

The Irish Catholic

MARY KENNY

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BISHOP NIALL COLL

Ireland's newest bishop receives a warm welcome Pages 14-20



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Religious education 'never more important' – new bishop

Chai Brady

Ireland's newest bishop has warned that politicians would be making a big mistake if they push ahead with plans to secularise faith-based schools.

Bishop of Ossory Niall Coll, who was ordained on Sunday, told *The Irish Catholic* that in the Republic "you get the impression that someone has decided that we have to become an utterly secular republic in line with France, with its policy of *laïcité*."

"I think this is a dreadful mistake that doesn't understand Irish history. To exclude God and faith and Church from all public discourse doesn't seem to me to be very sensible.

"I would rather build a pluralist Ireland," Bishop Coll insisted rather than one that is purely secular.

He also said that religious education has never been more important and will help newcomers who have made their home in Ireland in recent years to better integrate into Irish society.

"I think we will have to look again at the idea of pluralism with other European countries. Ireland, like most of western Europe is becoming yes, more secular – but



Bishop of Ossory Niall Coll greets parishioners during his episcopal ordination on Sunday.

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A NEW MISSION

Franciscan sisters open new Drogheda house PAGE 10



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Authority is being undermined in Ireland PAGE 11



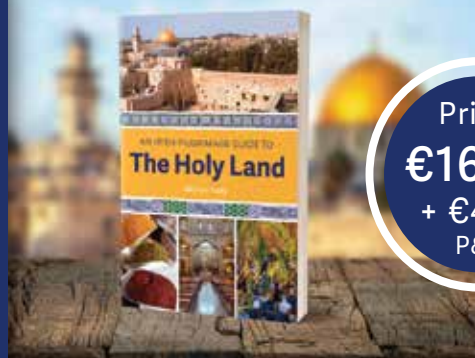
HOMELESS CRISIS

Cork community under severe pressure PAGES 12-13



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Opening new ecumenical pathways

Every year the week of prayer for Christian unity comes and goes. Traditionally, the week is celebrated between January 18-25, and is greeted with varying degrees of enthusiasm.

If we're honest, most of us pay little more than lip service to the commemoration. Coming as it does so close after Christmas, many parishes find themselves rushing in early January to organise something.

I don't detect much hostility to the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, it's more a case of disinterest from most people – including clergy.

On one level, it's a mark of how successful the peace process has been. Even if incomplete and inadequately lived, things are certainly much better than they were during the civil conflict we euphemistically call 'the Troubles'.

Bravery

Sometimes we forget the bravery that it took in previous generations to step outside of denominationalism. Many people on all sides of the divide took risks to build friendships and relationships. And these friendships proved vital to ensuring that the Good Friday Agreement could come to be and that historic acts like decommissioning of paramilitary weapons could happen.

It was to Fr Alec Reid and Rev. Harold Good that the governments looked to supervise the process of putting the weapons of the Provisional IRA beyond us.

I remember Fr Reid telling me some years before he died on one



Pope Francis greets Lutheran Bishop Jukka Keskitalo of Oulu during an audience with an ecumenical delegation from Finland at the Vatican Jan. 17, 2022.

particular occasion when they witnessed weapons being decisively and veritably put beyond use. He got a phone call to his Clonard Monastery home in West Belfast. He was told to wait and he would shortly be picked up in a van. It was a familiar drill; this is how him and Rev. Good went about their work – always in the dead of night.

“Many people on all sides of the divide took risks to build friendships and relationships”

As the two clerics were taken to a site where weapons were being decommissioned, they were now in a position to confirm that all weapons had been put beyond use. Fr Reid recalled how it was suggested that

Editor's Comment

Michael Kelly



grateful for that.

In the 21st Century on the island on the edge of Europe we need to discern what God is saying to us in our current time and place. What, for example, does the presence of tens of thousands of Orthodox Christian believers in Ireland say to us about the future direction of travel on ecumenism?

“Perhaps we're in a new era of ecumenism and relations between the different Christian traditions on this island”

Perhaps it is time to go even further ecumenically by embracing the members of the Sister Churches that have made their home among us. Many of our parishes now have believers from the various Orthodox traditions, yet we know so little about their faith and traditions – despite the fact that they are theologically and spiritually much closer to Catholicism than most of the Protestant traditions are.

Maybe in our thinking over the next 12 months as we look to another week of prayer for Christian unity it is time to expand our horizon.

“Sometimes we forget the bravery that it took in previous generations to step outside of denominationalism”

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See Pages 14-20.

Religious education 'never more important' – new bishop

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also more multi-religious,” he said.

He pointed to the fact that in recent decades many people from an Islamic background and many Africans from an Evangelical Protestant background have made their home in Ireland as well as many Catholics from Central Europe, Asia and Africa.

“These people are certainly not secular, or tempted by secularism,” he insisted.

In this context, Bishop Coll said that “religious education has never been more important in Ireland, north and south – because these large numbers of people of faith are coming in and we need to learn about their faith, because faith is central to who they are and central to their culture.

“Anything that would help increase religious knowledge should – in a good

cares, educational context – lead to greater empathy and greater appreciation of these people and their faiths and their cultures.

“Ireland needs to become a truly pluralist society,” he said.

Asked whether Catholic schools can be hubs of integration, he said “they already are”.

“Look at the North, it's already true that people of other faiths and cultures are more likely to choose a Catholic school, if they can. All across Western Europe, Muslims in particular do well in Catholic schools because they appreciate an environment where God is honoured and respected.

“If Christians honour God, then there is space for them [other believers] to honour God,” he says.

Bishop Coll referred to the experience of France where he says state schools are “very cold places for peo-

ple of faith”.

“It's increasingly clear, there is literature emerging about this, that Muslim children in France are better acculturated to French society if they go through Catholic schools – because they're allowed to both develop as people of faith, and develop as citizens of France – both together,” he said.

Bishop Coll said that politicians need to adopt a model of pluralism that hears all voices rather than going down the secular route.

“We used to hear so much about that Ireland where there would be many peoples of different outlooks, and faiths, and cultures – and that everyone would be facilitated in a multi-cultural, and multi-religious society. But, now it seems the voice of faith alone is to be silent,” he said.

Brigidine sister hopes Brigid's day will show 'beauty of faith'

Ruadhán Jones

Brigidine Sr Rita Minehan CSB hopes that people will see "the beauty of faith" as the first ever bank holiday for St Brigid's day takes place on February 6.

The Irish saint's "beautiful witness" of care for the poor speaks loudly to today, believes Sr Minehan, chairperson of Solas Bhríde Christian spiritual-ity centre.

"She was a woman of the Gospel, she took it to heart," Sr Minehan told *The Irish Catholic*. "The social justice element to her life is extraordinary, her outreach to the oppressed and the poor of her time."

Resurgence

The Solas Bhríde centre, founded by the Brigidine Sisters, has seen an "amazing resurgence of interest" in the 5th Century saint since it was announced that she would be honoured with a national holiday.



Sixth class students Oisín Lee and Sophie Hannon of St Brigid's Primary School in Kildare Town, Ireland, are pictured in 2019 making St Brigid's crosses for President of Ireland Michael D. Higgins. Photo: CNS photo/Kenneth O'Halloran.

St Brigid "blazed a trail for female leadership", Sr Minehan continued, adding that it's important to recognise that.

"It's 120 years since St Patrick got his honour, so we've been waiting 120

years for Brigid. It's great to be alive for it."

Patroness

St Brigid is the patroness of Ireland, one of three patron saints along with St Patrick and St Columba.

Sr Minehan acknowledged that there is "confusion" over the identity of St Brigid, due to folklore surrounding a pre-Christian goddess.

"There are arguments on both sides, and you

have to listen to both sides, but I believe - I'm taking it on faith - that she was there," the Brigidine sister says.

However, Sr Minehan believes this ambiguity is an opportunity for inclusivity, reaching out to people who are not religious or may be anti-religious so they can see "the beauty of faith".

"They can still feel a certain affinity with her," she explains. "And that's something to build on."

Solas Bhríde in partnership with the Kildare tourist board is encouraging people to 'Pause for Peace' with a global minute's silence at 12 noon on St Brigid's day, February 1.

Sr Minehan said this movement for a Pause for Peace sets the scene for marking the new national holiday. She added that it reflects a "spiritual underpinning" to the day and is consonant with the value of peace which Brigid stood for in her time.

St Michael statue strikes back at alleged thief

Jason Osborne

A man in Mexico was on the tail end of heavenly justice after he was injured following a fall on to the sword of a St Michael statue he was allegedly trying to steal in the early hours of the morning, January 14.

Local media reports that Carlos Alonso (32) went to Christ the King parish in Monterrey with the intention of robbing the church.

It's reported that under the cover of darkness, Mr Alonso jumped over a fence to gain access to the church, before breaking a glass door and entering the building.

However, while trying to make his escape with the statue of St Michael the Archangel, the alleged thief tripped and fell on the angel's sword, seriously injuring his neck in the process.

A passerby saw the injured man lying by the church doors and sought help, which saved the man's life.

It is expected that once Mr Alonso recovers, he could be handed over to the public prosecutor's office and he could face punishment for the damage caused to the church.

The statue of St Michael was unharmed throughout the incident.

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Ending eviction ban will lead to ‘repeat pattern’ of Irish homelessness

Chai Brady

A homeless charity has warned that once the current eviction ban ends in March there will be a large increase in the number of people becoming homeless and needing their assistance.

Paul Sheehan of the Cork Simon Community told *The Irish Catholic* that lifting the pause on evictions, which is in place from October 30, 2022 until March 31, 2023, will lead to a landslide of homelessness.

“We’ve got record numbers of people in emergency accommodation last November in Cork and Kerry. We were expecting the numbers to increase but maybe not to that extent. During Covid there was a moratorium

on evictions and on rent increases and that certainly helped,” Mr Sheehan said.

“We saw the number of new presentations fall to a trickle during that time. As soon as those moratoria were lifted we began to see a very slow but steady rise in the numbers of people presenting from around June, July onwards last year and it just kept going. There is another moratorium in place until the end of March and we will see that reflected in the first three months of this year in the number of people who are presenting but as soon as that moratorium is lifted at the end of March we’re just going to see a repeat of the pattern we did last year.”

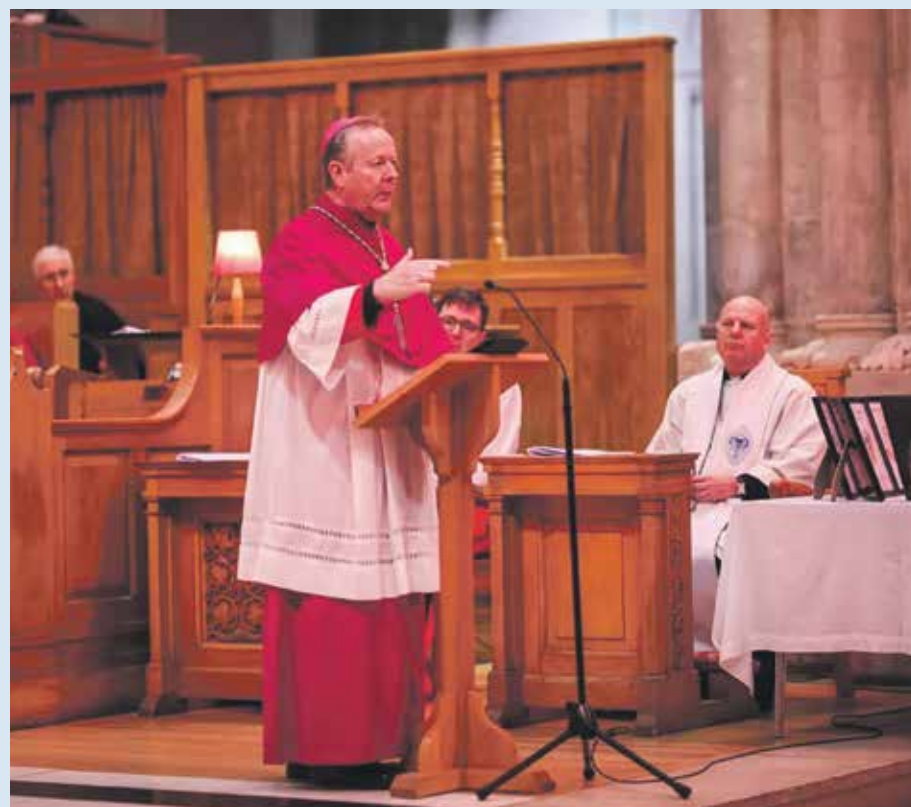
Already Cork Simon has seen a 31% increase in the

number of women presenting as homeless and in need of their services, which Mr Sheehan described as “significant”.

He added that the record number of homelessness across Ireland recorded by the Government in November is “concerning” and is reflected in Cork.

As of November 2022, 11,542 people were accessing emergency accommodation, according to figures from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. This includes 3,494 children and 8,048 adults. However, this figure does not include those who are sleeping rough, ‘coach surfing’, or homeless people in prisons or hospitals.

Archbishop Eamon Martin: Churches could help truth recovery process



Ruadhán Jones

Churches can help develop an agreed truth recovery process to address the “legacy of pain” of the troubles, Archbishop Eamon Martin has said.

The Primate of All-Ireland made the suggestion during an ecumenical service in St Anne’s Cathedral, Belfast, held on Sunday January 22.

Peace, reconciliation and forgiveness on the island of Ireland “can only be progressed if we bring to light the truths about our troubled past that remain hidden and festering”, Dr Martin warned.

He encouraged “respectful conversations across our communities about what

we mean by a shared future”.

“It may seem ambitious, but might we in the Churches offer to help develop an agreed truth recovery process to address the legacy of pain and mistrust that continues to hang over us,” Dr Martin said.

“And might our Churches also work together to create spaces for dialogue at parish, congregation and community level so that all voices can be fully heard about the kind of society and values we want for our children and grandchildren.”

The service on Sunday was led by the Dean of Belfast the Very Rev. Stephen Forde and marked 100 years since the first meeting of the Irish Council of Churches on January 23, 1923.

The final straw to break up the United Kingdom?

There have been over 50 major battles between Scotland and England in the last thousand years, including the Battle of Falkirk in 1298, Bannockburn in 1314, Flodden in 1513, the much-lamented Culloden in 1746 and the Battle of the Braes in 1882, over the cruel Highland Clearances (when people were evicted to make way for sheep pastoralism).

And it has never been forgotten that Elizabeth I beheaded her Scottish cousin and rival Mary, Queen of Scots in 1587, having kept her a prisoner for over 18 years.

But not even the most ardent Scottish patriot, from Robert the Bruce to William Wallace, could have predicted that England and Scotland would come to stage a battle over – gender identity, involving transitioning from male to female, and vice-versa. But that's the constitutional question that some believe will finally break up the Union of Eng-



Mary Kenny

land and Scotland, which is the primary basis for the constitution of the United Kingdom.

Nicola Sturgeon, the Caltonian leader, insists that Scots should have the legal entitlement to change gender at 16, without a medical diagnosis or other verification. In London, the English are determined to block her plans. Westminster says 16 is too young, and her Scots law will breach the British Equality Act, since males who transition to female could threaten women's safe spaces.

Crisis

It has bubbled up into a constitutional crisis, with the spectre of Scotland offering a "Gretna Green" for English teenagers crossing the border to switch gender at 16.

Surely, "gender wars" have reached a pinnacle of the absurd.

Yes, anyone with gender dysphoria needs compassion and appropriate treatment, at an appropriate age. But does the belief among so many young people now that they can easily change sex come from the slogan "the right to choose", so widely used in advancing abortion rights?

The truths about biology have been conspicuously brushed aside; and the mantra has been that individuals can demand "rights" from nature, and choose to do anything they wish with their bodies. The confusions and falsehoods around gender and sex are, alas, the logical conclusion of this obsessive ideology of "choice", which may be the final straw breaking up the United Kingdom.

• A friend in California, Mary Cahill (née Brannigan) sometimes sends me cheering messages, and her latest involves three heart-warming human stories.

*In Worcester, Massachusetts, almost 5,000 people queued in the pouring rain to get tested for a swabbing event to find a medical match for a 5-year-old old cancer patient.

*In Nigeria, a Danish charity worker, Anja Ringgren Loven, who campaigns against children being victims of witch-

craft, gave a starving and abandoned young child some water. She subsequently adopted him and called him Hope and he now thrives.

*In Rome, a little girl with Down Syndrome left her seat during a papal audience and walked up towards Pope Francis where he was preaching. The security guards made to return her to her place, but Francis told the child, "come and sit next to me": she did so, and held his hand while he continued with a sermon.



A young girl sitting next to Pope Francis smiles during an audience with Special Olympics athletes participating in the Unified Football tournament, at the Vatican October 13. Photo: CNS /L'Osservatore Romano

The way we name

People in England are being given instruction on how to pronounce certain Irish names, which some find difficult. These include "Saoirse", "Aoife", "Caoimhe", "Niamh" and "Siobhan".

Those who do not have a grasp of the Irish language, and don't know that a "v" sound is constructed by a "h" in the "Cló Romanach" (indicated by a dot over the letter in older Irish script, known as a buailte or séimhiú), must learn to pronounce these names properly.

The patterns of Christian names (now sometimes

called forenames or first names, since we cannot assume a Christian Baptism) usually indicates a cultural change. The Saoirses ("Freedom"), "Niamhs", ("Radiance") and "Caoimhes" ("Gentleness") signal a move away from Christian associations. "Aoife", although the Irish version of "Eva", is explained as "Beauty", and Siobhan is the equivalent of Joan – Joan having been a popular name after St Joan of Arc was canonised in 1920.

In my generation, girls and boys were given names with

some Biblical or saintly link (and family tradition): Michael, Anthony, James, Catherine, Elizabeth (sometimes as Eilis, and its popular diminutive, Eileen), Bernadette, Therese, Peter, Paul, Patrick, Thomas – and Mary in its many forms.

In recent times, there has been a move towards Irish-language names – often very attractive – with little or no religious connotation. Interesting that in France, however, the two most fashionable names for boys are "Patrick" and "Kevin" – of Irish saintly repute.

• I'm a great fan of the Central Catholic Library at 74 Merrion Square, Dublin where I have so often been helped with sourcing books for research. So I'm honoured and delighted to give a talk there on Wednesday, February 1 at 1pm, on *The Way We Were – Catholic Ireland since 1922*. Attendance is free.

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Irish sister in South Sudan undertakes 400km trip for Pope's ecumenical visit

Jason Osborne

Loreto Sister Orla Treacy from Co. Wicklow is currently accompanying 60 students and pilgrims on a 405km pilgrimage from the diocese of Rumbek to South Sudan's capital, Juba for the Pope's upcoming ecumenical visit.

Pope Francis is scheduled to make an ecumenical pilgrimage to Juba, South Sudan, February 3-5 with Anglican Archbishop Justin Welby of Canterbury and the Rev. Iain Greenshields,

moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Sr Treacy said that "people are really excited about this," and that it's "fantastic to engage in it and it's a privilege to be part of it".

"The goal is that we would walk about 150km and then the rest we will do by road with the aim of staying and sleeping in the different parishes along the way and engaging with the communities that we stay with," Sr Treacy said.

The youth she's travelling with have been given four "pillars" to focus on as part of their journey.

"The first one obviously is a walking pilgrimage, the second one we're saying is an experience of prayer. It's an ecumenical prayer as well because not all of our youth are from the Catholic Church, we also have from the Anglican, which is locally called the Episcopal Church of South Sudan. The third is that it is a community experience, so we're going to sleep very simply, wherever we can, along the

road probably, in classrooms. It will be quite basic. We'll have to cook for ourselves," she said.

The fourth pillar is a "sense of peace," which will see them visit different communities along the walk and engage with them in conversations about peace.

Sr Treacy said that it's "beautiful" because "everybody is excited".

"I think because we've lived so many years of war where we couldn't even imagine these journeys, now all of a sudden we're saying to people not

only can we imagine going to the city, but a) we can imagine driving there and b) we can even imagine walking there. It's incredible."

The fact that the Pope, the Church of England's Archbishop Justin Welby and the moderator of the Church of Scotland, Rev. Iain Greenshields "consider us important enough to visit" is enough, Sr Treacy said, and that if anything else happens it will be an "extra blessing".

The group is scheduled to arrive in Juba February 2.

French nun who was world's oldest person dies aged 118

Chai Brady

A French nun who was the world's oldest person died last week aged 118.

Sr André, who joined the Daughters of Charity in 1944, died in her sleep in her nursing home in Toulon.

She was originally born into a Protestant family but later converted to Catholicism and was baptised aged 26. With the Daughters of Charity she

was sent to a hospital in Vichy, where she spent most of her working life – more than three decades.

In one of her last interviews, Sr André told journalists: "People should help each other and love each other instead of hating. If we shared all that, things would be a lot better."

Born Lucile Randon in France in 1904, she lived through both World War I and World War II, 18 French

presidents and 10 popes. While she was blind and in a wheelchair during her last years, Sr André continued to care for other elderly people.

She once said during an interview that while she would be better off in heaven, she continued to enjoy earthly pleasures like eating chocolate and drinking a glass of wine every day.

Asked about her longevity, she once told reporters "Only the Lord knows".

Northern Ireland hospital abortion numbers lower than last year

Staff reporter

The latest statistics from Northern Ireland relating to hospital-based abortion have revealed that there were 53 terminations carried out in HSC hospitals during the period of 2021/22.

This was 10 less than the previous year, but still an increase on the figure from 2019/20.

The number only relates to procedures carried out on hospi-

tal inpatients and day cases and isn't representative of all abortions notified to the Chief Medical Officer during 2021/22.

All 53 of the abortions carried out during 2021/22 were carried out on women normally resident in Northern Ireland.

During 2021/22 there were 36 abortions carried out on women aged 30 years and over, 13 carried out on women aged 25 to 29, and four on women aged 24 and under.

Making music for Ukraine...



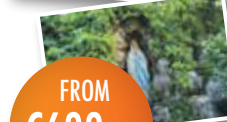
Local and Ukrainian artists perform at a musical event hosted by Portlaoise parish, Co. Laois, on Sunday, January 22, which raised €3,670 for Ukraine. Photo: Agnieszka Kaczmarek.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Peter McVerry Trust CEO stepping down

The CEO of the Peter McVerry Trust, Pat Doyle, has signalled his intention to resign as CEO of the housing charity later this year.

Mr Doyle has held the role of CEO at Peter McVerry Trust for 18 years having been appointed in 2005.

Announcing his decision, Mr Doyle said "I have been extremely privileged to be the

CEO of Peter McVerry Trust since 2005. The role is one that I am proud to have held and it has been an absolutely fantastic experience to work alongside Fr Peter McVerry, the participants, staff and the chairpersons and the wider members of the board of directors and committee members".

Bishop McKeown appointed administrator of Down and Connor

Pope Francis appointed Bishop of Derry Donal McKeown as Apostolic Administrator of the diocese of Down and Connor on Saturday, January 21.

He takes up the appointment after Archbishop Noel Treanor was appointed to the diplomatic post as papal nuncio to the European Union.

Archbishop Treanor wel-

comed the appointment, saying Bishop McKeown brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the role.

The bishop of Derry will hold the role until a new bishop is appointed to Down and Connor. He holds all the rights and responsibilities of a diocesan bishop applicable in accordance with canon law.

Significant concerns over NI schools funding crisis

Ruadhán Jones

Schools' bodies in the North have shared "significant concerns" about the impact of the "crisis" in education funding, warning of negative impacts for many generations to come.

There is a need for an "urgent meeting involving everyone with a concern for the future of our children and young people," say the schools' bodies in a joint letter to Mr Heaton-Harris.

Among the signatories were the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and the Catholic Schools' Trustee Service.

Their warning comes as Westminster is fast tracking legislation to allow the UK government to set a budget without the North's assembly.

Secretary of State to Northern Ireland Chris Heaton-Harris warned in November that cuts to education funding were likely.

The bodies say they would be "failing the children and young people of Northern Ireland" if they didn't share their "significant concerns about the impact of the current crisis in

education funding".

Reduction in funding and under investment "will negatively impact the quality of education of every child and young person living in NI", they continued.

"This is inequitable, as the funding for our children and young people is already significantly lower than that received by those in other regions," the schools' bodies say.

The letter highlights that the North receives less funding per pupil than Scotland, England and Wales, adding that proposed funding will not be sufficient.

"Our schools are telling us that unless this under investment is addressed, it will be impossible to continue to provide our children and young people with an education that ensures they have the best start in life."

The schools' bodies warn that "failure to address this problem will have a negative impact for many generations to come".

The letter concludes: "Education is essential to the creation of a sustainable economy for all. It is therefore imperative that we act now to ensure that our children and young people have and contribute to a positive future."

President leads tributes to sociologist Fr MacGréil

Staff reporter

The President of Ireland has led tributes to eminent sociologist and advocate for the travelling community Fr Mícheál MacGréil SJ after his death aged 92.

Paying tribute to him, the President Michael D. Higgins said that Fr MacGréil made a "deep impact on the lives of many people".

"Throughout all of his work, Mícheál MacGréil brought a sense of the

urgency of recognising justice issues of compassion. His was an early and constant call for the importance of overcoming social prejudice," Mr Higgins added.

