

# The Irish Catholic

**NUALA O'LOAN**

We need to invest in care rather than death Page 8



**PATRICIA CASEY**

Harry and Meghan do us no favours talking about mental health Pages 14-15



**MARY KENNY**

Lay off the criticism of Catholic schools in the North Page 5



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## Call for Catholic schools to ditch 'occult' Halloween celebrations

Chai Brady and Brandon Scott

Catholic schools should focus on celebrating the saints "instead of the demons" during Halloween parties according to a Rome-based professor of theology.

Fr Richard O'Connor, a priest of the Diocese of Kerry who teaches in the Pontifical Angelicum University, told *The Irish Catholic* that he believed that dressing up as devils, witches and the like can be "an avenue to the occult" even if parents' intentions are pure.

"We're supposed to be celebrating the Feast of All Saints' [November 1] and we have the kids dressed up as demons and devils and witches and things like that – the very opposite. It shows a complete betrayal of the Christian faith, on this particular point," Prof. O'Connor said.

If teachers could have children dress as saints and say something about them "it would give real meaning", he insisted.

"Certainly, have Halloween parties but have them centred on the saints. I would expect Catholic schools to give the lead in that respect," he continued. "There's great room for imagination, you take at Christmas, the school will have a little play centred on the nativity, and the kids love dressing up as shepherds, the

» Continued on Page 2



Olympic gold medallist Kellie Harrington meets children Isabel Lyons, Lorcan Sheery and Braxton Byas at Mounjoy Square during the Scream Festival as part of the Dublin's north-east Inner City Halloween Festival. Photo: Leon Farrell/Photocall Ireland.

## Parishes' relief over end to red tape

Ruadhán Jones

Priests around the country expressed relief as limits on capacity at churches were lifted last Friday, October 22.

However, some priests added that people are still "wary and cautious" as cases continue to remain high.

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These sentiments were echoed by Fr Billy Swan of Wexford parish, who said "there is relief", and that "the focus is much more on the celebration now".

Fr Warren Collier of Trim, Co. Meath, said they "had good congregations at the weekend, we probably did have some more extra than normal".

The "red tape" was taken away in Ardfinnan and Newcastle, Co. Tipperary, where Fr Michael Toomey said people are glad to be back: "We have just asked people to be socially distant and to use common sense."

See page 6

**JANE MELLETT**

Faith communities have a vital voice in the climate talks PAGE 10



**DANGEROUS MEDIA**

How social networking took over our lives PAGE 11



**MICHAEL KELLY**

Armagh ceremony was all about reconciliation PAGE 2



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# Reconciliation is the key to our contested past

I've mentioned once or twice before that I grew up in Northern Ireland and for me it will always be home. When I was six-years-old, the British and Irish governments signed what became known as the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985. For the first time, it gave the Irish Government a say in the day-to-day affairs of the North and the reaction from loyalist hardliners was fury.

One of the first reactions was when loyalist workers turned off the electricity grid to large parts of the region. It was winter, and I remember the struggles to keep warm.

There was more to come. A few days later as we tried to go to school, local loyalist farmers had blocked the road with large slurry tankers and were setting up barricades to show their rage at the agreement. I will never forget sitting in the back of my parents' car trying to make the journey to school while protesters kicked the car doors and banged the roof to prevent us while members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) stood on with a mixture of humour and disinterest in their faces.

## Shouted

I also remember what they shouted at us – but that has no place in a Catholic newspaper.

I was – of course – mercifully spared the worst ravages of the partition of the

island that occurred in 1921 when hell was unleashed on northern Catholics. Almost immediately, thousands of Catholics were forced out of their homes and thousands more were 'expelled' from their jobs by vigilante groups with the full blessing of the newly-installed "Protestant parliament for a Protestant people" at Stormont (that is how James Craig, prime minister of Northern Ireland described the legislature he presided over).

**“What, I wonder, did they find so objectionable? Was it victims of the troubles reading prayers, or the schoolchildren singing about hope?”**

It is no exaggeration to say that the first 50 years of the existence of the northern state on this island was one of apartheid. Sure, Catholics were allowed to take buses and – mostly – walk freely



## Editor's Comment Michael Kelly



Archbishop of Armagh Eamon Martin elbow bumps the Irish Government Chief Whip Jack Chambers following a service to mark the centenary of the partition of Ireland in Armagh. Photo: Chai Brady

in the streets. They were not, however, afforded the same opportunities in housing and employment as their Protestant neighbours.

In 1933, Basil Brooke – who would also go on to be a prime minister – told an Orange parade: "I would not have a Roman Catholic about the place and neither should you."

Voting rights were a joke as those who did not own property (mostly Catholics) were not allowed to vote. Even if they had been, gerrymandering had been exe-

cuted to ensure permanent unionist majorities even in the staunchest of Catholic areas.

## Thought

A lot of these thoughts were to the fore of my mind as I sat in Armagh on Thursday for the service of reflection and hope to mark partition. Why do I bring them to mind? Not out of any sense of bitterness, but from a profound conviction that the past must be faced with courage and that we need to

have difficult conversations about the past.

**“It is no exaggeration to say that the first 50 years of the existence of the northern state on this island was one of apartheid”**

The Armagh ceremony – organised by the main Church leaders – had become controversial after President Michael D. Higgins refused an invitation saying he felt the event had become political. My experience in Armagh proved to me that it was anything but political. One cannot do otherwise than accept the *bona fides* of the president's view. But some others were in my view cynical and opportunistic. Some commentators – and politicians – spun the event as a 'celebration' of partition and the participation of Catholics as a betrayal of their identity and past.

What, I wonder, did they find so objectionable? Was it

victims of the troubles reading prayers, or the schoolchildren singing about hope?

If anything, the event in Armagh had more of a funeral tone than that of a celebration. Archbishop Eamon Martin spoke movingly about the hurt felt in the Catholic community as a result of partition and subsequent events.

For me, one of the most poignant moments during the entire event was when we heard from the post-Good Friday Agreement generation, those born after 1998 who have only ever known peace. It made me reflect on the wastefulness that was part of my own childhood with the constant news of bombings and shootings. They pleaded for leaders not to abandon the work of reconciliation just because it is hard.

Reconciliation is hard, and it is sometimes controversial as some of the more reactionary opinion on last week's event has proven. But it is worthwhile – and our island is a lot better than the one I grew up on because of the peace process, imperfect as it is.

We can't forget that as we build a new Ireland together.

## Call for Catholic schools to ditch 'occult' Halloween celebrations

» **Continued from Page 1**  
three kings and all the rest of it. The same way you could have a party centred on the saints."

Prof. O'Connor added: "I would say certainly make a big thing of Halloween and have a great party but be celebrating the saints instead of the demons."

Fr David Jones, a hermit priest based in Meath with

experience of exorcism, also warned about practices around Halloween, saying: "The soft side of it [demonic activity] is new age, which can be especially represented by sinister forces at times like Halloween...it is a portal," he told *The Irish Catholic*.

Paula McKeown, who is the Director of Living Church in the Diocese of Down and Connor

said "let's trust parents and their instincts".

"Parents approach Halloween with a sense of fun, but we can always draw children in to the right traditions," Ms McKeown said.

Halloween can also be a time to explain Catholic teaching about death and life after death "and what we believe," she said, "we are all parenting in what is a more secular age and you just take opportunities like Halloween to actually teach about your faith.

"I know in our own parish,

we put out our 'faith survival kit' last week, and our colouring-in page absolutely had pumpkins and all the rest but the message was 'Do not fear God is always with you'. So, it's about how you use what is happening in culture as a teaching moment as well."

Columnist and author Mary Kenny said she believed it was a "question of degree".

"Halloween is a traditional Irish practice, but it's been over-merchandised, over-sold, and the demonic side exaggerated," she said.

**Managing Editor:** Michael Kelly, editor@irishcatholic.ie

**Northern Correspondent:** Martin O'Brien, martin@irishcatholic.ie

**Multimedia Journalists:** Chai Brady, chai@irishcatholic.ie

Ruadhán Jones, ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie

Jason Osborne, jason@irishcatholic.ie

**Newsroom:** news@irishcatholic.ie 01 6874026

**Books Editor:** Peter Costello, books@irishcatholic.ie

**Advertising:** advertising@irishcatholic.ie 01 6874094

**Accounts:** accounts@irishcatholic.ie 01 6874020

**Magnificat:** magnificat@irishcatholic.ie

**Shop:** shop@irishcatholic.ie

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# Prince Harry should give the talk about mental health a break – psychiatrist

## Staff reporter

One of Ireland's leading psychiatrists has warned that interventions by Britain's Prince Harry and his wife Meghan, Duchess of Sussex, risk trivialising the experiences of people who are mentally-ill.

Prof. Patricia Casey told *The Irish Catholic* that she was worried that the couple's high-profile role and comments about mental health risk making people think that the everyday ups and downs of life are actually mental illness.

"It's good that people can be open about it [mental health]... as against that there is a danger that people will open up 'willy-nilly' to everybody who's willing to listen about their interpersonal problems.

"I have to say, I think Prince Harry has contributed very negatively to all of this in that people are talking about normal

distress as though normal distress is a mental health problem," Prof. Casey says.

Prof. Casey – who has just published her latest book *Fears, Phobias and Fantasies* aimed at helping people understand the difference between mental illness and everyday life – warned that "normal distress is a sign of health. If you didn't have distress in some situations, you would probably either be dead or be a psychopath.

"It's very important that people are distressed in certain situations when they're bereaved, when they have difficulties with their parents, etc.," she said.

Prof. Casey also said that she has become increasingly concerned about what she describes as people being over-psychologised and "referred for psychological interventions when they really don't have any kind of mental health problem that needs a professional to help them, but time and friendship and

support would be sufficient," she said.

She also warned against attempts to 'fix' normal human experiences such as grief following the death of a loved one.

"Unfortunately, there is an industry out there – a psychotherapy industry. And I don't say they do it in any malevolent way, they want to make life easier for people. But it really doesn't. And for many people, it disturbs their grief and their sadness if these normal processes are interfered with too vigorously or too early.

"Counselling does have a role in some cases, of course it does. I don't want your readers to think that I'm opposed to it – but I think we have to be very judicious in the situations and circumstances in which we do use both medication and talking therapy," she said.

See Pages 14 and 15.



The Duke and Duchess of Sussex. Photo: CNS

## Dr in the house?



The Mortell household has two new doctors as husband and wife, Philip and Marian, from Ballinlough, Co. Cork, were both conferred with doctoral awards at a ceremony at Mary Immaculate College in Limerick, October 21. Photo: Brian Arthu.



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# A day of grace and reconciliation



The event marking partition was always going to be a highwire act from a Catholic point of view, but history will remember the ceremony well, writes **Michael Kelly**

**L**eaders of the country's Christian traditions have vowed to face "difficult truth" and work closer together to ensure that the fragile peace process in the North leaves a lasting legacy of reconciliation.

The leaders gathered in Armagh – the country's ecclesiastical capital where in the Fifth Century St Patrick first presided over the Church – for what they described as a service of reflection and hope. It was often poignant, and certainly not marked by any

sense of celebration – however critics tried to characterise it.

## Controversial

Marking partition and the creation of the northern state in any way had the recipe to be controversial. It was something experienced in very different ways: the birth of a country for the region's Protestant majority, a catastrophe for the Catholic minority.

Archbishop of Armagh Eamon Martin set the tone: "When I look back on what happened on this island in



Archbishop Eamon Martin speaks with Foreign Affairs Minister Simon Coveney, far left, and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson following a service to mark the centenary of the partition of Ireland in Armagh on October 21 while Government Chief Whip Jack Chambers looks on. Photo: Chai Brady.

1921, like many others in my community and tradition, I do so with a deep sense of loss; and also sadness.

"For the past 100 years partition has polarised people on this island. It has institutionalised difference, and it remains a symbol of cultural, political and religious division between our communities," he said.

Dr Martin was joined at the ceremony in St Patrick's Church of Ireland Cathedral by leaders of the other Christian traditions on the island including the Church of Ireland, Methodist, Presbyterian and the Irish Council of Churches.

## Political

The ceremony became controversial after President Michael D. Higgins declined an invitation insisting that the event had become political – a claim rejected by the Church leaders. However, the opinion of many nationalist leaders hardened and the intentions of the Churchmen was lost in the maelstrom.

The 300 guests included Minister for Foreign Affairs Simon Coveney and Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

Archbishop Martin said: "Today I reflect as a Church leader on the last 100 years. I have to face the difficult truth that perhaps we in the Churches could have done more to deepen our understanding of each other and to bring healing and peace to our divided and wounded communities," he said.

In a ceremony marked by hope, the congregation heard pleas from young people born after the 1998 Good Friday Agreement who have only known peace not to abandon the work of reconciliation.

Students from Catholic,

Protestant and integrated schools spoke of the hopes they have for a better life.

Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh John McDowell took up the theme of the Churches working for reconciliation. "I am sorry that as disciples of Jesus Christ, we didn't do more to become peacemakers, or at least to speak peace into the situation. Too often we allowed the attitudes around us to shape our faith, rather than the other way around.

**“Reconciliation refuses to see people through any other lens other than how God sees them – as made in his image”**

"That's certainly what I mean when I say we have too often been captive Churches," he said.

The Presbyterian Moderator Dr David Bruce said he had "mixed feelings" looking back over the last 100 year. "Northern Ireland is my home too, and I love it. But I lament the physical and emotional pain which has been caused over this last century to so many people by violence and the words which lead to violence.

"Sadly such things remain, and not only on this island. In hope, we long for a day when, as the Apostle John describes it, God will wipe every tear from our eyes, and there will be no

**“For the past 100 years partition has polarised people on this island. It has institutionalised difference, and it remains a symbol of cultural, political and religious division between our communities”**

more death, or mourning, or crying or pain," Dr Bruce said.

## Example

Delivering the sermon, the President of the Methodist Church in Ireland Dr Sahr Yambasu used the example of St Patrick as a model of reconciliation.

He recalled how St Patrick had been brought to Ireland and enslaved as an act of violence.

"Patrick had every reason to hate the Irish and seek for vengeance. But he didn't. Instead, he forgave and was forgiven. Consequently, the history of this place could be summarised in one word: grace – unmerited concern for the good of the other.

"For us Christians, grace is a gift. That gift is a person. Jesus Christ is his name. He is the gift of God to St Patrick. It is that gift that made him return to Ireland not to hold the past against the people of Ireland, but to hold before them the possibility of a mutually enhanced future: a future devoid of recriminations and unjust relationships; and a future imbued with and infused by grace," he said.

Dr Yambasu insisted that: "reconciliation refuses to see people through any other lens other than how God sees them – as made in his image".

Dr Ivan Patterson, President of the Irish Council of Churches said that "while it is important that we continue to show leadership to our young people by coming together as

Church leaders, we recognise that our failure, even to talk well together about the ways in which the past continues to affect us all, hampers them in addressing that unfinished work of peace so important for the future.

**“That's certainly what I mean when I say we have too often been captive Churches”**

"We have heard their voices clearly and powerfully today, we need to learn from their example. They are a generation who want to build peace, a generation who respect and care for this planet in solidarity with the poorest and most vulnerable here and around the world.

"As a disciple of Jesus with my brothers and sisters I commit myself to supporting that generation, even where that means that we must sacrifice some things which were important in the past for the sake of those generations who are to come," he said.

Britain's Queen Elizabeth II had been due to participate in Thursday's service. However, on the eve of the event a communique from Buckingham Palace said that the 95-year-old monarch had reluctantly accepted medical advice to rest rather than travel for the event.

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# Scarface? It never worried me!

In the current James Bond movie – *No Time to Die* – the villain, name of Safin, is played by an actor showing facial scarring (although Rami Malek's facial markings are purely the product of the make-up department). And he's not the first Bond villain to be a 'scarface'.

“And it's certainly unchristian to imply that a facial or outward disfigurement means a bad character or even some kind of curse”

But the 'scarred bad guy' image has offended groups who are campaigning to remove the stigma from those bearing facial scars. Organisations like 'Changing Faces' and 'Face Equality' – both with online presences – have protested against the negative stereotype of the 'scarface', as if a person's outer appearance were a stain on his inner character.

They're entitled to complain about this trope, which has been lazily used to convey wickedness ever since Shakespeare gave



Mary Kenny

Richard III an exaggerated hunchback (the Plantagenet king had a slightly twisted spine). It's often been a staple of films, novels and theatrical performances. And it's certainly unchristian to imply that a facial or outward disfigurement means a bad character or even some kind of curse.

## Facial disfigurement

As it happens, I have a minor facial disfigurement myself – a v-shaped scar on my cheek, just under my right eye. This arises from a childhood mishap, when, aged four, I climbed up on a kitchen dresser to fetch a china cup that took my fancy. Well, I fell down, cup in hand, which duly crashed on the stone floor and made a big gash on my cheek.

The wound should have been medically stitched, but for some reason, it was not. Other family members criticised my mother for not taking me to hospital for surgery, instead of leaving it to heal. But the fact that little fuss was made, and subsequently, joked about as an example of my

intrepid childish mishaps, may have been psychologically beneficial. I never had any complexes about this facial scar, and for most of my life I've forgotten about it. Every now again, I notice the v-shape showing up on my cheek – but I just slap on another application of Max Factor.

“Maybe they should make a movie where it's the hero who has the facial scar?”

The experience makes me ask how much of the 'scarface' stigma is largely about attitude? Because no one ever made much of an issue about my own facial scar, I never gave it much thought.

There may even be another way of approaching this: regard a physical imperfection as a distinction, as students at Heidelberg used to flaunt duelling wounds, or Kenyan tribesmen painted facial markers. Maybe they should make a movie where it's the hero who has the facial scar?



Rami Malek in *No Time to Die*.

● Every time a Catholic religious leader speaks about supporting peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland, there's a chorus of voices demanding they promote integrated education as a remedy for past (or ongoing) divisions.

Personally, I don't see any contradiction between the existence of integrated schools for those who want them, and faith schools, for those parents who seek a faith formation for their child.

Let the integrationists have their schools. But faith leaders should support parents who want faith schools.

## France plays Trump card...not

Éric Zemmour, the journalist and historian who has risen in the French polls as a possible presidential candidate, is sometimes referred to as 'the French Trump'.

This is a silly comparison. Donald Trump is a populist businessman who, by his own admission, has seldom read a book. Éric Zemmour is an intellectual with a deep knowledge of French history and literature, and a graduate of the elite academy Sciences-Po in Paris.

Yes, Monsieur Zemmour has tough views about the control of immigration, and he thinks militant Islam is incompatible with French

values. But I've read his books, and followed him on the French streaming channel CNews, and I'd describe him as a Gaulliste, with Bonapartist tendencies. He believes in the nation, and fiercely defends France. He's not anti-EU, but is against over-dominance by Brussels. He is not a fan of NATO, and is critical of globalism, and the way in which 'wokism' has embraced every American fad (like many French commentators, he sometimes lumps Americans and Brits together as *les Anglo-Saxons*.)

His book *Le Suicide Français* was a bestseller because it disparaged the

'decadence' and defeatism of modern culture.

Born in Algeria into a Jewish family, Monsieur Zemmour has often stated his respect for French Catholic tradition which he sees as essential to French identity. Asked last week if he was religious, he answered with a smile: "it depends on the day of the week! I had a religious formation, and that is with me. Some days that struggles with my modern rationalism." He often quotes Charles Péguy, the French Catholic writer who died in the First World War.

A controversial political personality, but absolutely not a 'French Trump'.

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# Parishes' relief over end to red tape

Ruadhán Jones

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However, some priests added that people are still "wary and cautious" as cases continue to remain high.

"Life is good again," said Fr Tom Walsh of Gurrabraher, Co. Cork, adding that "we're doing what we're supposed to be doing. It's great that people are enthusiastic".

These sentiments were echoed by Fr Billy Swan of Wexford parish, who said "there is relief", and that "the focus is much more on the celebration now".

Fr Warren Collier of Trim, Co. Meath, said they "had good congregations at the weekend, we probably did have some more extra than normal".

The "red tape" that sectioned off the church was taken away in Ardfinnan,

Co. Tipperary, where Fr Michael Toomey said people are glad to be back: "We have just asked people to be socially distant and to use common sense."

The restrictions were also lifted for funerals and baptisms, with Fr David Vard saying "it's great not to have to worry about numbers".

"For funerals as well, we had two funerals yesterday, and it was lovely not to have to worry about that [turning people away] which was always a big thing," the Portlaoise priest said.

Fr Joe Deegan of Clara, Co. Offaly, said that it is "a little bit easier for sure".

"Yesterday we had three baptisms and each of the three families had quite a number of extended family there so obviously that people may be aware of that, that they're allowed now to do things on a bigger scale," Fr Deegan continued.

Most priests attested to a "bit-by-bit" return, as Fr David Bradley of Kells par-

ish, Co. Meath described it, over the past few months.

"There's a certain element of relief amongst the congregation," Fr Bradley said. "There's another cohort of people who are still wary and cautious. People are just treading gently."

Fr John Joe Duffy of Creeslough parish, Co. Donegal, estimated that 80-85% of his parishioners have returned already.

"People are delighted to be back to Mass," Fr Duffy said. "I'm very conscious of need for safety. I want to ensure that people feel safe for starters, but also that they are safe."

Fr Bryan Shorthall, PP Priorswood parish, Co. Dublin, said that "there are some older parishioners, and I know that from talking to families and others in other parishes, that are still a little bit worried about coming back again, and that's fine."

"We've found certainly on the week-

ends the numbers have been a little bit more."

Fr Denis O'Mahony of Ballyheigue, Co. Kerry, said that while he hasn't noticed an immediate increase since the lifting of restrictions, they are running a poster campaign encouraging people to return.

"We have something in Kerry, an effort to promote next Sunday and the next couple of weeks, we have posters up about gathering together again, but I think it will be slow," he said.

