

The Irish Catholic

MARY KENNY



How the Church helped unmarried mothers Page 5

MARIA STEEN



Christians shouldn't have to pay to be offended Page 9

MICHAEL KELLY



New archbishop signals reform is on the agenda Page 8

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Priests urge boycott of RTÉ licence fee

Almost 5,000 complaints to broadcaster

Chai Brady, Ruadhán Jones and Jason Osborne

A satirical sketch broadcast by RTÉ accusing God of rape has been dubbed “scurrilous” and “disgraceful” and has provoked thousands of complaints from viewers.

The national broadcaster logged almost 5,000 complaints by the time this paper went to print regarding the New Year's Eve broadcast which depicted a man described as God being arrested for rape.

Fr Gerry Kane PP of Booterstown in Dublin vowed that he would break the law and not pay his television licence due to the offensive broadcast.

“I am at the moment being forced to pay - by law - for something that is against my conscience and I can't in conscience continue to pay my licence fee and I don't intend to. I will break the law,” he told *The Irish Catholic*.

RTÉ apologised to those that were offended but left the sketch on their online platform, adding a warning label to the content. It was a move

» Continued on Page 2

‘We three kings of Orient are...’



The carol singers come out of Aachen Cathedral after a liturgy to start the 2021 Epiphany which Christians mark on January 6 to commemorate the visit of the Magi to Bethlehem. Photo: Henning Kaiser/dpa.

New archbishop VOWS consultation on reform

Staff reporter

The new Archbishop of Dublin has insisted that his reform agenda will be guided by widespread consultation with priests and parishioners.

Archbishop-elect Dermot Farrell – who will take up office next month – said he believed that listening was key but that “this dialogue with others does not mean diluting the radical nature of the Gospel or manipulating it by restricting its reach.

“People of faith must still have the courage to proclaim the one who is the Saviour in all his power and newness and mystery,” Dr Farrell said.

“Everyone in this diocese – laity, clergy, religious, those who embrace apostolic charisms, as well as the women and men called to a more contemplative way – has something essential to contribute to the future of the faith in Dublin,” Archbishop-elect Farrell said.

“The Church in Ireland has become a humbler Church, a Church more capable of listening – more like Christ who is last of all and servant of all, and who calls us to follow him,” he said.

» See on Page 8

TRINITY COLLEGE LIBRARY

Insights into millenniums-old treasures PAGES 22-23



DAVID QUINN

Ireland remains almost alone in banning public Masses PAGE 13



POPE IN IRAQ

Hopes papal visit will bring relief PAGE 14



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Inside this week

Personal Profile

Sarah Deegan: A woman after Our Lady's heart

Page 34



Fr Rolheiser

What is your practice?

Page 30



Book Reviews

A Pope with his eye on the future

Pages 36-37



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Getting the Church 'fit for mission'

The idea of journey is a central motif in our Faith. Whether it is Abraham leaving his homeland to go to the Promised Land or Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt – the People of God on the move is a constant.

The Second Vatican Council (1962-65) describes the Church as being on a "pilgrimage towards eternal happiness".

“In the midst of decline and falling numbers of priests, we can despair or we can get on with the work of proclaiming Christ”

It's a powerful image and one which also invokes the idea that as well as being on a journey as a Church, each one of us is on a spiritual journey towards being united with our ultimate beginning – God Almighty in the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Church is always on a pilgrimage – it is a

journey of ups and downs, of heroes and villains. Ecclesiastical history teaches us that we stand on the shoulders of giants as well as rotten crooks. It also helps us understand that there really never was a 'golden age' of Catholicism – every generation had unique challenges, and yet God's gentle hand was there guiding and leading his Church.

Previous times

Sometimes as Catholics we look back on previous times and think it was a better or easier time to have been a Catholic. It may appear so, but in reality there were difficulties then as well. It can be dispiriting to look at the Church in Ireland bowed by sin and scandals mostly of its own making, and yet this is the reality where God has placed us to preach the Good News.

In the midst of decline and falling numbers of priests, we can despair or we can get on with the work of proclaiming Christ.

Editor's Comment Michael Kelly

Despair is the opposite of faith – Christ constantly tells his followers in the New Testament not to give in to hopelessness and anxiety. We need to hear those words and know that they are also addressed to Catholics in Ireland in 2021.

“Sometimes as Catholics we look back on previous times and think it was a better or easier time to have been a Catholic”

The new Archbishop of Dublin Dermot Farrell has a massive task ahead of himself leading the necessary reform of the country's largest diocese to ensure that it is fit for mission. And that fitness for mission is the only thing that matters – the Church does not exist for its own sake, but for the sake of the world. Whatever structures are obsolete or holding back

the journey need to be dispensed with quickly and without nostalgia. Survival is not a particularly Christian value. Jesus did not say "I have come that you may survive" but "so that you may have life and have it abundantly."

Journey

Only a fool goes on a journey without being prepared. Dr Farrell will want to discern prudently along with the clergy and People of God about the future direction of the diocese. Key to that will be getting the nuts and bolts right. It's one thing to have a nice car, it's quite another to make sure it has four wheels and that you can keep up the repayments. It might not be the most glamorous work of Church reform – but it is vital if there is to be growth. Come Holy Spirit.

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Almost 5,000 complaints to RTÉ over NYE broadcast

» Continued from Page 1

described by barrister and columnist Maria Steen as "mealy mouthed".

Fr Kane said: "Their so-called apology and leaving it up on RTÉ Player is what finally incensed me completely, they don't see anything wrong with it, they're hiding behind the notion that satire hurts some peo-

ple – that wasn't satire it was mockery plain and simple, scurrilous mockery."

Co. Monaghan-based priest Fr Seán Mulligan said he believed that "Every devout Catholic should at this stage be boycotting RTÉ and refusing to renew your TV license."

"We deserve better from a national broadcaster. If the best they can provide for

entertainment is to attack the divinity of God and the sanctity and purity of his holy mother, Mary, then we can do better elsewhere," he said.

Mrs Steen said she believed the station "simply does not care about offending Christians."

"But we don't have to pay for it any longer. You may choose to insult me and my religion; I should not be required to pay you to do so."

"This latest offence by RTÉ underscores the reality that the station simply doesn't deserve to be propped up any more by the licence fee," she said.

Huge reaction

Fr John Collins of the Association of Catholic Priests (ACP) added that he believes RTÉ will be surprised by the "huge reaction" to the broadcast, and that people are making their voices heard which is a good thing.

In Tipperary, Fr Michael Toomey – who has been celebrating a lot of the online Masses that the station has been offering during the pandemic – said he was "deeply saddened" to see the "horrendous" item aired.

However Fr Toomey said: "there are parts of RTÉ that

have done phenomenal work. I was in RTÉ in December, and the welcome I got and the respect that was shown for the Mass, even in the studio of the camera people and the directors, was very respectful and welcoming. I'm sure they would have thought this was below the belt."

“If the best they can provide for entertainment is to attack the divinity of God and the sanctity and purity of his holy mother, Mary, then we can do better elsewhere”

"I think it's a new low for RTÉ. I know there have been calls to remove it from the online player, but it's too late for that now. It's out there, people will watch it anyway, they'll find other ways. I think if RTÉ were really sincere, they would have taken it down straight away," Fr Toomey said.

See Page 9.



Photo: Abbie Trayler-Smith / Concern Worldwide

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Priests call for calm after fatal shooting

Chai Brady

Local priests have called for a thorough, transparent investigation and calm among the community following the fatal shooting by gardaí of a 27-year-old man in Clonee, Dublin last week.

Fr Mathew Binoy SVD of Mountview and Blakestown Parish told *The Irish Catholic* there is “a lot of tension in the area” after George Nkencho was shot by armed gardaí.

“My message to the community would be for calm. There are people seeing this as nationalism versus migrants coming in, people have come to make this place their

home,” he said, adding the situation “is quite sensitive”.

“People are obviously very hurt. There should be a very genuine inquiry into why it happened in such a brutal way, people need to get an explanation why it was so sad and tragic in the end, I think people need to be reassured. In this area we have a lot of migrants in the parish we look after, a big percentage of foreign nationals, of Christians and other faiths.”

He said there must be assurances from authorities that there will be a “very thorough investigation and the truth be brought out and truth be told to people”.

Fr Binoy, who is originally from India but has spent his whole priestly ministry in Ireland, added: “At the moment I can see a lot of people speaking for and against, I think that is going to further divide the local community. I’m calling for calm.”

Another priest of the parish, Fr George Adzato SVD originally from Ghana who has been ministering in Ireland for six years, reiterated the call for calm saying: “Since there are two different investigations ongoing now, the best thing is there should be calm and then we see the outcome of the investigations. The guards are doing their

own investigation and the commission is also doing an investigation to see why there was killing so I believe there should be calm and at the end we’ll see what comes out.”

Before the shooting Mr Nkencho punched a staff member of the local Eurospar before drawing a knife. By the time he had walked home a large number of gardaí were at the scene. An Garda released a statement saying attempts to subdue him using two tasers and pepper spray proved unsuccessful. It’s been reported Mr Nkencho was suffering with mental health issues.

‘Sir’ Lewis Hamilton insists God is at the wheel

Jason Osborne

Formula 1 champion Lewis Hamilton was knighted in a new year’s honours list. He was honoured alongside hundreds of people recognised for their work during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Mr Hamilton’s knighthood comes on the back of personal success, as he equalled Michael Schumacher’s title record and was awarded a second BBC Sports Personality of the Year.

However, Mr Hamilton attributes his success to God. In multiple interviews, Mr Hamilton has referenced the importance of his Catholic faith and prayer.

Speaking to the British *Independent*, Mr Hamilton spoke of the efforts he goes to in order to ensure his prayer slots into the day alongside his intense work schedule:

“You have to make time for things and every morning I have breakfast and before I eat, I pray. Every time I eat, actually, I pray. So, whether it’s a couple of seconds, a minute or whatever you are praying for, take that moment. Everyone is talking, and I say, ‘Sorry, one second’ and you just make the time.”

In the same interview, Mr Hamilton described the enlightening, empowering and “re-centring” effect going to church on Sunday

has on him, saying he puts it before meetings.

Speaking to tennis star Serena Williams for the *Interview* magazine, Mr Hamilton again spoke of his faith. “I used to be insecure about the fact that I’m Catholic and that I have a relationship with God. It wasn’t until I got to Formula One that I really started to embrace it and feel comfortable showing it,” he said.

