's most popular miracle-working saints.

Three months on, after attracting record crowds for the 850th anniversary of his death, many are struck by the exhibition's warm evocation of the country's Catholic past and dramatic reconstruction of the centrality of Church and Faith.

"There's no doubt the anti-Catholicism long embedded here is dissipating now, enabling a more sympathetic understanding of the past, which cultural events like this can subtly reflect," Fr Timothy Byron, a historian, told *Catholic News Service*.

"There are issues surrounding our religious and cultural identity and how we evaluate our history and a better climate now for debating the place of our Catholic and Protestant traditions."

Born in London, Becket studied in France and Italy, rising to become a senior lay office-holder at Canterbury for Archbishop Theobald of Bec.

In 1155, he was appointed chancellor to King Henry II, responsible for royal revenues, becoming a close and trusted confidant; just seven years later, after Archbishop Theobald's death, the king named him archbishop of Canterbury.

The top Church post carried vast wealth and power. But Becket, a fine horseman and sword-fighter, was not even a priest. So the surprise appointment also required, in the words of the curators, "some stage management".

The exhibition includes artefacts from Becket's early London life, a rare document bearing his seal, and an alabaster altar panel depicting him delivering a blessing at his episcopal consecration just a day after he had been ordained.

The exhibit also noted the king's neat arrangement soon unravelled.

Henry had expected his new

British Museum exhibit on St Thomas Becket gives sympathetic look at past



A man examines the St Thomas Becket exhibit at The British Museum in London, which is marking the 850th anniversary of the death of the 12th-century saint. (CNS photo/courtesy The British Museum)

“An original copy of Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*, the first book printed in English, shows how Becket’s story quickly became rooted in public imagination”

chancellor-archbishop to do his bidding, but Becket adopted an ascetic lifestyle and opposed the king's authority, notably when he sought to tighten control over the Church with a series of statutes in 1164.

With tensions rising, Becket fled abroad to the protection of the king of France, as the Pope negotiated on his behalf.

Traitors

He finally returned in late 1170 and was killed at Canterbury December 29 by four knights who had witnessed the king's Christmas tirade against "miserable drones and traitors" he had "nourished and promoted" in his royal household.

Evidence indicates the intruders planned to take Becket to Winchester. When he resisted, they lost control and hacked the archbishop to death in his cathedral during vespers.

Becket's violent end, captured by five eyewitness accounts, shocked Europe – sending, in the curators' words, "strong echoes out down the centuries".

His martyr cult quickly developed, and just 26 months later, he was canonised by Pope Alexander III, making Canterbury Europe's foremost pilgrim centre after Rome, Jerusalem and Santiago de Compostela.

His four disgraced murderers later died while serving in the Holy

Land by papal order, while in 1174, Henry II begged forgiveness.

Becket's fame is recalled in objects such as a gilded blue-green casket, which would have contained fragments of his bones or bloodied clothing, as well as in the stained-glass cathedral "Miracle Windows", depicting cures at his intercession.

An original copy of Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, the first book printed in English, shows how Becket's story quickly became rooted in public imagination.

“Joseph Shaw, an Oxford lecturer on medieval philosophy, agrees and is struck by the exhibition’s sympathetic portrayal of Becket”

Fr Byron, the historian, thinks Becket's enduring cult typifies how popular devotions can endure for centuries, against all efforts to diminish them, if the "soft power" they represent is effectively harnessed and directed.

Joseph Shaw, an Oxford lecturer on medieval philosophy, agrees and is struck by the exhibition's sympathetic portrayal of Becket.

"Catholics have often been presented here as peddlers of strange superstitions – but this exhibition shows a detachment from sectarianism and a real willingness to engage with what Becket achieved," Mr Shaw told CNS. "Though it shows there are two sides to the story, it also reflects today's greater openness, which is enabling people to look at art, theology and history more objectively."

During the 16th-century Reformation, King Henry VIII declared Becket "no longer a saint, but a traitor to the crown". All references to Becket were ordered erased from prayer books, while the king proclaimed an end to his feast-day – a move that shocked Europe and hastened Henry's excommunication.

New generation

People drew parallels between Becket and the new generation of Reformation-era martyrs, notably St Thomas More, who also was a royal chancellor. The Catholic English College in Rome, training priests for secret ministry, promoted Becket "as a model for emulation".

The exhibition includes a carved marble base from Becket's desecrated tomb, found in a river near Canterbury, as well as a bone fragment reputedly from the saint's skull, which was smuggled abroad to an exiled Jesuit college in France.

Mr Shaw thinks the exhibition's connection of Becket with later Catholic persecutions is significant.

"It's a reminder that, even after the terrible destruction of the Reformation, Catholicism still re-

mained the true faith of many English people," Mr Shaw told CNS.

“Today, when education is key, exhibitions like this can help widen knowledge and understanding, by challenging perceived truths about the past”

Ruth Cornett, an art historian from Northern Ireland, admits it's difficult for any exhibition to capture complex historical ideas through material objects or to retrace political and ecclesiastical divisions for modern minds. But the exhibit shows what was lost to spiritual life from Reformation disputes, she said, and will resonate with people familiar with the modern killing of outspoken clergy, as well as with images of cultural and artistic vandalism from Afghanistan to Syria.

"Becket's instant fame across Europe, where Christians were horrified by his fate, shows how the Church of the day knew no borders," Ms Cornett told CNS.

"Today, when education is key, exhibitions like this can help widen knowledge and understanding, by challenging perceived truths about the past."

Jonathan Luxmoore is a freelance writer covering church news from Oxford, England, and Warsaw, Poland, and serving as a staff commentator for Polish Radio.

After Haiti earthquake, Catholic aid official says ‘desolation’ faces population



John Lavenburg

When Dr Fonie Pierre looks around the streets of Les Cayes the word that comes to her mind is “desolation”.

“No businesses are open. People are in streets. There is no shelter,” Ms Pierre, head of the Catholic Relief Services Les Cayes office told *Crux*. “There are needs for food, water, every basic need.”

The death toll from the 7.2 magnitude earthquake that hit the city August 14 has climbed to almost 1,500, with almost 7,000 reported injured and tens-of-thousands left homeless as of August 16. Homes, churches and schools are among the buildings left in rubble.

Even for those whose homes survived, Ms Pierre said concerns for an aftershock still exist, which stranded people outside as the Caribbean nation braced for Tropical Depression Grace. By 5 pm on August 16, heavy rains ran through the island with winds that topped out at 35 mph – just short of tropical storm status. It is expected to regain tropical storm status today.

“Hurricane Matthew that struck in 2016, and the assassination of President Jovenel Moïe last month are three examples”

Now days out from the earthquake prelates and priests in the US with connections to Haiti called the devastation of the earthquake “heartbreaking” for a nation that has endured so much in the past decade. A 7.0 magnitude earthquake in 2010 that killed 220,000, injured 300,000 and displaced an estimated 1.5 million people; Hurricane Matthew that struck in 2016, and the assassination of President Jovenel Moïe last month are three examples.

Archbishop Thomas Wenski of Miami told *Crux* he spoke with Bishop Joseph Decoste of Jérémie and Archbishop Launay Saturné of Cape-Haïtien who were both unharmed. However, both reported that church buildings and diocesan schools were destroyed, Archbishop Wenski said.

Cardinal Chibly Langlois of Les Cayes, the first Haitian cardinal, has non-life-threatening injuries. At the time of the earthquake a priest that was with him at the priestly residence was killed along with two other employees.



A woman is assisted by a member of the medical personnel outside a hospital in Les Cayes, Haiti, August 16, following a magnitude 7.2 earthquake two days earlier. Photo: CNS

Fr William Konicki, the pastor of the Catholic Community of Sacred Heart Parish in Hopedale, Massachusetts, that twins with St. Gerard’s Parish in Les Cayes told *Crux* that St Gerard pastor Fr Claude Renel Elysée told him the church is destroyed and the condition of the mission house is uncertain.

Fr Konicki corresponded with people in Las Cayes over the weekend, but lost communication without a way for them to charge their phones. He said they were using “farming equipment, pick-axes, shovels and machetes to lift heavy concrete debris”.

Masses

“We prayed at all of our Masses this weekend for the people of Haiti, and especially at our twin parish because we visited them, we know who they are, it just feels like our hands are tied and it’s very frustrating,” Fr Konicki said. “I’m thinking about why do bad things happen to good people and they’re just a wonderful people satisfied with simple things in life.”

Ms Pierre said right now they’re still evaluating the situation and participating in coordination meetings with the Haitian government and the United Nations. They’re also trying to distribute hygiene kits, kitchen kits and some supplies for temporary shelters they have in their warehouse.

Figuring out how to handle the medical reports is a challenge because a lot of people have orthopaedic injuries that can’t be treated due to a lack of supplies, she added. And

as someone who was in Haiti when the 2010 earthquake struck, Ms Pierre said there will be less injuries and deaths this time because the population of Les Cayes is less dense and the buildings are smaller compared to Port-au-Prince, although there’s a new set of logistical challenges.

“In Port-au-Prince, there is the capacity to receive materials from any country very fast,” Pierre said. “Then in Les Cayes, with the gang situation it’s very difficult for the help to come.”

The gangs control certain areas and block the roads preventing supplies from getting through, Ms Pierre explained. The people are fearful of using the roads for the same reason, along with a fear of possible landslides.

