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Help me revitalise the Church says new Archbishop of Dublin

Michael Kelly

The new Archbishop of Dublin has appealed to Catholics to put their shoulders to the wheel and join him in the work of revitalising the Church in the capital.

In an extensive interview with *The Irish Catholic* ahead of his installation next week, Archbishop-elect Dermot Farrell has also urged Catholics to bring their ideas to the fore rather than waiting to be led by bishops and priests. He has vowed to engage in extensive consultation with priests and parishioners to chart a direction for the future of the country's largest diocese.

Dr Farrell also warned that the Church cannot shun the responsibility to clearly articulate Church teaching and called on Catholics to make their opposition to euthanasia known as legislation is before the Oireachtas.

"It's up to us [bishops] to encourage people to speak out and to push the importance of life which is the fundamental value that every other value is based on.

"If you don't have the value of life then you can't talk about other values," he said.

The archbishop-elect said he wants to hear about "opportunities not just crises".

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Faithful footballer gets ready for the next Catholic challenge



American footballer and devout Catholic Philip Rivers announced this week that he would retire from the National Football League (NFL) to coach football at an Alabama Catholic high school. "Thank you God for allowing me to live out my childhood dream of playing quarterback in the NFL," he said in a statement. See page 3. Photo: PA

Charities warn of post-lockdown homeless 'avalanche'

Chai Brady

Groups working to end homelessness have warned of a large increase of new people at risk of losing their homes when measures to protect tenancies during the pandemic are lifted.

The Government has implemented an eviction ban and rent freeze during level 5 restrictions, which are due to be in place until at least March 5.

Focus Ireland's Services Manager John O'Haire told *The Irish Catholic* that there has been a decrease in people presenting as homeless to their services during lockdown due to rent protections but he fears an "avalanche" once they are ended.

Mr O'Haire said: "My big fear is after Covid-19, and please God all of this will end soon, there will be a pent-up demand or avalanche waiting among landlords for properties to be sold or moved on, and the pandemic has proved it doesn't have to be that way".

He said that: "The moratorium on evictions helped in reducing the number of families coming in, and if we can match that with some housing supply, we wouldn't be far away from solving the problem.

"That has to happen with a matter of urgency. Homelessness doesn't

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HOMELESSNESS

Facing a housing crisis during a pandemic PAGE 17-19



FR PAT COLLINS

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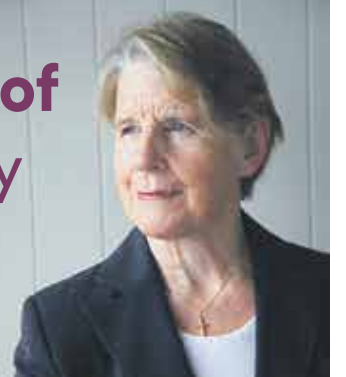


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There is a cruelty at the heart of rigid funeral restrictions

There's a terribly jarring advertisement on the radio at the moment. The trite catchphrase goes something like "this is us...staying at home...keeping away from one another...this is us". It's undoubtedly well-meaning and designed to affirm people in their persistence in observing pandemic-related restrictions. But, there is something desperately sad in it because this is actually not us – it is not who we are, it is what we have had to endure in a bid to thwart this deadly pestilence. It is what has been forced upon us by circumstance and regulation.

Burying
Nowhere is this more acutely felt than when it comes to burying our dead, and nowhere else is there more piercing need for a rethink from policy-makers on the handful of people permitted at funerals. Families who are burying loved ones are being denied even the consolation of their spouse at their side during a funeral due to the rigid restriction on mourners.

“There is also the fact that even for a moderately-sized family, a limit of ten people means that some of the children of other close relatives of the person who has died may be asked to stay at home”

As Catholics, we believe in a profound unity between the living and the dead. We also believe that this life matters and the human relationships we form on earth matter since our faith is both a call to live in this world as well as to look forward to the world that is to come.

Reminds

It is captured beautifully in the funeral rite when the priest reminds mourners: “My brothers and sisters, we believe that all the ties of friendship and affection which knit us as one throughout our lives do not unravel with death”.

In the profound experience of death, family matters, the human relationships we form that sustain us throughout our earthly pilgrimage matter and - crucially - marriage matters. In fact, Catholics believe that the moral and sacramental significance of the two-in-one-flesh bodily unity is foundational to the marital form of love. Yet, if it breaches the limit two people who share the same bed are not allowed to sit beside one another in an enormous church at a time of tremendous grief.

Love

The desire to love and be loved is the deepest need of our being. We long to be known, accepted, and cherished by another. Of course, only God can give us the unconditional love and acceptance that we desire. Yet, he has created marriage to mirror this supreme love on earth.

This has profound implications for how we understand the relationship between a married couple both theologically and practically. It goes against everything we believe about marriage as Catholics to treat a couple as two distinct units, particularly at a time when they need the love and affection they share more than most to help them navigate grief and loss.

“There has been much talk in recent days about the damaging effects on mental health of the pandemic restrictions.”

There is also the fact that even for a moderately-sized family, a limit of ten people means that some of the children of other close relatives of the person who has died may be asked to stay at home.

Editor's Comment Michael Kelly



Cruel

This is cruel at a time when people need kindness and support. It is a cruelty that is compounded if one leaves the funeral and goes to the supermarket across the road and sees – perhaps – hundreds of people doing their grocery shopping under one roof. Or, what of what the Government has decided to call 'elite' sports where 30 players from 30 different homes are kicking a football around a pitch for 70 minutes while families are told they must limit attendance at funerals to ten?

Mental health

There has been much talk in recent days about the damaging effects on mental health of the pandemic restrictions. When the pandemic subsides – as subsides it undoubtedly will – people will remember the cruelty of not being at funerals more than missing the county championship. There does need to be limits, of course, but a limit of 10 takes no account of the size of Irish families or of the

importance of obsequies in our tradition.

“In the profound experience of death, family matters, the human relationships we form that sustain us throughout our earthly pilgrimage matter and - crucially - marriage matters”

There should be flexibility here and so long as physical distancing can be observed, more close family members ought to be allowed to attend a funeral. With indications that this current lockdown will go on for months, kindness and compassion needs to win out over rigid legalism.

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New archbishop calls for laity to join him in revitalising Church

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“I have no problem with somebody coming in and telling me everything is wrong. That's fair enough, but then come in and tell me a little bit as to how we could fix some of these things,” he said.

He insisted that: “No one with ideas or energy is going to be let go without [me] asking as Jesus did to the rich man, ‘What more can you give?’” Dr Farrell said.

The archbishop-elect, who will take up office on February 2, said his plan is to work collaboratively with laypeople, priests and religious. “I'm not going to be doing radical things just alone, as a lone ranger. I'll

try and listen. That's very important to listen to people, to hear what they're actually saying and to hear what the options are. And then we try and make a decision together,” he said.

Rather than pushing a predetermined outcome, Dr Farrell underlined the fact that he is keen to hear from people who have ideas for the future of the Church in Dublin. “I certainly will be involving anybody I can that have ideas and that has energy. They'll certainly be welcomed by me with open arms.

“I couldn't see why anybody would refuse to have people help who have talents,” he said.



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WHATEVER
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‘Evil One’ exploiting Covid-19 to bring about fear says famed Dublin exorcist

Jason Osborne

Veteran exorcist Fr Pat Collins has warned that the ‘Evil One’ may be exploiting a lack of faith to bring about a surge of fear and anxiety during the pandemic. This comes on the back of recent research which shows that Irish people are amongst the most afraid of contracting Covid-19 in Europe, alongside respondents in southern Europe.

“I think that there’s a possibility that the Evil One is exploiting the current situation to bring people into fear and anxiety”

The famous Vincentian priest and author said that the primary source of the fear is a fear of death, which Scripture links to the devil.

“He’s the father of death, because obviously death came into the world through the temptations of the Evil One. I think that there’s a possibility that the Evil One is exploiting the current situation to bring people into fear and anxiety,” Fr Collins said.

Fear

This heightened fear of death is linked to a lack of a sense of meaning, and to a lack of belief in eternal life, Fr Collins suggested. “There’s a very poignant line in the second chapter of Ephesians, and St Paul is talking about unbelievers. He says: “They live without hope and without God in the world”. Now, it would strike me that as Ireland has secularised and as people have parted company with formal religion, that

many of them have less of a relationship with God and have less hope of eternal life,” Fr Collins said.

Movement

This movement has been noticed by Fr Collins, who said that one of their parishes in Dublin has seen a noticeable drop in people looking for church funerals, despite the fact that the “vast majority” of people who die in the parish are Catholic.

The pandemic has exposed the fact that the “anchor” of the Faith came loose over the years, and that people are “adrift upon a sea of relativity”, and that death has become more scary as a result.



Fr Pat Collins

He noted that an increase in anxiety is the result of depending on “here and now” rewards as opposed to eternal meaning and life, and this has been exacerbated by recent events.

Quoting St Francis de Sales, Fr Collins said that “next to sin, the greatest enemy of the human soul is anxiety. That it’s very corrosive.

“An increase in anxiety is the result of depending on “here and now” rewards as opposed to eternal meaning and life”

“It leads people to be more narrow-minded and less open. It’s a very detrimental and corrosive emotion, and the only thing that will dislodge anxiety as the basic deep-down emotion is the sense of ultimate belonging,” Fr Collins said, a trust in God and his providence.

NFL star retires on feast of St Sebastian

Jason Osborne

NFL quarterback Philip Rivers is set to begin the next stage of his career as the head football coach at St Michael Catholic High School in Fairhope, Alabama.

The former Indianapolis Colts star announced his retirement on January 20, the feast day of St Sebastian, the patron saint of athletes. “Every year, January 20 is a special and emotional day. It is St Sebastian’s feast day,” Mr Rivers said upon announcing his retirement.

Principal of St Michael Faustin Weber said, “His football credentials are impeccable – by any objective measure, he’s up there with the greatest NFL quarterbacks of all time. But what we’re most excited about is we believe he’ll promote our mission to form ‘scholars, leaders and disciples of Jesus Christ’ in a powerful, credible way.”

“He’s devout in his faith, he’s a good father and husband, and he’ll be a great leader and example to our young men,” Mr Weber said.

Mr Rivers attributed the happiness of his sporting years to God in his announcement.

A footballer’s call to charity



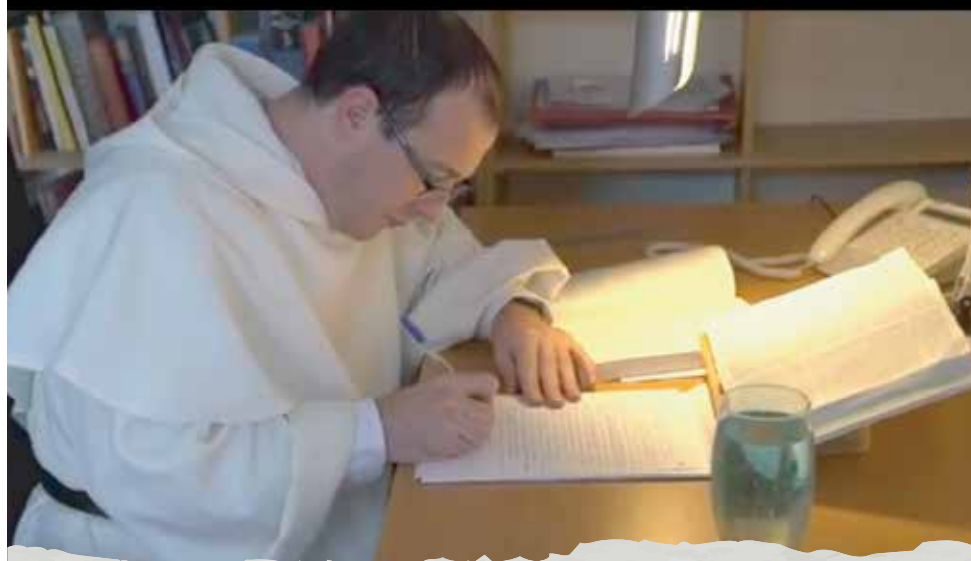
Former Dublin footballer Michael Darragh Macauley is pictured with two Syrian boys in Iraq where he visited refugees being helped by Concern Worldwide last year. The charity congratulated its ambassador Mr Macauley on his sporting career after he announced his retirement from inter-county football last week. Photo: Gavin Douglas of Concern Worldwide.



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- St. Thomas Aquinas

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Kenya president praises selfless service of Irish Loreto Sisters

Ruadhán Jones

President Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya has commended the Loreto Sisters for a century of selfless service to humanity and outstanding contribution to his country's growth.

The six founders arrived in Kenya from Ireland in 1921 and established the Loreto Eastern Africa Province which has been able to initiate 24 educational institutions in three African countries, 21 in Kenya, two in Tanzania and one in Ghana.

The Irish sisters were Dolores Stafford, Raphael Gordon, Borgia O'Shaughnessy, Catherine Beauvais, Francis Teresa Murphy and Sixtus Naughton.

The president noted that through the Loreto Sisters' Christian ministry and investments in education, social ministry and other acts of mercy, they have transformed the lives of many people and made Kenya a better country.

Alumni

"The contribution of Loreto Sisters in our nation is inked in their alumni, which include a president, bishops, scientists, leaders in government, academia, legal minds, captains of industry, entrepreneurs, sportsmen and women," Mr Kenyatta said.

"Loreto's training has contributed immeasurably to the creative and performance arts, to politics, governance, religion and theology, environmental

protection, community service, among many fields," he added.

"As a child, having spent two years in Loreto, I was eager to learn. My childhood foundation gave me the spirit of hard work, honesty, duty to my country, respect for others and, most of all, the fear of God," the president said.

The Head of State spoke at the weekend at the Loreto Mary Ward Centre in Karen, Nairobi County when he joined Catholics during Mass celebrated to commemorate 100 years of the Loreto Eastern Africa Province.

As part of the centenary celebrations, the president also announced government approval and support for the construction of a new Loreto School in Kilifi to accommodate 500 girls.



President Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya.

Faith, hope and love...



Carmel Gibbons from Aughagower and Michael McGreal from Westport pictured in St Patrick's Church, Aughagower after they were married in the presence of six guests.

Staff area introduced in Castlerea chapel 'temporary'

Chai Brady

The governor of Castlerea Prison has moved to reassure people that using the back of the prison's chapel as a staff area is a "temporary" measure in order to accommodate social distancing due to the pandemic.

After concerns were raised anonymously to this paper a spokesperson for the prison said there had been some couches and chairs moved into the back of the church in order for staff to comply with social distancing restrictions while a more appropriate space is being sought.

Public church services are currently suspended and the needs of the prison's faith community are being catered for through

a prison tv channel and by other means according to a spokesperson.

"As a temporary measure they are using a little part of the back of the church for staff to go there to unwind from the stress of work," a spokesman for the prison said.

"The church itself, nothing has changed, it's still fit for service. There are no positive cases among staff or prisoners at the moment.

"There's a big emphasis being put on staff social distancing and things like that because that's the highest risk, staff coming in from the community and obviously bringing it in to the prison. So we're very adamant to have these measures in place."

It was confirmed that the Eucharist has been removed from the tabernacle.

Charities warn of post-lockdown homeless 'avalanche'

» Continued from Page 1

need to be a part of the new normal when we have a new normal," he said.

Paul Sheehan of Cork Simon echoed the need for the Government to continue to help people keep their accommodation and to tackle high rents. He said the number of new people seeking assistance from Cork Simon "reduced to a trickle" during the pandemic due to Government measures to keep people in their homes.

Mr Sheehan said: "The vast majority of people using our services are depending on that private rented market to exit homelessness and for the last few years they've been pretty much been locked out of that market just because it's so expensive and costs continue to rise."

See pages 17-22.

Senator Mullen proposes national collection for mother and baby home redress

Jason Osborne

Senator Rónán Mullen has called for a national voluntary collection to be organised which would allow individuals and families to contribute to a redress package for pregnant women and children who spent time in mother and baby or county homes.

Speaking in the Seanad about the Report, Senator Mullen said Judge Murphy's report painted "a sad and sobering picture" of how the State and wider society, including institutions run by religious orders, failed women and children.

"We should perhaps consider, as we ponder the case for redress, and how it might be organised and who should contribute, whether it would be appropriate to have some kind of National Voluntary Contribution as part of a redress package to reflect the social and community dimension to this story, along with Church and State contributions," he said.

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Tribute to a great scientist – en route to sainthood?

It is so welcome, and so fitting, that Pope Francis has just declared the late French geneticist Jérôme Lejeune as 'venerable'. Prof. Lejeune, who discovered the chromosome that causes Down Syndrome, was surely a saintly man, as well as a very distinguished scientist.

Before he identified this chromosomal difference in 1958, the condition was called 'Mongolism'. He renamed it with the medical name 'Trisomy 21' (the condition is caused by an extra copy of this chromosome). In English, 'Mongolism' became Down Syndrome, after the Victorian physician John Langdon Down who had first described its appearance.

“He thought it tragic that because they were born with a chromosomal disability that they should not be permitted to live”

It was an anguish to Jerome Lejeune that the medical identification of Trisomy 21, which he hoped would help babies with the condition, was then so widely used to promote the termination of pregnancies through pre-natal diagnosis.

I met Prof. Lejeune when he visited London in the 1980s and did a rather brief interview with him between his speaking engagements. He was a courteous and charming person, but what I remember most vividly was his evident feeling of care for Down Syndrome people. He thought it tragic that



Mary Kenny



Prof. Jérôme Lejeune who died in 1994.

because they were born with a chromosomal disability that they should not be permitted to live. I could see that he felt a real sense of distress that his scientific work was used for this purpose. He was a smoker and when speaking about this subject, he reached for another cigarette to allay his pained feelings.

Institutions

Prof. Lejeune, who was married with five children, was garlanded with honours and awards from universities and scientific institutions. But there are grounds to believe he was deprived of the Nobel prize because of the position he took on supporting the Down Syndrome children, for whom he felt such a tender sense of protectiveness and care.

● One of President Joe Biden's first executive orders was to ban all discrimination against transgender students in educational institutions (and subsequently in the military).

Most fair-minded people are opposed to discrimination, but Mr Biden's executive order on this issue is controversial, and may be problematic: "Children should be able to learn without worrying whether they will be denied access to the restroom, the locker room or school sport." Feminists, and women in sport, are concerned that in allowing individuals who were born males access to women's facilities – and competing with those born females in sport – this will rebound against women. A hashtag #Bidenerasedwomen emerged to make this point.

All human persons are deserving of respect, and those with body dysmorphia – convinced that they were born into the wrong sex – should be included. Yet the fact remains that a sportsperson born male will almost always have a physical advantage over those born female, even after a sex change. That is why most sports are segregated by sex (with the noted exception, as Princess Anne once drily pointed out, "those that involve a horse").

Football teams, rugby teams, baseball teams, or any other team do not mingle men and women equally – because of different physical capacity and musculature. Even tennis 'mixed doubles' must be composed of a male and female on each side, to balance out the comparative physical differences. That, however, is not recognised in the new president's executive order, which seems to favour political 'wokeness' before women's best interest.

Little optimism over lockdown alcoholism

A report in Britain last weekend indicated that during lockdown mental health problems were up by 40%: most people were eating more and piling on the weight: and most people were drinking more too.

I dread to think of the increases in alcoholism we may see as an outcome of lockdown. Alcoholics, who have few enough sources of help for their addiction, can't go to AA meetings during present conditions – and Zooming negates the crucial principle of anonymity. Neither can they do the things that alcohol counsellors often advise when the craving for liquor becomes overwhelming – go for a drive, go for a long walk somewhere distracting, go out for a coffee with a friend, go to the cinema.

When I was quitting

alcohol back in the 1990s, the cinema was my saviour. The point about alcohol is that it is a form of escape – it is getting you out of your own head and into a fantasy world. Whenever I felt the urge for that gin-and-tonic, I'd take myself off to see a movie.

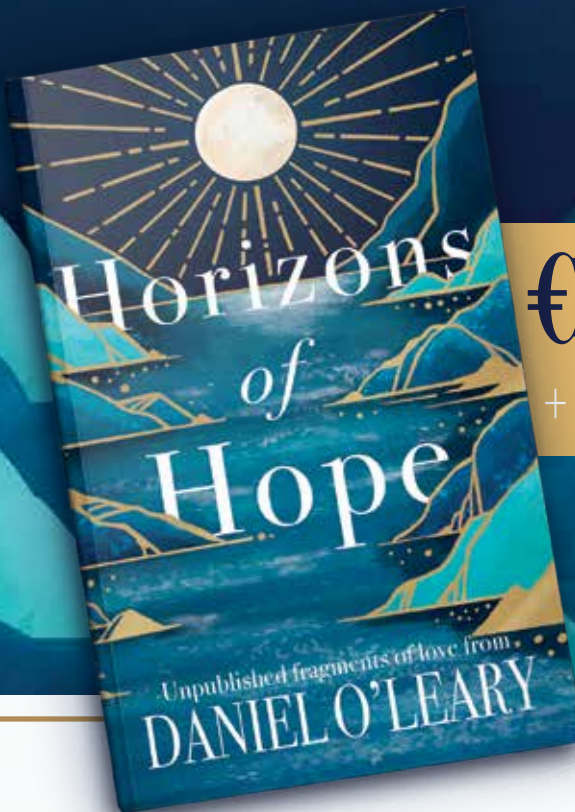
Yes, you can see a movie online these days: but a computer screen is not the same as getting out of your own environment.

I am, nowadays, involved with an alcohol addiction problem within my own family, and it has got much worse with lockdown. There are no outside agencies to help, and the alcoholic broods, ever more intensely, on the demons tormenting him, reaching for the only remedy he knows – the bottle. The sorrow and the pity are inexpressible.

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Pandemic thwarting human trafficking – missionary priest

Chai Brady

The pandemic has “stymied” human trafficking efforts due to heightened restrictions on travel, according to an Irish missionary priest who heads a charity tackling the issue in Vietnam.

Human trafficking

CEO of Dasatt, Franciscan Fr Sean Cassin, told *The Irish Catholic* that the recent convictions of several Irish people in relation to human traf-

ficking from Vietnam exposes the “horrific” reality of what is happening.

However, he said one of the positives of the pandemic is that “because of the coronavirus, trafficking efforts are really stymied, my people in Vietnam are saying there isn’t much evidence of either missing persons or people seeking to migrate across to Europe”.

The people found responsible for the deaths of 39 Vietnamese immigrants who were discovered suffocated in a sealed refrigeration container in Essex last October were sentenced

over the weekend.

Four Irishmen were among those who jailed by a court in London, three for manslaughter. They received sentences from seven to 20 years based on their varying levels of involvement.

Fr Cassin said: “It was horrific to be seeing it and hearing more of the details about the end hours of the young people that died in it, and it actually confirmed the level that which this was actually a coordinated, trafficking effort and the extent of the coordination and planning of it.

“For me there was a relief that here is bla-

tant evidence of the levels of human smuggling and trafficking that are actually happening, most of us are incredulous that children could actually be treated like that. I’m glad that this is getting another airing, I’m glad that it’s been exposed, now people are more willing to say this is a reality.”

The victims were 28 men, eight women and three children, two of them aged 15. The judge, Nigel Sweeney, said the victims died “excruciatingly slow deaths” of asphyxia and hyperthermia, or overheating.

Bishop recommends ‘Battle of Britain’ approach for Irish pharma

Ruadhán Jones

Bishop Kevin Doran of Elphin Diocese likened tackling the pandemic to the “Battle of Britain” and questioned if Irish pharmaceutical companies could make use of production facilities to stimulate vaccine production.

Bishop Doran said that “every expert here is saying that all of this depends on the availability of supply” and that production could be focused on this, similar to manufacturing during the Battle of Britain in WWII.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Bishop Doran highlighted that the World Trade Organisation (WTO) provides that coun-

tries are authorised without the consent of the patent holder to manufacture essential medicines for their own domestic use and for the uses of countries not able to provide it for themselves.

“I’m aware that the pharmaceutical industry in Ireland is fairly strong as an element of the economy,” Bishop Doran said. “It struck me that it was something we could do as a service to developing countries and countries not able to produce or buy vaccines for themselves.

“Wouldn’t it be great if, given the substantial capacity we have in Ireland, it might be possible to identify one or more plants that could be utilised for this purpose – to serve the common good of humanity.”

Irish Olympian Jerry Kiernan remembered as man of faith

Staff reporter

Irish Olympian Jerry Kiernan will be remembered as a man of “great integrity and faith”, according to Fr Tom O’Keeffe of Cabinteely parish.