Despite soaring to lofty new heights in his career, Mr Hamilton is in no doubt about the key to his success, telling *The Guardian* newspaper, “Anything can happen any day, but I feel God has his hand over me.”



Lewis Hamilton.

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Ireland must address 'urgent issue' of Christian persecution on UN Security Council

Ruadhán Jones

Michael Kinsella of Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) said Ireland should highlight the "very pressing and urgent issues surrounding Christian persecution" now that they are on the UN Security Council.

Aontú leader Peadar Tóibín has also spoken up about the need to tackle religious persecution "whenever and wherever it happens".

Their comments come as Ireland took its seat at the 15-member Council for the

first time on January 1.

Dr Kinsella said that Ireland "should be aware at a foreign diplomacy level that Christians are the most persecuted group on the planet".

Ireland should use the "significant platform of the Council" to be a "voice for the voiceless", the ACN Ireland national director continued.

"Ireland in a sense can be a voice for the voiceless, be a voice for other small open democracies and ensure that any security resolutions proposed and passed are for the

common good of humanity and not for the vested interests of the few," he said.

Meanwhile, Meath TD Peadar Tóibín said the Irish State "has been reluctant to call out religious persecution or Christian persecution" and this needs to be addressed.

"There's no doubt in my mind that it is a difficulty around the world and needs to be focused on and tackled wherever it happens – whether it's in North Africa or China or anywhere else around the world," Mr Tóibín said.

Mr Tóibín highlighted the West's silence on the persecution of Uighur Muslims in China as being influenced by "the economic clout that China holds currently".

"I think that's wrong, we need to be able to increase the importance of human rights in the Security Council meetings, especially with China."

However, the Aontú leader stressed that Ireland had to be consistent in tackling human rights abuses wherever they occur.

'Hope' of vaccine muddled by messy rollout

Jason Osborne

Fr Paddy Byrne has hailed the rollout of the coronavirus vaccine as "hope" yet has offered criticism of the delays in getting the vaccine to the Irish people.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, the Abbeyleix priest said he believes getting the vaccine to the population "must be more than a 9-5 job", and

said he experienced disbelief upon reading of the laxity of the proposed vaccination programme.

"I think if you look at the likes of Israel and places around the world, that, we want to avail of this as soon as we can. Now, I'm not being critical of the HSE staff, but I do think their record is poor and I think we need to get that out as quick as we can," he said.

Fr Byrne's comments come as criticism builds of the Irish vaccination strategy, with *the Irish Times* reporting that one in every 2,500 people in Ireland had been vaccinated by the end of December, or 1,800 people. This stands in contrast to one in every eight in Israel, and one in 80 or so in both the US and the UK.

Meanwhile, in Northern Ireland, Health Minister

Robin Swann has revealed that 80% of nursing homes were vaccinated by the end of December.

The slow speeds in Ireland are likely attributable to uncertainty over whether the Department of Health or the HSE are in charge of the vaccination effort, with confusion on the ground among GPs and nursing homes, as well as supply issues.

Faithful to the facts



Women protest the ban on public Mass outside the Cathedral of the Assumption in Carlow.

High Court case over ban on Masses likely in early February

Irish Catholic businessman Declan Ganley received confirmation that the State has until January 22 to deliver their opposition to his constitutional challenge to restrictions on religious worship.

Once the High Court receives the State's opposition they will set a date for the judicial review, which Mr Ganley expects to be in early February.

Mr Ganley said that it was as he expected and assumes the Government is intending to defend the constitutionality of the ban.

"It was procedural stuff today, but the State are defending it. That's quite noteworthy," Mr Ganley explained. "They presumably are arguing that they have the right to do this ban, that it's not against the constitution."

Mr Ganley added that he was confident his case would succeed, as "the constitution is on my side", but that "you can never predict what will happen when you get into court".

Writing in *The Irish Catholic*, Mr Ganley explained the rationale behind his case, saying the ban is unconstitutional.

"Under the Constitution, it should have been left to the sole discretion of churches and other religious groups," he wrote.

Baptism: Beginning of Ministry

The Sunday Gospel

Fr Silvester O'Flynn OFM Cap.



The baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan marks the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus. He came out of the years of hidden life. There was no need for Jesus, being without sin, to participate in the ceremonial washing that John the Baptist offered people. But by submitting to John's baptism, he showed his desire to be with all sinners. The mission he was about to begin would call sinners to repentance by offering them mercy, forgiveness and hope.

John the Baptist said that he baptised with water, but the one coming after him would baptise with the Holy Spirit and fire.

On Pentecost Day the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples in the form of tongues of fire. They were transformed by the fire of extraordinary wisdom, courage and enthusiasm. The mission of Jesus had now become the mission of the newly-born Church. The Apostles were sent to the ends of Earth to preach to all people and baptise them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Christening

That mission of the Church embraced each one of us on the day of our baptism. Christening is actually a more powerful word than baptism. In the sacrament (a sacred moment) a person is Christ-ened. The day of Christening is not the end of a journey but the beginning of a new life. "But to all who did accept him he gave power to become children of God" (John 1: 12). To become means to grow continually. It is not enough to be a Christian in name without being a Christian in fact. "You are the light of the world", said Jesus, "let your light shine before people so that they might see your good works and give glory

to your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

A New Evangelisation

Pope Francis wrote in *The Joy of the Gospel*, "Jesus wants evangelisers who proclaim the good news not only with words, but above all by a life transfigured by God's presence... How I long to find the right words to stir up enthusiasm for a new chapter of evangelisation full of fervour, joy, generosity, courage, boundless love and attraction!"

You are baptised with the Holy Spirit and fire!

A question to ponder: If you were on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence in your life to convict you? We have been Christ-ened. We are members of his Body on earth, called to continue his mission.

In the Cursillo programme we encourage people to be active evangelisers in their own environment. If you have been Christened, then Christ is counting on you.

Counting on you

God alone can give faith, but you can offer witness.

God alone can give hope, but you can give confidence to others.

God alone can give love, but you can pass it on to others.

God alone can give peace, but you can work for unity.

God alone can give power, but you can sustain somebody who is feeling low.

God alone is the way, but you can show it to others.

God alone is the light, but you can make it shine for others.

God alone is life, but you can give others a taste for living.

God alone can do the impossible, but through you it becomes possible.

God alone is self-sufficient...but amazingly, God prefers to count on you.

Remembering Fr Fergal O'Connor...

Fifty years ago, in 1971, a very fine Dominican priest (and philosopher), Fergal O'Connor, set up an organisation to support unmarried mothers, calling it 'Ally'. In her autobiography, *Political Woman* the late Nuala Fennell, T.D. - the first minister for women's rights - praised Fr O'Connor most especially for his pioneering and compassionate work in this field of social services.

“Fergal O'Connor became quite well known during the 1970s for his appearances on Gay Byrne's *Late Late Show*”

Previously, in 1968, under his leadership of the Homeless Girls' Society, Fr O'Connor founded the Sherrard House Hostel in Dublin, a residency for homeless young women, run by a female staff, with the instructions that discipline should not be punitive.

Fergal O'Connor became quite well known during the 1970s for his appearances on Gay Byrne's *Late Late Show*. Gay liked him a lot, and also used him, to some extent, as a touchstone to air discussion of issues such as divorce. Fr O'Connor believed that Church and State should be separate on such matters, and that, in consequence, the State should be free to introduce divorce, if democratically supported. Fergal O'Connor also identified himself as being on the left - at one point, he described himself as a "Christian Marxist".

Fr O'Connor - who I met briefly, and thought a gentle and kind man, afflicted by arthritis - has now been remembered, 50 years on, for his support for the plight of



Mary Kenny



single mothers. Through 'Ally' these young girls were often placed with volunteer families during their pregnancy, rather than in institutions - since their own families sometimes rejected them.

False accusation

However, Fergal O'Connor's kindness and compassion were rewarded by a false accusation of sexual and physical abuse which overshadowed the last years of his life, and caused him mental torment. In 2004, a former resident of Sherrard House accused him of having imposed a brutal regime, having connived at the rape of inmates, and having raped her himself.

The diocesan authorities passed this information on to the civil authorities and eventually the Garda; and a lengthy investigation followed. Eventually, the priest

was exonerated - apart from anything else, Fr O'Connor's severe arthritic condition made him incapable of inflicting either physical cruelty or rape. He died not long afterwards. His accuser Kathy O'Beirne wrote a best-selling book *Don't Ever Tell*, whose lurid claims were disputed by friends and siblings, and shown to be false in a subsequent book by Hermann Kelly. But O'Beirne's book is still available on Amazon.

Reputation

Fergal O'Connor's good deeds and liberal reputation did not shield him from being maligned, living the last years of his life in reputational misery.

There's a sardonic saying - "No good deed goes unpunished", and alas, Father Fergal O'Connor's good deeds are a sad exemplar.

A tea a day keeps the doctor away

In these times of lockdown, how pleasant to remember the hospitality - which was once the household norm - of the kettle on the hob, and the ever-present offer of a cup of tea to any visitor.

In the TV satire *Father Ted*, the dotty Mrs Doyle (Pauline McLynn) is continually seen virtually forcing the clergy to take a cup of tea. "Ah go

on! You will. You will." Mrs Doyle's enforced cup of tea has become a standard joke.

Well, maybe there was wisdom in Mrs Doyle's daftness. Behind many a custom is common sense which research subsequently shows to have a basis in fact. A recent study from Newcastle University has found that drinking copious amounts of tea can have a positive impact

on health, especially among older people.

Those over 85 years of age who drank more than five cups of tea a day were found to have better brain function, focus, attention span and psychomotor skills (link between movement and brain function).

So go on. Have a cuppa! You will, now, you will...

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● I recently did a podcast interview on Catholic Ireland in memoir and memory with Damian Thompson, of the *Spectator* magazine. I've been grateful for very positive feedback. It can be heard at: [@holysmoke@spectator](https://twitter.com/holysmoke) - just google it and tune in!



Monsignor Tom Stack recognised the power of the story as a bridge to interpreting the complexities of life, writes **Séamus Dooley**

When the novelist Benedict Kiely died in February 2007 Msgr Tom Stack, who had received his remains at the Church of the Sacred Heart, wrote an incisive tribute in the Donnybrook parish bulletin.

Benedict Kiley, he wrote, “was above all else, a storyteller. The need we all have to hear the ‘story’ was fulfilled for us by him in an unrivalled fashion. His spell binding voice and meticulous power of recall could hold his listeners in a state of rapt attention”.