Another Kerry priest, Fr Kevin McNamara of Glenflesk parish, said he has noticed that "families are coming back as well, and young ones are coming back, and I think there is a little buzz with that, the fact that they realise that some 'new normal' is coming back".

*Additional reporting by Chai Brady, Jason Osborne and Brandon Scott,*

## Fr Shay Cullen praised in Dáil for work tackling sex crime

Staff reporter

Fr Shay Cullen was praised for his work tackling sexual crimes against children by Fianna Fáil TD Cormac Devlin as he relaunched the Sex Offenders (Amendment) Bill 2018.

Speaking in the Dáil October 19, Mr Devlin acknowledged Fr Cullen's "distinguished record of working with women and children in the Philippines to protect them from sex slavery and exploitation".

He thanked Fr Cullen and Gráinne Kenny of the PREDA Foundation for their support of the bill, which would "regulate and restrict, where appropriate, convicted sex offenders from travelling abroad... to protect people outside the State from serious harm".

Ms Kenny, the Irish representative of PREDA – founded by Fr Cullen – lobbied Mr Devlin to take up the bill after its progress stalled, Mr Devlin told *The Irish Catholic*.

"Credit where credit is due, she was very vocal to me, she wanted me to take it over," Mr Devlin explained. "She brought to me the benefits of this bill, and didn't want to see it lapse."

# VC launches online training platform for missionaries

Jason Osborne

Irish faith-based NGO Viatores Christi (VC) recently launched an online training platform, UPSKILLS, for missionaries, development and humanitarian aid workers.

Upskills is a suite of "affordable, easily accessible and practical online training

courses" aimed at helping such workers in their missions.

"The online platform of self-conducted courses has been developed in response to a growing demand from missionaries, development practitioners, community grassroots projects and recent graduates from across the

globe," according to a statement from the agency.

Missionaries and development workers increasingly seek "practical, relevant and affordable" professional skills-based training, and Upskills has been launched with that demand in mind.

It will offer "most requested courses" initially,

such as Project Cycle Management, Monitoring and Evaluation, NGO Governance, Community Development and Safeguarding, with the objective of adding more courses over time.

Speaking at the launch of the platform, VC CEO Shane Halpin said:

"VC has been engaged in the training and preparation of volunteers and development workers for over 60 years. Increasingly we saw more and more demand for good, affordable training for people involved in donor

funded projects.

"During lockdown, we had the opportunity to trial some online courses in Project Cycle Management and other topics with our partners in Ireland, East Africa, SE Asia and Haiti – these were a huge success."

Courses are expected to cost in the region of \$15-\$40 (€13-€34) and all participants who successfully complete the training will receive a certificate from VC.

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## Memorial Mass for murdered MP



Minister for Education Norma Foley talks to British Ambassador HE Paul Johnston, with Ceann Comhairle Sean O' Fearghail and Australian Ambassador the Hon. Gary Gray AO before a special Mass for murdered British MP Sir David Amess in St Teresa's Church Clarendon St, October 21. Photo: John McElroy



# KNOCK

Ireland's International Eucharistic  
and Marian Shrine

## Events during November & Advent

### Scripture Reflections - Online (Monthly)

In conjunction with St Louis Community School, Kiltimagh  
Beginning Tuesday 2nd November, 8.30pm



Students will take their favourite passage of Scripture and reflect on it through video, providing their own written narrative and imagery. You can join us on our website [www.knockshrine.ie/watch-live](http://www.knockshrine.ie/watch-live) to end the day in a prayerful and peaceful way and to enjoy a quiet time of reflection through various aspects of Scripture. The reflections will take place on the first Tuesday of each month until June 2022.

### National Memorial Mass

Sunday 14th November, 3pm

To pastorally support everyone who has suffered during the pandemic, and in the context of November being the traditional time when we remember our dead, on Sunday 14 November at 3pm, the Bishops of Ireland will undertake a pilgrimage to Knock Shrine to concelebrate Mass for all those who have died on the island, and for their families, during the pandemic. During the Mass, Bishops will offer prayers of thanksgiving for all those who so selflessly sacrificed so much during this time. This Mass will be live-streamed from Knock Basilica on [www.knockshrine.ie/watch-live](http://www.knockshrine.ie/watch-live) and broadcast on the RTÉ News Now digital television channel and online.



### Advent Talks

Thursday Evenings: 2nd, 9th & 16th  
December at 8.15pm

Location: St John's Rest & Care Centre, Knock  
Shrine and live-streamed on  
[www.knockshrine.ie/watch-live](http://www.knockshrine.ie/watch-live)

With Fr Eamonn Conway, Head of Theology & Religious Studies, MIC, University of Limerick and Julie Kavanagh, member of the National Synodal Steering Committee, Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin. As the initial phase of the Synodal Pathway for the Catholic Church in Ireland is now underway, these talks will offer the opportunity for discussion and reflection to help deepen our understanding of this important subject.

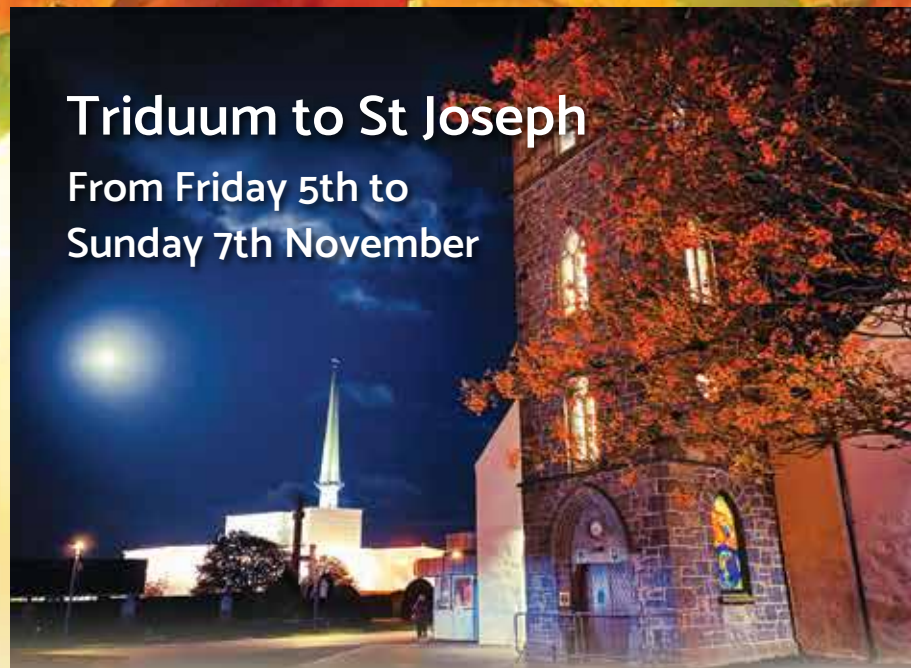
Thursday 2nd: Fr Eamonn Conway - Synodality: What does it mean?

Thursday 9th: Julie Kavanagh - Synodality: How does it work?

Thursday 16th: Fr Eamonn Conway - Synodality: Why does it matter?

## Triduum to St Joseph

From Friday 5th to  
Sunday 7th November



A recently commissioned statue of St Joseph will be placed at the sanctuary of the Basilica during the Triduum ceremonies:

### Friday, 5th November

**Rosary at 7pm, Mass at 7.30pm**

Speaker: Trish O'Brien, St Louis Community School, Kiltimagh

Theme: **St. Joseph and the Family**

### Saturday, 6th November

**Rosary at 7pm & Mass at 7.30pm**

Speaker: Most Rev. Michael Neary, DD, Archbishop of Tuam  
*The Mass will include a special blessing of the new statue of St Joseph*

Theme: **St Joseph, the Man of Faith**

### Sunday, 7th November

**Rosary at 2.30pm & Mass at 3pm**

Speaker: Fr Richard Gibbons, PP, Rector Knock Shrine

Theme: **St Joseph and Knock**



See website at:  
[www.knockshrine.ie](http://www.knockshrine.ie)  
for further details on  
upcoming events and  
special celebrations





## Nuala O'Loan

### The View



# We need a massive expansion of palliative care rather than investing in death

**C**ampaigns to make euthanasia/assisted suicide legal are underway in both England and Wales, and here in Ireland. The most recent bill was before the House of Lords on Friday. We had just three minutes each to make the case against the bill...a challenge!

That was very little time in which to contemplate the grave issues involved in introducing euthanasia/assisted suicide. It meant that I felt that I had to focus on the risks for those who most need to be kept safe in this context. As legislators, we have a duty to safeguard the public good as best we can, to legislate in the public interest, taking into account the needs not only of the strong and eloquent but also the weak and vulnerable, who have come to believe, perhaps, that their lives have

no value because that is what so much of society tells them if they are sick, or ageing, or even disabled; if their ongoing existence is eating up the money they have faithfully saved to leave to those they love, or if they need care and are afraid of becoming a burden on those who care for them, or for many other reasons. The bill does not provide the safeguards and protections they need from those who would encourage them to opt for assisted death.

#### 2020 report

A 2020 report from Oregon revealed that 53% of patients requested lethal drugs because they feared becoming a burden on those whom they loved, who cared for them. There is an assumption among those who support assisted death, that doctors will do the

dreadful work of facilitating and assisting suicides. However, another 2020 survey showed that the majority of those licensed to practice medicine, who are closest to terminally-ill and dying patients, do not support legislation on assisted suicide and will not participate in it.

For that reason, I said, the bill must be rejected.

Before these matters are raised again in Parliament and in the Dáil, it may be useful to reflect a little more deeply on the spiritual, religious and ethical issues involved. As Catholics we believe that life is sacred and that it is God given - that before we even existed, we were loved by God, created for a purpose which is unique to each of us. As Cardinal Newman put it, we may never know what that purpose is in this life. However, we will undoubtedly



A patient is pictured chatting with a sister at a Dominican-run facility in New York that provides palliative care to people with incurable cancer in financial need. Photo: CNS

know it in the next. As we walk through life, sometimes stumbling, sometimes lost in the darkness, sometimes enfolded in terror, we may encounter someone who, by some simple act of kindness, some great generosity of soul, or some professional act whether it be medical, legal or other, may cast light on our darkness, ease our pain or diminish our terror. We are told by Jesus, that "I am with you always"; in faith we believe that God will love us and care for us to the end of our lives. I watched a friend of mine die some years ago from cancer - a warm, compassionate, lively, very fit and young priest. His dying was lengthy and there were times for him which I know were very bad, but he really wanted to live, to carry on his priestly work, to be there for people in their joy and in their pain. His dying, at the end was peaceful, but it was profoundly hard for those who loved him to lose him.

#### God lives in us

The reality is that every death in some way diminishes us. We are enriched, enabled and encouraged by our good and positive encounters with others, which make us a better, even greater, person because we learn from them and perhaps above all, because God lives in each of us, and therefore as we touch each other's lives, so we are touched by the hand of God in ways we may not immediately realise.

So it is that when someone we love, or someone we know dies, we grieve their passing because they became in some way a part of us and that part of us has gone. That feeling of real physical heartache when

someone dies is not an illusion. It is very real.

The arguments made by the promoters of assisted death are very resonant of the arguments used to promote, and ultimately to legislate for abortion - the language is the same. Those who want assisted death speak of the need for compassion and the right to autonomy.

**“This is the third time I have fought the passage of such a bill through Parliament”**

Terrible stories are told of people lingering in unspeakable agony for long periods before death, watched with horror by those who love them. Such things happen. They should not. Among those with whom I work are colleagues, expert practitioners in palliative care. They tell me that this does not have to be the case, that there are not enough palliative care consultants, that people quite simply do not have access to the palliative care they need.

This is the third time I have fought the passage of such a bill through Parliament. One of the interesting things this time is that my massive postbag contains a disproportionate number of letters and emails from senior clinicians of all kinds: anaesthetists, oncologists, specialists in palliative care, surgeons, GPs - and they all make the same request: please do not do this.

The other large proportion of letters reflect the feelings of an 80-year-old lady who wrote and told me that she

was terrified of the bill and begged me to try and stop it. She told me that it would change the whole approach to dying. Her fears are repeated by so many others. At present we have a system which is predicated upon care which should include appropriate pain control. This is possible. What is necessary to achieve it, is a massive expansion of publicly funded hospice and palliative care systems, rather than investing in death.

The second concern of those who promote assisted dying is 'autonomy'. The argument is that "it is my body and I have the right to choose when I die". In law such a right now exists because suicide is no longer a crime. What does not exist is the right for another person to enable us to kill ourselves, or to kill us. There are very cogent and compelling reasons relating to the value which we place on human life and the need to provide safety for the vulnerable, why such a right does not exist.

The reality is that although I may claim autonomy over my body and, it is true that, in law, I could choose to terminate my life, it is not as simple as that. We have a duty to protect our fellow human beings and to provide proper care. We are blessed in our living and we have to strive to make life the best it can possibly be for everyone. There is beauty and goodness in each life no matter how limited the circumstances may become, and we know that the Spirit of God lives in each of us until God takes us home in his own time, when all our work is done.

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Faith communities have a vital role to play in addressing the root causes of the environmental crisis and we must raise our voices, writes **Jane Mellett**

**D**uring the Season of Creation this year the leaders of the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church and the Anglican Communion issued a joint statement warning of the urgency of the environment crisis, its impact on poverty, and the importance of global cooperation.

Pope Francis, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and Archbishop Justin Welby urged everyone to play their part in 'choosing life' for the future of the planet. They called on people to pray for world leaders ahead of the crucial UN Climate Conference (known as COP26) which is due to take place in Glasgow starting next week.

In their statement the heads of the three Christian traditions appealed to everyone, whatever their belief or worldview, to "listen to the cry of the earth and of people who are poor", to examine their behaviour and pledge meaningful sacrifices "for the sake of the earth which God has given us."

**“What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?”**

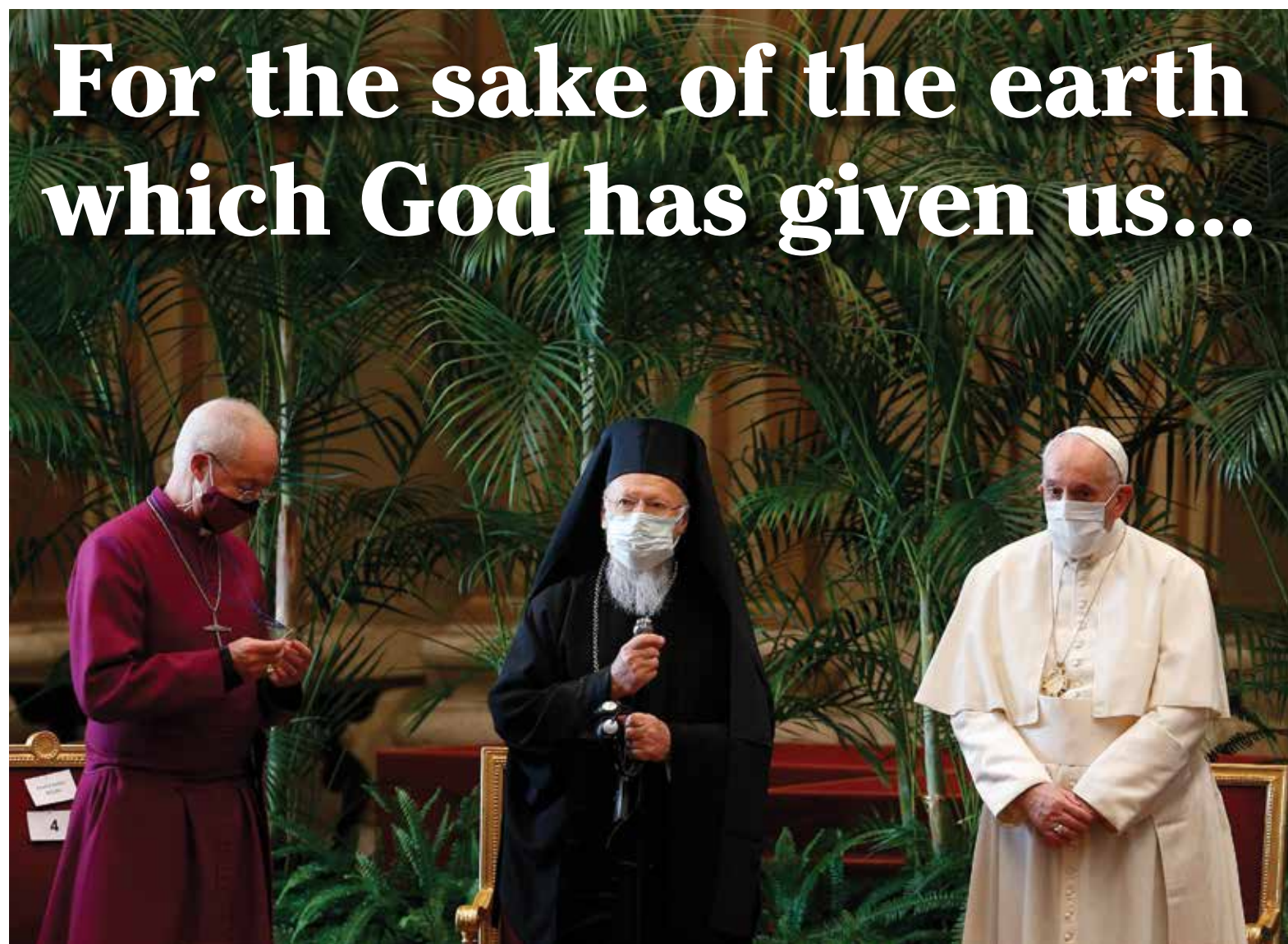
Referring to COP26, they said "This is a critical moment. Our children's future and the future of our common home depend on it." They asked world leaders, with far-reaching responsibilities, to choose people-centred profits and lead the transition to just and sustainable economies.

### Harrowing

The statements from the leaders comes weeks after the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released its most harrowing report to date, which was described by the UN Secretary General as a "code red for humanity".

The IPCC report was clear that there is now no doubt that human activity is causing our planet to warm, with the impacts being felt across all regions and all systems. It also said it will get worse.

The changing climate is causing parts of world to become uninhabitable for human beings.



Anglican Archbishop Justin Welby of Canterbury, Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople and Pope Francis attend the meeting, 'Faith and Science: Towards COP26,' with other religious leaders at the Vatican on October 4. Photo: CNS.

We have seen this played out across the world during the summer months where devastating floods caused much destruction in Belgium and Germany, killing more than 200 people, leaving hundreds missing and thousands of homes destroyed in one of the worst natural disasters to hit the region in decades.

### Burned

In the USA record temperatures have literally burned entire towns to the ground, forcing people into emergency shelters. Many of the communities we work with overseas have been feeling the devastating effects of the climate crisis for decades, as it has threatened their food and water sources, their livelihoods and their homes. In East Africa, two million people are on the brink of devastating hunger due to drought and conflict exacerbated by global warming.

While the IPCC report was stark, it also offered some hope, saying if governments take immediate action now, we can steer onto a different path. It said, "Strong and sustained reductions in emissions of carbon dioxide (CO2) and other greenhouse gases would limit climate change."

(IPCC 2021). World leaders must come together and make decisions which will have repercussions for many generations to come. It is a critical moment for our common home.

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis' encyclical on Care for Our Common Home, he asks us "What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?" (LS, 160).

This is the same question being asked of world leaders by the youth climate movement today. Many faith leaders have spoken out on this issue, most recently the Archbishop of Dublin, Dermot Farrell, who published a pastoral letter *The Cry of the Earth, The Cry of the Poor* in September.

In this compelling document, the Archbishop notes: "The climate crisis is a societal issue. Addressing it – nationally and globally – requires a societal response. One aspect of this is the response of communities, and Church is profoundly about community" (p. 49).

### Communities

Faith communities have a vital role to play in addressing the root causes of the environmen-

tal crisis. Pope Francis describes the roots of the ecological crisis as deeply spiritual, urging us to reconnect with the natural world, restoring our sense of awe and wonder for the Book of Creation.

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis reminds us that we are protectors of this earth, not destroyers, called to contemplate the mystery of the universe, and to see that, "The entire material universe speaks of God's love, [God's] boundless affection for us. Soil, mountains everything is, as it were, a caress of God" (LS 84).

**“Faith communities can come together to bear witness to solutions locally”**

Faith communities can come together to bear witness to solutions locally and create spaces where people can reflect on this issue and discern a way to walk more gently on this earth.

Ahead of COP26, what can people of faith do to affect change? The Vatican has endorsed a petition called 'Healthy Planet, Healthy People' which calls for a joined-up, just response to the

Covid-19, climate and biodiversity crises. The petition asks that world leaders listen to the science and agree on science-aligned global targets for climate and biodiversity action. It calls for an end to fossil fuels and the protection of the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities.

### Signatures

People are urged to gather as many signatures as possible in their parishes and wider communities and to promote its message. There is also an opportunity to lift up the message and the power of *Laudato Si'* at this critical moment. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, many delegations from the global south will not be in attendance at COP26, therefore we must all play our part to raise the voices of the most vulnerable at this time.

Trócaire, the bishops' conference and the Association of Missionaries and Religious in Ireland (AMRI) are supporting this petition and urging everyone to go to [www.healthyplanetandpeople.org](http://www.healthyplanetandpeople.org) to sign the petition and get their family and friends to do the same. This is one simple action we can all take today which can make a real difference at the UN Climate Conference in November and for future generations.

"Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience." (LS, 217). Pope Francis reminds us that "Truly, much can be done!" (LS, 180).

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

**“There is now no doubt that human activity is causing our planet to warm, with the impacts being felt across all regions and all systems”**



# How social media took over our lives



Networks set up to make life more interactive also operate in a more insidious way by harming your peace of mind, writes **David Quinn**

In George Orwell's *1984* it was 'Big Brother' who was constantly watching us. 'Big Brother' was the totalitarian state – it wanted to control every aspect of our lives, shaping our thoughts, our days, what we love, and what we hate, constantly keeping us under surveillance. Step out of line, and you would face serious consequences.

In Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, everyone is still under tight control, but the yoke is lighter. If you step out of line you are 'merely' exiled to a faraway island. You do not suffer death or imprisonment and in general people do not feel oppressed. They are encouraged to seek pleasure and genetically programmed to accept their place in life.

**“Around two billion people use Facebook every single day”**

In *Brave New World* the state is not in charge. This time it is a giant corporation. Huxley wrote in the 1930s, and even though totalitarianism existed, it was something like Ford Motors that controlled every aspect of our lives.

Can there be any doubt that if Huxley was writing his book today, the corporation he would have in mind would be Facebook, or one of the other social media giants?

Around two billion people use Facebook every single day. The numbers would be much higher were it not for the fact that China, with its 1.4 billion people, bans it, and large parts of Africa still have unreliable internet connection.

But if we are not on Facebook, we are very likely to be on something else, whether it be TikTok (mainly used by young people) or Snapchat, or Instagram or Twitter.

China has its own versions of these social media giants. In fact, TikTok is a Chinese company.

I can't pretend to be exempt from all of this. I use Facebook once a day or so, but Twitter much more. Twitter tends to be favoured by journalists who obviously want to be read and Twitter is a great way of attracting readers.



But what is happening is that we are inviting these companies into our lives in very significant ways. These corporations are unlike anything that has existed ever before.

The closest comparison might be television. Once these became widespread, we suddenly spent hours in front of them. But there is a vast difference between a television set and being connected to the internet and sharing so much of your life on social media.

You could watch TV, but TV could never watch you. Your smartphone can. It can literally listen to you unless you know how to ensure it doesn't.

## Advertising

But even when it isn't listening, it knows what you are looking up on the internet. Facebook knows what you are interested in and then it will begin to put your interests in front of you through advertising and other means.

Therefore, if you have looked up a particular product, it will start to suggest other, similar products to

you. If you have read a given article, it will suggest similar articles to you.

The social media giants know a great deal about you. They often know where you are at any given moment, right down to the restaurant you might be in and where you are holidaying. This isn't only because you might share a picture of yourself while you are out having a meal or on a beach somewhere. It also knows that you have looked up a restaurant or holiday online, and booked them.

In addition, the locator on your phone will transmit where you are, unless you have turned it off. Google Maps can pinpoint you with total accuracy.

Maybe this is all harmless? Does it really matter if Facebook knows what you are up to at any given moment, or what you are interested in?

Yes, it does. For one thing, Facebook, like all companies, is chiefly interested in making money and therefore wants you to spend as much as possible because then advertisers will place more ads on

Facebook. This is how the business model works.

But it also operates in more insidious ways by harming your peace of mind. You post something about yourself, and then you wonder how many 'likes' you have received. You are likely to be disappointed if you have few or none, and friends are receiving plenty. You might wonder why your life isn't measuring up to theirs.

**“Young people seem more prone to having their mental health damaged by social media than older people”**

You will be constantly tempted to pick up your phone to see what reaction your posts are receiving and what other people are up to. (I now place my phone out of reach if I'm watching or reading something because the habit of picking up the phone is so great).

Young people seem more prone to having their mental health damaged by social media than older people. They have grown up with smart-

phones and social networking and are more likely to care about popularity and what other people think of them. Social media has been called a 'comparison cauldron'. It's easy for a young person to become convinced by being on social media all the time that their lives don't measure up and to become extremely anxious and even depressed as a result.

Researchers like Mary Aiken in Ireland and Jean Twenge in America are convinced about the link between social media usage and mental ill-health.

Recently, a former Facebook employee, Frances Haugen, appeared before Congress to condemn the company. She told America's politicians: "I'm here today because I believe Facebook's products harm children, stoke division and weaken our democracy."

## Polarising opinion

How does it stoke division and weaken democracy? It does so by polarising opinion. It will constantly feed you what you are most interested in, and you will no longer see opinions that differ from your own. The bias of the mainstream media exacerbates this problem, of course.

Politicians are now promising to introduce measures to weaken the grip of the social media giants on young people in particular, and to reduce its polarising effects.

Whether they can succeed or not is another question. These companies have become all-pervasive and we have already surrendered a great deal of our lives to them. Do we even wish to be liberated?

**“Researchers like Mary Aiken in Ireland and Jean Twenge in America are convinced about the link between social media usage and mental ill-health”**



## The Sunday Gospel

Fr Silvester O'Flynn OFM Cap.



**I**t was an attempt to start an argument with Jesus, to disconcert him, when one of the Pharisees asked for his opinion on the greatest commandment. Jesus cut through all their commentaries and debates with a simple and challenging answer. "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. The second resembles it: you must love your neighbour as yourself" (Matt 22:35). Religious laws meant to be pointers to total love of God and the practical expression of that love in the way we treat people, beginning with ourselves.

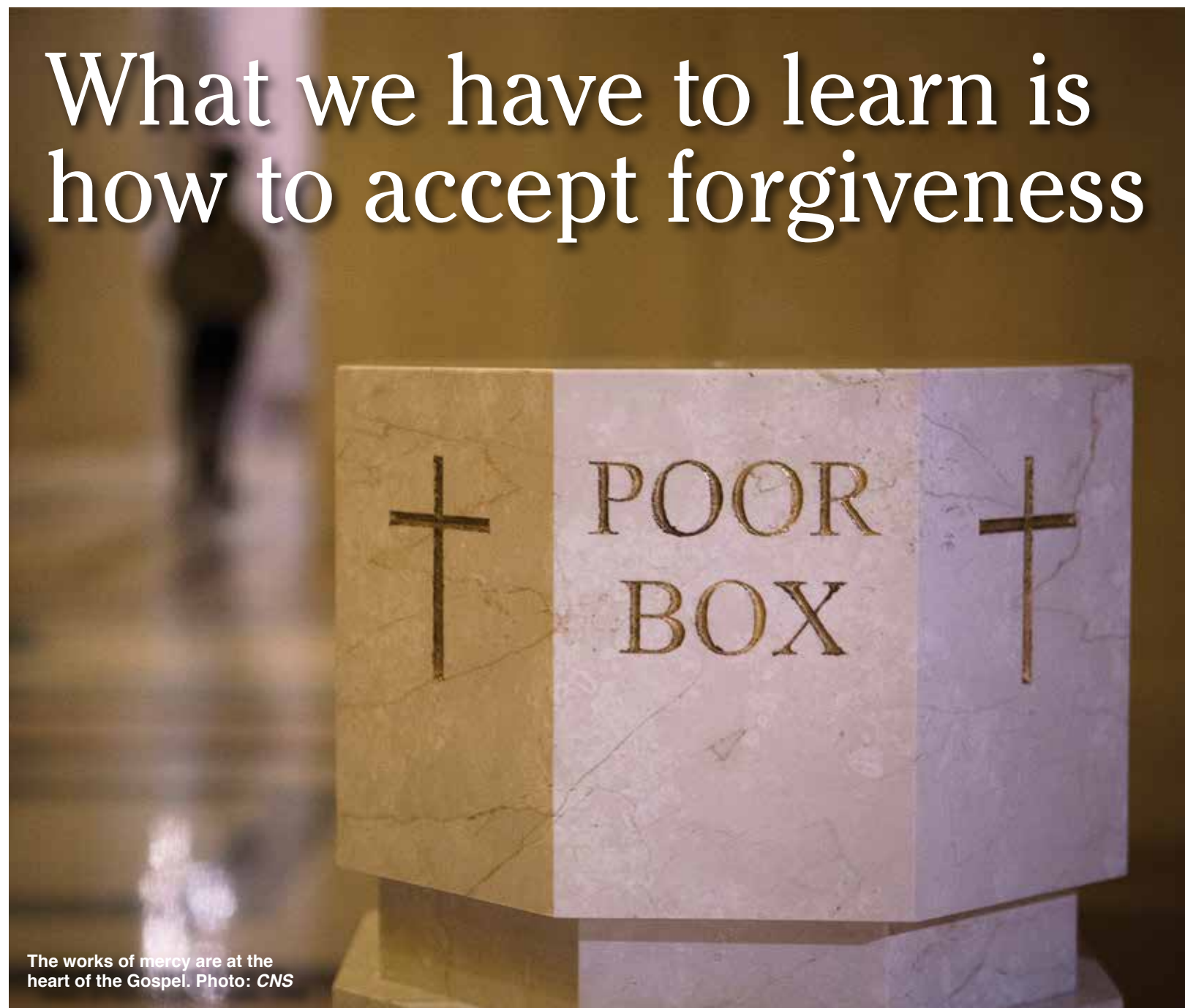
It's no harm to remember that the people who plotted the death of Jesus were the religious leaders. When religion gets warped it is very dangerous. People have been driven to scrupulosity, bitterness and justification of war by the concept of a severe, judgemental God. It is important to enjoy the loving, merciful God revealed in Jesus Christ. Loving with all your heart recognises God as the driving energy of life. All your soul makes God the desire of your eternal spirit. All your mind means making space for God in personal prayer each day. All your strength directs you into practical works of charity.

### The Trinity of Love

The doctrine of the Blessed Trinity reveals that the inner life of God is about interpersonal relationships of love: love given, love received and love returned. Think of it as a circle or a triangle. We are offered three aspects of love in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

**“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (John 3:16)**

God the Father, the source of all life, loved me into life. I was first a thought in the beautiful mind of God before ever I was spoken into life. As Saint Paul said, "We are God's work of art, created in Christ Jesus to live the good life as from the begin-



The works of mercy are at the heart of the Gospel. Photo: CNS

ning he had meant us to live it" (Eph. 2:10). A friend gave me what I consider a work of art: a simple line drawing of a little boy, arms resting on a table, looking out with this message underneath: I know I am somebody 'cos God don't make no junk. The grammar ain't good but the message is brilliant. You are God's creation and God never made junk.

### Accepting forgiveness

People drifted away from God but God did not drift from us. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16). Jesus is the face of mercy. He sat with the sinners and shared food with them. What we have to learn is how to accept forgiveness, how to enjoy God's love. The most wonderful of the parables is the Prodigal Son, the story of a merciful Father who hugs us back and calls for a celebration. The seven sacraments are celebrations of God's presence at the key moments of life. The Sacrament of Reconciliation

should never be a tribunal of enquiry but a celebration of God's hug of forgiveness.

### The transforming Spirit

This Sacrament was initiated when the Risen Lord breathed the Holy Spirit on the Apostles. "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive they are forgiven. Whose sins you retain they are retained" (John 20:23). Retaining means telling someone who has no intention of giving up some serious sin that he/she is

### Prayer

Inspired by the words of the Gospel, we pray.

May the Church avoid a web of legalism which obscures the joy and love of true religion.

May the lives of Christians today resemble the early Christian community when pagan writers remarked how these Christian love one another.

May our appreciation of God's love for us

blocking God's desire to forgive.

**“The Holy Spirit is the breath of God and divine life within us”**

The Holy Spirit is the breath of God and divine life within us. The Holy Spirit is the power of God's love transforming us into agents of God's love to other people. The proof of our love of God is how we respect and care for other people.

inspire us to treat others with deep respect as God's beloved children

May the thought that we are God's work of art sustain our hope in these difficult times.

(Add prayers for any local, personal or topical intention)

O God, our loving Father, we thank you for creating us in love. May it be our joy to pass on your love to others. Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

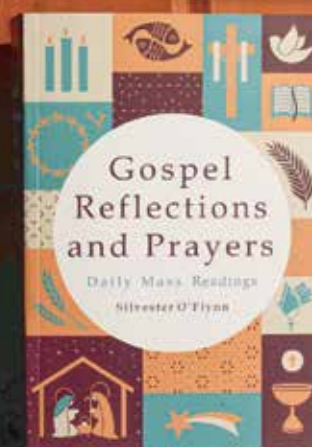
### Love your neighbour

"Love your neighbour as yourself." Too many people cannot begin that programme because they have very low self-esteem. People with low self-esteem will be negative towards others too. True self-

love is not a preoccupation with self but the joy that comes from knowing God the Father as our Maker, the Son as our merciful Saviour and the Holy Spirit as our Sanctifier. Awareness of our own importance in God's eyes will spur us into respect and care for all others.

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# Devoted to Their Daughter

**When Elisa was born in Madagascar, her parents' joy lasted only for a fleeting moment before they saw her cleft lip and cleft palate.**

In an instant, their hopeful excitement gave way to overwhelming sadness.

Jean consoled his wife, Sidonie, encouraging her to be strong and that they would do everything they could to help Elisa. Though the parents were heartbroken, they held fast to their faith. They believed that their daughter's condition was an obstacle sent by God for them to overcome.

Indeed, their faith would be tested.

The midwife who helped deliver Elisa told her parents that surgery could repair their daughter's cleft lip and palate, but the procedure would be too expensive for them.

Undeterred, Elisa's parents began seeking out surgical care for their daughter.

Sidonie and Jean were referred to a local doctor to see if he could help. When Elisa was 6 weeks old, the family travelled to the capital city of Antananarivo to see a plastic surgeon, who then explained that Elisa was too young to receive surgery and asked them to return in about five months for another evaluation.

Meanwhile, Elisa's cleft lip and palate made it difficult for her to breastfeed and she soon became underweight. Desperate for her daughter to gain weight, Sidonie spoon-fed milk to Elisa, but it wasn't enough for her to thrive. By the time the family returned to the surgeon when she was 6 months old, he delivered more bad news. Elisa had become malnourished and was not healthy enough to receive surgery.

Devastated by the diagnosis, Sidonie and Jean returned to their village uncertain about their daughter's future. Still, they remained hopeful that she would one day receive surgery. Fortunately for Elisa, spoon feeding ensured that she would survive until she could begin eating solid

foods, which helped her return to better health.

Though Elisa was too young to realise it, Jean and Sidonie dealt with cruel treatment from some members of their community. Some even seemed to take pleasure in the family's suffering and blamed Sidonie for Elisa's condition. Turning to superstition, certain neighbours said that Elisa's cleft was caused by Sidonie using a shovel or wearing a key as jewellery during pregnancy.

## Pray

All the while, the family continued to pray that Elisa would get the surgery she desperately needed as the odds for her future continued to worsen. In the most resource-poor, poverty-stricken places like rural Madagascar, as many as 93 percent of children with an unrepaired cleft condition die before their 20th birthday.

When Elisa's parents finally learned that Operation Smile provides free, safe cleft surgeries and would be conducting a medical mission in Tamatave, their prayers were answered.

Unlike Sidonie and Jean's previous attempts at providing cleft surgery for their daughter, this time Elisa would not be turned away.

A comprehensive health evaluation determined that Elisa was healthy enough to receive surgery to repair her cleft lip. Her parents were overjoyed to learn that her life would soon be forever changed.

Sidonie and Jean waited nervously as the Operation Smile medical team performed Elisa's surgery. After her successful procedure was completed and Elisa awoke from anaesthesia, the family poured out emotions when they were reunited in the post-operative room. After so much hardship, Elisa's smile was finally whole.

When the family returned home, their neighbours were shocked by the difference in Elisa's appearance. Children who once kept their distance from Elisa now became her playmates. Now Elisa is a happy and cheerful girl, living a fulfilling life.



## IT ALL STARTS WITH NUTRITION

**Malnutrition is one of the biggest barriers to children receiving the cleft surgery that could change their lives.**

Breastfeeding is usually impossible because babies can't latch on properly, and the specially designed bottles that babies with a cleft condition need often aren't accessible to parents.

Children then become malnourished, which – as well as the immediate threat to their life – means they won't be strong enough for the surgery that means they could eat normally: it's a torturous circle.

**But Operation Smile never just turns a child away.**

If they don't pass their comprehensive health evaluation,

children are supported by Operation Smile's nutrition programmes which provide ready-to-use-therapeutic food (a type of peanut paste), formula milk and cereals to families, along with education sessions and monthly assessments.

"We train families to use what they have to create nutritious food for their children," says Dede Kwadjo, Operation Smile volunteer nutritionist. "We ask what they have available: fish, beans, banana. Then we work with them on solutions."

"It's so hard to tell parents that their child is too unwell for surgery," says Dede. "We always promise to return. And thanks to our nutrition programmes, we can then give children the smile they deserve."

## WHAT IS OPERATION SMILE?

Every three minutes a child is born with a cleft, and this statistic doesn't change even during a global pandemic. This means that 1 in 700 babies are born with a cleft lip or cleft palate, a gap in the lip and or mouth that didn't close during early pregnancy.

Every year in the Ireland, 1 in 700 babies are born with the condition, which is usually corrected by a simple operation provided by the national health system by the time children reach 12 months old.

In the developing world this isn't always an option: the surgery can cost up to a year's salary and often there are no local medical professionals qualified to carry out the procedure. This condemns children to a life of stigma and difficulties with breathing, eating and speaking. Many will never go to school.

Since Operation Smile was founded in 1982, Operation Smile's medical volunteers have provided hundreds of thousands of free, safe surgeries to children in more than 30 countries.

## CHILDREN CAN'T WAIT ANY LONGER FOR THE CARE THEY NEED

No parent should have to choose between keeping a roof over a child's head or giving them the medical care that they need to be healthy.

45 minutes is all it can take to perform the surgery that saves and changes lives and it costs as little as €180. This is possible thanks to the generous contributions of medical professionals who volunteer their time, as well as corporate partners that donate critical supplies and equipment necessary for safe surgery.

To learn more, please visit:  
[www.operationssmile.ie/newsmile](http://www.operationssmile.ie/newsmile)  
or call 01 667 6659

Operation Smile





By trying to over-psychologise everyday life we do people a huge disservice, Prof. Patricia Casey tells Michael Kelly

Over decades of professional practice and a ready willingness to appear in the media, few people have contributed to the public understanding of psychiatry as much as Prof. Patricia Casey.

And yet, the realm of mental illness remains one that can be as difficult to talk about as ever. Covid-19 restrictions have not helped. The constant policy of on/off lockdowns and disruption to daily life has contributed to greater anxiety by any measure and those who are in urgent need of psychiatric help to deal with their mental health issues face the prospect of further delays.

"The waiting list has only grown over time and the current infrastructure is not adequate to provide the right kind of help to those who need it," Prof. Casey told *The Irish Catholic*.

She has just published her latest book which she hopes may provide some much-needed relief for those struggling with mental health, whether for themselves or those around them.

**“Psychiatry has always been bedevilled by extremes in my opinion”**

*Fears, Phobias and Fantasies – Understanding mental health and mental illness* is a first-of-its-kind guidebook aimed at laypeople, not academics or experts in the field. While Prof. Casey's contribution to the academic field is vast, this new book seeks to redress a growing gap where people wish to research and understand what they or family members and friends are going through without having to resort to some questionable material being offered online.

#### Warn

Prof. Casey is keen to warn about the perils of some of the unscientific advice offered online to people who are mentally-ill. She underlines the centrality to psychiatry of using “scientific approaches and applying these to the study of mental illness in the same way that they are to physical illnesses”.

With actual case vignettes, succinctly put diagnoses and treatment suggestions, as well as a step-by-step guide for how to go about seeking help and what exactly it entails, *Fears, Phobias and Fantasies* will be an invaluable tool.

# Navigating the ups and downs of everyday life



Photo: Alexis Sierra.

While people have been talking about mental health problems from the time of Aristotle, psychiatry itself is a relatively modern discipline. The word psychiatry did not come in to common usage until the early 1900s. Earlier approaches were rudimentary and treatments often rare.

"There were no medicines available to treat depression or to treat panic disorder in the way that there are now. So - on the one hand - in the early days you had extreme institutionalism going hand-in-hand with the psychodynamic approach: people talking about their childhoods, their fantasies, their dreams, etc.," Prof. Casey says adding that both of these aspects have changed "immeasurably in the last century".

#### Shift

One of the big obvious shifts is away from the large psychiatric hospitals that were once a feature of the outskirts or every provincial town. Most people now requiring inpatient psychiatric care receive this in a local hospital while people with milder conditions get a combination of psychological therapies and medication.

But, isn't medication controversial I ask? "Some people might say people

with the milder conditions get too much medication, and there is an element of truth in that certainly. But medication when it is used appropriately is very good - it's an excellent treatment," Prof. Casey insists.

Over her professional career, she has become increasingly concerned about what she describes as people being over-psychologised and "referred for psychological interventions when they really don't have any kind of mental health problem that needs a professional to help them, but time and friendship and support would be sufficient.

"Psychiatry has always been bedevilled by extremes in my opinion," she says.

There is no question that if mental health was a taboo in the past, people have become much more comfortable talking about it. Nowhere is this more obvious than looking at tabloid newspapers. Each day there are stories about x or y celebrity 'opening up' about their mental health or 'revealing' their struggles.

#### High profile

High-profile cases of people who have taken their own lives after having appeared on popular television

programmes such as *Love Island* have also increased the focus on mental health in the media.

Undoubtedly, Prof. Casey says it is important to talk about mental health in the media but, "it's a double-edged sword...It's a good thing that people are more comfortable talking about depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, etc.

**“It is undermining the reality of mental illness for those who genuinely have it to talk about distress and worry in the same breath”**

"There is still some reticence about it, but it's good that people can be open about it and feel comfortable coming to see a psychiatrist without feeling overly stigmatised," the professor says.

But, back to the double-edged sword: "As against that there is a danger that people will open up 'willy-nilly' to everybody who's willing to listen about their inter-personal

problems...often mental health difficulties have their origins in childhood trauma, not always, but often they do. And that kind of confessional approach and that kind of 'tell all' approach isn't helpful either to people themselves or to the public," she insists.

This brings the conversation naturally to a certain California-based couple who have been playing out a very public rupture with the British Royal Family over recent years. "I have to say, I think Prince Harry has contributed very negatively to all of this in that people are talking about normal distress as though normal distress is a mental health problem," Prof. Casey says.