Fr MacGréil died on Saturday, January 21, following a short illness. Born in Co. Laois in 1931, he first served in the armed forces before pursuing a vocation to the priesthood.

He lectured on sociology in Maynooth, conducting an influential survey on prejudice and tolerance in Ireland.

A passionate supporter of

minorities, he gave particular attention to the treatment of Travellers in Ireland publishing *The Emancipation of the Travelling People* in 2010.

Fr MacGréil was also a strong proponent of the pioneer movement. In a statement, the spiritual director of the pioneers in Ireland Fr Robert McCabe praised Fr MacGréil for his promotion of temperance in Ireland and his work to "kindle the fire of God's love in the hearts of society".

On the banks of the Jordan...



Bishop of Kilmore Martin Hayes (second from right) and Bishop of Cloyne William Crean (second from left) were among bishops of 11 countries that visited Jordan recently as part of the Holy Land Coordination. The visit took place from January 14-19. The bishops are pictured here with the Latin Patriarchal Vicar in Jordan Bishop Jamal Khader in Amman. Photo: Mazur/cbcew.org.uk

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Healing the historic memory



Forgiveness on this island can only be progressed if we bring to light the truths about our troubled past, says Archbishop Eamon Martin

Although I was only eleven years old in September 1973, somewhere lodged in my boyhood memory are news images of Church leaders gathering for an his-

toric meeting - while others marched in protest. I knew instinctively that something special was happening at Ballymascanlon - it was a beacon of hope in dark times.

Some years afterwards Cahal Daly and Stanley Worrall described a sense of "excitement" and "momentous new departure" as the delegates convened at Ballymascanlon; but they also admitted their anxiety that perhaps the Churches might have been too ambitious and it all might fail.

Vision

But it couldn't fail, for its vision was inspired by the longing of our Saviour who prayed, "That they may be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you (John 17:21)".

That high priestly prayer of Jesus is the motivation behind all our working and praying and hoping together as Churches; and the reason why we 'be longing' that we may be one! For decades those words, "That they may



A silhouette of the peace statue, 'Hands Across the Divide,' in Derry. Photo: CNS

be one', have guided visionary people from our various traditions to boldly confront the reality and pain of our divisions and to set out on a pilgrim journey, daring to dream of greater unity.

Sadly, it hasn't always been so. On St Patrick's Day 2021 our Church leaders lamented that sometimes in our history we have "failed to bring to a fearful and divided society that message of the deeper connection that binds us, despite our different identities, as children of God" (Church Leaders' message: In Christ We Journey Together of 17 March 2021).

Peacemakers

Today, then, let us re-commit to being the peacemakers, the healers, the reconcilers that our Saviour longed for his followers to be, even though we know that our ongoing pilgrimage towards unity will always involve risk - just as it did for the pioneers of the Inter-Church bodies that we are commemorating today.

Just four months ago, at the memorial service for Queen Elizabeth II here in St Anne's Cathedral, my brother Archbishop John, reminded us that "Reconciliation is about the restoration of broken relationships. And the word should never be cheapened by pretending it's an easy thing to achieve... Reconciliation requires the greatest of all religious virtues, love; and it requires the greatest of all civic virtues, courage".

I also believe reconciliation requires trust. And trust is perhaps all the more important on this island where people from different traditions have often regarded one another with fear and suspicion. I thank God today

for the trust and friendship that has already been built up between us - fellow pilgrims - on the path to unity.

At a recent Irish inter-Church meeting it was agreed that "our friendship allows us to go together places where it might be difficult for us to go as individuals". In recent years trust has enabled us to facilitate together shared spaces for encounter, dialogue, healing, conversion and reconciliation. There have been initiatives at Church leadership level and - even more importantly - on the ground, in partnerships between groups of Christians at parish, congregation and community level. We long for more of this. For it is only in safe, shared and prayerful spaces, inspired by the Word of God, that the truth of our divided past can be sensitively unfolded and hopes enkindled for renewed encounter and healthy relationships on this island.

"I thank God today for the trust and friendship that has already been built up between us - fellow pilgrims - on the path to unity"

Three years ago, in his message for the World Day of Peace, Pope Francis said, "(every) peace process requires enduring commitment. It is a patient effort to seek truth and justice, to honour the memory of victims and to open the way, step by step, to a shared hope stronger than the desire for vengeance (Message for the 2020 World Day of Peace)".

Peace, reconciliation and forgiveness on this island

can only be progressed if we bring to light the truths about our troubled past that remain hidden and festering, and engage in respectful conversations across our communities about what we mean by a shared future. It may seem ambitious, but might we in the Churches offer to help develop an agreed truth recovery process to address the legacy of pain and mistrust that continues to hang over us? And might our Churches also work together to create spaces for dialogue at parish, congregation and community level so that all voices can be fully heard about the kind of society and values we want for our children and grandchildren.

Initiatives

Such initiatives are essentially about deep and intentional listening to 'the other' who differs from us - and really 'getting' where they are coming from. The Churches have no desire to dominate such conversations. We are merely servants, inspired by the words of the prophet Micah in this afternoon's reading:

"What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8)."

The theme for this year's Christian Unity Week calls on Churches not only to connect with each other, but also to engage with the questions and demands of justice - and to do so together - not separately. A manifesto for the next 50 years might include: Churches together confronting homelessness; together responding in practical ways to racism and sectarianism; Churches together tackling

human trafficking, exploitation and poverty; Churches together welcoming and providing hospitality for migrants and those seeking refuge among us; Churches together addressing climate injustice; Churches together upholding the right to life and dignity of every human person.

"The theme for this year's Christian Unity Week calls on Churches not only to connect with each other"

To engage in such issues - together, and with honesty - may uncover ways in which we ourselves might be supporting or facilitating unjust systems and structures. But it will also bring us closer in Christ, and strengthen our sense of common Christian purpose.

It is a credit to our predecessors, the pioneers of Ballymascanlon, that we gather today as much closer companions on the Way; looking around the Cathedral this afternoon we see brothers and sisters - friends - in Christ who can share each other's joys and burdens, successes and vulnerabilities.

This is an abridged version of a homily preached by Archbishop Eamon Martin at a service in St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast during the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity on the theme, 'Celebrating our Reconciling Vision of Hope'. The service celebrated the centenary of the Irish Council of Churches and 50 years since Ballymascanlon peace talks.

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Franciscan sisters open new mission house in Drogheda



Bishop of Meath Tom Deenihan with the Sisters of the Franciscan Renewal (CFR) and two lay missionaries in St Mary's Church, Drogheda, Co. Louth, on Saturday January 21. Photos: Bro Sean Blackwell OP.



Bishop Tom Deenihan blesses the CFR's new house of mission.

Ruadhán Jones

At a time when many orders in Ireland are contracting as the vocation crisis bites, the Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal opened a new mission house in Drogheda on Saturday.

A Mass and blessing of the mission house took place on January 21 and two young Irish women are ready to take up residence in the refurbished community house.

A large crowd turned out, with standing room only as Bishop of Meath Tom Deenihan blessed the house.

The order, which celebrates 10 years since opening its convent in the Co. Louth city, sees Ireland as being "fertile ground" for their mission, the order's superior Mother Clare told *The Irish Catholic*.

The time was ripe to open the house for lay missionaries as people are "looking for discernment through us, they're coming to us", Mother Clare added.

The missionary house is open to young women who are interested in spending a year working closely with the sisters.

It is not a formal entry into the community, Mother Clare stressed, but it is an opportunity for young people to see the sister's work and life, and to give service to the Church.

Bishop Deenihan praised the sisters for their "radical" witness, adding that "With the sisters, radicalness is accompanied with happiness and gentleness".

"The House of Mission here that we bless and open today will allow that work in this parish and diocese to grow," the bishop of Meath said in his homily in St Mary's Church.

Bishop Deenihan continued, saying: "It will allow others to hear the invitation of Christ to 'come and see' and it will also, with God's help, increase vocations to the sisters.

"It is remarkable that though the house is only opening today, two Irish women have already begun living as missionaries here. We wish them every happiness and blessing."

The Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal came to Drogheda in 2013 at the invitation of Bishop-emeritus of Meath Michael Smith, taking up residence in a former Sister of Mercy convent.



Coptic Orthodox Sr Gabriella Reham Louka and Sr Philomena Rania Dos at the blessing of the new house of mission.



Sr Rosa and two young volunteers helped serve the many people who attended the celebrations after the blessing of the mission house.





In combating authoritarianism we have dismantled true authority, writes David Quinn

Violent attacks on Gardaí are becoming more common. A few weeks ago, a Garda car was rammed in Cherry Orchard in Dublin, while two members of the force were seriously assaulted around the same time in Ballyfermot. In an incident last weekend, a Garda had part of his finger ripped off in an attack in Ballymun.

Following that incident, Garda Damien McCarthy from the Garda Representative Association told RTE that there has been a “real societal change” in attitudes towards members of the force, resulting in more violence. Many other incidents are not violent. They can involve angry verbal confrontations with gardaí.

What is happening? Why are gardaí the target of a “real societal change”? What is behind it? ‘Respect’ is an old-fashioned word. So is ‘authority’. Respect for members of An Garda Síochána was once almost universal. They were regarded by almost everyone as figures of authority. It is clear that a growing minority no longer see them as such. Quite the contrary, they regard them as figures of derision, and worse.

“Parents are now encouraged to be more like friends to their children”

The mere fact that words like ‘respect’, and especially ‘authority’, have gone out of fashion is indicative in itself of what might lie behind the “real societal change” noted by Garda McCarthy.

Authoritarianism

‘Authority’ has become over-associated with authoritarianism and domination. The Britannica Dictionary defines authority as “the power to give orders or make decisions” and “the power or right to direct or control someone or something”.

This definition is true, insofar as it goes. A teacher, for example, has the power to

The undermining of authority is now playing out on our streets

give orders or make decisions. So does your boss at work, or a parent, or, of course, a member of an Garda.

Priests and religious had authority and still do in certain settings.

But the definition quoted above does not quite capture the fullness of what authority means, because for authority to work properly, there must also be respect. If you don’t respect those in authority you are much less likely to obey them in which case compulsion must sometimes be used, and in the case of gardaí, physical force.

When there is no respect, then physical force will often have to be used much faster than was once the case.

All cultures have recognised the importance of authority for the healthy functioning of society and therefore encourage respect for those in positions of authority.

Honour

The Bible tells children to honour their parents. Confucianism in China very much emphasises respect for your elders and others in authority over you. Western culture is very unusual in that it has consciously dismantled or drastically weakened authority structures.

One big factor that has made it easy to do so is abuse of authority. We are now well familiar with how priests and religious were guilty of this. They were given too much power. There was too much unquestioning deference and respect, some of it based on fear.

Parents have also abused their authority at times, as have teachers and police and employers.

In the case of police, a drastic example was the killing of George Floyd in America by police officers and subsequent calls to ‘defund the police’.

In order to protect people from abusive behaviour, authority figures have been pulled down closer to the level of those over whom they are meant to be in authority. The relationships have become more egalitarian and less hierarchical.

Parents are now encouraged to be more like friends to their children. It is the same with teachers, priests and religious, and employers. Gardaí are not expected to be friends to those they come in contact with, but there is a much greater emphasis now on community or collaborative policing.

All of this is defensible, but what happens when authority

structures weaken too much? For example, is it necessarily a good thing that parents are more friends than authority figures to their children? Parents humouring their children is a very common sight now. It’s as though the power has flipped over. Parents defer to their children rather than the other way around and want to stay on their good side. This can easily result in children thinking their parents have nothing to teach them and that their parents exist mostly to serve them.

Does teaching in general become harder if teachers are no longer seen as real authority figures? Can priests teach properly when they believe they have to humour their congregations rather than challenge them? (Jesus never humoured his listeners).

“Parents have also abused their authority at times, as have teachers and police and employers”

If a Garda does not automatically command respect then his or her job becomes much harder and the streets less safe.

Another aspect to the growing problem is the disappearance of fathers from the lives of many children, especially in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

In many ways, fathers have historically been seen as the archetype of the authority figure. When his authority is destroyed, or he is simply no longer present, there will be consequences. Respect for all other authority figures becomes eroded as well.

Former US president, Barack Obama, has spoken very eloquently on the roles of fathers and what happens when they are missing. Addressing a congregation in 2008 in a deprived part of Chicago where father absence is common, he said: “But if we are honest with ourselves, we’ll admit that what too many fathers also are missing – missing from too many lives and too many homes. They have abandoned their responsibilities, acting like boys instead of men. And the foundations of our families are weaker because of it.”

He spelled out the consequences: “We know the statistics – that children who grow up without a father are five times more likely to live in poverty and commit crime; nine times more likely to drop out of schools and 20 times more likely to



end up in prison. They are more likely to have behavioural problems, or run away from home or become teenage parents themselves. And the foundations of our community are weaker because of it.”

Against a background like this, which is now replicated

across growing parts of Ireland, is it such a surprise that gardaí are finding their jobs increasingly difficult to carry out?

Failed

In Ireland, as in almost all of the Western world, we have failed to properly distinguish between authority and

authoritarianism and have therefore collapsed both of them together. We need to find ways of rebuilding the former without restoring the latter as well. If we do not, then the consequences will continue to play out on our streets and are likely to get worse.

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‘Severe pressure’ as Cork community responds to dire homelessness crisis



Cork Simon Community is rallying to prepare for a big increase in homelessness after rent moratorium ends, writes Chai Brady

Government interventions intended to alleviate the housing crisis are nowhere near enough to help people struggling to get a roof over their head, a homelessness charity has warned.

Homelessness in Ireland has increased to record highs month on month for the last half a year, leading to emergency services being “packed to the rafters” with people unable to obtain affordable housing, the Cork Simon Community tells *The Irish Catholic*.

As of November 2022, 11,542 people were accessing emergency accommodation, according to figures from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. This includes 3,494 children and 8,048 adults. However, this figure does not include those who are sleeping rough, ‘couch surfing’, or homeless people in prisons or hospitals.

“The record number of homelessness across Ireland recorded by the Government is ‘concerning’”

The Simon Communities of Ireland reported earlier this month that there were about 40 properties available across the country for people in receipt of HAP (Housing Assistance Payment). There were none available in Cork.

According to Paul Sheehan of the Cork Simon Community, if you are a single person currently in emergency accommodation and are depending on the private rental market to escape, “you are locked

out of that market – there’s no question”.

He says: “Chances are you will be depending on the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP), which comes nowhere near what the average rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Cork at the moment which is anywhere between €1,100-1,200 a month.

“Even if you’re in a very well-paid job I think people would struggle to be able to pay that. Certainly single men, single households, stuck in emergency accommodation, they’re at the very bottom rung of the ladder.”

Rent freeze

The eviction ban put in place from October 30, 2022 until March 31, 2023 means that those who are in private rented accommodation can’t be evicted even if issued with a valid notice of tenancy termination.

While this has stopped homelessness increasing during the period, Mr Sheehan predicts there will be a large increase in homelessness when the moratorium comes to an end – which happened during the previous eviction moratorium during the Covid-19 pandemic.

He says the record number of homelessness across Ireland recorded by the Government is “concerning” and is reflected in Cork.

“We’ve got record numbers of people in emergency accommodation last November in Cork and Kerry. We were expecting the numbers to increase but maybe not to that extent. During Covid there was a moratorium on evictions and on rent increases and that certainly helped,” he says.

“Certainly single men, single households, stuck in emergency accommodation, they’re at the very bottom rung of the ladder”

“We saw the number of new presentations fall to a trickle during that time. As soon as those moratoria were lifted we began to see a very slow but steady rise in the numbers of people presenting from around June, July onwards last year and it

just kept going. There is another moratorium in place until the end of March and we will see that reflected in the first three months of this year in the number of people who are presenting but as soon as that moratorium is lifted at the end of March we’re just going to see a repeat of the pattern we did last year.”

Women

Already Cork Simon has seen a 31% increase in the number of women presenting as homeless and in need of their services, which Mr Sheehan described as “significant”.

He says: “Because of the two years of Covid and lockdowns and reduced capacity that fed into a pent-up demand, traditionally we would have seen for the most part single men pretty much of all ages, that would certainly be the cohort of people we would have been used to seeing.

“Women have better social support networks in any case, and there’s plenty of research to back that up, but there is a housing crisis, more and more people are under pressure with their housing,” Mr Sheehan says.

“You’ve got overcrowded housing, perhaps options that women might have had in the past aren’t available anymore because maybe what they might have been falling back on is already under pressure.

“They might fall back on family or friends if they needed accommodation for the short term, or

“Homelessness in Ireland has increased to record highs month on month for the last half a year”

quickly, and that option may no longer be available to people, and there is certainly a shortage of emergency accommodation here in Cork and that's feeding into it. Again there's that delayed reaction, we probably saw the number of women increase quickly whereas if we didn't have that lockdown we might have seen it increase much more slowly, but steadily."

Cold

The cold weather has exacerbated the situation in which many homeless people are suffering. Mr Sheehan says it is "potentially deadly".

"In periods of extreme cold weather like we've experienced and we're experiencing now, and we had it in the run-up to Christmas, we work with everybody across the city here to make sure there is a space for everybody to come in from the cold," he says.

“Irish governments have been ‘dancing around the edges – a sticking plaster there, a sticking plaster there’”

"I use the term 'space', because it might be a chair, it might be a sofa, it might be a mattress on the floor but certainly we'll do whatever we can to get people in. To be honest not everybody can come in. Some people distrust homeless services and that's likely because of some traumatic experience in their past, or in their childhood," Mr Sheehan continues, "Some people distrust workers, but we have an outreach team that's out there every day checking in on people and they'll keep at it until they can establish some sort of a trusting relationship. It may take days, weeks or months but when that happens that's when the story really begins – the faint glimmer of a fresh start. That's a group of people that have very complex needs. Obviously we would do everything we can to get them in."

The Government's €500 rent relief per year, which will be backdated to renters for 2022 and will be in place up to 2025, is a "sticking plaster" according to Mr Sheehan.

While he says "everything helps", Irish governments have been "dancing around the edges – a sticking plaster there, a sticking plaster there, it's never long lasting".

The Cork Simon Community's soup run is open every night of the week and about one in every three people presenting are in private rented accommodation. They have a roof over their head, but all of their resources are being used to maintain their tenancy.

Mr Sheehan says: "There's no money left for food, for heating, for anything else. And it's inevitable that we're going to see those people knocking at our door looking for an emergency bed. The costs of renting just a one-bedroom flat is beyond people's reach and it's prohibitively expensive and €500, that's certainly useful, it might help for

a month, it might help for two months, but it's a very short term solution and it's not solving the problem at all."

Housing assistance

The Government's social housing support, Housing Assistance Payment (HAP), helps those who are unable to afford housing by themselves. While it is available in, and administered by, all local authority areas who pay the landlords directly, those who avail of HAP are at a disadvantage when trying to avail of a rental property.

Mr Sheehan explains: "In certain ways it's human nature. You've got 30-40-50 people showing up to a viewing of a rental property, you're going to have a bunch of people there who have got the deposit in their back pocket in cash, they've got their first month's rent in their back pocket in cash, that can all be sorted overnight and the tenant is in the property the next day and job done – that is the easy way to do it, and you can see why it's happening."

He adds that quite often "we're hearing now that people are finding places to rent through social media, through word of mouth, so not everything is becoming available through the normal channels, so there are barriers after barriers being put in place so that people who are stuck in emergency accommodation find them very difficult to overcome."

Cork Simons's emergency services are under "severe pressure", with their emergency accommodation "literally packed to the rafters," according to Mr Sheehan.

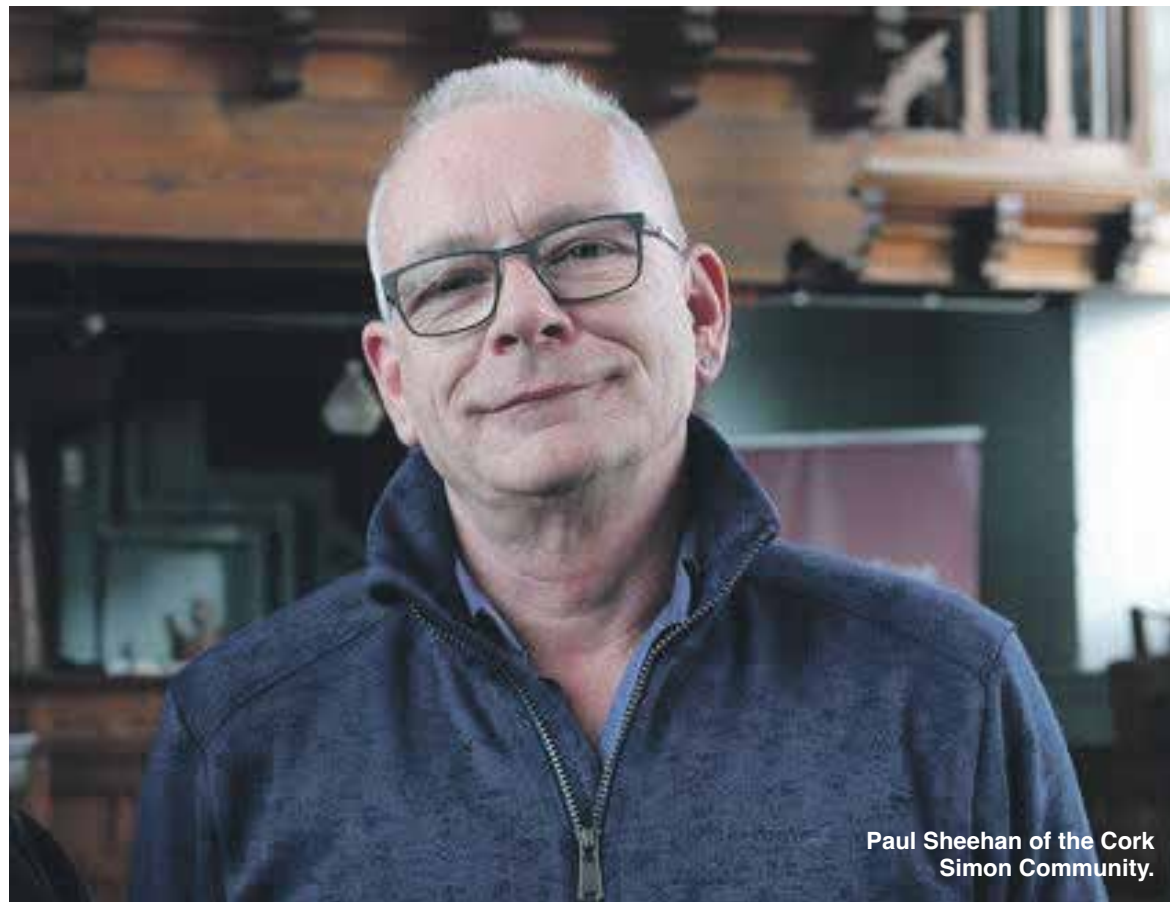
"Every spare inch of space is being used, particularly in the cold weather that we're experiencing now. Our outreach team are still meeting people on the streets, even though there is a space for everybody, not everybody can come in for various reasons and our outreach team are there everyday meeting people, checking in with people, just making sure that they're doing OK, trying to establish that trusting relationship with people."

He says: "On the other side of it, housing, that's under pressure, we provide a certain amount of housing from our own stock, we work with other approved housing bodies, but that's a diminishing supply and the options available to people are becoming fewer and fewer

"They are the pressure points. On paper it looks simple but obviously there are a whole load of challenges behind it but we're seeing the kind of numbers of people stuck in emergency accommodation because people can't find housing, they can't afford it, it's as simple as that and as long as that housing supply issue is there we're going to see record numbers in emergency accommodation."

Supply and demand

The housing crisis in Ireland is nothing new and has been a blight for more than a decade, for a homelessness charity it's a constant challenge to try to move people from emergency accommodation to a more secure dwelling.



Paul Sheehan of the Cork Simon Community.

“The Cork Simon Community's soup run is open every night of the week and about one in every three people presenting are in private rented accommodation”

Regarding the housing supply and demand issue, Mr Sheehan says: "To be fair it is being addressed to an extent, but certainly not to the extent that's needed. We saw more housing completions, more housing commencements last year but even if they all come to fruition at the same time it's nowhere near enough to address the kind of numbers of people who are in need of affordable housing now and if things keep going as they are that is going to be the case for the next three, four, five years, there's no question."

“We're seeing the kind of numbers of people stuck in emergency accommodation because people can't find housing”

Speaking of the demographics of people struggling with homelessness, Mr Sheehan says nationally there's been a small but noticeable increase among younger people, under the age of 25.

Younger

However the numbers of younger people in Cork presenting as homeless have remained more stable, but there has been a rise in homeless women, who Mr Sheehan says face "unique challenges".

"Our emergency shelter is for men and women and obviously for some women that is a problem, it is a challenge, particularly if they're coming from abusive

relationships or domestic violence, and what we're trying to do is to create a space specifically for women in emergency accommodation, so that they have got their own space, they have a female support worker," he says.