“Everyone who left St Brigid’s Boys school would say Jerry was a tremendous influence on their lives, a man of great integrity and deep faith indeed too,” Fr O’Keeffe said.

Mr Kiernan’s principal at St Brigid’s Boy’s School, Donal O’Meara, also remembered his “empathy and charity” throughout his teaching

career and described him as a “modern Catholic” and “spiritual man”.

“He used to go to John Delaney for shirts that he sent out through contacts he had in Africa to children out there. He was always there to do anything for charity,” Mr O’Meara said.

Mr Kiernan died on Thursday, January 21, aged just 67 and is best remembered for his top 10 finish at the 1984 Olympics. He spent 30 years teaching at St Brigid’s Boy’s school, Foxrock.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Death of Bishop Pat O’Donoghue

Bishop Pat O’Donoghue, formerly priest and auxiliary Bishop of the Diocese of Westminster and Bishop Emeritus of Lancaster, died on the morning of January 24.

He died at home in the Nazareth House in Mallow, Co. Cork, where he had been living since 2013.

Bishop O’Donoghue was born at Mourne Abbey, Co. Cork, in 1934 and requested to be buried there near to his parents.

May he rest in peace.

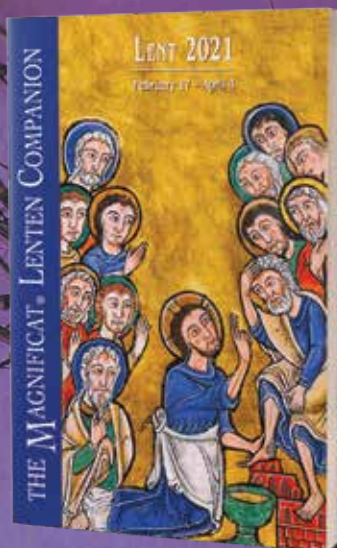
Smiles, cake and birthday wishes



Bishop Fintan Monaghan of Killaloe and Ennis parish sacristan Rebecca, share smiles and cake as they celebrate their birthdays, Sunday 23 January in Ennis.

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Martin Mansergh

The View



Britain is stuck with Brexit and it won't make their country great again anytime soon

Who America's leader is matters to people around the world. With President Joe Biden there is now a Christian gentleman in the White House, whose ambition after all the turmoil of recent times will be to do what is right, working as much as possible with others at home and abroad. If he and his party are wise, they will analyse past shortcomings, and try to address the alienation that creates risks for democracy.

Course

The Republican Party will probably adjust their course. The revival of bipartisan co-operation that existed in the 1980s between President Ronald Reagan and House Speaker Tip O'Neill would be welcome. For all the criticisms of the recent past, US institutions held up, in stark contrast to systems where opposition is promptly repressed. In democracies, radical populism from the right or left may arouse strong partisan enthusiasm in the short term, but it is off-putting to others and rarely endures. Support for Donald Trump and for Brexit drew from some of the same sources, the difference being that Britain is stuck with Brexit, which is unlikely to make the country great again anytime soon. 'Buccaneering' is a positive gloss on piracy, which will be strongly resisted by the EU. As James Murdoch, son of Rupert, put it ten days after the mob invaded the Capitol, media proprietors are as culpable as politicians who "propagate lies" and leave the public believing a falsehood. Restoration of the integrity of public discourse is vital.

President Biden is only the second American President of an Irish Catholic background. President John F. Kennedy gave a strong, much-needed boost to national self-confidence, when he visited Ireland in June 1963. President Biden has already done Ireland a great service, when prior to taking up office he expressed strong opposition to the mooted breach of an international agreement, the Irish Protocol, designed to prevent a hard border



following Brexit, by making clear that it would preclude a UK-US trade deal. His pledge to back a process that would regularise the position of undocumented immigrants is also encouraging, though experience advises caution, given the legislative obstacles.

It would be wise to be realistic about how much President Biden's evident pride in his Irish Catholic background can achieve. American and EU economic interests, including Irish ones, will not always coincide. In the US, religion matters greatly to many people, but, when it comes to public policy, there is also a strong separation of Church and state, given the country's diversity. The US return to international agencies and agreements has been welcomed by our Minister for Foreign Affairs Simon Coveney, speaking to the IEAA last Friday, even if aspects of this may disappoint the Church. The president's predecessor in his final weeks demonstrated his strong support for the death penalty by expediting some long-pending executions, which is hard to reconcile with holistic support for pro-life values.

Ireland too is faced with the contradiction of reconciling with present religious convictions the little value too frequently attached to infants' and small children's lives that happened in Church-run mother and baby homes. One root cause of the problem was the insistence of the Irish Parliamentary Party in 1901 and previously, but carried over, like much

else, into post-independence Ireland, that since no scandal could occur in Magdalen and similar-run institutions they should not be subject to inspection or be accountable to the civil authorities. While the ideal was to create a model Christian society, what Eamon de Valera called "a spiritual empire", it had to be based on more than outward conformity and sweeping difficult human situations out of sight.

Pandemic

One side-effect of the pandemic has been to make talks and conference proceedings much more widely accessible online at home and abroad by not requiring a physical presence. Last week, I listened to a talk organised by the King's School Canterbury which I attended in the early 1960s by David Alton, a member of the House of Lords, since being appointed by John Major, and whose mother was Irish. He was a Liberal MP, but left his party over its insistence on whipped support for unrestricted abortion, including late in pregnancy. He made the case that conscientious objection should be respected, but also that disagreement on fundamental principle should strive to be respectful, citing many public debates he had with Germaine Greer, whom he regards as a friend. He had a telling anecdote about Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, who once replied to a question, "Where was God at Auschwitz?", by retorting "Where was man?"

Many US presidents have been of Ulster Presbyterian stock, but that aspect is rarely mentioned, and not made much use of. The reason probably is that

the spirit of American independence to which they contributed is difficult to match with the staunch British and unionist identity today of the community they are descended from.

Ancestors

America, and especially Irish-Americans, many of whose ancestors like Mr Kennedy's and President Biden's emigrated in the Famine era, played an indispensable role in forging an independent Ireland, but also a decisive role in the peace process and the modern Irish economy, where America accounts for 70% of inward investment. Wealthy backers of the peace process in the 1990s, mostly Republican Party supporters, would have loved the opportunity

to support a peacefully reunited Ireland and help make a success of it, but it was not their decision.

In 100 years, the relative economic performance of Ireland and Northern Ireland has been reversed. It is to be hoped that an open debate about the future will be possible not just between but within communities without compromising anyone's personal safety. Under the Good Friday Agreement, everyone in Northern Ireland can choose to be Irish or British, or both. Northern Ireland was a unionist creation, but people from more than one political and religious tradition, inside and outside of Ulster, have long contributed to making an independent Ireland that re-envisioned could work for everyone on the island.

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America's bishops must challenge Joe Biden when it is necessary



It would be a failure of moral witness if the Church did not point to policies at odds with the Catholic Faith, writes David Quinn

On the morning of his inauguration as president of the United States, Joe Biden attended Mass. He carries a set of rosary beads on him that belonged to his late son, Beau, who died of cancer in 2015. President Biden is, without question, a personally devout man, unlike his predecessor, Donald Trump.

On-demand

But he is also a supporter of policies that are at total odds with his Church. For example, he supports abortion-on-demand. A few days after being sworn in as president, he and his vice-president, Kamala Harris, reiterated their support for *Roe v Wade*, the 1973 Supreme Court ruling that forced a very permissive abortion regime on all 50 US states.

One of the first things he did on taking office was to sign an executive order that greatly advances the transsexual agenda. Mr Biden wants men who say they are women to be able to play women's sports, go into women's changing rooms, toilets, prisons and women's shelters.

He believes all a person has to do is declare themselves a member of the opposite sex for it to be so, and the government must then go about facilitating this regardless of its effects.

How would Joe Biden, a devout Catholic in his private life, justify these things? He would probably say what some of our politicians say, namely that he leaves his personal beliefs at the door of his office and governs for everyone.

This is a cop-out, however, because his policies must be informed by some moral



Mr Biden and his wife Jill pray during Mass at the Cathedral of St Matthew the Apostle in Washington on the morning of his inauguration. Photo: CNS

viewpoint, and no moral viewpoint is held by everyone. So why dump his Catholicism at the door of his office, and not all moral beliefs?

He clearly believes in the right to choose and that this is more important than the right to life. Not everyone agrees. Far from it. He has made a moral choice in favour of 'personal autonomy'. He has not left that belief at the door of his office.

“These principles are rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the social teachings of his Church”

To coincide with the inauguration of Mr Biden, the head of the US Catholic bishops' conference, Archbishop Jose Gomez of Los Angeles archdiocese, issued a well-considered statement about the attitude Catholics ought to take towards Joe Biden, and politics in general.

He prayed that God would grant President Biden the wisdom to govern well. He then reminded Catholics that the Church is above partisan politics.

He said that when the bishops speak on issues in

American public life, “we try to guide consciences, and we offer principles. These principles are rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the social teachings of his Church. Jesus Christ revealed God's plan of love for creation and revealed the truth about the human person, who is created in God's image, endowed with God-given dignity, rights and responsibilities, and called to a transcendent destiny”.

He explained that those principles “do not align neatly with the political categories of left or right”.

Concerns

Archbishop Gomez referred to a document from the American bishops called *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, which addresses a wide range of concerns, including abortion, euthanasia, the death penalty, immigration, racism, poverty, care for the environment, criminal justice reform, economic development, and international peace.

But then Archbishop Gomez turned his attention to the issues of abortion and the family. Acknowledging that Joe Biden is America's first Catholic president since John Fitzgerald Kennedy, he expressed concern that “our new president has pledged to pursue certain policies that would advance moral evils and threaten human life and dignity, most seriously in the

areas of abortion, contraception, marriage, and gender. Of deep concern is the liberty of the Church and the freedom of believers to live according to their consciences.”

“In a tweet he said it was ‘ill-considered’ and issued without proper consultation”

He said it would be a failure of moral witness not to point these things out.

The statement read: “as pastors, the nation's bishops are given the duty of proclaiming the Gospel in all its truth and power, in season and out of season, even when that teaching is inconvenient or when the Gospel's truths run contrary to the directions of the wider society and culture.”

There are reports that the Vatican did not like the statement.

Pope Francis himself said he prayed that President Biden's decisions “will be guided by a concern for building a society marked by authentic justice and freedom, together with unflinching respect for the rights and dignity of every person, especially the poor, the vulnerable and those who have no voice”.



Joe Biden is sworn in as US president. Photo: CNS

But one of America's most influential prelates, Cardinal Blaise Cupich of Chicago directly criticised the Archbishop Gomez statement, which was issued on behalf of the US bishops as a whole.

In a tweet he said it was “ill-considered” and issued without proper consultation. He hinted at tensions among the American bishops over politics.

The reference to “moral evils” seems to have caused most offence, although Cardinal Cupich did not directly reference this.

But even if, at a stretch, Archbishop Gomez should have waited until another day to challenge President Biden, it does have to be done.

It would be extremely remiss on the part of bishops to simply ignore the fact that a Catholic president is such a strong backer of abortion and is promoting a view of gender

and the family so at odds with that of his own Church.

Moral leadership

To say nothing, or else to offer only mealy-mouth opposition, would be a failure of moral leadership. Joe Biden might be a devout Catholic in his personal life, but precisely on account of that fact, many Catholics, and non-Catholics for that matter, might end up believing that it acceptable for a Catholic to promote and advocate for abortion, when it obviously is not.

America's bishops will have to walk their usual delicate political line over the next four years, as they did during the Donald Trump years, supporting what they can support, and opposing what they must oppose. They cannot be silent simply because Joe Biden goes to Mass.

Christian Persecution in Pakistan



Conn McNally

Christians are the most persecuted religious group in the world. Most people are not aware of this fact, partly because of the lack of media reporting. One country where Christians face continuous persecution is Pakistan. Christians make up a small minority of Pakistan's population, around 1-2% of the population. Pakistan has over two hundred million people, which means there are millions of Pakistani Christians. Life can be extremely difficult for these Christians, who face discrimination daily and often fear for their lives.

Recently, one story from Pakistan did manage to break into national and international media. This was the case of Asia Bibi. Asia is a Catholic woman from Punjab in Pakistan. A mother of five, Asia worked as a farm labourer and was married to a local Catholic man. She frequently faced pressure at work to convert to Islam but refused. It was under these circumstances that trumped-up allegations were brought against Asia that she had committed blasphemy. Pakistan's blasphemy laws are often used against religious minorities. Those found guilty can be sentenced to death.

Trial

Asia was brought to trial at a court in Punjab, was found guilty of blasphemy and sentenced to death in 2010. A mother being sentenced to death over obviously trumped-up charges rightfully caused widespread condemnation abroad and in Pakistan itself. An appeal was lodged. Asia was not without supporters in Pakistan. Most notably these supporters included the Governor of Punjab, Salman Taseer (a Muslim) and the national Religious Minorities Minister, Shahbaz Bhatti (a Catholic). Both men were assassinated in separate incidents in 2011 for the support they gave Asia Bibi. Asia was to spend eight years on death row. Finally, in October 2018, Asia Bibi was acquitted by Pakistan's Supreme Court. Her ordeal was not over. Mass protests followed the acquittal, demanding that Asia be hung for blasphemy. Asia was forced to go into hiding before she claimed asylum abroad. Asia's lawyer also had to flee Pakistan after the acquittal.

Unfortunately, Asia Bibi's case is not particularly unique. There are currently approximately eighty individuals on death row in Pakistan for blasphemy, a disproportionate number of whom are religious minorities including Christians. The legal system in Pakistan is used in other ways to persecute Christians. One of the most distressing trends to emerge in Pakistan in recent years is the kidnapping and forced marriage of teenage girls from religious minorities, including Christian girls. These girls are forced to convert to Islam. This means the



Asia Bibi. Photo: Aid to the Church in Need.

courts are far less likely to find in favour of the girl's family if the case is ever brought to court, as the court will not want the girl to revert to her previous religion and leave Islam. These cases are often decided using Islamic legal principles, using the hadiths as the basis for many decisions. This obviously puts non-Muslims at a disadvantage, even when just considering the fact Christians and Hindus would be unfamiliar with Islamic legal principles.

“Asia was brought to trial at a court in Punjab, was found guilty of blasphemy and sentenced to death in 2010”

Over the last year, several of these cases involving catholic girls have received reasonable attention from Christian news agencies. The first case involved a 14-year-old girl called Maria Shahbaz from Faisalabad in Punjab. In April 2020, Maria

was abducted at gunpoint by several armed men. After being taken, Maria was forced to marry one of her captors, Mohamad Nakash. She was also forced into signing a statement that she had converted to Islam. Maria's family, wishing to have their daughter returned, brought the case to court. The case came to the High Court in Lahore, who found that Maria was lawfully married to her abductor and had converted to Islam. This is obviously shocking and horrifying.

Maria managed to escape from captivity herself. She then rubbished the claims made by her captors. Maria was not voluntarily married; in fact, she was raped. She had also not converted to Islam and had remained steadfast in the Catholic Faith. Maria was forced to go into hiding. Maria took her “husband” to court to try to have the marriage annulled. Her kidnapper did not turn up to court last September. Even if the court case is successful, Maria and her family will likely have to leave Pakistan if they wish to live in safety. Maria will be regarded by many as an apostate

“There are currently approximately eighty individuals on death row in Pakistan for blasphemy, a disproportionate number of whom are religious minorities including Christians”

from Islam, which will put her life and her family's lives in danger. Maria is currently in hiding and is under constant police protection.

Abducted

This is not an isolated case. It is estimated in Pakistan every year that around 1,000 Christian and Hindu women and girls are abducted and in forced into marriages with Muslim men. Another one of these cases that is still ongoing is that of 13-year-old Catholic Arzoo Raja from Karachi. The teenage girl had previously served as an altar server and was kidnapped in October 2020 while playing outside her home. Like in the case of Maria, Arzoo was married to a Muslim man (44-year-old Syed Ali Azhar) and forced to convert to Islam. The family called the police. The police called into Syed Ali Azhar's home and had a friendly cup of tea with him before calling to the parents' house. Once there, they immediately asked to see Arzoo's birth certificate and other documents. It was evident they were not interested in making things any easier for Arzoo's family. In a more positive development, the family was given support by elected officials both on the state and national level. The case was brought to court, and thankfully the court did declare the marriage to be invalid. It was ordered for Arzoo to be transferred to a shelter. Her alleged conversion to Islam is putting obstacles in her returning

home. When her family meet Arzoo, she says that she wants to go home and has not converted to Islam. When in court, Arzoo declares that she is 18 years old and has willingly converted to Islam. She is clearly being pressured in what she says in court and fears what might happen if she tells the court the truth.

Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) has worked in Pakistan for a long time. Like in other parts of the world, ACN works in partnership with the local Church. In the specific case of Pakistan, ACN works closely with the Catholic bishops' National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP), which works with released Christian prisoners and provides aid to their families. ACN is paying the legal fees in Arzoo's case and is providing support to her parents, who have lost their jobs because of the case and have also been forced to leave their home (they are currently being provided shelter by a Protestant pastor). ACN is committed not only to the financial support of these families but also to their spiritual support. For these reasons, ACN would ask you all to keep Christians of Pakistan in your prayers and specifically keep Arzoo and her family in your prayers in the coming months.

Conn McNally is a member of staff at Aid to the Church in Need Ireland.



Protests over the abduction of Arzoo. Photo: Aid to the Church in Need

Being constantly plugged in can make it difficult to hear the voice of God

The Sunday Gospel

Fr Silvester O'Flynn
OFM Cap.



Quiet Attentiveness

Last Sunday we had the dream of Jesus as he launched his mission to establish the kingdom or reign of God on earth. "The time has come and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent and believe the Good News." This meant repossessing the world from the ways by which Satan had misled people through lies and false promises.

Many scholars say that St Mark wrote his Gospel for the Christian community in Rome when the Emperor Nero began the persecution of Christians there (64AD). The most popular form of writing at that time was drama. The public reading of this Gospel, either by one voice or several, has opened up the dramatic power of Mark's writing in a way that previous scholars did not suspect. It's a drama of struggles, non-recognition of who Jesus is, and half-seeing, as when a blind man being healed described people like trees walking about. In this drama the life of Jesus seems to end in total failure when he dies with the dreadful cry, "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" End of story? There is a moment of dramatic silence. Then the Roman Centurion, seeing how Jesus died, proclaims, "In truth this man was Son of God." Finally, the divinity of Jesus is recognised. All is changed. Through the medium of drama, Mark wrote a theology of suffering, revealing the presence of God in the midst of suffering and persecution.

“Great healing and inner peace come to people who give time in prayer to developing a personal relationship with God”

The Reign of God

We continue today with Mark's Gospel, 1:21-28. Jesus began his mission by proclaiming that the reign of God would replace the reign of Satan. In the early chapters of Mark there are several exorcism stories which dramatically describe the victorious march of Jesus, like an army in battle, driving out the evil, occupying forces. In this warfare Jesus has two weapons, the light of his word and the divine power manifested in his deeds of healing. The people are impressed. "Here



is a teaching that is new, and with authority behind it: he gives orders even to unclean spirits and they obey him." The teaching of Jesus is new. He rejects the old ways of injustice, greed, violence, war, disrespect and so on. The old ways will be replaced with a religion of non-violence, mercy, compassion, truth and gentleness. Pope Francis called the mission of Jesus "a revolution of tenderness". The new way of Jesus is motivated by Christ-like love.

Be Quiet

Notice how the evil spirit threw the demented man into bodily convulsions and loud cries. By contrast, Jesus said sharply, "Be quiet." Great healing and inner peace come to people who give time in prayer to developing a personal relationship with God. It is through prayer that our inner demons are driven out. God's power is gentle. True wisdom needs no loud shouting.

“Twenty years ago, the attention span of people was 20 seconds. Five years ago, it was reduced to eight seconds”

Attentiveness

Technology has invaded the quiet areas of the mind through the mechanical amplification of noise. Many psychiatrists and neurosurgeons are very concerned about constant use of smartphones seriously damaging our attentiveness to other people. Marriage counsellors recognise that it is often a factor in the break-up of a relationship. The ability to hold concentration is also suffering.

“Astonishment expands into wonder: and wonder opens the mind to thoughts of God”

Twenty years ago, the attention span of people was 20 seconds. Five years ago, it was reduced to eight seconds. It is probably less now. Twitter, Facebook and slogans have replaced rational

debate. Whatever is not liked is called fake news. It has become the age of post-truth. In the denial of truth, lies take over, the louder the more effective. But as Jesus said, it is the devil who is the father of lies. Faced with the loud cries and convulsions of the demented man, Jesus called for quietness. Attention to God is another name for prayer.

Astonishment

Those who saw how he cured the demented man were astonished. Astonishment expands into wonder: and wonder opens the mind to thoughts of God. Science bred the expectation that everything can be measured, taken apart and controlled. But there is a shift in scientific thought in the growing awareness that everything in this world is related to everything else. Instead of divide and conquer, people are realising that it is better to unite and conquer. More and more people are taking courses in mus-

cular relaxation, breathing exercises and techniques of mental awareness, often called mindfulness. By these means they are recovering inner peace and the sense of wonder which opens up the beauty of God's creation. Beauty is a wonderful nurse to the demented mind.

“Technology has invaded the quiet areas of the mind through the mechanical amplification of noise”

Prayer

"Be still and know that I am God." God's power is strong but gentle. True wisdom avoids shouting. Be still, my soul, and rest in the Lord. His gentle power whispers to me. He offers a quiet strength which is greater than the outer frenzies and inner fretting which often possess us. May God open my eyes and ears to all that is beautiful in this world. Open my imagination to grow in wonder.

"I thank you, Lord, for the wonder of my being and the wonder of all your creation."

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



Photo: Apsatou Bagaya / Concern Worldwide.

countries – including Niger.

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

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

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

What Concern's help looks like

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

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

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

Every day becomes a terrifying battle to find food.

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

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

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

deadly effects will be felt next year too.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

Be part of a world without hunger

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

– Pope Francis

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

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

the world's poorest, most vulnerable families, they have chosen to make a lasting commitment: to be part of a world without hunger.

“I have two children and if they were in need, I would hope that somebody, somewhere would reach out to help them. With my legacy, I will be that person for somebody's loved ones – you could be too.” – Fiona, Co. Louth

To discover more about how leaving a gift in your Will transforms and saves lives, please request your complimentary copy of 'Be Part of a World Without Hunger', Concern's legacy booklet.

Inside you'll see how legacies left by people like you are helping the world's poorest people. Both today and for years to come.

The booklet also answers many of the common questions people have about leaving a gift in their Will. And explains how to start the process.

Of course requesting your free booklet does not oblige you to leave a gift, or do anything else.

“Moments of kindness shine in the darkness and give so much comfort – that's the final gift I intend to leave to the world.”

– James, Co. Wicklow

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

– Pope Francis

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

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

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



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The Church must preach the Gospel, even if that is unpopular Archbishop-elect Dermot Farrell tells **Michael Kelly**

When Dr Dermot Farrell is installed as Archbishop of Dublin next week it will be quite unlike any such episcopal installation in the capital in recent memory. The ceremony in St Mary's Pro-Cathedral on February 2 – the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord – will be behind closed doors as a result of pandemic restrictions.

But, the beauty of Church history is that there is very little that is new. Covid-19 is not the first time in the 2,000 year history of Catholicism that the Faithful have been afflicted by a plague. Archbishop-elect Farrell will be installed and take possession of his *cathedra* – the episcopal seat from which the cathedral gets its name – when he presents the letter appointing him from Pope Francis to a senior group of clergy known as the College of Consultors.