#### Distress

"Normal distress is a sign of health. If you didn't have distress in some situations, you would probably either be dead or be a psychopath. It's very important that people are distressed in certain situations when they're bereaved, when they have difficulties with their parents, etc and it's very important that they feel sad... It's very important that people feel anxious before exams, for example," she adds.

Prof. Casey also warns against a modern tendency to see mental health problems as ubiquitous. "Take Covid-19, it has had a huge effect on people's level of distress - but most people are not mentally-ill because of Covid-19...they're fed up with it, they're anxious and worried in case they get it, they're anxious in case their loved ones get it but they're not mentally ill.

**“It's good that people can be open about it and feel comfortable coming to see a psychiatrist without feeling overly stigmatised”**





Interviews like those of Britain's Prince Harry and Meghan, Duchess of Sussex, with Oprah Winfrey do little to help the conversation around mental health according to Prof. Casey. Photo: CNS

"I think it is undermining the reality of mental illness for those who genuinely have it to talk about distress and worry in the same breath," she says.

Prof. Casey and her family have had their own experience of grief. She and John adopted Gavan and James when they were very young.

Gavan, who had already recovered from cancer of the nose when he was just five years old, was diagnosed with a tumour of the spine two days after his 24th birthday. He died five months later.

### Grieving

While she was grieving for Gavan, she was struck by the number of people who suggested therapy for what was a perfectly normal reaction.

Prof. Casey recalls "people telling me 'You must go for counselling' even while he was ill. 'You must go for counselling' - never mind the fact that I worked at a department of psychiatry with a wonderful colleague who was immensely supportive to me and a husband here at home, and another son who were immensely supportive, and very many friends who were supportive.

"But yet people wanted to send me 'to do something about it' - and there is nothing to be done about understandable sadness, it's part of the veil of tears that we live in," she says.

On a personal level, Gavan's original illness as a child had tested Patricia's faith. When the cancer returned,

she said she found it "immensely helpful" for her spiritually when he received the Sacrament of the Sick as he neared the end of his life.

Speaking of the cancer that would eventually take his life, she says "surprisingly it didn't test my faith. When Gavan was ill the first time around it tested it much more, I can't explain it because I anticipated that it would," Prof. Casey said.

**“Yet people wanted to send me ‘to do something about it’ - and there is nothing to be done about understandable sadness”**

She recalled how she had been at the Edinburgh festival with her family when Gavan developed a limp and returned to Dublin as it became more painful. She received a call with the news of his diagnosis.

"I sat outside the shop [in Edinburgh] and I must have looked very pale because - I'll always remember this - a young man walking along with a bottle of water and a burger in his hand, said: 'Are you alright?' and I said 'no I'm not, I've just heard my son has cancer' and he said 'I'll call a cab for you'.

"And he did and then he said to me: 'God bless you, I'll pray for you', and he walked away, I'll always remember that," she said, "it was very kind."

I ask if Prof. Casey sees the modern aversion to grief as part of the same tendency to psychologise everything.

"Yes," is her immediate reply. "Unfortunately, there is an industry out there - a psychotherapy industry. And I don't say they do it in any malevolent way, they want to make life easier for people. But it really doesn't. And for many people, it disturbs their grief and their sadness if these normal processes are interfered with too vigorously or too early.

"Counselling does have a role in some cases, of course it does. I don't want your readers to think that I'm opposed to it - but I think we have to be very judicious in the situations and circumstances in which we do use both medication and talking therapy," she insists.

### Rationale

This is part of the rationale behind the new book - helping people discern what is best in a given situation.

"I am a practicing psychiatrist, and when patients come to see me about themselves - or maybe with a loved one - they want information about the condition that I diagnose (if I do diagnose a condition).

"There is a lot of information out there in the public domain, some of which is patently inaccurate and some of which is most helpful. So, I thought I would try and put it into a single book for all of the conditions for the Irish public," she says.

It's a difficult question: how do we know if someone has a psychi-

**“There is a lot of information out there in the public domain, some of which is patently inaccurate and some of which is most helpful”**

atric illness, or how do we know if what they're experiencing is normal distress? "I cover that quite extensively in the book, because that's quite a difficult concept to get across in a talk or in an interview. My book is peppered with explanations as to how one identifies what we call psychopathology and normal variation in symptoms," she says.

The book is as user-friendly as it is accessible - Prof. Casey was adamant that it must be a book that would appeal to non-professionals. "Making it a handbook for your average person was exactly what I intended," she says.

### Tool

As well as someone concerned about themselves, she hopes that it will be a valuable tool for people who might be concerned about a loved one or a work colleague.

**“When something is in the news, people's anxiety is going to be heightened - perhaps unnecessarily, perhaps necessarily who knows”**

As we speak, research has just been published by a British university indicating that 60% of young adults say they feel anxious either all of the time or most of the time about the issue of climate change. The issue is due to be discussed by world leaders in Scotland next week and is rarely out of the headlines. The troubling British research makes me wonder if this generation is more anxious than those who have gone before. Some newspapers have even spoken of an 'epidemic of anxiety'.

"In my opinion, there is no epidemic of anxiety," Prof. Casey says. Referring to the research I cite, she points out that it was actually a telephone interview. "Telephone interviews always tend to get highly positive scores for what we call 'false positives'. People who self-rate themselves tend to score more highly and more positively because there isn't any nuance to the questions.

"And when you're on the telephone doing - maybe a 20-minute interview - people don't sit and have time to deliberate: 'am I really like

this all of the time?' They may only think about the past 24 hours, or the past two days or whatever.

"Also, when something is in the news, people's anxiety is going to be heightened - perhaps unnecessarily, perhaps necessarily who knows," Prof. Casey says.

On heightened anxiety about a rise in Covid-19 cases on the island of Ireland, Prof. Casey says that people will ultimately have to learn to live with the virus rather than feeling constantly preoccupied about it.

### Preoccupation

"There is a lot more worry and a lot more preoccupation about getting it [Covid-19]. But I think it will ease, and when people get back into more normal type work - perhaps a hybrid type work working from home and the office - things will settle and when people can start socialising again the stress will get less.

"And in time, hopefully as we get herd immunity, people will learn to live with Covid in the same way that we learn to live with many infections that at the beginning were potentially very serious.

"Even the ordinary flu can be life threatening, but yet people learn to live with it...I think that's what will happen," she says.

One theme that Prof. Casey returned to again and again in the book is that of resilience. She believes that the starting point is people knowing that unpleasant emotions are a normal part of life. "Don't be frightened if you have a 'bad hair day', or if they're crying for a few days after they split up with their boyfriend or their best friend.

"I'm very concerned that in the UK at the moment, there are now classes on mental health in the secondary schools. And I don't think that that is terribly helpful. I think it's going to heighten young people's worry and self-analysis in young people who are already very inwardly-focused and I think this will make it more so.

"I would not be rushing in to have mental health classes in secondary schools," she says adamantly.

**📖 Fears, Phobias and Fantasies by Prof. Patricia Casey is published by Currach Books and is available on their website [www.currachbooks.com](http://www.currachbooks.com) as well as in all good bookshops.**



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## Sr Anne Cahill OLA tells Ruadhán Jones about her 50 years as a missionary

**S**r Anne Cahill OLA spent more than 50 years on mission to Nigeria, Sudan and Tanzania. In all that time, though the demographics of her order have changed, the generosity of the Irish people never has, she says.

"We've done very well, Ireland is wonderful," Sr Anne tells me, reflecting not only on her experience as a missionary, but also the future of Irish missionary orders. While the numbers of missionaries from Ireland aren't near those of the past, the vitality of indigenous African missionaries and the continuing generosity of Irish people bode well for the future, she says.

"I would go right back to my first tour, when we had a few lay missionaries with us," Sr Anne begins. "For ourselves, there will always be a place for lay missionaries. I'm still friendly with Tina Coughlan from Donegal... and Mary O'Driscoll, a great colleague of mine, she died three years ago now. She helped me in Tanzania. One of my big things was sourcing funding for girls, especially in secondary education. I remember one day saying to Mary, she was asking me about one of the girls, and I said she'll get married after 14 or 15 after primary school. She said, Anne I'll fund her.

**“From the age of 13, Sr Anne knew she wanted to be a missionary. She knew this after visiting the convent of the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles”**

"A lot of laypeople have been funding students for the next six or seven years, otherwise they would never get into secondary education. In Mwamapalala, a very rural village, we have a lot of girls educated as a result. And there's one boy, he was sponsored and he came back with his father, he's a teacher now, which really touched me, to say thank you. He said he didn't know what would have happened if we hadn't sponsored him, he'd never have been educated. This is much more the case for girls.

"That's where the money we get from Ireland goes, into sponsoring for education and helping where help is needed. For HIV, we've got a lot of help from the Vatican and American drug companies as well. That help will be for the hospitals the schools, a lot of it will still come from overseas."



Sr Anne Cahill OLA with Fr Joseph, principal of a local school.

# Ireland is wonderful to its missionaries

## First encounter

From the age of 13, Sr Anne knew she wanted to be a missionary. She knew this after visiting the convent of the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles (OLA) at Ardfoyle, Co. Cork, with her father. One of the sisters said to her father, "maybe someday your daughter will join us".

"I said, that's exactly what I will do," Sr Anne remembers.

It was always specifically in terms of Africa that she thought of mission life. Sr Anne recalls an encounter she had with a local priest, not long after beginning at the OLA's school in Ardfoyle.

"A priest from Farranferris [Co. Cork] said to me, did you ever think of entering? And I said I did. He said, I've two sisters in America. I said I'm not interested in America, I'm more interested in Africa. He said that's grand and I stuck with my Africa all the time."

The OLA sisters were ideally suited to Sr Anne's desire – the OLAs have a special charism for Africa, having been founded by a priest of the Society of African Missions

or SMA, Fr Augustine Planque. Sr Anne's first posting was, as she puts it, to a "first-class school" in Northern Nigeria.

## Nigeria

"My first posting was to a very good school in the north of Nigeria," Sr Anne explains. "It was one of the first education institutes, OLA run since 1938 or '40. When I went out in '68, it was a first-class school. Then the government took it over in '72, so there was some chaos. I wasn't interested in leadership of the school, taking over as headmistress. The other sisters who were there had retired because they were late 60s and early 70s. I taught there for some years, doing the best I could. We had some good teachers. At that stage, they needed teachers from outside, so we had some Indian and other teachers."

Having spent several years in Nigeria, Sr Anne was offered the chance to spend some time in Rome on sabbatical. She spent nine months there, before returning to Nigeria to oversee the novitiate while the

novice mistress was away. It was during this time that she received a call – "much to my chagrin and my surprise", she says – inviting her to join the order's council.

**“For HIV, we've got a lot of help from the Vatican and American drug companies as well”**

She spent four or five years on the council before, in 1986, she was sent to Sudan, a posting which she considers to this day to be simultaneously her most rewarding and most challenging. Having worked mostly in education in Nigeria, she found Sudan very different.

## Challenge

"Outside of Khartoum was a centre for displaced people," Sr Anne begins. "I was there for 7 years. It was very different. It was across four roads of desert, sand and then shacks put up and you'd have some-

body knocking at your door. The great need would be for cardboard boxes to shelter them from the Sahara wind. So my work, I used to go round to primary schools.

"I remember once getting €10,000 during Lent from one of the Irish sponsors and the children got bread every single day for breakfast and it was a wonderful, wonderful thing to be able to do because they would seldom see it – they would get a cup of tea and they'd get sugar in it. They were really beggars most of the time when they were there, most of these years. We had a primary school and, especially girls, they didn't go past primary school normally."

Sr Anne faced many challenges during that time, as the country was experiencing great unrest. These included encounters which, had they turned sour, could have claimed her life.

## Close encounter

"I remember once at the middle of the night coming home, I was driving an Egyptian sister who had come in, it was after midnight," Sr Anne says. "We were coming across those four kilometres of sand. This soldier stopped us, he was an Arab speaker, so he was obviously Muslim to us. There was a Southerner, a younger lad behind him. We felt threatened, anything could happen, we wouldn't know where he'd lead us to. But the southerner kept on

**“The OLAs have a special charism for Africa, having been founded by a priest of the Society of African Missions or SMA, Fr Augustine Planque”**





Sr Anne Cahill OLA with students of a local school in Tanzania.



Sr Anne Cahill OLA spent 53 years on mission.

making the sign of the cross, just to say, I'm a Christian, I'm on your side, I'll help you no problem. Anyhow, the other lad left us go afterwards.

"That was just one shock, but there was another time when we were out in the centres. We had two Canadian foreign missionaries and each sister would be in charge of two centres, those of us who were mobile and could walk there or drive a car. I remember being there

once on Christmas morning. The next thing, a group of soldiers came loudly to the back.

"And I just wondered, this could be the end now. I said to them, we're going to visit a sick person, we're going to pray. When they saw it was all prayer and not politics, my heart began to beat again. We were sent off, 'Ok, ok, you're ok, go on your way'.

"It was a very challenging time in Sudan, very different from any-

## “In the evening time, we tried to devote to other things, to smaller Christian communities and visitation and so on”

thing I had been used to. Just going around and looking after the sick and displaced. All the area would have been seven big centres divided by Catholic missions, we'd have displaced people and our work would be... helping them as much as we could when we were there."

Other challenges were smaller and more humorous. Sr Anne recalls how she used to sleep outside at night because of the heat: "We were surrounded by a five and half, six-foot wall. I didn't feel afraid, but they were afraid for me. I said, no problem. I slept outdoors to get a bit of cool and a decent sleep at night."

### Normality

After Sudan, Sr Anne spent some time in Ireland caring for her mother, but for returning to Africa in 2007. This time, she was posted to Tanzania, which she found to be more like Nigeria than Sudan in terms of its challenges.

## “Sr Anne faced many challenges during that time, as the country was experiencing great unrest”

"It was, it was more normal, there was a big secondary school there, I taught there," Sr Anne explains. "My subjects would be science subjects, chemistry. But even in Nigeria after a year I taught no more chemistry.

I was teaching English for a while, then Bible knowledge.

"In Tanzania the big, big need would be English. You would have some who could speak English, but they wouldn't be very good. I was teaching English all the time I was there, going out to small Christian communities, visiting in the evening. They're very poor, but they're managing.

"They were living in peace. I don't know now what will happen, Islam has taken a different turn for Nigeria and all West Africa. I believe Tanzania is under threat as well."

### Radicalisation

This last reflection Sr Anne fleshed out as she went on, remembering how different Nigeria was when she first arrived there in 1968.

"It was very different from today," she begins. "For example, in our school, which was a famous school in the north of Nigeria, a third would be Catholic, a third other Christians, and a third would be Muslim. We had a great relationship with the Muslims.

"Now there's extremism and the situation has changed. The government took over the school, but that didn't change it too radically for a while, slowly, slowly it changed. But now the situation is quite terrifying with extreme Islam. They're just a group that have put the fear of God into other Muslims as well.

"They've come to places where we're in in the north of Nigeria and they have killed some Muslims as well as Christians. They prob-

ably thought because the Catholic church was there that they were all Christians, I don't know. They just take us prisoner or kill a lot of the local people."

When I asked if Christian and Muslim communities on the ground continued to intermingle and work together, Sr Anne said that in the villages, they certainly would: "But people are living in fear now. It's a different Nigeria from what it was even 10 years ago. It's changing, radicalism is taking over."

### Change

Sr Anne only returned to Ireland at the start of October, this time with the intention of retiring after 53 years as a missionary. When asked about how things have changed since she began her life on the missions, she pauses for a moment before answering.

"We went big into education," she says. "In the 1950s, we had a provincial here, she withdrew so many sisters from Nigeria and Ghana. They were saying, what's going to happen to us? But she said, they need degrees. All the sisters who had diplomas did degrees, there were sisters in their 40s and 50s even who went to university, and the rest of us just starting out went straight to university before going out or did proper training in nursing.

## “It was a very challenging time in Sudan, very different from anything I had been used to”

"Then, we were capable of running schools and hospitals, which we did in a big way in Nigeria. Maybe we said our focus was a bit much on education. But then in the evening time, we tried to devote to other things, to smaller Christian communities and visitation and so on."

### Future

Considering the future of her own order, Sr Anne points to the youthfulness and spirit of vocations in Africa.

"Our average age in Africa would be in maybe their 30s. There'd be many in their 20s, 30s, 40s, some in their 50s, a few in their 60s and 70s, a very few. Here, it would be the opposite. We'd be a majority of over 70s, I'm 78 myself. That's a big change for us. It's reversing if you like.

"Those who are going out, they themselves have to be our missionaries going out to other countries. We've tried to install it from early ages. You're a missionary, you're not here for Nigeria and Ghana only, you're here for wherever you're sent. We're opening a place in the Congo now and in Liberia. Sisters have already gone to Liberia and they're getting ready to go to the Congo."

With young sisters from Africa leading the charge for the OLA's, their charisma would seem to be coming a full-circle. Sr Anne can enjoy her retirement in the knowledge that SMA Fr Augustine Planque's call to the sisters to "know and love God in order to make God known and loved" is being carried on by her African sisters.





# Out&About

## A hurling blitz



**WEXFORD:** Good Counsel college first years celebrate winning the Wexford Hurlers blitz, October 19.



**MAYO:** Archbishop of Tuam Michael Neary – chief celebrant for the Western Region Mass – Fr Patrick Madigan, Fr Francis Mitchell and Fr Declan Carroll PP Cong are pictured outside the Church of St Mary of the Rosary, Cong.



**MAYO:** Dr James Sheehan, Sean Kenna, Mairead and Peadar O Hici and Mary McGivney Nolan are pictured before the Western Region Mass of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre.

### INSHORT

#### IRC concerned by extended quarantine of people seeking protection

The CEO of the Irish Refugee Council (IRC) said they are “very concerned” as people who apply for international protection are having to quarantine 14 days.

While mandatory hotel quarantine ended in September, people who apply for protection are still required to quarantine in allocated hotels in the absence of home quarantine, the council said in a statement October 20.

Figures obtained by Catherine Connolly TD state that, since January 2021, 884 people (out of a total of 2890 people) have stayed in quarantine beyond the 14 days, at an average length of 21 days.

“It is very concerning that a significant number of people have been required to quarantine beyond the time required by the Travel Regulations. This is apparently due to the lack of onward accommodation to which they can be moved,” said Nick Henderson, CEO of the IRC.

“We urge the Government to ensure people can move out of quarantine upon five days if they have a negative test in line with public health guidance and as applies to other arrivals into the State. “We understand that it is not a specific policy to keep people in quarantine... however, the situation is very concerning and should not continue, particularly in the case of children and vulnerable people.”

#### Mayor of Dublin praises Sophia for commitment during Covid

The Lord Mayor of Dublin praised the commitment shown by the staff of homelessness charity Sophia in supporting people during the pandemic.

Mayor Allison Gilliland said she commended the “commitment of the Sophia teams to support people who have experienced homelessness across Dublin especially over the past 18 months”.

During the visit Mayor Gilliland took some time to meet with residents and staff, where she spoke about the Sophia model of care, one which recognises the trauma that people have experienced.

“Sophia’s trauma informed approach to supporting people to recover from homelessness in homes of their own is to be admired,” she said while visiting the charity’s housing with support service in Cork St.

This model of providing homes with visiting supports as opposed to just providing a temporary solution was seen by the Lord Mayor as an effective model for supporting people with multiple needs.

Sr Jean Quinn DW, founder of Sophia, praised the charity’s staff for going “above and beyond over the past 18 months”.

“By rising to meet those challenges our teams ensure that 99% of all those supported by Sophia maintained their home during the pandemic,” Sr Quinn said.



Edited by Ruadhán Jones  
Ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie



Events deadline is a week in advance of publication



**MEATH:** Priests from the diocese of Meath with their Bishop Tom Deenihan were led for three days of reflection by Dominican Prior Provincial Fr John Harris OP.



**CLARE:** Bishop of Killaloe Fintan Monahan launches the diocesan Syondal Pathway with Don O'Sullivan, chair of the Diocesan Pastoral Council and Maureen Kelly, Pastoral Worker for the Diocese of Killaloe, in Ennis Cathedral October



**DUBLIN:** The Lord Mayor of Dublin, Mayor Allison Gilliland, is pictured with Charlotte Anderson and Jean Quinn DW, founder of Sophia with Victor Ótiend, October 19.

**ARMAGH:** PSNI Superintendent Barney O'Connor and Mary Waide, Regional President North Region SVP, are joined by Lynette Cooke and Brendan McKernan, at the launch of the SVP and PSNI Community Support Initiative for Armagh, Craigavon, Lurgan and Portadown.



**ARMAGH:** Deacon Stefano Colleluori is pictured during Mass October 14, when he was ordained to the Diaconate in St Patrick's Cathedral by Archbishop Eamon Martin.



### Events

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





# World Report

## IN BRIEF

### Filming of vulgar music video in church forces archbishop to apologise

Spanish archbishop Francisco Cerro Chaves has asked for forgiveness after the filming of a music video, which included sensual dance scenes, took place within the church.

Archbishop Chaves, of Toledo, was also forced to carry out a penitential act Sunday at the city's cathedral after the revelations about the music video became known to local church authorities.

Speaking in the aftermath of the video, the archbishop apologised for the collective "negligence in the care and respect for the church" after it was revealed that a local priest, Fr Ferrer had granted permission for the video to be film after he misconstrued what the content of the video related to.

### Number of Catholics in Asia and Africa continues to rise

The number of Catholics in Asia and Africa continued to grow in 2019, as per newly released statistics.

The world population grew by 81.3 million in 2019, while members of the Catholic Church increased by 15.4 million for a total of 1.3 billion Catholics worldwide.

The Catholic population has stayed steady with population growth. At the

end of 2019, Catholics made up 17.74% of the global population — up just .01% from 2018.

The number of Catholics in Africa grew by more than eight million in 2019, for a total of around 19% of the population, while in Asia, which has 4.5 billion people, Catholics make up just 3.31% of the population, at 149.1 million.