On that grey February evening in Donnybrook, Msgr Tom had welcomed the eclectic gathering with a story delivered with his characteristic style and humour.

Unsurprising, given Tom’s love of the poet’s writings, it concerned Patrick Kavanagh, Ben Kiely and the death of an archbishop.

Both men were working on the *Standard* newspaper and were working on the obituary of Archbishop of Armagh Cardinal Joseph MacRory.

As Kiely told it, Msgr Stack explained: “Kavanagh coughed and rasped and, referring to the deceased cardinal, said ‘now he knows what I knew years ago – there is no God!’”

“He revealed at the funeral of Anthony Cronin that the poet had discussed his return to the Church and a “renewal of a belief in God”

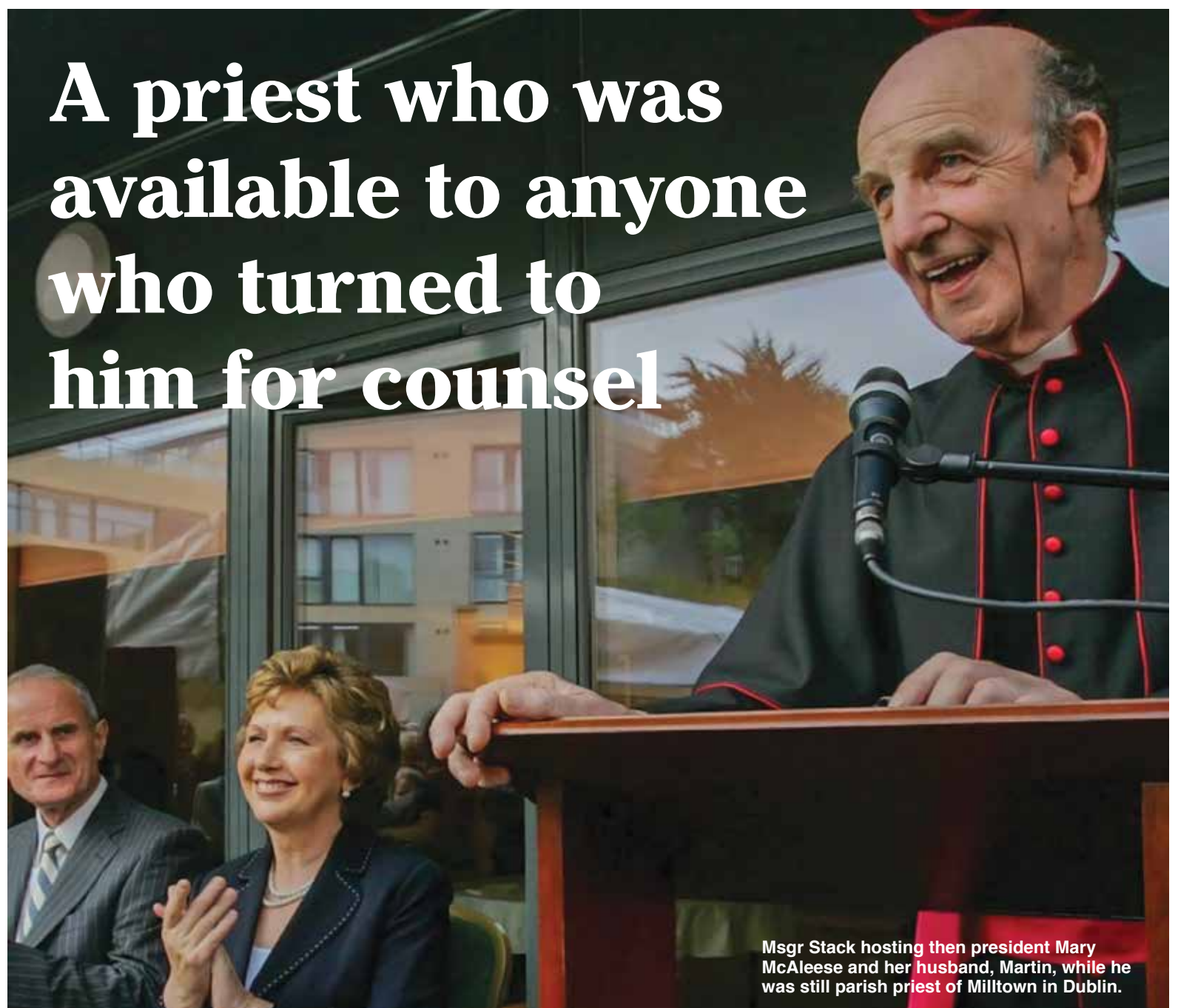
In introducing the story Tom commented that “on the surface it appears disparaging and irreverent but in reality [the story] discloses its own strong, beguiling and even heartening metaphysic.”

“Whatever about Patrick Kavanagh’s contorted eschatology on that occasion, in fact the teaching of Jesus Christ is replete with paradox, for example in the Beatitudes, though certainly in a different key,” linking the story to the readings at the service, taken from the Sermon on the Mount.

Storytelling

Like Kiely, Tom Stack had a gift for storytelling and deployed his skill with ease, recognising the power of the story as a bridge to interpreting the complexities of life.

Over the years he seemed to have assumed the unofficial role of chap-



Msgr Stack hosting then president Mary McAleese and her husband, Martin, while he was still parish priest of Milltown in Dublin.

A priest who was available to anyone who turned to him for counsel

lain to writers and journalists and so many of my encounters with Tom are linked to occasions of sadness.

He was an assiduous funeral-goer and was frequently called upon to preside at funerals of journalists, writers, and poets – many of whom may have had a tenuous connection to the official structures of the Catholic Church.

He revealed at the funeral of Anthony Cronin that the poet had discussed his return to the Church and a “renewal of a belief in God”.

Tom Stack loved the company of journalists and had a passionate interest in the media. He enjoyed a close friendship with the former editor of *the Sunday Independent* Aengus Fanning and was concelebrant at his funeral and was one of the few invited to celebrate Mass in the private church at Tony O’Reilly Kildare mansion, Castlemartin.

There were few editorial executives in both print and broadcasting organisations with whom he was not on first name terms.

Naturally gregarious with a love of current affairs and gossip it is no surprise that Tom spent so much time in the company of journal-

ists. He was a great networker and enjoyed the glamour and glitter of media occasions.

Sweet guy

As Mary Kenny tweeted following the announcement of his death:

“Absolutely sweet guy. Liked him enormously. Lifted one or two Gins and tonics with him (along with Maeve Binchy back in the day. Was kind of pastor to many journalists/writers. And friend. RIP.”

It would be easy to view Tom Stack as a celebrity chaplain and certainly he was sometimes perceived as such in some clerical quarters. In my experience he was available to anyone who turned to him for counsel or friendship.

I recall in particular his compassion towards a mutual acquaintance – not a media worker, who had fallen on hard times. With his good friend the late Fr Dan Breen they also comforted her family, from whom she had been estranged following her untimely death.

Tom recalled after the funeral that he had befriended her as part of an informal drinking circle in Dublin’s smallest pub, the Dawson Lounge

in the late 1960s. When a relative of the deceased raised a disapproving eyebrow Tom once more fell back on storytelling, recalling the wedding feast of Cana as a sort of imprimatur for good wine and merry-making.

Moving in liberal, even trendy circles, often among the glitterati Tom Stack never compromised his principles and was the antithesis of the jaded guitar playing Fr Trendy stereotype.

“Naturally gregarious with a love of current affairs and gossip it is no surprise that Tom spent so much time in the company of journalists”

His homilies and commentaries were reflective, often rooted in his love of poetry.

His devotion to the work of Patrick Kavanagh was reflected in his anthology, *No Earthy Estate*. In the introduction he refers to his own friendship with the notoriously difficult poet.

He wrote “I retain the cherished memory of a rewarding, if limited, personal acquaintance with Patrick Kavanagh himself who, despite his ambiguous public reputation, I found to be a person of uncommon courtesy whose conversation I found as intriguing as it was memorable.”

Tom Stack’s death breaks another link with the pioneering *Radharc* team. In the RTÉ Guide of November 16, 1973 there is a revealing insight into how *Radharc* secured a world exclusive interview by Fr Peter Lemass with Rose Kennedy for their documentary *Mother of the Kennedys*.

Tom Stack was on a visit to New York and visited an Irish priest in Florida, the brother of the Irish sculptor Edward Delaney who successfully mediated contact with the matriarch.

Mrs Kennedy later waived but was persuaded to trust the Irish independent production team by Fr Dermot McCarthy.

The 425 *Radharc* programmes made between 1962 to 1996 are a remarkable legacy and his involvement in that enterprise undoubtedly shaped the subsequent career of Tom Stack, priest and storyteller.

“Msgr Tom had welcomed the eclectic gathering with a story delivered with his characteristic style and humour”

Séamus Dooley is a journalist and Irish Secretary of the National Union of Journalists. Msgr Stack died on December 27, 2020. Anima eius et animae omnium fidelum defunctorum per Dei misericordiam requiescant in pace.

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Baroness Nuala O'Loan



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In choosing the new Archbishop of Dublin, the Vatican is signalling that much-needed reforms are on the agenda, writes **Michael Kelly**

Archbishop Diarmuid Martin is widely – and correctly – credited with taking decisive action on the issue of child abuse.

It was a point noted by his successor Dermot Farrell last week when he said: “Archbishop Martin accepted the leadership of the diocese at a challenging time in 2003. Since then, he has provided forceful and unambiguous leadership, especially in safeguarding children where he took courageous positions”.