“Fr Enrique Camacho, director of Caritas Puerto Rico, told *Crux* they’re collecting monetary donations that will go directly to Caritas Haiti”

The CRS official said as relief efforts continue, she hopes to see better coordination from the international community. IsraAID a humanitarian international non-government organisation, and USAID are two organisations that have sent emergency relief teams.

“For now, we will see many physicians, many nurses, but they are

coming and doing nothing because there are no materials,” Ms Pierre said. “We also have the Covid-19 that is existing. Now, to manage all of the orthopaedic cases, then to have Covid-19, with the gang situation, with the social, political situation, with a lack of coordination, it’s very difficult.”

Hardly anyone in Haiti has received a Covid-19 vaccination.

Wenski said the church has to have a long-term response to Haiti, and let the US government and others handle the rescue operations in the short term.

“We have to be there when they go away,” Dr Wenski said. “We’re going to have a continuing role with the engagement with the local church in Haiti, and our engagement has to be to help that local church and be in a position to be able to continue to serve its people.”

The Archdiocese of Miami is accepting donations. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops recommended people donate to CRS on August 14. The Catholic Medical Mission Board, the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development, and Caritas Internationalis are other organisations that are collecting monetary donations for Haiti.

Fr Enrique Camacho, director of Caritas Puerto Rico, told *Crux* they’re collecting monetary donations that will go directly to Caritas Haiti. Fr Camacho traveled to Haiti 11 times to help it recover after the earthquake in 2010.

Fr Camacho said he doesn’t have plans to travel to the Caribbean nation because unlike 2010 Cari-

tas Haiti wasn’t affected and can provide relief. He noted, however, that he will do whatever they need because he remembers how scary these situations are from being in Haiti in 2010 and experiencing an earthquake in Puerto Rico last year.

“I feel heartbroken because these people are suffering so much right now,” Fr Camacho said.

Fr Reginald Jean-Mary of Notre Dame d’Haiti Catholic Church in Miami told *Crux* that his message to the Haitian parishioners at Mass this past weekend was that it’s time to be prayerful and come together for the people of Haiti.

People of faith

“This is not the time to blame anybody. This is not the time to complain. This is not the time to blame God. This is the time for all of us to come together,” Fr Jean-Mary said. “As people of faith we have to come to the realisation that God is not there to punish his children and as people of faith and hope that gives us strength to believe that it cannot stay the way it is, that there will be a new day for Haiti one day.”

Bishop Gerald Barbarito of Palm Beach noted how the Haitian community is “filled with a vibrant faith and dedication to the Lord”, and so Catholics should “through the Church show our support and our concern and offer whatever we can from the diocese in that regard”.

John Lavenburg is an American journalist and the national correspondent for *Crux*.

Letters

Letter of the week

Fair play to the rebel bishops

Dear Editor, - I cannot be alone in finding the shadow boxing between Church and State over the issue of First Holy Communion and Confirmation amusing.

The bishops are acting responsibly within their competence and are also acting with due regard for the common good. It is unprecedented for a democratic government to try

to tell a religious community which sacraments they ought to be allowed to perform (matrimony) and which should remain forbidden (First Holy Communion and Confirmation). By all means, if the State authorities thought - and had evidence to show us - that religious ceremonies are dangerous that would be a different matter: they

would be well within their rights to ban them all. As it is, the singling out of First Holy Communion and Confirmation is unacceptable. I applaud those rebel bishops who are proceeding.

*Yours etc.,
Sean Smith
Letterkenny, Co. Donegal*

Despite evil, good work remains

Dear Editor, - Jean Vanier the founder of L'Arche International was like the camel who went through the eye of a needle by giving up an illustrious career with the Canadian navy and all the wealth that went with it to serve people with disabilities abandoned in an asylum in northern France. Many people over his lifetime joined him in this mission to make L'Arche an outreach to a multitude of vulnerable and forgotten people in every continent on the planet.

The many people who worked with him learned to love and care for others in need and so fulfilling the rule of the Gospel: whatever you did to the least of these, you did it to me.

He fell from grace like so many of us do, but the organisation which he founded will continue to bear fruit in love. There was only one perfect man and that is Jesus Christ.

*Yours etc.,
Andrew Kieran
Former L'Arche assistant
Mornington
Co. Meath*



The Pope has betrayed the tradition

Dear Editor, - It is with a mixture of sadness and dismay that for the first time in my life I feel compelled that I must criticise the Successor of St Peter. I confess that from day one, I have not been a huge fan of the Argentine Pontiff - I readily admit that my tastes were more in line of those of the now Pope-emeritus Benedict XVI. But Catholicism is not a popularity contest so nevertheless I have always accepted Francis as the Pope and prayed with and for him, even at times when I felt that his pronouncements confused the Faithful and gave fuel to the enemies of the Church to criticise our Faith.

His banning of the traditional Latin Mass will be for many traditionally-minded Catholics the last straw. I know many of my friends who will now attend Mass with the Society of St Pius X rather than endure these harsh and unfair restrictions from a man who should be defending the tradition rather than restricting it.

As for me? No, I will not stray - I will bite my lip and endure all the while praying that God will grant Pope Francis the courage to reverse this wrong-headed decision.

*Yours etc.,
Mary Gallagher,
Belfast, Co. Antrim*

Any vacancies?

Dear Editor, - With bishops so regularly pessimistic about the future of the Faith in Ireland, are they considering retraining as health and safety officers? Or, perhaps there is another explanation for the jobsworth attitude to doing the State's bidding on Covid-19. I can't think of one - answers on a postcard, as they say!

*Yours etc.,
Joan Keane
Omagh, Co. Tyrone*

A test of loyalty

Dear Editor, - I've never been to a Tridentine Mass, so I find it hard to understand the upset some devotees feel that this liturgy is being restricted. My advice to them is simple: follow the example of the saints and accept the judgement of the Church. Great saints like Padre Pio suffered immensely because of what they felt were unfair judgements of the Church - but they never grumbled. They accepted it with courage and offered it up for the sins of the world.

There is no better example than that.

*Yours etc.,
Joe Campbell
Galway City*

Education not Latin is the key

Dear Editor, Liam Foley argues that unless the Latin Mass is restored the Church will continue to decline (*The Irish Catholic*, August 5, 2021). I am afraid that he deludes himself. The very Irish people who were formed in the Latin Mass very readily abandoned their Catholic Faith when the waves of secularism began to arrive in Ireland in the 1960s and 1970s.

We had a largely uneducated clergy and Faithful - the priests reduced to following rubrics from Roman books and the Faithful reduced to chewing toffees while attending a liturgy they could neither comprehend or appreciate.

The rapid and dizzying decline of Irish Catholicism is proof that it was not the change in the liturgy that caused the catastrophic collapse, but the lack of any real education of catechesis. When the windows were opened - to borrow the imagery of St John XXIII - the hot house flowers that were Irish Catholics withered and died.

Only a well-educated laity and clergy will be able to rebuild from the ashes.

*Yours etc.,
Stephen Kelly
Cobh, Co. Cork*

facebook community

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

A self-congratulatory celebration of that pro-choice victory

We have really sunk to the lowest level we possibly can as a society. What shocked me more were the generation who were brought up to value life in the womb, just condemn to death with the stroke of a pen. I wonder if any of them watched an abortion taking place, would they be so triumphant. There is nothing to celebrate or be proud of in taking a defenceless life. - **Flo Fahey**

There is no expiry date on the sacraments

Who cancelled Holy Communion and Confirmations in July and August if NPHET didn't?

Tánaiste Leo Varadkar in what seems like a blood rush to the head at the closing of a press conference on 29th June, made a throw away comment that First Communion and Confirmations were off. He admitted on the following Thursday in the Dail that National Public Health Emergency Team (Nphet) did not recommend the cancellation of First Communion and Confirmations.

It is now blatantly clear Tánaiste Varadkar in his 'off-the-cuff' remark painted himself into a political corner in which he had cancelled the ceremonies and the Government decided without backing from NPHET to unilaterally cancel the ceremonies to save the political beacon of the Tánaiste akin to what we saw from the bash on the lawn of the Merrion. And did so without concern for the children who ought to have had the opportunity to these sacraments at a time when the vital load would be lower than in the Autumn/Winter months, the Government inferring that parents could not be trusted with after parties which is all wrong and totally ridiculous. I would like to remind the Government that parents are responsible and care for their children's well-being and safety. - **Fr John Joe Duffy**

Archbishop says 'drop the long face'

I'm not sure if it's something as superficial as that. The Catholic faith is quite serious at times. Jesus didn't go down as far as I can see in the gospels. Sure, atheists can laugh... - **John Kehoe**

Yes, we should be joyful. Who wants to see a long face? I think we all need to see a smile. When I am feeling sad I love to meet someone who smiles at me with a genuine smile! Gloom disappears. My opinion. - **Deirdre Quinn**

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

A living legacy

Dear Editor, - I was delighted to see Ruadhán Jones' article on how Irish missionaries are coping under Covid-19. We often hear stories about missionaries from the past as if it is something to be consigned to that era. This proves that our missionaries are very much a current reality. Good for them.

*Yours etc.,
John Byrne,
Drogheda, Co. Lough*

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



▲ **GERMANY:** Sr Theresia Kucklick, head of the altar bread bakery of the Abbey of St Gertrude in Am Mellensee packs what will eventually become consecrated hosts in a cardboard box. Photos: CNS.

◀ **VATICAN:** Pope Francis plays foosball after leading his general audience in the Vatican's Paul VI hall.