### Possibility of 'ideological risk' prompts archdiocese to forego synod

Archbishop Wolfgang Haas of Vaduz, Liechtenstein, announced that his archdiocese won't take part in the two-year global synodal process, saying that it would run "the risk of becoming ideological".

Addressing the decision, Archbishop Haas stated that "all those who wish to do so can enter into dialogue with one another, listen to one another, and maintain personal communication about suggestions, wishes, and ideas in everyday Church life.

"In parish and church councils, as well as in school, social, and charitable institutions and in educational establishments, there are constant relationships among interested people in which a responsible, tactful, sensitive interaction can take place."

The archdiocese is based in the capital of Liechtenstein and has a population of 38,000 people, around 73% of whom are Catholic.

### Adults from Afghanistan baptised as Catholics in Vienna

Eleven people from Afghanistan are among the 27 adults who were recently baptised as Catholics in Austria's Vienna archdiocese with Cardinal Christoph Schönborn of Vienna formally welcoming the candidates for adult Baptism at a ceremony on October 20 at a Carmelite church in Vienna's Döbling district.

In addition to the 11 Afghans, there are six Iranians and four Austrians, with the remainder from five

other countries.

Afghanistan is the world's second-worst country in which to be a Christian, behind North Korea.

Celebrating the event, Cardinal Schönborn remarked that "being a Christian imparts a hope that is greater than the problems and crises of this world and also greater than the personal blows of fate that some of you have already experienced".

## English assisted suicide bill not put to vote in House of Lords

After seven hours of debate and prominent opposition in the House of Lords on Friday, the sponsor of a bill that would legalise assisted suicide in England and Wales chose not to take the bill to a vote. More than 60 peers spoke against the bill during the debate.

One of the foremost objectors to the bill in the House of Lords, Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby said that, "No amount of regulation can make a relative kinder or a doctor infallible; No amount of reassurance can make a vulnerable or disabled person feel equally safe, equally valued if the law is changed in this way.

"It does not serve compassion if, by granting the wishes of one closest to me, I expose others to danger; It does not serve dignity if, by granting the wishes of one closest to me, I devalue the status and safety of others," Archbishop Welby continued.

Another objector, Baroness Campbell of Surbiton and founder of Not Dead Yet UK, commented that the bill "would alter society's view of those in vulnerable circumstances by signalling that assisted suicide is something that they might or ought to consider.

"Disabled people with terminal conditions or progressive conditions like mine are alarmed by the misleading narrative of autonomy and choice," she said, and "We



Anti-euthanasia protesters demonstrate outside the Royal Courts of Justice in London. Photo: CNS.

must not abandon those who can benefit from high-quality health and social care to the desperate temptation of assisted suicide in the guise of a compassionate choice."

She has also said that were the bill approved, it "would run counter to our duty to protect those in the most vulnerable situations, and would exacerbate their fears, through insidious pressure, of being regarded as an expendable burden. As has happened elsewhere, the bill would doubtless be extended."

Continuing her statement, she also warned that "no major disability rights group

in the UK supports legalising assisted suicide. What they support is immediate and sustained improvement in their care. Now is not the time to abandon them to the desperate temptation of an assisted suicide under the guise of compassion."

Multiple prominent, public demonstrations of opposition to the bill occurred ahead of its second reading and Cardinal Vincent Nichols of Westminster, along with Justin Welby, the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, and Ephraim Mirvis, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Common-

wealth, recently wrote a joint letter to peers "to express our profound disquiet at the provisions of the 'Assisted Dying' Bill currently in the House of Lords".

Assisted suicide is illegal in England and Wales, and doctors who assist a suicide can be jailed up to 14 years under the Suicide Act 1961. In 2015 the British parliament rejected a bill that would have legalised assisted suicide for patients with a terminal diagnosis, by a vote of 330 to 118. Parliament has consistently rejected efforts to change the law.

### Nun released nearly five years after kidnapping in Mali thanks God

Sr Gloria Cecilia Narváez Argoti, a missionary who was abducted in Mali in February 2017 and held for nearly five years before finally being released on October 9 of this year, posted on Twitter thanking God and all those who have made her new-found freedom possible.

Sr Gloria said, "I want to lift up my thanksgiving to God on this day because I have felt him close to me during this captivity" and offered her gratitude to "His Holiness Pope Francis, to the Italian government, to the Italian intelligence agen-

cies, to the Malian authorities, to Cardinal Zerbo".

Armed men kidnapped Sr Cecilia, a member of the Franciscan Sisters of Mary Immaculate and a Colombia native, in Karangasso, about 90 miles south of San, February 7, 2017. The men demanded that Sr Cecilia hand over the keys to the community's ambulance. The vehicle was later found abandoned. Three other sisters were present at their house but escaped without being taken hostage.

According to Malian sources, a judge

in the country indicted four individuals in relation to the kidnapping in April 2017.

Sr Cecilia had served in Mali for 12 years before her abduction. Her community operates a large health center in the country, as well as a home where they care for some 30 orphans between one and two years of age and also teach literacy to some 700 Muslim women.

In July Sr Cecilia identified the group then holding her as Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin, a militant Islamist group in West Africa and the Maghreb.

### Pre-meditated arson attack damages Scotland's national Marian shrine

Suspected arsonists targeted Scotland's national shrine to Our Lady of Lourdes in the latest in a series of incidents at Catholic sites.

The fire caused damage to Carfin Grotto, which has added to the financial strain on the shrine that welcomed in excess of 70,000 pilgrims a

year before the Covid crisis.

John P Mallon, the co-founder of Sancta Familia Media, which handles press inquiries on the shrine's behalf, expressed that "It has saddened us all at Carfin as we approach our centenary next year of the opening of the Grotto on October 1, 2022.

"Covid has reduced a lot of our annual intake by reducing pilgrimages so we are already on a tight budget before this attack.

"The fire was quite fierce and set deliberately by the piling of items together and setting them alight," he said.

Although Catholics are a

minority in Scotland, comprising just 16% of the total population, the Catholic Parliamentary Office of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland claimed in 2019 that Catholics were "disproportionately targeted in terms of religiously aggravated offending".





Edited by Brandon Scott  
news@irishcatholic.ie



## Tackling hunger



Women from the Samburu tribe receive a food donation due to an ongoing drought in Oldonyiro, Kenya. Photo: CNS

## British MP proposes adding 'Amess amendment' on last rites to bill

An MP has proposed adding an "Amess amendment" to a bill going through parliament ensuring that Catholic priests can administer the last rites at crime scenes.

Mike Kane, a Labour Party representative, is seeking to add the amendment to the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill. A spokesperson for Kane has stated that the 'Amess amendment' would protect the right of Catholic priests and other ministers of religion to pray alongside the dying after Fr Jeffrey Woolnough was refused access to deliver the last rites to Mr Amess after he was stabbed to death in what prosecutors are calling a religiously motivated

attack by a suspected Islamic extremist.

Alluding to Mr Amess' strong Catholic beliefs, Kane described how Sir David Amess "participated fully in the liturgy and the sacraments of the Church". Continuing, Kane said "while I have the attention of those on the front benches, Catholics believe that extreme unction helps guide the soul to God after death, so maybe we could come up with an Amess amendment so that no matter where it is, in a care home or at a crime scene, members, or anybody, can receive that Sacrament".

It has been reported that sympathetic members of the House of Lords were prepared to put forward the amendment

to the bill, which is currently at the committee stage in the Lords. The BBC has also reported that cross-party discussions were under way.

Conversation surrounding the importance of and the fact that they were not safeguarded by legislation was previously highlighted in a non-parliamentary setting by Bishop Mark Davies of Shrewsbury, who reflected on the value of sacraments to those who possess faith. "Every believing Catholic desires to hear Christ's words of pardon and absolution for the last time; to be strengthened by the grace of anointing; accompanied by the assurance of the Church's prayer and whenever possible to receive Holy Com-

munion," he said.

"This is something well understood in hospitals and care homes, yet the events following the murderous assault on Sir David Amess suggest this is not always comprehended in emergency situations.

"I hope a better understanding of the eternal significance of the hour of death for Christians and the Church's ministry as an 'emergency service' may result from this terrible tragedy."

Mr Amess, who had given 38 years of service as an MP and was a prominent pro-life advocate in the House of Commons, was described by Fr Vincent O'Hara "as a man of conscience".

## US Supreme Court to hear challenges to Texas heartbeat law

The US Supreme Court agreed to consider two legal challenges to Texas' pro-life heartbeat law, just weeks before it hears oral arguments in another major abortion case.

Both the Biden administration and abortion providers had opposed the Texas Heartbeat Act, a law which went into effect September 1 and which restricts most abortions after detection of a fetal heartbeat. The law is enforced through private civil lawsuits.

On October 22, the US Supreme Court agreed to evaluate both challenges to the law and expedited the cases, with oral arguments arranged for November 1. The court will consider whether the federal

government can sue to block implementation of the law by the state, state courts, and private citizens and will also consider whether lawsuits under the law are capable of proceeding.

In her opinion accompanying the court order on Friday, Justice Sonia Sotomayor chastised the court's refusal to temporarily block the law while considering challenges to it.

"The promise of future adjudication offers cold comfort, however, for Texas women seeking abortion care, who are entitled to relief now," Justice Sotomayor wrote. "These women will suffer personal harm from delaying their medical care, and as their pregnancies progress, they

may even be unable to obtain abortion care altogether."

In its October 21 brief before the Supreme Court, the state of Texas maintained that the court should reconsider landmark abortion cases if it took up the Biden administration's appeal.

"The Court erred in recognising the right to abortion in Roe and in continuing to preserve it in Casey," the brief read. "The heartbeat provisions reasonably further Texas's interest in protecting unborn life, which exists from the outset of pregnancy.

"If it reaches the merits, the Court should overturn Roe and Casey and hold that this bill does not therefore violate the Fourteenth Amendment," the state argued.

## Pope Francis appeals that migrants not be sent back to unsafe countries

● Pope Francis made an appeal for migrants on Sunday, urging the international community to stop deporting migrants to unsafe countries.

Speaking from the window of the Apostolic Palace, the Pope asked the Catholic pilgrims gathered in St Peter's Square to pray in silence for migrants, many of whom he said had been subjected to "inhumane violence".

"I express my closeness to the thousands of migrants, refugees and others in need of protection in Libya: I never forget you; I hear your cries and pray for you," he said.

He continued, "We need to end the return of migrants to unsafe countries and prioritise rescuing lives at sea. Once again I call on the international community to keep its promises to seek common, concrete and lasting solutions for the management of migratory flows in Libya and throughout the Mediterranean."

During his address, the Pope called explicitly for "safe and reliable rescue and disembarkation equipment", and alternatives to detention with decent living conditions, underlining the importance of ensuring "access to asylum procedures" and establishing regular migration routes.

"Let us all feel responsible for these brothers and sisters of ours, who have been victims of this very serious situation for too many years," he pleaded.

## Pope Francis thanks God for 'profound personal bond' with Orthodox leader

● Pope Francis sent a letter Friday to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I which illustrated his appreciation for the "profound personal bond" between the two religious leaders.

"It is with gratitude to God that I reflect on our own profound personal bond, from the time of the inauguration of my papal ministry, when you honored me with your presence in Rome," Pope Francis wrote in the letter on October 22.

Pope Francis sent the letter to the 81-year-old Orthodox leader to commemorate the 30th anniversary of his election as Ecumenical Patriarch.

The Pope reflected on their shared commitment

to working to safeguard creation, combatting the social repercussions of the Covid pandemic, and forging unity between Christians.

"I sincerely thank you for ceaselessly indicating the way of dialogue, in charity and in truth, as the only possible way for reconciliation between believers in Christ and for the reestablishment of their full communion," Pope Francis said.

Bartholomew was recently in Rome, joining Pope Francis at an interreligious prayer gathering for peace in front of the Colosseum and signing a joint-appeal at the Vatican asking countries to "achieve net-zero carbon emissions as soon as possible".

## Vatican regulates the role of postulator in saints' causes

● The Vatican has unveiled official regulations for postulators – those who help guide the process behind the declaration of a saint in the Catholic Church.

The norms are part of the reform of the administration of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, which began in 2016.

The regulations for postulators, set out in 86 points, are designed to explain the tasks and procedures, and to prevent conflicts of interest. Pope Francis ratified the rules at the end of August, and the congregation's prefect, Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, signed the document on October 11.

Elaborating on the nature of the new regulations, Cardinal Semeraro stated, "the figure of the postulator and the office he holds continue to be important and, at the same time, delicate.

"The new regulation just promulgated is a sign of this, the need for which has been felt for some time," he explained. "If they take their task seriously and with an ecclesial spirit, postulators can do much for the good of the causes and of the Church."



# Letter from Rome



Elise Ann Allen

## After friend's death, Benedict XVI says he hopes to join him 'soon'

After the death earlier this year of a close friend and former colleague, Benedict XVI wrote a letter to the monastery to which his late friend belonged in which he offered condolences, and said he hoped his journey to the afterlife would not be long in coming.

German priest and Cistercian monk Gerhard Winkler, a fellow professor during Benedict's time at Regensburg, died September 22 at the age of 91.

Three weeks later, Benedict wrote an October 2 letter to Reinhold Dessel, abbot of the Wilhering monastery to which Fr Winkler belonged in which he said news of Fr Winkler's death, which he received from Abbot Dessel himself, "deeply moved me".

"Of all my colleagues and friends, he was the closest to me. His joyfulness and his deep faith always attracted me," Benedict said.

"Now he has reached the afterlife, where certainly many friends await him," he said, adding, "I hope that I may join them soon."

It is unclear whether these words from Benedict were in reference to a specific illness, or whether he was making a general statement.

Benedict resigned from the papacy in 2013 citing reasons of health, but he has lived for nearly a decade after becoming the first Pope to renounce the papacy in nearly 500 years.

**Regensburg represents an important part of Benedict's history, particularly his academic years prior to coming to Rome**

At 94, Benedict has been described as increasingly frail, hard of hearing and losing his sight, and as having difficulty speaking, while also being fully mentally astute. Although he is no longer able to stand for the celebration of the Mass, according to previous statements made by his personal secretary, German Archbishop Georg Ganswein, he concelebrates Mass every day in the small chapel housed in the Vatican monastery where he lives from his wheelchair.

While his words in the letter might sound ominous, Benedict has implied that his time might be short before, saying in a letter published in an Italian newspaper in 2018 that he was on a "pilgrimage towards home".

The letter was sent to Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera* to thank readers for their best wishes on the fifth anniversary of his resignation.



Retired Pope Benedict XVI smiles at Germany's Munich Airport before his departure to Rome June 22, 2020. Photo: CNS.

**“It is unclear whether these words from Benedict were in reference to a specific illness, or whether he was making a general statement”**

In the letter, Benedict said that he was “moved that so many readers want to know how I spend my days in this, the last period of the life”.

“I can only say that with the slow withering of my physical forces, interiorly, I am on a pilgrimage towards home,” he said.

### Low public profile

Ever since his resignation, Benedict has attempted to keep a low-public profile, making just a handful of public appearances over the past eight and a half years. However, he has given numerous interviews and has written several letters which have been published since stepping down, some of which have caused controversy for being spun in the media to contradict positions taken by his successor, Pope Francis.

Benedict's last time traveling outside of the Vatican walls was to visit his ailing brother, Georg Ratzinger, in Regensburg in June 2020.

Georg died shortly after that visit, leaving Benedict as the last of the Ratzinger siblings. Their sister Maria, who never married, but who managed Benedict's apartment in Rome after he was named a cardinal, died in 1991 after suffering a massive heart attack during a visit to their parents' tomb.

Regensburg represents an important part of Benedict's history, particularly his academic years prior to coming to Rome.

After his ordination in 1951 alongside his brother Georg, Benedict held several teaching positions at different universities in Germany, before returning to his native Bavaria in 1969 as a theology professor at the University of Regensburg.

He served as vice president of the university from 1976 to 1977, before his appointment as Archbishop of Munich and Freising in 1977.

During his time as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, then-Cardinal Joseph

Ratzinger often repeated his desire to retire to his family house in the Bavarian village of Pentling, near Regensburg, and dedicate himself to writing books.

**“Benedict said that he was ‘moved that so many readers want to know how I spend my days in this, the last period of the life’”**

Benedict's parents and siblings are buried just outside of Regensburg, and for years his brother Georg, an avid music enthusiast, served as director of the prestigious Regensburg cathedral choir, known as the *Regensburger Domspatzen*.

Regensburg is also where Benedict caused one of the earliest international incidents in his papacy while giving a September 2006 lec-

ture at the University of Regensburg that touched on Islam, and which enraged Muslims and Islamic leaders around the world when he quoted a 14th century dialogue between Byzantine emperor Michael II Paleologus and a “learned Persian,” in which the former criticises Islam.

### Regensburg

Regensburg is also where he met Winkler, who grew up next to the Wilhering monastery he joined in 1951, the same year Benedict and his brother Georg were ordained priests.

Winkler conducted his academic studies in Vienna as well as at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana. He was ordained a priest in 1955 and went on to obtain two doctoral degrees, in theology and German studies.

He taught English and German in grammar school before becoming a research assistant and later professor at the University of Bochum in 1972.

From 1974-1983 Winkler was a professor of Middle and New Church History at the University of Regensburg, before moving onto the University of Salzburg. After his retirement in 1999, he continued actively writing on specialistic topics, including St Bernard Clairvaux and the Cistercian order.



# Vatican at COP26: Hearts and habits must change fast to care for creation



Carol Glatz

Even though Pope Francis will not attend the 26th UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow in person, the Vatican delegation and the Catholic Church will be “everywhere” during the two-week summit – from the highest-level private negotiations to the sidelines with grassroots “social action” and community-led events, said two delegates.

And most importantly, Church representatives will bring with them the people that climate change affects the most “to make sure that the voices of the Global South are heard clearly and are taken seriously. This cannot be a meeting about them without them,” said Alistair Dutton, a member of the Holy See delegation to COP26 and the chief executive of Caritas Scotland’s Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund (SCIAF), which is one of a number of key local organisers.

Increasing their visibility is important because past climate conferences have shown “those who are suffering most already get pushed to the sidelines, and it ends up being a talking shop among the wealthier nations,” he told *Catholic News Service* October 19. He said SCIAF was covering the expenses of a group of people from Malawi, Zambia, Colombia and other nations so they could attend COP26 to call for urgent action against the climate crises they already live with.

**“We go there to represent the Church, as Christians’ and as one of the many faith communities that know the Earth is not just a planet, but is God’s creation”**

Hosted by the United Kingdom in partnership with Italy, the October 31–November 12 global climate summit aims to have world leaders put forward concrete ways to cut global emissions by half by 2030 and reach “net-zero” emissions by 2050 as part of efforts to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. Negotiations will also focus on helping protect biodiversity and honouring promises to fund action in developing countries, particularly in helping them adapt, mitigate and recover from the harm caused by climate change.

These will be the same priorities the Holy See delegation will be insisting on, Salesian Father Josh-trom Kureethadam, coordinator of the “ecology and creation” desk at



Pupils at St Conval’s Primary School learn about climate change ahead of the UN Climate Change Conference, COP26, in Glasgow, Scotland. Photo: CNS.

the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, told CNS October 21.

“We go there to represent the Church, as Christians” and as one of the many faith communities that know the Earth is not just a planet, but is God’s creation, he said. The delegation will also represent the voiceless and the vulnerable who did not cause the climate crisis but are its “early and disproportionate victims”.

Mr Dutton said financial compensation for “loss and damage” experienced by so many poor and vulnerable people will be a “big issue, particularly for the Global South, during COP26”.

## Damaged

For example, funding is needed by those whose livelihoods have been damaged by climate change and by the poor whose land has disappeared under rising sea levels so they can buy new land elsewhere, he said.

That means all money raised for developing countries as promised in the 2015 Paris Agreement must be split evenly between climate change adaptation and mitigation, he said, because currently most funding is prioritised for mitigation and technologies aimed at reducing emissions.

The \$100 billion pledged a year should “not all be spent on rich people

playing with new technology while poor people just cannot survive where they are”, Mr Dutton said.

The Vatican delegation, led by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, will include officials from the Secretariat of State and the integral development dicastery, as well as from two local Catholic organisations: SCIAF and CAFOD, Mr Dutton said.

## Committed

Even though it is “hugely disappointing”, Pope Francis will not be in Glasgow in person, Mr Dutton said, there is no doubt how committed he is to caring for creation, which has been “the defining issue of his papacy”.

“His words live on” and give the delegation a platform to build on, he said.

Members of the delegation will be actively engaged in the so-called “Blue Zone”, which is the UN-managed space hosting the official negotiations with delegations from observer organisations and the more than 190 government “parties” who signed the UN Framework Convention of Climate Change.

They will also be contributing to side events in the “Green Zone”, managed by the UK government for the general public in order to promote dialogue, awareness and active commitments. Here, there will be “sacred

spaces” for reflection, a big march November 6 with a “faith and belief section” with bishops and parishes, and there will be a Mass November 7 followed by an interfaith service, Mr Dutton said. “The Church will be everywhere.”

Vatican delegations did the same at past climate summits, Fr Kureethadam said. “That is one of the strengths of our delegation because we have so many of these contacts” with local organisers.

**“Financial compensation for ‘loss and damage’ experienced by so many poor and vulnerable people will be a ‘big issue’”**

It reflects the Church’s “multilateral approach” of working with all levels of civil society – from the top-down with the UN and governments to the bottom-up with local communities, he added.

Also, “it is much more inspiring and reinvigorating to be in the Green Zone,” he laughed, “but we need both.”

Mr Dutton said the Church will keep the COP26 agenda alive after global leaders go home.

SCIAF, for example, will put pressure on Scotland to fulfil its promises, and will “translate” that into local action “so when it’s all over, people don’t go, ‘What was that all about?’ but they have a clear sense of the role they can play,” he said.