“When I think about the formation that I went through in Maynooth, the emphasis was largely on the intellectual and the spiritual”

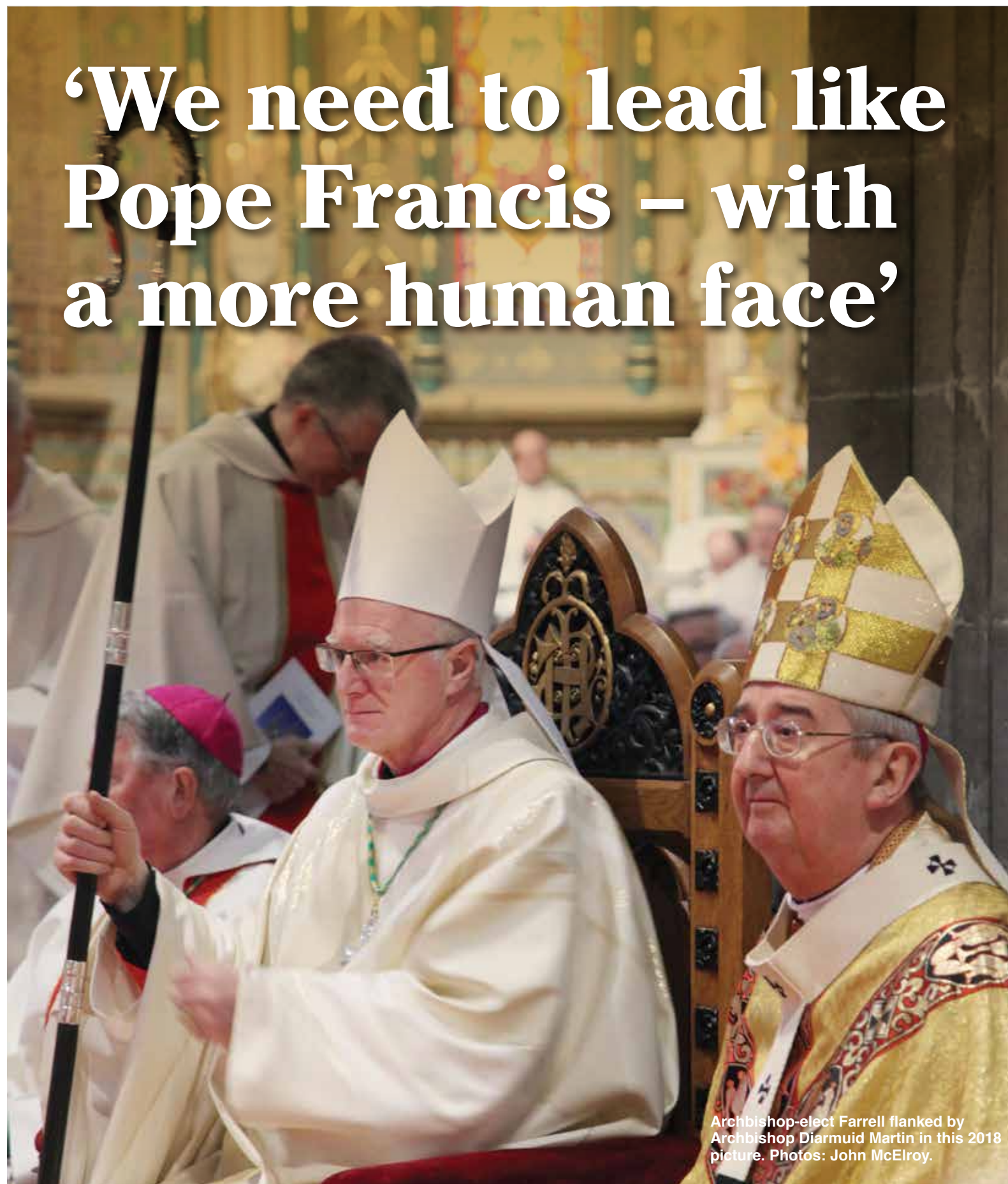
It will be a lowkey affair, but one that will mark an important milestone in the history of the country's largest diocese. Dr Diarmuid Martin was named coadjutor archbishop in Dublin in 2003 and much of his time has been marked by a series of punishing revelations of abuse and getting proper safeguarding standards in place.

From a rural background in Co. Westmeath, Archbishop-elect Farrell (66) spent summer holidays in the capital.

“From a young age Dublin has always been part of my life,” he said of his appointment.

He recalls spending time with his aunt and uncle who lived and worked in the Liberties. “They introduced me to the history and rich cultural life of the city. Dublin has always been a place of welcome for people from all over Ireland. Now it is a city of welcome for people from all over the world,” he said.

But the diocese of more than the city: its 198 parishes – rural and



Archbishop-elect Farrell flanked by Archbishop Diarmuid Martin in this 2018 picture. Photos: John McElroy.

urban – stretch across Leinster. Dr Farrell believes that “This presents distinctive challenges and opportunities. The challenges to take account of the new cultural and social contexts in which we find ourselves and in which the Gospel is proclaimed,” he said.

Different world

It is a different world to the one Dr Farrell was born into in the 1950s when Ireland was a much more instinctively Catholic country. He had many priests in his own family and it felt like a natural route to take when he left school in the early 1970s. “It was something I had considered when I was in secondary school, on and off.

“Sometimes I’d think about it, sometimes you’d put it off. It came

more and more to the fore, I suppose, as you came towards the end of your secondary school. So I said, let’s go,” he recalls.

It was a journey of discernment that would take him to ordination to the priesthood in 1980 and his first pastoral appointment as a curate in the cathedral parish of Christ the King, Mullingar. In 1985 he began postgraduate studies in the Gregorian University in Rome and was awarded a doctorate three years later for his dissertation: *The Dogmatic Foundations of Bernard Häring’s Thought on Christian Morality as a Sacramental Way of Life*.

During his final year in Rome he also served as a formation director in the Pontifical Irish College – experience that would serve him

when he was later appointed president of the national seminary St Patrick’s College, Maynooth where he first joined the teaching staff in 1989.

The untimely death of Msgr Matthew O’Donnell in 1996 left a vacancy for president of Maynooth and Dr Farrell was appointed by the bishops. It was a turbulent time at the college as Msgr O’Donnell had replaced Msgr Micheál Ledwith who fled the college in (at the time) unexplained circumstances just two years earlier.

Dismissed

Msgr Ledwith – who joined a new-age cult in the United States – was subsequently dismissed from the priesthood after allegations that he had abused a child and engaged

in inappropriate sexual behaviour with seminarians, claims he denies.

Dr Farrell recalls that the culture of Maynooth had transformed dramatically since his time as a student there in the 1970s. The focus had shifted from training to formation and St John Paul II’s landmark 1992 document *Pastores dabo vobis* (I will give you shepherds) was framing the thinking around the preparation of young men for the priesthood.

“In order that his ministry may be humanly as credible and acceptable as possible, it is important that the priest should mould his human personality in such a way that it becomes a bridge and not an obstacle for others in their meeting with Jesus Christ the Redeemer of humanity,” the Pope had written.

The document identified four pillars of formation: intellectual, spiritual, human and pastoral.

"When I think about the formation that I went through in Maynooth, the emphasis was largely on the intellectual and the spiritual – that was the case, I'm sure, for the previous 100 years," Dr Farrell recalls.

"We were overly-dependent on spiritual direction and intellectual formation. Given the number of seminarians, it was impossible to have any sort of real human formation," he says.

Formation

He believes that formation now – while underlining the vital importance of the intellectual and spiritual – is more balanced because "we came to realise more and more that the human dimension is a building block, so if the human dimension is not right, your foundation is very shaky.

"So out of all that I hope the people serving the Church in Ireland certainly should be more human and certainly more pastoral. From what I can gather working with priests who've gone through the system that is certainly the case.

“There is secularism in the country and that does weaken the Faith, God is lost in that sense and we have to speak that message in a way that's heard today”

"The Church is certainly more humble. What we need is a Church that is more human and has a more pastoral approach. When you read the Gospels, what comes across there in the way Jesus ministered to people: his compassion comes across, and these are the human things," he says.

Archbishop-elect Farrell sees the human dimension as one of the reasons people are so taken with Pope Francis.

"When I reflect on his teachings, and you read his pastoral [letters], he's talking about the care of people and Jesus was somebody who cared – who had compassion," he says.

He believes that the key thing in choosing future priests is to ensure that the human dimension is right. "If you build on sand, we're all too aware of what happens when the human dimension is wrong. But I think the priests we have now are very well balanced. They're the new wave that is coming to fore in the Irish Church – the new leaders. There's a different way of thinking. They're approaching pastoral ministry in a different way. And that promises to me to be a better future for the Church, and they will have a better relationship with the people that they serve – their humanity comes across," he insists.

Dr Farrell comes to Dublin in the wake of significant defeats for the Church's moral teaching on issues on the definition of marriage and the right to life. More than three quarters of voters in the capital – many of them regular Massgoers – voted for abortion in 2018.

He describes the relationship between Church and State as "ten-



Outgoing Archbishop Diarmuid Martin lays his hands upon Archbishop-elect Farrell during his episcopal ordination in Ossory in 2018.

sive" adding that given the radical nature of the Gospel "I think it's probably good that there's a tense relationship, that's important.

"The first thing I think priests or bishops are called to do is to preach the Gospel: we're asked to make people disciples, we're asked to make people holy – and that's a fairly delicate task. In terms of trying to guide people, you're also guiding society, just not individuals.

"You look at the transformation – the cultural transformation – that's taken place in the last 20 or 30 years, it's just phenomenal. We're called to exercise ministry where there's huge culture transformation.

"There is secularism in the country and that does weaken the faith, God is lost in that sense and we have to speak that message in a way that's heard today.

"And it's not always heard. It is difficult to be heard in the society in which we live in, but we can't shun that responsibility," he believes.

Euthanasia

Central to that responsibility, Dr Farrell insists is the Church having the courage to speak out and defend its teaching. I ask him about the current push in the Oireachtas to legalise euthanasia. He is emphatic: "the first thing we have to state very clearly is what the teaching of the Church is. It has to be stated very bluntly, that if it [euthanasia] comes into law



The archbishop-elect with his predecessor following his appointment in December.

at some stage, it's not only going to encourage the acceptance of assisted suicide, but it's also going to weaken the protection against what you might call 'non-consensual killing' of your vulnerable class of people. They're the people that are going to suffer if this bill was to come into law," he says.

The tone of the debate around the issue also worries the prelate. He believes that the key thing in choosing future priests is to ensure that the human dimension is right.

"When I listen to what's being said, there's almost an assumption underlying this whole thing that there is such a thing as a life without value.

"We can't accept that. Every life has a value. There is no life that is not worth living," he insists.

His own mother Carmel "was very ill for 112 days," he recalls. "Every minute of that life was valuable to her. It was worth living, it was worth having her family around.

“He believes that the key thing in choosing future priests is to ensure that the human dimension is right”

Assumption

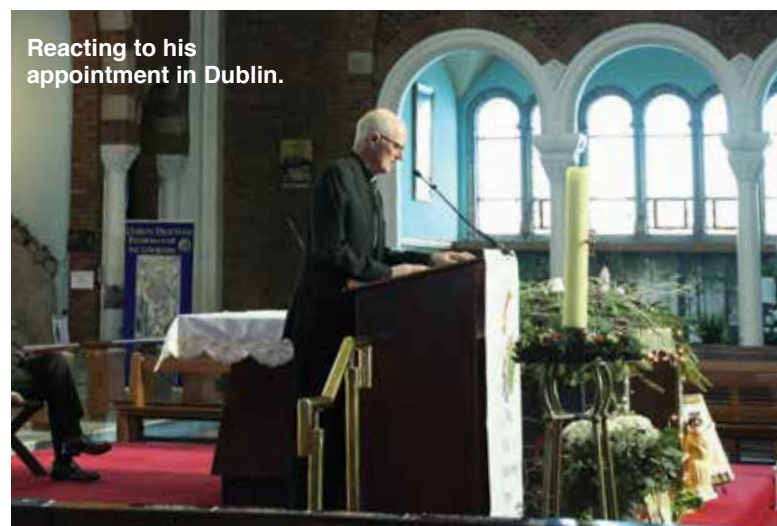
"There's a false assumption in this whole thing that life is not worth living, that inevitability erodes the very basis of legal respect and protection on the basis of equality for every human life regardless of their age, disability, competence or illness," he says.

Dr Farrell also thinks that lay-people have a duty to also speak out rather than try to leave it to bishops and priests. "The message has to be spoken very strongly. Not just by priests and bishops, but by every single person in this country. Because what politicians ultimately respond to is the views of the people.

"It's up to us [bishops] to encourage people to speak out and to push the importance of life



Archbishop-elect Farrell after his ordination as Bishop of Ossory in 2018.



which is the fundamental value that every other value is based on. If you don't have the value of life then you can't talk about other values. You can be talking about the rights to a home, or the rights to x, y, and z - but if you don't have the right to life including that end of life, you can't talk about other values," Archbishop-elect Farrell says.

He also rejects caricatures of priests as being too timid to defend the Church's teaching. My experience with priests, when they were talking about the abortion referendum, for example, was that they were not afraid to speak out.

"There are countless examples of people in the Church - not just bishops or priests - who are baptised and are speaking very proudly about their Faith: that's the thing we need to do today, we have to have the courage to speak," he says.

He passionately believes in a collaborative effort between clergy and laypeople to put the Church's voice in the public square. "Sometimes we have a form of clericalism where we reduce the Church to priests or to bishops - all of us have a responsibility as baptised

members to preach the Gospel, to be missionaries for the Gospel.

"If you profess to be a follower of Jesus Christ, then there are concrete workings out of that in terms of moral values. Priests have the courage to do it, but sometimes maybe we need to encourage the laity more. Because laypeople want to hear these things spoken about - we believe in these truths. We can't be dictated to just by popularity because sometimes doing the popular thing is not necessarily the right thing," he says.

Flashpoints

One of the flashpoints between the Church and the wider culture is the reservation of the priesthood to men alone. Dr Farrell has been characterised as expressing support for women priests since he said that this teaching is based on Tradition rather than Scripture.

"Obviously my thoughts on these issues are far more nuanced than that particular article," he says, keen to point out the necessary distinction between discussions about female deacons and the priesthood.

On the issue of deacons, Dr Farrell references the long discussions that have been going on about admitting women to this ministry which have been inconclusive.

"Basically there is a discussion - but I suppose what's required along with the discussion is the discernment. And they're not the same. Discernment is done in prayer and is the prompting of the Spirit, and ultimately it's the universal Church that will decide whether there will be female deacons, and if there are female deacons, what they will actually do," he says.

“There are countless examples of people in the Church - not just bishops or priests - who are baptised and are speaking very proudly about their Faith”

Archbishop-elect Farrell is keen to correct any misconception that he spoke in favour of the admission of women to the priesthood. "The way I always like to approach that issue is that for Catholics Scripture and Tradition are in a dynamic relationship. Scripture and Tradition carry the deposit of Faith.

The important thing often in the Catholic Church when we think about Scripture and Tradition, we need to say 'look, these two things go hand in hand'.

"It's not either or, but it's both, and. They are distinct, but they're not separate... With regard to women priests, we base ourselves on the revealed Word of God. That is carried in tradition and priest-

“If you profess to be a follower of Jesus Christ, then there are concrete workings out of that in terms of moral values”

hood is tied into the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

"It's not an invention of the Church - sometimes you think the way it's discussed, it's almost like it [priesthood] was invented by the Church, but it's not. It's instituted by Christ," Dr Farrell says.

He also believes that discussion around women priests can sometimes "be another form of clericalism - it's a conversation that sometimes distracts".

Challenges

Dublin - not unlike other dioceses - is faced with a myriad of challenges. Not least are the financial challenges, but priests and others in the archdiocese have frequently complained about a lack of reforms.

"The first thing I have to do is I have to try and listen - which I did here in Ossory - to the priests and the people of Dublin," he says.

While not naïve about the challenges, Dr Farrell is keen to say he wants to hear about "opportunities not just crises".

"Crises are an opportunity for grace - they're not necessarily bad things. Sometimes we can think of them as not being helpful or whatever, but we need to look at what are the opportunities. I want to hear about those. Because a diocese that's as large as Dublin and a people as diverse as you find in Dublin, there has to be opportunities there for some real developments," he says.

Inevitably, some of the work in Dublin will be disposing of infrastructure that is no longer necessary. Dr Farrell hopes this is something that will come from the ground up. "What I would like is that the

community would begin to consider these things rather than me coming in with a solution. But, I think it's important that people look at the challenges, but also the opportunities," he says.

He sees the Holy Spirit in the midst of the issues facing the Church. "If these chal-

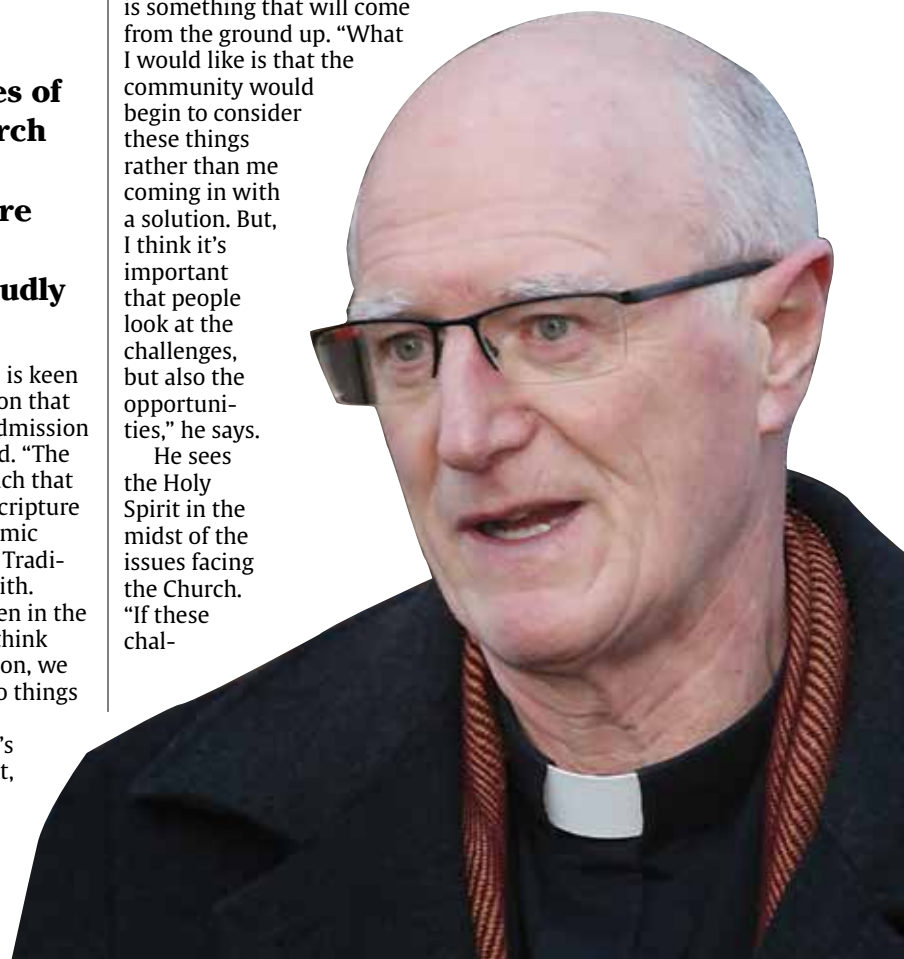
lenges weren't there would we be looking at more involvement of laity? Looking for new ministries for laity? Probably not," he believes.

Covid-19 restrictions notwithstanding, one gets the impression that Dr Farrell is keen to hit the ground running. "What I'll be doing is listening to the priests, hearing what they have to say. And listening to parish councils, parish finance councils, all of the groups that are involved in their parish," he says of his priorities.

“On the issue of deacons, Dr Farrell references the long discussions that have been going on about admitting women to this ministry which have been inconclusive”

It was a process that he adopted in Ossory when he was appointed there in 2018. "What I discovered talking to them is that they're sometimes more realistic - they're people of the world. They can see the problems. They can see what we have at the moment is not sustainable in terms of the demographics of the priests, the finances, and the amount of buildings that we have with the amount of people that are practicing.

"That needs to be addressed by the faith communities including the priests and the bishop," he says of the experience.





Outgoing Archbishop Diarmuid Martin placing the mitre on Archbishop-elect Farrell's head during the 2018 ceremony.

Could this lead to a synod in Dublin – an idea first mooted by Cardinal Desmond Connell more than 20 years ago. “Maybe, but that’s down the road,” Archbishop-elect Farrell says.

He is acutely aware that a synod is a point on a journey, but that the journey itself cannot be neglected. “Synodality for me is far more important because it’s how that journey is undertaken, and how it’s continued because it does need to be continued.

“What’s crucial for us is how we are with each other. How do I relate to my priests? How do I relate to the people in the parishes? How do they relate to me? It’s something that’s going to unfold,” he says.

“Rather than pushing a predetermined outcome, Dr Farrell underlines the fact that he is keen to hear from people who have ideas for the future”

The archbishop-elect uses the image of a marriage. “One can’t predetermine how that marriage is going to be or how one’s family will be. A couple gets married, they can’t know how their children are going to be if they will have children. So, what do you do with your marriage? You set a direction. One commits to the other person. You commit to a way of life. You commit to a direction. But then, your married life unfolds.

“There’s an element of mystery in that and there’s an element of gift. That’s true of the synodal ways as well,” he says.

Reform

Dr Farrell also insists that any form of structural reform cannot forget the spiritual. “What’s important about that is that the Spirit is in it. The providence of God is in it. We believe in the power of the Spirit. We believe in listening, the Spirit is speaking through the situation and through people,” he says.

Far from having a blueprint or a magic formula, Dr Farrell says it is important to get the journey right by talking and listening. “The plan will emerge when there’s a dialogue with people. That’s what I mean by a synodal Church. It’s a Church where



Bishop Dermot Farrell greeting people after the 2018 ceremony.

we’re going to take peoples’ gifts seriously.

“These things need to emerge both at an individual level and at a corporate level. I’m not going to prejudge that. It’s far easier for some people to complain than to be constructive. I think we need to be positive.

“I have no problem with somebody coming in and telling me everything’s wrong. That’s fair enough, but then come in and tell me a little bit as to how we could fix some of these things,” he says.

Dr Farrell is also clearly a team player. “You have to have the right team of people to explore things. I’m not going to be doing radical things just alone, as a lone ranger. I’ll try and listen. That’s very important to listen to people, to hear what they’re actually saying and to hear what the options are. And then we try and make a decision together,” he says.

Rather than pushing a predetermined outcome, Dr Farrell underlines the fact that he is keen to hear from people who have ideas for the future. “I certainly will be involving anybody I can that have ideas and that has energy. They’ll certainly be welcomed by me with open arms. I couldn’t see why anybody would refuse to have people help who have talents.

“No one with ideas or energy is going to be let go without asking as Jesus did to the rich man, ‘What more can you give?’” he says.

A lot is said – and written – about priests’ morale in Ireland. The archbishop-elect is keen to say that he sees affirming priests in their ministry as a key part of his role as a shepherd in Dublin. “I know the last number of years in Dublin and throughout the country has been a very difficult time for priests and religious trying to preach the Gospel in sometimes very difficult and trying situations. The priests I know have certainly done that,” he says.

Future

He sees the future as building on great work that has already been done in parishes all across the country. “We’re always standing on the shoulders of other people. Sometimes we’re reaping seeds that were sewn by priests and religious in sometimes more difficult circumstances that we find ourselves now.

“I see part of role of the bishop is to be a shepherd of priests and people, and to recognise what they have done in terms of carrying the Gospel to parishes and to homes; caring for the sick; looking after the bereaved; and that has been tireless work of the priests in Dublin,” he says.

“Synodality for me is far more important because it’s how that journey is undertaken, and how it’s continued because it does need to be continued”



Speaking to the media.



Bishop Dermot Farrell being congratulated by fellow bishops at the 2018 ceremony.



And what of future priests? Dr Farrell thinks that the work of nurturing vocations is the work of the entire Church. “Sometimes I think with a vocations director, that people pass the buck to the vocations director. Everybody has a responsibility in the Church, every priest and person.

“The vocation is a gift of God, so we need to pray for vocations. And, people need to be asked. Somebody actually has to ask you the question.

“But vocations only come out of faith. The vocations are going to come from the people in the pews

and if there is nobody under 40 in the pews, there won’t be vocations. If a young guy is not praying – or an older guy even – because many of the vocations are a bit older now – you’re not going to succeed with priesthood or ministry.

“The first place is prayer, a relationship with the Lord. And if you have a relationship with the Lord, if that’s the right thing, that will emerge for you as the vocation of the priesthood,” he says.

Ahead of assuming responsibility in Dublin, Dr Farrell comes across above all as upbeat and ready for a challenge. It’s not a naïve optimism or a simplistic hope that everything will work out, but a fundamental faith in God’s gentle hand guiding the Church now as before. It’s an approach perhaps best captured by his episcopal motto taken from Psalm 124: “Our help is in the name of the Lord”.

Facing up to Ireland's housing crisis during the pandemic



'Avalanche' of homelessness feared after pandemic if Government fail to protect vulnerable, writes Chai Brady

Homelessness, which is now a crisis within a crisis due to the pandemic, was brought to the fore of public conscience once again when RTÉ highlighted the story of a man who was repeatedly refused a hostel bed because he was not from Dublin.