"But with such pressure on beds sometimes that can be very challenging. Women sleeping rough are particularly vulnerable and certainly we would have anecdotal evidence from women that the treatment they receive on the street when they are sleeping rough is nothing short of appalling. So we do everything we can to make sure that women aren't sleeping rough but again there can be cases where women don't trust services, they don't trust workers and it can take a bit of time to build up that relationship with them.

"Obviously we work closely with the local authority here and the HSE, and if anyone is in dire need for accommodation or a bed, to be fair everybody will move mountains to try and find that bed. But increasingly that is very challenging," he adds.

Challenges

Despite the challenges, Mr Sheehan praised the people of Cork for their "huge community spirit" in reacting to those who are often forgotten in society.

"I think from a State point of view they [the homeless] can be forgotten, there's no question about that, and they may not be a priority and that's a pity really because the longer somebody remains homeless the more difficult it is for them to get out of homelessness, it creates its own challenges, I've heard it described

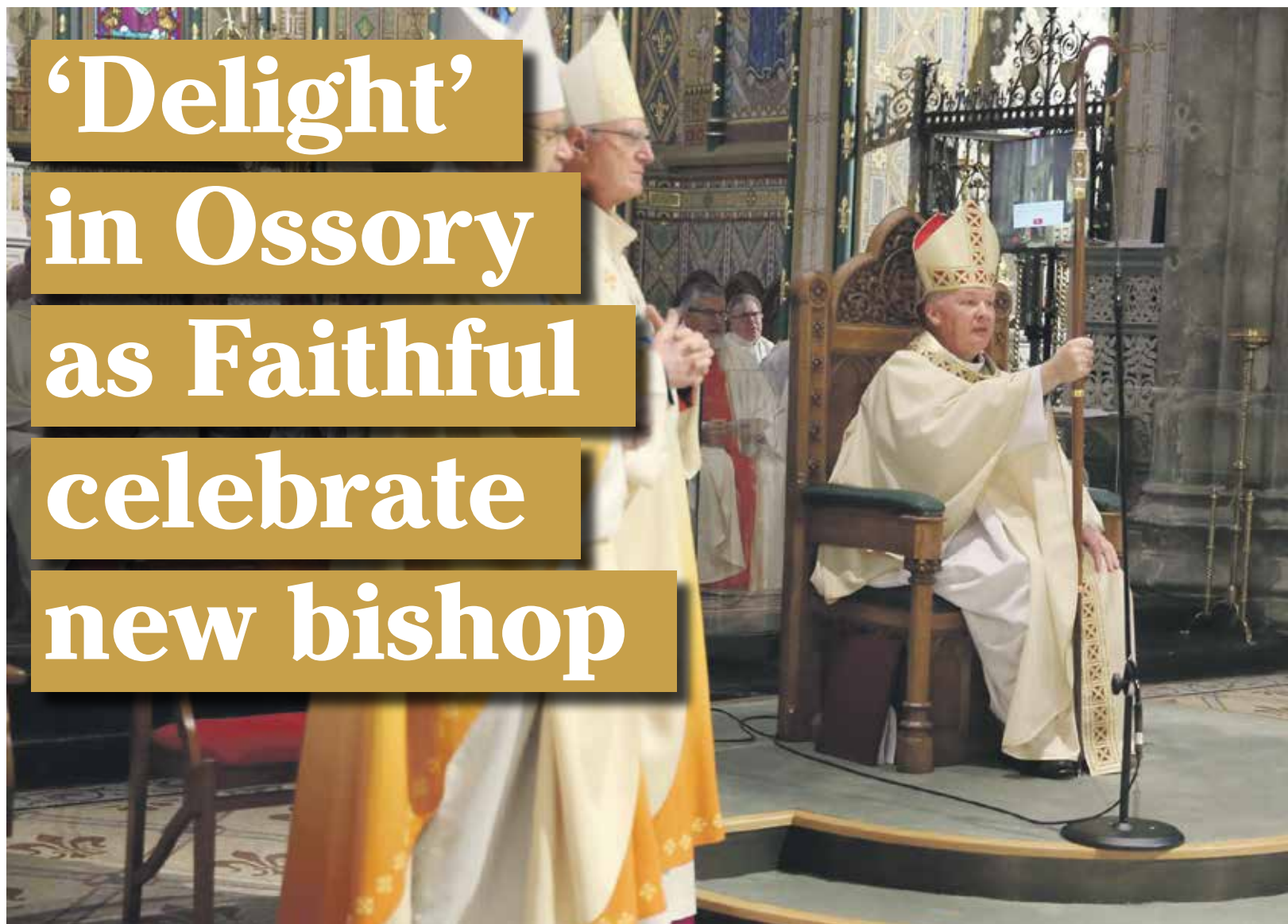
as being a trauma on top of a trauma," he says.

"That being said, there is a huge community spirit here in Cork, despite all the pressures that people are experiencing at the moment with the cost of living and uncertainty about the future, we see people still rallying around and doing what they can to make sure people who are sleeping rough or who are homeless aren't forgotten and that's really the wind in our sails, that's what keeps us going because we couldn't do what we do without that level of support.

“Our emergency shelter is for men and women and obviously for some women that is a problem, it is a challenge”

"There is a huge degree of care about homelessness here in the south-west, people really do care about what homelessness does to people, what it does to our communities and we see it particularly with the generosity of people putting their hand in their pockets just to make sure that the services are there for people who need them and that the doors are kept open," he adds.

For Cork Simon, the charity is hoping and pushing for housing to be a right enshrined in Ireland's Constitution so that consecutive Governments are beholden to ensure people have a roof over their head regardless of their circumstance, far into the future.



‘Delight’ in Ossory as Faithful celebrate new bishop

Chai Brady

Ireland's newest bishop has said that for Christians in Ireland there can be a temptation to “retreat into a holy huddle”, but they must draw strength from Christ to tackle the challenges of our time.

The episcopal ordination of Donegal native Bishop Niall Coll for the Diocese of Ossory took place on Sunday in St Mary's Cathedral in Kilkenny. He took the reins from Bishop Denis Nulty of Kildare and Leighlin who had been the administrator.

Speaking at the ceremony, Bishop Coll said that in “an era marked by strong currents of secularisation, materialism and individualism, when many people have pushed God to the margins of life – if they haven't forgotten about him entirely – Christians can be tempted to lose hope and retreat into a holy huddle”.

He said this is exacerbated for many by “the concrete problems of life today as we try to recover from the restrictions on life visited by the Covid-19 pandemic”.

“Then there's the current war in Ukraine and civil conflicts raging elsewhere in such places as Ethiopia, Congo, Yemen which rarely get reported in the West. And there are economic difficulties, especially for young people, rising prices, climate change and social unrest especially in relation to the fam-

THE SYNODAL TIMES

FEBRUARY
2023 ISSUE

Catholics all over the world have told their bishops, and now Rome, that we need to talk about women and their role in the Church. In our February edition, we speak to women in the Amazon and ask has anything changed for them since the Pan Amazon Synod in 2019?

We recall a hero of the Amazon, Sr Dorothy Stang, who was shot dead with her bible in hand while trying to protect the Amazon and its people from the illegal logging mafia.

We examine the role of religious sisters in Haiti who assist rape victims and raise public awareness of the plight of Haitian women, of whom an estimated third are victims of sexual violence, and it is not getting any easier.

We hear from the International Presentation Association at the United Nations on their work to highlight violence against women and children.

We also hear from women who have embraced the synodal listening process with passionate honesty, despite articulating fears that their contributions will ultimately not be heard and/or respected.

We ask Cardinal Grech about the role of women and their fears, and the next phases in the Synodal process.

We hear from women who always wanted to be ordained and how they coped with it.

We look at the legacy of Pope Emeritus Benedict, while Irish religious Sr Stan interviews a number of well-known women and asks them ‘Where do you find hope?’.

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ily. In the midst of such rapid change, some may be tempted to lose heart," he said.

Despair

However, Bishop Coll said that to despair would be a response that would "fly in the face of the Gospel".

"Christian hope speaks into these difficult contexts," he continued, "Christ... drawing on the Letter to the Hebrews, is our beginning and our end, the Alpha and the Omega in whom we place our joys and sorrows, our fears and hopes."

Archbishop Dermot Farrell of Dublin was assisted by co-consecrators Bishop Nulty and Bishop Alan McGuckian SJ of Raphoe. Msgr Julien Kaboré, Chargé d'Affaires of the apostolic nunciature in Ireland, and many other bishops from across Ireland celebrated.

Fr Kieran O'Shea of the Diocese of Ossory gave the homily, saying that today, as in Jesus' time, there is "always the spectre of rejection".

He warned Bishop Coll that there are many challenges to be faced, and that for centuries, Ireland was a land that "embraced the Gospel enthusiastically and, indeed, the mission of the Church".

“The cathedral was packed for the ordination with attendees from across Ireland”

Fr O'Shea said: "Your part of the country, and ours, once overflowed with saints like Adomnán (Eunan) and Baithin, Colmcille and Canice, Feargal and Fiacre, Kieran and Killian, and more recently, Blessed Edmund Rice, and this overflow spilled onto the shores of other lands. It is not so straightforward now.

"The light that shone so brightly in the Zebulun's and Naphtali's of Ireland has been flickering dimly for some time, and buffeted by the winds of change, has altered profoundly the relationship between God's people and their priests and bishops. There are many well-rehearsed reasons for this – some we have inflicted on ourselves – and for which we can only ask forgiveness and proactively repent; some as a result of secularism and the erosion of values that accompany the growth of materialism," he said.

Fr O'Shea said that this situation is not unique and that the Church has always

“Christ... drawing on the Letter to the Hebrews, is our beginning and our end, the Alpha and the Omega in whom we place our joys and sorrows, our fears and hopes”



Bishop Niall Coll standing before the principal and co-consecrators as Fr William Dalton addresses Archbishop Farrell. Photo: John McElroy

encountered difficulties and at times been a "landscape blighted by bitter disagreements".

"Sometimes Christ has been parcelled out and when this happens, there is a vacuum which we tend to fill with the good news about ourselves which never really works out too well. Coming face to face with these inherent frailties let us not be overwhelmed or disheartened. Let Christ Jesus be our hope," he said.

Packed

The cathedral was packed for the ordination with attendees from across Ireland, and many who were from Bishop Coll's home county of Donegal. Students from Presentation Secondary School Kilkenny, St Kieran's College, CBS Kilkenny and Loreto Secondary School Kilkenny assisted with proceedings.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* after the episcopal ordination Cllr Pat Fitzpatrick, Cathaoirleach of Kilkenny County Council, said that it was a "really special occasion".

He continued: "We've been without a bishop for a number of years now, we've had Bishop Nulty looking

after us from Kildare and Leighlin, but today was a very special day, and it's a day the people of Kilkenny and the diocese of Ossory will remember for a long time. It was a very touching, moving ceremony and there's such warmth here from the people to welcome our new bishop. We wish him well and may God protect and guide him as he guides his flock through the difficult times we all face."

“The faith that we know remains the same but its expression must now find new forms and new structures”

Principal Colm Keher of Loreto Secondary School Kilkenny, who attended the ordination with his daughter Sarah who helped at the ceremony, told *The Irish Catholic* he was "absolutely delighted" to welcome Bishop Coll to Ossory.

"I'm looking forward to working with him, we're delighted to have a bishop



Some of the priests who attended the ceremony. Photo: John McElroy



Bishop-elect laying prostrate during the episcopal ordination. Photo: John McElroy



Some of the Faithful in attendance at the episcopal ordination. Photo: John McElroy



Principal consecrator Archbishop Dermot Farrell speaking to the congregation on Sunday. Photo: John McElroy

after a long wait. I thought the ceremony itself was beautiful, it was very inclusive, I think he's got a great welcome to the diocese," Principal Keher said.

The former administrator Bishop Nulty said in a statement before the ordination that in assuming his responsibility as the bishop of the diocese of Ossory, Bishop Niall "makes the move from his home in Donegal to his new home the south east of Ireland in this wonderful diocese, following in many ways the path once travelled by St Canice. May he too energise and continue to encourage a people of great faith in this wonderful diocese".

Change

He added: "Ours is a time of great change in the Church. The faith that we know remains the same but its expression must now find new forms and new structures. In accepting the responsibility to lead Ossory in this, Bishop Niall can be assured that the good Lord, who called him to this ministry, will also support him as he undertakes it.

"Having served as Apostolic Administrator of Ossory since February 2021, I have seen at first hand the wonderful life of this Diocese, the commitment of the lay faithful, religious and priests here



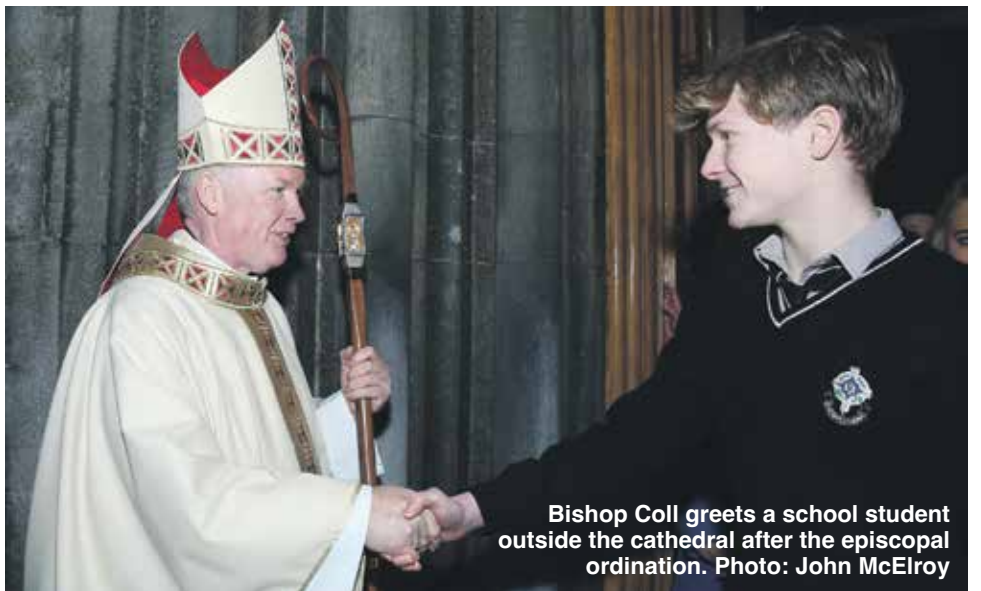
Bishop Coll greets pupils outside St Mary's Cathedral Kilkenny. Photo: John McElroy

to following in the footsteps of the Lord."

Every bishop chooses a motto which seeks to encapsulate his thoughts, prayers and priorities as he begins his new ministry. The motto Bishop Coll chose is 'Christ

Jesus our hope' or 'Críost Íosa ár ndóchas' in Irish. It is taken from the opening greeting of the first letter of St Paul to Timothy.

The Diocese of Ossory was established in 1111 AD and its patron saint is St Ciarán.



Bishop Coll greets a school student outside the cathedral after the episcopal ordination. Photo: John McElroy



Bishop Niall Coll greeting Mary Egan from Kilkenny on Sunday. Photo: John McElroy

“Sometimes Christ has been parcelled out and when this happens, there is a vacuum which we tend to fill with the good news about ourselves which never really works out too well”



Paul, Siobhan and Michael Hannigan from Letterkenny, Co. Donegal. Photo: Chai Brady



Caitlin, Finbarr and Maise O'Neill from Seir Kieran in Co. Offaly. Photo: Chai Brady



Laurence and Cait McMullin from Donegal Town. Photo: Chai Brady



Colm Keher, principal of Loreto Secondary School Kilkenny, and his daughter Sarah who is a pupil at the school. Photo: Chai Brady



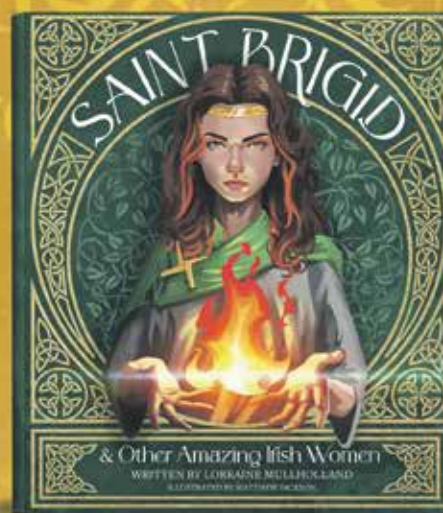
Michael Saseyi and his mother Svitlana, who left their home in central Ukraine because of the war, attended the episcopal ordination of Bishop Coll. They are currently living in Kilkenny. Photo: Chai Brady



Nuno and Sofia Marques with their children Salvador and Alice, who are originally from Portugal but have been living in Kilkenny for the past decade. Photo: Chai Brady

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Growing a faith that endures



We need to re-present the faith again and be a renewed Church that goes out to meet people Bishop Niall Coll tells Michael Kelly

When Karol Wojtyła was elected Pope in 1978 taking the name John Paul II, he famously told the pilgrims gathered in St Peter's Square that the cardinals had chosen him *da un paese lontano*. "From a distant country," he said in flawless Italian - his booming Slavic accent delighting the crowds who welcomed the first non-Italian Pope in 455 years.

Hailing from east Donegal, the new Bishop of Ossory Niall Coll is not exactly a million miles away from his new see in Kilkenny, but it has been a steep learning curve since his appointment by Pope Francis was announced last autumn.

Surprise

Bishop Coll admits that it was a surprise when he got a call from the apostolic nunciature, the Vatican embassy in Dublin, to tell him that Pope Francis had chosen him to replace Archbishop Dermot Farrell in Ossory.

"I am apprehensive," he says candidly "and conscious that I have so much to learn here: to get to know the people and priests of the diocese and to understand the local circumstances".

Since his appointment he has been getting to grips with a local passion followed with religious devotion by his new priests and parishioners: hurling.

"Coming as I do from the mainly soccer culture of east Donegal, my knowledge of hurling, that game so close to Kilkenny and Laois hearts, will test very few of you," he quipped on his appointment. "But I have always been fascinated by the skill and dance of the game," the 59-year-old



said.

Bishop Coll says that the wrench of leaving behind his native Donegal and close friends and family there has been made easier by the warmth of the welcome he has received in Ossory. "I've been really astounded by it," he says. "I've received so many letters, and cards, and emails from people who knew me, but many who didn't know me, welcoming me and assuring me of prayers."

“Dr Coll is conscious of how important the local priest is in the local community from his own recent experience as parish priest in two parishes in Donegal”

"That was very encouraging. I'm only at the beginning of the process of getting to know the people, but they've been very welcoming so far," Bishop Coll told *The Irish Catholic*.

A key challenge in Ossory as elsewhere is the shortage of priests. The diocese has not seen an ordination in quite some years. Statistics reveal that in the year 2000, there were almost 100 dioc-

esan priests serving the 42 parishes and 24 priests who were members of religious orders. Today, there are just 62 diocesan priests and 12 priests from religious orders.

Looking back farther, in the 1970s there was one priest in the diocese for every 385 Catholics - today that is one priest per 1,163 Catholics and numbers are only going one way.

Local priest

Dr Coll is conscious of how important the local priest is in the local community from his own recent experience as parish priest in two parishes in Donegal.

"In the parish situation, the priest comes across almost everybody during the course of his ministry: births, deaths, sicknesses, marriages - and you rub shoulders with everyone," he says.

He also believes that the story of the Church is "not as black and white as the picture portrayed in the media". In his experience "quite a lot of people who are secular will actually engage in very good conversation because many of them - not all of them - are actually searchers, they're seekers."

"They may have let go of their Catholicism, I would say for now. But the challenge is to help them return to the Faith at a deeper level than before," he says.



Bishop of Ossory Niall Coll is pictured before his episcopal ordination in St Mary's Cathedral, Kilkenny, on Sunday January 22. Photos: John McElroy.

Dr Coll, with a solid background in theology and religious education is conscious that for all the greatness, what passed for traditional Irish Catholicism also had serious shortcomings.

“Dr Coll's deep reading and reflection on theology comes across in almost every sentence of our conversation”

"So much of the Catholicism of the past was very tribal rather than personal. And in the age we live in this - an age of authenticity - society puts a huge emphasis on the individual. And I think if we are to minister in this context, we have to hear that and

try to understand it.

"We have to find a way of connecting, of dialoguing with people who are turned off, but it may be turned off by the old model of Church in Ireland. Who's to say that many of them won't be attracted by a renewed Church? The Church that Pope Francis keeps talking about, a Church that goes out," he says.

Dr Coll's deep reading and reflection on theology comes across in almost every sentence of our conversation. Talk turns to the recently deceased Pope Benedict XVI, a man whose theology has had a profound influence on generations of Catholics but a man whose thinking was often misunderstood or misrepresented.

"He wasn't at all interested in developing a fortress Church," Bishop Coll insists. "He spoke very much from

the European context, but he was very anxious for us as a Church to understand better the secular culture and to keep the light of faith alive in that context, and to nurture it. He didn't want us to pull up the drawbridge, but to better understand and engage with the culture," he says.

Disarmed

It brings to mind an anecdote oft-remembered by the retired Archbishop of Dublin Diarmuid Martin. He spoke about his *ad limina* meeting with Benedict XVI in 2006 and how he had prepared all of his statistics about parishes, Mass attendance etc.

However, the German Pontiff disarmed the prelate and immediately asked: where are the points of contact between the Church in Ireland and those areas where the future of Irish culture is

being formed.

Bishop Coll has spent a lot of his ministry forming the formers – training future teachers in Catholic schools, those who will pass on the flame of faith to future generations. This has convinced him that many people are searching for more, and that the Church locally really is on the side of those on the margins.

“Experience has also taught him that priests have very much taken on-board the advice of St Paul to ‘go on quietly working’ (II Thessalonians 3: 12)”

“Modern society, modern Ireland without God is a pretty grim place. There is a lot of meaninglessness. Talk to anybody at the local level, talk to priests at the parish level: we encounter a lot of despair, a lot of drug abuse, a lot of alcoholism.

“It doesn’t suit the media narrative to shine the light on that because the reality of modern culture is very painful, and damaging – and there are a lot of victims there. And, it’s groups like the Society of St Vincent de Paul who are doing amazing, quiet work with the poorest of the poor – and among many people who are in effect abandoned by the State system,” he says of his experience pastorally.

“The State system turns to them [voluntary and Church agencies] over and over again to assist with people on the margins. Anybody who is close to that aspect of Irish society would know that Catholics are committed, and Catholics are at the very heart of outreach,” he says.

Experience has also taught him that priests have very much taken on-board the advice of St Paul to “go on quietly working” (II Thessalonians 3: 12). “Priests are hugely active across the community – but they’re so quiet and discreet about their work. There are many unsung heroes, and priests are still greatly valued – but priests no longer operate from a pedestal of power. It is very much a ministry of service again, what Pope Francis keeps talking about. The Church has been humbled and a lot of good can come from that,” he says.

Unusually for a priest whose native diocese doesn’t straddle the border, Bishop Coll has spent a lot of time ministering in both jurisdictions. During his time in St Mary’s University in Belfast (2001-2019), he was involved in forming teachers to take up the challenges of post-Good Friday Agreement Northern Ireland.

Thirty years of the civil conflict that we euphemis-

tically call ‘the Troubles’ had come to an end, and St Mary’s could proudly boast that despite all the odds it had sent teachers all across the North to form the minds of the discriminated-against Catholic minority. What is more, Catholic educational achievement – despite underfunding and discriminatory state policy – was the envy of the world and in large parts of the North Catholic schools had tackled that most intractable of issues: educational disadvantage.

Catholic schools

Bishop Coll is proud of his time in St Mary’s and thinks that the struggle of Catholic schools in the North is now one being replicated in the South with little or no appreciation of the vast contribution such schools make all across the world – including in non-Catholic and otherwise secular countries.

“In the south of Ireland you get the impression that someone has decided that we have to become an utterly secular republic in line, say with France, with its policy of *laïcité*. I think this is a dreadful mistake that doesn’t understand Irish history. To exclude God and faith and Church from all public discourse doesn’t seem to me to be very sensible.

“I would rather build a pluralist Ireland,” Bishop Coll insists rather than one that is purely secular.