## Policies

Inspiring political leaders to support the right kind of policies is not enough because if they are not re-elected or the issues are no longer “in vogue”, the policies may not survive or could get reversed, unless they are also strongly supported by the people, he said.

Mr Dutton said the world’s bishops’ conferences “should be playing much more of a role”, speaking out, holding political leaders to account and warning that if the target is missed, it is “a massive instance of global injustice”.

However, he said, truly caring for the environment, “ultimately that’s going to have to come from the grassroots”.

The Church has the “capillary network” to be able to “really mobilise every community in every country” and prompt the “conversion in the hearts of each individual” that will make the difference, Mr Dutton said.

“Each one of us will have to stop pumping carbon into the world,” which means rethinking what transport they use, how they heat and cool their homes, what food and products they buy and how many miles things travelled to get from the producer to consumer, he said.

He asked, “Are we willing to live differently so that others get to enjoy the planet we inherited?”

**“It reflects the Church’s ‘multilateral approach’ of working with all levels of civil society”**



# Letters

## Letter of the week

### Evil is not an abstract phenomenon

**Dear Editor,** The title of Fr Sean Smith's item in your 26/08/2021 issue was 'We still speak about keeping the Faith as if it were something, instead of a relationship with someone'.

David Quinn's article in your 14/10/2021 issue is titled 'The Church has underestimated the reality of evil' and discusses the

report on child abuse in the Catholic Church in France. There are several references to "evil", which comes across as an abstract phenomenon ('something'). If we believe in a living, personal God and seek to have a relationship with him, then isn't our struggle more to do with 'God versus the Devil' rather than 'good versus evil'?

(I expect the Devil probably prefers the latter: "The greatest trick the Devil ever pulled was convincing the world that he didn't exist.")

"Our Father, who art in heaven..... deliver us from the Evil One". Matthew 6: 9-13

*Yours etc.,  
James McKeown  
Randalstown, Co. Antrim*

## Avenues leading towards the occult

**Dear Editor,** The word 'Halloween' means the eve of the feast of All Saints. Yet on shop windows and even on school windows we see images of ghosts, skeletons, witches, demons etc., at this time of year, indeed of all sorts of ugly things that remind one of the occult and of Satan. But many Catholic parents and the boards of Catholic schools seem to have no problem with this. Instead, they see it, naively, as good fun even though such things are what might be called 'avenues' leading towards the occult; and this at a time when Satan-worship, black masses and seances are on the increase all over the world.

If Halloween is to get back its true meaning why not make this a time when parents encourage young people to dress up as their favourite saints, and schools, then, give prizes for the best efforts. Furthermore, instead of 'trick-or-treating', the young could also go around to their neighbours offering to pray to those saints for their intentions. It would certainly gain help from the saints and it might even gain a few chocolates also for the young from



grateful neighbours! Thus, we might see a return again of something of the Christian to this season.

*Yours etc.,  
Prof. Richard O'Connor  
Rome, Italy*

## Govt contraception campaign beggars belief

**Dear Editor,** The recent Budget 2022 announcement directing that free contraceptives will be made available next year to young women aged 17-25 with €10 million a year allocated for that purpose is cause to pause. When the iconic 'contraception train' movement happened in 1971, contraception was only decriminalised in 1980 and approved for sale in 1985. Now 36 years later, contraception will be provided free of

charge to young women aged 17-25 many of whom are unmarried mothers.

Women in this age group are likely to be in part-time employment, jobless, in full-time education and not financially independent. Yet the cost of the new abortion regime amounts to €20 million for 2019 to 2020 which equates to €10 million per annum. It can be adduced the Government is planning to spend €20 million

a year on the prevention of births, by way of abortion or contraception. There is no evidence available to suggest free contraception might impact abortion numbers. It beggars belief the Government promotes a reduction in the birth rate further. A GP managing a pregnancy is paid €250 which contrasts with a GP prescribing abortion pills who is paid €450 even though the pregnancy requires far more GP visits.

And pre-abortion counselling receives no funding whatsoever. Neither is Gianna Care and Every Life Counts, which ably assists women experiencing an unexpected pregnancy, or need help following an abortion given any State funding. Should both male and female be educated about contraception is a moot question.

*Yours etc.,  
Gerry Coughlan  
Kilnamanagh, Dublin 24*

## Future generations will be 'horrified' by abortion

**Dear Editor,** I would like to thank Fr Martin Delaney for his excellent article on what happens to the remains of babies killed in abortions. He asked a most interesting question: What examples of group think are existing and thriving today that in 50 years' time we will be horrified by?

As slavery is now recognised as the horror it was, so will abortion to future generations. Yes, as Fr Delaney said, many things occurred in the past that should not have happened, but it is impossible to imagine anything more horrific than the deliberate killing of innocent, vulnerable babies in the

womb, 13,243 disposed of since abortion was legalised here, not counting those killed during this year. No other right can apply without the right to life and when this is denied to unborn babies, it is no surprise that efforts are now being made to shorten or end the lives of older people who are seen as disposable. Each individual life is of importance and must be protected and cherished.

We are constantly hearing claims of how babies who died in Tuam were treated, seemingly without proper investigation.

This is just one example of the group think in the media and which was so evi-

dent in the abortion campaign. We simply had no proper debate and the media had full rein in its promotion of abortion, ably aided by most politicians. Opposing views were silenced and indeed, still are. We simply cannot be silent on the issue of abortion which is happening daily in our country. Now, if any other such deliberate killings were taking place, would there not be an outcry? It is time that we stood up and are counted in speaking up for the voiceless babies.

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

## facebook community

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

### 'New Irish' will transform and renew Church here – missionaries

True, but the issue will be that a lot of the people in power in the Irish Church will see the new generation as 'rocking the boat' too much because many of them are keen on orthodox teaching and have little time for cafeteria Catholicism. - **Adam Conroy**

Very true but a revelation to those who seem unable to grasp most migrants in Ireland are Christian, whether from Africa or Europe or from the likes of Philippines and Brazil, also many from India. - **Declan McSweeney**

### Quite an experience searching for Mass in France

I find this surprising. We've holidayed for years in various regions of France and have usually found daily Mass possible, never mind Sunday... - **John Kehoe**

In rural areas it is common for the priest to look after 10s or 20s parishes. Of course, masses in little villages happen every blue moon. For other sacraments, they better get them in bigger towns. The recent Rapport on the paedophilia in the French Church won't help people to come to the Church for sure and attract vocations. - **Guillaume Rouy**

I remember staying in a campsite in Brittany in 2010 and there was a village with a church next to the campsite. Although the church was open to visit it only had Sunday mass once a month and the nearest weekly Sunday Mass was in the Cathedral in Dol de Bretagne. It reminded me of some of the Church of Ireland churches here that might only have Sunday service every second Sunday to once a month. - **Fearghal O'Muineachain**

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

## No justification for Taliban comparison

**Dear Editor,** Fr Roy Donovan claims that the Catholic Church is like the Taliban because it does not allow the ordination of women to the priesthood or the permanent diaconate. This is clearly a clever ploy to get the mainstream media's attention to listen to the self-declared 'liberal' Association of Catholic Priests. But whatever frustrations Fr Roy has at the slow pace of change within the Church, there really is no justification for his actions, that undermine our bishops, fellow priests, deacons and most importantly the many wonderful male and female volunteers within our parishes.

*Yours etc.,  
Frank Browne  
Templeogue, Dublin 16*

## 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



▲ **USA:** Fr Mike Joly walks with Duffy, his seeing eye dog, on the grounds of St Joan of Arc Church in Yorktown, Virginia, where he is pastor. Photos: CNS.

◀ **SPAIN:** Worshippers carry a statue of Mary and the Christ Child during a Mass outside the Pine of the Virgin Chapel on the Canary Island of La Palma, in the hope that the volcano will stop erupting.



**HAITI:** Police in Port-au-Prince, remove a burning tire as people mount a nationwide strike to protest a growing wave of kidnappings.



**LEBANON:** Syrian refugee boys look out from behind a fence at an informal tented settlement in Akkar.



**NIGERIA:** Cynthia Chukwuemeka, far right, and Sr Dorothy Okoli, pose with students on the playground of Catholic Hail Mary Nursery and Primary School in Nkwelle Ezunaka.



**VATICAN:** Pope Francis receives gifts as he attends a session of the Salesian Sisters' general chapter at their headquarters in Rome.



# Beware of your inner circles



**“N**o man is an island.” John Donne wrote those words four centuries ago and they are as true now as they were then, except we don’t believe them anymore.

Today more and more of us are beginning to define our nuclear families and our carefully chosen circle of friends precisely as a self-sufficient island, and are becoming increasingly selective as to who is allowed on our island, into our circle of friends, and into the circle of those we deem worthy of respect. We define and protect our idiosyncratic islands by a particular ideology, view of politics, view of morality, view of gender, and view of religion. Anyone who doesn’t share our view is unwelcome and not worthy of our time and respect.

**“Today more and more of us are beginning to define our nuclear families and our carefully chosen circle of friends precisely as a self-sufficient island”**

Moreover, contemporary media plays into this. Beyond the hundreds of mainstream television channels we have to choose from, each with its own agenda, we have social media wherein each of us can find the exact ideology, politics, and moral and religious perspective that



**Fr Rolheiser**

[www.ronrolheiser.com](http://www.ronrolheiser.com)

fosters, protects, and isolates our island and makes our little nuclear clique, one of self-sufficiency, exclusivity, and intolerance. Today we all have the tools to plumb the media until we find exactly the ‘truth’ we like. We have come a long way from the old days of a Walter Cronkite delivering a truth we all could trust.

The effects of this are everywhere, not least in the increasingly bitter polarisation we are experiencing vis-a-vis virtually every political, moral, economic, and religious issue in our world. We find ourselves today on separate islands, not open to listen, respect, or dialogue with anyone not of our own kind. Anyone who disagrees with me is not worthy of my time, my ear, and my respect; this seems to be the popular attitude today.

#### Cancel culture

We see some of this in certain strident forms of ‘cancel culture’ and we

see much of it in the increasing hard, inward-turned face of nationalism in so many countries today. What’s foreign is unwelcome, pure and simple. We will not deal with anything that challenges our ethos.

What’s wrong with that? Almost everything. Irrespective of whether we are looking at this from a biblical and Christian perspective or whether we are looking at it from the point of view of human health and maturity, this is just wrong.

#### ‘The stranger’

Biblically, it’s clear. God breaks into our lives in important ways, mainly through ‘the stranger’, through what’s foreign, through what’s other, and through what sabotages our thinking and blows apart our calculated expectations. Revelation normally comes to us in the surprise, namely, in a form that turns our thinking upside down. Take

for example the incarnation itself. For centuries people looked forward to the coming of a messiah, a God in human flesh, who would overpower and humiliate all their enemies and offer them, those faithfully praying for this, honour and glory. They prayed for and anticipated a superman, and what did they get? A helpless baby lying in the straw. Revelation works like that. This is why St Paul tells us to always welcome a stranger because it could in fact be an angel in disguise.

**“I have often found myself graced by the most unlikely, unexpected, initially unwelcome sources”**

All of us, I am sure, at some point in our lives have personally had that experience of meeting an angel in disguise inside a stranger whom we perhaps welcomed only with some reluctance and fear. I know in my own life, there have been times when I didn’t want to welcome a certain person or situa-

tion into my life. I live in a religious community where you do not get to choose who you will live with. You are assigned your ‘immediate family’ and (but for a few exceptions when there is clinical dysfunction) like-mindedness is not a criterion as to who is assigned to live with each other in our religious houses. Not infrequently, I have had to live in community with someone who I would not, by choice, have taken for a friend, a colleague, a neighbour, or a member of my family. To my surprise, it has often been the person whom I would have least chosen to live with who has been a vehicle of grace and transformation in my life.

#### Unexpected

Moreover, this has been true for my life in general. I have often found myself graced by the most unlikely, unexpected, initially unwelcome sources. Admittedly, this has not always been without pain. What’s foreign, what’s other, can be upsetting and painful for a long time before grace and revelation are recognised, but it’s what carries grace.

That is our challenge always, though particularly today when so many of us are retreating to our own islands, imagining this as maturity, and then rationalising it by a false faith, a false nationalism, and a false idea of what constitutes maturity. This is both wrong and dangerous. Engaging with what is other enlarges us. God is in the stranger, and so we are cutting ourselves off from a major avenue of grace whenever we will not let the foreign into our lives.

**“We find ourselves today on separate islands, not open to listen, respect, or dialogue with anyone not of our own kind”**



# Family & Lifestyle

The Irish Catholic, October 28, 2021

## Personal Profile

Following the God of many surprises

Page 38



# The changing face of funerals



**T**he world seems more fluid than ever before, and even the age-old traditions surrounding death and funerals aren't immune to the effects of the current trends and technology reshaping everything we know.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper as part of the build-up to the Irish Hospice Foundation's 2021 Forum: 'On Dying, Death & Bereavement', which took place October 5-6, Joseph Behan of Hibernian Funerals told us how the Covid-19 pandemic hastened the ways in which funerals are changing, and pointed to the UK landscape as an example of what's to come.

"Where you couldn't register a death online beforehand, so you had to do it in person, then all of a sudden last year, you



**The latest trends and advances in technology are changing funeral practices in Ireland and around the world, writes Jason Osborne**

could do it, so it's just how Covid or an emergency forces change," Mr Behan tells this paper.

"Then even some simple things that happened in the UK, the government there have a 'Tell us once', where rather than going to each government department, like the passport, driving license, all those things, you use 'Tell us once' and then it goes from there.

"A lot of financial institutions are signed up to a death notification service, so rather than going

to your post office, your credit union, your bank, etc., you just tell once to the death notification service," he says.

### Changes

While these may seem like small changes, "it's often the simplest things make the biggest difference," Mr Behan notes. This is all the more true at a time when people are under the "most extreme emotional circumstances" that many people experience in their entire lives.

However, the notification system in the UK is one of the smaller changes on the horizon, with different possibilities coming forward with regards to the body's treatment after death, and where to response.

Pointing again to the UK, which is often a good indicator of where the Irish funeral scene is heading, Mr Behan says that "at least 80%" of people are now choosing to be cremated, a large break with past traditions. However, there is a limit to the rise in cremation's popularity, with many religious minorities opting against it, particularly Orthodox, Jewish and Muslim populations.

"On the cremation side there's quite a bit happening there. The UK market is over 80% cremation. What happens there now

is actually direct cremation happens quite a lot.

"In the space of a year it's increased fourfold, from three to 14 per cent. What happens there is actually the body goes straight to the crematorium and then the ceremony or not happens afterwards with the ashes rather than the body," Mr Behan says.

### Cremation

With Covid-19 accelerating that trend, cremation is no longer the straightforward process it once was, either. Traditional gas cremation exists alongside "greener" cremation options, such as electric and water cremation, and "organic reduction", which is so far mainly a phenomenon in the United States.

» Continued on Page 33



## Family News



## AND EVENTS

### 900-YEAR-OLD SWORD FOUND ENCRUSTED IN SHELLS OFF ISRAEL

A sword believed to have belonged to a crusader who sailed to the Holy Land almost a millennium ago has been recovered from the Mediterranean seabed thanks to a sharp-eyed amateur diver, the Israel Antiquities Authority has said.

Though encrusted with marine organisms, the metre-long blade, hilt and handle were distinctive enough to notice after undercurrents shifted sands that had concealed it, Reuters reported.

The location, a natural cove near the port city of Haifa, suggested it had served as a shelter for seafarers, said Yaakov Sharvit, director of the authority's marine archaeology unit.

"Actually it's heavy", Mr Sharvit said while holding the sword and talking about the Crusader knight who had probably fought with it.

"I'm trying to imagine him on the field with all the armour on him and the sword and fighting with it ... maybe they were bigger than us today but definitely stronger. And it's amazing," he said.

The sword, believed to be 900 years old, will be put on display after it is cleaned and restored, the authority said.

### FACEBOOK TO HIRE 10,000 IN EU TO WORK ON METAVERSE

Facebook is planning to hire 10,000 people in the European Union to develop a 'metaverse', the BBC reports.

A metaverse is an online world where people can game, work and communicate in a virtual environment, often using VR headsets.

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg has been one of the leading voices on the concept.

"The metaverse has the potential to help unlock access to new creative, social, and economic opportunities. And Europeans will be shaping it right from the start," Facebook said in a blog post.

Facebook has made building the metaverse one of its big priorities.

Despite its history of buying up rivals, Facebook claims the metaverse "won't be built overnight by a single company" and has promised to collaborate.

### JAPANESE VOLCANO ERUPTS AT POPULAR TOURIST SPOT

Japan's Mount Aso has erupted, spewing a giant column of ash thousands of metres into the sky as hikers rushed away from the popular tourist spot.

No injuries were immediately reported after the late-morning eruption on the main southern island of Kyushu, which sent rocks flying in a dramatic blast captured by nearby CCTV cameras.

People were warned not to approach the volcano as it ejected hot gas and ash as high as 3,500 metres (11,500 feet) and sent stones tumbling down its grassy slopes.

The last time the JMA raised its warning for Mount Aso to its current level – three out of five – was when it erupted in 2016, having rumbled to life the previous year after being dormant for 19 years.

The agency has been warning of increasing volcanic activity there in recent days.

# The future of the Covid booster dose



This month figures show that the number of confirmed cases of Covid-19 in the Republic of Ireland has surpassed 400,000 since the pandemic began. The death toll due to the coronavirus now stands at more than 5,000 of which about 75% occurred in those aged over 75. In fact, half of all deaths were in only a two-month period, and were accounted for by fatalities in January this year and in April of 2020 during the first wave of the pandemic.

While 92% of the entire adult population are now fully vaccinated, a period of relative stability in case numbers seems to have given way to a recent increase in Covid diagnoses and hospitalisations.

**“A small trial using a booster dose of the Pfizer vaccine 6 months after full vaccination resulted in good increases in immune response”**

Despite this, vaccine efficacy at preventing severe disease remains high at about 90% and of those in intensive care about two thirds were not fully vaccinated. However, a significant minority of people, especially those with weaker immune systems and chronic underlying conditions are susceptible. In fact, between March and September of this year, there were over 100 deaths due to 'breakthrough Covid' in fully vaccinated people.

#### Merits

This has brought into question the merits of a third or booster vaccine, which recently got 'emergency approval' by both

## Medical Matters

Dr Kevin McCarroll



the European Medical Agency (EMA) and the FDA in the US. But what is the evidence that such an approach works, or is safe and to which groups of people should it be targeted towards?

#### Efficacy

Studies show a significant decline in vaccine efficacy (after 6 months) for prevention of infection with the delta strain in those over 65. Despite this, any increase in the risk of hospitalisation in the same age group was small. A review in the Lancet this month concluded that current evidence does not show a need for boosters in the general population at present. Indeed, it has been estimated that about 500 adults over 65 would need to be given boosters to prevent one hospital admission over 6 months. The corresponding figure for those aged 50-64 is about 2,000. Furthermore, the WHO has called for a 'moratorium' on vaccine boosters until the benefit of primary vaccination is made available globally.

We know however, that mRNA vaccines do not prevent symptomatic Covid in about 5% of adults where there is probably an inadequate immune response. Even in those where the vaccine initially works well, antibody levels drop after 6 months and in high-risk groups

'severe' breakthrough infection and death have occurred. A small trial using a booster dose of the Pfizer vaccine 6 months after full vaccination resulted in good increases in immune response. Data from Israel, where a booster dose of the Pfizer vaccine was given to people aged 60+ at least 5 months after their initial immunisation resulted in a reduction in severe illness, though follow up was short. However, studies to date do not show an increased risk of any serious side effects and suggest that boosters are safe.

#### Booster

For this reason, it makes sense to target booster doses to adults most at risk, though countries have adopted different approaches as to who this should include. In Ireland, it is recommended that all adults aged 80 or over and those 65+ in long term facilities who were



vaccinated at least 6 months ago should have a booster dose. Additionally, patients at risk due to underlying medical conditions that weaken their immune system should also receive a third dose which may be given within six months of their first completed vaccination. Other countries including the UK have a broader inclusion criteria. For example, in England, it is also advised for all adults over 50

as well as frontline health and social workers. Importantly, some hospital staff who were fully vaccinated earlier in the year are now developing symptomatic Covid and albeit with mild symptoms, pose a serious risk for transmission to vulnerable patients.

**“It makes sense to target booster doses to adults most at risk though countries have adopted different approaches as to who this should include”**

Booster doses are ultimately likely to be required in the general population but can be adapted to new variants that arise in the future. However, more studies on the dose required and potential timing of such vaccines are needed, as well as surveillance for side effects. Global inequity to vaccine access is also a big problem with only 2.5% of people in low income countries having had one dose.

On a positive note, the first oral antiviral (molnupiravir) used to treat Covid was found to reduce the risk of hospitalisation or death by about 50% in patients with mild or moderate disease. The clinical trial which included 775 patients with early Covid identified positive results after the drug was taken twice daily for 5 days. By targeting the virus in the early stage of illness, this easy to take tablet has the potential to

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



» Continued from Page 35



Many of these new options and possibilities are being driven by environmental concerns, Mr Behan explaining that each of these options has a lower environmental footprint than traditional options, which appeals to many people.

Electric cremation "operates at about 200 degrees lower than gas cremation, so it's a slower process, it's a bit like driving your car a bit slower, so it uses a lot less energy and it can use renewables as well.

"So then even if that used our [environmental] coffin as well, it would have a much lower footprint," he says, continuing "the water cremation has a much lower footprint as well, and obviously the organic reduction is the lowest of all."

**“While this is still a niche in Ireland, there are over 300 sites in the UK, indicating a potentially popular future in Ireland”**

Coming from the same environmental concern trend is the renewed consideration of where to be buried. Mr Behan says that in the UK, natural or woodland burial sites are becoming more popular, with them popping up over here as well.