CYPRUS: A newly hatched baby sea turtle makes its way into the Mediterranean Sea for the first time on a beach near the Cyprus village of Kiti.



HAITI: People run past in front of a heavily damaged church in Les Cayes after a 7.2 magnitude earthquake rocked the area four days earlier.



MEXICO: Fr Jorge Luis Martínez Chávez prays before a monstrance as he celebrates Mass in Coalcomán, where drug cartels have damaged local highways in their battles for territory.



USA: A group of seminarians arrives in Philadelphia at the conclusion of their five-day Biking for Vocations tour.



The Fading of forgiveness...

In a recent issue of *Comment* magazine, Timothy Keller, theologian and pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, wrote an insightful essay entitled, 'The Fading of Forgiveness', within which he highlights how, more and more, forgiveness is being seen as a weakness and a naivete.

“Hence, our culture sees forgiveness more negatively than positively”

He begins by pointing to a couple of highly-publicised incidents of forgiveness. In 2015, Dylann Roof shot nine members inside an African American church in South Carolina and was publicly forgiven by the relatives of his victims. And in 2006, when a gunman shot ten Amish children in a school room in Pennsylvania and then killed himself, the Amish community there not only forgave him, they went to visit his family and expressed sympathies to them for their loss. What was the general response? Admiration for extraordinary selflessness and virtue? No, not that. More generally, these instances of forgiveness were judged as naïve fundamentalism and as unhelpful. Why? Why would these instances not be recognised instead both for what is most noble within humanity



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

and for what is highest within religious virtue?

Rev. Keller suggests that there are a number of reasons for this, but he singles out two in particular. We are a 'therapeutic culture' (where only our own truth and feelings matter) and a culture that has a 'religion without grace' (its vision and virtue go no further than what echoes in our emotions and willpower). Hence, our culture sees forgiveness more negatively than positively. For it, forgiveness allows oppression to maintain its power and thus permits the cycle of violence and abuse to go on. Like a family refusing to stand up to an alcoholic member, it enables rather than stops the abuse and allows a sick situation to continue. Forgiveness then is a further

“Like a family refusing to stand up to an alcoholic member, it enables rather than stops the abuse and allows a sick situation to continue”

injustice to the one who has been violated and can lead to a form of self-loathing, an acceptance of a humiliation destructive of one's self-image, a further loss of dignity. Moreover, the moral pressure to forgive can be a further burden on the victim and an easy escape for the perpetrator. Is this logic correct?

Purely emotional

From a purely emotional point of view, yes, it feels right; but it is wrong when scrutinised more deeply. First, it is evident that vindictiveness will only produce more vindictiveness. Vindictiveness will never soften a heart and help change it. Only forgiveness (analogous to dialysis) can take violence and hatred out of a relationship. As well, in the words

of Martin Luther King, anyone devoid of the power of forgiveness is also devoid of the power of love. Why? Because each of us will get hurt by others and will hurt others in every one of our relationships. That is the price of community inside human inadequacy. Hence, relationships at every level, personal and social, can only sustain themselves long term if there is forgiveness.

Moreover, with Jesus, forgiveness becomes singularly the most important of all virtues. It decides whether we go to heaven or not. As Jesus tells us when he gives us the Lord's Prayer, if we cannot forgive others, God will not be able to forgive us. Why? Because the banquet table, eternal community of life, is only open to everyone who is willing to sit down with everyone. God cannot change this. Only we can open our hearts sufficiently to sit down with everyone.

Christian discipleship

Recently, given some of our ecclesial infighting, various groups have attempted to single out one specific moral issue as a litmus test for Christian discipleship. For many, this litmus test is abortion; others pick church attendance or some other issue. What might serve as a litmus test for Christian discipleship? Precisely this: the willingness to forgive. Can I forgive someone who has wronged me? Can I forgive someone whom I hate and who hates me? That challenge lies most

central in Jesus' teaching.

That being said, it must also be said that forgiveness is not simple or easy. That is why in the Judeo-Christian spirituality of Sabbath, there is a (too-little-known) spirituality of forgiveness. As we know, the command to celebrate Sabbath asks us to honour this cycle in our lives: Work for six days – rest for one day. Work for seven years – rest for one year. Work of seven times seven (49) years – have a major rest (sabbatical). Work for a lifetime – and then be on sabbatical for eternity.

“You may hold a grudge that ruined your life until your deathbed - then you need to let it go”

Well that is also the cycle for forgiveness. In the spirituality of Sabbath: You may hold a minor grudge for six days - then you need let it go. You may hold a major grudge for seven years - then you need to let it go. You may hold a soul-searing grudge for 49 years - then you need to let it go. You may hold a grudge that ruined your life until your deathbed - then you need to let it go. That is the final Christian moral imperative.

Desmond Tutu once said, “without forgiveness there is no future”. True - on both sides of eternity.

Family & Lifestyle

The Irish Catholic, August 26, 2021

Personal Profile

Preaching the purity of Christian love to the youth

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The Season of Creation 2021



The recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) made for sober reading, warning that unless there are immediate, grand reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, it won't be possible to limit global warming to 2 degrees Celsius, as has long been touted as the required figure to meet. Naturally, being the polarised times we live in, reactions to the report were contentious and calamitous, and agreement over the best course of action is far from being reached.

However, for Catholics and Christians, the urgency of proper environmental conduct is a little simpler a matter. God created humanity as stewards of his creation, to aid the natural world and all that inhabits it in the fulfilment of its purpose. Pope Francis has brought this duty



The Church has highlighted the importance of playing a responsible role in the complex web of creation in recent years, writes Jason Osborne

to the forefront of the Church's consciousness with *Laudato si'* and his institution of the 'Season of Creation', which is now celebrated each year from September 1 through October 4.

Season of Creation

The Season of Creation is a "time to renew our relationship with our Creator and all creation through celebration, conversion and commitment together".

The purpose of the season is for all Christians to join together in an ecumenical fashion in

prayer and action for our "common home".

Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I instituted September 1 as a day of prayer for creation for the Orthodox in 1989, with the Orthodox Church year starting on that day in commemoration of God's creation of the world. The World Council of Churches went on to inspire the transformation of this day into a season, extending its celebration from September 1 through to October 4, as we have it now.

The day the season ends on

isn't arbitrary, either, with October 4 being the feast of St Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology, who's beloved by Christians beyond the Catholic Church.

In the wake of this, many Christian denominations have adopted the season as part of their own calendars, with Pope Francis welcoming the celebration officially to the Catholic Church in 2015.

This year's season

The theme for this year's Season of Creation is 'A home for all? Renewing the Oikos of God'. The season's website tells us that "Christians join the Psalmist in proclaiming the Earth is the Lord's and all that is in it (Psalms 24:1)".

Despite this fact, the current climate crisis is accelerating the instability of God's world, which

is resulting in the loss of habitats that are homes to millions of species – including humans, many of whose' homes are at risk due to the adverse effects of the shifting climate.

"As people of faith, our baptismal call compels us to till and keep God's garden, and participate in the renewal of the whole inhabited Earth, so that life may flourish and all may have a just and sustainable home," the season's website reads.

The subtheme of this year's season is the concept of *oikos*, which means house or home in Greek. The hope is that by focusing on this, the intricate, interconnected relationships that hold the web of life together might be lifted up.

"Within the whole inhabited

» Continued on Page 33

Family News



AND EVENTS

YOUNG WOMAN TAKES OFF ON ROUND-THE-WORLD RECORD BID

Pilot Zara Rutherford, 19, has taken off at the start of a three-month bid to become the youngest woman to fly solo round the world. She departed from Kortrijk-Wevelgem Airport in western Belgium in her Shark ultralight, the world's fastest microlight aircraft.

"Growing up, I loved aviation and STEM – science, technology, engineering and mathematics, but I didn't see many other women or girls doing that. I just always thought that was quite sad or discouraging," Zara said. "I'm hoping that I can encourage girls to go into this field."

Zara is seeking to win the title from Shaesta Wais, who became the youngest woman to fly solo round the world at 30.

Zara's route will take about three months, with stops in 52 countries – including Greenland, China and Nicaragua – where she will stay with local families or in hotels.

WELL-PRESERVED SKELETON SHEDS LIGHT ON CULTURE IN ANCIENT POMPEII

Archaeologists have uncovered a well-preserved skeleton at a burial site in Pompeii which has shed new light on funeral rites and cultural activity in the doomed, ancient Roman city, officials said.

The body of the man, believed to be in his 60s, was found in a tomb which dated to the final decades of Pompeii, before it was destroyed by the Vesuvius volcano in 79 AD. A commemorative inscription named the man as Marcus Venerius Secundio and made a reference to theatre performances at Pompeii in Greek – the first time archaeologists have found direct evidence of plays performed there in Greek as well as in Latin.

"That performances in Greek were organised is evidence of the lively and open cultural climate which characterised ancient Pompeii," said Gabriel Zuchtriegel, director of Pompeii's Archaeological Park.

The park said in a statement that it was one of the best preserved skeletons ever found at the site and showed signs of partial mummification, with hair and an ear still evident on the skull. Two cremation urns were also found in the tomb enclosure.

Adults were normally cremated in the city at the time, so the burial of Marcus Venerius is seen as highly unusual.

WALLY THE WALRUS CONTINUES TOUR OF WILD ATLANTIC WAY

Wally the Walrus is continuing his tour of the Wild Atlantic Way with people flocking to see the wandering mammal off the west Cork coast.