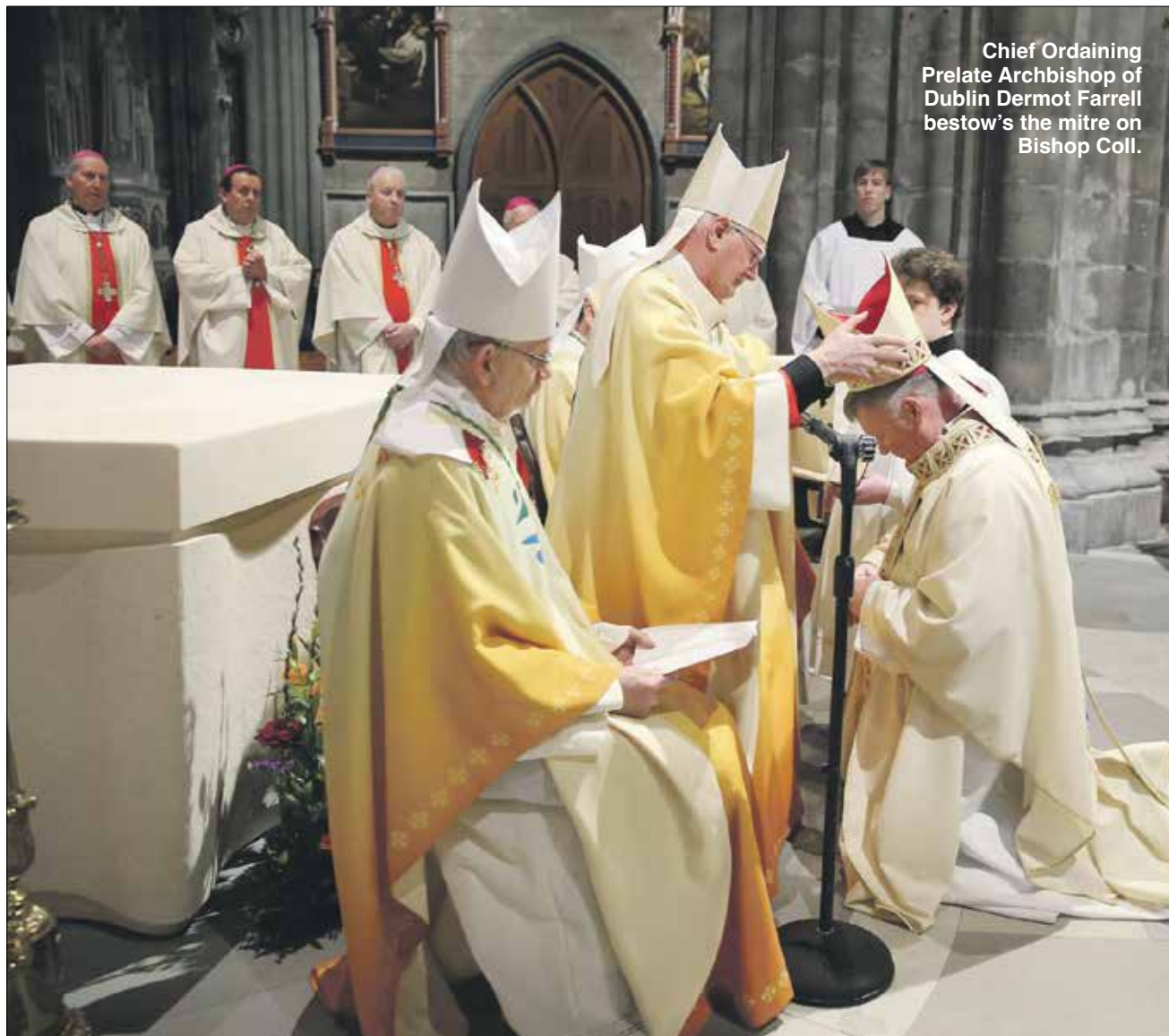
He is outspoken in his critique of a political and media culture that seeks to exclude some voices. “We used to hear so much about that Ireland where there would be many peoples of different outlooks, and faiths, and cultures – and that everyone would be facilitated in a multi-cultural, and multi-religious society. But, now it seems the voice of faith alone is to be silent,” he says.

He thinks Ireland is behind the curve in this and should look to the example of more mature and thoughtful democracies who have struggled with these issues. “I think we will have to look again at the idea of pluralism with other European countries. Ireland, like most of western Europe is becoming yes, more secular – but also more multi-religious”.

He points to the fact that in recent decades many people from an Islamic background and many Africans from an Evangelical Protestant background have made their home in Ireland as well as many Catholics from Central Europe, Asia and Africa.

“These people are certainly not secular, or tempted by secularism,” he insists.

In this context, Bishop Coll believes that “religious education has never been more important in Ireland, north and south – because these large numbers of people of faith are coming in and



Chief Ordaining Prelate Archbishop of Dublin Dermot Farrell bestows the mitre on Bishop Coll.

we need to learn about their faith, because faith is central to who they are and central to their culture.

“Anything that would help increase religious knowledge should – in a good, caring, educational context – lead to greater empathy and greater appreciation of these people and their faiths and their cultures.

“All across Western Europe, Muslims in particular do well in Catholic schools because they appreciate an environment where God is honoured and respected”

“Ireland needs to become a truly pluralist society,” he says.

Asked whether Catholic schools can be hubs of integration, he is adamant: “they already are”.

“Look at the North, it’s already true that people of other faiths and cultures are more likely to choose a Catholic school, if they can. All across Western Europe, Muslims in particular do well in Catholic schools because they appreciate an environment where God is honoured and respected.

“If Christians honour God, then there is space for them [other believers] to honour

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God," he says.

Bishop Coll refers to the experience of France where he says state schools are "very cold places for people of faith".

"It's increasingly clear, there is literature emerging about this, that Muslim children in France are better acculturated to French society if they go through Catholic schools - because they're allowed to both develop as people of faith, and develop as citizens of France - both together," he says.

“I think synodality is Pope Francis' shorthand term for the fuller implementation of the reforms of the Second Vatican Council”

Bishop Coll takes up his appointment at a time when the Church in Ireland has definitively embarked on the synodal process articulated by Pope Francis. He is enthusiastic about the process, but sounds a warning in terms of the formation required around the process.

"Synodality is really important, but I think there is a lot of misunderstanding about what synodality is about: some people hear 'synod' and they think immediately of the sort of legislative, Anglican, approach to synods. That is not how I understand synodality. I think synodality is Pope Francis' shorthand term for the fuller implementation of the reforms of the Second Vatican Council.

"It's about nurturing in people the deeper understanding of the meaning of Baptism and the call to discipleship: to building up the Church and so building up God's kingdom," he says.

Again, Bishop Coll takes the long view and refers to the post-Reformation period when the Church focused intensely on education to remedy some of the deficiencies that had become obvious in terms of formation.

The Church, he says, "had a huge interest in education - but a lot of this ministry became very clerically-centred.

"There were lots of priests and nuns - now that has changed. Vatican II is helping us rediscover the call to holiness and call to ministry that is there as part of Baptism," he says.

Bishop Coll is far from pessimistic about the future, but he is realistic in terms of the challenges: "In the future, the Catholics of Ireland need to be active in their faith, or there won't be any real Church life at all.

"Faith can't be a passive thing, there is a need to galvanise local communities, parishes and deaneries to



educate people more and to bring them into the life of the parish".

It's now 65 years since Pope St John XXIII in 1958 convoked the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) to help the Church face the challenges of a rapidly changing world.

Tension

The task then, as now, is to hold in tension the fact that what the Church teaches is eternal, but the context is constantly changing. Bishop Coll has published extensively about the impact of the reforms of Vatican II and is convinced that the council - authentically understood - is the blueprint for the future.

"It's hard to reform the Church - it's a big ship. So change comes slowly.

"Maybe now we're only really beginning to see clearly what the council involves," he says of the task of genuine co-responsibility within the Church.

On the wider context, I wonder if there is a certain amnesia (my words, not the bishop's) about the positive influence of the Church in Ireland's growth and development.

"Up until the 1950s, the Catholic Church in Ireland it was very important for Catholics to create a stable political identity [in the south]. The Church was very useful to nationalists who argued that Ireland should leave the UK - by that stage we were largely English-speaking, so you couldn't say we were different because we had a different language. We were different because we were Catholic.

"And then with the foundation of the State, the new State relied on the Church to provide schools and hospitals.

But, by the 1960s the State was just beginning to come into its own stride. And it no longer needs the Church to provide those services. But, I think had it not been for the work of the sisters, the brothers - an independent Ireland would be unthinkable.

“Education in the Faith to help people in very secular society is vital - especially where people are better educated in all other aspects of life”

"At the moment, there is an anger with the Church and with faith - but I think that in decades to come there will be a reconsideration and an awareness of the importance of the work of religious in terms of building the State," he says.

But, Bishop Coll is also reflective on the fact that while the Church was building up the new State ecclesial life was neglected.

"In a way, you look back on it now and you'd have to say that more should have been done in those times to create a better theological culture.

"There has been no critical examination of the Faith, and we're paying the price now for those failures in the past.

"Education in the Faith to help people in very secular society is vital - especially where people are better educated in all other aspects of life.

"Education and faith formation is going to be a really, really important feature of synodality," he says.



Bishop Coll receives a warm welcome from Ossory natives following his ordination.



Out&About

A heavenly host...



WEXFORD: Gorey altar servers with Fr Billy Flynn and faith representative Conor Brennan after Mass in St Michael's Church, Gorey. Photo: Jim Campbell



DUBLIN: Archbishop in the Solomon Islands Chris Cardone OP visits his brother friars in Dublin, telling them about his ministry to the 500 islands, January 17. Photo: Bro. Sean Blackwell OP



CLARE: Bishop of Killaloe Fintan Monahan is joined by the diocese's council of priests for one of their regular meetings.

IN SHORT

SVP gives thanks for 'immense' 250k donations

St Vincent de Paul South-West Region thanked the public for the "immense" support shown as over €248,000 was raised from the annual car draw.

The SVP have said they are humbled by the generosity of the public during an extremely difficult and challenging period.

Regional President Paddy O'Flynn said the much-needed funds would be "invaluable" to enable the Society to continue assisting families and individuals in Cork and Kerry with basic needs, such as food vouchers, hampers, heat, utility costs and education.

Mr O'Flynn continued: "2022 was a very challenging year, with the rising cost of living

especially utilities and the conflict in Ukraine adding to this burden and uncertainty.

"Despite this, the public supported us in their droves and the 2022 Car Draw was a huge success."

Tánaiste praises Church charities for work overseas

An Tánaiste Micheál Martin praised the "invaluable" work of Church charities who offer aid to the Irish diaspora.

Mr Martin thanked a number of charities, including Crosscare and the Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas (ICPO), for their "invaluable support".

"These continue to do great work in sup-

porting citizens and their families who experience difficult and in some cases tragic situations overseas," the Tánaiste said in a January 11 statement.

He announced that Department of Foreign Affairs provided consular assistance to over 1,500 citizens in 2022.

Crosscare is a charity of Dublin Diocese, while the ICPO was established by the bishops' conference to provide information and support to Irish prisoners overseas and their families.

4 Corners dreams of better Belfast

The 4 Corners festival taking place January 29 to February 5 is setting out to encourage

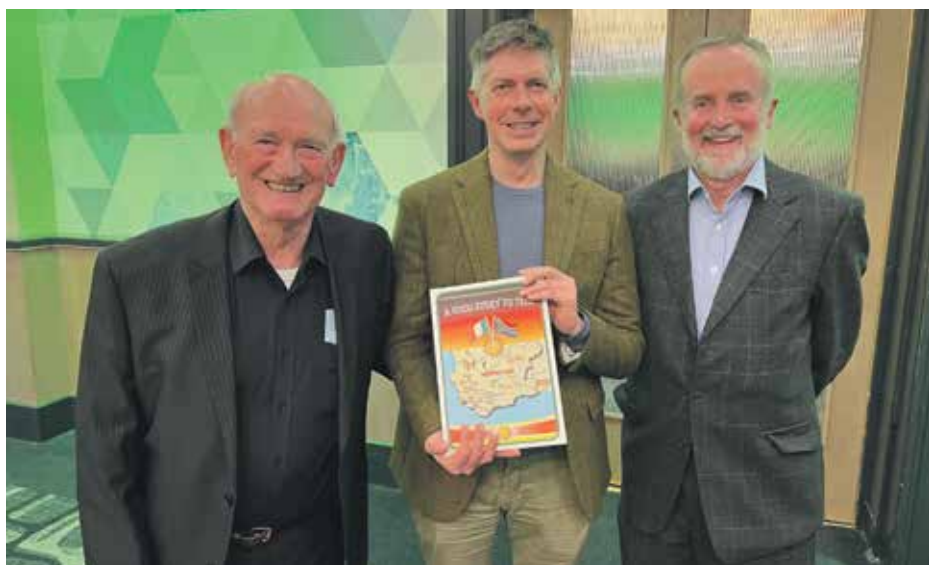
people to "listen to our dreams", its organisers say.

Fr Martin Magill and Presbyterian minister the Rev. Steve Stockman chose the theme 'Dreams... Visions for Belfast', saying: "From Church leaders, to women in leadership to young loyalists to the homeless to artists we will hear the dreams and visions for a better Belfast."

"In 2023 it will be 60 years since Rev. Dr Martin Luther King's astonishing 'I Have A Dream' speech in Washington DC when he articulated a vision for a better, more just, America," they said, adding that "2023 will also see us in Northern Ireland celebrate 25 years since the referendum when 71% of us in the North endorsed the Good Friday Agreement and dreamed of a better future for us all".



DERRY: Students in Holy Family PS make the most of the snowy weather last week, with few teachers spared from their snowball attacks, January 17.



DUBLIN: Fr Michael Mernagh (left) of the Irish Augustinians is pictured at the launch of his book, *A Good Story to Tell*, about the 20-year partnership initiative for social inclusion in the Western Cape that he set up with the South Inner City Community Development Association (SICCDA), Marathon Trust and Resource and the Development Foundation in South Africa. Fr Mernagh is pictured with Mísean Cara CEO John Moffett and Colin Wrafter, former Ambassador to South Africa and former Mísean Cara Board member.



DERRY: Students from St John's PS join the high table with Mayor of Derry and Strabane Cllr Sandra Duffy, January 16.



CORK: Frank Boland from Kinsale receives his Ford Focus courtesy of the Cavanagh family's TOMAR Trust having won the SVP raffle. Mr Boland is pictured with his wife Mary and the Lord Mayor of Cork, Cllr Deirdre Forde. Included are Conor Kavanagh, Tomar Trust (2nd from right) and Paddy O'Flynn, SVP. Also included are Gerry Garvey, Regional Co-Ordinator SVP (front left) and Pat Harte sales manager at CAB. Photo: Brian Loughheed



DUBLIN: Trócaire CEO and chair of the Irish Consortium on Gender Based Violence Caoimhe de Barra (centre) is joined by Minister of State TD Sean Fleming (right) and Director General of Irish Aid Michael Gaffey at a meeting to reaffirm their commitment to ending gender-based violence, January 17.

Edited by Ruadhán Jones
Ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie



Events deadline is a week in advance of publication



DONEGAL: St Eunan's Cathedral, Letterkenny, stands out in a snowy landscape. Photo: Fr Kevin Gillespie.



DUBLIN: St Laurence O'Toole parish hosted a Medjugorje evening of prayer attended by one of the visionaries, Ivan Dragicevic on Friday January 13.



DUBLIN: Volunteers for Our Lady of Victories, Ballymun, are pictured as they began their parish based 'Grow in Love' on January 15.

ANTRIM

Living Church office are to host a faith development conference in the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Shaw's Bridge, Belfast, on Saturday, January 28. Keynote speaker is David Wells. Delegates receive lunch and resources to take home. For more information or to book visit livingchurch-events.com.

ARMAGH

Armagh Parish Holy Spirit prayer group are hosting 'New Life in the Spirit Seminars' on Wednesday evenings at 8pm beginning on February 8 in the Synod Hall, St Patrick's Cathedral. First speaker will be Fr Eamonn Kelly.

CAVAN

Legion of Mary meetings take place on Tuesdays at 8pm in St Clare's Chapel.

CLARE

Mass is celebrated on the first Monday of every month at 7:30pm in Ennis Cathedral for those struggling with addiction, their families and all those affected by addiction. The names of those enrolled in the Matt Talbot Prayer Society are placed on the altar.

CORK

A first class relic of St Charbel will be brought to St Patrick's Church, Fermoy, P61 N446, on Tuesday, January 31. Begins 9.40am with the rosary, followed by Mass at 10 am and then a blessing with the relic.

A Youth 2000 prayer group for young adults aged 18-35 meets Mondays at 7:30pm for prayer followed by refreshments in Ladysbridge parish.

DUBLIN

A Medjugorje prayer evening takes place Mondays at 8pm in St Laurence O'Toole Church, Seville Place, Dublin 1.

The Thomistic Institute in Trinity College Dublin is hosting a lecture on paganism in Irish Christianity entitled 'Fire in the Head', by Fr Conor McDonough OP on Thursday, January 26.

The Aquinas Lecture 2023 will be given by Fr Pierre Januard OP in St Mary's Priory, Tallaght,

on Friday, January 27 at 7:30pm. Admission free, visit prioryinstitute.com to register.

GALWAY

A weekly gathering for young adults (18-35 years) takes place on Wednesdays at 7.30pm in the Cathedral. An opportunity for adoration, silence, prayer, music, Scripture and reflection, followed by refreshments. Contact youth@galwaycathedral.ie for more information.

KERRY

The 'Rescue project' weekly prayer meeting begins Monday, January 30, at 7.30pm in St John's Tralee. An experience of the Gospel with prayer and conversation.

KILKENNY

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place St John's Church, Kilkenny town, between 11am and 1pm on Wednesdays.

LIMERICK

Dominican Sisters of St Cecilia are to host a course on 'Come Follow Me', a catechetical programme aimed at children, on February 3-5. For persons age 18 and over. Contact limerick@op-tn.org for more information. Registration closes January 18.

LOUTH

Taizé prayer takes place Friday, February 3, in Bethany House, Dundalk, for those aged between 18-40 years. A relaxed time of peace and quiet prayer, in candlelight from 8-9pm followed by tea/coffee Contact 042 933 1602 or bethanypointroad@gmail.com. Takes place in "Bethany" 34 Point Road, Dundalk A91 WOC9.

Mass for the African Community takes place in St Nicholas' Church the third Sunday of each month at 2pm.

Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal novena takes place on Mondays at 10am (except holidays) in Holy Redeemer parish, Dundalk.

MAYO

The next Latin Mass in the Extraordinary Form will take place in Our Lady's

Shrine Knock on Sunday, February 12 at 5:30pm.

Annual Pilgrimage of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem – Lieutenancy of Ireland to Knock takes place Friday January 27 and Saturday 28.

MEATH

Legion of Mary rosary takes place in the community centre daily at 6:30pm. Meetings Monday and Tuesday at 7pm in the community centre. New members welcome.

ROSCOMMON

'Evangelising the Culture' seminar takes place January 28 in the Radisson Blu Hotel, Athlone. Keynote speakers include David Quinn, Dr Alexander O'Hara and Fr Brendan Kilcoyne. Suggested donation of €20. For more information contact Tom Flanagan 087 2421070.

SLIGO

The next Living Family retreat will take place in the College of the Immaculate Conception, Summerhill, on Sunday, February 5, beginning at 10.30am with registration and closing with a Eucharistic family blessing at 5pm. Booking will open soon.

TYRONE

Omagh Charismatic Prayer Group meet in the pastoral centre on Thursday evenings with rosary at 7.40pm, followed by prayer meeting at 8pm.

WATERFORD

St Anthony's Novena and blessing with the relic of St Anthony held on Tuesdays in Waterford Cathedral after 10.30am Mass. The Franciscans have asked that the Cathedral continue the Novena. The Mass will conclude with the prayer and hymn to St Anthony followed by blessing with the relic.

WEXFORD

Divine Mercy devotions take place the first Tuesday of the month at 7pm in Wexford Friary, including Mass and blessing with the relic of St Faustina.

Rosary and devotions at the Rocklands shrine to Our Lady of Wexford take place every Tuesday at 2.30pm.

World Report

IN BRIEF

Young people told to 'Open hearts to other cultures'

● Pope Francis told young people to always "look to the horizon" and open their hearts to other peoples and cultures.

In a video message to the 400,000 participants registered for World Youth Day 2023, the Pope encouraged young people not to "put up walls" that close them in but to "thirst for the horizon" that makes them grow.

World Youth Day is scheduled to take place in Lisbon, Portugal, August 1-6. Pope Francis will attend the event and even publicly registered as a participant with the help of two Portuguese college students after praying the Angelus in St Peter's Square in October.

In the video released January 20, the Pope said that even if some young people say they are going to Lisbon "only for tourism," each person attending World Youth Day is going "because deep down, they are craving to participate, to share, to tell their experience and receive the experience of others".

Italian Psychoanalytic Society expresses concern over puberty blockers

● The Italian Psychoanalytic Society (SPI) has sent a letter to Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni expressing "serious concerns" over the use of puberty blockers.

Sarantis Thanopoulos, the president of the society, called for "rigorous scientific discussion" of gender issues in young people, noting that the "current experimentation" without careful scientific evaluation raises serious concerns.

In the letter published

on the society's website January 12, Thanopoulos outlined contraindications to the puberty-blocking drugs that should be seriously considered.

"The diagnosis of 'gender dysphoria' in prepubescent age is based on the statements of the individuals concerned and cannot be subjected to careful evaluation while sexual identity development is still in progress," he said.

Brazilian bishop authorises prayer for private devotion to Benedict

● A bishop has authorised and published a prayer for private devotion to Pope Benedict XVI, who died December 31, 2022, at the age of 95 in Rome.

Bishop Carlos Rossi Keller of the Diocese of Frederico Westphalen in the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul published the prayer in Portuguese, Spanish, French, and Italian.

"As children of the Church we must pray and ask God for his eternal rest in heaven," the prelate said in sharing the prayer in Portuguese on his Facebook page.

"But as testimonies of his generous dedication to God and knowing that his last words were 'Lord, I love you,' we can also privately ask for his intercession," Bishop Rossi explained.

US Supreme Court: Impossible to identify Dobbs draft leaker

● The US Supreme Court revealed January 19 that after a months long investigation by its marshal, the high court has yet to identify who leaked the draft of the high court's decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organisation*.

The June 2022 opinion ultimately overturned the court's previous abortion-related precedents in *Roe*

v. *Wade* and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*.

The leak of an earlier draft of Justice Samuel Alito's opinion in the *Dobbs* case, published by *Politico* in May 2022, caused a public firestorm before the court issued its official ruling.

The leak is seen as the most significant breach of the court's confidentiality in its history.

Second person ensnared by UK ban on prayer outside abortion clinics

Amid continuing controversy over strict limits on behaviour outside abortion clinics in some English cities, a man faces a fine for praying silently outside one clinic in memory of his dead son.

"I would never have imagined being in a position to risk a criminal record for praying silently," Adam Smith-Connor said, according to the legal group supporting him, Alliance Defending Freedom UK.

Mr Smith-Connor had approached a British Pregnancy Advisory Service abortion facility in Bournemouth, in the southwest English county of Dorset. He intended to pray for his unborn son, who had died in an abortion he helped procure at a similar facility more than two decades ago.

Mr Smith-Connor stood silently with his back to the clinic to respect the privacy of staff and visitors, according to Alliance Defending Freedom UK. Community safety officers inquired about what he was doing, and Mr Smith-Connor replied: "Praying for my son, who is deceased."

His November 24, 2022, encounter with the officers was recorded on his phone.

"I'm sorry for your loss," one officer replied. "But ultimately, I have to go along with the guidelines of the Public Space Protection Order, to say that we are in the belief that therefore you are in breach of clause 4a, which says about prayer, and also acts of disapproval..."

"I'm just standing praying," Mr Smith-Connor said.



Adam Smith-Connor was fined after praying for his deceased son near an abortion facility in Bournemouth, England. Photo: ADF UK

"I do understand that. But the (protection order) is in place for a reason and we have to follow through on those regulations," the officer replied.

A protection order is intended to stop anti-social behaviour. The protection order for the abortion clinic has been in force since October 13, 2022, and will remain in place for three years.

As part of the order, the Council of Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole

has drawn red lines around an abortion provider and designated the area a "safe zone". Anyone caught blessing themselves with the sign of the cross, reciting Scripture, or sprinkling holy water behind these red lines can be fined £100 or risk a court conviction. The order bars engaging in an act or an attempted act of approval or disapproval of abortion services.

Mr Smith-Connor faces a fine based on his statement

that he was praying for his deceased son. A legal team with the support of Alliance Defending Freedom UK is challenging the fine.

Jeremiah Iggunbole, legal counsel for Alliance Defending Freedom UK, objected to the action against Mr Smith-Connor.

"Nobody should be criminalised for what they believe — especially not when they express that belief silently, in the privacy of their own minds," Mr Iggunbole said.

Former Vatican consultant banned from public ministry

The archbishop of Paris has banned French Msgr Tony Anatrella, a long-time Vatican consultant on issues of sexuality, from all public ministry and ordered him to a life of prayer after a Vatican investigation into allegations he sexually abused young men he was counselling.

Msgr Anatrella, who will be 82 in February, had been a consultant to the pontifical councils for the family and for health care ministry and wrote a long article in the Vatican newspaper in

2005 explaining an instruction issued that day by the then-Congregation for Catholic Education cautioning bishops about accepting homosexuals as candidates for the priesthood.

A year later, two French periodicals published stories accusing Msgr Anatrella, a psychotherapist, of sexually abusing them during therapy sessions. He denied the accusations.

A notice published January 17 on the website of the Archdiocese of Paris said French criminal courts had dismissed

"several accusations" against Msgr Anatrella because the statute of limitations had expired.

But, it said, "a canonical procedure" against him was begun by the archdiocese in 2016.