"And then burial grounds...it's an interesting topic, because I know personally someone who operates one [natural burial site] down in Wexford. Is it consecrated ground? He's had clergy bless it, so it's an interesting one. Or else you can have a woodland as well, so just to show you what can be done."

### Popular

While this is still a niche in Ireland, there are over 300 sites in the UK, indicating a potentially popular future in Ireland.

"In Ireland, it's a niche, in the UK, there's probably over 300 natural or woodland burial sites, so they're much further ahead of us and then there's actually another product that they're looking to bring to the

market as well which is a return to nature," Mr Behan says.

"Ashes themselves are quite toxic, since it is ground-down bones, so it's two things: One is the pH is the wrong level, so if you planted a tree with it, then there's a good chance that the tree will die. But also the trace elements, so your sodium, your potassium, your magnesium, all those things, will be at the wrong concentrations, so you need to dilute them down. There's a product that's gaining traction in other parts of the world, that actually you would mix with the ashes and then you could use it to plant a tree or spread it safely and so on."

### Trend

Personalisation is another trend driving people's funeral choices, with customisable coffins and 'novel' ways of distributing ashes flooding the market.

"There's some segmentation of the market that I've seen done, some very good segmentation, that the personalisation is coming more in to the fore. We tend to lag really, what's happening in the UK and other markets, so you can see what has been happening there and some of it I would expect we'll follow.

"So, for instance, one of the products that I would be bringing to the market then would be an environmentally friendly coffin, but it could be personalised. There



would be different ranges in that, so that's something then that will come on stream soon enough."

Offering a demonstration of the personalisation options, Mr Behan shows me that it's possible now to design coffins with religious imagery, such as Michelangelo's Pieta or a golden cross, or adorned with personal photos and messages incorporated into the coffin's design.

**“Personalisation is another trend driving people's funeral choices, with customisable coffins and 'novel' ways of distributing ashes flooding the market”**

With regards to ashes, everything that people can think to do with them is done, from tattooing the ashes, to having them launched into space for a princely sum, to having the ashes incorporated into a diamond. While most of these options are, and will likely remain, niche services, they exemplify just how much funerals and the surrounding arrangements have changed.

How people travel to their final resting place is also no longer fixed, the classic hearse being supplemented with electric vehicles now, and even, bicycles. Mr Behan refers to cycling advocate and filmmaker Paddy Cahill's last journey through Dublin's streets earlier this year, which caught the nation's attention and featured in national media.

Mr Cahill's brother, Conor, cycled his coffin to Glasnevin Cemetery in April, followed by a train of cyclists, in a move that has since become more popular.

Mr Behan offers a glimpse of the changing face of funerals and death preparations, both in Ireland and abroad, showing that millennia-old traditions are no more immune to change than anything else.

# Dad's Diary

Rory Fitzgerald



I can still vividly recall my first day in secondary school. As I nervously walked in the gate with a friend, we saw that we were no longer the big boys in school, as we had been in sixth class, just a few months earlier.

That became abundantly clear as I saw six foot tall, fully grown men with beards walking in the gate alongside us – wearing the very same school uniform as us. One pupil even drove casually in the gate and parked his car. Another arrived on a motorbike. As we gazed around us in awe, we knew that we were entering a new world, and another phase in our lives.

At that moment, it was impossible to believe that we too were about to undergo the strange transformations of adolescence. Intellectually, we knew that somehow we too would become young men by the time we left this place. Yet we were still young boys, in the innocence of childhood.

**“There's safety in numbers, and while the move to secondary school is a time of excitement, it is also a time of trepidation”**

Of course, we did somehow make that transition into adulthood. We had little choice, after all. In those dramatic teenage years, we learned a lot about the world. We somehow navigated those rollercoaster years, with its many hazards and delights. We somehow charted a reasonably sane course through darkness and light, scrambling to understand the pitfalls of drugs, alcohol, sex, freedom, identity crises, ideological conflict, as our childhood was inevitably stripped away from us.

Thankfully, we managed to grow, and to gain a greater

understanding of the world as we went. As teenagers, we took decisions that would set us off on lifelong career paths. Leaving school five years later, aged just 17, we went on to university, living away from home for the first time. Secondary

school is truly a crucible of transformation. No wonder we parents want to choose it with care.

Our eldest is due to make the leap into secondary school next year, and so it's time to apply to our local secondary schools. As a result, we've

been talking a lot with the older children about life in secondary school, and we have gone to open days. Most of these have been online, thanks to Covid, but we were able to physically visit some schools. We've talked about the subject choices available and the varying approaches schools take to education. Of course, for kids, there's an understandable desire to go to the same school their best friends are going to. There's safety in numbers, and while the move to secondary school is a time of excitement, it is also a time of trepidation.

When selecting a school, many questions arise, such as whether a single sex school would be preferable. The ethos of the school is a crucial consideration, of course. I'm grateful that we live in a rural part of Ireland, where much of the insanity of the modern world is quietly rejected. Yet the teenage years are a time of questioning, and vulnerability. In our age of ideological flux and conflict, I'm reminded of the words of Bob Dylan, "the lines are long, the fighting is strong, and they're breaking down the distance between right and wrong."

At the end of the day, the transition to secondary school is a leap in the dark for children, as they walk in that school gate, and into a strange new world. After a few short years, they will somehow walk out that same gate, as young men and young women.





# Following the God of many surprises

## Personal Profile



Ruadhán Jones

**W**hen Sr Helen Freer made her first profession to the Redemptoristines in Dublin a few weeks ago, the celebrant said that “God is a God of surprises”. This is a truth that Sr Helen’s life testifies to – it was only in 2016 that she entered the Catholic Church, a journey sparked by a series of Divine ‘coincidences’.

Sr Helen was baptised into the Church of England, but grew up in a non-denominational family. Her parents were happy to go to a Methodist, Church of England or Catholic service, and she went to Catholic and Methodist schools.

“Probably after I went to college and went to work, church and God weren’t part of my life,” Sr Helen explains. “The 10 Commandments, yes, the way of life. But not the sacramental and the relationship wasn’t. And that progressed and sadly I lost my mum and 16 years later my dad. It wasn’t until we were on holiday – I’ve got friends who are Catholic – and we got talking. It obviously was the right moment, because it piqued my interest. And I started investigating.”

One of Sr Helen’s friends told her about an online Mass that she could watch. She decided to watch “out of nosiness”, Sr Helen says, hoping to spot her friend in the pews.

“And then it became a regular occurrence that I started watching and listening to the Mass and the readings and the homily. I missed it one day, and I thought I’d really like to hear Mass still. I came across



Sr Helen Freer

the [Redemptoristine] sisters here online. It was Churchservices.tv. I started joining them for evening prayer and Mass when I could.

**“Sr Helen did as she was told, contacting a Jesuit centre just outside Manchester, who set her up with a spiritual director”**

“With work – I was self-employed – and so when I could I joined them. From that, I started reading books by [Bishop] Robert Barron, [Fr] James Martin, Scott Hahn and progressed from there to speak to what wasn’t my parish priest but the neighbouring parish priest to find out some more. He said to start an RCIA course. I started that in September and in the following April I came into the Church in 2016.”

It was a “total change of life”, Sr Helen says, and she continued to pray online with the sisters. Then she went on retreat to St Beunos, North Wales, a Jesuit retreat centre – this was to provide the next important step in her faith life.

### Retreat

“I had a wonderful retreat guide that time. I remember her final words before I was leaving, she said you need to speak to your spiritual director. I looked at her and I said I haven’t got one. She looked at me and said, find one.”

Sr Helen did as she was told, contacting a Jesuit centre just outside Manchester, who set her up with a spiritual director.

“We met up and we talked and we progressed from there. That December, there was an advert, the [Redemptoristine] sisters had put out for a monastic weekend for anybody who was interested. They had been

up during my journey and the rest of the time. Something called to me, that I needed to investigate this more.

“I got in touch with Sr Lucy and she said yes I could come. I came for the weekend in February 2017. Then I came again for a week in the summer. But when I first arrived and I walked through the door, I just felt, I’m home. That’s all I could feel, I’m home.

“I came back again in the summer. That was full of joy because we had Sr Perpetua, who has sadly died since then, gone home to God, it was her jubilee. I was here for that, we had the celebrations, which was a wonderful occasion.”

### Returning

After returning home, Sr Helen determined to make a decision, but not before she had been on retreat to St Beuno’s.

“I went to St Beuno’s and, it sounds really small, but my post

never arrives until 12 o’clock and the day I left, the post arrived at 11, just as I was leaving. It was a card from the sisters with the calendar in. I put it on my desk and I got to Beuno’s and I was drawing.

**“One of Sr Helen’s friends told her about an online Mass that she could watch. She decided to watch ‘out of nosiness’”**

“I looked at it and I thought, I must show the director my sisters. And I stopped, and I thought, I’ve never called them my sisters. I had such a joy in my heart. All I could think was singing the Lord’s Magnificat, and walking in the garden, and skipping.

### Come back

“I knew at that moment that I was going to ask could I come back for longer. I asked to come back and I came in the summer for three weeks. In that time, I saw joy and mourning. Because a week into my arriving, Sr Patrick died. We had the sadness of her death, but the joy of her going home to God, and the working of the community to support each other with the grief and the joy and the mixture of emotions.”

When she went home, Sr Helen still wasn’t clear what she wanted to do. But as she prayed and reflected, it became clear to her – she was to join the Redemptoristines in Dublin.

“I thought, what am I worrying about, I know the path I’m to take, to step off a cliff into his hands. I don’t know how I’m going to do this, but I know it’s safe to do, it’s what he wants. I wrote to Sr Lucy and asked if I could enter and she said yes. That was 27 August, 2018. But it took me to December 28 to sort out everything and actually get over here. It’s been a journey of discovery to enter. To step off that cliff but knowing his hands are there, right beneath my feet.”

## Living Laudato Si’

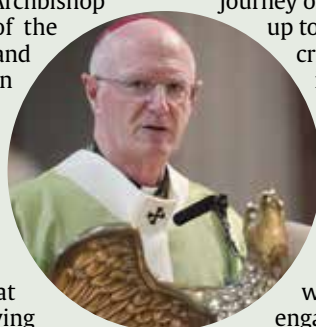
Jane Mellett



## Be Good Samaritans and answer call of ‘hurting world’

**E**arlier this month, the Archbishop of Dublin’s first pastoral letter, ‘The Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor’, was launched in An Tairseach Ecology Centre, Wicklow. During his address, Archbishop Dermot Farrell noted, “the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor go hand in hand. There will be no solution to this crisis without facing up to our obligations to our sisters and brothers whom the West has left behind... Our future—and the future of the planet—depends on our facing up to our responsibility”.

Highlighting the urgency of the crises the archbishop noted that turning towards another way of living involves a conversion which involves not only a change of practice, but a change of heart, a transformation from within. “Such a change of heart, such a transformation from within will only be effected by an encounter with the Lord of creation, and an encounter with Christ in each other.” This letter is an invitation to each of



us, to join with the archbishop on a journey to care more deeply for our common home.

This pastoral letter calls people of goodwill, and especially people of faith, to embark on a journey of eco-conversion where we wake up to the realities of the environmental crisis. Our response to this crisis will involve nourishing a spirituality of gratitude and wonder, praying with and for creation. Using the parable of the Good Samaritan as a key to explore the issues, the pastoral letter urges each of us to really see how our world is hurting, left ‘half-dead’ at the side of the road, and that we, like the Samaritan, are called to engage. The archbishop invites parishes, schools, religious congregations to embrace small actions which can have a major ripple effect across a community.

The first action we can all take is to take time to read this pastoral letter which is available online and from Veritas. And we can discern where we are being called to

respond. “Everyone’s talents and involvement are needed...” (Laudato Si’ 14). Secondly, as we approach COP26 (the UN Climate Conference) in November, one simple action we can all take is to sign the ‘Healthy Planet, Healthy People’ petition today [www.thecatholicpetition.org](http://www.thecatholicpetition.org)

The launch of this pastoral letter took place in An Tairseach, the Dominican Ecology centre in Wicklow town. For 25 years the Dominican Sisters have walked the talk in terms of responding to the environmental crisis. They have created an ecology centre, an organic farm with its own farm shop, beautiful grounds designed to protect biodiversity and a cosmic spiral garden where people can come reflect on the vastness of God’s creation. There are numerous courses running in An Tairseach to help people engage and explore the wonders of God’s creation. There are also opportunities for families, schools and parishes to make a visit there. You can find out more at [www.antairseach.ie](http://www.antairseach.ie)

Jane Mellett is the Laudato Si’ Officer with Trócaire





# TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



## A great outing for positivity and genuine religious faith

It was a week of 'good example, bad example' – concepts you don't hear much about these days, though we constantly hear about the importance of 'influencers'. It's a term usually reserved for obscure 'celebrities' on social media yet good role models are still so important for inspiring the young and boosting flagging morale among the not so young.

And so it was that I was impressed by the appearance of Sr Colette of the Poor Clares in Galway on **The Meaning of Life** (RTÉ One, Sunday).

### Accountant

Originally a certified accountant by profession, she had joined the contemplative order, and though this was an extraordinary and radical step, her reflections on her own life, life in general and indeed the next life were entirely accessible. Growing up in a family that wasn't overly religious but where faith and family values were important, she wasn't conscious of any vocation and lived an active social life until she felt a sense of anti-climax when she qualified, and this, coupled with a visit to Medjugorje where she was overwhelmed by a sense of God's love, nudged her towards the religious life. If she was heading in that direction it had to involve dedication to prayer – her relationship with God had to be more than just coming



Former Tyrone manager Mickey Harte was candid about faith.

to when desperate. And so, she found her way to the Poor Clares. She obviously saw prayer and service very much linked as the prayer life of the convent helped those with burdens of all sorts – lightening the load and giving people hope. It was a very human story too – "it was awful" she said as she told of breaking the news to her family – there had been tears!

It was a very relaxed interview, and Joe Duffy's questions were effective and varied. Answering the question all guests on the series get asked – what would you say to God if you got to 'the pearly gates', she reckoned she'd be overwhelmed, speechless. She'd be relieved

to get there, would offer praise and thanksgiving and would have questions about suffering but figured it would all click into place without those questions even needing to be asked.

### Unafraid

Also, very much unafraid to be upfront about his faith is Mickey Harte, former Tyrone football manager, who was interviewed on **The Pat Kenny Show** (Newstalk, Wednesday) about his new book *Devotion*, about football, faith and family – Mr Kenny described it as "riveting". Understandably much of the conversation focused on his close relationship with his daughter Michaela who was

murdered on honeymoon in Mauritius. He spoke movingly of how he still feels very close to her, how thinking of her still makes her present to him. He said his faith "permeates" everything in his life, and that it was caught rather than taught at home. His parents and brother had been sacristan in the local parish. Though it wasn't the ideal, he valued the opportunity to get online Mass and valued private Eucharistic adoration. He said he was far from being a saint but liked speaking with bereaved people to give them a solace born out of his own experience of tragedy.

With the positivity and genuine religious faith displayed by Sr Colette and

### PICK OF THE WEEK

#### ST MARTIN DE PORRES

EWTN Sunday October 31, 9pm

Born out of wedlock to a mixed-race couple, St Martin de Porres overcame prejudice and gained acceptance throughout his entire life simply by using love and humility. An EWTN original film.

#### MASS

RTÉ News Channel Monday November 1, 10.30am

Mass for the Feast of All Saints from Liege, Belgium with commentary from editor of The Irish Catholic's Michael Kelly.

#### CATHOLICISM: THE HEART OF HISTORY

EWTN Wednesday November 3, 6am

James and Joanna Bogle discuss the propaganda that was spread about the Spanish Monarchy and the Catholic Church, claiming that Spanish explorers forced Native Americans to convert to Catholicism.

Mickey Harte in these interviews, the antics of Oliver Callan in **Callan Kicks the Years** (RTÉ One, Wednesday), seemed sour and jaundiced to me. It might well have been called 'Callan Kicks the Church'.

### Impressions

Mr Callan is a great one for the impressions, and is frequently funny, though sometimes harsh and judgemental (that's okay you see if the liberals practice it). While he did do some mild skewering of the in-crowd liberals like Leo Varadkar, David Norris, and Michael D. Higgins, he was keen to hammer us relentlessly with the awful history of old Catholic Ireland in black and white (what age is Mr Callan anyway?). And so Éamon de Valera and the 1937 Constitution got an

awful battering, repeatedly. It goes to show the more you get preachy the less you are satirical or even funny. The worst of the sourness I thought was in the stereotyping, even demonisation, of priests, with subtlety thrown out the window.

In the media there are acceptable targets and forbidden targets. Maybe it was always thus, with just a change in what you can and can't attack. It seems nowadays there are three strands in acceptable public discourse – lambasting our past, being smug about our present and catastrophising about the future.

[boregan@hotmail.com](mailto:boregan@hotmail.com),  
[@boreganmedia](https://twitter.com/boreganmedia)



# Music

Pat O'Kelly



## The ever-inventive Eric Sweeney will be sorely missed

On the occasion of his retirement in 2018 as organist of Christ Church Cathedral Waterford, Dean Maria Jansson described Eric Sweeney as "a man of deep faith for whom music is his language with God".

Eric Sweeney's final service coincided with the ordination to the Church of Ireland priesthood of former leader of the Green Party, Trevor Sargent. Following the ceremony Mr Sweeney said he planned to devote his time to composition. However, his untimely death on July 21 this year means his plans may not have been fully realised.

One of the first Irish composers to embrace a minimalist style, Eric Sweeney was born in Dublin on July 15,



The late Eric Sweeney

1948 and, like his younger brother Peter, attended Sandford Parish Primary School. Secondary education had the brothers at St Patrick's Cath-

edral School and taking organ lessons from the revered incumbent, Sydney Grieg.

Eric continued his organ studies abroad with the eminent Flor Peeters in Belgium and the equally renowned Fernando Germani in Italy.

### Lectured

Back in Dublin, Eric Sweeney lectured at the College of Music and his *alma mater*, TCD. In 1978 he became choral director in RTÉ, working closely with the station's 'Singers' until 1981. That year he and his family – he had married Sally Johnston in 1972 – moved to the music department of Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) where he remained until 2010. By then, it might

be said, Eric Sweeney had become music patriarch of the south-east.

Besides his work in WIT and the city's Anglican cathedral, Eric Sweeney found time for composition. His extensive output covers a large corpus of chamber, organ and choral music and a considerable legacy of large-scale works including several commissions from home and abroad.

Appointed a member of Aosdana, Eric Sweeney served on the board of the Arts Council, was composer-in-residence to the Newport Rhode Island Festival, visiting scholar of composition at the University of Illinois, visiting lecturer at Indiana State University and composer-

in-residence at Memorial University in St John's Newfoundland.

More recently he was composer-in-residence at Waterford University Hospital for which he wrote one of his final pieces, *Hospital Voices*. With its text devised by Waterford poet Edward Denniston, the work has been termed "unusual and thought-provoking".

### First performance

The cantata *Deirdre* for RTÉ was premiered at the National Concert Hall while his *Dance Music*, commissioned by London's Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, also had its first performance at the NCH by the visiting RPO. Among Sweeney's other

compositions are two symphonies and five concerti – trumpet, saxophone, guitar, four violins and solo violin.

There are also three chamber operas – *The Invader*, *The Green One*, both with libretti by English poet Mark Roper, and *Ulysses* with its text adapted by Joycean expert Andrew Basquille. Excerpts from the latter were performed at various Dublin venues on Bloomsday 2016. The inventive Mr Sweeney also provided music for a number of classic silent films including *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Dracula*, *Nosferatu* and *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*.

A man of many talents used with imaginative diversity, may Eric Sweeney's soul rest in peace.



# BookReviews

Peter Costello



## ‘Sermons in stone’: what churches tell us about the changing faces of faith across the centuries

**If these stones could speak: The history of Christianity in Britain and Ireland through twenty buildings** by Peter Stanford (Hodder & Stoughton, £20.00/€24.00)

I have long found the books of Peter Stanford - a former editor of the *Catholic Herald* - no matter what their topic (he writes mostly about religion, history and ethics) to be always entertaining and stimulating, even when one disagrees with some of his observations.

His new book, telling the tangled tale of Christianity in these islands through a series of churches, some famous or less well-known, ought to be enjoyed by a wide audience as it describes and comments on nearly 2,000 years of religion among the many cultures that have come and gone in that time.

“There is no discussion of Iona, a place that played a vital part in the creation of Scotland as we know it today”

He opens by confessing that when bringing up his own children he turned into an inveterate ‘church crawler’. No matter where the family found itself he would always visit the local fanes no matter what their denomination, which gave great enjoyment and provided insights into history that were never in the school books.

An Irish reader will, I suspect, turn first to see what Irish churches are included. What a surprise it is to find he has chosen Clonmacnoise, ‘St Ciaran’s city fair’ as the 14th Century poet Angus Ó Gillan called the Shannon-side monastery, rather than say the now over-exposed Skellig Micheal. Clonmacnoise was once packed with students from Europe; it was a preserver and a transmitter not just of the Christian faith but also of the archives of European culture.

### Discussion

But there is no discussion of Iona, a place that played a vital part in the creation of Scotland as we know it today. Nor is Wales well represented, and there is nothing about Cornwall, from which British missionaries carried Christianity back to Brittany and so into France.

The book opens, however, with Glastonbury, a place with many disputed legends, including the notion that the boy Jesus came there with Joseph of Arimathea. But even historians cannot deny that it is a very atmospheric place that has in the past inspired many seeking souls.

If the concentration is mostly on England we can all understand the reasons for that: Jarrow where Bede flourished is here as it should be. But what really marks out this book and should open many English eyes are the churches selected to illustrate more recent centuries.

One is delighted to see here St John’s at Little Gidding, to which T.S. Eliot devoted one of the *Four*

*Quartets*. The mystical tradition of the Anglican tradition is, I suspect, something that many Irish Catholics might well need an introduction to.