The Arctic walrus was first spotted in Ireland off the coast of Valentia Island in March, and has since travelled 4,000km along the coast of western Europe, being spotted in France, Spain and the UK.

Melanie Croce, executive director at Seal Rescue Ireland, has urged the public to behave responsibly when visiting Wally.

Safe alcohol levels depend on the person



Reducing alcohol consumption in Ireland has become an important public health policy that has received much recent attention. A report conducted by the Health Research Board in 2013 showed that more than half (54.3%) of drinkers aged 18-75 in Ireland were classified as harmful drinkers, with approximately two fifths (37.3%) practising binge drinking and 6.7% having alcohol dependence.

“At risk” drinking based on current guidelines is so high that it has been suggested that the maximum safe level has been set too low”

What constitutes a safe level of alcohol intake has been subject to much questioning and even controversy over the years. Indeed, the prevalence of “at risk” drinking based on current guidelines is so high that it has been suggested that the maximum safe level has been set too low.

Definition

Hazardous or at risk drinking is defined as that which puts one at risk of future health problems due to drinking more than the recommended weekly or daily limit. Harmful drinking is said to happen when the pattern of drinking causes damage to physical or mental health.

Trying to define an exact cut-off point for safe alcohol consumption is not easily done and is largely based on evidence from epidemiological studies looking at the relationship between alcohol intake and several outcomes or diseases.

Medical Matters

Dr Kevin McCarroll



However, alcohol has been associated with up to 200 acute or chronic conditions and the level which poses a risk for cancer, cardiovascular disease and other health problems will vary.

Some would argue that there is no definable safe level of alcohol intake. Indeed, alcohol is classified as a group 1 carcinogen and has been causally implicated in at least eight cancers. The 2014 World Cancer report concluded that when it comes to cancer no level of alcohol consumption is safe and that increasing intake raises the risk in a dose dependent fashion.

On the other hand numerous studies consistently show that a low level of daily alcohol intake is beneficial against heart disease, however, this effect is not present for episodic and in particular heavy drinking.

Under reporting of alcohol consumption, difficulty in defining a reference or control group of non-drinkers, and lack of adjustment for other factors like smoking in those who drink make interpretation of studies difficult and mean that proving a definite cause and effect for any given level of intake is difficult.

Several professional bodies have established guidelines which have set maximum safe drinking levels for both female and males. Above these cut-offs there is an increasing risk of alcohol-related health problems. To

confuse things, there is considerable variance in guidelines across countries with some referring to drinks as opposed to alcohol units consumed and with little attention being given to patterns of drinking behaviour.

In Ireland, the HSE recommendations which are broadly similar to Britain advise a maximum weekly consumption of 11 standard drinks for a female and 17 for a male (with a drink equating to half a pint of beer, a small glass of wine or a measure of spirits). Binge drinking is defined as taking six or more standard drinks in a short space of time. In addition, guidelines also advise not taking alcohol for at least two days of the week.

Having an alcohol intake just above this level puts one at an increased risk, but still in the relatively low risk category. As more



studies emerge on the effects of alcohol, guidelines may become more fine tuned.

The World Health Organisation previously reported that drinking below 35 units per week in males and 17.5 units per week in females was low risk (one unit equates to approximately one standard drink). This is much higher than the safe drinking level now generally recommended.

Exceptions

Of course, guidelines apply to a typical person and cannot be applied in a one size fits all approach. In those with low body mass or liver disease a lower intake is advised.

Alcohol consumption should also be lower if you are taking certain medications, especially hypnotics or sedatives.

“Studies also show that drinking behaviour changes throughout life and when younger tends to be more irregular whereas with increasing age is more frequent though with overall consumption declining”

In addition, in older adults and in particular those with cognitive impairment alcohol may cause worsening confusion and falls and many guidelines now factor this in. The evidence suggests that in terms of health risk patterns of drinking behaviour may be more important than total weekly alcohol consumption. Studies also show that drinking behaviour changes throughout life and when younger tends to be more irregular, whereas with increasing age, it is more frequent though with overall consumption declining.

In summary, the guidelines reflect what constitutes for most a safe level of drinking. As always, a sensible approach should be taken to alcohol consumption which should factor in not just overall intake, but also importantly your pattern of drinking.

Dr Kevin McCarroll is a consultant physician in geriatric medicine in St James's Hospital, Dublin.

» Continued from Page 31



Earth, *oikoumene*, the Church, *oikoumene*, calls all households and societies, *oikos*, to turn our political, social and economic systems, *oikonomia*, towards just, sustainable economies of life, which respect the limits and life giving ecological boundaries, *oikologia*, of our common home."

“Their website is home to a host of resources enabling everyone to take part in the Season of Creation, and then beyond afterwards”

The ultimate goal of the season each year, and this one just as any other, is to “renew our baptismal call” to care for and sustain “an ecological turning” so that life, human, animal, plant and otherwise, may flourish.

Resources and activities

The main Catholic environmental group spearheading the climate response is the Laudato Si’ Movement, formerly known as the Global Catholic Climate Movement. Their website is home to a host of resources enabling everyone to take part in the Season of Creation, and then beyond afterwards.

For those with time on their hands and looking to take up something new, a number of roles are open to volunteers, in areas such as administration, grassroots, policy, digital and animator programme

volunteering. Roles as diverse as gathering signatures for petitions and theological and spiritual consultancy are advocated for too. If any of these sound of interest, visit www.laudatosimovement.org for all the details.

The movement also suggests beginning or joining a local Laudato si’ circle, which are small groups that meet regularly to deepen their relationship with God as Creator and all members of creation.

They pray with and for creation, reflect on their ongoing ecological conversion, and take action. Resources for these groups are freely available, ranging from simple prayers and reflections on the topic of the environment and our relationship to it, to deeper analyses of pressing issues facing the climate movement around the world.

For those of a more contemplative bent, the ‘Creation Care Prayer Network’ is a network of communities committing themselves to the healing of the planet. The network



is connected through prayer and Eucharistic adoration and welcomes religious and lay contemplative communities, too.

“There’s never been a better time to get involved in the climate movement, particularly for those of religious faith”

The network prays for creation and “accompanies species and non-human life most affected by climate and ecological injustice”, joining Catholic institutions around the world in helping more people care about creation and undergo an ecological conversion.

Prayer must always precede action, the webpage for the network wisely advises, so sign up for that if yourself and any friends or family members feel like praying for the good of creation.

There’s never been a better time to get involved in the climate movement, particularly for those of religious faith. While technology and heavy industry has done much harm to people and the planet, the potential is there to bring more people together than ever before. Perhaps give it a try this Season of Creation.

Dad’s Diary

Rory Fitzgerald



August is the new October. A succession of low-pressure systems hit the west coast of Ireland this August, just in time for peak holiday season. We found ourselves needing full winter clothing as we explored the windswept Aran islands or the rain-drenched streets of Galway. Of course there were gaps in the weather, when the sun even threatened to shine, but there was always a sharp autumnal feel in the air. Still, the kids were always happy to make the most of things. They don’t care much about the rain, when they are busy rolling down sand dunes or running into the surf in their wetsuits.

decades or even generations. My 11-year-old finds this prospect daunting, and said that he hated seeing plastic floating in the sea offshore. Given such timescales, it’s little wonder that the younger



Yet of those who follow the weather closely – farmers, fishermen and sailors – many I’ve spoken to agree that something is amiss with the weather in recent years. Last August also saw some atrocious conditions, with boats wrecked by an unseasonal storm in Cork. More unseasonable gales lashed the coast this August, along with a succession of dreary weather fronts, which brought rain and bitter winds. These are not the Augusts we remember. The scientific evidence for global warming is strong, of course, but it is the strength of the feeling in our bones that something has shifted in our climate which causes the greater emotional impact. On the face of it, the idea of Ireland becoming a few degrees warmer may seem welcome, but when we see what it means in practice, it seems far less attractive.

The increased warmth in the seas and the atmosphere gives greater energy to the North Atlantic weather systems which hit Ireland, meaning more powerful winds and more torrential rain. Some scientists see initial signs of the Gulf stream slowing down which, were it to happen in earnest, could leave us with a climate akin to that of Atlantic Canada. Yet any such drastic changes are likely to take place over

generation seems especially interested in climate change. They are the ones likely to live to see it play out.

Even my seven-year-old says that she learned from school and programmes like *Blue Peter* that the climate is changing and that doing things like turning lights off when you’re not using them might help. I asked my 10-year-old her feelings about it, and she says that she worries about how floods and storms might affect us. They get a lot of messages about climate change from the media, of course, which inevitably tends to catastrophise. Perhaps some perspectives are unduly apocalyptic, and others unduly sanguine. I don’t want them to worry about it as such, but to be aware of the uncertainty it poses, and to focus on taking positive steps to play some small part in helping to make the environment better. Using cleaner technology is a good thing for the immediate environment as well as having a positive impact on climate change.

Of course, we’ve always had summer storms, at times, and floods, and unsettled Augusts. Yet as summer storms become more commonplace, and record floods follow heatwaves, the frequency of extreme weather makes us feel that something strange, and sinister, is going on.

Preaching the purity of Christian love to the youth

Personal Profile



Ruadhán Jones

When Helen Vysotska entered University College Dublin, she knew she wasn't happy – she just wasn't sure why. Practically in the first week, however, Ms Vysotska was drawn to the Newman Catholic society. Within a few years, the shallow faith of her youth took root and flourished and Ms Vysotska is now the general manager of Catholic youth group, Pure in Heart.