Without giving any specifics of the procedure or a verdict, if there was one, the archdiocese said the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith had ordered Msgr Anatrella "to immediately renounce all professional activities as a therapist".

Ukrainians discuss war, trauma, forgiveness at World Economic Forum

At the World Economic Forum, Ukraine's first lady Olena Zelenska and Ukrainian Catholic Archbishop Borys Gudziak of Philadelphia discussed the physical, psychological and emotional trauma of war, forgiveness, and their dreams for

Ukraine's future.

The panel discussion with Archbishop Gudziak was hosted by Ukraine House Davos in collaboration with the January 17 "Ukraine Is You" project.

Ms Zelenska explained the war is teaching Ukrainians

to value every life, because "tomorrow we might lose our nearest and dearest, so we must give them our care and love today".

Archbishop Borys Gudziak said Ukraine's courage and resilience are rooted in and

inspired by Catholic social teaching.

He hoped Russians will renounce imperialism and understand soon that "the God-given dignity of Ukrainians is something they will defend to the last drop of blood".



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Water and the Spirit



Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin patriarch of Jerusalem, sprinkles pilgrims and visitors with holy water from the Jordan River at the Catholic Church of the Baptism of Christ in Bethany Beyond the Jordan near Amman January 13. Photo: OSV News/courtesy Catholic Centre for Studies and Media, Amman, Jordan

Report: Christian persecution at its highest point in 30 years

The persecution of Christians is at its highest point in three decades, according to the latest report from advocacy group Open Doors.

The World Watch List, released by Open Doors on January 18, reported that, overall, the number of Christians facing persecution worldwide remained steady in 2022 at approximately 360 million.

In a list of the 50 countries with the most persecution, North Korea returned to the first spot in 2022. The year prior, Afghanistan had landed in the top ranking following the Taliban's takeover of the

country's government.

Afghanistan ranks ninth in the latest list because the country's Christians have either been killed, fled, or are in strict hiding, according to Open Doors' Italian director Cristian Nani.

The few Christians who remain in Afghanistan are living like the early Church, Mr Nani said at a January 18 presentation of the World Watch List at Italy's Chamber of Deputies. "They live the faith in secret because it's the only way to live it in safety."

Mr Nani explained that today there is an increasing phenomenon of a "refugee"

Church, due to the number of Christians fleeing persecution.

The other countries classified as having "extreme" levels of Christian persecution this year are Somalia, Yemen, Eritrea, Libya, Nigeria, Pakistan, Iran, Sudan, and India.

In sub-Saharan Africa, anti-Christian violence has reached "unprecedented intensity," the report said.

Nigeria continues to be the epicentre of massacres with 5,014 Christians killed in 2022, nearly 90% of the total number of Christians killed worldwide – 5,621.

Almost 90% of kidnappings carried out against Christians

in 2022 also took place in Nigeria, where Mr Nani said there is a kidnapping "business" taking place.

He said an all-too-common scenario is the kidnapping of a Christian man's wife and daughters, who will frequently endure sexual violence and sex trafficking before they are released for a ransom.

In addition to its Watch List, Mr Nani said Open Doors is working to find "radical solutions" to persecution and to help persecuted Christians find healing and forgiveness, and to "break the circle of violence."

Church in Scotland condemns government's 'gender obsession'

A spokesman for Scotland's Catholic Church has welcomed the British government's veto of legislation allowing teenagers to change their sex on legal documents via a simple self-declaration, and criticised Scottish politicians' "obsession with gender politics".

"We didn't support this bill, and we were against clauses which have now been questioned by the UK government," said Peter Kearney, director of the Church's Catholic Media Office.

"There's no reason to think Catholics in Scotland don't share the opinion of the wider public, most of whom are uncomfortable and unhappy with the measure. The fact it's been stopped, no matter by whom, is something the majority will welcome."

In a January 18 interview with OSVNews, he said surveys suggested most Scots opposed the bill, which would also reduce the waiting time for a gender change from two years to three

months, and would lose interest as it became mired in rival court actions.

The bill, passed in the Edinburgh parliament December 22 by 89 votes to 39, allows Scottish residents to change their legal sex from age 16, without consulting a doctor or obtaining a gender dysphoria diagnosis, through a Gender Recognition Certificate overriding the sex recorded on birth and marriage documents.

Buddhists visit Vatican to meet with Pope

● Interreligious dialogue can combat climate change by tapping into the "profound richness" of faith traditions to promote a sense of "ecological responsibility" and conversion, Pope Francis said.

Welcoming a delegation of Cambodian Buddhists to the Vatican January 19, the Pope called for "dialogue at all levels" to seek solutions for repairing the broken relationship between humanity and nature.

"This, however, cannot take place without a change of heart, visions and practices," he noted.

The Buddhist delegation travelled to the Vatican to meet with officials from the Dicastery for Promoting Interreligious Dialogue. They chose the theme "Ecological Conversion" for their gathering in Rome.

Referencing his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis said ecological conversion entails turning "what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering," which results in a sense of personal responsibility toward the planet.

"Ecological conversion happens when the human roots of the present environmental crisis are named," the Pope told the delegation, and "when true repentance leads to the slowing or halting of trends, ideologies and practices that are hurtful and disrespectful to the Earth".

Pope expresses concern over tensions on the Baltic Sea

● The Baltic Sea, shared by Russia and northern European countries, is a "source of life threatened by human action," Pope Francis said.

Speaking to an ecumenical delegation from Finland January 19, the Pope acknowledged the body of water that separates Russia and Finland and connects Russian trade routes to the European continent was "painfully affected by the climate of conflict caused by the fierce senselessness of war".

Lutheran Bishop Kaisamari Hintikka of Espoo, Finland, greeted the Pope to begin their meeting and referred to the image

of the Baltic Sea, prompting the Pope's remarks.

"War is always a defeat," said the Pope. "Always."

Finland and Sweden both applied to join NATO after Russia's invasion of Ukraine and have participated in military exercises with NATO countries on the Baltic Sea, raising tensions with Russia.

The Finnish delegation, composed of Lutheran, Orthodox, Catholic and Methodist representatives, travelled to Rome as part of an ecumenical pilgrimage in honour of St Henrik, an English-born bishop who was martyred in Finland in the 12th Century.

Animals blessed in St Peter's Square for feast of St Anthony

● St Peter's Square was filled with horses, cows, donkeys, dogs, goats, geese, and rabbits for the feast of St Anthony Abbot.

Farmers and pet owners alike brought their beloved animals to the Vatican for a special blessing on January 17.

While many American Catholics associate the feast of St Francis of Assisi with a blessing of animals, in Italy farmers traditionally celebrate the feast of St Anthony Abbot, the patron saint of domestic animals.

St Anthony Abbot was a fourth-century hermit known for his asceticism and as a father of monasticism. His holy life in the Egyptian desert was recorded by St Athanasius in *The Life of St Antony*.

The annual Vatican tradition had been cancelled for the past two years due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Despite the cold and rainy weather, many people showed up to celebrate again with their furry friends.

Cardinal Mauro Gambetti, the archpriest of St Peter's Basilica, greeted many of the animals after offering the blessing.

Letter from Rome



Elise Ann Allen

Church hails arrest of Italian kingpin, but warns anti-mafia fight isn't over

In a scene reminiscent of Francis Ford Coppola's 1972 cinematic sensation *The Godfather*, Italy's most notorious mob boss was arrested January 16 after 30 years on the run, a development celebrated by civil and ecclesial authorities alike.

A fugitive for the past 30 years, infamous Italian mobster Matteo Messina Denaro – tied to countless kidnappings, killings, and public attacks – was arrested at the La Maddalena private clinic in Palermo, where he had been receiving treatment for over a year and had gone for a cycle of chemotherapy.

High-profile murders with which Denaro's name has become associated over the years include that of the young Giuseppe Di Matteo, who was kidnapped in 1993 at the age of 12 then killed in 1996 and his body dissolved in acid; the 1992 slaying of prominent anti-mafia judges Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino; and a string of mafia terrorist attacks in 1993 in Milan, Florence and Rome.

A longtime leader within Cosa Nostra, the Sicilian mob, Denaro was sentenced to life imprisonment in absentia and put on Italy's most wanted list in 1993. In 2010, *Forbes* magazine labelled Denaro as among the top 10 most wanted and powerful criminals in the world.

After the death of other prominent mafia leaders in recent years, Denaro was widely seen as the "boss of all bosses" within the mafia and had been dubbed as Sicily's "last godfather." His arrest is therefore seen as a major blow to the mafia world and is being hailed as a historic step in the fight against organised crime.

“Also recalled all the victims of mafia violence, calling them ‘martyrs of justice and faith’”

More than 100 officers from Italy's special forces division were present for Denaro's arrest, though he reportedly came willingly.

Denaro's arrest has also been welcomed by the Church in Italy, which historically has sometimes been faulted for being quiescent and even accepting of the mob, but which in recent decades has become increasingly identified with a strong anti-mafia stance.

In a statement, the Archbishop of Palermo, Corrado Lorefice, said the 30 years that Denaro lived in hiding “are the same 30 years that the city of Palermo and its inhabitants have instead passed choosing the path of freedom and of dignity, rejecting with all their strength the logic of violence and prevarication



Fr Luigi Ciotti, founder of the Italian anti-Mafia group Libera, attends a prayer service with Pope Francis for victims of the Mafia in Rome in this file photo. Photo: CNS/Paul Haring

and embracing with conviction, as a community, the logic of a new industrious and shared civic spirit”.

Archbishop Lorefice said Denaro's arrest held major symbolic value and signaled “the closure of the most dramatic and painful page of Palermo's recent life,” and applauded the efforts made in recent years by the city to distance itself from the mafia legacy.

He also recalled all the victims of mafia violence, calling them “martyrs of justice and faith”.

Arrest

Similarly, Bishop Angelo Giurandella of Mazara del Vallo in Sicily called Denaro's arrest not only a great victory for law enforcement, but “a great satisfaction for those who fight every day for legality”.

“Thirty years on the run have also been 30 years of civic engagement by many men and women who have rejected the logic of violence,” he said, calling the arrest a reminder of the importance of education, “because the mafia is also fought in making new generations grow with their heads held high”.

Bishop Giuseppe Marciante, who leads the Sicilian diocese of Cefalù, likewise praised authorities and said the arrest held enormous “historic significance,” but he cautioned that the fight is not over yet.

“It makes us think because someone like Matteo Messina Denaro who is hidden for years means that he is

well protected. This means that the mafia is still alive, it's not true that it's dormant, so you should never let your guard down.”

“It makes us think because someone like Matteo Messina Denaro who is hidden for years means that he is well protected”

In terms of what more can be done at this point, Bishop Marciante said the mafia's labour force must be removed, saying it “takes root” where there is unemployment, which is a problem throughout much of Sicily. For this to happen, he said, more state initiatives fostering labour opportunities are needed.

In a sign of just how prevalent mafia activity still is in Italy, the country's bishops' conference for the southern region of Campania, also notorious for organised crime, recently announced the establishment of a special diocesan commission to support and guide priests involved in anti-mafia efforts.

The leaders of several prominent organisations on the frontlines fighting against the mafia have also hailed the arrest as historic, and have echoed Bishop Marciante's caution that there is still a long way to go.

Italian Fr Luigi Ciotti, president of

the anti-mafia Libera organisation and one of the most prominent anti-mafia figures in the country, said Denaro's arrest was “beautiful and comforting news” for both the authorities who have been chasing him, and the families of mafia victims.

While praising police efforts, Fr Ciotti also cautioned that the country is “seeing the same scenes and reactions as 30 years ago: the climate of general exultation, the unanimous applause of the politicians, the congratulations and the declarations of a ‘great day,’ of ‘victory of legality,’ and so on”.

“I would not like the mistakes made following the capture of Riina and Provenzano to be repeated,” he said, referring to two other major mob bosses.

Not reducible

Mafias, Fr Ciotti said, “are not reducible to their ‘bosses,’ they never have been, and they are even less so today, having developed into reticular organisations able to make up for the single lack through the strength of the system.”

Fr Ciotti said Denaro's decades in hiding were accompanied by political inaction that was ultimately “indirectly complicit” in Denaro's actions with “the failure to build, in Italy as in the world, a social and economic model based on fundamental rights – home, work, school, healthcare – the antithetical model

to the predatory one which produces injustices, inequalities and voids of democracy”.

These latter problems, he said, “are opportunities for the profit and power of mafias all over the world”.

Custody

Fr Ciotti voiced hope Denaro, now that he's in custody, will be forthcoming with the details of the mafia syndicates that he was a part of and the crimes he helped to commit, as well as other key figures involved.

“No one avoids capture for thirty years if not thanks to cover on several levels,” he said, saying it is necessary that those complicit in Denaro's actions and hiding are unmasked, “also because only so many family members of mafia victims who await justice and truth would have partial compensation for their long and intolerable agony”.

“I would not like the mistakes made following the capture of Riina and Provenzano to be repeated”

Similarly, Fr Marcello Cozzi, president of the Study and Research Centre on Southern Realities (Cestrim), which works with the disadvantaged in Italy's typically less-developed south, thanked authorities for their work, but cautioned that “the mafia doesn't have the face of just one person”.

Denaro's arrest means “the end of a massacre season,” Fr Cozzi said, but cautioned that “the mafia doesn't stop there...we are invited to continue in this battle because the mafia exists and we need the commitment of all to defeat it”.

Italian Fr Francesco Fiorino, who founded the Marsala Centre of the Just in Sicily on the grounds of a confiscated mafia property to help those who have lost relatives to mafia violence, said the arrest is “excellent news both for the entire country and for Sicilians who fought the mafia and are fighting in the ranks of social and educational anti-mafia” activities.

“As a Church it is the miracle of inner change that is most dear to us,” he said, calling the mafia “a cancer for our country” and a product “of social underdevelopment”.

As a priest, Fr Fiorino said he is happy with the arrest because it testifies that “good wins over evil,” but he cautioned that “it is not a victory of revenge but of justice”.

“Whoever destroyed lives and families must be accountable to human justice,” he said, saying Denaro's arrest is a “sign of hope” for those left behind and a motivation, especially for the Church, to continue fighting the mafia with education regarding dignity and respect.

Elise Ann Allen is senior correspondent for Crux in Rome

“More than 100 officers from Italy's special forces division were present for Denaro's arrest, though he reportedly came willingly”

Preaching peace amid violence: Pope heads back to Africa



Gentiny Ngobila Mbaka, the Kinshasa Governor, is seen during a crackdown on street vendors in the Congolese capital ahead of Pope Francis' visit, in Kinshasa, Congo, January 13. The Pope is scheduled to visit Kinshasa January 31-February 3. Photo: CNS/Justin Makangara, Reuters



Cindy Wooden

Pope Francis' fifth trip to the African continent will highlight gestures of peace and reconciliation, consoling the victims of violence but also emphasising the importance of each person sowing peace in the family, the neighbourhood and the nation.

The Pope is scheduled to travel to Kinshasa, Congo, January 31-February 3 before making an ecumenical pilgrimage to Juba, South Sudan, February 3-5 with Anglican Archbishop Justin Welby of Canterbury and the Rev. Iain Greenshields, moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

"It is enough, or it should be enough, that the Pope is going to support the peace process; but the fact that he and his colleagues have committed to doing this as a joint visit should be understood to be a spectacular commitment to the peace process itself," said Chris Trott, the British ambassador to the Holy See and former British envoy to Sudan and South Sudan.

Although the civil wars in both Congo and South Sudan officially have ended, the people continue to suffer from horrific acts of violence, which force the large-scale displacement of communities and keep

much of the population in poverty.

Both countries are rich in natural resources, which makes the poverty even more glaring, but also gives the powerful or the disgruntled something else to fight over.

Pope Francis frequently decries the notion that "Africa is to be exploited". As he told the *Comboni Missionaries' magazine* in an interview published January 14, the world's powerful nations gave Africa "independence halfway: they give them economic independence from the ground up, but they keep the subsoil to exploit," extracting oil or minerals and paying only a pittance.

“The Congolese government also has blamed Rwanda and Uganda for sponsoring the rebel movement”

Archbishop Ettore Balestrero, the nuncio to Congo, told reporters in Kinshasa January 10 that Pope Francis' plan to visit the country is an acknowledgement of Congo as the African nation with the most Catholics – close to 50 million Faithful – and “the country of the first black bishop of the African continent,” Nzingo Mpemba, also known as Bishop Henrique de Portugal, the son of the ruler of Kongo who was ordained a bishop in the early 1500s.

Theme

The theme of the Pope's visit, “All reconciled in Jesus Christ,” he said, is a call to the Congolese to set aside grudges and unite to end the great suffering of their compatriots who

live under the constant threat of violence, particularly in the eastern part of the country.

Pope Francis will stay in Kinshasa, the capital, but his original itinerary for Congo included a day trip east to North Kivu province for Mass and a meeting with the survivors of the conflicts there.

But the violence in North Kivu has flared up again, cancelling that part of the papal trip.

In early December Catholics and other Christians took to the streets in a protest supported by the Congolese bishops. In a message read at the rally, the bishops accused Rwanda, and to some extent Uganda, of perpetrating the violence in the East through the M23 rebel militia.

Rebel

The Congolese government also has blamed Rwanda and Uganda for sponsoring the rebel movement and using the rebels as cover to steal minerals that are abundant in eastern Congo.

But M23 is one of only dozens of armed groups operating in the area. The Allied Democratic Forces, a group affiliated with Islamic State, claimed responsibility for the bombing of a Pentecostal church in Kasindi January 15, which killed at least 14 people.

In November Bishop Placide Lubamba Ndjibu of Kasongo issued a public appeal to the government to restore order in the East.

People need lasting solutions to the disputes over gold mining in eastern Congo, which, he said, are “sowing a climate of terror and desolation, accompanied by deaths, rapes, school closures, the destruction of food reserves and looting of livestock”.

Looting livestock is a major problem in South Sudan as well and is related to the problem of forcing young women into early marriage, a problem Irish Loreto Sr Orla Treacy has been fighting for decades.

In 2005, six years before South Sudan achieved its independence from Sudan after 50 years of war, Sr Treacy and two other Irish sisters arrived in Rumbek to open a school for girls. The students were accepted only if their parents signed a promise to allow the girls to complete high school and not marry them off in exchange for cattle, which is the most stable currency in the land and the chief sign of wealth.

“In November Bishop Placide Lubamba Ndjibu of Kasongo issued a public appeal to the government to restore order in the East”

Sr Treacy told *Catholic News Service* January 15 that so far, “we have had a good year in Rumbek, the best, I can say” in terms of peace and of keeping students in school. “We have a new, strong governor who has worked with the different communities to try and help to build peace. He has also passed a bill against early and forced marriage. We still get troubles but at least now we can quote the governor and tell families to go to him if they don't like our answer!”

The Irish sister and some 50 students and members of justice and

peace committees in the Diocese of Rumbek were in training in mid-January. They are planning a nine-day, 200-mile walk to Juba to join Pope Francis, Archbishop Welby and the Rev. Greenshields for an ecumenical prayer service for peace.

Spotlight

The visit, she said, can “help to shine a spotlight on South Sudan. We hope that it will generate world interest and also help push our leaders to keep working for peace and development”.

Ambassador Trott, who was involved in negotiating the 2018 peace agreement among the major actors in South Sudan's civil war, said the ongoing conflicts have an ethnic element because they are regional, but “at its heart is about access and control of resources,” including oil, minerals, water and rich farmland. “This fight has always been about who benefits from those resources and who controls them.”

“This is where the Churches come in,” he said, because a peace process can address power and resource sharing, but the success of an agreement depends on a willingness to implement it and to reconcile with former enemies for the good of the nation.

“Diplomats can only talk to their heads or about their pockets,” the ambassador said. “But I think the three ecumenical leaders can really appeal to people's sense of responsibility” and what they want their legacy to be.

i Cindy Wooden is Rome Bureau Chief for the Catholic News Service.

Letters

Letter of the week

Govt must face reality: people want Catholic schools

Dear Editor, It is clear the narrative around the demand for secular or multidominational schools is completely overstated by the Government, media and lobby groups. This was highlighted by some schools, in areas earmarked for changes in patronage, finding that a huge majority of parents wanted their school to remain under Catholic patronage.

It's important to remember that some parents may not feel strongly about having their children educated in a school with a Catholic ethos. They may just want the school, and how it runs, to remain the same as they are happy with the status quo and the

quality of education it provides.

There are also others who do feel strongly that their children are educated in a Catholic school because they have a strong Faith.

Both positions should be respected regardless of what certain ideologues think about the Church and its teachings. Running roughshod over the wishes of parents regarding their children's schooling is a recipe for disaster, a reality that will become apparent the harder secular schooling is pushed.

In addition, if there is such a demand for schools without a Catholic patronage, why has the divestment

process been such an outstanding failure? It's not because of resistance from the Church hierarchy who have stated time and again that they will respect the wishes of communities, it is because of resistance from those very communities that this is not happening across Ireland – there is no denying that. Some may bury their heads in the sand and keep ranting about the Church and education but they are living in a dream world, and are highly undemocratic.

*Yours etc.,
Sean O'Connell
Cork City, Co. Cork*

End of an era for the Franciscans

Dear Editor, I read with sadness that another Franciscan community are leaving another friary in Ireland due to their aging demographics [*The Irish Catholic* – January 12, 2023]. After 800 years they have left Athlone. This is shortly after they left Clonmel after 750 years.

The statistics are stark, that 50 of their 76 friars are over the age of 75.

I have fond memories of the Franciscans. This really is the end of an era.

*Yours etc.,
Mary Boyle
Ranelagh, Dublin 6*



Remembering the Jewish people killed in the Holocaust

Dear Editor, January 27 is Annual Holocaust Memorial Day (the anniversary of Auschwitz's liberation), when around the world millions of Christians, in solidarity with Jews, commemorate the attempt by the Nazis to liquidate the Jews of Europe, "this people who originated with Abraham, our father in faith" (John Paul II).

Many Christian churches, on this day or on the Sunday

nearest to it, remember the six million, and millions of others, who perished in the Great Catastrophe (Shoah); and your readers may wish to reflect upon the following statement (derived from the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland, Vatican II and related sources):

"God holds the Jews most dear. He does not repent of the gifts he has made or of the call he issues. Our

respect and regard for Judaism, therefore, is not for an ancient relic of the distant past. It is God who has given to the Jewish people an irrevocable vocation. We recognise that Judaism is a living faith, and that its covenant and vocation are valid and operative today. We reject the position that the coming of Christ has dissolved that covenant (supersessionism) and we

deplore those who, for whatever reason, seek to minimise or deny altogether the reality of the Shoah (Holocaust Deniers)."

The theme of Holocaust Memorial Day 2023, 'Ordinary People', can be accessed comprehensively at hmd.org.uk

*Yours etc.,
Peter Keenan
Kinsale, Co. Cork*

History will judge Ireland harshly on abortion

Dear Editor, I note that Pope Francis in his New Year's address to ambassadors pointed out that abortion was murder and emphasised the importance of supporting all human life [*The Irish Catholic* – January 12, 2023]. Of course this was only published in *The Irish Catholic* so I would like to know if our Ambassador to the Holy See conveyed this message to our Government, and, if so, what its reaction was.

It is very worrying to note that the committee set up by the Minister for

Health to review the abortion legislation, as promised at the time of the referendum, is due to publish its findings but only those in favour of even more abortions here, as the minister has refused to meet any pro-life group and, therefore, only the views of those seeking more abortions here will be recorded.

Seemingly, a bill lifting restrictions on abortion here has passed the first stage in the Dáil. Why has this not been reported on extensively? Of course, because all of the media seeks unrestricted abortion

and censors all opposing views. Silence is not acceptable and it is essential we all make every effort to have our voices heard before we, too, are silenced through fines or imprisonment for daring to do so. Hopefully, there will be a few Thomas Mores among us. Otherwise history will judge Ireland harshly in its acceptance of the continued slaughter of the innocents.

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

facebook community

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

Four ordinations to diaconate in one weekend

Great news. Deacons play a very important role in our Church ministry. Encourage more men to give time to their Church and a life within the ministry, I think. – **Deirdre Quinn**

God bless and guide them through life journey. Congratulations to them all. – **Myra Grennan**

Congratulations to the four men ordained and may God bless you all and protect you in your ministry. – **John Long**

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

Militant groups are masquerading as women's spokespeople

Dear Editor, It was noteworthy that the coverage of Nollaig na mBan (Women's Christmas) by our national broadcaster (RTÉ) was very much influenced by the values of the so-called feminist point of view, to such an extent that a traditional point of view was, well, 'cancelled' (a bit like the crib outside the Mansion House).

I have two observations to make. The pro-life organisations seem to have ceded the platform that is the national broadcaster to the exclusive use of those militant groups that masquerade as spokespeople for women. Where was the storm around the coverage of Nollaig na mBan – apart from letters from individuals like myself, who don't even receive a reply?

Equally serious – and this is where a united pro-life leadership might have made an impact – is the unwillingness of the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland to put in place reformed procedures to address imbalance and biased content in programmes.

The stages by which the Irish media was captured and colonised by one point of view is not our concern here. It should however be noted that we find ourselves now in the 'bedding down' stage of that successful process.