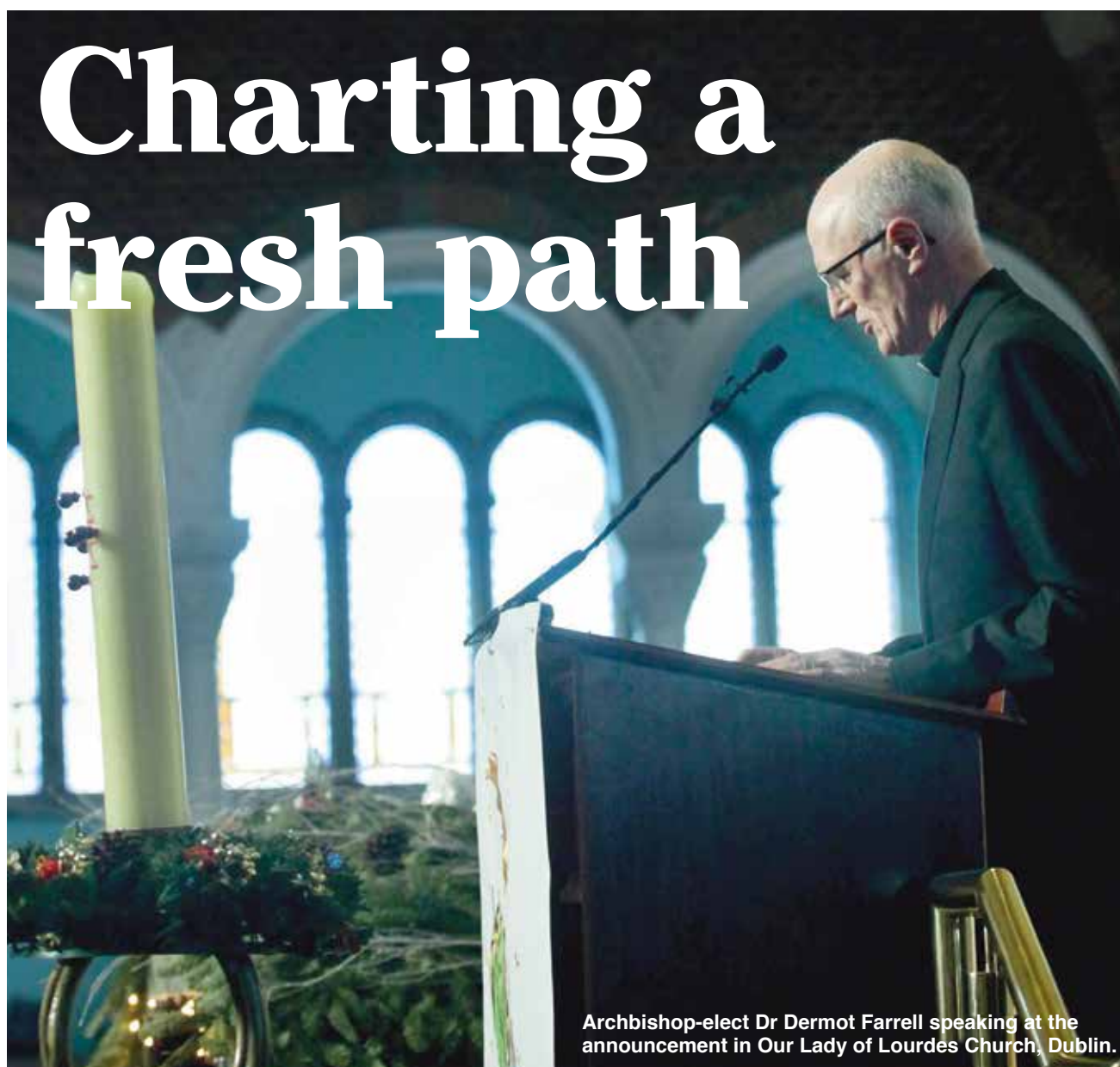
Dr Martin should be rightly proud of his achievements and the transformation in Church culture that he helped usher in. He has borne the burden and heat of the day and deserves a long, happy and healthy retirement.

To a sceptical Faithful angered and dismayed at their Church’s slowness to act, Diarmuid Martin was a breath of fresh air. His contribution to the Church’s now evident culture of putting child protection front and central is beyond dispute and he has built up considerable capital in that sphere.

His leadership on the much-needed reform of the Church in Ireland is less discernible. Despite the fact that Archbishop Martin has been one of the most senior Irish Churchmen in the early decades of the 21st Century, there is precious little by way of blue sky thinking when it comes to the reform of the Church. The archbishop has more often resembled a casual observer on Church affairs rather than one of the men with the levers of power.

A new chapter

The appointment of Archbishop-elect Farrell signals a new chapter for Dublin and for the Church in Ireland at large. He is a man of huge energy unafraid of embracing reform and new ways of doing things. The Pope’s appointment to Dublin is the most important episcopal choice since Archbishop



Archbishop-elect Dr Dermot Farrell speaking at the announcement in Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Dublin.

Eamon Martin was appointed as Primate of All-Ireland. As vice-president of the bishops’ conference, Archbishop-elect Farrell will have an important role in setting the mood music for the next phase in the reform and renewal of the Church on this island.

“If the history of the Church teaches us anything, it is that what seems unimaginable at one moment becomes the seed of reform in another moment”

He is likely to hit the ground running. In Ossory, he has achieved more in just three years than many bishops do in their entire episcopal ministry. He has acted decisively and shown strong leadership where it has been necessary.

Dublin now needs some of his characteristic efficiency. For all his many talents, Diarmuid Martin would be the first person to admit that he lacks the ability to unite people around a vision. Many of the priests of Dublin are disillusioned and Dr



Archbishop-elect Dr Dermot Farrell (L) and Archbishop of Dublin Diarmuid Martin (R) speaking to the media at the announcement in Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Dublin.

Farrell will have to bring healing where there is hurt and sometimes alienation.

He will also have to act decisively and move forward with necessary (if painful) pastoral reforms that may see many parish churches close. If the history of the Church teaches us anything, it is that what seems unimaginable at one moment becomes the seed of reform in another moment.

Financial management – a particular skill of Dr Farrell’s – will be vital to get the diocese bank on a good footing. As this newspaper revealed in December, Dublin is running desperately short on funds with some predicting that there is just enough money to pay priests for two more months.

Many Dublin priests share the perception that vital and necessary pasto-

ral planning has been long-fingered. They speak about a culture of ‘keeping the show on the road’.

Priests and other bishops often speak with frustration about Diarmuid Martin. They speak of a man who is second-to-none in diagnosing what is wrong with the Church. A man who has a keen eye for what has gone wrong and what should be done better, but curiously has

no prescription for exactly how to do things better.

But, then perhaps Dr Martin had one great mission in him – bringing about accountability for the cover-up of abuse. And in that regard, he has certainly left the Church a lot better than he found it and everyone should be grateful for that.

Reforma Agenda

Archbishop-elect Farrell will have to embrace a much wider reform agenda. Faith is fragile. There’s so much talk of Church reform and Church renewal that doesn’t lead anywhere. Many committed Catholics are frustrated that there is still no real role for lay voices in Church decision-making.

The mission that Archbishop-elect Farrell will have to undertake is to help chart a vision of the future that all people of faith can get behind and find their voice in a Church that is reformed and renewed. He will need to be a man of both vision and action. He will need to be someone who cannot just talk about reform, but who can walk the walk. This is a defining issue for the Church, and if it does not get it right the institution will continue to decline.

He could do worse than breathing new life in to a plan that was shelved by Dr Martin – the idea of convoking a diocesan assembly or synod that would honestly and courageously discern the challenges facing Dublin and, by extension, the wider Church in Ireland.

“He [Dr Farrell] will need to be someone who cannot just talk about reform, but who can walk the walk”

It would have to be handled prudently and manage expectations, but it could be a moment to re-imagine how we think of the Church.

Such a process – listening attentively to the Word of God in the way that Pope Francis has spoken so passionately about – could be a fresh step in becoming the co-responsible and participatory Church that the Second Vatican Council imagined in the 1960s.

In his apostolic exhortation, *Querida Amazonia*, Pope Francis proposed that the real reform that is needed in the Church is transcending traditional divisions and “finding other, better ways, perhaps not yet even imagined”.

Archbishop-elect Farrell has shown in Ossory that he has the courage, strength and determination to find better ways forward. I wish him a fair wind and God’s blessing.

Maria Steen

The View



Christians should not have to pay RTÉ to offend them

On New Year's Eve, RTÉ broadcast a show, 'NYE Countdown', hosted by Deirdre O'Kane and Kathryn Thomas. Aengus MacGrianna, the former RTÉ newsreader, also took part, delivering a 'Waterford Whispers' comedy sketch in a mock newsroom. The show confirmed me in my decision – once again – to get rid of our television and stop paying the licence fee. At this juncture, no one can be in any doubt about the station's general anti-religion bias, and particular loathing of Catholicism.

“The show's content drew sharp criticism from Catholic quarters”

As one of a number of “news” items, MacGrianna announced that God was “the latest figure to be implicated in the ongoing sexual harassment scandal”. He said that God “stood accused of forcing himself on a middle-eastern migrant and allegedly impregnating her against her will,” before going on to say that he had been “sentenced to two years in prison with the last 24 months suspended”. The following item, showing a photo of movie producer Harvey Weinstein, a convicted rapist, said that Weinstein was looking for a retrial in Ireland.

The show's content drew sharp criticism from Catholic quarters. Archbishop Eamon Martin was the first Church leader to tweet about it, saying that he was “shocked” that RTÉ didn't realise how deeply offensive was its mocking news report. He called the broadcast “deeply offensive and blasphemous” and called for the “outrageous clip” to be removed immediately.

Deeply disturbed

Newly appointed Archbishop-elect of Dublin, Dermot Farrell, added to the criticism, saying that he was “deeply disturbed” by the item, and that it showed a “fundamental lack of understanding of the nature of rape and of God”.

RTÉ reported that by January 2, more than 1,000 complaints had been lodged with the station about the show. An online petition was started by Becky Kealy

of Aontú and had gathered over 5,500 signatures at the time this paper went to print.

Apology

RTÉ eventually issued a mealy-mouthed apology: “Having reviewed the feedback and complaints received up to this point, RTÉ wishes to apologise to those who were offended by the segment.” The subtext of the statement translates as: only because so many of you made such a fuss, are we apologising (if we did anything wrong, which we don't accept we did).

And again, “RTÉ recognises that matters which can cause offence naturally differ from person to person, within comedy and satire in particular”. Translation: we're sorry you have no sense of humour or appreciation of sophisticated satire.

The station has so far refused to remove the item, merely adding a disclaimer of sorts at the start of the programme that states: “Viewer discretion is advised for the following content.”

Dee Forbes, Director-General of RTÉ, has been silent since the broadcast; the promotion of the show is still top of her Twitter feed. Neither has there been a comment from Aengus MacGrianna, who read out the offending material, nor any attempt by Kathryn Thomas or Deirdre O'Kane, the presenters of the programme, to distance themselves from what was said.

“The truth is that RTÉ simply does not care about offending Christians”

One can imagine the scrambling efforts to apologise if it was something they were really bothered about, or worried would affect their careers. Remember the grovelling apologies in grave tones after the RTÉ staff were caught having a party in the middle of the Covid-19 restrictions? Imagine if the joke had been racially insensitive or had been about Muhammad?