The Carlow man Joe Nolan, who is in his 50s, had been living in a multi-storey car park in Dublin for more than four months. On Monday January 18, RTÉ Investi-

gates revealed that because his last registered address is in Carlow the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) told Mr Nolan that he could not avail of emergency accommodation in the city.

He was offered a hostel bed later that same day, after public outrage. The drastic issue of Ireland's housing and homelessness crisis – overshadowed by Covid-19 – will undoubtedly still be here long after the pandemic's conclusion.

Focus Ireland's Services Manager John O'Haire tells *The Irish Catholic* there is concern that after Government measures to protect tenancies during the pandemic are lifted, there will be an "avalanche" of evictions.

Eviction ban

Currently there is an eviction ban in place. It was introduced for any period when people's movement is restricted to 5km from their home as part of Covid-19 restrictions. This means that tenants cannot be evicted when the country is at level 5 restrictions and for a 10-day grace period after they are lifted.

There are also rental laws to protect tenants economically affected by Covid-19, who have fallen into rent arrears and are at risk of losing their tenancy. These protections include a rent freeze and a 90-day notice

period when ending a tenancy.

The Government previously said the steps they have now taken couldn't be done, Mr O'Haire says, "then we had a pandemic and we could do it, so it proved there's certain things that can be done and it took a pandemic".

“There are also rental laws to protect tenants economically affected by Covid-19, who have fallen into rent arrears and are at risk of losing their tenancy”

"We had a housing emergency anyway so that should have been enough to do some of these things," Mr O'Haire says, "but further than

that it's still only a plaster when the actual problem is there's not enough accommodation."

"So my big fear is after Covid, and please God all of this will end soon, there will be a pent up demand or avalanche waiting among landlords for properties to be sold or moved on, and the pandemic has proved it doesn't have to be that way.

"The moratorium on evictions helped in reducing the number of families coming in and if we can match that with some housing supply, we wouldn't be far away from solving the problem. That has to happen with a matter of urgency. Homelessness doesn't need to be a part of the new normal when we have a new normal."

Mr O'Haire continued saying that the number of families presenting as homeless to their services has also dropped during



the pandemic, which he puts down to the tighter restrictions.

Anti-social

"I mean I fully agree that if there's anti-social issues or there's drug dealing or serious violence, you have to take steps to resolve that, which may lead to eviction, however what we've seen in the last few years is actually most families are becoming homeless due to issues in the private rented market, like rent, availability and all of that. Those families then become homeless because the landlord is either selling or the rent has gone up or whatever, it's not to do with the person's own personal issues."

Despite the challenges, he says Focus Ireland have continued to find people accommodation during the pandemic.

Paul Sheehan of Cork Simon echoed the need for Government to continue to help people keep their accommodation and that with the charity have been calling for an emphasis to be placed on prevention rather than reaction.

"We were saying rents were too high in the private rental sector, that needs to be addressed. Evicting people into homelessness, that needs to be addressed," he says, adding that the number of new people seeking assistance from Cork Simon "reduced to a trickle" during the pandemic after the Government introduced the measures to stop evictions.

Mr Sheehan said they have had a "fantastic experience" working alongside the HSE social inclusion team and Cork City Council during the pandemic, with the Government's measures being "what was needed to address homelessness".

"If it took a pandemic to do it, so be it, but at least it happened and I think we're all learning from that experience now," he says.

"The vast majority of people using our services are depending

on that private rented market to exit homelessness and for the last few years they've been pretty much been locked out of that market just because it's so expensive and costs continue to rise," Mr Sheehan says.

A 2015 Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) in Ireland, compiled by the CSO, found almost one in six people in Ireland (17%) are at risk of poverty. It was also discovered that 61% of people in rental accommodation are at risk of poverty.

“Ireland's lack of housing must be urgently addressed, as it 'undermines' all the efforts of charities”

Cork Simon found that 27% of people seeking support at their Soup Run live in private rented accommodation, which reflects the poverty trap people are falling into, after rent and bills are paid some people are left without the means to buy food.

Mr Sheehan, speaking of the Government's response to renters during the crisis, says: "The mantra all along was look, it can't be addressed, it's impossible, but it can and it's proven so we would like if a good, hard, long look could be taken at that and seeing how that can be done for the longer term. I think everybody involved in addressing homelessness has learned from this experi-

ence of the pandemic in that there are other ways to do things."

According to latest rental report (Q3 2020) from Daft.ie, asking rents in Cork City increased by 5.2% from Q3 2019 to Q3 2020; they increased by 2.5% in Cork County during the same period.

The Simon Communities in Ireland's latest 'Locked Out of the Market' study (November 2020) notes private rented supply is at "chronically low levels across the country". It found there were just 72 properties available to rent in Cork city over a three-day period from September 21-23, none of which were within Rent Allowance/Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) levels. Just 57 properties were available to rent in Cork City suburbs during the same period – only one of which was within a Rent Allowance/Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) limit.

Goal

Regarding issues for people attaining housing in Cork, Mr Sheehan said: "Our goal is affordable housing, we've been around for 50 years this year. When Cork Simon was founded by a small group of volunteers back in 1971, rough sleeping in the city was at an awful rate and that group of volunteers were the first to start counting the number of people sleeping rough and to start taking note of who is without a home.

"A lot has changed in the last 50 years but we're here for the

long haul and our goal now is to find as much affordable housing as we can for people who can't afford the high cost of housing as it is today. We've started a fairly intensive programme of finding those houses, in some cases building those houses, we have a project under construction at the moment which will become eight independent living flats hopefully by the middle of this year people will start moving in."

The construction of the houses was halted during the first lockdown but due to revised restriction for level 5 the project was deemed essential so has been allowed to continue.

“When Cork Simon was founded by a small group of volunteers back in 1971, rough sleeping in the city was at an awful rate”

Mr Sheehan says: "What we've learned over the last 50 years really is that all of the reasons – and there are many – that push people into homelessness can only really be effectively addressed for the long term when people have a roof over their head, and it's a place they can call home.

"When people don't have to worry about where they will sleep and where they will get their next meal and the plethora of other concerns brought on by

homelessness, they are in a better position to address other issues," Mr Sheehan states, adding:

"When you take all of that out of the equation people are in a much better place to be able to address all of those issues, poor mental health, alcohol and drug use, more often than not they're disconnected completely from family, many have had very traumatic childhoods, left the education system very early and you add all of that together and it can make for complex situations for people and we stick with people for as long as they need us really.

“there are 8,484 people homeless in Ireland and over 2,452 of these are children”

"What we've been doing for the last five to six years is rather than having people jump through hoop before they can find a place to live, if you house people as quickly as possible no matter what their circumstances, nine times out of 10 they're able to address all the other issues very effectively and for the long term."

Mr O'Haire similarly said Ireland's lack of housing must be urgently addressed, as it "undermines" all the efforts of charities "Despite all the support and all the things that we do to help families, children, young people, single people, at the end of it all there's simply not enough housing and we need to be able to have that as a realistic goal for people who are trying to resolve lots of complex issues and at the end of the day they need somewhere to live and that's the most important thing."

In another attempt to tackle Ireland's seemingly endless housing crisis, the Minister for Housing Local Government and Heritage, Darragh O'Brien published the Affordable Housing Bill 2020 on January 20.

The bill is expected to provide for the introduction of three new schemes delivering on the programme for Government commitment to put affordability at the heart of the housing system and aims to prioritise the increased supply of affordable homes. One of the schemes aims to see the introduction of a new form of tenure in 'Cost Rental'. This legislation will provide the basis for the first 400 Cost Rental homes in the State which will be delivered in 2021. It is said there will be many more in the pipeline in the years thereafter.

Affordable

There is also an affordable housing scheme aimed at mitigating the affordability challenges faced by young working people, "many of whom are caught in a rental trap", said the minister.

He also said: "The scheme will increase housing supply as it helps to improve viability by bridging the gap between the maximum mortgage that might be available to a household and the actual cost of a new home for ordinary income families. In Budget 2021 we have put aside

“The vast majority of people using our services are depending on that private rented market to exit homelessness and for the last few years they've been pretty much been locked out of that market”

an initial €75m for 2021 to start the scheme up and will boost this with additional private investment." These schemes must lead to real changes for people faced with housing insecurity or caught in extortionate rental accommodation, as the situation continues to cause homelessness and subsequently pressure on Ireland's charitable sector.

Working with homeless families, and being a father himself, Mr O'Haire says the pandemic has created unique challenges for everyone but being homeless has added a new layer to an already severe situation.

"It's extremely stressful anyway to be homeless, now we have families who are trying to do a combination of things, whether it be work, educate their children and get their homework done in emergency accommodation," he says.

"In normal times, the sort of building blocks for family life, for young people, is seeing their friends, is sporting activities, all of those things get taken away from families when they're homeless because they often have to move to a hotel, or to a hub or somewhere far from where they grew up, those connections are lost with their local community and now on top of that they don't even have that connection of school and seeing friends so they are further isolated with the stress of being couped up in emergency accommodation.

“There are concerns that the pandemic may have affected the charities ability to meet the ‘new homeless’”

"That's a huge disconnection for young people, for all of those supports to be taken and that's a huge challenge for parents as well while also trying to find accommodation, you may have kids with special needs, so to try and do all of that in the middle of a pandemic is incredibly challenging."

Both charities have had to be creative in their response to Covid-19 and the subsequent restrictions in order to continue supporting vulnerable people and keep staff and volunteers safe, all while trying to maintain the services they provide.

Cork Simon is in a "much better place" than the first lockdown

in March which hit them like a "fast moving rain", according to Mr Sheehan.

"All of our services operate pretty much 24 hours a day, there's a very high footfall, there's a lot of interaction between people who use our services and our staff and volunteers, so we had to move very quickly to reorientate a lot of our services."

In their emergency shelter Cork Simon had to reduce rooms to single occupancy whereas before they held two people, in order to ensure people could maintain social distancing and self-isolate if necessary. They also had to reduce the number of people accessing their day service, which hit rough sleepers hard as often they have nowhere else to go Mr Sheehan explains. They also had to reorientate their high support housing around the city and had to suspend visits regarding their housing services for people living independently – except in more "extreme cases".

Concerns

There are concerns that the pandemic may have affected the charities ability to meet the 'new homeless', with Mr Sheehan saying: "Our soup run operates indoors and we had to change that to an outdoor service, a takeaway service only, and that hit people using that service quite hard because often it's their only social interaction of the day and it is an opportunity for staff and volunteers to get to know people, particularly newer people on the scene, to get to understand where they're coming from and what their needs are."

However, he says that even though there was a reduced capacity, Cork Simon are not aware of anyone who fell through the cracks, saying: "We had that concern earlier on but it doesn't appear to be the case, we're certainly not aware of it. When we had to reduce capacity in our emergency shelter it wasn't the case where we just turfed a load of people out and said fend for yourself. We worked closely with

“When people don't have to worry about where they will sleep and where they will get their next meal and the plethora of other concerns brought on by homelessness, they are in a better position to address other issues”

the local authority here and with the HSE social inclusion team and we found people bed and breakfast rooms on an emergency basis and then those people were able to come to our day service at an agreed time and work through the support that they needed. So while it added more work layers we were still able to work through it so we're certainly not aware of anybody who wasn't able to access services because of the various lockdowns."

The effect the pandemic has had on homeless people can't be underestimated, with Mr Sheehan saying: "There was a story of one man in one of our high support houses in the very early days of the first lockdown, he went

into his local shop and the shopkeeper certainly was keeping her distance, he didn't understand that it was because of the virus and he thought it was because of his situation, that he was homeless, and he became very upset.

"They're the kind of things that people experienced. There was fear, there was huge degrees of worry, particularly amongst people who were using the shelter because they were mixing with a lot of other people or for people who were sleeping rough, they were feeling a lot more alone and isolated than they would previously and I've heard it being described as people experiencing a crisis within a crisis that they were already experiencing."

Charities

Both charities have made sure staff were trained in how to

respond correctly to Government restrictions and stay safe while keeping people availing of their services safe, particularly because many of them would be in the vulnerable category due to their age or health condition.

Mr O'Haire said Focus Ireland "put an incredible amount of effort into our compliance with Covid regulations, we do an internal training, we're constantly changing and adapting to make sure that we're fully adhering to all the Covid guidelines, that we have enough PPE, that we're maintaining our social distance, hand washing, the basics and we're really putting a lot of effort into making sure that works".

Positive

On a positive note, Focus Ireland has been able to keep most of their services open, Mr O'Haire explains, but says: "The negative is that because we're doing the social distancing and implementing all the regulations, what suffers from that is that human connection.

"What we really strive to do as an organisation is to try and build that human relation with somebody, from there we can then establish some trust and from there we help intervene to make sure that we exit them from homelessness and get them somewhere to live.

"People have complex issues it takes time to build that relationship with people and that is definitely made harder when you're trying to social distance and you have a mask and all of those things. We've also seen, for the people that use our services, they've come under a lot of stress, they have poor mental health, and they really crave that social connection and that support from people – and we do it – but because we do it with a mask and we do it the right way now Covid-wise, it just makes things more difficult. We've seen that deterioration in people's mental health and it's not just their

day-to-day experiences, they are bombarded with the news and from conversations about Covid so they've become fatigued and they struggle like everyone else through this. Thankfully we're there to support them."

Last week Focus Ireland called on the Government to commit to ending homelessness with a campaign that has already received significant public support. Since the #EndHomelessness campaign was launched nearly a month ago 7,000 people signed a petition urging the Government to make a clear plan to end the ongoing homelessness crisis at the time this paper went to print.

“The pandemic has created unique challenges for everyone but being homeless has added a new layer to an already severe situation”

According to figures from the Department of Housing, there are 8,484 people homeless in Ireland and over 2,452 of these are children. Focus Ireland believes that the Government must reclaim the vision of ending homelessness, otherwise the State will be abandoning these people to a very bleak future.

Charities have done their best to respond to a housing crisis that continues to deteriorate, and additionally they are contending with a virus that has caused an unprecedented necessity to transform and adapt their services. While Focus Ireland and Cork Simon welcomed the Government's measures to protect people from becoming homeless and called for the protections to continue past the pandemic, their major appeal, as Mr O'Haire says, is for "housing, housing, housing".



Men, Women and Children in Emergency Accommodation - Southwest (Cork & Kerry)



FOCUS

Ireland

We cannot revert to a situation where homelessness is part of the new normal



Sr. Stanislaus Kennedy
Founder & Life President
of Focus Ireland

Firstly, I want to wish you a happy and healthy new year and secondly, to express my sincere gratitude to our supporters for their loyalty and commitment to ending homelessness and supporting Focus Ireland throughout one of the most difficult years we have experienced as a nation. There are no positives about pandemics, but our response as a society to the Covid-19 crisis has certainly taught us a great deal about what we can achieve when we work together for a common cause. Collectively, we have reduced the number of people who are homeless from more than 10,000 to 8,737 – the lowest figure we have had for some years.

Generosity

As a result of the generosity of our supporters, we have been able to house 883 families, preventing 390 children from becoming homeless and 12,300 people engaged with our services overall. Throughout 2020, our services team worked

with 434 young people at risk of homelessness, providing them with support, advice, assistance with education, encouragement seeking employment and most importantly – hope.

Homeless organisations and State bodies, with the kind and generous support of the public, are working tirelessly to end homelessness – and we believe it can be ended. The temporary ban on evictions and the rent freeze brought in by the Government to prevent homelessness in Covid-19 times made a big difference in cutting the numbers of people becoming homeless. This is a precious achievement that we cannot allow to go into reverse.

“Our supporters have enabled us to achieve so much, going forward we will still need your commitment”

Even as the pandemic hopefully recedes through 2021 as vaccines come on stream, it will leave havoc and destruction in its wake: not only the sad bereavements that families all over the country have suffered but also job losses, the closure of businesses and, very likely, a recession. These are

classic circumstances for a rise in homelessness – an outcome we desperately need to avoid.

Positive

Such an outcome can be avoided, but only if, as a people, we make a clear, positive and unshakeable commitment to eradicating homelessness. Back in 1987, the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless, I was hopeful we would be able to defeat homelessness in Ireland within a few years. That didn't happen. In fact, the problem got much, much worse. And the reason

it didn't happen was the government reneged on its commitments.

“The Government has already committed to certain actions in its Programme for Government”

Our challenge now is to build on what we have achieved in 2020 and use the

experience of coping with a pandemic to create a turning point in our national struggle to defeat homelessness. Our supporters have enabled us to achieve so much, going forward we will still need your commitment. We have a duty to look after all our citizens, especially those who are most vulnerable. In a civilised, developed country like ours, no family should ever have to experience the trauma of losing their home. No child should ever be born into homelessness in this country.

Effective as the short-term measures to prevent homelessness have been, we now

need to look to the longer term. The Government has already committed to certain actions in its Programme for Government:

- To hold a referendum on housing as a constitutional right.
- To establish a housing commission with the aim of providing social and affordable housing to rent and to buy.
- To develop a strategy to prevent and alleviate youth homelessness.

This is positive to see and we now need more action in 2021. Additionally, we urge





“ That is why Focus Ireland has launched a campaign calling on the Government to set a deadline to end homelessness altogether, backed up by a realistic plan and timeline to achieve its eradication”

the government to develop a strategy on family homelessness that can move us from managing this crisis towards ending it.

Campaign

We urgently need to move beyond short-termism. That is why Focus Ireland has launched a campaign calling on the Government to set a deadline to end homelessness altogether, backed up by a realistic plan and timeline to achieve its eradication. In the past, we had a government commitment to ending long-term homelessness by 2010 and this led to the lowest-ever level of homelessness in Ireland.

Unfortunately, that success was swept away by the

economic crisis, but we can do it again and we can do better next time. No country has ever managed a significant reduction in homelessness without having a clear commitment to ending it. And so, we are calling on Government to set a clear and firm deadline for the ending of homelessness in this country.

With this momentum, and the kind and generous support of people across Ireland, we are working tirelessly to end homelessness – and we believe it can be ended. As the country opens up, we cannot revert to a situation where homelessness is part of the new normal.

This New Year, join Sr. Stan’s vision and make a resolution to end homelessness.

Inspired by the vision and passion of Sr. Stan, many people are choosing to leave a loving gift in their will to support people who are homeless to find safety, and a place they can call home.

Please remember Focus Ireland in your Will.



To join in Sr. Stan’s vision please contact eve.kerton@focusireland.ie or phone **01 881 5917**. CHY 7220

FOCUS
Ireland

How a little wooden heart from Merchants Quay Ireland finds its home...

It was in the storm of a dark winter's night that a mighty beech tree was felled by the wind. It had watched over Merchants Quay Ireland's St. Francis Farm since it was a sapling.

St. Francis Farm is where miracles grow - a chance to

start life anew. Merchants Quay Ireland reaches out to people living on the streets, sleeping in doorways. Offering kindness to those who are hungry and alone, struggling with addiction and suffering poor mental health. MQI lights a pathway to recovery.

The legacy you leave for tomorrow, the keepsake you'll have for today...

Like the lives that are saved at MQI's St. Francis Farm, the timber from that beech tree was recovered. A small workshop on the Farm holds the seasoned wood and clients use it to carve simple little hearts. Even after it has died, that tree gives them the chance to create something beautiful, to shape it with a special purpose. Each heart is inscribed with a quality that speaks to its maker, "Respect" "Compassion" "Dignity" "Justice" and on the back, their initials. Each heart is made especially for people who include a legacy for MQI in their will.



MQI

Merchants Quay Ireland
Homeless & Drugs Services



"There's none of us perfect. Beechwood is the picture of any of us..." Farm manager, Norah.

Beech is secretive. It's only when the tree falls that the grain is revealed. Every wooden heart is unique. The clients who make them know that their hearts are going to someone who's leaving a legacy to Merchants Quay Ireland. Says our farm manager, Norah "They fully understand it's for someone who's remembering MQI in their will. The absolute gratefulness for that type of contribution to be coming to Merchants Quay, to sustain the work being done, they 'wow' about it when I tell them."

From our hearts to yours.

Your legacy, of any amount, can enfold the most vulnerable and lonely in wrap-around supports. You can decide to keep the details confidential. But we want to give you this little wooden keepsake. This is your heart for the homeless and those on the road to recovery.

"This is your heart for the homeless and those on the road to recovery."

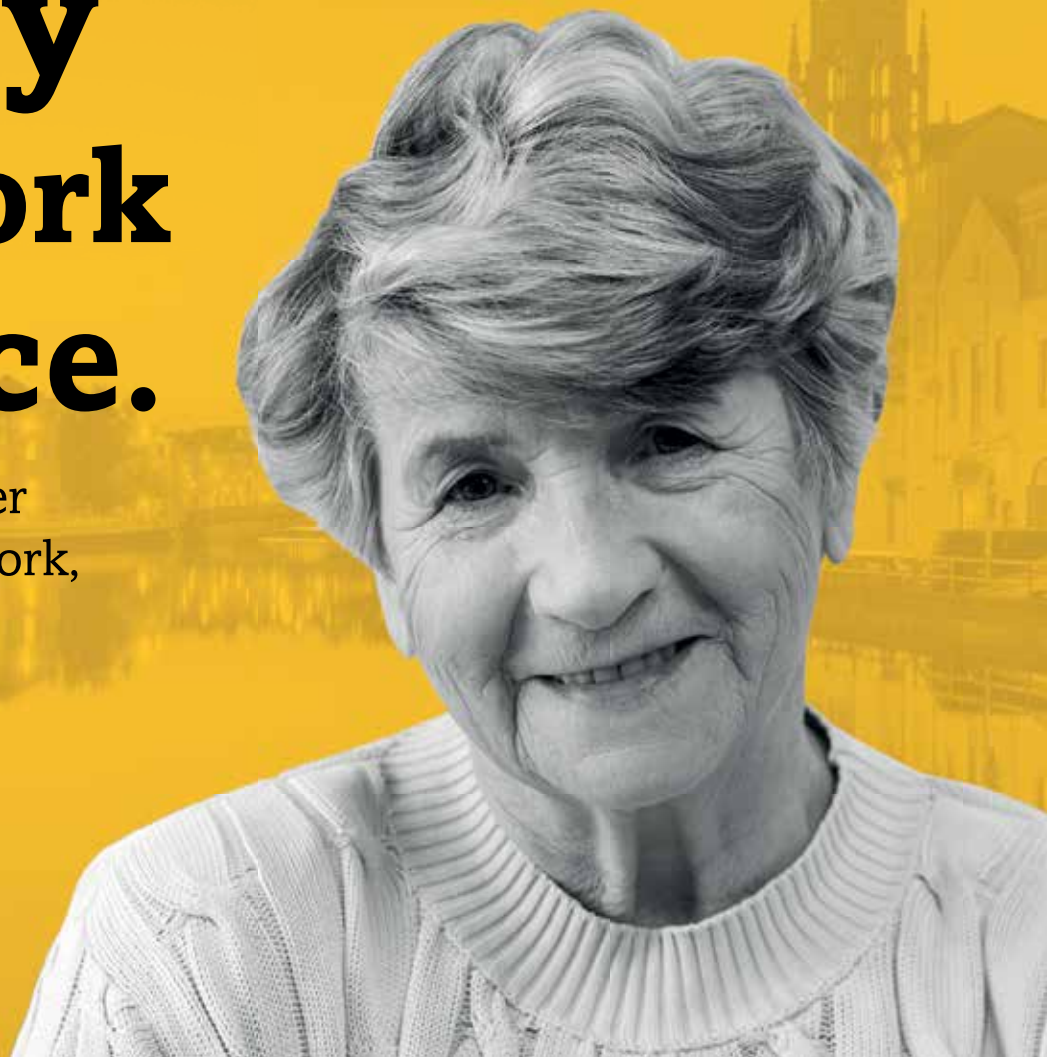
To receive your little wooden heart and information on remembering Merchants Quay Ireland in your will, ring **Emma Murphy, Legacies Manager** at **01-524 0965** or email **emma.murphy@mqi.ie**

The good they do is rooted in the goodness of your heart.

It's my way of leaving Cork a better place.