“Despite this, she identified as a Christian and, coming into college, she was interested in learning more”

“I did have some Catholic upbringing,” Ms Vysotska began. “I was baptised as a Greek Catholic. My family are Ukrainian, my grandparents would be very practising. My parents, they would stick with traditional celebrations, Easter, Christmas – those events would be highlighted and we would mark them. But we wouldn't know beyond those aspects of the faith, we wouldn't be going to weekly Mass or Confession.”

She described her relationship with God as a teenager as being “transactional”.

“It was like a jackpot machine, like I put in a coin and I get more coins out,” Ms Vysotska said. “But



Helen Vysotska.

I didn't have a deeper understanding of a close intimacy with Christ and really having him the centre of my life.”

Despite this, she identified as a Christian and, coming into college, she was interested in learning more. At fresher's week, when new students get a chance to sign up for college societies, Ms Vysotska chanced across UCD's Newman Catholic society – it was a fateful encounter.

“I kept going to their Monday night gatherings, the people there were really genuine, really lovely and I just really liked that they had a wholesome, a different life per-

spective,” Ms Vysotska explained. “In college, it was really easy to be sucked in to drinking, partying, all that kind of stuff. These people, they could have a laugh, they could have fun, but they wanted more, they wanted a greater purpose to life than just getting drunk.”

American missionary

At these Monday nights, she met an American missionary from Focus (Fellowship of Catholic University Students), who asked her along to a Bible study group.

“That first commitment I made with my relationship with Jesus was the Bible study,” Ms Vysotska con-

tinued. “I thought, hey, you know what, that makes sense – if I want to know more about God, it makes sense for me to get to know the Bible. I started to attend weekly these Bible studies. I started to get a greater grasp on the Church, the sacraments, and then Mass. All of a sudden, I was going to Mass every Sunday.”

“However, there were things I still didn't fully surrender. One of the biggest things was chastity and purity. First of all, I didn't know that young people actually practised chastity. I did not know that. There was a desire in my heart to practice it, but I'd never had accountability or people of a mindset to be pure.”

This desire found its fulfilment, its grounding, when the Bible study group read Theology of the Body by Pope St John Paul II.

“After that encounter came the discovery of Pure in Heart, which she was introduced to by a friend”

“For me, that was like, boom – everything just made sense to me,” Ms Vysotska said. “It made sense to me why the culture is the way it is. Why people are searching for love, to be loved and they're looking for it in the wrong places and they're trying to fill the emptiness that can only be filled by God.”

“Seeing the beauty of the other person and the gift of the other person, the gift of marriage – understanding all of these big themes – I then in 2019, went to a retreat and at that retreat, I had my first very honest confession. That for me was like, yeah, I'm never going back.”

After that encounter came the discovery of Pure in Heart, which she was introduced to by a friend.

“It was in September 2020, when we were able to get back in person, thanks be to God,” she said. “It

went on Zoom and I kept on going weekly to their prayer meetings. I loved the mission, to spread purity amongst the youth, authentic relationships and chastity and the gift of love. That was huge, I think that's the crisis at the moment, the crisis of love and how we should love and how we should respect our own selves.”

All the while she had been coming to a deeper understanding of the Faith and relationship with Christ, a desire to be on mission came to the fore. Having led Bible studies of her own, an opportunity arose when the position of general manager for Pure in Heart opened up.

Having prayed and reflected, Ms Vysotska determined to apply and was blessed to take up the position. Now, just a few months into her tenure, she has ambitious plans for the youth group.

Pure in Heart

“I think that we should really re-evangelise and implant a greater desire to know God more and to know ourselves more, the purpose of our bodies and our dignity,” she said. “I think it's difficult because of the secondary schools – that's our mission to go the schools, do retreats and talks. The bigger kind of mission that we're about is going to communities already out there, like chaplaincies in university.”

“A lot of them don't know Pure in Heart, they need a reminder, to be reminded of the message. Youth communities, parishes with active youth groups or who need help, they want youth groups. Also branching the groups out. Our head office is in Merrion Square, but we've had so many emails in the past couple of months, from Limerick, Cork, Belfast, asking can they have a Pure in Heart prayer group. We'd like to branch out and spread the seeds of Pure in Heart around the country.”

Living Laudato Si'

Jane Mellet



Our Common Home

The recent UN report on Climate Change (IPCC) left many people feeling overwhelmed as the UN Secretary General, António Guterres, described it as a “code red for humanity”. The report was released during a week which saw wildfires continue to rage across the world and countries such as Madagascar bracing themselves for a devastating famine, the roots of which are attributed to global warming. The IPCC report was clear, there is no doubt that human activity is causing our planet to warm, the impacts are being felt across all regions and all systems and will get worse. However, the report also offered some hope that if governments take immediate action now, we can steer onto a different path: “Strong and sustained reductions in emissions of carbon dioxide (CO2) and other greenhouse gases would limit climate change.”



Faith communities have a vital role to play in addressing this crisis for, as we read in *Laudato Si'*, at the heart of the environmental crisis is a deep spiritual crisis. We must restore our relationship with God's creation. *Laudato Si'* calls faith communities to respond: “Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience” (LS, 217). The upcoming Season of Creation (September 1 – October 4) gives us the perfect opportunity to respond in prayer, reflection and action for our common home. Extensive resources are now available for parish communities in Ireland to help us celebrate this season and can be found at www.catholicbishops.ie (search Season of Creation).

This Season of Creation the Vatican are also inviting Catholics to urgently unite and

demand bold action to protect God's creation by signing the “Healthy People, Healthy Planet” petition. This petition is aimed at the next UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) which is due to take place in Glasgow in November. At this conference world leaders must come together and make decisions which will have repercussions for many generations to come. It is a critical moment for our common home. Pope Francis will attend this UN Conference and we are asked to help create the momentum that is needed for real change. So this Season of Creation we would urge all parishes, schools, families and communities to help promote the Healthy Planet Healthy People petition by going to www.thecatholicpetition.org, adding your name and encouraging family and friends to do the same. This is one way we can lift up the voices of the most vulnerable, respond to the cry of the earth, and take a stand for future generations. Celebrating the Season of Creation and signing this petition are two actions that can make a real difference this year.

“For we know that things can change...” (LS, 13).

Jane Mellett is the *Laudato Si'* Officer with Trócaire

TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



A pleasure to hear both sides of an argument

If there are, broadly speaking, two sides of an argument, I like to hear from both sides together. Too often inadequately informed or biased presenters just have one side at a time and are unable or unwilling to put the hard questions.

So, I enjoyed the discussion on the **Pat Kenny Show** (Newstalk, Wednesday) between David Quinn of this parish and the Iona Institute and Michael Nugent of Atheist Ireland. As one listener texted at the end, it was “an intelligent respectful discussion”. The item was prompted by the recent comments of Dublin’s Archbishop Dermot Farrell to the effect that the visibility of the Christian faith in Ireland was vanishing. I’d like to have seen that specific topic teased out more thoroughly, with an acknowledgement of the many green shoots, for example the huge involvement of lay people in parish work during Covid-19 and the many youth groups and charity works. Mr Quinn agreed with the archbishop as far as the figures go – e.g. Mass attendance, drop in vocations, but he sought to put it in a wider context – an increase in individualism and the lessening of a sense of institutional belonging.

Order

Pat Kenny put it to Mr Nugent that religion created order in society but he thought that



Shannon Campbell from the Catholic chaplaincy at Queen's University who spoke about faith in action.

was an “illusion”. He thought the archbishop’s statement was “significant” and that this had implications for relationships with the State, e.g. in relation to the funding of faith schools, which he saw as the State funding of evangelisation. Mr Quinn felt that parental choice was the key element when it came to education.

Mr Nugent made some very broad generalisations (‘without evidence’ as they say) to the effect that secularists were typically less racist, less nationalistic, less prejudiced, less dogmatic.

Mr Quinn reckoned he wasn't comparing like with like and the differences were more a function of class, with contrasts between poor and rich countries. He also instanced countries that were explicitly built on secular-atheist principles (North Korea, Soviet Union, China) and suggested these weren't exactly bastions of human rights. Further, he thought Mr Nugent was ignoring the Christian foundations of increasingly secular states in the developed world – pointing out for example the contribution of these foundational principles

to the great post-war human rights documents.

I thought Mr Nugent was too inclined to be acerbic and dismissive – e.g. talking about religion ‘preying’ on people. Mr Quinn, while outlining the Church’s huge contribution to education and medical care in the most dangerous of places accepted that over the centuries Christians often fell short of the ideals they preached, suggesting for Christians how endemic sin was and how this showed the need for a saviour. Mr Nugent was again too dismissive and judgemental, suggesting that the missionaries don’t do their work to protect people on the ground but to save souls. He did accept that authoritarian secular states were just as bad as authoritarian religious ones and wouldn’t be happy with state funding atheism.

Prompted

Archbishop Farrell’s words also prompted an item on **Sunday Sequence** (BBC Radio Ulster) when stand-in presenter Mark Devenport said it wasn’t easy to find young Christians to talk about their faith on radio. I wondered how hard they tried, but they were fortunate in their eventual line-up. Exemplifying the green shoots I mentioned earlier, two young women, Holly Thompson and Shannon Campbell spoke enthusiastically about their faith and how central it was to their

PICK OF THE WEEK

MASS

RTÉ One Sunday September 29, 11.00am

Fr Tom McDermott, Administrator of St Colman’s Cathedral, Cobh, celebrates Mass in the Chapel of The Divine Word Missionaries, Maynooth, with music from members of the cathedral chamber choir, directed by Dominic Finn.