The truth is that RTÉ simply does not care about offending Christians. Noted. But we don't have to pay

for it any longer. You may choose to insult me and my religion; I should not be required to pay you to do so.

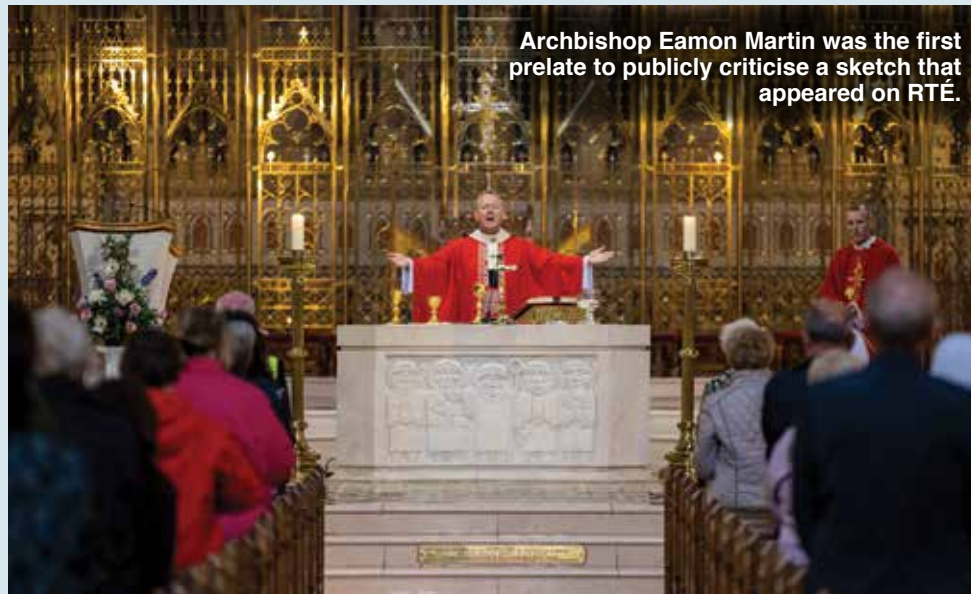
The time has come for people to stop paying their licence fee and campaign for the defunding of RTÉ. The organisation continues to rely on a patina of objectivity and neutrality which, if it was ever the reality, certainly is not the reality today. We now have access to a variety of sources of information and entertainment, many of which are superior to RTÉ. Some are funded by advertisements; for others we choose to pay subscriptions. But those subscriptions are not compulsory. The licence fee provides RTÉ with an unfair competitive advantage, which it uses to promote an agenda that is offensive to Catholics, and many others.

Failing financially

It also seems strange that a station that has been failing financially for years should be so cavalier about insulting such a large swathe of its own viewers. This latest offence by RTÉ underscores the reality that the station simply doesn't deserve to be propped up any more by the licence fee. It abuses God, degrades the Mother of God, and ridicules Christianity, and then expects us to pay for the privilege.

Aside from the fact that the ‘comedy sketch’ in question was decidedly unfunny, the parody as presented was totally ignorant of Christian beliefs and the Gospel narrative. Real humour requires the ring of truth – and the problem with this piece was not merely its clunky and leaden writing, and its hammy delivery – but that it managed entirely to miss the point of the story it was trying to send up.

Anyone familiar with the Gospel story of the Annunciation will know that its centrepiece is Mary's consent. The dialogue between Mary and God's messenger, the Angel Gabriel, has been a source of contemplation and wonder down through the ages. Here was the Creator of all things sending his emissary to ask permission from a woman whom he had created, and who, in the eyes of the world, was nothing. The fate of all humanity depended



Archbishop Eamon Martin was the first prelate to publicly criticise a sketch that appeared on RTÉ.

on her answer. The act of asking for consent was itself an exercise in humility, love, and respect. For a moment, God placed himself in Mary's power, as asking for permission implies the possibility of rejection. Following her “fiat” the

God of all things placed his only Son under her care and authority.

There is a reason why the Annunciation is a story that is still retold 2,000 years after it happened and why all generations still call Mary “Blessed”. The story bears no

resemblance to RTÉ's crass portrayal. On the contrary, it demonstrates God's profound respect and care for us, his created beings and adopted children, and is the prelude to the event that literally divided time in two: the birth of our Saviour.

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MAKE 2021 A YEAR TO GO TO THE HOLY LAND

This September and October will see two groups of pilgrims depart on an unforgettable trip to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. In recent years, these trips have become an integral part of The Irish Catholic year with hundreds of pilgrims making the journey from every corner of Ireland to take part in a unique opportunity to visit the sites associated with the earthly life of Christ. The pilgrimage also helps the Bible come alive for people as they visit Nazareth, Bethlehem and Jerusalem. Here are some highlights of this year's itinerary:



The Sea of Galilee.

Day One: Ireland to the Holy Land

Depart Dublin Airport in the evening for an overnight flight direct to Tel Aviv on El Al.

Day Two: Nazareth

Upon arrival in Ben-Gurion Airport, pilgrims will be met by a Marian Pilgrimages representative and guide before boarding our tour coach to Nazareth. En route we will see stunning views of the sun rising over the Galilee region – site of much of the ministry of Jesus. After breakfast, check-in to the four-star Legacy Hotel for five nights with dinner and breakfast.

After time to rest and freshen up, we will walk the short distance to the nearby Basilica of the Annunciation to celebrate Mass. On the lower level of the basilica we see the remains of Mary's house and where the Archangel Gabriel visited her.

Adjacent to the basilica is St Joseph's Church, where we will visit the site of Joseph's workshop and the house of the Holy Family. A short walk from the basilica is Mary's Well here you have the opportunity to draw water from the same well as the Virgin Mary followed by free time in Nazareth before dinner at the hotel.

Day Three: Mount Tabor and Cana in Galilee

After breakfast, we have a short drive to Mount Tabor to ascend by taxi for Mass at the Church of the Transfiguration where Jesus is transfigured and speaks to Moses and Elijah. There is time to enjoy the view of the Valley of Armageddon and the Jezreel Valley – bread basket of the Holy Land.

After time for lunch we take the short coach journey to Cana in Galilee. Here we visit the Wedding Church, the site of the first miracle of Jesus. Couples on the pilgrimage can take part in the special ceremony to renew their wedding vows and there is also prayers and blessings for spouses at home and deceased husbands and wives. In the lower level of the church, we will see artifacts from the site before having an opportunity to taste and purchase some of the famous wine from this sacred site before returning to Nazareth for dinner in the hotel.

Optional Eucharistic Adoration at the Basilica of the Annunciation at 8.30pm.

Day Four: The Sea of Galilee

This morning we make our way to the Mount of Beatitudes overlooking the Sea of Galilee where Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount, Capernaum and Tabgha. Visit the site of the multiplication of the Loaves and Fish at Tabgha, and the Church of the Primacy of St Peter.

After lunch on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, continue to Capernaum and see the old synagogue and the excavations of St Peter's house before taking a boat trip on the lake, with relevant Bible readings. Before returning to the hotel we visit Magdala, the home of Mary Magdalene, a prosperous fishing village at the time of Jesus.

Optional rosary at the Irish icon at the Basilica of the Annunciation at 8.30pm.

Day Five: Acre – the Crusader capital

We take the short coach ride to the coastal city of Akko, famed throughout history as the Crusader capital of the Holy Land. After Mass, we return to Nazareth for free time in the town of the Holy Family before dinner at the hotel.

Optional candlelit procession at the Basilica of the Annunciation at 8.30pm.

Day Six: Jericho and Bethany

We leave Nazareth and drive south along the Jordan Valley into Jericho. Here we can see the Mount of Temptation and the Sycamore tree of Zacchaeus. Continue to the Dead Sea and enjoy a 'dip' near Qumran, where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. Drive by the Inn of the Good Samaritan, to Bethany to celebrate Mass at 16.00 and visit the Tomb of Lazarus. Continue to Qasr el Yahud, the baptismal site of Jesus on the River Jordan, here we can renew our baptismal vows.

After we drive to Bethlehem and check-in to the four-star Manger Square Hotel, located just a stone's throw from the Church of the Nativity for four nights, with breakfast and dinner.

Day Seven: Jerusalem

We drive to Jerusalem and enter the Old City to the Church of St Anne and nearby, see the Pool of Bethesda. Close by we begin the Via Dolorosa and follow the stations of the cross through the markets and narrow streets of the Old City to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the site of

Calvary where Jesus was crucified and His tomb. Here we will celebrate Mass at 11.00 and take some time to reflect at this sacred site. Enjoy some free time in Jerusalem for lunch before visiting the Western Wall.

We will then drive to Taybeh – a town where Jesus stayed before going to Jerusalem to endure the Passion. It is the last all-Christian town in the West Bank and here we will hear about efforts to keep the local Christian community vibrant, including local wine-making before returning to the hotel in Bethlehem for dinner.

Day Eight: Mount of Olives

Drive to the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem where we take our group photo and enjoy the view of the Old City below. We make our way to the highest point on the Mount of Olives to the Ascension Dome. Continue to visit the Pater Noster Church, Dominus Flevit, the Church of the Assumption and grotto and the Garden of Gethsemane.

In the afternoon we celebrate Mass at 15.00 in the Church of St Peter in Gallicantu or 'cock's crow', where St Peter denied Jesus

three times and see the dungeon where Jesus was held the night of Holy Thursday. We walk around Mount Zion and visit the church of the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Tomb of King David and the Room of the Last Supper. Return to the hotel for dinner.

Day Nine: Bethlehem

After breakfast we take the short walk to the Church of the Nativity and celebrate Mass at 10.00. Here you can visit the birthplace of Jesus, and the Holy Manger as well as the chapels of St Joseph, St Jerome, the Holy Innocents and the Church of St Catherine.

Visit the Milk Grotto before lunch and meeting with members of the local Christian community in Bethlehem. Afterwards, we take the short drive to the Shepherds' Field and Ein Karem to the Church of the Visitation before returning to the hotel for dinner.

Day Ten: Emmaus

After breakfast at the hotel, we have some free time in Bethlehem before boarding the coach for the journey to Emmaus where we will have Mass and lunch before proceeding to the airport for the direct flight back to Dublin.