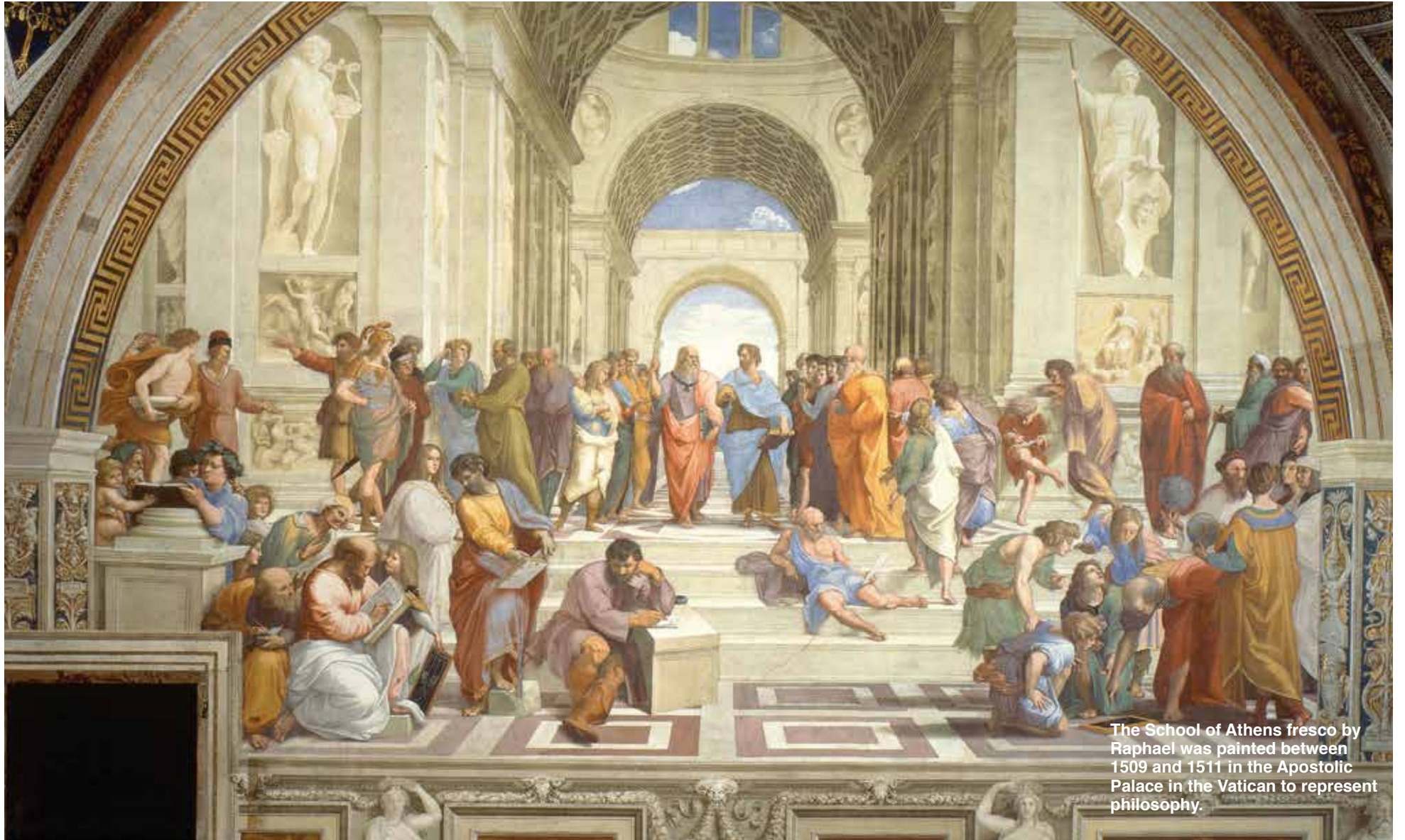
Helping people who are homeless after I've passed on... that's my legacy to Cork, the city I love.

Join me by leaving a gift to Cork Simon in your Will.



For more information please call Leona on 021 4929 418 or email Leona@corksion.ie

Philosophy – its nature and significance



The School of Athens fresco by Raphael was painted between 1509 and 1511 in the Apostolic Palace in the Vatican to represent philosophy.



Philosophy primarily seeks to uncover what it is to be, a truth presupposed by our other theoretical disciplines but never established by them, writes Dr Gaven Kerr

Go to the philosophy section in any high street bookshop and you will usually find it sandwiched between the new age section and the self-help section. Philosophy today has taken on the air of a malleable outlook on life, love, and the universe; a subject within which one can think what one wants without challenge, and exclaim any view without support. Needless to say, this is not what I practice as a professional academic philosopher, nor does it characterise the nature and significance of philosophy. When we think of goods, we can divide goods into those that have

a use and those that we pursue for their own sake. Money, food, 'things' are useful goods; they assist us in the living of our lives. But insofar as they are merely useful, they are not what we live our lives for. By contrast, there are goods for which we live, family, children, happiness etc. These are goods in themselves that are not just useful, but for which we make use of other things. For example, money and food are useful goods, and they are useful because they make it easy to enjoy the good of family life.

“When we think of goods, we can divide goods into those that have a use and those that we pursue for their own sake”

The same distinction between goods can be applied to disciplines of learning. There are disciplines that are merely useful insofar as we make some practical use out of what we learn; medicine and engineering are key examples. Yet, there are disciplines that are not merely useful, but without which the useful disciplines would be useless. These are theoretical

“There are disciplines that are merely useful insofar as we make some practical use out of what we learn”

disciplines such as mathematics, chemistry, biology etc which inform our practical disciplines. The theoretical disciplines are like the goods for which we live insofar as they are sought not for any further purpose, but can be enjoyed in themselves.

Philosophy is such a theoretical discipline insofar as it seeks to discover something about the nature of reality (often referred to as 'being') and our place within it. Philosophy can be put to use in a practical manner, for example in ethics whereby we try to figure out how to be good. But philosophy primarily is a theoretical discipline which considers the nature of reality. This primary or first philosophy focuses on reality and seeks to say something about it. In contrast to mathematics and natural science, what philosophy seeks to understand is not some particular domain or field of inquiry; rather philosophy primarily seeks to uncover what it is to be – a truth presupposed by our other theoretical disciplines but never established by them.

Metaphysics

At the very beginning of his *Metaphysics* Aristotle argued that by nature all men desire to know.

Philosophy itself is a good for human life insofar as it satisfies man's desire to know. This is what sets us off from non-rational animals. By contrast with other animals, man does not rest once his basic physical needs are met; man begins to think, to wonder, and in such wonder the desire to know, and thus philosophy, emerges. Philosophy is a response to the wonder that comes about when the troubles of life do not face us. And such philosophy arrives once our basic goods such as food and shelter and leisure are met, philosophy is itself a good more fundamental than these other goods for which we strive.

“Philosophy is such a theoretical discipline insofar as it seeks to discover something about the nature of reality”

Given that philosophy is a fundamental study into the nature of being and seeks to unearth what it is to be, philosophy is not a quaint subject on a par with popular self-help guides or new age mysticism. Philosophy is a serious

intellectual discipline by which views on the nature of reality are considered and either accepted or rejected. Not only that, insofar as philosophy considers the nature of reality and presents itself as an answer to one of our deepest longings, philosophy has always naturally allied itself with theology. This is because in the consideration of reality we naturally consider the cause of reality; and in being a response of our fundamental desires, philosophy finds its goal in that which fulfils all human desire, i.e. the vision of God. The work of philosophy, whilst wholly based on natural reason, finds its culmination in that which transcends reason. It is common then to see in philosophical discussions considerations of the existence of God, proofs of God, the nature of God, man's place in the universe, how man ought to live etc. These questions can all be addressed from the standpoint of natural philosophical reason and then integrated with revelation so that the water of philosophy is transformed into the wine of theology.

Dr Gaven Kerr is a lecturer in philosophy at St Patrick's College, Maynooth. This article is part of a new regular column where philosophers from Maynooth Drs Gaven Kerr and Philip Gonzales offer accessible introductory thoughts on perennial themes in the history of philosophy and the Catholic tradition.

World Report

IN BRIEF

Nigerian priest abducted for ransom found dead

● The body of Fr John Gbakaan, a Catholic parish priest in Nigeria, was found dead with machete wounds on January 16, a day after armed men kidnapped him and demanded ransom.

Fr Gbakaan, the parish priest of the Saint Anthony Church in Gulu in Minna diocese, was kidnapped while traveling through Niger state, reported Vatican's news service *Agenzia Fides*.

Fr Gbakaan, with his brother and another priest, left for Makurdi in Benue state on January 14 to visit his mother, the agency said.

The two brothers were abducted by armed men who sought ransom from the Diocese of Minna. Initially, the kidnappers demanded 30 million Naira, which was later reduced to five million Naira.

Cardinal named head of Christian research centre in Pakistan

● Cardinal Joseph Coutts, the archbishop of Karachi, has been appointed as the chairperson of a key Christian research and study centre.

He is taking charge of the Christian Study Centre in Rawalpindi, said Fr Nasir William, director of the Diocesan Commission for Rawalpindi and Islamabad.

"It's a big responsibility but since this prelate of the Catholic Church is well known for his experience and personal interest in the

interfaith and ecumenical field, I would say he is the right man for the right place," Fr William told *UCA News*.

Founded in 1967, the Christian Study Centre aims to work for peaceful coexistence, cooperation, better understanding and strong bonding between the Christian and Muslim communities and with people of other faiths. It is supported by both the Catholic and Protestant churches.

Indonesian Catholics hold Mass for plane crash victims

● Catholics in Indonesia's Ketapang Diocese have held a requiem Mass for a Catholic couple who died in a recent air disaster after authorities successfully retrieved their bodies and identified them.

Vincentius Luskandar, 52, and Melania Nelly, 49, were identified on January 16 and 17 respectively.

They were among 62 passengers and crew on Sriwijaya Air Flight SJ182 heading from Jakarta which crashed shortly after take-off on January 9.

Held at St Gemma Galgani Ketapang Cathedral Church on January 20, the Mass concelebrated by three priests and attended by the families of the victims was broadcast on YouTube.

Passionist Fr Damianus Sepo, one of the priests, said he knew the victims very well and they were "good people who were always full of enthusiasm, always entertaining and caring".

Patriarch reaffirms baptismal site in Jordan

● Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, reaffirmed the Catholic Church's recognition of the official Baptism site of Jesus in Jordan and said a new chapel on the opposite side of the river is purely touristic, not historic.

"It is clear from the historical, archaeological, and indeed all the points of view that the actual site of Jesus Christ's Baptism (in the Jordan River) is on the Jordanian side. Traditionally, historically and according to the Bible, it is on this side," Archbishop Pizzaballa told *Catholic News Service* in an interview at the Latin Patriarchal Vicariate in the Jordanian capital. He also spoke of the Church's continued work with Syrian and Iraqi refugees in Jordan during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Biden expected to overturn 'Mexico City policy' which bans foreign aid for abortion

Dr Anthony Fauci told the World Health Organization's (WHO) executive board January 21 that "in the coming days", President Joe Biden will revoke the so-called "Mexico City policy", which blocks US funding of foreign nongovernmental organisations that perform and promote abortion as a form of family planning.

Women's health

The action will be part of the new president's "broader commitment to protect women's health and advance gender equality at home and around the world", said Fauci, who is the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and now Biden's chief medical adviser.

"It will be our policy to support women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights in the United States, as well as globally," Fauci told an executive board meeting of WHO.

He made the comments after being chosen to head the US delegation to WHO. The White House released his prepared remarks.

First announced by President Ronald Reagan during an international meeting in Mexico City, the policy has been upheld by Republican presidents since then and overturned by Democratic presidents. Critics of the policy call it a "gag order".

By executive order January 23, 2017, President Donald Trump reinstated the policy,



Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, speaks during a news briefing at the White House in Washington Dec. 18, 2020. Dr Fauci has said Biden will overturn the 'Mexico City Policy'. (CNS photo/Cheriss May, Reuters)

which had been suspended by his predecessor, President Barack Obama, and he expanded it to create the Protecting Life in Global Health Assistance Policy.

Last August, then-Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar issued the administration's second report on implementation of the expanded policy. He said it showed the vast majority of foreign nongovernmental organizations – 1,285 out of 1,340 – had complied "with this policy with minimal disruption of health services and no reduction in funding".

Pro-life policies

In an interview with *Catholic News Service* shortly after the November 3 election of Biden, Mary FioRito, the Cardinal Francis George fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, said the Catholic president's actions to overturn Trump's pro-life policies were expected to be swift, starting with the Mexico City policy.

"Biden's position is vastly out of step with the American public, since the majority of Americans, even some who identify as 'pro-choice,' do not

want their tax dollars used for programmes that endorse abortion as a method of family planning," said FioRito, an attorney, public speaker and commentator on issues involving women's leadership in the Church.

The Biden team also has vowed to repeal the long-standing Hyde Amendment, which outlaws federal tax dollars from directly funding abortion except in cases of rape, incest or when the life of the woman would be endangered.

School parents will appeal to EU for relief against Spanish law

An association of Spanish education advocates will appeal to the European Union to prevent Spain's socialist government from implementing an education law that will restrict the exercise of the rights of parents in deciding their children's education.

The law, approved by the Spanish parliament December 23, 2020 prevents parents from choosing religious schools for their children.

Spain has a charter school program

that allows private schools, most of which are Catholic, to receive significant financial resources from the government. About 50% of Spain's students go to charter schools.

The new law prevents parents who live in a district with a public school to opt into a charter school for their children, a blow to both parental freedom and the ability of charter schools to survive financially.

Más Plurales, an organisation that

includes thousands of educators, parents, and students from charter schools in Spain, announced January 19 that "in the upcoming days we will appeal to the European Commission a lawsuit against the Spanish government due to the serious imminent risk of violation of the fundamental rights and freedoms recognised by the European Union that implies the approval and entry into force of the new law".

Catholics in public life, saints to be included in Trump's new 'heroes' garden

Catholics in public life, saints and sainthood candidates, figures from US history, military heroes, leaders in science, politicians and athletes were included in a list of dozens of figures President Donald Trump said will be in a new National Garden of American Heroes he cre-

ated by executive order January 18. The garden "will be built to reflect the awesome splendour of our country's timeless exceptionalism," he said in the order.

His plan for a public garden "where the legends of America's past will be remembered" is in part an

effort, he said, to counter last summer's destruction and violence aimed at statues and memorials around the country. Catholic figures in Trump's list include: Nellie Gray, founder of the March for Life; Sts Kateri Tekakwitha, Junipero Serra and Elizabeth Ann Seton; Charles

Carroll, a signer of the Declaration of Independence; Catholic Worker co-founder and sainthood candidate Dorothy Day; Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, a sainthood candidate who has been declared Venerable.



Edited by Ruadhán Jones
Ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie

Vatican vaccines for all



Coronavirus vaccinations take place in the atrium of the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican, January 20. Photo: CNA

Hundreds reportedly dead after massacre at Oriental Orthodox church in Ethiopia

At least 750 people are reported dead after an attack on an Oriental Orthodox church in Ethiopia's Tigray region, according to a European watch-group.

Europe External Programme

On January 9, the Europe External Programme with Africa reported that the Church of Our Lady Mary of Zion in Axum, about 80 miles west of Adigrat, had been attacked, and that hundreds of people who hid inside were brought out to the front square and shot to death.

According to *Church Times UK*, the attack was

carried out by Ethiopian government troops and Amhara militia from central Ethiopia. At least 1,000 people were estimated to be hiding in the church at the time of the attack.

Locals have said they believe the church was targeted by raiders of the lost ark. The church is thought to contain the original Ark of the Covenant, a sacred golden chest first mentioned in the book of Exodus that carried the ten Commandments, parts of Sacred Scripture, Aaron's rod, and a pot of manna.

They believed the attackers wanted to steal the Ark of the Covenant and take it to the

capital city of Addis Ababa, the *Church Times* reported. Whether it is really the true Ark has been debated by historians for centuries.

Orthodox Church

The church belongs to the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, an Oriental Orthodox Church that is estimated to have about 36 million members. Tigray has been the site of the Tigray War since November of last year.

Thousands of people are estimated to have been killed on both sides of the conflict. Each side blames the other for the conflict,

and it is difficult to confirm their claims, the *Associated Press* has said. Tigray's communications have been almost completely cut off, and journalists were reportedly not allowed in the area where the church attack took place.

Peace and dialogue

Pope Francis and the Catholic bishops of the region called for peace and dialogue as the conflict worsened in November. According to the UN, tens of thousands have fled the Tigray region for Sudan after the outbreak of the war.

Four dead in Madrid parish explosion

At least four people have now died after an explosion destroyed a parish building in the Spanish capital, Madrid, with a gas leak cited as a possible cause.

The victims included a recently ordained Catholic priest who died in hospital early Thursday morning. Fr Rubén Pérez Ayala was ordained to the priesthood last June. His first assignment was at the Virgen de la Paloma parish near the Puerta de Toledo in the

centre of Madrid, where he was serving when an explosion destroyed much of the parish rectory and office at 3pm on January 20.

Cardinal Carlos Osoro Sierra, the archbishop of Madrid said that he is "grateful for his life of dedication to Christ and to his Church". Cardinal Osoro said that he was praying for the victims of the explosion and all those affected by it.

The archdiocese identified one of the

deceased as 35-year-old electrician David Santos Muñoz, a parishioner and father of four, who had come to the building "to lend a hand" with the building's boiler.

Another victim was an 85-year-old woman, according to *CNN*. Two pedestrians who had been walking by the building at the time of the explosion were among the victims, according to *ABC News*.

Vatican roundup

Homeless people receive Covid-19 vaccine in the Vatican

● Pope Francis is working to ensure that poor people who are assisted by Holy See facilities for the homeless be offered the possibility of being vaccinated against Covid-19.

A statement released on Wednesday by the Holy See Press Office said that 25 homeless persons were inoculated with the Covid-19 vaccine in the Vatican's Paul VI Hall.

One of those who received the first dose of the vaccine was Mario, who told *Vatican News'* Michele Raviart that he feels that now he has "extra security".

Pope Francis had affirmed his desire that a part of the vaccinations available for the vaccination campaign in the Vatican be offered to those most in need.

"We thank the Pope for this gift," said Mario, also on behalf of the other 24 people present on Wednesday morning in the Paul VI Hall.

Holy See Press Office Director Matteo Bruni said those vaccinated Wednesday morning are part of a group of people who regularly receive assistance from the Office of Papal Charities. He added that other poor people will receive the vaccine in the coming days.

Pope to Biden: foster peace and reconciliation in the US and the world

● Pope Francis sent a message to President Joe Biden, urging him to be a bringer of peace and reconciliation to the United States and to the whole world.

Pope Francis opened his message to US President Joe Biden saying, "On the occasion of your inauguration as the forty-sixth President of the United States of America, I extend cordial good wishes and the assurance of my prayers that Almighty God will grant you wisdom and strength in the exercise of your high office".

"At a time when the grave crises facing our human family call for farsighted and united

responses," Pope Francis writes in his message, "I pray that your decisions will be guided by a concern for building a society marked by authentic justice and freedom, together with unfailing respect for the rights and dignity of every person, especially the poor, the vulnerable and those who have no voice."

Concluding his message, Pope Francis writes, "I likewise ask God, the source of all wisdom and truth, to guide your efforts... With these sentiments, I willingly invoke upon you and your family and the beloved American people an abundance of blessings".

Pope Francis urges nations to eliminate nuclear weapons

● Pope Francis said nuclear weapons "strike large numbers of people" and provoke long-lasting damage to the environment", and expressed support for the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

The Treaty, which came into force Friday January 22, is the first legally binding international agreement to prohibit signatory states from developing, testing, producing, stockpiling, stationing, transferring, and using or threatening to use nuclear arms.

Pope Francis encouraged all States and people to "work with determination to promote the conditions necessary for a world without nuclear arms".

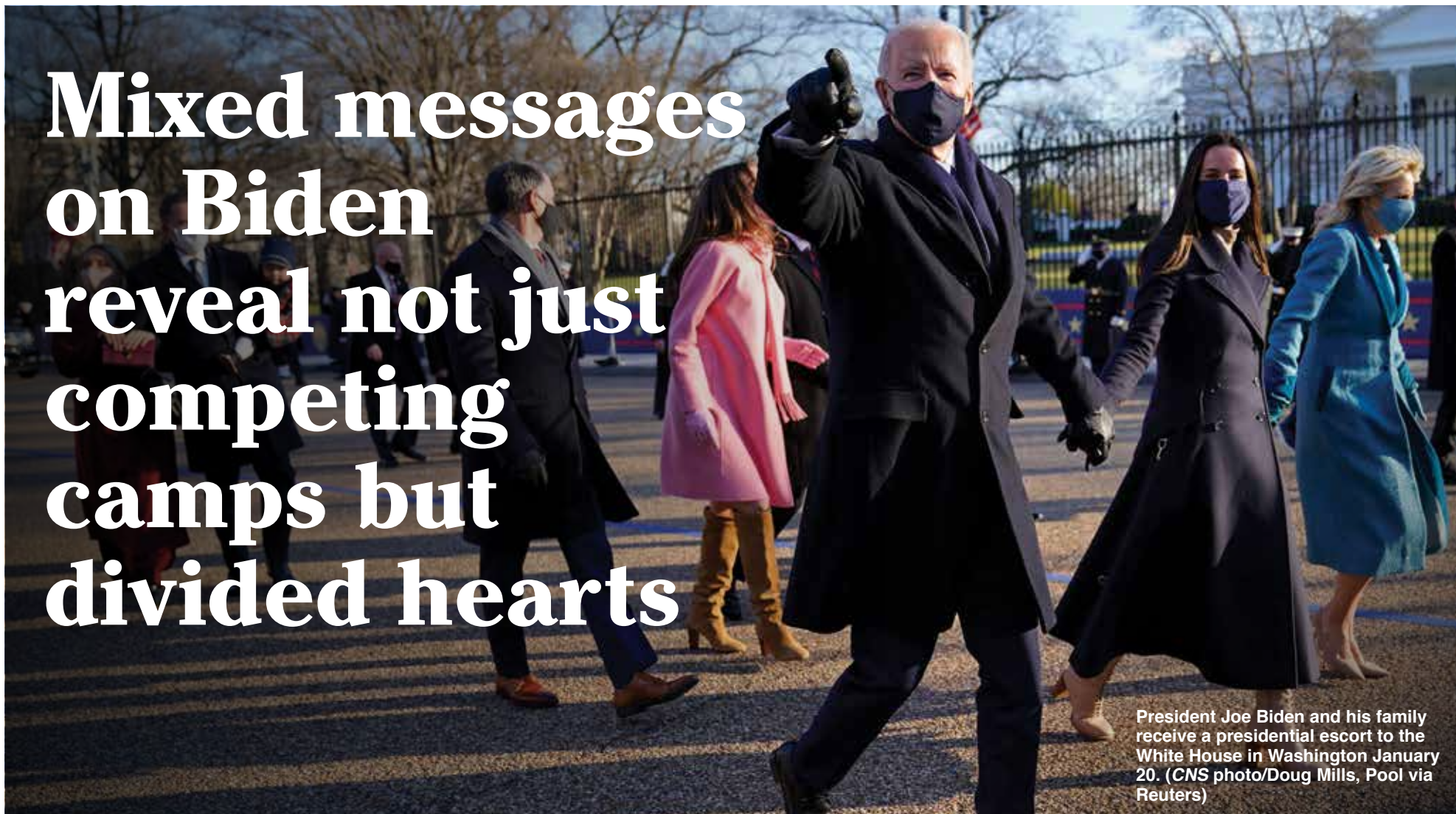
The best way to do this, added the Pope, is by "contributing to the advancement of peace and multilateral cooperation, which humanity greatly needs".

The Vatican became the first state to sign and ratify the Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty.

Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, the Vatican's Secretary for Relations with States, signed it at the UN Headquarters in New York on 20 September 2017, the first day it was open for signatures. It reached the required 50 signatures in late October 2020.

Letter from Rome

Mixed messages on Biden reveal not just competing camps but divided hearts



President Joe Biden and his family receive a presidential escort to the White House in Washington January 20. (CNS photo/Doug Mills, Pool via Reuters)



John L. Allen Jr

Among the many traditions surrounding a presidential inauguration, Catholics seem to have created one of their own, especially when it's a Democrat: Mixed messages from the Vatican and the US Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Twelve years ago, when Barack Obama was elected, Pope Benedict XVI dispatched a note of congratulations on November 5, breaking the custom of waiting until Inauguration Day, and the Vatican newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*, gushed about the hopeful symbolism of Obama's triumph. Later, then-editor Gian Maria Vian defended Obama from pro-life criticism, insisting he was not a "pro-abortion president".

All that contrasted sharply with the tougher line of the US bishops under the late Cardinal Francis George of Chicago, at the time the president of the conference, above all over abortion, and occasioned some

sharp behind-the-scenes complaints to the Vatican's Secretariat of State by Cardinal George.