THE CRUSADES

EWTN Sunday August 29, 4pm, Thursday September 2, 9am, and (night) 3am

The Crusades have given rise to many myths and legends, but what’s the real story? Includes re-enactments and insights from leading historians.

NEW! VATICANO

EWTN Sunday August 29, 8.30pm, also Monday August 30, 7.30am, Tuesday 2.30pm

Preview of the International Eucharistic Congress in Budapest, Hungary.

lives. Holly, 18, was taking a year out to do an internship with her local church (now there’s an idea for Catholic parishes) while Shannon worked with the Catholic chaplaincy in Queen’s University Belfast. In her work she was seeing faith in action in many of the young people they came across – for example service to the homeless. Holly was asked if it was ‘cool’ to be Christian and she said it was for her, though it depended on who you were with. She found the young Christian community to be vibrant in Northern Ireland. It was an uplifting and inspiring contribution.

Later in the show outgoing Northern Ireland Human

Rights Commissioner Les Allenby outlined what his priorities had been, including ‘autonomy rights’ for women. Mr Devenport asked him a question for the pro-life perspective which I’ve rarely if ever heard from a journalist down south – “What have you done for the rights of unborn children?” Mr Allenby deflected, referencing ‘international human rights standards’ but neglecting to mention the Convention on the Rights of the Child which references protection of children *before and after birth*.

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Film

Aubrey Malone



Be afraid...be very afraid

Who will ever forget the summer of 2021 when both the weather and Covid-19 conspired to keep us out of cinemas? When we went back to them, all they seemed to offer us was horror.

Old is a supernatural thriller from M. Night Shyamalan about a family who find themselves ageing at an alarming rate on a tropical beach. Horrific elements are leavened by the dark comedy.

You’ll also have the daylight scares out of you by *Censor*, set against the ‘video nasty’ explosion of the eighties, *Candyman*, *Malignant*, *Boys from County Hell* and *Demonic*. In *The Night House*, Rebecca Hall lives in

an isolated house when she becomes aware of strange presences around her.

Retreat home to the telly and you’ll have more Fright Nights. *Things Heard and Seen* (Netflix) has Amanda Seyfried as an artist who’s just moved to a haunted house with her very strange husband (James Norton).

Professor

A university professor with some dodgy credentials, Mr Norton’s true nature comes to the fore when his tenure is threatened by a colleague who discovers a secret in his past. He unlocks the demons in him, thereby spiralling the film to its very odd conclusion.



Boys from County Hell directed by Chris Baugh.

The tension is built nicely throughout but I had a question. Why doesn’t Amanda hightail it out of the house the second she discovers it’s haunted? Of course there

would be no film then, would there?

Neither could I ever understand why Alfred Hitchcock had Raymond Burr killing his wife in *Rear Window* with the

curtains open. It made it a bit easier for James Stewart to see him doing the dastardly deed.

Agoraphobic

The Woman at the Window (Netflix) has agoraphobic psychologist Amy Adams witnessing a murder in similar fashion. Is it the ditsy Julianne Moore who’s been killed or is Amy imagining things because of her habit of mixing alcohol and pills? And is Julianne really ‘Jane Russell’? If so, who’s the ‘new’ wife of Gary Oldman claiming to be the namesake of the famous actress?

There are one too many twists and turns for comfort in this baroque whodunit. Mr Oldman also hams things up no end.

Amy finally conquers her agoraphobia by climbing onto a roof in the freezing cold as she tries to dodge demented

knife swipes from the deranged killer. I’m sure there are easier ways to remedy this condition.

In Neil Jordan’s *Greta* (Netflix) Isabelle Huppert plays a woman who leaves her handbag in public places and then kidnaps the people who return them to her. Nice lady!

Why did she scare me more than a man doing this would? Maybe it’s the incongruity between her viciousness and the air of ‘defenceless little lady’ that she gives off. Mr Jordan keeps the tension at Richter level right up to the last frame where Isabelle has finally been caught. Or has she?

Wildfire is a tale of conflict between two sisters from Northern Ireland that’s intensified when one of them who’s been missing returns home.

BookReviews

Summer series:

‘Saints and Beasts’ IV

Saint Francis of Assisi and the wolf of Gubbio

St Francis of Assisi, canonised in 1228, a mere century after his death, must be one of the most universally venerated saints in the world, a man widely respected beyond the Christian community. This is partly due to his special relationship with birds and animals.

In *The Little Flowers of St Francis* a later writer assembled and arranged traditional stories about Francis of Assisi. The twenty first chapter of this compendium of piety related the story of St Francis and how he dealt with the wolf of Gubbio, a small town in Perugia in the foothills of the Apennines.

With efforts being made across Europe from Ireland and Scotland to the Alps and Pyrenees, the interaction of people and wolves has come into focus in these troubled days. But first the story itself (edited here for length).

“Having listened to these words, the wolf bowed his head, and, by the movements of his body, his tail, and his eyes, made signs that he agreed to what St Francis said”

At the time when St Francis was living in the city of Gubbio, a large wolf appeared in the neighbourhood, so terrible and so fierce, that all the people were in great alarm, and used to go about armed, as if going to battle.

St Francis, feeling great compassion for the people of Gubbio, resolved to go and meet the wolf, though all advised him not to do so.

Making the sign of the holy cross, and putting all his confidence in God, he went forth from the city, taking his brethren with him; but these fear-

ing to go any further, St Francis bent his steps alone toward the spot where the wolf was known to be, while many people followed at a distance, and witnessed the miracle.

The wolf, seeing all this multitude, ran towards St Francis with his jaws wide open. As he approached, the saint, making the sign of the cross, cried out: “Come hither, Brother Wolf; I command thee, in the name of Christ, neither to harm me nor anybody else.”

Sign of the cross

Marvellous to tell, no sooner had St Francis made the sign of the cross, than the terrible wolf, closing his jaws, stopped running, and coming up to St Francis, lay down at his feet as meekly as a lamb. And the saint thus addressed him: “Brother wolf, thou hast done much evil in this land, destroying and killing the creatures of God without his permission; yea, not animals only hast thou destroyed, but thou hast even dared to devour men, made after the image of God; for which thing thou art worthy of being hanged like a robber and a murderer. All men cry out against thee, the dogs pursue thee, and all the inhabitants of this city are



St Francis preaching virtue to the wolf of Gubbio.

thy enemies; but I will make peace between them and thee, O brother wolf, so no more offend them, and they shall forgive thee all thy past offences, and neither men nor dogs shall pursue thee anymore.”

Having listened to these words, the wolf bowed his head, and, by the movements of his body, his tail, and his eyes, made signs that he agreed to what St Francis said.

On this St Francis added: “As thou art willing to make this peace, I promise thee that

thou shalt be fed every day by the inhabitants of this land so long as thou shalt live among them; thou shalt no longer suffer hunger, as it is hunger which has made thee do so much evil; but if I obtain all this for thee, thou must promise, on thy side, never again to attack any animal or any human being; dost thou make this promise?”

Consented

Then the wolf, bowing his head, made a sign that he consented. Said St Francis again: “Brother wolf, wilt thou pledge thy faith that I may trust to this thy promise?” and putting out his hand he received the pledge of the wolf; for the latter lifted up his paw and placed it familiarly in the hand of St Francis, giving him thereby the only pledge which was in his power. Then said St Francis, addressing him again: “Brother wolf, I command thee, in the name of Christ, to follow me immediately, without hesitation or doubting, that we may go together to ratify this peace which we have concluded in the name of God”; and the wolf, obeying him, walked by his side as meekly as a lamb, to the great astonishment of all the people.

The saint also spoke to the people.

“The wolf lived two years at Gubbio; he went familiarly from door to door without harming anyone, and all the people received him courteously”

The sermon being ended, St Francis added these words: “Listen my brethren: the wolf who is here before you has promised and pledged his faith that he consents to make peace with you all, and no more to offend you in aught, and you must promise to give him each day his necessary food; to which, if you consent, I promise in his name that he will most faithfully observe the compact.” Then all the people promised with one voice to feed the wolf to the end of his days; and St Francis, addressing the latter, said again: “And thou, brother wolf, dost thou promise to keep the compact, and never again to offend either man or beast, or any other creature?”

And the wolf knelt down, bowing his head, and, by the motions of his tail and of his ears, endeavoured to show that he was willing, so far as was in his power, to hold to the compact.

The wolf lived two years at Gubbio; he went familiarly from door to door without harming anyone, and all the people received him courteously, feeding him with great pleasure, and no dog barked at him as he went about.

At last, after two years, he died of old age, and the people of Gubbio mourned his loss greatly; for when they saw him going about so gently amongst them all, he reminded them of the virtue and sanctity of St Francis.

This remains one of the most popular tales about St Francis, especially in the city of Gubbio itself.

As for the historic Brother Wolf of Gubbio, when renovations were being made in 1872 to the church of St Francesco della Pace, which tradition associated with the wolf, in the grounds a grave containing the bones of a wolf were discovered. Later the remains, which were thought by local people to be those of Brother Wolf himself, were reburied inside the church. Or so it is claimed in Gubbio.