PRICING NOTES FOR THE PILGRIMAGE

The package on offer is all inclusive of the following:

Travel and accommodation

- Flight from Dublin to Tel Aviv;
- Transfer on arrival from Tel Aviv airport to the hotel in Nazareth with guide assistance;
- Five nights in the four-star Legacy Hotel in Nazareth
- Four nights in the four-star Manger Square Hotel in Bethlehem;
- Breakfast and evening meal served each day at hotels;

- Transfer to Tel Aviv airport for return flight;
- Flight from Tel Aviv to Dublin;
- Luxury air-conditioned coach throughout the itinerary;
- Guiding audio system (earphones for listening to the guide).

Tours and religious programme

- Full religious programme with a spiritual director including daily Mass;
- Services of Marian Pilgrimages representative.

- English-speaking guides throughout the pilgrimage;
- Full day guided tour of Jerusalem including visits to the Western Wall, Dome of the Rock, Church of St Anne, Via Dolorosa, Holy Sepulchre and Shrine of the Book;
- Complete programme of sightseeing and visits to sites of interest in the Holy Land;
- Boat ride on Sea of Galilee;
- Return taxi transfers to Mount Tabor.

Entrance fees included

- Dominus Flevit;
- Capernaum;
- Mount of Beatitudes;
- Muhrakha;
- Qumran.

Optional

- Travel insurance €25 for passengers up to 85 years. Please note that an additional insurance premium of €25 is charged for persons aged 86 to 94 years;

passengers 95 years and over should secure private travel insurance.

- Price per person sharing twin/double/treble rooms with private facilities. Passengers are entitled to check in one standard piece of luggage subject to airline's conditions. Single rooms are subject to availability at a supplement.
- Taxes, charges and government levies are included.
- Porterage at hotels are included in the package price.
- All tips and gratuities everywhere are included.

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Thousands tune in for Knock carol service



Fr Richard Gibbons with Schola Cantorum Basilicae and ConTempo String Quartet after 'Carols By Candlelight' at Knock Basilica. Photos Sinéad Mallee



Fr Richard Gibbons, PP and Rector of Knock Shrine stands on the sanctuary of Knock Basilica after the 'Carols by Candlelight' online carol service.



Claire Lavin, member of Schola Cantorum Basilicae performs during the 'Carols by Candlelight' online concert at Knock Basilica.

Carols By Candlelight was streamed live from Knock Basilica on Sunday, December 20. Schola Cantorum Basilicae, Knock Shrine, under the direction of Una Nolan, Director of Sacred Music at Knock Shrine were accompanied by ConTempo Quartet and Pianist, Mark Keane. The ceremony can be viewed on www.knockshrine.ie



Alannah Burke, member of Schola Cantorum Basilicae performs during the 'Carols by Candlelight' online concert at Knock Basilica.



ConTempo String Quartet & Organist Mark Keane perform during the 'Carols by Candlelight' online.



Una Nolan, Director of Music at Knock Shrine performs during the 'Carols by Candlelight' online concert at Knock Basilica. Photo Sinéad Mallee.

Republic remains almost alone in banning public Masses



Parishioners attend a socially-distanced Christmas Eve Mass in the Church of Christ the King, Omagh, Co. Tyrone.



Church leaders right across the board have been so slow to defend the right to public worship, writes David Quinn

Currently, we are not allowed to go to Mass again in the Republic. All public worship is effectively banned. From the end of March last year until the end of June, public worship was called off, and again in places like Donegal and Dublin from September until early December, and in the rest of the country from October until early December.

Prohibition

The current prohibition looks like it could go on for at least another two months. It began again on St Stephen's Day.

This means that by the time March comes around, we will have been stopped from attending Mass for roughly seven out of 12 months.

The question, as always, is

whether this is proportionate and justifiable. Is it backed by evidence?

At present, given the high daily count of Covid-19 cases, a big majority of people, including Mass-goers probably, will think that it is.

But this is partly because we are not being properly informed about what is happening in other European countries.

Public worship

It is hard to keep track of all the various restrictions being imposed by all European countries, but it is relatively easy to keep an eye on what is happening in the case of public worship in the biggest ones and in our closest neighbours. The picture is subject to constant change, but at the time of writing, you could still go to Mass in England, Wales and – of course – the North.

You could go to Mass in France, Italy and Spain, Netherlands, Poland, Germany, Austria and the Czech Republic.

If you add together the populations of Britain, France, Italy, Spain, Germany and Poland you arrive at around 350 million people, the great majority of the population of Europe overall.

In all these countries, public worship is still permitted, albeit with limits on numbers who can attend at any one time.

In Britain, each of the four 'nations' (as they are called) can set their own Covid-19

policy. Large parts of England recently went back into lockdown again, so-called 'tier 4', which may become stricter still.

In November, when highest level restrictions were reimposed following a second spike in infections, certain parts of England stopped public worship again.

“This time around, public worship is being permitted even in those areas affected by the new, more infectious Covid-19 variant”

Leaders of all the main faiths wrote to Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, in protest. They said their places of worship had been extremely safely run and there was no justification for banning public worship again.

This time around, public worship is being permitted even in those areas affected by the new, more infectious Covid-19 variant.

Obviously, public health authorities looked at the evidence and couldn't find a good enough reason to stop public worship again.

In Wales, which is run by Labour, public worship has been stopped for only a very

brief period since the summer.

It has been the same in Scotland, which is run by Nicola Sturgeon and the Scottish National Party. Only now that the country has gone back into full lockdown and people told not to leave their houses, is public worship ceasing again.

North

In the North, with the joint Government, public worship has been only briefly stopped since the first lockdown ended, as in Wales. This is despite the North having a consistently much higher infection rate than the South for months now, partly because it is twice as densely populated as the South.

In each case, the science simply doesn't justify a total ban on public worship because it is so low-risk.

We hear a lot about the crucial 'R' number, that is the reproduction rate of the virus. If it is above 1, it is bad news. Anything that clearly adds to the R number is generally closed down, unless there is very good reason to do otherwise. (It is why we are keeping the meat factories going, for instance, despite breakouts in those places).

There have been isolated examples in some countries of breakouts in some places of worship, but they are the exceptions that prove the rule.

Overwhelmingly, churches have been safe places to be because an army of volun-

teers has kept them that way. Therefore, they have added nothing measurable to that R number.

This is what other countries have found and it's why the French, British, Germans, Italians, Poles, Dutch, Spanish, etc. Can still attend Mass at present.

In fact, you can go Mass in Derry, but not in Letterkenny.

Perhaps the ban on public worship at level 5 can be justified in the name of social solidarity, or because the infection rate has gone so high.

“It is as though freedom of worship and religion are not fundamental rights in the Constitution but these other things are”

But under NPHET guidance, public worship stops at level 3, never mind level 5.

Dr Ronan Glynn, the Deputy Chief Medical Officer told me in September that public worship is considered “less important” in the context of a pandemic.

But in level 3, outdoor dining was still permitted, you could still go to a hairdresser, or a gym or into any shop you

liked. These were all considered more important.

It is as though freedom of worship and religion are not fundamental rights in the Constitution but these other things are.

When we moved back into level 5, non-essential retail was kept open to begin with, but not public worship. Again, we can see the Government's priorities. Public worship is far down the list, and they are happy to 'turn it off' quickly.

Church

It doesn't help, of course, that Church leaders right across the board have been so slow to defend the right to public worship. This contrasts strongly with their counterparts in other countries. In France, Catholic bishops took the Government to court over disproportionate restrictions, and won.

It seems amazing the religious leaders here didn't at least express disappointment at the decision to stop public worship and point out how safe it has been to attend Mass and other services.

At this point, it is very doubtful that any voices will be raised until the latest storm has passed, but at the first opportunity Church leaders must begin to call again for the resumption of public worship, even when so many other European countries still permit it.

Hopes papal visit will stop ‘horrific’ loss of Christians in troubled Iraq



Pope’s visit could inspire exiled Iraqi Christians to return, Archbishop Eamon Martin tells Chai Brady

The monumental decision taken by Pope Francis to visit Iraq in March will no doubt be one for the history books.

Although the current pontiff is no stranger to visiting territories plagued by conflict and seemingly perpetual violence, this will be the first time a Pope has ever visited Iraq, a country which is the birthplace of Abraham, the patriarch of the three great monotheistic religions.

Iraq – ancient Mesopotamia – is therefore sacred to followers of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Iraq is the country of Prophet Jonah who lived in Nineveh and called for repentance and permanent return to God. It is also the country in which the people were exiled in the Old Testament during a merciless trip called the ‘exile’ to Babylon.

Hiatus

The Vatican announced in December that Pope Francis would break his 15-month hiatus from travel due to the Covid-19 pandemic to make an apostolic journey to the Middle Eastern country on March 5-8 this year. He is expected to visit Baghdad, the plain of Ur, Mosul, and Qaraqosh.

Primate of All-Ireland and Archbishop of Armagh Eamon Martin, who visited Archbishop Matti Warda of Erbil, Iraq, two years ago, told *The Irish Catholic*: “I was



Pope Francis leads the recitation of the Angelus prayer on December 27, 2020, from the library of the Apostolic Palace. Photos : CNS.

delighted to hear that Pope Francis had clearly prioritised the situation of Christians in Iraq for a papal visit. I think we’re all very pleased that Pope Francis feels well enough and indeed safe enough to be able to travel again, to put his very first visit after such a break as a visit with Christians, Catholics in Iraq.

“It’s dear to my own heart because two years ago, almost to the day, I was in Iraq myself visiting Archbishop Warda and some of the communities in the Ninevah Plain, who had been so impacted by the awful situation of ISIS and the aftermath. It has left the situation of the Catholic parishes completely devastated.”

Reach out

Archbishop Eamon said for Pope Francis to want to reach out to Iraqi Christians is “totally in tune with the sort of mission that Pope Francis has always had, seeking out the peripheries, seeking out the

marginalised, having a particular soft spot in his heart for refugees and for communities that have been displaced or terrorised due to war and violence, so in many ways a visit to Iraq fits so neatly with Pope Francis’ ethos and mission”.

“For me it’s particularly important, because first of all it’s important to remember that the Christian communities there are very, very ancient, going right back to the very dawn of Christianity – the very first Christians who settled in those Ninevah plains, and then to wind the clock forward to today and to remember as we do, especially at Christmas time, the awful situation of Christians in Iraq, only just four or five years ago, when one of the last pushes forward of Daesh of ISIS completely devastated their communities,” he said.