On Wednesday both the Vatican and the USCCB released statements on the inauguration, and once again it was a Tale of Two Tones.

“Many American Catholics see a great deal to admire in Biden, not simply his devout Catholic Faith but also his commitment to personal decency”

Pope Francis's brief congratulatory note to President Joe Biden was lofty and avoided areas of possible disagreement, while a longer message from Archbishop Jose Gomez of Los Angeles, president of the USCCB, offered prayers and support but also warned that the new administration “would advance moral evils and threaten human life and dignity”, drawing clear lines in the sand on the issues of “abortion, contraception, marriage, gender”.

Tension

For the record, this is not a case of “good cop/bad cop”,

meaning a coordinated strategy to allow the Pope to dangle a carrot while the bishops wield a stick. Both with Obama and with Biden, it's a genuine tension between Rome and the USCCB, with neither side especially delighted with the approach of the other.

The difference between 2009 and 2021, however, is eight years of Pope Francis. When Obama took office, the U.S. bishops were fairly compact in focusing on the abortion issue, while today there are enough “Francis bishops” in the US to offer a vocal counterweight, one closer to the Vatican's line.

On Wednesday that voice came from Cardinal Blase Cupich of Chicago, widely viewed as one of Francis' staunchest allies among the American bishops, who took to Twitter to call Archbishop Gomez's statement “ill-considered” and to object to what he described as a lack of consultation in how it was crafted.

Cardinal Cupich also appeared to issue a warning that he's not prepared to just let this go, saying the “internal institutional failures involved must be addressed”.

So, today we have three groups, not just two, at odds within the Catholic power structure: The Vatican, the leadership of the USCCB, and an increasingly influential

cluster of bishops who dissent from that leadership.

Some may find this division distressing, especially at a time when a new president is calling Americans to unity. Yet here's the glass-half-full reading: In a time when “facts” seem to be up for grabs, at least the discord reflected in those messages has the virtue of being honest.

Most importantly, this isn't exclusively, or even primarily, a tension between Rome and the USCCB, or between Archbishop Gomez and Cardinal Cupich. Instead, it's a fault line that runs straight through the hearts and minds of many American Catholics themselves.

Many American Catholics genuinely want to see the Church partner with the new administration to help build a post-pandemic society marked by greater inclusion, greater racial justice, a healthier environment, and many other pressing aims.

Admire

At a personal level, many American Catholics see a great deal to admire in Biden, not simply his devout Catholic Faith but also his commitment to personal decency, and they don't want to see their Church – which is, after all, the president's church too – as his enemy, especially from day one.

Yet like Archbishop Gomez, many American Catholics also

regard the defence of unborn life as a “preeminent priority”, and struggle to reconcile their enthusiasm for Biden's civil tone and broadly compassionate agenda with the reality that he's likely to pursue policies on abortion they can't support. For example, Dr Anthony Fauci told the World Health Organisation on Thursday that Biden is preparing to reverse the Mexico City Policy, which prohibits US funding for overseas groups that provide or refer patients for abortions.

“For the record, this is not a case of ‘good cop/bad cop’, meaning a coordinated strategy to allow the Pope to dangle a carrot while the bishops wield a stick”

When that happens, at least some Catholics inclined to give Biden a chance will be left saddened and alarmed about what may come next.

In other words, framing Wednesday's mixed messages as a conflict between two distinct factions isn't the whole picture. Yes, there are some bishops more inclined to go to war with Biden and others

disposed to make a separate peace, and they'll likely continue to spar – unless, that is, the USCCB finds a way to deal with such contrasts in a quieter and less public way, which no doubt is a consummation devoutly to be wished.

Beneath all that, however, at the level where real people live and breathe without issuing statements or calling press conferences, this is less about competing camps than about contending instincts and divided hearts within the same individuals. If you're a Catholic who tries to start with the Faith rather than a partisan position, some part of you had to be sympathetic with both Rome and the USCCB on Wednesday, with both Archbishop Gomez and Cardinal Cupich, and wishing you had a magic formula to unite the knot.

As just the country's second Roman Catholic president, Biden's relationship with his Church inevitably will be part of the drama of his presidency. How he'll thread the needle remains to be seen, but perhaps it's not altogether a bad thing that, on day one, he got an inadvertent reminder of just how demanding that may turn out to be.

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

Catholic leaders praise Biden's executive actions helping immigrants



John Lavenburg

Hope Border Institute executive director Dylan Corbett sees first-hand the hardship thousands of people face in Ciudad Juárez – the Mexican city opposite the border to El Paso, Texas – while they wait in limbo to pursue their asylum cases and hopefully enter the United States.

Resources

“It does not have the infrastructure and resources to handle these populations,” Mr Corbett said. “There are severe medical needs. We’ve had to bury migrants that have not received proper medical attention. They don’t have access to education. Some families are there for the long term so the children are missing several months, sometimes years, of school. There’s a lack of work. There’s a lot of physiological-social needs because of the stress they have endured.”

“In the past two days US bishops and Catholic immigration advocates have expressed their support for the executive actions”

Last Wednesday, the Migrant Protection Protocols policy – known as the “remain in Mexico” programme that keeps asylum seekers on the Mexico side of the border – was suspended, part of a handful of immigration related executive actions President Joe Biden signed on day one.

In the past two days US bishops and Catholic immigration advocates have expressed their support for the executive actions. Other actions included the preservation of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals programme, reversing the travel ban from predominantly Muslim countries and halting production of the border wall.

Mr Biden also introduced an immigration bill that would provide pathway for 11 million undocumented immigrants living in the United States.

“We applaud President Biden’s restoration of the



A US Customs and Border Protection agent looks at a migrant deported from the US. at the Paso del Norte international border bridge in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, November 1, 2020. US President Joe Biden January 20, 2021, revoked Trump’s 2017 executive order authorising massive expansion of immigration enforcement in US and has implemented a 100-day moratorium on certain deportations. (CNS photo/Jose Luis Gonzalez, Reuters)

DACA programme, and we also strongly encourage him and the US Congress to immediately enact legislation that provides a path to citizenship for Dreamers,” Archbishop José Gomez of Los Angeles, president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and Auxiliary Bishop Mario Dorsonville of Washington said in a statement.

Persecution

Bishop Dorsonville and Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York issued a separate statement on the president’s reversal of the Muslim ban “which will help ensure that those fleeing persecution and seeking refuge or seeking to reunify with family in the United States will not be turned away because of what country they are from or what religion they practice”.

In a third statement Bishop Dorsonville said other actions like the 100-day moratorium on certain deportations to allow the Department of Homeland Security to review its policies and practices are “important first steps towards ensuring that immigration

enforcement in our country is balanced and humane”.

While they are appreciative, Mr Corbett and others note it’s important to hold the Biden administration accountable when it comes to their immigration reform promises.

“The need for legislative reform is really illustrated by the number of executive orders issued by both Republicans and Democrats in the last few administrations”

In a conversation with *Crux* Ashley Feasley, the USCCB Migration Refugee Services director of policy, said executive actions are helpful, but can only go so far.

“The bishops have long called for legislative reform,” Ms Feasley said. “The need for legislative reform is really

illustrated by the number of executive orders issued by both Republicans and Democrats in the last few administrations.”

Hopeful signs

Mr Corbett said there were a lot of hopeful signs, but when it comes to the Migrant Protection Protocols, suspension isn’t enough: Asylum seekers who are part of the programme must stay where they are pending further information from US government officials, according to the Department of Homeland Security.

“We work with this community every single day so there is still a lot of uncertainty about what’s going to happen next, and frankly we’re not sure what’s going to happen next. It’s great to see the programme suspended but we need to see asylum,” Mr Corbett told *Crux*.

Hosffman Ospino, president-elect of the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States, said some of the actions were the “low hanging fruit” of the Biden-Harris presidency,

since they just reversed the executive actions of the Trump administration.

“We need to have serious conversation and not just private conversation, but public conversation about who we are as a society”

He cautions that former President Barack Obama and Biden – then the vice president – couldn’t get the DREAM Act through Congress.

“These are good steps forward and let’s hope Congress delivers,” Mr Ospino told *Crux*. “Advocacy groups including the Catholic Church need to be on top of this particular topic and be proactive putting fire under the feet of this administration. We cannot allow as a society, as a Catholic Church, to see our sisters and brothers, Catholic and non-Catholic, live in the margins of society.”

Mr Ospino also recognised that millions in the country have a different view of immigration – citing nationalism “that has been brewing in society in the last decades”.

“We need to have serious conversation and not just private conversation, but public conversation about who we are as a society,” Mr Ospino said.

“Right now, we get snippets about who white supremacists are, who Black Americans are, snippets about the middle class, the upper class, immigrants, name every group. All of these snippets are mediated by ideology, by shortness of language used in social media and different people who want to manipulate the message,” he continued.

“I would love to see churches, our schools, our universities, our government having good conversations. It’s time to disagree, but let’s disagree in such a way we educate in the process.”

i John Lavenburg, national correspondent for *Cruxnow.com*

Letters

Letter of the week

Treatment of women in mother and baby homes 'inhumane'

Dear Editor, Victims of the mother and baby homes deserve every apology and compensation. Most of these ladies were young and innocent, many of them were sexual victims of employers and others known to them. Their treatment was cruel and inhumane. We need to place the blame where it belongs. Firstly, they were abandoned by par-

ents who didn't want to be ashamed in the eyes of their neighbours. The men who impregnated them took no responsibility and escaped justice. Some survivors tell us that many of the nuns were good and kind, and there is no excuse for those who were not. Some of the nuns were unhappy women, who were living frustrated lives.

It is ironic that today in Ireland, thousands of little babies are being killed in their mothers' wombs, and those who legislated for it cannot see that this is also a shameful time in our history. The little ones are victims, once again.

Your etc.,
Christina Doran
Raheen, Co. Limerick

A society that preferred 'out of sight, out of mind'

Dear Editor, In the years under investigation in the mother and baby homes inquiry, fathers, families and society at large washed their hands of responsibility for young girls and women who were pregnant outside of marriage. Institutions provided a handy 'out of sight, out of mind' solution.

Two thirds of the Irish electorate chose to wash their hands, yet again, with the legalisation of abortion in 2018. In the oft quoted words of French writer, critic, journalist and novelist Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Kerr, "Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose" (The more things change, the more they stay the same).

Your etc.,
Sinéad Tracey,
Leitrim Village, Co. Leitrim



Misogyny is still alive in Dáil Éireann

Dear Editor, I watched the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste apologise in the Dáil on Tuesday, January 13, on behalf of the State to women and children who were in mother and baby homes. The appalling cruelty visited upon those unfortunate women and their children stank of hypocrisy from all quarters of Irish society and rightly deserves to be condemned.

The report mentioned it appears that some 9,000 children died in eight-

een institutions over approximately seventy years.

The apologies given by Mr Martin and Mr Varadkar deserve some scrutiny however since both of these men publicly campaigned for abortion. Not only that but they dismantled the legal framework that protected the innocent lives of the unborn i.e. the Eight Amendment. To then castigate those who colluded in illegally imprisoning women and their children in what

were supposed refuges, and in separating children from their mothers, is hypocritical when one considers the effects of the 2018 abortion legislation.

It seems misogyny is still alive and well in Dáil Éireann. And men still talk out of both sides of their mouths simultaneously.

Your etc.,
Loretto Browne
Ashbourne, Co. Meath

A balanced view of history needed

Dear Editor, As I reflected and prayed deeply and sorrowfully after hearing reports from mother and baby homes, I could not help but recall other stories. Several people I have spoken to in the past who made efforts to research their family tree had to stop for they came across some news that was better left in the past, eg. one family in particular discovered murder and crime in their family line.

In my biblical studies, we were taught stories in the Old Testament had to be read in the history, culture and context of the time of writing. So many who have not had the privilege of biblical study, find these stories revolting, unbelievable and shocking. I feel when it comes to mother and baby homes, we need the history, culture and context of the time to be kept in mind. I'm aware these were

very dark times and some experienced much pain and deep suffering; but I am also aware some had better experiences and were given opportunities and possibilities that they may not have had elsewhere. I know some of these people, and their stories are good and their hearts are grateful. As in everything else, we must have a balance and we must keep history, culture and education of the time in mind.

I pray for forgiveness for all the wrong that has been done, I pray for healing for those who have been hurt and I pray in gratitude for all the good that has been done and is being done especially in this Covid time. God bless all.

Your etc.,
Sr Susan Evangelist
Drumkeen, Co. Donegal

Journalists should champion freedom of speech

Dear Editor, It is extraordinary to see media outlets, with all the advantages at their disposal, cowering behind a ban on the highly irresponsible bluster and politicking of President Donald Trump. The first duty of the journalist is to champion freedom of speech and freedom of expression, to fact-check claims and statements, not to ban them. It is also well to remember that freedom of speech and freedom of expression are fundamental to our cherished democracies.

Your etc.,
Fr J. Anthony Gaughan
Blackrock, Co. Dublin

facebook community

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

Looking at Confirmation positives during bleakness of Covid-19

The whole way we do communion, confirmation etc... in this country is wrong. It shouldn't be done in schools at all as that system has proven to be ineffective at producing properly formed, practicing Catholics. It should be parish based with the onus on families to actually put their kids forward for sacraments. – **Adam Conroy**

Why confirm them at all if they don't want to take their faith seriously? Why put priests and lay pastoral workers through all the trouble of getting students ready when, everyone knows, that out of the entire class, only 5% or less, may actually return to Mass on a regular basis? I think it's time to end this sacramental conveyor belt. – **Anthony O'Shaughnessy**

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

Fathers must own up to their responsibility

Dear Editor, I just read an article on the deaths in mother and baby homes between 1922 and 1998 which says 9,000 babies died in these homes during that period.

Advances in modern medicine have dramatically reduced the number of child deaths in modern times.

It is easy to rush to judgement in the case of child deaths in the mother and baby homes. But the issue must be viewed in its historical context. At present we have the luxury of the latest mod cons in our well-ventilated heated homes. Childcare services are available for all including working mothers. There are a vast array of social welfare services for single mothers including social housing. Contraception ensures family planning is the order of the day. Even with that up to 6000 women per year avail of abortion provided and funded by the State.

The fact that more babies and young children died in mother and baby homes is not surprising as none of these children would have individual care. There would have been no parent getting up in the middle of the night to change them or walk the floor with them till they fell asleep. There would be no specially trained staff in child care it did not feature in education until recently. If one child got any infection it would be passed on to all the other children in the same dormitory. No baby formula became available till well into the 1960s or 1970s. Disposable nappies did not exist either.

But one issue that needs to be highlighted in this context is the question of fatherhood. Justice demands that those fathers who abandoned those young pregnant girls should be obliged to own up to their responsibility. Justice must be seen to be done even in retrospect. Families too have to take the share of the blame when they abandoned their vulnerable young daughters.

Your etc.,
Nuala Nolan
Bowling Green, Galway

Letters to the Editor

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

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

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

📷 Around the world



▲ **BANGLADESH:** People look through debris of burned shelters at the Nayapara refugee camp in Cox's Bazar. Photos CNS

◀ **USA:** Pro-life advocates pray for the unborn during a prayer service at St Patrick parish cemetery in Smitttown New York, on the 48th anniversary of the Supreme Court's Roe v. Wade ruling legalising abortion in the US.



SPAIN: Migrants wait to disembark from a Spanish coast guard vessel in Arguineguín.



IRAQ: The site of a twin suicide bombing attack in a central market in Baghdad is seen on January 21, which claimed the lives of dozens of people.



BRAZIL: Relatives of patients hospitalised or receiving health care at home gather to buy oxygen at a private company in Manaus.



INDONESIA: Rescue workers carry a bag with the body of a victim in Mamuju, Indonesia, following a magnitude 6.2 earthquake that left at least 46 people dead, hundreds injured and thousands homeless.

God cannot tell a lie



Lying is the most pernicious of evils, the most dangerous of sins, the worst of blasphemes, and the one sin that can be unforgivable. Perhaps we need to be reminded of that today, given our present culture where we are in danger of losing the very idea of reality and truth. Nothing is more dangerous.

There's a line buried deep in scripture that is too seldom quoted. The Letter to the Hebrews states simply: It is impossible for God to lie (Hebrews 6: 18). It could not be otherwise. God is truth, so how could God lie? For God to lie would be a denial of God's very nature. Consequently, for us to lie is to go directly against God. Lying is the definition of irreverence and blasphemy. It is an affront to the nature of God.

Aware

If we are aware of that, we haven't taken it seriously lately. Everywhere, from countless social media tweets, texts, and blogs to the highest offices of government, business, and even the Church, we are seeing an ever-deteriorating relationship with reality and truth. Lying and creating one's own truth have become socially acceptable (to a frightening degree). What's changed? Haven't we always lied? Who among us can say that he or she has never told a lie or falsified information in one way or another? What's different today?



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

What's different today is that, until our generation, you could be caught in a lie, shamed for telling it, forced to accept your own dishonesty. No longer. Today our relationship with truth is fracturing to a degree that we no longer distinguish, morally or practically, between a lie and the truth. A lie, now, is simply another modality of truth.

“The Letter to the Hebrews states simply: It is impossible for God to lie”

What's the net effect of this? We are living it. Its effects are everywhere. First, it has broken down a shared sense of reality where, as a community, we no longer have a common epistemology and a shared sense of right and wrong.

“Trust is predicated on the belief that we all accept that two plus two equals four, that we all accept there is such a thing as reality”

People no longer relate to reality in the same way. One person's truth is the other person's lie. It is becoming impossible to define what constitutes a lie.

This doesn't just destroy trust among us; worse, it plays with our sanity and with some of the deeper moral and religious chromosomes inside us. As I wrote in this column several months ago, we believe that there are four transcendental properties to God. We teach that God is one, true, good, and beautiful. Because God is one, whole and consistent, there can never be any internal contradictions within God. This might sound abstract and academic, but this is what anchors our sanity. We are sane and remain sane only because we can always trust that two plus two equals four, ever and always. God's oneness is what anchors

that. If that should ever change, then the peg that moors our sanity would be removed. Once two plus two can equal something other than four, then nothing can be securely known or trusted ever again. That's the ultimate danger in what's happening today. We are unmooring our psyche.

Lying

The next danger in lying is what it does to those of us who lie. Fyodor Dostoevsky sums it up succinctly: “People who lie to themselves and listen to their own lie come to such a pass that they cannot distinguish the truth within them, or around them, and so lose all respect for themselves and for others. And having no respect, they cease to love.” Jordan Peterson would add this: If we lie long enough “after that comes the arrogance and sense of superiority that inevitably accompanies the production of successful lies (hypothetically successful lies – and that is one of the greatest dangers: apparently everyone is fooled, so everyone is stupid, except me. Everyone is stupid, and fooled, by me – so I can get away with whatever I want). Finally, there is the proposition: ‘Being itself is sus-

ceptible to my manipulation. Thus, it deserves no respect.”

Jesus' warning in John's Gospel is the strongest of all. He tells us that if we lie long enough we will eventually believe our own lies and confuse falsehood for the truth and truth for falsehood, and that becomes an unforgivable sin (a blasphemy against the Holy Spirit) because the person who's lying no longer wants to be forgiven.

“People who lie to themselves and listen to their own lie come to such a pass that they cannot distinguish the truth within them”

Finally, lying breaks down trust among us. Trust is predicated on the belief that we all accept that two plus two equals four, that we all accept there is such a thing as reality, that we all accept that reality can be falsified by a lie, and that we all accept that a lie is falsehood and not just another modality of truth. Lying destroys that trust.

Living in a world that plays fast and easy with reality and truth also plays on our loneliness. George Eliot once asked: “What loneliness is more lonely than distrust?” So true. The loneliest loneliness of all is the loneliness of distrust. Welcome to our not-so-brave new world.

Family & Lifestyle

The Irish Catholic, January 28, 2021

Personal Profile

Finding joy and freedom through Confession

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Putting down the phone in favour of a pen



Last week I wrote about chess as a fun and potentially endless way to while away lockdown during these dark and dreary days. For those that didn't appeal to, there's another activity to consider as a coping mechanism during these most trying of days: writing.

Most of the writing we engage in day to day is of a mundane or everyday sort: texts, emails, shopping lists, memos, notes and whatever else might be needed throughout the course of a standard day. While these kinds of writing are certainly functional, they're not the sort of writing I'm suggesting you take up if you're



Writing letters, stories or poetry are widely unpractised skills with transformative potential writes Jason Osborne

feeling the January blues.

Writing a letter to a friend, penning a story or musing over the structure of a poem all have the ability to take us away from this world and into another – a much needed escapism when life feels as heavy as it recently has. Before discussing some specifics surrounding each of these pur-

suits, it's worth considering some of the benefits writing can confer upon those who practice it.

The benefits

The benefits of writing are many, and while it seems the studies concerning the effects of writing are fewer than the studies lauding the benefits of reading,

there is still plenty to commend the habit. Not least among these is the fact that it is considered to be one of the most important innovations in the development of civilisations and societies throughout history. That alone ought to indicate its transformative power.

Connected to the development of civilisation is that one benefit of writing is the ability to concretise and work through abstract ideas that would otherwise be too difficult for us to grasp. In this age of information overload, and with relatively little way to work through the sheer quantities of information we're exposed to on a daily basis, whether it

be through social media or the incessant news cycle, writing can act as a real anchor in the midst of what seems like an increasingly complex reality.

This may be what compelled the advent of writing in the first place – an overload of information that couldn't be handled without being set down. As civilisations developed, it's believed that writing originated as a way to handle the increasing amounts of information they produced. This writing wouldn't be in any way recognisable when set next to what we use today (look up cuneiform and hieroglyphs if

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Family News



AND EVENTS

BIDEN RETURNS US TO PARIS CLIMATE ACCORD

Joe Biden has reinstated the US to the Paris climate agreement mere hours after being sworn in as president. The US president is pursuing this amid a number of executive orders aimed at tackling climate change, with the issue being one of the Biden Administration's top priorities.

President Biden's executive action, signed in the White House last Wednesday, will see the US rejoin the international effort to slow the heating of the planet, following a 30-day notice period. The US is the world's second largest emitter of greenhouse gases, after China, and was withdrawn from the Paris deal under Mr Trump.

President Biden is also set to block the Keystone XL pipeline, which was intended to bring large quantities of oil through Canada to the US, and would have involved drilling in two large, protected areas of wilderness.

ELEPHANTS COUNTED FROM SPACE FOR CONSERVATION

Scientists are using images taken from space to count the number of African elephants for the purposes of conservation. This new measure could allow scientists to survey up to 5,000 square kilometres of elephant habitat on a cloud-free day, the BBC reported.

Scientists are saved the drudgery of the work too – the counting is done via an algorithm that is trained to detect elephants against a variety of backdrops.

Dr Olga Isupova, from the University of Bath, explained the process: "We just present examples to the algorithm and tell it, 'This is an elephant, this is not an elephant.' "By doing this, we can train the machine to recognise small details that we wouldn't be able to pick up with the naked eye."

Conservationists have to pay for access to the commercial satellites and their images, but the novel approach could vastly improve the monitoring of elephant populations, particularly in areas that span international borders where it can be difficult to obtain permission for aircraft surveys.

OLDER PEOPLE SHOULD INCREASE EXERCISE PRIOR TO COVID VACCINATION

Researchers of Trinity College Dublin have said that regular aerobic or moderate exercise in the weeks and months before Covid-19 vaccination can help improve antibody responses post vaccination in older people, according to *The Irish Times*.

The finding is set out in a report by scientists leading the on-going Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (Tilda). It suggests that adults aged 60 and above should regularly exercise, at least two to three times per week, prior to vaccination.

While the elderly are those in most need of the Covid vaccine, vaccine efficacy in older people is challenged by the effects of ageing on the immune system. As people age, their ability to formulate a strong antibody response following vaccination declines. They are much less likely to be able to summon up the long-term protection required for full immunity to a virus.

Fanning the flame of faith in children



I was speaking to a young Catholic father recently about the difficulties and challenges he faces in trying to pass on the Faith to his four young children. He was feeling a bit overwhelmed and ill-equipped for the job, wondering how he could be more proactive and involved.

He's feeling the increasing pressure in recent months as he struggles to juggle his career, household and family commitments. "What's a Catholic parent to do these days?" he asked in exasperation.

“Many parents are finding it even more of a hurdle as the work world, school world and family life all compete for the same space”

He felt that his children's spiritual and faith development were at risk of being pushed to one side or being put into a lesser category of something that he and his wife could attend to at some later stage. He was feeling a bit guilty knowing that if parents don't carve out a specific space in each day that's devoted to God, it just won't happen. Many parents are finding it even more of a hurdle as the work world, school world and family life all compete for the same space. It's a wonderful development for mothers and fathers that they now have the new flexibility to work from home but strict boundaries need to be drawn up to stop the demands of their jobs or other commitments from interfering with their primary role of raising their children to know and love God.