The last pages of the book may well be for many the most insightful and interesting. The chapter focuses on Liverpool’s Metropolitan Cathedral - for this another city with two cathedrals.

He quotes Cardinal Heenan when Archbishop of Liverpool in 1967 very relevantly: “It is significant that the architect of the Metropolitan Cathedral was a non-Catholic, I don’t regard [it] as Catholic property, but as belonging to you all.”

“The last pages of the book may well be for many the most insightful and interesting”

He writes movingly in an epilogue written of course in Covid-haunted days and nights of present-day Britain. The streaming of services has brought more people to worship and prayers than attended in the buildings themselves. Religion of all kinds is becoming “small, simple and freelance” - we have all observed this for ourselves.

### Varied

Reaching the end of this rich and varied text, the mind goes back to a passage at the end of the prologue. The point of church crawling is not an evangelical drive to repopulate churches or to revive institutional faith.

“It is much more modest and inclusive: to benefit from these free-to-access resources in our midst that are centuries old, historic and usually beautiful, and which have something about them that makes them stand apart from the rush of modern life and our own fleeting obsessions. They may once have been built ‘to the glory of God’, but their continuing meaning is subtler. They are close to the heartbeat of human history, giving expression to our longings and helping us to remember who we are.”

## Learning some lessons

**Living with History: Occasional Writings**

by Felix M Larkin (Kingdom Books, €24.00/£20.50)

John Bruton

Felix Larkin will be well-known to readers of the books page of *The Irish Catholic* for his many perceptive reviews of books about Irish and American history. He is a former senior official in the Department of Finance and was later in the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA).

All the while, he has also been an historian writing about many topics, most notably the history of Irish newspapers, something he first took up as a graduate student as far back as 1971. He made a special study of the *Freeman’s Journal*, a paper that survived many changes of owners and editorial stance, from its foundation in 1763, up to its eventual closure, and incorporation into the *Irish Independent*, in 1924.

Felix Larkin’s work on newspapers has given him a unique window into contemporary Irish public opinion, over two centuries.

This book also focuses on commemorations, and their official use in shaping popular opinions about what is supposed to have mattered in history. Popular opinions about history frequently involve mythologising certain events, and over simplifying the choices that were available to decision makers at the time.

For example, Felix Larkin robustly challenges the popular view, endorsed in his recent book by the historian Diarmaid Ferriter, that the border was ‘imposed’ on Ireland, against its will, by the British in 1920.

### Partition

Mr Larkin points out that Redmond and Carson had accepted some form of partition in principle in 1914, and again in negotiations after the Easter Rising in late 1916. So also did the majority of TDs, who had been elected under a Sinn Féin banner, when they accepted the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 by a vote in the Dáil.

On each occasion, the Irish leaders in question shrank from the prospect of a prolonged and bitter sectarian war - and even more deaths - that would have been necessary to impose a united Ireland on a resisting unionist population.

They were realists, facing their unpleasant responsi-

bilities, and realists are rarely suitable subject for romantic historical commemorations. We are being reminded of this by recent events.

As Mr Larkin sees it, the role of the historian is to debunk myths about the past.

An unrealistic understanding of the past can lead popular opinion, and politicians, into tragic errors. This is real risk today.

The historian’s role is to recognise that nothing that happened in the past was necessarily inevitable. History is the result of an accumulation of a series of individual decisions, each one of which could have been different. Politicians and citizens are, and always were, the shapers of their own destiny within the constraints that existed at the time.

### Commemoration

So the study of history, and the well-chosen commemoration of past events, should enable us, by learning from the consequences of past decisions, to make better decisions in the future.

It should encourage the taking of responsibility, rather than undue submission to victimhood, nostalgia or the blaming of others.

“On each occasion, the Irish leaders in question shrank from the prospect of a prolonged and bitter sectarian war”

This book covers many other topics, the contrast between the ideologies that inspired the 1798 and 1848 rebellions, the successes and failures of the Irish Parliamentary Party, and the varying attitudes of the Catholic hierarchy to political violence.

It also explores the appropriation of the religious feast of Easter by the faction of the IRB that launched the Rising, including through the use of religious imagery and notions of blood sacrifice in the Proclamation.

Even to this day, in secular Ireland, the 1916 Rising is commemorated on Easter Sunday, whenever that falls under the Christian calendar, rather than on April 24 each year, which is the actual anniversary. This



Author Larkin speaking at an ‘Ivy Day’ event at Parnell’s grave in Glasnevin.

purely secular commemoration should probably not be conflated with the Resurrection of Christ. Each should be recalled by modern Ireland on their own merits.

Mr Larkin believes democracy should infuse commemoration, so the foundational event of this State should be recognised as the anniversary of the meeting of the duly elected First Dáil in 1919. This was a democratically sanctioned event, whereas, as a matter of historical fact, the 1916 Rising was not.

Felix Larkin’s book deserves to be widely read. It gives a very personal perspective, and offers insights that will help all residents of this island, whatever their allegiance, shape a peaceful future, free of grievance and myth.

John Bruton was Taoiseach from 1994 to 1997.

“The historian’s role is to recognise that nothing that happened in the past was necessarily inevitable”



Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral.



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.

## from our troubled past



## Celebrating and preserving the right to speak freely

### PEN International: An Illustrated History

edited by Charles Toner and others (Thames & Hudson, £45.00/€54.00)

#### J. Anthony Gaughan

**P**EN International celebrated its centenary in London on October 5, 2021. As part of the celebrations the President, Jennifer Clement, and others published this absorbing history of PEN and its activities over those ten decades, edited by Charles Toner.

Founded in 1934, Irish PEN is one of almost 200 branches of PEN International throughout the world. A number of well-known Irish writers have served as its president, among them Bryan MacMahon, John B. Keane, Séamus Heaney, Brian Friel and most of them have contributed to its activities and proceedings at one time or another.

#### Great deal

I had the honour to serve as president of Irish PEN for many years and took a great deal away from my involvement, which opened up many new aspects of the literary world to me and my fellow Irish members, through meeting great and interesting writers from many cultures. These encounters and resulting friendships were an illuminating part of the experience for me.

Over the years PEN as a world-wide organisation has helped writers who have risked losing their families, homeland, livelihood, freedom and very often their lives to tell the truth.

Established to promote friendship, intellectual co-operation and exchange between writers, it is the largest and oldest literary organisation

and a champion of translation and linguistic rights. It sees literature as playing a significant role in developing mutual understanding, dialogue and peaceful debate.

While PEN originally stood for 'Poets, Playwrights, Essayists, Editors, Novelists', the membership has grown to include a broader understanding of the term 'writer' and welcomes publishers, translators, bloggers, academics and journalists. Its quintessential role is to protect freedom of expression, as well as honouring the transformative experience of literature.

Catherine Amy Dawson-Scott, novelist and poet, is regarded as the founder of PEN. She enlisted a group of fellow-writers to set up the first PEN club in London on October 5, 1921. She and the other founders envisaged PEN centres in every city in the world. By 1923 there were PEN centres in New York, Mexico City and most European cities. Eventually it was to be found on all the five continents of the world.

**“From the outset, the PEN charter was the organisation’s guiding-star in that regard”**

The founders were determined that the organisation would not be a transmitter of ideologies or politics. In a letter to the *Times*, dated April 24, 1923, Nobel Prize Winner John Galsworthy, president of PEN International, set out the organisation’s aims and activities and stated that: “when we say we are not political, we mean it!”

From the outset, the PEN charter was the

organisation’s guiding-star in that regard. The evolution of the charter over the years was influenced by the existential challenges faced by the organisation.

In the original PEN charter, agreed at the congress in Brussels in June 1927, item one reads: “literature, national though it be in origin, knows no frontiers, and should remain common currency between nations in spite of political or international upheavals.”

#### Transmission

Item four of the current PEN charter reads: “PEN stands for the unhampered transmission of thought within each nation and between all nations, and members pledge themselves to oppose any form of suppression of freedom of expression in the country and community to which they belong, as well as throughout the world wherever this is possible.

“PEN declares for a free press and opposes arbitrary censorship in time of peace. It believes that the necessary advance of the world towards a more highly-organised political and economic order renders a free criticism of governments, administrations and institutions imperative.

Since freedom implies voluntary restraint, members pledge themselves to oppose such evils of a free press as mendacious publication, deliberate falsehood and distortion of facts for political and personal ends.”

Irish PEN continues to concern itself with a wide range of activities under the four headings: ‘Writers in Prison’, ‘Translation and Linguistic Rights’, ‘Writers for Peace’, and ‘Women Writers’.

And most importantly of all it remains committed to the letter and spirit of the PEN charter.

## Kerry poet Brendan Kennelly recalled

### Gabriel Fitzmaurice

“Who can beat the kingdom sweet at horse or hound or man?”

How Brendan Kennelly loved to quote those lines from Bryan MacMahon’s 1946 Kerry All-Ireland victory song.

Football and song. Both would come together in the person of Ireland’s most popular poet, Brendan Kennelly. Indeed he played on the Kerry minor football team in the 1954 All-Ireland final which they lost narrowly, and Brendan to his dying day complained unfairly, to Dublin.

Brendan grew up in a culture full of songs and stories. It was one thing to win an All-Ireland. True immortality lay in being commemorated (deified!) in a ballad.

Indeed Brendan’s poetry grew from the singing tradition which



Brendan Kennelly at home in Ballylongford.

he would have heard first hand in the family pub in Ballylongford. In his marvellous lyric, *Living Ghosts*, he describes local singers “touching enchantment” as they become song.

And Brendan became song memorably and melliflously in lyric and epic mode for he was a singer at heart whose mind “became a festival” when he sang with his pen.

First President of PEN, Nobel Prize winner John Galsworthy.









# Leisure time

## Operation Smile

Charity Regulatory Authority No. 20054588 Revenue Number: CHY 15661

**By remembering Operation Smile in your Will, you are leaving the gift of a lasting smile for a child born with a cleft condition.**

Operation Smile envisions a future where health and dignity are championed through safe surgery. Get in touch with Kristen Bell, Legacy & Fundraising Manager, on

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Be there for others after you're gone.

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[www.hospicefoundation.ie](http://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.

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Merchants Quay Ireland in your will, ring Emma Murphy, Legacies Manager at 01-524 0965 or email [emma.murphy@mqi.ie](mailto:emma.murphy@mqi.ie)

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[www.mscmissions.ie](http://www.mscmissions.ie)

**When you remember Trócaire in your Will, you bring hope to people living in the world's poorest places**

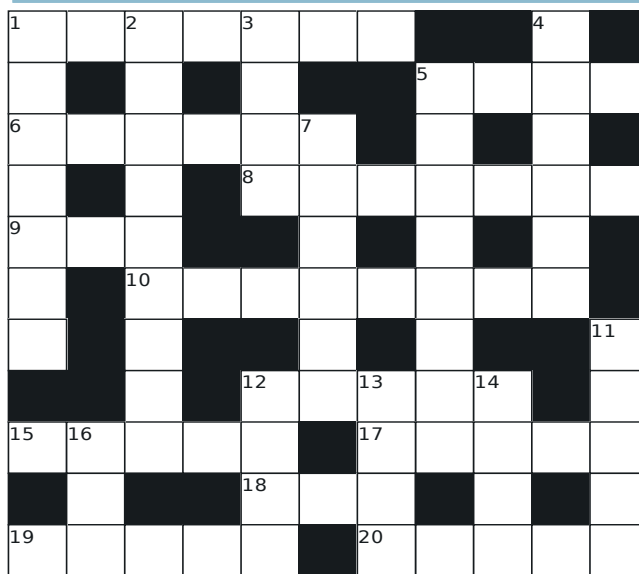


It's easy to get started, and we'll help you every step of the way. Call **Grace Kelly** on 01 629 3333, email [grace.kelly@trocaire.org](mailto:grace.kelly@trocaire.org) or write to me at Trócaire, Maynooth, Co Kildare.

**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

Children's 406



### Across

- 1 A sports shoe, or the person who makes sure the team stays fit (7)
- 5 You plant it in the ground (4)
- 6 It protects your clothes when you are eating (6)
- 8 Trucks (7)
- 9 This river flows through Cork (3)
- 10 The last stop on a bus route (8)
- 12 Snowy kind of rain (5)
- 15 A short saying to sum up how to do best (5)
- 17 Thoughts (5)
- 18 Automobile (3)
- 19 Group of sheep (5)
- 20 Go in (5)

### Down

- 1 Jumbled up - some string, perhaps (7)
- 2 Delicious pie with a fruit filling (5,4)
- 3 Use a hammer to drive it in (4)
- 4 Precious stones (6)
- 5 Ran at top speed (8)
- 7 Usual, as you would expect (6)
- 11 Powerful light beam which can cut and is used in some operations (5)
- 12 Put it on your foot before you put on your shoe (5)
- 13 The Irish word for Ireland (4)
- 14 You camp in this (4)
- 16 Harry Potter's pet, Hedwig, is this kind of bird (3)

## SOLUTIONS, OCTOBER 21

GORDIUS NO. 530

**Across** - 1 Bet 3 Fun and games 8 Elphin 9 Oblation 10 Sewer 11 Solar 13 Whist 15 Summons 16 Drop out 20 Hello 21 Libya 23 Garda 24 Profound 25 Malawi 26 Table tennis 27 Tin

**Down** - 1 Bless my soul 2 Tapeworm 3 Friar 4 Anosmia 5 Goats 6 Mainly 7 Son 12 Rastafarian 13 Winch 14 Torso 17 Overcast 18 Aladdin 19 Absorb 22 Adore 23 Glass 24 Put

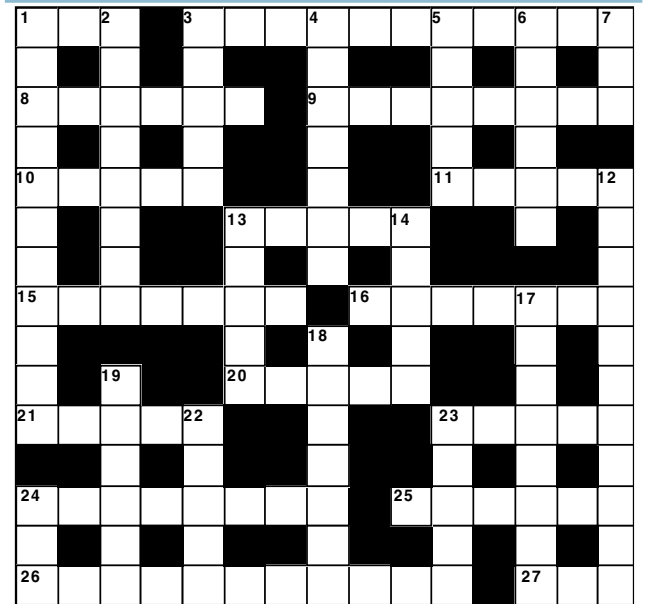
### CHILDREN'S No. 405

**Across** - 1 Wolfhound 7 Eel 8 Chose 9 Letters 10 Leads 11 Writer 14 Waddle 17 Artist 18 Gallop 19 Nile 20 Season

**Down** - 1 Wicklow 2 Leopard 3 Heels 4 Ulster 5 Desert 6 Closer 11 Weapon 12 Intend 13 Easily 15 Awake 16 Dolls

## Crossword

Gordius 531



### Across

- 1 A pipistrelle, for example (3)
- 3 This large, poisonous lizard of the Americas got minerals distributed (4,7)
- 8 World-famous gallery in Paris (6)
- 9 & 10 This beautiful religious building in Galway might make Beryl obey a new order (8,5)
- 11, 15a & 27a Message on a triangular road sign (5,5,2,3)
- 13 Saddle strap (5)
- 15 See 11 across
- 16 On TV, Rowan Atkinson played this French detective, created by Georges Simenon (7)
- 20 Post a message on one form of social media (5)
- 21 Travels on water (5)
- 23 Silent member of the Marx Brothers (5)
- 24 Matrimony (8)
- 25 Country that neighbours the USA to the south (6)
- 26 The cities of Bismarck and Fargo are in this US state (5,6)
- 27 See 11 across

### Down

- 1 Shamelessly confident (4,2,5)
- 2 Greta, Swedish climate campaigner (8)
- 3 Town in Wexford (5)
- 4 Clumsy, maladroit (7)
- 5 Poor, in want (5)
- 6 Bricklayer's or gardener's implement (6)
- 7 A type of bread or alcoholic spirit (3)
- 12 This part of the Bible upset Tudor yeomen (11)
- 13 Boast, brag (5)
- 14 The 'ticker' (5)
- 17 & 19d This allows a driver see what is behind the car while driving (8,6)
- 18 Demented, totally out of control (7)
- 19 See 17 down
- 22 Metalworker (5)
- 23 Doglike scavenger (5)
- 24 Male adult (3)

## Sudoku Corner

406

### Easy

				7		6		
		4			8	5	1	
	9				1	7	2	4
		7	1					
5	8						4	7
					5	3		
9	2	3	8					7
	1	6	3			8		
		8		2				

### Hard

4		6		5	8	7		
					6			1
		5	7			3		
							2	
2	4	1				8	7	5
		6						
		4			1	2		
7			6					
		8	5	9		1		4

### Last week's Easy 405

2	6	7	1	8	3	4	9	5
3	4	5	6	9	7	2	8	1
8	1	9	5	2	4	3	7	6
9	3	6	7	4	8	1	5	2
1	8	2	9	6	5	7	3	4
7	5	4	2	3	1	8	6	9
5	7	3	4	1	6	9	2	8
4	9	8	3	5	2	6	1	7
6	2	1	8	7	9	5	4	3

### Last week's Hard 405

4	8	2	9	3	5	6	7	1
1	3	9	2	7	6	4	8	5
6	7	5	8	1	4	3	9	2
7	2	8	4	9	3	1	5	6
9	6	1	5	2	8	7	3	4
5	4	3	7	6	1	9	2	8
8	9	7	1	4	2	5	6	3
3	5	4	6	8	9	2	1	7
2	1	6	3	5	7	8	4	9



Notebook

Fr Conor McDonough



# Words of praise stretching through the ages

**PROBABLY THE BEST-LOVED** poem written in the Irish language begins with the words 'Messe ocus Pangur Bán'. In Robin Flower's translation, the first stanza reads: "I and Pangur Bán my cat, / 'Tis a like task we are at; / Hunting mice is his delight, / Hunting words I sit all night."

It was probably written at some point in the ninth Century near Reichenau in Austria, a monastic peninsula jutting out into Lake Constance. The Irish monk who wrote it was a scholar: he "hunts words", he "sits with book and pen", and by his study seeks to "turn darkness into light". In all of this work Pangur is a pleasant companion, at work alongside him. "So in peace our task we ply, / Pangur Bán, my cat, and I; / In our arts we find our bliss, / I have mine and he has his."

**Online**

I've known and loved this poem for years, but I only learned recently that the manuscript which contains the poem is available to view online. It's a fascinating little book, and reveals so much about the world of its author. It contains a few other poems written in Irish, for example, including a poem praising Aed,



eight-century king of Leinster, as "the trunk of a great tree".

Apart from these poems, the rest of the manuscript is aimed at the classroom, and suggests that, like so many other Irish monks on the continent, Pangur Bán's owner was a teacher of the liberal arts. We find there a brief life of the Roman poet, Virgil, for example, as well as notes on his great poem, the *Aeneid*.

There are bits of Greek too: grammatical paradigms and lists

of vocabulary. I could make out their words like *anastasis* (resurrection), *pistis* (faith), *gnosis* (knowledge), and *agape* (charity). All very useful vocabulary for reading the New Testament!

**Anonymous**

Astronomy is always useful in monastic communities, and our anonymous Irish monks had a finger in that pie too. On the page facing his famous poem, there's an astronomical table. I sent it on to Seb Falk, expert in medieval astronomy and author of *The Light Ages*, and he identified it as a lunar table, showing the times of the year at which the moon is in a particular zone of the night sky.

My very favourite part of the manuscript, though, is a long list of Latin hymns, probably used as an aid in teaching Latin grammar. What delights me in this list is

the fact that in our community in St Saviour's, Dublin, we still sing many of these hymns today. On Sunday evenings, for example, we begin Vespers by singing "Lucis creator optime", honouring the Lord as creator of light. And in the Reichenau manuscript are found the very words of that hymn, including a note explaining that this hymn is sung "at Vespers on Sunday".

Isn't that extraordinary? When we Dominican friars sing these words of praise on Sunday evenings we're taking our place in a relay of praise that stretches back 1200 years and more. When we sing this hymn we're singing words that were sung in Reichenau in the ninth Century, words that the keen ears of Pangur Bán himself would surely have heard as he paced the chapel, hunting for mice.

**The Welsh roots of Pangur the cat**

Pangur is not a very Irish-sounding name, and in the 1930s a Welsh scholar by the name of W.J. Gruffydd made an intriguing suggestion. Perhaps 'Pangur' is an older form of the modern Welsh word 'pannwr', meaning a fuller (someone who bleaches clothes), which would be a very fitting name for a bright white cat. This idea, largely accepted by scholars, means that the cat received its name not from Irish-speakers, but from Welsh-speakers. It's likely, then, that Pangur was picked up in Wales by his Irish owner when he was on his way from Ireland to the continent. We know that other monks passed through Wales on their way to the continent, so it's perfectly plausible. I find it rather lovely to think of this wandering monk, alone in Wales, finding companionship in a pet.

**Still singing about Pangur Bán**

Many modern poets have had a go at translating this ancient poem, including Auden and Heaney, and it was even set to music by the great American composer, Samuel Barber, as part of his 'Hermit Songs' cycle. It was premiered in 1953 at the Library of Congress. Just imagine we could travel back in time and tell the anonymous poet that 1200 years later people would still be singing about his cat in a mysterious land across the wild Atlantic...



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