“Iraq – ancient Mesopotamia – is therefore sacred to followers of Judaism, Christianity and Islam”

The number of Christians in the country has drastically diminished in the past two decades due to violence and persecution.

In 2003, before a US-led coalition invaded to depose Saddam Hussein, there were around 1-1.4 million Christians in the country.

A drawn-out war and the 2014-2017 occupation of the Plain of Nineveh by the so-called Islamic State reduced their number to between 3-400,000.

Iraq’s president and prime minister have often invited Christians who have fled the country to return and help rebuild the nation.



Displaced by fighting between the Iraqi army and the Islamic State group, a family leaves a processing centre for displaced families January 27, 2017, outside Mosul.

However, an economic crisis, corruption and the devastating effects of conflict which led to 1.7 million people being internally displaced has impeded recovery

UNICEF estimates that some 4 million Iraqis require humanitarian assistance, of whom half are children. Covid-19 has accentuated these issues.

Archbishop Eamon visited Iraq in December 2018, a visit he says remains in his memory particularly at Christmas time.

He said: “I had the opportunity to visit some parishes and some villages out on the Ninevah plains, near Mosul. That particular visit just stays with me particularly at Christmas time because the people were basically walking through rubble and the devastation of their villages.

“One particular village stands out called Batnaya, and I actually walked the streets of Batnaya, really there was nothing left.

“The images which particularly stand out in my head are of the churches completely destroyed with hateful graffiti written on them, also to see graveyards and cemeteries destroyed – something that I just really felt must go to the very core of people’s being.”

Solidarity

The archbishop said he went to the country “in solidarity” with the Christian community, adding that Archbishop Warda has links to Ireland having spent time with the Redemptorists in Dundalk.

Speaking of Archbishop Warda he said: “He has been really vocal in trying to draw the attention of the world to the plight of Christians in Iraq so I wanted to visit him and to bring him greetings of solidarity from Ireland and I was also aware that some of our charities like Trócaire and Aid to the Church in Need Ireland have been very active in supporting Christians in Iraq over the years.

“What Archbishop Warda said to me was, ‘look resources are now beginning to come our way but what we need to know is your prayers and your solidarity’ and that’s why I think a visit from Pope Francis will be hugely meaningful for him and his communities.”

Regarding his interactions with Christians on the coalface in Iraq,

Archbishop Eamon said: “When I was in a parish called Tel Kaif, I met there with the parish council and they told me that one of their greatest sadnesses is the fact that large numbers of their young people and their young families had left and they said that they understood why they had left because all you had to do was look around and see the devastation, the lack of job opportunities, the lack of hope and therefore many young people had left, so much so that the percentage of the Christian community there had essentially gone down to about 30% of what it had been even 10, 20 years ago.

“The number of Christians in the country has drastically diminished in the past two decades due to violence and persecution”

“Therefore, they said, ‘in order to attract our young people back we need education, we need health services and we need jobs and also a sense of security and hope for the future’.

“So Archbishop Warda has established a Catholic university in Erbil, he had also been building a new hospital, and this is one of the areas where the Irish donations had helped in the establishment of a health clinic and thirdly the idea of attracting jobs and giving confidence and hope for the future and therefore our visit and indeed of course above all Pope Francis’ visit I hope will inspire young people who still have a great longing for their homeland to feel secure and safe enough to return home and yes of course that would be a very welcome outcome because for us to lose the presence of Christianity in those ancient lands would be a horrific eventuality and the likes of the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre, Aid to the Church in Need, Trócaire, they’re all working together with many other charities to try to ensure that the Holy Lands and the ancient lands of the Bible will not be completely depleted of Christians.”



A priest celebrates Mass on December 25, 2019, at St George Chaldean church in Baghdad, Iraq.

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Out&About

Communion amid Covid



DONEGAL: Children from Frosses and Killian National Schools, in Co. Donegal who made their First Holy Communion in St Mary's Church, Frosses pictured with their teacher Dermott Gallier and Fr James Sweeney.



ARMAGH: Archbishop Eamon Martin and Church of Ireland Archbishop John McDowell stand in St Patrick's Cathedral as they share their joint Christmas message.



CAVAN: Pictured are the Byrne Family, the Monaghan Family, the McMahon Family and the Boylan family representing all the families of the parish at the planting of the Kingscourt 2020 parish time capsule and Irish Oak Tree in the church grounds. Photo: Gerard MacCormack.

INSHORT

Focus Ireland warns the Government to protect most vulnerable as the country faces a third wave of Covid-19

Figures published by the Department of Housing show the number of people who were homeless in November fell by 253 to 8,484 – compared to 8,737 in the previous month. There was also a drop in the number of children who are homeless to 2,452 – a fall of 190.

With the country re-entering Level 5, Focus Ireland believes there should be a broader eviction ban until April 2021 which will help keep people safe in their homes and prevent homeless services from becoming stretched to breaking point during winter and spring months.

Focus Ireland CEO Pat Dennigan said: "During 2020, incredible work has been achieved during the pandemic to keep the most vulnerable protected. Despite this latest rise (or reduction) we've made major progress this year working with the State, local

authorities and NGOs to reduce the number of people homeless from a record total of over 10,000 to 8,484. We are especially encouraged with the lower number of children who are homeless from 3,752 in November last year to 2,452 this month. In addition, Focus Ireland's prevention and housing work in 2020 means that 1,500 households will be waking up on Christmas morning safe in their homes who would have otherwise been homeless or at risk. This partnership work has to continue with urgency as the country

hopefully emerges from Covid-19 next year."

Mr Dennigan welcomed the continued generosity of the Irish public to Focus Ireland and other homeless charities.

"The public's continued generosity to Focus Ireland and to other homeless charities is essential in allowing us to continue our work, but it is also a very encouraging reminder that – despite the unprecedented challenges that Covid-19 creates for everyone – people continue to care deeply about other vulnerable human beings."

Edited by Jason Osborne
jason@irishcatholic.ie



Events deadline is a week in advance of publication



CORK: Cork Students pictured at the blessing of the Share crib on Patrick Street at the start of their Christmas fundraising campaign. Photo: Ger McCarthy.



DUBLIN: The Redemptoristine nuns of Drumcondra busy themselves preparing their monastery for the Christmas celebrations.



LIMERICK: Joe Lyons, retiring school principal of St Joseph's Primary School, Ballybrown, and incoming school principal Sheila Hayes stand after a retirement Mass for Joe at Clarina Parish church.

WEXFORD: Fr Aodhan Marken and Canon Arthur Minion observe the Covid restrictions as they engage in their annual four day Christmas appeal at St Iberius Church.



LIMERICK: Redemptorist Gerard Moloney and Limerick hurling star Diarmuid Byrnes receive goods for the Redemptorist Hamper Appeal.



SUDAN: Concern logistician Paula Donohoe with a section of an aid consignment at the airport in Khartoum on Christmas Day.



WEXFORD: Bishop Denis Brennan launches a Youth Initiative called The Way Forward by switching on the Star of Hope at the top of St Peter's.



TYRONE: Eoghan and Daithi Kelly stand with their Grandad, Michael Kelly, at Christmas Eve Mass in Cappagh Parish.



DUBLIN: Fr Liam Lacey sits during the release of his recently published collection of poetry and musings, *Echoes of the Heart*. Proceeds for the books were divided between Crosscare and RNLI. Also pictured from left to right are Rose Michael from RNLI, Conor Hickey from Crosscare, Fr Liam Lacey, Eamon O Murchú and Ian Sheridan, volunteer crew member RNLI.



GALWAY: Damien Hanniffy, store manager, Niamh Hackett, Deputy store manager, of Lidl in Wellpark, and JP Scally, managing director, stand with their donations to St Vincent de Paul.



MAYO: Fr Richard Gibbons, Rector of Knock Shrine, receives a Covid test at Ireland West Airport in Knock.

IN SHORT

Vatican calls for equitable Covid-19 vaccine distribution

The Vatican's coronavirus commission and the Pontifical Academy for Life issued a joint statement calling for a coordinated international effort to ensure the equitable distribution of Covid-19 vaccines worldwide. The document highlights the "critical role of vaccines to defeat the pandemic, not just for

individual personal health but to protect the health of all," the Vatican said in a statement accompanying the document. "The Vatican commission and the Pontifical Academy of Life remind world leaders that vaccines must be provided to all fairly and equitably, prioritising those most in need," the Vatican said. The pandemic has exacerbated "a triple threat of simultaneous and interconnected health, economic and socio-ecological crises that are disproportionately impacting

the poor and the vulnerable," the document said. "As we move toward a just recovery, we must ensure that immediate cures for the crises become stepping-stones to a more just society, with an inclusive and interdependent set of systems." Pope Francis established the Covid-19 commission in April with the goal of expressing "the Church's concern and love for the entire human family in the face of the Covid-19

pandemic." The new document issued a set of objectives, particularly around making the vaccines "available and accessible to all." Part of that process, the document said, would be to consider how to reward those who developed the vaccine and repay "the research costs and risks companies have taken on," while also recognising the vaccine "as a good to which everyone should have access, without discrimination."



LIMERICK: Sarah Ryan, principal of St Brigid's Primary School, Singland, makes a presentation of €2,000 to Melissa of Milford Hospice on behalf of the parents, pupils, and staff of St Brigid's NS. Also pictured are pupils Jayden Slattery and Hollie Kelly.



MAYO: Fr Richard Gibbons, Rector of Knock Shrine, visits Ireland West Airport at Knock for a Covid test.



▲ ▼ CARLOW: Bishop Denis Nulty stands with those present at the virtual carol service livestreamed from Carlow Cathedral.



MEATH: Billy Kavanagh stands dressed as St Finnian to celebrate Clonard's hosting of the Christmas Eve Eurovision Mass.

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.



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And Catch the Heart Off Guard
Fr Brian D'Arcy

A quintessentially Brian D'Arcy book, these pages offer a collection of thoughts, reflections and stories from the heart, and looks to both challenge and comfort the reader.



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Tired of all the Bad News
Fr Bryan Shortall

In this collection of homilies, blogs and stories, Fr Bryan Shortall, a Capuchin priest working in Dublin, aims to bring a bright and positive message to the reader to pass through the negativity.

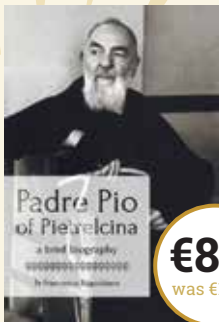


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Cora Ginnane & Joanne O'Brien

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Fr Francesco Napolitano

This revisited biography follows the saint from humble beginnings through his life of profound sacrifice and goodness. It recounts stories of the obstacles he overcame and the people he touched.