Take, for instance, the frequent permitted use of 'the baby' these days to include the one not yet born. The baby in the womb is humanised here – which is quite a change from the fights about this before the 2018 vote.

The modification of the jargon is intended to conciliate or 'keep on side' the moderate (and Catholic) centre, who meant well but whose vote in 2018 facilitated the removal of the Eighth Amendment – and the outcome they prefer not to see or acknowledge in the years that followed.

*Yours etc.,
Gerald O'Carroll
Ballylongford, Co. Kerry*

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.

Your Faith

The Irish Catholic, January 26, 2023

Questions of Faith

Is the Devil real?

Page 32



Why you should go on a pilgrimage – more than once

The Sea of Galilee is seen in Israel in this updated photo. Photo: CNS/courtesy Today's Catholic

So many significant moments in my spiritual life are tied to sights, smells, sounds and emotions felt on a pilgrimage: The deep sigh after walking all the way up from the train stop to the Basilica of St Francis of Assisi. My jaw dropping when I turned the corner and saw St Peter's Square. Squatting and praying at the Sea of Galilee shortly after my grandmother passed away.

There are a billion reasons why you might go on a pilgrimage: to get away or to come home; to find yourself or to find God. Although Jesus lived his life in a relatively small geographical radius, Christians – since Constantine's mother, Helena, made her own trip to Jerusalem – have always made



Pilgrimage is an age-old Christian tradition for a reason, writes Zac Davis

pilgrimages.

They've gone to tombs of martyrs, sites of Marian apparitions, as well as the place that Jesus walked. Pope Francis has said that going on pilgrimage is "one of the people of God's most eloquent expressions of faith".

Why? And why should Catholics today try to go on one as often as possible?

First, it reminds us that our

very lives are a pilgrimage. Our homes are in this world, but we are only here temporarily. Even within our four walls and our hometowns, we are guests on this Earth. And while a pilgrimage on a pilgrimage might seem a little meta, it does remind us that we should live our lives as if we are merely travellers passing through.

Second, it reminds us that the world and the Church are bigger

than what we've known thus far. It expands our ideas of both time and space. Pilgrimage sites tend to draw faithful people from all over the world.

I remember the first time I attended a Wednesday papal audience and saw the multitude of flags and languages around me. It left quite an impression on what a global Church means on a young Catholic. We also typically visit graves and sites and say prayers that are centuries older than we are – reminding us that our faith has been handed down to us, that we belong to a communion outside of our present age.

Third, like a retreat, pilgrimages allow us to step outside of the regular churn of productivity to destabilise us

enough that we might actually hear God's voice. Yet unlike a retreat, it requires that we be on the move, giving us practice at becoming contemplatives in action.

But how does someone make a pilgrimage? There are a few tips to keep in mind and questions to consider when discerning making a pilgrimage

Where should you go? This depends on your time and budget, mostly. The Holy Land, Rome, the Camino de Santiago, Guadalupe – those and a few others are heavy hitters for a reason and, if possible, everyone should try to do one of them once in their lifetimes.

But you don't need to travel to another country or get on a plane. According to the University

» Continued from Page 29



Nuns arrive at the Marian shrine of Fatima in central Portugal. Photo: CNS/Pedro Nunes, Reuters

of Dayton, there are Marian shrines in 37 US states. You could even make a pilgrimage in your hometown. Are there places in your family or community that have spiritual resonance and a connection to the past? Schedule an intentional day to travel there – maybe on foot or by a scenic route – and spend some quiet reflective time there.

A pilgrimage is not a vacation (but that doesn't mean it isn't relaxing or fun). As Pope Benedict XVI said,



This image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, seen in a 2006 photo, hangs in the basilica named for her in Mexico City. Photo: CNS/Greg Tarczynski

“To go on pilgrimage is not simply to visit a place to admire its treasures of nature, art or history”. Rather, it “really means to step out of ourselves in order to encounter God where he has revealed himself, where his grace has shone with particular splendour”.

As a result, you'll want to approach it differently than you would your typical vacation. Pack simply and lightly. Manage your expectations: Something will probably go wrong.

“Ask God for a specific grace to come from your pilgrimage. You aren't just going to visit something when you're on pilgrimage – you're bringing some things with you”

The site, shrine or painting you were most excited to see will be closed for renovation. It will rain on the day you arrive. Your bad knee will act up at the worst possible time. A good pilgrim is an adaptable one who realises that all these things are part of the pilgrimage you were supposed to be on.

Ask God for a specific grace to

come from your pilgrimage. You aren't just going to visit something when you're on pilgrimage – you're bringing some things with you. Hopes, fears, anxieties. Call those to mind.

Big life decision

Maybe you have a big life decision coming up. Ask for clarity. Maybe someone in your life is going through a debilitating illness. Ask God to comfort that person. It might seem odd to think about yourself or your home while traveling, but it helps put some of the experience and prayers you'll go through on pilgrimage into perspective.

Pray to travel with a pilgrim's heart. Be open to new experiences. Trust in God's providence and the welcome and kindness of strangers to guide your way. These are good practices for life, but we can do our best to accentuate them on pilgrimages, when we're somewhat forced to.

Ultimately, pilgrimages help us to see ourselves, our homes and our world with the eyes of God: eyes of wonder, mercy and solidarity. So, what are you waiting for? I'll see you on the road.

i *Zac Davis is an associate editor at America magazine and a co-host of the podcast, Jesuitical.*



A man who saw the poor face-to-face

Faith in film



Ruadhán Jones

I've already looked at several films from the Vatican's list of 45 significant films. This week, I will add *Monsieur Vincent*. The 1947 French film is a picaresque account of the life of St Vincent de Paul, founder of the Daughters of Charity.

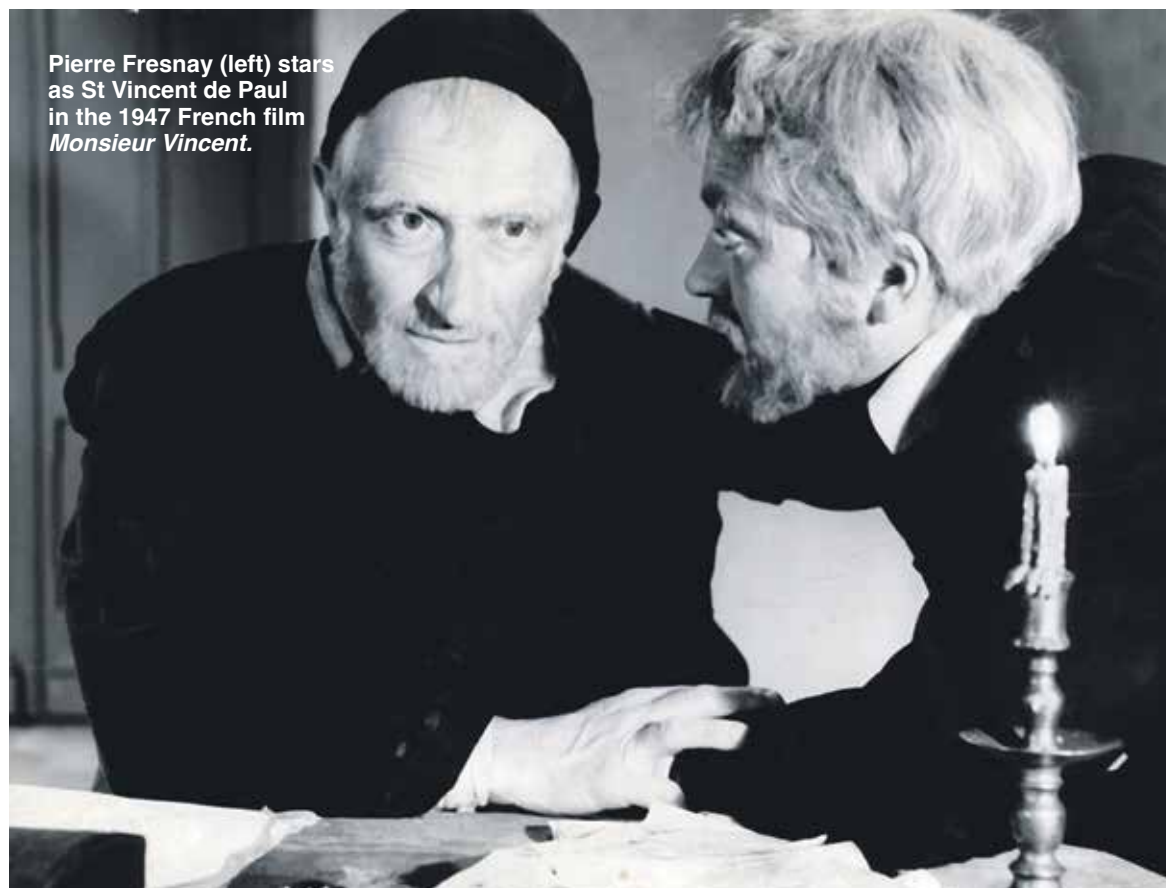
As Catholic film critic Deacon Steven Greydanus puts it, there are many films that deal with the Faith or with saints and it's almost happenstance the director chose the subject matter.

“The film covers 40 years of the 17th Century saint's life through a few brief but illuminating scenes”

But with *Monsieur Vincent*, you get the impression that this film wants to be Catholic, it wants to be a saint's life. It was a passion project for French director Maurice Cloche.

He was fortunate to draw on a great deal of French talent; Claude Renoir, nephew of the director Jean, directs the cinematography; Pierre Fresnay stars as St Vincent and is supported by talented character actors and actresses.

The film covers 40 years of the 17th Century saint's life through a few brief but illuminating scenes. It focuses on his efforts to minister to the poor, the sick and the abandoned, as Vincent puts it. He does his work in the face of the plague that is spreading and also



Pierre Fresnay (left) stars as St Vincent de Paul in the 1947 French film *Monsieur Vincent*.

battles against the establishment. Some of them joined him and supported him; many others were either shamed by his work or else appalled and sought to stop him.

Pierre Fresnay in the title role is excellent. It's a restrained performance conveying with simple gestures both the character of St Vincent and how he changes with age.

The opening sequence sets up the film perfectly. St Vincent arrives in a small French town where he is to be priest, finding the church abandoned and in a terrible state. Everyone fears the plague, locking themselves in their rooms. The rich party; the poor suffer, and the supposed victim has been boarded up as they wait for her to die.

Vincent refuses to accept

this. He breaks down the boards, despite the stones cast from the windows and the approbation of the wealthy. It is largely without words, this opening scene, captured beautifully in black and white with the play of shadow and light doing so much.

As he gets older, he doesn't lose his zeal, though I think he gains in patience. He comes to understand the destitution of the poor, how they are our masters – it is not that they are any less petty than the rich Vincent used to serve, but they have a moral claim on us.

Charity

So he goes out to serve them, learning in time that charity is a heavy load to carry. We must ask forgiveness of the poor for our charity, is how he puts it, not act-

ing condescendingly.

They are “Touchy and demanding masters,” he tells a young nun. “The uglier and dirtier they are, the more unfair and vulgar they are, the more love you'll have to give. Only because of your love, and your love only, will the poor forgive you for the bread you're giving them.”

“They view the poor as a mass, a crowd, always desiring money, always falling into sin”

Monsieur Vincent doesn't romanticise; neither the rich nor the poor, nor Vincent himself, come out as romantic figures. Vincent actually is quite stern and passionate. In one scene, where

his female benefactors and staff refuse to save a baby conceived by a prostitute, he is angry and upset.

In another, when staying in tenement style lodgings, he comes to understand the moral decrepitude that falls on the poor and abandoned, who as a young man tells him, cannot afford to care and so often turn to malice.

The rich, on the other hand, can afford to care. Still, most do not, preferring to be holed up in their mansions. They view the poor as a mass, a crowd, always desiring money, always falling into sin.

Amusement

Some do care, mainly it seems wealthy women who, imperfectly, do care for the poor. It is almost like an amusement for some of them, but they commit a great deal to Vincent, giving money and time.

Then the poor come to him to help, including the first Daughter of Charity, a humble milk maid, who does her work quietly and industriously, doing the jobs the wealthy do not want to or cannot think of.

We see the panoply of human life in this film, all captured and conveyed excellently. Fresnay is marvellous, the rest of the cast superb. It is inflected with humour, capturing the pettiness with gentility and the love with warmth. It truly loves as Vincent does amid the suffering, not seeing them as a mass but face-by-face, seeing the one among the many and striving to bring them forward.

It is a moving film, simple in its style, but challenging in its message, about a deep man who learned so much from his work and gave so much, and yet in the end considered it so little when weighed against the great sufferings around him.

Saint — of the — week

By Jason Osborne



Saint Paula Teaching her Nuns, mid-17th century, by André Reinoso.

St Paula: The Roman noblewoman who took a less travelled path

Paula of Rome was truly a woman of the world. Born to a prominent, wealthy Roman family in 347 AD, she married a senator, Toxotius, with whom she had five children. A person in such a position would have wanted for nothing, and indeed, Paula didn't. Until the age of 32, Paula lived a life of luxury, clothed in fine materials and carried about Rome on a litter by slaves. Such a life was only possible for those at the pinnacle of worldly power.

When her husband died, Paula approached a group of widows led by another saintly woman – St Marcella, who would reportedly die at the hands of the Goth invaders of Rome in 410 AD. Taken by the group's semi-monastic ways of prayer and asceticism, Paula allowed them to make use of her home on the Aventine Hill.

Through her association with this group, Paula would be put in touch with another one of the Church's great saints – St Jerome, a doctor of the Church. What many don't know, however, is that Jerome was as affected by his relationships with these holy women as they

were by him.

Introduced by St Marcella in the year 382, St Jerome was in Rome with the Bishop of Salamina, Epiphanius, and Paulinus of Antioch. Taking these, too, into her home, Paula couldn't have known the transformative role St Jerome in particular would have on her life – a role which would see her turn her world upside down and embrace a life of prayer and service in the Holy Land.

This move was precipitated by the death of her daughter, Blesilla, in 385 AD. Whatever this event stirred up in Paula resulted in her upping and making her way to the Holy Land with another of her daughters, Eustochium, to exchange a life of luxury and wealth for one of prayer and personal poverty.

They followed in the footsteps of St Jerome, who had left ahead of them. Reacquainting at Antioch, they journeyed on together, finally settling in Bethlehem. There, they established a monastery for men and one for women. It was at this point that Paula and Eustochium's relationship with St Jerome began to influence

each of them, with both Paula and her daughter benefiting immensely from his spiritual direction and guidance, while he reportedly grew in patience and humility in dealing with those who frustrated him in his work.

However, one of Paula's most important contributions for Jerome came in the form of her support and encouragement of his biblical translations, which St Jerome has since been famous for. It is believed that Paula funded at least some of this work, and both she and her daughter dedicated themselves to copying his works so that it might be promulgated more widely.

Paula died in 406 AD at the age of 59 – a death marked by the religious of the monasteries she and St Jerome had founded, as well as by the poor of the region that she'd helped over the years. She was buried in Bethlehem, in the Church of the Nativity. Jerome dedicated his famous *Epitaphium sanctae Paulae* to her, and when he died in 419, was buried in close proximity to the tombs of Paula and Eustochium.

The Church celebrates this holy mother, religious and benefactor January 26.

Religion at the service of fraternity



The Wisdom of Pope Francis

The different religions, based on their respect for each human person as a creature called to be a child of God, contribute significantly to building fraternity and defending justice in society. Dialogue between the followers of different religions does not take place simply for the sake of diplomacy, consideration or tolerance. In the words of the Bishops of India, “the goal of dialogue is to establish friendship, peace and harmony, and to share spiritual and moral values and experiences in a spirit of truth and love”.

“Their self-interest as a class, group or nation would inevitably set them in opposition to one another”

As believers, we are convinced that, without an openness to the Father of all, there will be no solid and stable reasons for an appeal to fraternity. We are certain that “only with this awareness that we are not orphans, but children, can we live in peace with one another”. For “reason, by itself, is capable of grasping the equality between men and of giving stability to their civic coexistence, but it cannot establish fraternity”.

In this regard, I wish to cite the following memorable statement: “If there is no transcendent truth, in obedience to which man achieves his full identity, then there is no sure principle for guaranteeing just relations between people. Their self-interest as a class, group or nation would inevitably set them in opposition to one another. If one does not acknowledge transcendent truth, then the force of power takes over, and each person tends to make full use of the means at his disposal in order to impose his own interests or his own opinion, with no regard for the rights of others...”

“The root of modern totalitarianism is to be found in the denial

of the transcendent dignity of the human person who, as the visible image of the invisible God, is therefore by his very nature the subject of rights that no one may violate – no individual, group, class, nation or state. Not even the majority of the social body may violate these rights, by going against the minority.”

From our faith experience and from the wisdom accumulated over centuries, but also from lessons learned from our many weaknesses and failures, we, the believers of the different religions, know that our witness to God benefits our societies. The effort to seek God with a sincere heart, provided it is never sullied by ideological or self-serving aims, helps us recognise one another as travelling companions, truly brothers and sisters.

We are convinced that “when, in the name of an ideology, there is an attempt to remove God from a society, that society ends up adoring idols, and very soon men and women lose their way, their dignity is trampled and their rights violated. You know well how much suffering is caused by the denial of freedom of conscience and of religious freedom, and how that wound leaves a humanity which is impoverished, because it lacks hope and ideals to guide it”.

Individualism

It should be acknowledged that “among the most important causes of the crises of the modern world are a desensitised human conscience, a distancing from religious values and the prevailing individualism accompanied by materialistic philosophies that deify the human person and introduce worldly and material values in place of supreme and transcendental principles”.

It is wrong when the only voices to be heard in public debate are those of the powerful and “experts”. Room needs to be made for reflections born of religious traditions that are the repository of centuries of experience and wisdom. For “religious classics can prove meaningful in

every age; they have an enduring power [to open new horizons, to stimulate thought, to expand the mind and the heart]”. Yet often they are viewed with disdain as a result of “the myopia of a certain rationalism”.

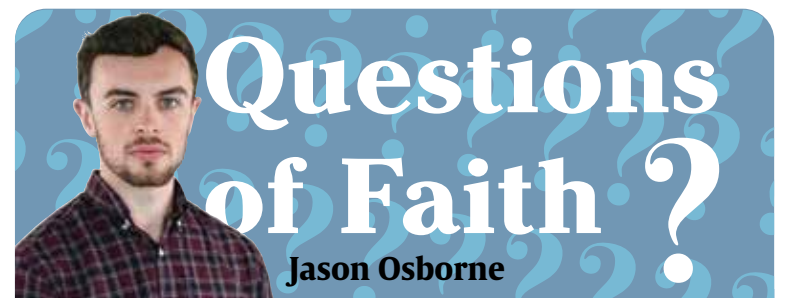
For these reasons, the Church, while respecting the autonomy of political life, does not restrict her mission to the private sphere. On the contrary, “she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines” in the building of a better world, or fail to “reawaken the spiritual energy” that can contribute to the betterment of society. It is true that religious ministers must not engage in the party politics that are the proper domain of the laity, but neither can they renounce the political dimension of life itself, which involves a constant attention to the common good and a concern for integral human development.

“We want to be a Church that serves, that leaves home and goes forth from its places of worship, goes forth from its sacristies”

The Church “has a public role over and above her charitable and educational activities”. She works for “the advancement of humanity and of universal fraternity”. She does not claim to compete with earthly powers, but to offer herself as “a family among families, this is the Church, open to bearing witness in today’s world, open to faith, hope and love for the Lord and for those whom he loves with a preferential love. A home with open doors. The Church is a home with open doors, because she is a mother”.

And in imitation of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, “we want to be a Church that serves, that leaves home and goes forth from its places of worship, goes forth from its sacristies, in order to accompany life, to sustain hope, to be the sign of unity... to build bridges, to break down walls, to sow seeds of reconciliation” (*Fratelli Tutti*)

“The effort to seek God with a sincere heart, provided it is never sullied by ideological or self-serving aims, helps us recognise one another as travelling companions, truly brothers and sisters”



Questions of Faith?

Jason Osborne



Is the Devil real?

The famous quote goes something along the lines of, “The greatest trick the devil ever played was convincing the world that he did not exist”.

If the topic of this week’s ‘Questions of Faith?’ column caused you to cringe or laugh, you’re doubtless not alone in that. Whatever about the existence of God, the existence of spiritual beings like angels and demons is handled with some considerable embarrassment by many Christians in the western world.

I think there are two main reasons for this: there’s a belief that the Church used to make Satan, demons and sin the focus of its preaching, and that that was a mistaken departure from what the Church is really about. That’s both incorrect and correct; to focus on these things is to miss the point of the Gospel message, which is love and the life of Jesus Christ. But it would also be a mistake to believe that the Church ever made demonic realities and sin the centre of its message.

The second reason for the embarrassment surrounding this topic is that most people today simply doubt the existence of spiritual beings, ranking them alongside trolls, centaurs and other creatures from our childhood fantasies. As spoken about previously in this column, the prevailing philosophy of our age is materialism, which argues that everything that exists is material, and as a result it only makes sense to believe in things we can see, touch, measure, analyse and ultimately, physically prove.

Of course, we can’t see Satan, angels or demons, but does that mean they don’t exist? The Church has always maintained that they do, taking its lead first from the life of Christ and his words, and then also from the “masters of the spiritual life” as the 1975 document, *Christian Faith and Demonology*, puts it.

That same document goes further, clarifying that Satan is not a “mythical or functional” personification of evil or sin, as is also popularly claimed today.

Rather, Satan is a real spiritual being that seeks to tempt people away from God by lies and empty promises of happiness apart from God. Jesus gives us a major insight into Satan’s nature and behaviour when in dialogue with those arguing against him, he said:

“You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” (John 8:44)

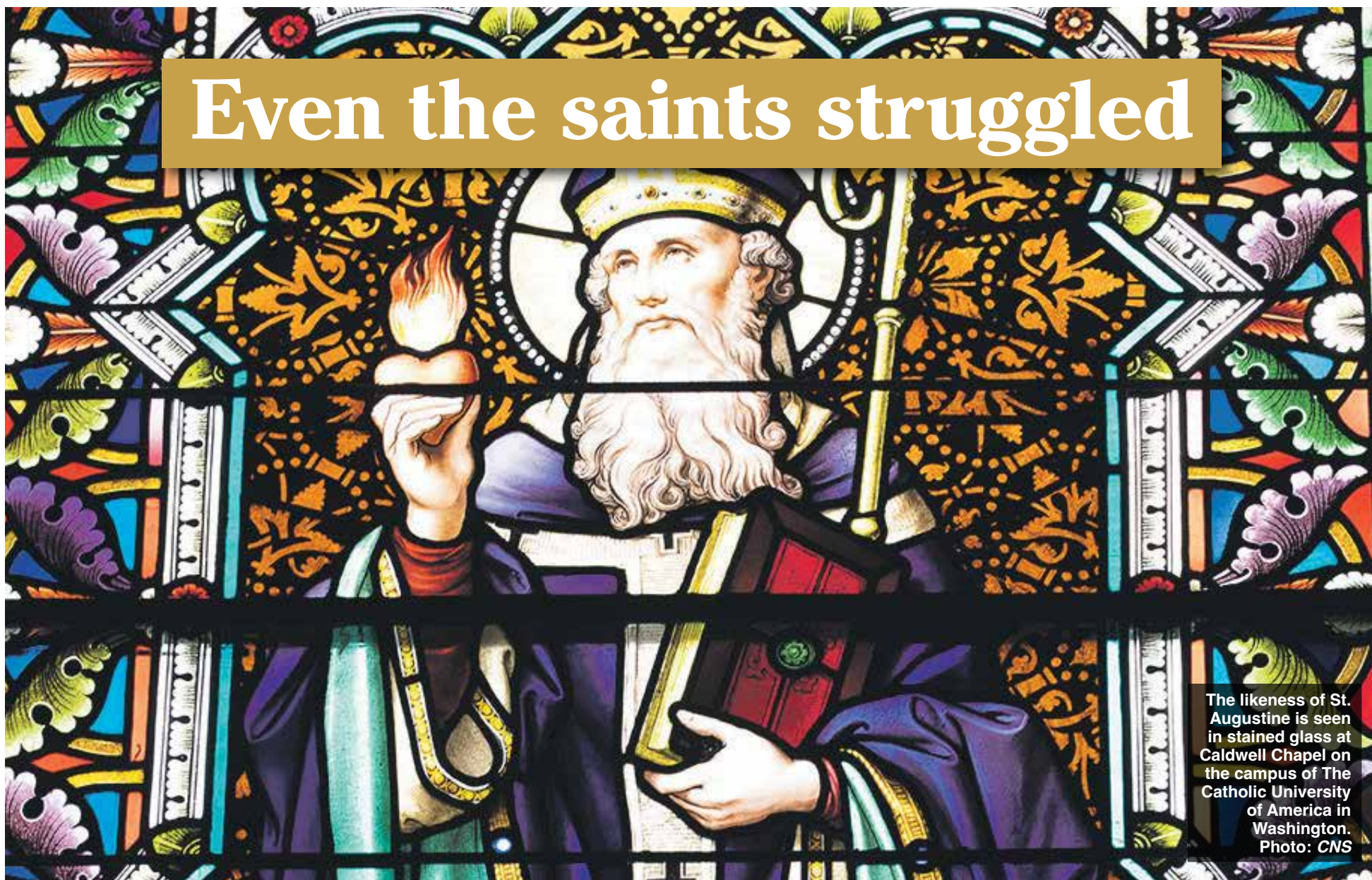
Pope St John Paul II, in his general audience of August 13, 1986, went some way towards explaining this passage in John’s Gospel:

“When, by an act of his own free will, he rejected the truth that he knew about God, Satan became the cosmic ‘liar and the father of lies’ (John 8:44). For this reason, he lives in radical and irreversible denial of God and seeks to impose on creation – on the other beings created in the image of God and in particular on people – his own tragic ‘lie about the good’ that is God.”