A parent's perspective Maria Byrne

When it comes to helping his children to love God and deepen their knowledge of their Christian faith, I think this young dad ended up answering his own questions about what to do. It's based on a bit of advice that applies in all areas of life and is often presented by some guru or other. It simply involves getting back to basics. Just take a deep breath, forget the worry and stress of the day and focus on what can be done now, today, in the available time that you have.

Holiness

You don't need to reach your destination immediately as it's a lifelong journey to holiness, not only for our children but for each and every one of us. God is our loving father, not a stern, punitive distant power who's waiting for us to mess up. Even the smallest toddler can understand that simple concept of a loving father who cares for us through all the ups and downs of life, even during scary pandemics when everything seems so different. The father I was chatting to recalled the words of Jesus telling us that "My yoke is easy and my burden is light" and reminded myself that being a good Catholic father doesn't have to be so difficult. In fact, it's a great source of joy to be the leading light in your child's life and to have been given such a key role.

In the task of fanning the flames of faith in our children, we can turn to St Joseph, an ordinary man who was entrusted

with the extraordinary task of being a loving father to Jesus. He can teach us the true values we need to stay close to Jesus and Mary and how to follow his example in cooperating with God's plan in how we teach our children. In this 'Year of St Joseph', what better saint to unite ourselves to.



Pope Francis referred to him as "The carpenter of Nazareth" who was able to "turn a problem into a possibility by trusting in divine providence".

I highly recommend that parents invest in the YOUCAT for Kids, a Catholic Catechism for parents and children. In the very beginning of this great book, it explains that believing in God means "I put all my trust in the one who loves me the most". To pass on our love of God, we must let our children see how we love and trust him. We need to pray and to teach our children to pray. It doesn't have to be a long session; start with 10 minutes at the table, maybe after dinner while everyone is there. Children follow our

example so let them see us saying our morning and night prayers; turning off the mobile phone and reading the Bible; going to Mass and Confession and trying to grow in virtue.

“A great incentive to look into is exploring the lives of the saints and encouraging children to emulate their favourite ones”

Most of all, make God a part of every day and focus on the fact that in the words of Pope Benedict XVI: "We are only Christians if we encounter Christ." We do that when we pray, read about Jesus in the Gospels and take an active part in the liturgical life of the Church which is centred on the Holy Eucharist and the sacraments. It's difficult at the moment but, when the opportunity arises, bring children to Mass even when they're small. Take them into the church for visits and get involved with parish and Catholic events that are family orientated. All children love to light a candle and pray for their special requests and the lovely older churches usually have beautiful shrines and statues of the better-known saints. A great incentive to look into is exploring the lives of the saints and encouraging children to emulate their favourite ones. How we, as parents, conduct our own lives is the greatest influence of all in our children's formative years. It may seem like too great a responsibility at times but it's a privilege and a great treasure to be honoured with helping to give our children the greatest gift they will ever have.

» Continued from Page 31



you're interested in seeing how it looked), but it was certainly a step along the road to the writing we use today.

Writing develops your capacity for complex thought as it involves attention, forethought, reflection and organisation which translate well into every other area of life. It doesn't only help the logical and dispassionate side of you either; more research has been devoted to the emotional benefits of writing, with some therapists and psychologists advocating writing as a way to come to terms with what's going on both around you and inside you.

A 2004 study researched writing's ability to aid in the healing of old wounds, with the author concluding that it can help anyone. So whether the doom and gloom of the present times weigh heavily upon you, or a simple desire to explore some new inner territory besieges you, writing is a reasonable activity to take up.

While I've been referring to writing as some kind of monolith throughout the article, there are many different kinds that might take your fancy.

The lost art of letter writing

While I'm not saying no one writes letters anymore, the necessity of letter writing has undoubtedly been eclipsed by the advent of the internet. It's a shame, because writing to another person affords a depth of expression that I've found is very hard to match in a message, email or phone call.

The ability to instantaneously communicate any sentiment we wish to whomever we wish means that, unless you're an especially focused and thoughtful person, we don't put too much attention into what we write anymore. Having sent a message, it can be followed up immediately with another, or amended if needs be. No such luxuries exist with letters; you better think before you set pen to paper.

Before we got engaged, my fiancée and I wrote letters to one another out of simple friendship, and I believe that the letters were an inextricable part of the development of our relationship. When each word is carefully considered and the most

important sentiments are selected from a multitude of rivalling ideas, how can anything but a deepening of the relationship with the person you're writing to result? The very process of sitting down for an hour or two to pen a letter implies and develops commitment to another – something sorely lacking in our hearts too often.

Escaping to another world

If letter writing isn't to your liking, or if the affairs of this world are proving a little too much at the moment, why not create your own world? I remember an author saying that he simply writes the stories he'd like to read – surely we can all do that?

This far into lockdown, limited to our houses as we are, the time has never been better for formulating and setting down your own story. You may have exhausted your bookshelf at this stage, or you may have come to the conclusion that nothing you have left is of any interest to you at the moment. No matter; whether it's historical fiction, fantasy, romance, a thriller or a science fiction story you're after, you can take a stab at crafting your own.

As the aforementioned author said, the best way to set about writing a story is to write something you'd like to read – not something to get published. Words that are put on the page for the mere purpose of making money are always lacking the heart that gives any story worth reading its soul.



The art of story writing is too large to do any justice to here, but two books that might be recommended on the topic are *Style: The Art of Writing Well* by F.L. Lucas and *How to Write Science Fiction & Fantasy* by Orson Scott Card. Lucas' book deals excellently with the mechanics of writing itself, ranging from clarity and brevity, to humour and vitality in writing. Scott Card's book, while limited in title to science fiction and fantasy, contains all of the rules necessary for constructing a realistic and believable setting for whatever story you decide to write.

Poetry

There is a rich connection between poetry and the spiritual life, and writing some of your own may feed your spiritual life while we're deprived of the sacraments and social supports that we so need.

“With so many concerns pressing down upon us, and with so few outlets, perhaps now is the time to pick up your pen and get writing”

In the foreword to his book on poetry *The Ode Less Travelled*, Stephen Fry confessed to the “dark and dreadful secret” that he writes poetry, yet he goes on to describe it as “songwriting, confessional, diary-keeping, speculation, problem-solving, storytelling, therapy, anger management craftsmanship, relaxation, concentration and spiritual adventure” – a potent mixture for renewal. Another extensive topic, I would recommend Mr Fry's book for fuller treatment of the ancient art-form.

For an insight into the spiritually transformative potential of poetry, Gerard Manley Hopkins and St John of the Cross ought to be examined. Ireland has deep roots in this field, with the revolutionary Joseph Plunkett writing his own mystical poetry too, most famously his poem *I See His Blood Upon The Rose*.

With so many concerns pressing down upon us, and with so few outlets, perhaps now is the time to pick up your pen and get writing.

Dad's Diary

Rory Fitzgerald



This has been the longest January in recorded history. The month began about ten years ago, as I watched as Big Ben ominously ticked down the seconds to 2021 with my wife and our two oldest kids. Instead of our usual cheerful New Year's gathering of friends and family, it was just the four of us this year, as the two smaller kids were in bed.

2021 arrived with an uneasy sense of trepidation, rather than cheer, all across our plague-ridden and confused world. I didn't even toast the new year with a glass of wine, for perhaps the first time since I was a teenager. 2021 didn't seem like a year to celebrate, but one best faced with a clear mind.

Like the rest of the country, we've been locked down at home since Christmas. I'm perpetually in the company of the usual crew: four kids, two dogs, two cats, a mother-in-law and a wife. Fortunately, I like my shipmates. A winter lockdown is a lot like being at sea for weeks on end, confined in close quarters with the same few people. We're making the most of things as this strange voyage continues towards an unknown destination. At least we have the hope of arriving in sunnier shores some time latest this year, as the vaccines roll out.

My wife is a frontline healthcare worker and so she got her jab a couple of weeks ago. As someone with budding immunity to the coronavirus, she now is tasked with most of the trips to the supermarket, depriving me of some of my most exciting outings of the week. Cases have exploded in our area, so it pays to be careful at this time.

Cork University Hospital is struggling badly with a surge in cases. Amid that chaos, my poor mother had to be admitted suddenly ahead of an operation. Now that she's in, nobody can visit her – not even my father who had to say goodbye at the door. It's terrible being unable to visit and comfort her, and to just pass the time together. This year, her birthday was spent alone, confined to a hospital bed. We did all we could to make it cheerful from a distance. The kids made happy paintings for her, and wrote cards for her, but there's no

substitute for being there. Thankfully, the government lets frontline healthcare workers use childcare, even though the schools are closed. This means the two smallest kids get to go to their childminder's house when my wife's at work. It's a welcome change



of scenery for them, and a strange peace descends on the house in their absence. I can work with fewer interruptions and the older kids get to concentrate on their schoolwork without a toddler's polyphonic orchestra going on around the house. She seems to think that everything is a drum at the moment. For a couple of days, the ice was so bad we couldn't transport the smolies along the country lanes to their childminder. It was interesting, to say the least, trying to schedule work calls around naps and tantrums.

We're all muddling through this latest lockdown as best we can. It seems unlikely that the schools will be open for a while yet, so the kids are stuck with the strange dislocation of online learning. They do get quite a lot of schoolwork done though, and they can send messages to their friends in their class to keep in touch. With the winter weather and the early nights, there is not much to do after school, except play with their siblings or the dogs. Sometimes, the weather is kind enough to let them have a run in the woods or in the fields. They have embraced reading, making models, painting, chess and other indoor activities. We often do family movie nights, complete with popcorn. Even in this longest January, there is comfort to be found.

Finding joy and freedom through Confession

Personal Profile



Ruadhán Jones

For those outside the Faith, the idea that confession may draw you into Catholicism will seem counter intuitive – let alone that it can be joyful or freeing. But that's just what it was for Anita Sheahan, who now does faith outreach for St Mary's Dominicans in Cork.

Though she grew up in a house that attended Mass weekly, Anita explains that "it was Catholic by name but we didn't live out the Faith throughout the week". Catholicism was not something important to her. But things started to change when she went to college, as she spent years searching for the meaning of life.

Medjugorje

"It was through a lot of difficult times in college and things that I started seeking out God," Anita says. "But I was seeking him out in every place, but the right place, you know. I ended up being asked to go to Medjugorje by a neighbour of ours. He was inviting all of our family. I wasn't keen on going somewhere quite religious at the time!

"I said yes because it was sold to me like a holiday, a sun holiday. I said, you know, a free holiday for my parents, they can do the religious thing, I'll do my thing. I didn't mind going to Mass every day, out of respect for them I would do that. But I found that as the week went on at Medjugorje, I was very curious as to what this faith thing was all about.

"There were a lot of young people there that were really, truly



Anita Sheahan in Brew132, the Dominican-run café in Cork which she manages.

joyful and really free – and it was the freedom that really drew me because it felt like something I was really lacking. I was lacking in that real true joy which they seemed to have. They started talking to me about Confession and I can tell you that I was absolutely allergic to Confession, to the idea of it!

"But I had seen that real joy and freedom they had and on the other hand that fear, that resistance to Confession that I had. I had nothing to lose other than fear. I went and had an absolutely amazing experience speaking with a priest, he was lovely. It really changed my perspective and it really drew me back into the Church," she concludes.

A combination of the kindness of the religious she met in Medjugorje and the witness of

young Catholics drew Anita back to the Faith. When she came back from Medjugorje, she spent some time working, before joining the Holy Family Mission for two years. Here, she grew in understanding of the Faith through catechesis, Bible studies and prayer. She then began her new mission, going outward and teaching the Faith to others.

Faith

"My desire to share it with others, to share faith with others really grew – that's what led me to Cork," Anita says. "I'm working for the Dominicans in St Mary's. Part of that work, a good part of that work, is managing and looking after Brew132, a Catholic café in the city. Brew132 is Hebrews 13:2: 'Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for

in doing so you may have shown hospitalities to angels without knowing it.'

Hospitality

"Brew is really about showing hospitality and serving," she continues. "That same desire I have to give back really comes into Brew. You're meeting people where they're at. There are people who come in who have no faith, and that's perfectly fine, they're so welcome – and you have a conversation with them about absolutely anything. You're smiling, you're being kind and people come back. They come back because they're meeting amazing staff and volunteers who are really being genuine, just being kind to people. That's really what it's about."

"Through that, there's a lot of evangelisation going on – it depends on who you're meeting and where they're at. I know with the lockdown and things, evangelisation is not the same as it would have been. You have to go with the flow at the moment. A lot of things are going online. We're doing a lot of adult catechesis, we're doing a lot of different programs for people 35 plus. But we're also beginning again to do a lot with young people. We've the NET team as well in Brew who are doing amazing work, doing a lot of evangelisation online."

Anita is effusive in her praise for the "silent witness" of staff, volunteers and benefactors of Brew132.

“Having it as a nice little home for people to meet like-minded people of faith”

"The kindness of the volunteers and benefactors is amazing," she says. "We've had wonderful people who have supported Brew which is going on two years now. I'm just thinking the volunteers have poured their hearts into Brew. The kindness of people who supported the mission, people who have been praying for Brew and invested in that way.

"Please God, once we can open up again and have people in again, we'll have different evenings of game nights, music days and different ideas that we have for the cafe. Fostering that sense of community inside the cafe is what we're about. Having it as a nice little home for people to meet like-minded people of faith."



Children's Corner

Chai Brady

How to bend water with static electricity

There is quite an easy science experiment which is great for helping kids learn about static electricity. Static electricity is a familiar electric phenomenon in which charged particles are transferred from one body to another. For example, if two objects are rubbed together, especially if the objects are insulators and the surrounding air is dry.

We'll get into how this happens later, for now demonstration is the best form of instruction. Try bending water with static electricity produced by combing your hair or rubbing it with an inflated balloon. Can it really be done? Give it a try and find out!

Apparatus

- A plastic comb (or an inflated balloon)
- A narrow stream of water from a tap
- Dry hair

Method

- Turn on the water so it is falling from the tap in

a narrow stream (just a few millimetres across but not droplets).

- Run the comb through your hair just as you normally would when brushing it (do this about 10 times). If you are using a balloon then rub it back and forth against your hair for a few seconds.

- Slowly move the comb or balloon towards the stream of water (without touching it) while watching closely to see what happens.

Explanation

The static electricity you built up by combing your hair or rubbing it against the balloon attracts the stream of water, bending it towards the comb or balloon. It certainly seems like magic but in reality, like many of the mysteries of the universe, scientists have discovered the explanation.

Negatively charged particles called electrons jump from your hair to the comb as they rub together, the comb now has extra electrons and is negatively charged. The water features both

positive and negatively charged particles and is neutral. Positive and negative charges are attracted to each other so when you move the negatively charged comb (or balloon) towards the stream, it attracts the water's positively charged particles and the stream bends.

Static electricity has many more uses than just bending water though. One of its main applications is in printers and photocopiers where static electric charges attract the ink, or toner, to the paper. Other uses include paint sprayers, air filters, and dust removal.

In the natural world it even causes lightning. Lightning occurs due to a build-up of static electricity inside a storm cloud. Moving around inside the cloud are tiny water molecules called hydrometeors. These hydrometeors are colliding and bumping into each other—creating a static electric charge.

There is much to learn about the exciting world of static electricity and this experiment will certainly whet your appetite for more knowledge on the subject.



TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



Hard not to be inspired by the drama of the inauguration

I wasn't really surprised by how smoothly the inauguration of President Joe Biden went on Wednesday of last week - facilitated by massive security of course!

My positive and optimistic side was drawn towards inspiration as I watched the **RTÉ News Special** (RTÉ One). Amanda Gorman, the young poet laureate, delivered an inspiring poem *The Hill We Climb* - it was delivered with grace, drew in a Scripture reference and spoke of mercy, which has been in short supply. The invocation by Fr Leo O'Donovan SJ, a Biden family friend, was likewise inspiring and seemed to be well received by those present, including Republicans Mike Pence and George Bush, but not Donald Trump whose absence came across as ungracious. It was hard not to be moved too see President Biden and his entourage attending a religious service earlier, and yet if Mr Trump had done that it might have been dismissed as a cynical photo opportunity.

My own cynical side was uneasy, all the more so with the *National Public Radio* (NPR) report a few days later about the Biden administration preparing to undo Mr Trump's anti-abortion measures. Most of the media will give him a free pass on this one, if they're not positively cheering him on. If true



Jesuit Fr Leo O'Donovan delivers the invocation during the inauguration of Joe Biden. Photo: CNS/Brendan McDermid

healing of division was on the agenda perhaps a more measured response was in order rather than a flurry of executive orders to undo a host of Trump initiatives.

Inauguration

The inauguration of Mr Biden was the starting point for **The Big Questions**, back on BBC One on Sunday mornings, with presenter Nicky Campbell deftly handling

the new Covid-restricted environment - a few socially distanced studio guests with two other guests and a virtual audience tuning in remotely. It works. After a healthy and diverse debate about Covid-19 lockdown the week before, last Sunday's edition used the change of the guard in the USA as a prompt to explore social media in the light of Mr Trump's constant use of those platforms.

It was one of the best discussions of the topic I've come across. Comedian and author Andrew Doyle was concerned about intrusions onto free speech and thought the best way to counteract the extreme stuff was to have better arguments. He was "terrified" of the power of the huge social media companies which saw them kicking a sitting US president off their platforms. He wondered who gets to decide what's 'fake news'. Nicky Morgan, baroness and former Conservative MP wondered who holds the companies to account. She had received abuse and death threats and feared such online abuse would put people off going into public life. Imran Ahmed of the Centre for Countering Digital Hate was concerned about how, on social media, "misinformation is seamlessly integrated into information" and thought there should be consequences for "malignant activity".

Revive

The second half of the show asked 'Will Covid Revive Faith?' Some saw a huge interest in online religion as a hopeful sign, others weren't so sure. Rev. Dr Susan Salt, an Anglican deacon, thought lockdown gave people a chance to pause and reflect on what was important and she was impressed by the acts of kindness she saw in

PICK OF THE WEEK

SONGS OF PRAISE

BBC One Sunday January 31, 1.15pm

Mark De-Lisser hosts the semi-final of the brand new competition to find the Gospel Singer of the Year 2021.

BAKHITA PART ONE

EWTN Sunday January 31, 9pm

The dramatic life of Josephine Bakhita, Sudanese-born slave who converted to the Catholic Faith and became a sister in the Canossian Daughters of Charity. She was canonised by St John Paul II.

THE LEAP OF FAITH

RTÉ Radio 1 Friday February 5, 10.05pm

Topical religious and ethical issues with Michael Comyn.

hospitals where she worked. She found people more open to religious conversations, and to the reality of death. Prof. Francis Davis from the University of Birmingham thought there was a danger of "over self-dramatising" prospects of great renewal. Rev. David Walker, Church of England Bishop of Manchester, was encouraged by the involvement of large numbers in online religious services and also found religious faith a great motivation for people to get involved in tough voluntary work.

The start of the Biden era was also the starting point for last Sunday morning's **Sunday Sequence** (BBC Radio Ulster). Presenter Audrey Carville assured us the new president was a "committed Catholic" and a man of "deep faith". I think it would be

better if she left such judgments to her guests. Her only guest on the topic was journalist Marian McKeown of *The Business Post*, who at least has conservative commentator Cal Thomas as a foil when they spar regularly on *The Last Word* (Today FM). She thought Mr Biden was "a very authentic man", with "decent human impulses". There was no one to cast a more critical eye, though Ms Carville did reference criticism, on inauguration day, of Mr Biden's abortion stance by some Catholic bishops, including what she referred to as "the one from Los Angeles". She could have checked his name!

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Film

Aubrey Malone



Past and present worlds on Netflix

You've probably all seen *The Crown* by now. I enjoyed it but like many of the mini-series on Netflix it was anything but 'mini'. I also thought John Lithgow was far too tall for Winston Churchill though his performance is solid. We've been so spoiled by some of the recently brilliant depictions of Churchill on the big screen the bar has been set very high. As for Claire Foy as Queen Elizabeth, I had no problems here. Ms Foy is shaping up to be the new Helen Mirren.

Dramas

Ever since I tuned into *The Crown*, Netflix has been inundating me with period

dramas. *Bridgerton* is the latest one on offer. I can't recommend this yawning depiction of high society in Regency London. It's been dubbed 'a raunchy *Downton Abbey*' and that's a pretty apt description. Life is too short for these inconsequential costume epics.

Coming up to the present, *Hope Gap* is a riveting depiction of marital breakdown with astonishing performances from Annette Bening and Bill Nighy as a couple who've been drifting apart for years. Bening has to face the prospect of Nighty walking out on her as the film begins. During the next hour she undergoes all the parables of emotion you



Image from *Bridgerton*.

might expect - rage, disbelief, sarcasm, loneliness, raw pain. It's played with downbeat elegance on a suitably bleak corner of England against the backdrop of the Cliffs of Dover.

I can also recommend *Marriage Story*, a more streetwise film from Noah Baumbach on a similar theme. Here it's the woman who walks out. Scarlett Johansson courageously

goes without make-up for the part and looks almost plain as a result. (I never thought I'd see myself using the words 'plain' and 'Scarlett Johansson' in the same sentence.) A lot of it boils down to a child custody squabble. I thought it was going to turn into a latterday version of *Kramer Vs Kramer* for a while but thankfully it doesn't go down that schmaltzy road.

Sides

Baumbach doesn't take sides. That's what makes it so engrossing. His style, like that of his directorial mentor Woody Allen, is almost documentary in tone. The film plays out like a matrimonial

autopsy. For much of the time my sympathies were with Adam Driver, Johansson's husband. I was reminded of the man who said, 'Alimony is like putting a dime into the traffic meter after your car has been towed away'.

If you want to see pure evil in action, watch the Spanish thriller *The Occupant*. It's one of these 'cuckoo in the nest' films where a character infiltrates another person's life in an attempt to almost become them. The trope for this genre can be seen in everything from *Unlawful Entry* to *One Hour Photo*. It's disturbing but ingenious in its depiction of a man who loses his job and, subsequently, his comfortable life in a luxurious apartment. After he's forced to move out of it he targets the new owner and hatches his nefarious plan.

BookReviews

Peter Costello



The true importance of archives is not for today, but for tomorrow



Part of the national archives in Dublin.

Peter Costello

At the turn of the year *The Irish Catholic*, along with other long-established national newspapers, has customarily devoted space to items from the year end release of state documents from 30 years ago by our National Archives in Bishop Street, Dublin.

This usually ran to a mini-supplement of six pages. But this year, because of the pandemic and restriction on the opening of libraries and other institutions, this proved impossible.

In the past, members of the press were allowed five days access early in December to the files directly. This year, however, the staff scanned

a mere 100 files which they deemed would be of greatest interest to the 'newspapers of record'. This sounds like a lot of files, but in fact was a mere fraction of the thousands what would normally be available. In any case, in dealing with an ordinary year's release *The Irish Catholic* decided on another approach.

Politics

Realising that the other national papers would concentrate on politics - usually files on the northern and southern governments and files that could present embarrassing revelations about politicians still around or of recent memory - *The Irish Catholic* took a different path, reflecting the special social and historical focus of this paper.

Our interest was, for instance, on the foreign affairs files covering relation with the Holy See, which, depending on the individual Irish ambassador at the Vatican, could be very revealing, and often as embarrassing anything to be derived from Upper Merrion Street.

“The press are explicitly asked by the National Archives to record the numbers of the files their articles were based on”

But, we also had a different view on social matters. A couple

of years ago, for instance, there was a major release of the files from the old inter-war Aliens Office. These, from our point of view, were full of fascinating material, and will be worthy of investigation at PhD level. Many dealt with Jewish refugees, some passing through on their way to the US, others wishing to live here where they had relatives. These were ignored by the rest of the journalists.

Stories

The aim of present-day journalists is to find the stories they would have liked to have reported at the time, but never got on the trail of.