The medieval streets of Gubbio.

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.

Peter Costello



A sermon to the wild Hogs of Eritrea

St Francis is the widely venerated patron saint of ecology, and is connected with many Catholic and indeed Christian groups engaged with animal welfare. But the strange influence of St Francis over animals are echoed in other stories, such as one related by the Sicilian nobleman Alberto Denti, later Duke of Pirajno, which echoes the story of the wolf of Gubbio in a strange way.

He had gone to Africa as the personal doctor of the Duke of Aosta, the member of the royal family who was Italian Viceroy of the new Italian empire in the continent. His best known book is *A Cure for Serpents* (1955), which is still in print, but the following anecdote

comes from another book *A Grave for a Dolphin* (1956).

A tale he tells in a chapter of the latter book echoes strangely with what had been written about St Francis and the Wolf of Gubbio. It is too long to give in full, but here is a précis.

Dr Denti also served in Eritrea in East Africa, where his book *A Grave for a Dolphin* was set. In this he recounted his remarkable encounters with the "Big Father" of Barentu, the Prior of the Capuchin mission there in the territory of the Kunama people.

When he first heard of the prior's ability to communicate with animals, he was not on perfectly friendly terms with the priest. But he had heard from the local people about

how he had once dealt with a ravaging leopard, merely by telling it in plain language to behave himself.

"Once, coming away from the river on my way to Agordat," Dr Denti writes, "my car developed gear trouble and I had to spend a night in a hamlet buried in a grove of doum-palms. Squatting round the fire, the natives told me about a leopard that until a few months before had terrified the district, killing goats and cows, prowling at night in the villages where the people, hearing it snarl and sniff in the dark, trembled behind their bolted doors. Luckily the Big Father had ordered the brute to go away and since then the beast had never been seen again."

“A tale he tells in a chapter of the latter book echoes strangely with what had been written about St Francis and the Wolf of Gubbio”

Later he became friendly with the "Big Priest", and on one occasion the holy man



explained about his influence over animals. A little later, visiting the mission, Dr Denti asked the prior why no preparations had been made to scare off the hordes of wild wart hogs from the mission's own fields.

Such precautions were not needed the prior explained, as he had himself spoken to the wart hogs. He told them directly just how many poor people depended on the crops of those fields. The hogs, he said, had promised to leave them alone.

The prior later took Dr Denti

out with him into the forest to his next annual meeting with the hogs.

While the two men waited the hogs began to arrive from the depths of the wild forest. Then the Prior spoke to them, not in Latin or any language of exorcism, but in the casual local language. The Prior spoke firmly to the horde of wild hogs, who listened quietly and attentively. The gathering broke up at dawn, and the two men returned to the mission for early Mass. Dr Denti sat puzzled in his seat, wondering about what he had seen and heard. It was all so very strange for a scientist to

accept, though the poet in him understood.

But there was a finale.

"In harvest-time I visited the Mission's fields: not a single cob had been stolen.

"Hadn't the hogs been kind?" said the monks, piling on my plate the dark slices of that sort of puff-paste the natives call andjera. My stare of amazement made them smile: 'oh, it was all so simple'."

And then they reminded him then of just how St Francis had dealt with the Wolf of Gubbio.

(*A Grave for a Dolphin* (1956), ch. 4: "A sermon on wart-hogs".)



A Patron Saint for the Great Forest

Kindness to animals is all very well, and is often a fitful emotion. The only true way to show kindness to birds and beasts is to preserve their homes in the wilderness, whether in the mountains and prairies or in the great forests that ought really to cover as much of the world as creation intended. They prefer to cosset domesticated dogs and cats, but not wild wolves or wart hogs that they fear.

In response to the signs of the times, the Church has now found a patron for the wilderness.

This is St Kateri Tekakwitha, the first saint of Native American, or rather (to use the term preferred in Canada) First Nations origin. Born in 1656, she died at the St Francis Xavier Mission in Sault St Louis, New France, the present day Kahnawake in Québec, just south of the St Lawrence River. St Kateri is now associated with the developing spirituality of ecology.

Pious life

Her pious life was first recorded by Jesuits at the mission in Québec where she passed away. Slowly a devotion to her emerged over the course of

the next two centuries. In the early accounts it was her piety and her perpetual virginity that was admired and emphasised. So much so that many miracles were attributed to her intercession, leading to her beatification in 1980. Eventually in October 2012 she was canonised in a ceremony at the Vatican, perhaps because the US and Canadian Catholics both claim her as "one of our own".

But her association with the great forests which were the homeland of the First Nations that are such a feature of Canada made her a natural choice, one which appealed also to more conservative Catholics in both countries.

She is currently known as "a patron of ecology and ecologists, of the environment, environmentalism, environmentalists, exiles, orphans, those ridiculed for their faith and for World Youth Day." Her feast day is in high summer in the northern hemisphere, when we need to recall too that half the globe is in deep-

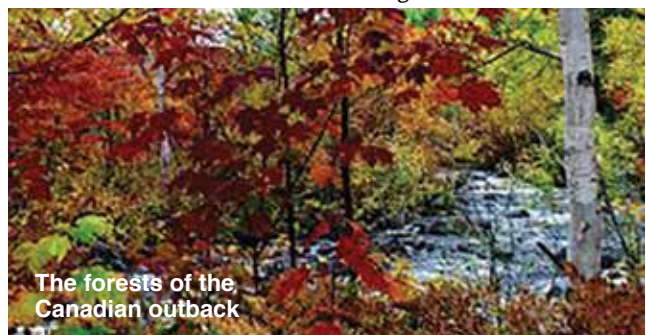


A modern memorial of St Kateri Tekakwitha in appropriate costume

est winter, a reminder of the natural cycles of life we too often forget about.

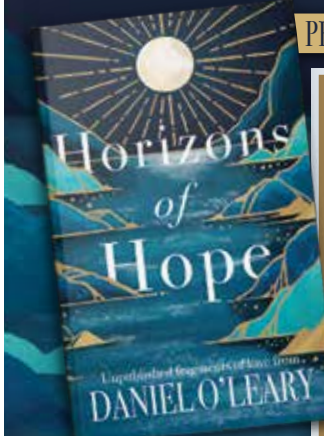
Yet, as one of her biographers remarked, St Kateri "often went to the woods alone to speak to God and listen to him in her heart and in the voice of nature".

She is, it seems, very much a saint for today, with an appeal to a spectrum of Catholics with a wide variety of views. She can hopefully serve to bring together many kinds of people, whatever their nation.



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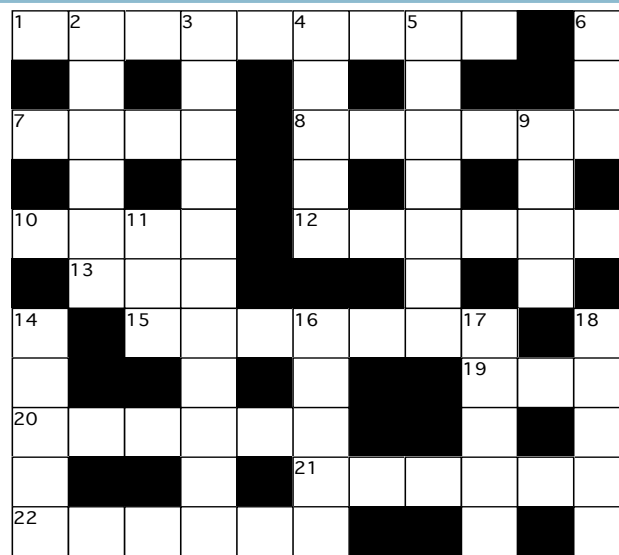
One day, parents and their children will tell the story of how your legacy of love changed their lives.

Thank you for considering a gift to Trócaire in your Will.

Trócaire

Crossword Junior

Gordius 397



Across

- 1 Type of fruit bat - its name includes the name of another animal (6,3)
- 7 You tie it with string or rope (4)
- 8 Come back (6)
- 10 Baby horse (4)
- 12 Creature which makes a web (6)
- 13 No score (3)
- 15 These nice lines on your face appear when you smile (7)
- 19 1, 3, 5 and 7 are ___ numbers (3)
- 20 Movies are shown here (6)
- 21 This plant might sting you (6)
- 22 They're like boots with wheels (6)

Down

- 2 City where the 2012 Olympics were held (6)
- 3 Brainy (11)
- 4 They're microscopic and can make you ill (5)
- 5 Not in a place, but in front of it (7)
- 6 What a boy grows up to be (3)
- 9 It's made of coral (4)
- 11 Help (3)
- 14 Birds which quack (5)
- 16 Schemes (5)
- 17 This direction is opposite to North (5)
- 18 Found the total of some numbers (5)

SOLUTIONS, AUGUST 19

GORDIUS NO. 521

Across - 1 Calamity Jane 7 Ram 9 Fork 10 Whimsy 11 Jeer 14 Penny 15 Inane 16 Pray 18 Tolls 21 Gnome 22 Linen 23 Rusty 24 Argo 25 Viola 26 Jolly 29 Coco 33 Stoker 34 Axle 36 Rod 37 Space shuttle

Down - 1 Coo 2 Lake Erie 3 Mows 4 Tribe 5 Jason 8 Marry in haste 9 Flying saucer 12 Sarong 13 Fever 14 Paths 17 Ransom 19 Lay-by 20 Slave 27 Optic 28 Likes 30 Cads 31 Urdu 32 Malt 35 Lee