Despite its unpopularity in this present age, it would be remiss of the Church to stay silent on the existence of Satan and the demons. While they should not be the focus of our spiritual life, to ignore the reality of them would be dangerous. Speaking to the Christians of Antioch, St John Chrysostom said: “It certainly gives us no pleasure to speak to you of the devil, but the teaching which this subject gives me the opportunity to expound is of the greatest use to you,” and it is this attitude that we ought to hold with regard to this topic.

Satan is, by Christ’s own words, the “prince of this world” and his voice is often ringing loudly in our ears when we’re tempted to sin. To know that temptation as a lie from a being that doesn’t wish you well is a valuable insight, and one that can help us to flee gratefully into the merciful, loving arms of God.

Even the saints struggled



The likeness of St. Augustine is seen in stained glass at Caldwell Chapel on the campus of The Catholic University of America in Washington. Photo: CNS

In his *Confessions*, St Augustine describes how his conversion to Christianity involved two separate moments of grace, the first that convinced him intellectually that Christianity was correct, and the second that empowered him to live out what he believed. There were nearly nine years between these two conversions and it was during those nine years that he said his famous prayer: “Lord make me a good and chaste Christian – but not yet.”

“I want to live more by faith, be less lazy, less selfish, more gracious to others, more contemplative, less given over to anger, bitterness, paranoia, and judgment of others”

Interestingly, a contemporary of his, also a saint, Ephraim the Syrian (306–373 A.D.) wrote a similar prayer: “O my beloved, how daily I default and daily do repent. I build up for an hour and an hour overthrow what I have built. At evening I say, tomorrow I will repent, but when morning comes, joyous I waste the day. Again, at evening I say, I shall keep vigil all night and I shall entreat the Lord to have mercy on my sins. But when the night is come, I am full of sleep.”

What Augustine and Ephraim



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

describe with such clarity (and not without a touch of humor) is one of the real difficulties we face in our struggle to grow in faith and human maturity, namely, the tendency to go through life saying: “Yes, I need to do better. I need to bear down and work at overcoming my bad habits, but now is not the time!”

It’s consoling to know that a number of saints struggled for years with mediocrity, laziness, and bad habits, and that they, like us, could for years give in to those things with the shrug: “Tomorrow, I will make a new start!” For a few years, one of Augustine’s expressions was, “tomorrow and tomorrow!”

“Yes, but not yet!” How often does this describe us? I want to be a good Christian and a good person. I want to live more by faith, be less lazy, less selfish, more gracious to

others, more contemplative, less given over to anger, bitterness, paranoia, and judgment of others. I want to stop giving in to gossip and slander.

Justice

I want to be more realistically involved in justice. I want a better prayer life. I want to take time for things, spend more time with my family, smell the flowers, drive slower, be more patient, and be less hurried. I have a number of bad habits that I need to change, there are still areas of bitterness in me, I am defaulting on so many things; I really need to change, but now is not the time.

First, I need to work through a particular relationship, grow older, change jobs, get married, get rested, get healthy, finish school, have a needed vacation, let some wounds heal, get the kids out of

the house, retire, move to a new parish, and get away from this situation – then I will get serious about changing all this. “Lord, make me a more mature person and Christian, but not yet!”

“God, I suspect, copes better with our faults than we cope with them and others cope with us”

In the end, that’s not a good prayer. Augustine tells us that, for years, as he said this prayer he was able to rationalise his own mediocrity. However, a cataclysm began building inside him. God is infinitely patient with us, but our own patience with ourselves eventually wears out and, at a point, we can no longer continue as before.

In *Book 8* of the *Confessions*, Augustine shares how one day, sitting in a garden, he was overwhelmed with his own immaturity and mediocrity and “a great storm broke within me, bringing with it a great deluge of tears. ... I flung myself down beneath a fig tree

and gave way to the tears which now streamed from my eyes ... in my misery I kept crying, How long shall I go on saying, tomorrow, tomorrow. Why not now?”

When he got up from the ground, his life had changed; he never again finished a prayer with that little nuance, “but not yet”.

We all have certain habits in our lives which we know are bad, but which for a variety of reasons (laziness, addiction, lack of moral strength, fatigue, anger, paranoia, jealousy, or the pressure of family or friends) we are reluctant to break.

We sense our mediocrity, but take consolation in our humanity, knowing that everyone (save full-blown saints) often have this spoken or unspoken caveat in their prayers, “Yes, Lord, but not yet!”

Indeed, there is in fact a valid consolation in this prayer in that it recognises something important inside the infinite understanding and mercy of God. God, I suspect, copes better with our faults than we cope with them and others cope with us. However, like Augustine, even as we say “tomorrow and tomorrow” a storm steadily continues to build within us and, sooner or later, our own mediocrity will sicken us enough to cause us say, “Why not now?”

When the Psalmist says, “Sing to the Lord a new song”, we might ask ourselves, what is the old song? It’s the one that ends with us praying, “Yes, Lord, but not yet!”

“Indeed, there is in fact a valid consolation in this prayer in that it recognises something important inside the infinite understanding and mercy of God”

The Christian identity card

Ghandi's favourite reading was the Sermon on the Mount, especially the Beatitudes. He was deeply impressed by the life of Jesus Christ but not by the lives of Christians. Last week our Gospel was about the mission of Jesus to restore the world to the reign of God. Today we start the Sermon on the Mount which summarises the vision of Jesus for the world, beginning with the Beatitudes which may be regarded as a summary of the Sermon (Matt 5:1-12).

Pope Francis wrote a down-to-earth, simple booklet called *Rejoice and be Glad*, on the call to holiness in today's world. You don't need a degree in theology or philosophy to understand it. We quote, "Jesus explained with great simplicity what it means to be holy when he gave us the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes are like a Christian identity card. So if anyone asks: 'What must I do to be a good Christian?', the answer is clear. We have to do, each in our own way, what Jesus told us in the Sermon on the Mount. In the Beatitudes, we find a portrait of the Master, which we are called to reflect in our daily lives" (Paragraph 63). Would my life impress Ghandi? Am I guided by the teaching of Jesus? If I was on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict me?

Happy or Blessed

How do we translate the Beatitudes? Do we say "happy" or "blessed"? Happy suggests a feeling of well-being, satisfaction and contentment. But are those who mourn or suffer persecution happy with their lot? To call them blessed is much deeper. It suggests that God is very close to people in these situations.

As we noted in last week's reflection, the popular opinion in religious circles held that God's blessings could be discerned in prosperity, power, prestige and popularity. Therefore, the poor and powerless, or victims of misfortune of persecution were regarded as being punished by God for their sins. In the Beatitudes, Jesus turned the situation upside down.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus did not condemn wealth as such. He accepted the invitation to sit at the table of some wealthy people, but he made three statements about money. First,

The Sunday Gospel

Fr Silvester O'Flynn OFM Cap.



to use it with a conscience about sharing with the poor. Money will not buy a place in heaven, but sharing with the poor will win friends who will welcome you into heaven (Luke 6:9). Then Jesus warned that money is tainted. It is a carrier of multiple forms of temptation. And then, Jesus warned about becoming a slave of money. At what stage does it become an alternative god? Wealth is a gift to be used for helping others, but it is tainted with temptation and burdened with responsibilities. True Christians are people who are not slaves of prosperity, and have a conscience about sharing with the poor. "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven"

Blessed are the gentle: for they shall have the earth for their heritage

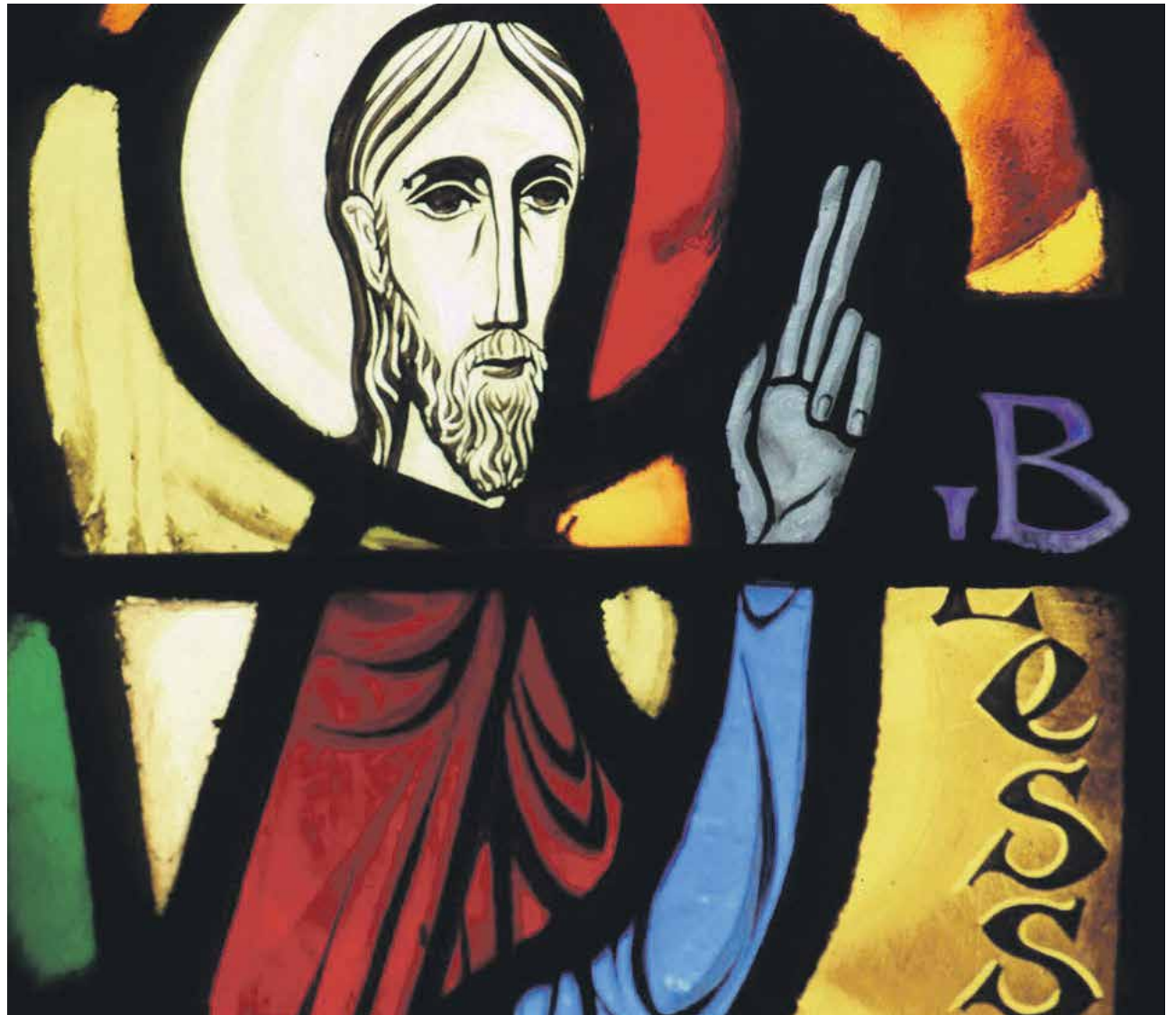
Jesus rejected power as a blessing. Faced with the threat to Mother Earth, we have to be honest about how violent and careless we have been in mastering the planet. We have to recognise how everything in this universe is related to everything else. Francis of Assisi embraced a life of poverty and gentleness and came to recognise everything as a brother or sister. By possessing nothing he came to own everything. In his gentle respect for everything, he received the entire earth as his heritage.

Blessed are those who mourn: they shall be comforted

True Christians accept that suffering is part of life, so they are willing to be compassionate with those who suffer, willing to accompany them. False religion was shown up in the parable of Jesus where two workers in the temple passed by on the other side instead of helping a dying man. Since it is in giving that we receive, those who accompany others in pain will themselves be comforted.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be filled

We all want justice and peace throughout the world but do we hunger and thirst



A church window depicts Jesus giving his Sermon on the Mount, which begins with the Beatitudes. Photo: CNS/Crosiers

for justice. Do we do anything about it? Personally, as I write I feel ashamed at my lack of involvement.

Is the world a better place because I am here? Maybe world problems are beyond my scope, but at least I must treat everybody with fairness, being less judgemental, being more available. If everybody lit just one little candle, what a bright world it would be.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy

A true Christian will be willing to move on from bitterness, hatred and revenge. This does not come naturally. We need the supernatural grace of the Holy Spirit. "It is not in our power not to feel or to forget an offence; but the heart that offers itself to the Holy Spirit turns injury into compassion and purifies the memory in transforming the hurt into intercession"

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. May the grace of the Holy Spirit inspire us to be true to our identity as followers of Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. Amen.

(Catechism 2843).

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God

It is not what goes into the stomach that makes one unclean, but what comes out of the heart. The unclean heart sees people as enemies, or objects to be used or abused. The old saying is that the eyes are the windows of the soul. The pure of heart will see others with the respect that is due as God's creation. They shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God

Apart from praying for peace, it's unlikely that any of us can do anything to end wars in the world. Yet in our own environment we might be the cause of conflict or misunderstanding. Pope Francis continually draws

attention to the harm done by gossip. The Letter of James states that whoever has control of the tongue must be perfect.

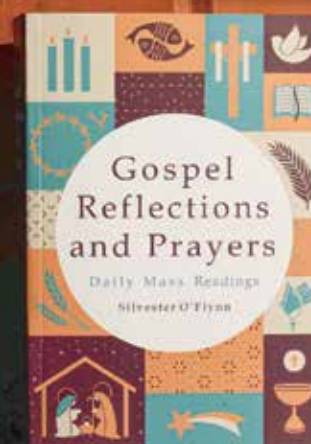
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for

theirs is the kingdom of heaven

Persecution or mockery of people for their religious beliefs is as bad today as any time in history. But God is on their side: they are blessed by God: their endurance will assure them of the kingdom of heaven.

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TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



Pro-life season in the USA

It's pro-life season in the USA, with the Marches for Life in Washington and on the East Coast. The EWTN channel is broadcasting a range of pro-life programmes for the occasion.

One of the best was **Fearfully and Wonderfully Made** (EWTN, Saturday), a new documentary from Canadian Kevin Dunn. Comprised of four personal story vignettes it was quite moving, uplifting and will be a valuable resource for pro-life educators. Ruth was 19 and unmarried when she had an unplanned pregnancy. It was the opposite of many cases, but in this instance her boyfriend was supportive, as was his family, and later they got married. She considered abortion, but also helping was a pro-life crisis pregnancy centre, and with all the help and her own personal courage she overcame her fears. It is worth noting that draconian 'safe-zone' legislation in many countries tends to outlaw offers of such support in the proximity of abortion 'providers' (abortion supporters thrive on euphemism).

Crisis

Carol was CEO of the crisis pregnancy centre that supported Ruth. She had so many great stories of the women and babies she and her vol-



Pro-life advocates gather for the 50th annual March for Life in Washington January 20. Photo: OSV News/Gregory A. Shemitz

unteers supported, the lives they saved and enhanced. She found that women with unplanned pregnancies often feel isolated, cornered, feel like they have no choices. Her work aims to empower women, and as Kevin Dunn said in the commentary, who would object to that? She found women were often pressurised towards abortion by those close to her and she advised speaking to someone outside the relationship. They also offer post-abortion support, accompany-

ing women on their 'grief journey'. She stressed that disability diagnoses were sometimes wrong, or sometimes things turn out not as bad as expected. Kevin Dunn, pointing out how most Down's Syndrome babies are aborted (a sore point here in recent times), wondered about how we condemn ableism for born people, but practice 'the worst kind of ableism, the lethal kind, within the womb'.

Chad was a high school music teacher and largely

wheelchair bound with cerebral palsy. He wasn't going to let his disability or his mode of transport define him. His more disabled brother, with his 'beautiful soul', enhanced his life and the lives of many others and it breaks his heart when medical professionals are not keen to give people a fighting chance. Too often, he thought, considerations of 'fear' and 'I can't' were dominant – he wanted to flip this around.

Prayer

Sr Antoniana was from of the Sisters of Life, an order dedicated to prayer and the sacredness of life. As with Carol, the sisters and the volunteer teams support women all through life, including crisis pregnancy and post-abortion situations. She felt 'the heart's desire' was to choose life, and that fear often drove decisions for abortion. She found women post abortion feeling betrayed and 'hurting tremendously'.

The March for Life in Washington last Friday and on the East Coast on Saturday, got live and comprehensive coverage on EWTN. I was curious to see how other stations covered it. For example, **Political Briefing** (CNN, Friday) had some coverage that was relatively balanced for CNN. The celebratory mood of the march

PICK OF THE WEEK

JESUS, LIVING IN MARY - LIFE OF SAINT LOUIS DE MONTFORT

EWTN Sunday January 29, 9 pm

The life of St Louis de Montfort from his upbringing, priestly formation, spiritual purification and canonisation.

UPFRONT WITH KATIE HANNON

RTE 1 Monday January 30, 10.35 pm

Journalist Katie Hannon hosts a live audience-centred current affairs programme where the public come face to face with those whose decisions impact directly on all our lives.

FINDING BRIGID

RTE One Tuesday January 31, 10:15 pm

On St Brigid's Eve, as Ireland prepares to celebrate its first public holiday dedicated to a woman, Siobhán McSweeney, of *Derry Girls*' fame, goes in search of the real Brigid.

was highlighted – this was the first March for Life since the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* last summer, and I'm sure the marchers had a huge sense of achievement. Now the question was, what new goals were in sight? The emphasis has shifted to state and national legislatures, symbolised by the destination of the March being the Capitol rather than the Supreme Court. Some typical media bias was evident – the movement was too much regarded as just a Republican Party or Evangelical thing. The terminology of 'anti-abortion-rights', much used in the report, showed a bias, though the commentator did bring himself to say 'pro-life' at one stage.

They played back President Biden's response when *Roe v. Wade* was overturned – the decision, he said, would 'upset the balance of our law' and was brought about by 'an extreme ideology'. So, it's more extreme to defend the lives of unborn but living babies than to facilitate their destruction?

Taking US politics into the past **The US and the Holocaust** (BBC, Mondays) is a riveting and upsetting documentary series. We saw the ugly story of ableism, eugenics, racism, anti-Semitism and even anti-Catholicism in the USA leading up the Second World War. Related conflicts over immigration figured also, with salutary warnings that resonate for current controversies.

Film

Aubrey Malone



Rollercoaster ride through Hollywood's early days

Babylon (18) isn't just a film, it's an experience. The first great release of 2023, it's a simultaneous celebration and denunciation of a wild and wacky era in film-making.

Everything Damien Chazelle does has the word 'Big' written all over it. If he isn't careful, he'll become our era's answer to Cecil B. De Mille. Steven Spielberg with an edge.

Beginning with the blitzkrieg that was the roaring twenties, he gives us some scenes of orgiastic frenzy before segueing into the story of aspiring star Nellie LaRoy (Margot Robbie), an ebullient character who's a composite of Clara Bow, Jean Harlow and Marilyn Monroe.

You may not think much of Nellie's morals but there's

no gainsaying the power of Robbie's performance. Arguably the most exciting actress in Hollywood today, she gives the part everything.

Are we talking Oscar for this Salomé-style phenomenon? I think so. She oozes vitality in every frame. Her exuberance drives the film.

She forms a friendship with Mexican-American wannabe Manny Torres (Diego Calva Hernandez). His star rises while she crashes and burns. In both of their predicaments we see metaphors for the transience of fame.

Obvious

Chazelle is too good a director to make this obvious. Instead, he gives us a series of vignettes that portray the



Director Damien Chazelle.

insanity of a town that grew like a two-headed hydra as the public's fascination with moving images went off the scale. My first book was called *Hollywoodweird*. That's exactly what we

get here. Mad people directing madder ones.

The evanescence of fame is captured more baldly in the life of Jack Conrad (Brad Pitt), a matinee idol of zilch talent.

He's too reminiscent of the character Pitt played in *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* for my liking but he plays him with his customary aplomb.

Chazelle bases him on John Gilbert. The Talkies killed Gilbert's career because of his poor voice. Conrad has a good voice so this part of the film doesn't really work.

Returns

In the last reel of this three-hour epic, Chazelle returns to the Dante-esque inferno of the early scenes. His not-so-grand finale is presented to us by a decadent character played by Tobey Maguire. This is Maguire like you've never seen him before, a sleazy drug baron who wallows in the macabre.

Babylon is a heady cocktail that exemplifies the *zeitgeist* indicated by the film's title, a world of sexual excess that ran tooth-in-jowl with the PR coyness of the so-called Dream Factory. Chazelle is both iconoclastic and elegiac as he unpicks it. Manny - its 'Greek chorus' character - witnesses it morphing into a sanitised modernity. This is epitomised by the film *Singin' in the Rain*. It's followed by a *Cinema Paradiso* style collage that's like a history in miniature of the Golden Age of film.

Where's Nellie now? We're not told. All we get by way of information is a headline I won't spoil by revealing.

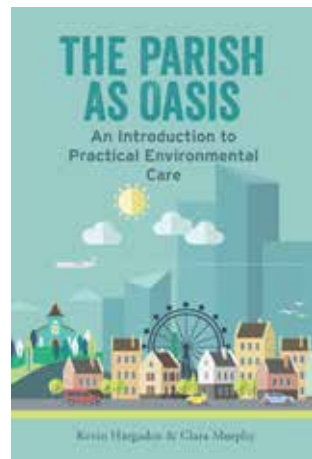
Robbie has by this stage danced her way daintily into the sunset.

BookReviews

Peter Costello



Seeing the wider world in the local



The Parish as Oasis: An Introduction to Practical Environmental Care
Kevin Hargaden and Ciara Murphy
(Messenger Publications, €14.95/£12.95)

Peter Costello

The very title of this book is enough to startle and attract my imagination as I had been reading a travel account of a journey through Ethiopia, that always troubled land, soon after the overthrow of Haile Selassie (formerly the prince Ras Tafari).

The back cover of the book is illustrated with a remarkable aerial photograph of one of 3,500 so-called “forest churches” that survive in the country (now even more troubled than it was in 1937).

The illustration (pictured) shows a largely arid hard baked landscape in which the circle of the flowering oasis stands out, with an Ethiopian Orthodox church in the centre. Ethiopia’s ancient Christian faith created what has been called “the Zion of Africa”.

Monastic

The monastic culture of Ethiopia has distinct connections with early Christian Ireland, with its small chapels, richly illuminated books, monk filled monasteries cut off from the wider society, and local priests holding ceremonies in churches cut from the living rock.

But this book is less concerned with the civilisation of the past as the human culture of the future. Those African oases are not quite so cut off: trade routes linking them together across the landscape.

There is a lesson to be taken from this: local

cultivation of a small area, a series of Edenic gardens all linked together. In that intense local cultivation lies a way to the future perhaps, which seems to be the theme of this splendid little book.

Dr Kevin Hargaden is the Director and Social Theologian of the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice. His co-author Dr Ciara Murphy is Environmental Justice Advocate at the Centre.

Evocation

The book falls into two parts. The first part is a brief evocation of the state of the Church in Ireland as it is today, a bit battered and bewildered, but still active. For a moment or two the symbolic image of the oasis is lost sight of in allusions to the Church once dominating the marketplace, though what they really seem to mean is the Roman style Forum.

But it really gets going in the second part, which consists of a set of 20 “experiments”, as the authors call the series of ideas for ways of thinking and acting which each parish and its activists and members can try out for themselves.

“The monastic culture of Ethiopia has distinct connections with early Christian Ireland”

These are filled with informative facts. Over recent years we have all been turning our thoughts to ecological notions such as those as promoted by Pope Francis in the hope of saving the climate, and so remaking our outlook on life. Yet oddly the number of large cars on our roads continues to rise. It is this kind of confused thinking that we have to become conscious of and which these “experiments” debate.

Every parish in Ireland should become aware of the ideas and suggestions in these pages. It is a book that will prove well worth the investment. If it can change the outlook of even a few parishes, it will promote those “oases” of life and faith on which the Pope sees the future depending.



How big was a parish intended to be? A backward look at the past

Peter Costello

These days we hear a great deal about Catholic dioceses being united, and also of parishes being run together, all because of the critical lack of priests. The penchant of the administrative mind when faced by such a crisis to make the administrative area ever larger is always apparent. But is this right with parishes? How large should a parish be to maintain a sense of community is a question that needs an answer.