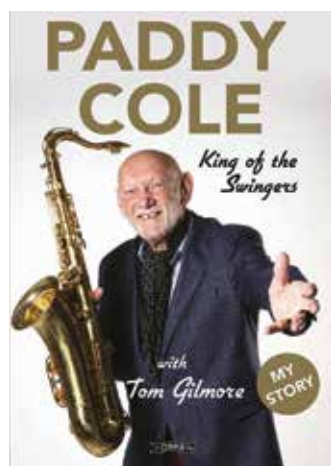
The press are explicitly asked by the National Archives to record the numbers of the files their articles

were based on. This *The Irish Catholic* was very careful to do: it enabled readers of these articles to go in and peruse the files directly themselves. Yet, we were the only paper or media outlet to do so. The rest ignored the instruction, intended by the National Archives as an aid to researchers. But as I say, the purpose of the press was to find scandal, not to write 'the first draft of history'.

If this year, printing deadlines prevented us presenting our usual articles.

The recent months have been filled with archival interest. This month, for instance, we learned of the difficulties of the staff at the White House to retain papers from the president's office. Former president Donald Trump did not believe in filing or preserving documents

On the road with the sounds of other days



Paddy Cole: King of the Swingers

by Paddy Cole with Tom Gilmore.
Foreword by John McColgan
(O'Brien Press, €19.99/ebook €9.99)

It is amazing how 'the little bit of religion' creeps into strange places sometimes. These are the music-making memories of a leading figure in the music scene since the 1950s. Paddy Cole is a great tale teller: For many of the years covered by this book, I lived abroad - in the United States and then in London - so let's just say I missed his act at Vegas. But I loved this book.

The little bit of religion? Paddy and his wife Helen are, so the co-author tells us, regular church-goers, then and now. But, more than that: like many in the Irish music and arts worlds, the Coles are friends of the great and inspiring Fr

Brian D'Arcy who from his earliest days had set himself to be the pastor to the Irish showbusiness world.

Clergyman

He was not the only clergyman to float through Paddy Cole's life. But so did a great many other people. This is a book filled with glimpses of figures such as Albert Reynolds, who attempted to use music contacts from his dance hall to promote contacts with the unionists. He also cured Paddy Cole of his taste for brandy and soda.

Paddy ran a pub in Castleblaney, Co. Monaghan for many years which seems to have been a hairy business at times. But, it is not for those bits that historians of the future will read this book. Unlike so many books Paddy Cole reveals

what a 'changing Ireland' really was. Political leaders have nothing to do with it. The rising post-war generation went their own way, and forced the politics and the journalists to follow. There comes across in these pages the sound of an era of happy innocence, no matter what many carpers thought about the dancehalls and their musicians.

The book is great fun, a saga of changing life and years of fun and music. I love it and I suspect so will many others, for it will ignite their own memories of youth and courtship and a world of travel, here and abroad. I wouldn't like anyone to take away the impression that this is a serious book. It goes with a real swing and provided a great read, which in these dark days of lockdown is a much needed thing.

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.

“In the past, members of the press were allowed five days access early in December to the files directly”

at all. He would tear them up as he dealt with them, and the staff had to retrieve the scraps from the bin and tape them together. Nevertheless, photo coverage in his administration's last hours showed boxes being removed by vans, going where is not known. We cannot assume they were to be preserved. (Back on November 2, *The New Yorker* reported on the auction sale of a Bible signed by Mr Trump - not the one that featured in the incident outside St John's Church though.)

Correspondence

The dealer, Bill Panagopoulos, told the magazine there was very little official presidential correspondence signed by Mr Trump in the market. “He doesn't seem to send any messages at all,” Mr Panagopoulos said.

Here in Ireland, however, we have seen with the mother and baby home report just how vital archives are in preserving past events for re-examination, to bring about just resolutions.

Yet, politicians do not always agree with preservation. They too would remove materials from their offices to their homes. I say materials, because the term covers such things as the Russian crown jewels, State property which the Boland family retained for decades, about which we wrote a revealing article.

The papers might sometime later be passed to University College Dublin (UCD) or other archives; Éamon de Valera's went originally to the Franciscans in Killarney, Co. Kerry - we do not know what was destroyed. The politicians were editing the historical first draft in their favour.

The real importance of archives is not for us today, but for the citizens of the future who wish to hold us to account. Archives are important: too important to be left to the mercy of departmental secretaries or government ministers.

Currently an extensive enlargement of the premises in Bishop Street is underway, but much more needs to be done to preserve our past. That means more money, more staff, and more controlling legislation.

The National Archives strive to do the very best they can, but it is difficult. For instance, few people seem to know that the National Archives will also accept and preserve the archives of large and small businesses: records from which our economic and social history can be written, the true history of Ireland in the eyes of many historians.

But, as often as not they just end up in a skip on Merrion Square or Angelsey Street, following in that way many records of Mr Trump's time in power.



In this 2018 file photograph, then US President Donald Trump signs into law an act to assist victims of genocide in Iraq and Syria while flanked by Church leaders. There is confusion around the final destination of many of Mr Trump's presidential archives. Photo: CNS

Memories of a Missionary in modern Africa

We learn that the new book from Fr William Kingston CSSp, *What is your Business? Memories of life, especially from my 23 years missionary work in Sierra Leone, West Africa* (CRM Publications), which was reviewed in these pages last week, is temporarily available only from: The

manager, Books Store, Holy Ghost Fathers, St Joseph's House, Rockwell, Cashed, Co. Tipperary. Intending purchasers should note that the cost is €20.00 from store (but only after Covid-19 Lockdown ends); currently it can be ordered by mail, €30.00 postage paid.

Ireland's Poles, a new community in our ancient nation

The Irish Polish Society Yearbook

ed. Jaroslaw Plachecki, vol. VII 2020

(see contact details below for ordering a copy)

J. Anthony Gaughan

Over the last couple of decades the Polish community has established a strong presence in Ireland - both commercially and socially. The many areas of life and history the two nations have in common are being built on, thanks mainly to the very active Irish Polish community.

A couple of years ago the Royal Irish Academy mounted a fascinating exhibition celebrating Count Paul Strzelecki, a now almost unknown Polish humanitarian whose efforts saved up to 200,000 children during the Great Irish Famine. Such forgotten connections are well worth recovery and exploration.

This year, as usual, the Yearbook of the Irish Polish Society arrived right on cue. It is a periodical from which Irish and Poles can explore their past and present. This year's issue includes a number of fascinating profiles.

“Children were taken from their families and sent to the Third Reich, where some who had Aryan features were selected for ‘Germanisation’”

The most important one is on Jan Kaminski, who must be one of the most fortunate and resilient Poles of his generation.

Jan was born into a Jewish family at Bilgoraj, near Lublin in Poland, in 1932. When World War II began it had a population of 8,300, of which 5,000 were Jews. The town was captured by the Germans in September 1939. Persecution of the Jews began immediately.

Deported

During 1941 and 1942, large groups of Bilgoraj's Jews were deported to extermination camps. The final stage of this appalling action took place in November 1942. Some 400 of the town's Jewish citizens were shot and the remaining 2,500 were deported to a death camp at Belzec.

Belzec had been established by the Nazis in 1941. It was the first camp built to carry out Operation Reinhard, the policy to use modern technology to conduct the 'Final Solution'. Almost 500,000 Jews were murdered there, together with some 1,500 Catholic Poles who had tried to save them.

It was closed down in 1943, all signs of it demolished and a pine forest planted on the site. As a result,



Celebrating Polish and Irish music and culture in Dublin

and because of a lack of survivors and documentation, for a long time little was known about it. Hannah Dowling's historically-accurate and dispassionate narration at what occurred at Bilgoraj and Belzec is a powerful moral lesson.

Survived

Jan Kaminski survived the awful events at Bilgoraj because he fled from the town during the final pogrom in 1942. However, his parents and siblings were not as fortunate. Jan remained on the run, assisted by people inhabiting the more remote places in the area.

Then he became a victim of another of the Nazi's heinous programmes. Known as Generalplan Ost, it aimed to ethnic cleanse vast areas and colonise them with Germans. Thus between November 1942 and March 1943, over 100,000 Poles were evicted from some 300 villages and transported to labour camps in Germany.

Those who were not fit for work were moved on to extermination camps. Children were taken from



Count Paul Strzelecki Polish hero of the Irish Famine celebrating Polish and Irish culture at the Polish House in Dublin.

their families and sent to the Third Reich, where some who had Aryan features were selected for 'Germanisation' and the rest were sent to work on German farms.

Jan had the good fortune to be rescued at one of the stops on the way by a Polish tailor.

After Lublin was liberated in July 1944 by the Polish army, Jan was adopted by them as a mascot. At the end of the war they took him to London where, with the help of the Polish YMCA, he was able to acquire a secondary education. Next a 'Veritas scholarship' enabled him to attend Trinity College in Dublin. After graduating he became a successful restaurateur and later the proprietor of Concorde Travel.

Avocations

The other profiles featured are of persons with very different avocations. Charles Stokes (1852-95) was born in Dublin. Later the family settled in Liverpool, where Charles joined the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in Central Africa. In 1885 he left the CMS and became 'a gun-runner'! While thus engaged he was captured by the Belgian authorities in the Congo and was hanged after a drumhead court-martial.

Andrzej Wejchert (1937-2009) was a renowned architect. He is best known in Ireland for his buildings on the Belfield campus at University College Dublin (UCB), but he designed many other projects in Ireland and Poland. In the Yearbook his art, style, talent, knowledge and skills are comprehensively explored by a fellow-master of design.

These profiles are just a few of the items in this very interesting and readable Yearbook, which is also replete with information on the Irish Polish Society and its activities.

Please note: the Polish House is only open during evening events. For further information contact: ips.dublin@gmail.com or Polish House, 20 Fitzwilliam Place, Dublin 2. Telephone: 01.676.2515 (+353.1.676.2515), or Krzysztof Kiedrowski on 087.795.1446.

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.

Email Clare Martin at clare.martin@hospicefoundation.ie or call 01 679 3188



www.hospicefoundation.ie



Your heart for the homeless

Merchants Quay Ireland reaches out with kindness to people living on our streets, sleeping in doorways, suffering and alone.

Your legacy, of any amount, can enfold the most vulnerable and lonely in wrap-around supports. You may wish to keep the details confidential. But we want to give you this little wooden keepsake, made by a client, for you.

This is your heart for the homeless and those on the road to recovery.

To receive your little wooden heart and information on remembering

Merchants Quay Ireland in your will, ring Emma Murphy, Legacies Manager at 01-524 0965 or email emma.murphy@mqi.ie

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@mscmisions.ie

www.mscmissions.ie

When you remember Trócaire in your Will, you bring hope to people living in the world's poorest places

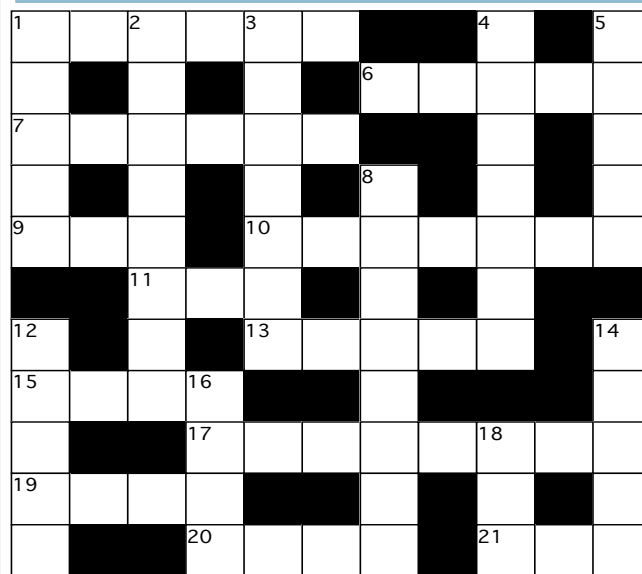
Trócaire

It's easy to get started, and we'll help you every step of the way. Call Grace Kelly on 01 629 3333, email grace.kelly@trocaire.org or write to me at Trócaire, Maynooth, Co Kildare.

One day, parents and their children will tell the story of how your legacy of love changed their lives. Thank you for considering a gift to Trócaire in your Will.

Crossword Junior

Gordius 367



Across

- 1 This river flows through Dublin (6)
- 6 Heroic (5)
- 7 Keep a car here (6)
- 9 Put down (3)
- 10 Creature such as a lizard or a snake (7)
- 11 Everyone or everything (3)
- 13 '_____ right of way' (5)
- 15 Travel on horseback (4)
- 17 Ring this when you want to go into a house (8)
- 19 Put money aside for later (4)
- 20 Have to have (4)
- 21 Cook something in a pan (3)

Down

- 1 Lawful (5)
- 2 You might see geese or chickens running around this space (8)
- 3 In a keen way (7)
- 4 Joined together in a wedding ceremony (7)
- 5 Fight with a sword for sport (5)
- 8 Turned up (8)
- 12 Car accident (5)
- 14 Young female horse (5)
- 16 Adam and Eve lived in the Garden of _____ (4)
- 18 Pixie (3)

SOLUTIONS, JANUARY 21

GORDIUS NO. 491

Across – 1 Petrol pump 6 Slow down 10 Chide 11 Punchbowl 12 Othello 15 Paste 17 Peep 19 Edwin 21 Tonight 23 Venue 24 Miss 26 Bambi 28 Striker 33 Affluence 34 Leant 35 Drag 36 Besmirched

Down – 1 Pact 2 Triathlon 3 Obese 4 Papal bull 5 Mine 7 Laois 8 Wilderness 9 Whippet 13 Logo 14 Options 16 Above board 20 Whitewash 21 Tedious 22 Hear 27 Mafia 29 Therm 30 Idler 31 Anne 32 Stud

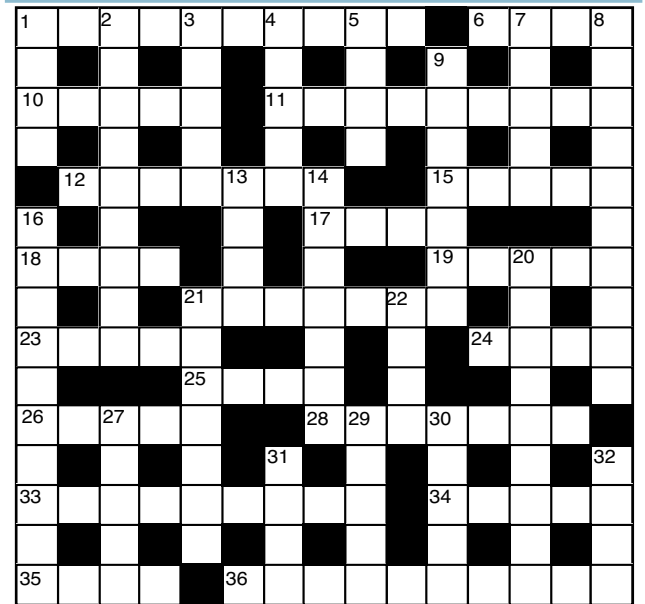
CHILDREN'S No. 366

Across – 1 Sparkling 6 Uranus 7 Tights 8 Remus 10 Western 12 Blue 14 Eclipse 17 Ink 18 Earring 19 Sun

Down – 1 Square 2 Alarm clocks 3 Last 4 Nought 5 Altar 9 Sweeten 11 Salary 13 Twig 15 Pail 16 Eggs

Crossword

Gordius 492



Across

- 1 & 12a Is it a religious career that provides one's creed? (10,2,5)
- 6 One who is obsessed with social position (4)
- 10 Tiles can be made of this fabric (5)
- 11 Easily upset by having to rewrite a cable, Iris? (9)
- 12 See 1 across
- 15 Not yet ignited; in darkness (5)
- 17 Teermini (4)
- 18 Wander - in the Eternal City, by the sound of it (4)
- 19 The English Derby is run here (5)
- 21 Run through by a spike, etc (7)
- 23 Cecelia, author of "PS I Love You", etc (5)
- 24 Help with a wager (4)
- 25 Starchy ingredient used in puddings (4)
- 26 Shade of brown (5)
- 28 Closest (7)
- 33 Do some laundry, then nag? That's loco! (4,5)
- 34 As French salutations go, it's the last word! (5)
- 35 Test (4)
- 36 Personal listening apparatus (10)

Down

- 1 Shelled out (4)
- 2 No longer fresh or fashionable (3,2,4)
- 3 Some serene matrons use it to give you that empty feeling! (5)
- 4 & 20d Did the arrows meant to kill him destroy a satin bassinet? (5,9)
- 5 Egg-shaped (4)
- 7 A Duran Duran singer turned up? Prize guy! (5)
- 8 Salad fruit not suitable for vegetarians? (4,6)
- 9 Made an allegation of guilt (7)
- 13 Individual part of an agenda (4)
- 14 Six-sided plane figure (7)
- 16 Use it to slice finer, baked produce (10)
- 20 See 4 down
- 21 Perceptive viewpoint (7)
- 22 Austen's heroine comes from from Salem, Massachusetts (4)
- 27 Hawaiian greeting (5)
- 29 Make an improvement (5)
- 30 Freshwater fish (5)
- 31 Scottish slope (4)
- 32 Embraces (4)

Sudoku Corner

367

Easy

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|--|---|---|---|
| | 8 | | | 9 | | 2 | | |
| 9 | 1 | | 3 | | | 6 | | |
| 4 | 6 | 2 | | 1 | | 5 | | 9 |
| 8 | | 5 | | 2 | | | | 3 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | | | | 7 | | 9 | | 6 |
| 6 | | 4 | | 3 | | 1 | 9 | 2 |
| | 5 | | | | | 7 | 4 | 8 |
| | | 8 | | 4 | | | 5 | |

Hard

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | 2 | 4 | | | 6 | |
| 8 | | | | 6 | | | | 7 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | | | | 9 | | | | 4 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| 6 | | | | 8 | 1 | 9 | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| 7 | | | | | 2 | | | 5 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | 9 | 6 | 3 | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | 9 | | | | 4 | | | 6 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | | 8 | | | 5 | 1 | | |

Last week's Easy 366

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | 1 | 5 | 4 | 8 | 9 | 3 | 7 | 2 |
| 9 | 4 | 3 | 7 | 2 | 6 | 5 | 8 | 1 |
| 8 | 7 | 2 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 6 | 9 |
| 2 | 3 | 1 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 4 |
| 7 | 9 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 8 | 6 | 2 | 5 |
| 5 | 8 | 6 | 2 | 9 | 4 | 7 | 1 | 3 |
| 3 | 6 | 8 | 9 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 7 |
| 4 | 5 | 9 | 6 | 7 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 8 |
| 1 | 2 | 7 | 8 | 3 | 5 | 9 | 4 | 6 |

Last week's Hard 366

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8 | 9 | 4 | 5 | 7 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 6 | 5 | 7 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 9 | 4 | 8 |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 8 | 4 | 9 | 5 | 7 | 6 |
| 2 | 7 | 9 | 6 | 3 | 8 | 4 | 1 | 5 |
| 4 | 3 | 1 | 9 | 5 | 7 | 8 | 6 | 2 |
| 5 | 6 | 8 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 7 | 3 | 9 |
| 7 | 9 | 5 | 2 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 8 | 4 |
| 3 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 8 | 5 | 6 | 9 | 7 |
| 8 | 1 | 6 | 7 | 9 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 3 |

Notebook

Fr Martin Delaney



A tendency to throw people away who are deemed useless

THE REPORT on the mother and baby homes is the latest in a line of painful spotlights to be shone into dark areas of our society during the decades following the setting up of the Irish Republic. One of the questions the report sought to answer was, why there had been the need to have mother and baby homes in Ireland back as far as the 1920s and continuing right up to the 1990s.

The report answers that question very clearly, “the institutions under investigation provided a refuge – a harsh refuge in some cases – when the families provided no refuge at all” (introduction to the executive summary). “Women were admitted to mother and baby homes and county homes because they failed to secure the support of their family and the father of their child” (section 5).

Commentary

In an interesting commentary on the report, Ryan Tubridy, during a radio interview, posed the question as to why we in Ireland have resorted to establishing institutions to address uncomfortable problems. Why did we lock away behind high walls those who did not fit into our image of what our country should be? He was thinking about the Lettracks, the Artanes, the Magdalen



laundries and the mother and baby homes and then he wondered if, in 50 or 100 years' time, people would judge harshly our current approach to direct provision centres and how a modern Irish society tolerated such treatment of people. Ryan was in conversation with author Billy O'Callaghan and they were discussing Billy's book *Life Sentences*. Billy's much acclaimed book deals with many of the same questions about family touched on in the mother and baby homes report. Prompted

by Ryan Tubridy's comment about institutions, Billy made a frightening comment which stopped me in my tracks. He said: 'In Ireland we have had a tendency to throw away people we don't find a use for.'

That comment of Mr O'Callaghan has haunted me because I don't think it just refers to the past. In 2018 abortion was legalised in Ireland. In 2019 the lives of 6666 babies were terminated in our country.

Are there any parallels in the circumstances which led to the need for mother and baby homes in the past and the circumstances which lead expectant mothers to choose a termination today?

The obvious common factor is the reality of unplanned pregnancies. I'm tempted to add the word 'unwanted' but then who can say that all the unplanned pregnancies of those women who ended up in mother and baby homes were

unwanted. There is significant evidence that many of the mothers wanted to keep their babies but sadly, as the report states: “There are many contemporary accounts throughout this report of Irish parents who were willing to welcome their daughter back to the family home following the birth but were not prepared to accept her child” (section 42).

Circumstances

What are the circumstances that lead so many expectant mothers today to choose a termination? In many cases the parents, families and partners may not even be aware of the pregnancy or the termination.

When we read the mother and baby homes report and indeed many of the others that preceded it, we are shocked and horrified that such things were allowed to happen.

Sadly however, the truth is that such institutions and how people were treated in them, were broadly supported by many sections of society at the time. There were of course voices, sometimes 'crying in the wilderness' who tried to challenge the prevailing culture but those voices were ignored or overruled. Today, the prevailing culture supports a new kind of 'institution' called abortion. A majority in our country voted to bring this institution into being. Yes, there were and are many voices, again crying in the wilderness, who have tried to challenge that prevailing culture but they too are silenced and overruled.

So I go back to that comment from Billy O'Callaghan about our country “having a tendency to throw away people we don't find a use for” and I wonder has anything really changed.

The hill we climb

“So let us leave behind a country better than the one we were left with. We will rebuild, reconcile and recover in every known nook of our nation, in every corner called our country our people diverse and beautiful will emerge battered and beautiful. When day comes, we step out of the shade aflame and unafraid. The new dawn blooms as we free it. For there is always light. If only we're brave enough to see it. If only we're brave enough to be it” (from the poem read by Amanda Gorman at President Joe Biden's inauguration).



One of the Sisters of Charity and grateful patients at St Vincent Health Centre, north-eastern India.



YOUR GIFT CAN HELP BRING MEDICINE TO SOME OF INDIA'S POOREST PEOPLE

Children under the age of five are dying from malnutrition and vitamin deficiency

The pandemic is stretching the already-limited resources of missionaries working with the poor. The Sisters of Charity of St Vincent De Paul write to The Little Way Association from north-eastern India: “Covid means that people are completely depending on the St Vincent Health Centre which we established in 2015 in Darenchigre. Patients are suffering from anaemia, jaundice, typhoid, diarrhoea, malnutrition, calcium and iron deficiency, and many children below the age of five are dying. We are unable to provide better medical care and treatment due to the lack of finance and the other issues like lack of medical equipment and oxygen supply monitors in emergency situations.”

“Please can you help us?”

The sisters work in one of India's poorest regions, where the people scrape a living from subsistence-agriculture. The health centre was intended just to provide first aid but people from 20 villages have come to use it as their principal medical facility. The sisters urgently ask for funds for vitamins, diagnostic equipment and treatment for those suffering from various dietary deficiencies. The sisters conclude their letter: “We earnestly ask you to participate in this humble effort to offer our medical support to the people in need. With a prayer that God will bless all your endeavours and bring to fruition all your charitable works.”

Your donation to the Little Way Association's fund for the sick, hungry and deprived will go, without deduction, to help hard-pressed establishments such as the St Vincent Health Centre.



“Do not fear. If you are faithful in pleasing Jesus in little things, He will be obliged to help you in the greater things.”

- 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 for the missions can benefit priests and people, and your intentions are faithfully honoured at Holy Mass.

We like to send a minimum of €5 or more for each Mass

HELP FEED THE HUNGRY

Please spare a thought for the thousands who die each year of hunger and disease in mission lands. Your donation will be forwarded to a missionary without deduction.

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:
 €..... **HUNGRY, SICK AND DEPRIVED**
 €..... **NEEDS OF MISSIONARIES**
 €..... **MASS OFFERINGS**
 (Please state no. of Masses _____)
 €..... **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
www.littlewayassociation.com

DONATIONS FOR THE MISSIONS ARE SENT WITHOUT DEDUCTION FOR ANY EXPENSES.