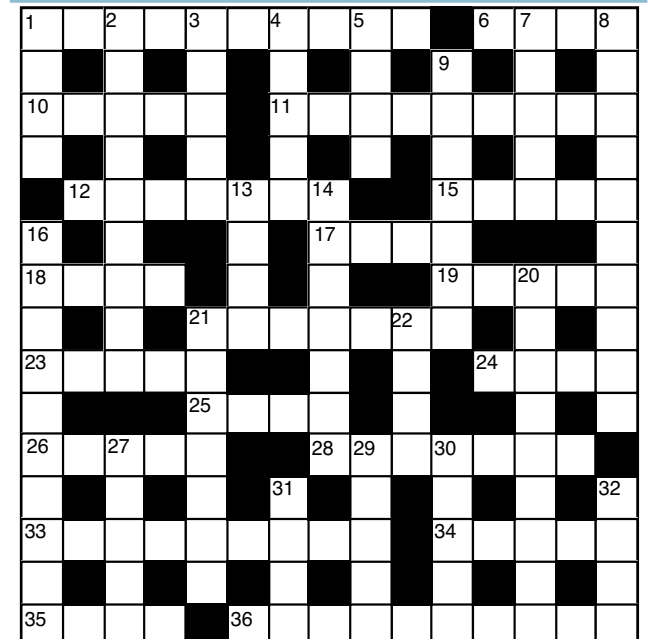
CHILDREN'S No. 396

Across - 1 Sunshine 6 Neat 7 Paw 8 Aged 9 Iced 10 Egyptian 13 Goat 16 Second 17 Skip 19 Surfer 20 Eraser 21 Sliced

Down - 1 Supper 2 Newry 3 Heart 4 Ending 5 Camera 11 Pacific 12 Ignored 14 Oak 15 Top 16 Skull 17 Soap 18 Idea

Crossword

Gordius 522



Across

- 1 & 32d Rescued in the nick of time (5,2,3,4)
- 6 Eye infection (4)
- 10 Irish sprite (5)
- 11 RL Stevenson novel that was taken to be held for ransom? (9)
- 12 Sorcerers (7)
- 15 The capital city of Ghana (5)
- 17 The first murder victim in the Bible (4)
- 18 Line up to see moon pioneer Armstrong (4)
- 19 Cowboy's rope (5)
- 21 Gary ran around a farm building (7)
- 23 Change (5)
- 24 On which the coffin may be laid at a funeral (4)
- 25 Sickens, feels poorly (4)
- 26 Citrus fruit (5)
- 28 Law (7)
- 33 Iron or lead, perhaps - not precious like gold (4,5)
- 34 Beast or insensitive, cruel person (5)
- 35 Simple, straightforward (4)

36 Work some magic, as 12 across may do (4,1,5)

Down

- 1 Takes small drinks (4)
- 2 This musician is on the fiddle! (9)
- 3 Roman goddess of the Hunt (5)
- 4 Harnessed by wooden apparatus, as oxen may be (5)
- 5 Conceal (4)
- 7 Theme for discussion (5)
- 8 Tries hard (10)
- 9 Mortally descriptive of an obese fellow-fighter (7)
- 13 Bellow (4)
- 14 Sorrow (7)
- 16 The Pope is this? That can't be wrong, you know! (10)
- 20 Sudan jet I divert to find the patron of lost causes (5,4)
- 21 & 27d One's relative and a biblical figure get together for an American artist (7,5)
- 22 Roster (4)
- 27 See 21 down
- 29 Sign outside an available rental property (2,3)
- 30 Large, brass instruments (5)
- 31 Volcano in Sicily (4)
- 32 See 1 across

Sudoku Corner

397

Easy

9			2					8
			5	1	8	9		
	1	5		9		4		
	9		6		3		7	5
	3	4				2	8	
7	5		8		9		4	
		9		8		3	5	
		7	9	5	6			
5					1			6

Hard

	1				4	2	6	3
3	2	6		9				
				4	6	5		1
		5				3		
6	3	8	5					
				8		6	5	4
8	6	2	4				7	

Last week's Easy 396

3	9	6	4	2	7	5	1	8
1	4	7	3	8	5	9	2	6
5	8	2	9	6	1	3	4	7
8	1	5	6	7	9	2	3	4
9	2	3	5	4	8	7	6	1
7	6	4	2	1	3	8	5	9
4	3	1	7	9	2	6	8	5
2	7	8	1	5	6	4	9	3
6	5	9	8	3	4	1	7	2

Last week's Hard 396

3	1	6	9	7	4	8	2	5
4	8	7	3	5	2	6	1	9
9	5	2	6	8	1	7	3	4
5	2	9	1	3	6	4	8	7
8	3	4	2	9	7	1	5	6
6	7	1	8	4	5	3	9	2
7	9	3	5	6	8	2	4	1
2	4	5	7	1	3	9	6	8
1	6	8	4	2	9	5	7	3



Carol Glatz

Notebook

Not me: The moral dilemma of seeking vaccine exemptions

GETTING VACCINATED is “an act of love,” Pope Francis said in his latest urgent appeal, after more than a year of insisting Covid-19 vaccines be equitably available worldwide for everyone to get inoculated.

Nonetheless, some Catholics have been wondering if they should seek a religious exemption from an immunisation requirement with vaccines tested or produced with cell-lines originally derived from aborted foetuses more than 50 years ago. Individuals are free to make a decision on getting the vaccine. Some, like the Archdiocese of New York, have said for Catholics, refusing the vaccine would be based on a personal belief, not Catholic teaching, as the Vatican and Pope have made it clear some vaccines for Covid-19 are permissible and it’s a moral duty to get vaccinated.

Because there has been “overwhelming consensus within the Catholic magisterium” for years on the permissibility of using such vaccines in the absence of alternatives, “to counsel people that it is legitimate to refuse the vaccines on religious grounds - and, in fact, to facilitate it - is to actively assist people in mal-forming their consciences,” said M. Therese Lysaught, a corresponding member of the Pontifical Academy for Life.

“In fact, in actively assisting people to put the lives of others at risk,



Photo: CNS

such advocates assist them in being indifferent to and even assisting them in doing evil. This sins against charity. This is the Catholic definition of scandal,” said the professor at the Neiswanger Institute for Bioethics and Healthcare Leadership of the Stritch School of Medicine at Loyola University in Chicago.

She and other experts in bioethics or moral theology responded by email to a series of questions by *Catholic News Service*.

Voluntary

Vaccinations, like all medical interventions, are voluntary - a right that is upheld by the Church and democratic societies.

However, Prof. Lysaught said vaccinations are also “morally obligatory” when they are seen as an “ordinary means” of protecting human life.

According to the Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services, “An ordinary or proportionate means is one that offers a reasonable hope of benefit and does not entail an excessive burden or impose excessive expense on the family or community,” she said, saying that Covid-19 vaccines meet those requirements.

Prof. Lysaught said: “Vaccines are clearly ‘ordinary means,’ and ordinary means are morally obligatory” - assuming, there are no associated medical or health risks for that individual. Catholic tradition teaches that “voluntarily protecting our own life and health and the life and health of others is an overriding theological and moral commitment,” she said.

Many organisations and places of work or study have requirements that people are asked to voluntarily comply with, and if people don’t, “then they must be willing to bear the costs of their conscience. That’s how conscientious objection works,” she said.

In the case of vaccine refusal, the doctrinal congregation said in its 2020 note on the morality of using some anti-Covid-19 vaccines that people “must do their utmost to avoid, by other prophylactic means and appropriate behaviour, becoming vehicles for the transmission of the infectious agent.”

Little to do with religious teachings...

Stefano Semplici, another corresponding member of the Pontifical Academy for Life, said many of the reasons for vaccine refusal and hesitation “are in many cases the same as those put forward regardless of religious grounds,” that is, they have little to do with a religion’s teachings.

Reasons more often reflect: concerns about a vaccine’s risks, which may be “magnified by the circulation of often-misleading news and information; an underestimation of those [risks] related to the disease, especially among young people; the idea of self-determination as inviolable when considering a health treatment; and the difficulty of communication between the sci-

entific community and public opinion,” said Dr Semplici, a professor of social ethics and bioethics at Rome’s Tor Vergata University.

This almost sacred sense of “self-determination” can be seen in the recent ‘My Body. My Choice’ signs, protesting against mask mandates and vaccination requirements.

Vaccines, however, are “a fundamental question of public health,” Prof. Semplici said, and limits on personal freedom have to be considered when they affect the welfare of others.

A democratic government allows exemptions to particular mandates out of respect for people’s sincerely held beliefs and personal limitations or health risks.

That’s because, while people have to be willing to bear the consequences of their objection, they cannot impose those consequences on others, Prof. Lysaught said.

“This is a crucial - and unacceptable - moral difference from a Catholic perspective. We are allowed to accept martyrdom for ourselves, if God so calls us; we are not allowed to martyr others,” she said. If people’s objection to vaccination “helps impede the achievement of herd immunity and

helps to fuel the development of new variants, many others will bear the costs of their exemption as well.”



The Pope with a Lebanese flag at his 4 August audience, at which he appealed for the people of Lebanon.

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“Jesus wills that we give alms to Him as to one poor and needy. He puts Himself as it were at our mercy; He will take nothing but what we give Him from our heart, and the very least trifle is precious in His sight.” ~ **St Therese**

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