I lived in London for some years in my past life. When I say London I really mean the city of London, “the City Square mile”, notorious these

days as the financial centre of the UK.

I shared a flat with my brother in the Barbican. Our balcony looked out over the city from the northern wall of the ancient Roman city. Immediately below I could see the remains of the old Roman wall at Cripplegate, and beside it St Giles Cripplegate where Milton is buried. He was born a few streets away in Bread Street. Round the corner was Silver Street, where Shakespeare once lived for a short time. A panorama of Church spires spread way to the south, just as in the banner title page of the old *Illustrated London News*.

But in that square mile or so that the City of London

enclosed how many churches were there?

When the monk Fitzstephen at the close of the 12th Century wrote the first detailed description of London according to his count there were 126 parish churches in the city, and in addition 13 large conventual parishes.

Survived

By 1924 only 109 parishes survived and the number has been further reduced by war, closure and demolition.

The same story might be told about Dublin, though the designations might be less clear cut, and the alterations made by the Reformation and the City of Dublin authorities more radical than those in the

City of London.

So we can safely say that there was in the Middle Ages at the height of the Catholic Church a church in every three or four city streets. This would suggest that those 126 churches must have had some 300 to 450 parishioners.

Of course, in recent days, until the building of the Barbican, few people “slept in the City”. The rich merchants of Cheapside had moved out in mid-Victorian days, followed by the smaller city retailers, to the spreading suburbs to north and south.

Doubtless this raw estimate could be disputed. But the point I want to make is that with that large number of parishes there were far

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.

parish



fewer parishioners per parish than we might think. But that meant that each parish was a real community in a way that parishes today are not. They were much more like a small rural parish of today than we might imagine.

“By 1924 only 109 parishes survived and the number has been further reduced by war, closure and demolition”

Discussing this the other day with a friend who is also interested in this matter, we agreed that say 400 people, created a real sense of community and unity in a way that today's calls for “community” cannot do.

So we should not be heading in the direction of ever and

ever larger parishes; Catholics should really aim to restore the medieval size of a parish.

And a point relevant to the idea of the parish as oasis discussed above: a while ago I wrote here about how when public administrators talk about parishes, they mean “civil parishes” (such as those Google now uses to indicate where Dubliners live, as you can see on screen every day). These are not the same as the religious parishes.

But Catholics when they talk of parish and community mean only their Catholic parish. Most have little regard for the true community of a place, those who live in the civil parish.

Catholics need to be less self-centred and to really share the space that they live in with all the inhabitants of the civil parish. They could make a beginning by realising that there is such a thing as a civil parish.

Parishes matter more to us than many think

Local Matters: Parish, Local Government and Community in Ireland
Dr Finola Kennedy
(Institute of Public Administration, €25.00)

Frank Litton

The philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre traced his early commitment to Marxism to his experience growing up in London's East End where his parents worked as doctors.

It was the communists' contributions to the neighbourhood that drew his attention to Marxist theory.

Neighbourhoods are important. The local matters. It is surprising that we pay so little attention to it. This is especially so given how much the contours of the local have changed and are changing.

Dr Kennedy's book is to be welcomed. In demonstrating the importance of the local while tracking its changes, she brings into focus important aspects of our society and politics that are too often ignored.

For centuries, the parish has provided the frame for the local. The parish was centred on the church. The majority of those living within its boundaries shared the same faith. They came together in worship. The ideal was harmonious unity, all pulling together in one happy community.

The reality fell short of this. We are, after all, fallen, and envy, jealousy and hatred shadow our interactions. Wider social injustices play out in the parish. Nonetheless, the parish sustained a sense of communality, of mutual obligations and the possibility of cooperative endeavour that extended beyond the specifically religious.

In the distant past, especially in rural communities the parish clergy were the best educated. They were the ‘intelligentsia’ interpreting the wider world for the parishioners.

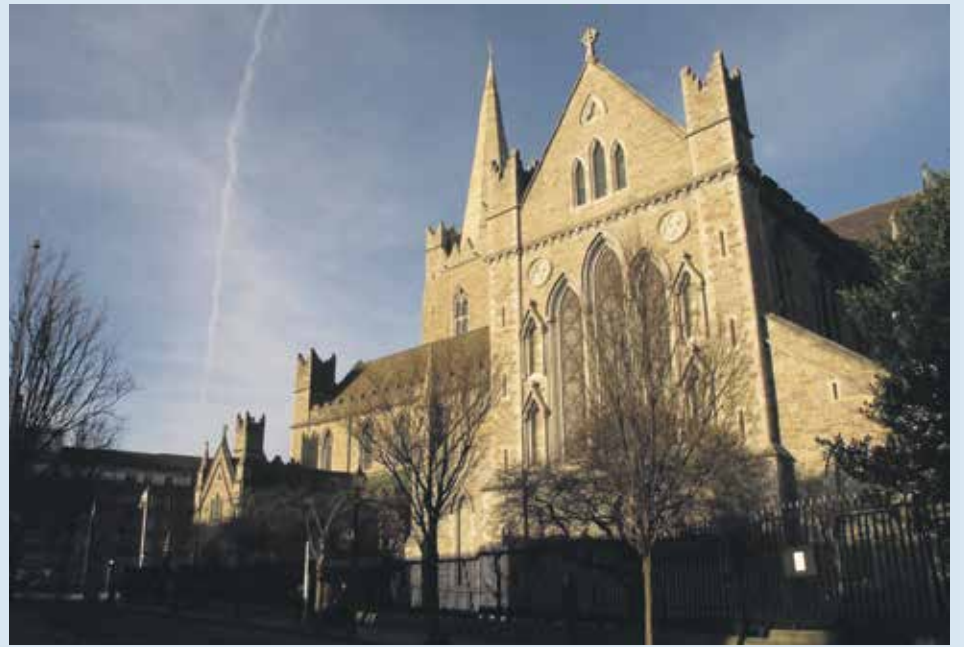
Story

My uncle told the story of a parish priest in Mayo who stood up to preach on the feast of Christ the King, just after rural electrification had reached the parish.

“Ye all know,” he told the congregation, “about Christ the King, but ye know nothing of electricity.”

He proceeded to inform, or perhaps misinform, the congregation on this new wonder.

That was then; now, as Dr Kennedy tells us, church attendance is in steep decline, vocations dwindle and parishes amalgamate as ageing priests struggle to serve their flock.



The parish of the past faces a future which will be very different.

From the perspective of faith, the picture is dismal. As she recounts, the ‘City of God’ and the ‘City of men’, the sacred and the secular, were inextricably intertwined in the life of the parish with inevitable costs and benefits for both. The religious decline of the parish has implications for the secular order.

‘Relationality’ is a clumsy word. Expect to hear more of it, as the neoliberal order flounders and its assumptions are questioned. The liberal starts with the individual and the question, “how can their autonomy be protected, sustained, asserted in the unavoidable relationships that constitute social life?”

Talk of relationality instructs us that this is the wrong starting point.

Relationships precede autonomy. If all goes well, the web of relationships in which we find ourselves enable us to grow as persons with the capacities to act as autonomous agents. And the important relationships are local.

To see why this is so it is useful to consider how relationships differ. The relationships in families differ from those that bring us together in voluntary activity; these

in turn differ from those in market transactions. Parents give their children what they need to grow and develop as autonomous individuals without thought of return. No bill is presented when the daughter or son reaches eighteen.

What parents provide is a ‘gift’ and the obligations of gratitude are not specific. Co-operative activities suppose an equality of exchange; what I receive should be returned in equal measure.

In market transactions, gifts or equality have no place. Traders seek to get as much from an exchange in return for as little as possible. As the saying goes to survive in the flea market you need to sell the sleeves of a waistcoat. The aim is maximising profits and as economists tell us its pursuit leads to the best possible world.

“We are, after all, fallen, and envy, jealousy and hatred shadow our interactions”

It is not quite so simple. It turns out that the co-operative spirit that encourages creativity in services and goods depends on relationships based on equality, gifts and gratitude.

We first encounter these relationships, grasp their role in human flourishing, and learn how to engage in them, at the local level.

Dr Kennedy details the many organisations nourished by the sense of belonging engendered by the parish: Macra na Feirme, Muintir na Tire, the GAA, Amateur Dramatics, the Society of St Vincent de Paul, the Legion of

Mary... The list is long, the contributions substantial.

They support democracy, albeit indirectly, as their members meet at regional and national gatherings, the local finds its place in the national picture while ensuring this recognises local realities.

Recognised

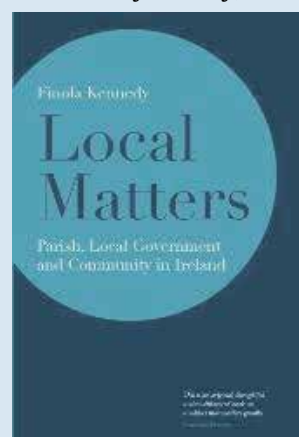
Local government has long been recognised as a key component in any design for democracy. But not in Ireland, where, as Dr Kennedy reminds us, it is a paltry, attenuated affair, dominated by the centre; more local administration than local government.

Social and cultural changes undermine the local. Reading Dr Kennedy's comprehensive survey, rich in detail, indicates what a world with an impoverished local would be: isolated individuals, winners, or more likely losers, in a globalised economy, bereft of those relationships that form community, disconnected from the centres of power and despised by the elites that control them. This is ‘Trump Land’ whose populist politics expresses the loss, the anger, the anguish, while sustaining the conditions that provoke them.

Dr Kennedy is not a pessimist. Her survey does not deliver an overarching analysis to inform a grand strategy, the kind of thing that centres relish.

She does deliver what parishes need: examples of initiatives, adaptations, solutions, successes, that can inspire and instruct.

Every Pastoral Council should acquire and ponder this book.



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For over 130 years, *The Irish Catholic* has been a voice of hope and inspiration for Catholics in Ireland. Help us pass on the flame of faith by remembering us in your Will.

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By choosing to leave a gift or a donation at any time, you are choosing to share God's love with those who need it most.

To learn more about the Holy Father's official charity for overseas mission, call Fiona on 01 497 2035 or visit www.missio.ie

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IRELAND

SERVICES

ALL UNWANTED home waste removed. Cookers, fridges, beds, suites, wardrobes, carpets etc. Removed and disposed of in a proper manner. No job too small or big. Contact Tommy, 087 6406015.

CENACOLO COMMUNITY

CENACOLO is a residential community offering FREE help for men and women with addictions. Visit www.communitycenacolo.ie or phone 094 9388286.

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STATE UNDER WHICH HEADING YOUR AD IS TO APPEAR:

Minimum charge of €24.60 (inc. VAT) for 5 lines (25 words). Extra lines €4.92 each.

No. of insertions: _____ weeks
Miracle Prayer €40

Please print your advertisement in the coupon, placing ONE word in each space. Below, please print your name and address. Do you require a Box Number? YES NO (Please tick) Box Number €6 extra.

1					€24.60
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					€29.52
7					€34.44

Name and contact detail form MUST be filled out

Name

Address

.....

Landline Mobile

I enclose Cheque/PO: €.....I wish to pay by Visa Mastercard Laser

My Visa/Mastercard/Lasercard number is:

.....

Expiry Date:Signature

Leisure time

The Gift Of A Lifetime

Be there for others after you're gone.

A gift in your will to Irish Hospice Foundation is a meaningful way to help ensure no-one faces death or bereavement without the care and support they need.

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Ireland's Foremost Introduction Agency for Catholics

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Please pray for the beatification of

Little Nellie of Holy God

"May God enrich with every blessing all those who recommend frequent Communion to little boys and girls proposing Nellie as their model!"

— Pope St Pius X, June 4, 1912

Will the MSC Missions

Missionaries of the Sacred Heart bring hope to the poorest people living in over 48 countries worldwide.

Please help us with a gift in your Will

Contact:

MSC Missions Office, PO Box 23 Western Road, Cork.
Tel: 021-4545704 Email: info@mscmissions.ie

www.mscmissions.ie

When you remember Trócaire in your Will, you bring hope to people living in the world's poorest places

Trócaire

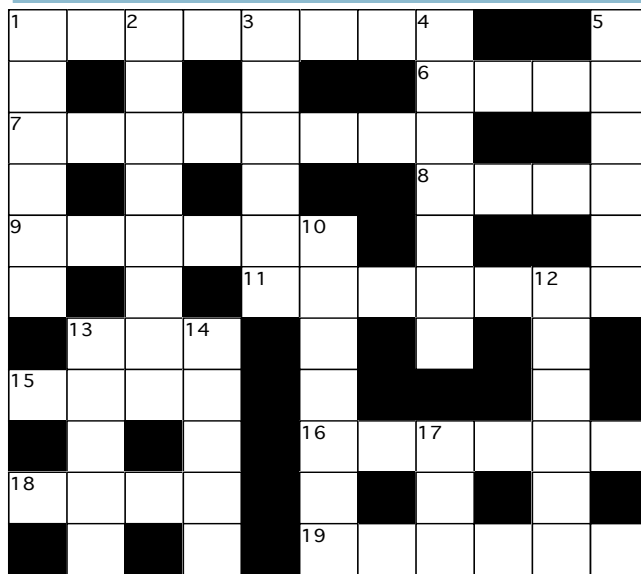
It's easy to get started, and we'll help you every step of the way. Call **Grace Kelly** on 01 629 3333, email grace.kelly@trocaire.org or write to me at Trócaire, Maynooth, Co Kildare.

One day, parents and their children will tell the story of how your legacy of love changed their lives. Thank you for considering a gift to Trócaire in your Will.

Classifieds: 01 687 4094

Crossword Junior

Gordius 467



Across

- 1 The eleventh month of the year (8)
- 6 Adam and Eve's first two sons were Cain and _____ (4)
- 7 Car crash (8)
- 8 Spin a coin (4)
- 9 Small (6)
- 11 Got away from being captured (7)
- 13 Creature that goes Moo (3)
- 15 Hair on a horse's or lion's neck (4)
- 16 Huge river in South America (6)
- 18 What we eat (4)
- 19 Shouted (6)

Down

- 1 In a tidy way (6)
- 2 Holiday (8)
- 3 Centre (6)
- 4 You use it to catch certain nasty animals (3-4)
- 5 Shut (6)
- 10 The part of a river where it meets the sea (7)
- 12 French word for 'more' which people sometimes shout out at the end of a good concert (6)
- 13 You use a paddle in this kind of boat (5)
- 14 You don't want these plants in your garden! (5)
- 17 Everyone or everything (3)

SOLUTIONS, JANUARY 19

GORDIUS NO. 594

Across – 1 Mop 3 French fries 8 Graven images 9 Baseball 10 Chick 11 Dream 13 Diced 15 Ramekin 16 Paragon 20 Lycra 21 Tooth 23 Costa Del Sol 24 Acid drop 25 Esteem 26 Incredulous

Down – 1 Magic carpet 2 Platinum 3 Fleck 4 Niblick 5 Fiend 12 Mount Carmel 13 Drill 14 Drama 17 God speed 18 Scalpel 19 Zodiac 22 Hedge 23 Casks 24 Ali

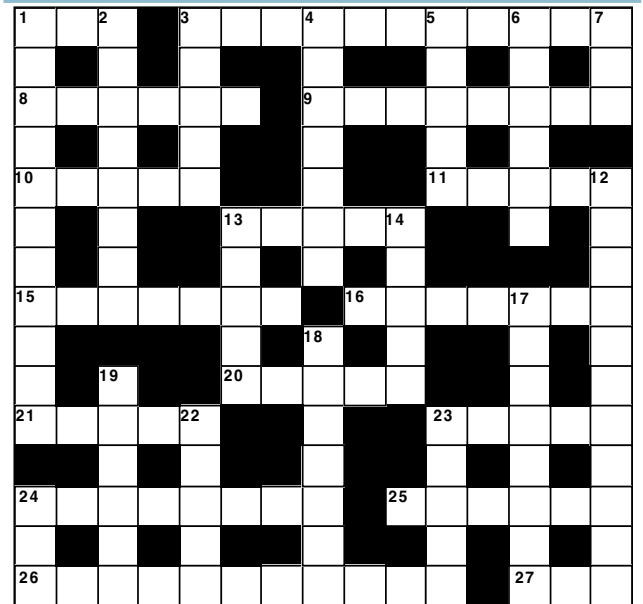
CHILDREN'S No. 466

Across – 1 Steady 6 Under 7 Reading 8 Lorry 9 Water 11 Asks 13 Rolls 14 See 15 Ash 17 Tears 19 Erase 20 Ear 21 Orders

Down – 1 Screwdriver 2 Exact 3 Drier 4 Address 5 Pray 6 Ugly sister 10 Eclipse 12 Feasts 16 Head 18 Are

Crossword

Gordius 595



Across

- 1 Where one works out (3)
- 3 Artery or vein, for example (5,6)
- 8 Worked out the answer (6)
- 9 Uses up fully or tires out completely (8)
- 10 Spacious (5)
- 11 The largest city in West Yorkshire (5)
- 13 Climbing plant used as cattle feed (5)
- 15 A hospital attendant or NCO (7)
- 16 Take out the creases, then a chap becomes Tony Stark's Marvel alter ego! (4,3)
- 20 Chef's hat (5)
- 21 A catch on an item of jewellery (5)
- 23 Bloodsucking worm (5)
- 24 Seven-sided shape (8)
- 25 Small-sized, often aggressive, chicken (6)
- 26 Marking from which one takes a most valuable free (7,4)
- 27 See 7 down

Down

- 1 Romantics go astray when

relating to great food and cooking (11)

- 2 Became more laid-back (8)
- 3 Muscular nickname for cricket legend Ian Botham (5)
- 4 Perform surgery (7)
- 5 Communication via the internet (1-4)
- 6 Term used when addressing a nun (6)
- 7 & 27a Smiles erupt as this West End show is named! (3,3)
- 12 & 18d Great thirteenth century theologian (5,6,7)
- 13 "Gentleman's gentleman" (5)
- 14 A great number - of savages? (5)
- 17 In physics, the product of mass and velocity (8)
- 18 See 12 down
- 19 Make moist (6)
- 22 Precious oyster-product (5)
- 23 Fewest or smallest (5)
- 24 Pelvic joint (3)

Sudoku Corner

467

Easy

9		7			1	5	6	
	8				4		7	
					6		2	1
3	4	2						
			2	8				
	7	6		9		1		
			7	5			3	6
2	9	3						
					4			8

Hard

	2				3		8	5
		9			7			
3			4					7
5		2					7	
4			6	9				8
	1				3			9
8				5				3
			7		1			
9	7		3				5	

Last week's Easy 466

7	6	3	9	2	1	4	8	5
9	5	4	3	8	6	2	7	1
8	2	1	4	7	5	6	3	9
1	8	6	7	5	2	9	4	3
4	3	7	8	1	9	5	6	2
5	9	2	6	3	4	7	1	8
6	7	5	1	9	8	3	2	4
3	1	9	2	4	7	8	5	6
2	4	8	5	6	3	1	9	7

Last week's Hard 466

1	2	7	6	8	9	4	5	3
3	4	6	7	2	5	8	1	9
8	9	5	1	3	4	7	2	6
9	3	2	5	6	7	1	8	4
5	6	4	3	1	8	2	9	7
7	1	8	4	9	2	6	3	5
2	5	1	9	7	6	3	4	8
6	8	9	2	4	3	5	7	1
4	7	3	8	5	1	9	6	2

Notebook

Fr Bernard Cotter



Teachers in the school of life

MY LATE FATHER, Denis Cotter, was a teacher all his life. As a national teacher, he taught in the classroom for over 40 years, the first 13 years in what was then the new Dublin suburb of Crumlin, and the remainder in a small two-teacher school in Ballinacarriga near Dunmanway in West Cork.

He retired from a formal education setting at the age of 63, but never really stopped teaching. The Lord gave him 35 more years for the task of teaching me everything he knew about life, as well as showing me how to age gracefully and live life to the full within the limitations of old age.

His role as a teacher in these life skills is shared by many people in every parish in Ireland; they teach those in the generations after them how to embrace maturity and age. Where else can those skills be learned but from the lived example of preceding generations?

My father had a lot of practice in looking after older people himself, long before old age claimed him. He was the youngest of nine, which meant that as a child he was doted over by his siblings. There was a price to be paid for all this attention,



though, and this came at the other end of life, when it fell to him to look after several unmarried brothers as they aged and ailed.

Firsthand

He saw firsthand how awkward it could be looking after people not good at looking after themselves, especially stubborn bachelors, used to managing in their own company. As he sought to help them, he learned how not to age. And he then passed all those lessons on to me and to anyone else who would listen.

I am fortunate to have many others to teach me how to age, also. In the family of parishes where I work, four of us are in active ministry. But

we have another four priests over the age of 75, no longer in fulltime parish ministry.

From being active pastors they have taken on the role of pastoral assistants to various extents, all the while teaching us younger pastors how to grow into their role. Their

continuing existence is a sign of hope to priests of my age-group, reassuring me that there is life in retirement, and that my gifts can be made available generously without the need to be burdened with the administrative tasks that those in active ministry find hard to avoid.

Ministry

In my almost 39 years of ministry, I have gotten to know many others at the opposite end of life to me. Their grace and good humour inspired me, and their memory is a blessing to me. I hope to emulate them in my later years: smiling, positive, interested, patient, ever learning and ever teaching. May the Lord give me the good health to do just that, and enough of a memory not to forget the example of those who preceded me along this path.

Relics of history

In many of the small coastal settlements in our Family of Parishes, the Catholic church is located on the edge of town or some distance from it, while the Church of Ireland is in the village centre (eg Castletownshend, Baltimore, Glandore, Union Hall).

The relative positions of these ecclesiastical buildings are relics of history, vivid reminders of another, less ecumenical, time. Times change however. Catholic churches are now located where plenty of car-parking is available in spacious fields, while at the Church of Ireland buildings, parking is practically impossible – something their proud builders could not have possibly imagined or foretold!

● Our Family of Parishes has one great advantage: it is centred on Skibbereen, home to many shops, restaurants and entertainment venues. It's a town towards which those in its hinterland gravitate, and having a cathedral adds to its status.

The central focus provided by the town also makes it easier for us to organise one central liturgy on occasion, in place of one in each parish. We already had one bereavement Mass in November, and a penitential service in Advent for the five parishes. Our next challenge is one Easter Vigil in place of five: watch this space for results.



YOUR GIFT COULD SAVE A CHILD'S LIFE

Millions of children throughout the world are suffering from hunger and malnutrition due to conflict, disease, displacement, and other factors. And the situation in Africa is only getting worse. Millions of women and children are struggling with inadequate diets which can lead to stunting and other health problems. Countless children are dying of malnutrition each day.

The Little Way Association is receiving requests from missionary priests and Sisters who urgently need funds to purchase sacks of wheat flour, sorghum, maize and beans for their people and for medical needs of their clinics such as intravenous feeding of children and babies. For a helpless child, prolonged hunger is a devastating, bewildering, intensely painful experience.

Your gift will assuredly help a missionary to relieve a child's suffering. It could save a life. Whatever you can spare will be sent WITHOUT DEDUCTION and will be gratefully received.



"Insofar as you did this to one of the least of My brethren, you did it to Me".



"It is love alone that matters."
- St Therese

MISSIONARIES NEED YOUR MASS OFFERINGS

The Little Way Association regularly receives appeals from bishops and religious superiors on the Missions for Mass stipends and intentions for their poor priests. Such payments help them to meet basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter. Also, the poor and deprived people, whom the clergy serve so faithfully, often turn to their priests for assistance. Thus, your stipends are gratefully received and your intentions are faithfully honoured at Holy Mass.

We like to send a minimum of €6 or more for each Mass

Our benefactors will be glad to know that a Mass is offered each day for their intentions.

WELLS NEEDED

Missionaries constantly appeal to The Little Way for funds to sink wells in order to provide clean water, the lack of which causes much illness and many medical needs. On average, women in Africa and Asia walk around three hours every day to fetch water, often in scorching heat.

Can you help provide a well?

Please consider making a gift to The Little Way Association's fund for children

Every euro you send will be gratefully received and sent without deduction, to enable a missionary priest or sister to carry the love, care and compassion of Christ to a deprived, abandoned or orphaned child.

Thank you, and may God reward your generosity.

Crossed POs and cheques should be sent and made payable to:

THE LITTLE WAY ASSOCIATION
Sacred Heart House, 119 Cedars Rd, Clapham Common, London SW4 0PR
(Registered Charity No. 235703) Tel 0044 20 76 22 0466
www.littlewayassociation.com

- I enclose €..... to be allocated to:
- €..... **FOOD FOR A HUNGRY CHILD**
- €..... **NEEDS OF MISSIONARIES**
- €..... **WELLS AND WATER**
- €..... **MASSES** (please state no.)
- €..... **LITTLE WAY ADMIN EXPENSES**

Please tick if you would like an acknowledgement

Name (Rev. Mr. Mrs. Miss)

(Block letters please)

Address

To donate online go to tinyurl.com/lwadonations

DONATIONS FOR THE MISSIONS ARE SENT WITHOUT DEDUCTION FOR ANY EXPENSES.