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Dublin, a Photographic Essay
Eddie Mallin

Created over the past decade, this collection of photography includes images of Dublin's urban cityscape, its beautiful coastal seascapes and luscious parkland in black and white images.

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Catherine McCann

"Catherine McCann, through her life, her work and her attitude, is the embodiment of a positive approach to ageing. Life is for Living. This book will help you to live better." - Ita Mangan, Age and Opportunity



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Beautiful Thoughts for Beautiful Minds
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Author John Scally offers stories of hope and joy and stories that cause us to pause and ponder, but do not make us anxious or leave us feeling worse for wear.

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Clare's Wild Atlantic Way
Patrick G. Ryan

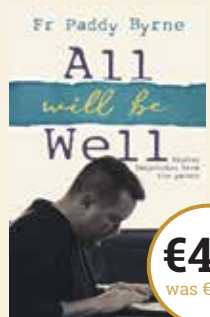
Clare's awe-inspiring coast is a magnificent beauty filled with rugged natural landscapes and man-made structures. The view from the air is even more remarkable than from the ground!



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Hallelujah!
Fr Ray Kelly

A poignant memoir describing Fr Kelly's fascinating journey from parish priest to fame, and following his experience of sharing his exceptional talent with the world.



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All Will be Well
Fr Paddy Byrne

Midlands priest Fr Paddy Byrne draws on his years of parish ministry to outline the current challenges we face, while offering hope through reflections, parables and prayers.



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Going Up the Holy Mountain
Gary Hastings

Learn how prayer and meditation can be used to move closer to God in the silence. Discover the origins of pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick and how you might use the climb as a spiritual resource.



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God's Tender Mercy
Joan Chittister

Sister Joan tackles the virtue of mercy and invites all of us to seek holiness through receiving and then offering God's tender mercy and forgiveness to one another.



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Achill the Island

John F Deane and John Behan

Celebrated poet John F Deane and leading artist John Behan invite us to explore the spiritual and enchanted secrets of Achill Island, presenting the beauty of the Wild Atlantic Coast.



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Medjugorje What it Means to Me

Ed. Louise Hall

This collection of deeply personal stories detail how Irish individuals have found themselves visiting Medjugorje, their experiences whilst there and the impact it has had on their lives today.

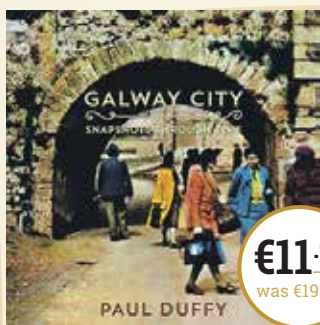


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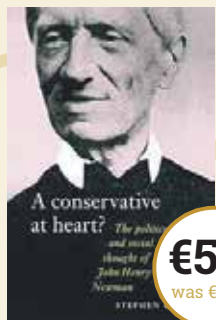


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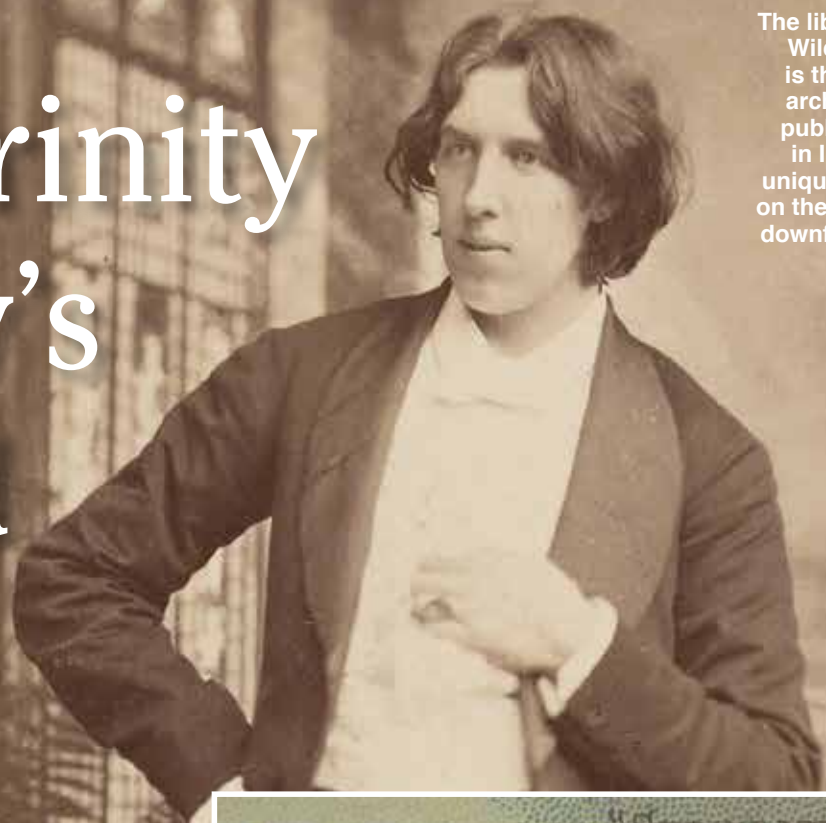
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Insights into Trinity College library's millennium-old treasures

The library's Oscar Wilde Collection is the only Wilde archive held in a public institution in Ireland and is unique in its focus on the playwright's downfall and exile.



Trinity College's new exhibition promises to deliver a rich history of selected artefacts, **Chai Brady** learns

An online exhibition highlighting the histories of the unique and rare collections of the library of Trinity College Dublin is available online and represents 3,000 years of "creativity, memory and knowledge".

The Library of Trinity College Dublin dates back to the establishment of the college in 1592 and is the largest library in Ireland. Its extensive collection of journals, manuscripts, maps and music reflects over 400 years of academic development and amounts to over six million volumes.

Success

Building on the success of the *Director's Choice: The Library of Trinity College Dublin*, published this year by Scala Arts & Heritage Publishers, the new expanded digital platform Director's Choice Uncut features more of the library's treasures.

A Legal Deposit Library since 1801, it receives copies of all material published in the UK and Ireland. Of course, the most famous of its treasures is the Book of Kells – one of the finest examples of medieval art.

The Book of Kells is featured in the exhibition with a fascinating insight into how technology has helped uncover more elements hidden on its pages.

The exhibition page states: "The 9th-century gospel does not always readily yield up its secrets. This summary of the gospel announcing the birth of Christ is an exuberant combination of colour, sinuous letterforms, human figures, peacocks and snakes. A later reader transcribed the display script at the foot of the page: *NATIUITAS / CHRISTI IN BETHLEM IU/DEAE MAGI / MUNERA OFFERUNT ET / INFANTES INTER/FICIUNTUR REGRESSIO* ('The birth of Christ in Bethlehem of Judea. The wise men offer gifts and the children are killed...')."

"The small, seemingly stray detail in the lower left margin of the page [pictured below], standing

alone like a medieval afterthought outside of the framed proclamation of the birth of Christ, went unnoticed in scholarly analysis of this page. Then along came technology: the digitisation of the Book of Kells in 2013 changed the way that it could be studied. Where once one could barely discern the base and stem of a blurred object, now the arms and red outline of a processional cross topped with a bird, probably an eagle, came into focus when magnified at high resolution. The red flared tail at the base suggests that this was a cross that could be carried in procession or slotted into a base to stand on the altar. This minor detail, long overlooked, may represent a cross that once stood in the monastery where the Book of Kells was created."

“The Book of Leinster is an anthology of early Irish sagas, genealogy, medical knowledge, place-name lore and the study of grammar”

The exhibition also includes the Book of Leinster (Leabhar Laighean), which has a claim to be the most important of the 12th-century manuscripts held in the Library of Trinity College Dublin.

The 'prime historian of Leinster' Áed Úa Crimthainn, abbot of Terryglass, County Tipperary, wrote the text during a period of huge ecclesiastical reform and political turmoil in Ireland. The Book of Leinster is an anthology of early Irish sagas, genealogy, medical knowledge, place-name lore and the study of grammar.

In the online exhibition, regarding the Book of Leinster, it states:



“These diverse riches represent 3,000 years of creativity, memory and knowledge”

"Most famously, it contains the Irish 'Book of Genesis' (Lebor Gabála Éirenn), which establishes the place of Ireland, the Irish people and their language in a Biblical world setting. The Irish language, according to this book, was created after the confusion at the Tower of

Babel. It claims that Irish avoided all the 'shortcomings' and 'confusion' found in the other languages and was thus deserving of special recognition. This origin legend was particularly relevant in medieval times when Irish was threatened by the enormous prestige of Latin."



A minor detail in the Book of Kells discovered through the use of new technology.



John Millington Synge's typewriter a No. 5 Blickensderfer presents a lightweight, almost spectral mechanism. Synge, who struggled with both spelling and grammar, in producing clean copy for publishers was to use this little machine for the rest of his life, typing every draft of his literary works on it, from the first to final version.

The Library also bears testament to more recent history, counting letters from Irish WWI soldiers and various artefacts from the Easter Rising – including a bullet fired through the Library roof – among its collection. This selection of objects highlights the diversity of the holdings and illuminates their history.

New digital platform

Librarian and College Archivist, Helen Shenton said: “We are delighted to be able to share some of the extraordinary items that form part of our magnificent collections through this expanded new digital platform Director's Choice Uncut.

“Ranging from the iconic to the less well known, Ms Shenton has selected some of the collections' precious items”

“Taking inspiration from the success of the book *Director's Choice: The Library of Trinity College Dublin* published earlier this year... we decided to further expand the selection of items. These diverse riches represent 3,000 years of creativity, memory and knowledge. We hope you connect with, and are inspired by, these objects...”

Ranging from the iconic to the less well known, Ms Shenton has selected some of the collections' precious items. She is joined by her library staff in telling the stories of each object, which range from the historic to the contemporary.

The selection ranges from 3,000-year-old papyrus scrolls of Egyptian Books of the Dead to Samuel Beckett's minimalist postcards sent from France to his friends; from Dean Jonathan Swift's death mask to the elegantly hand-written drafts of John Banville's novel; from one of Trinity's most celebrated alumni, Oscar Wilde's witty trade cards to John Millington Synge's typewriter; from the Nuremberg Chronicle of 1493, the most famous

woodcut-illustrated book in the western world to the marriage certificate of James III; from the Book of Durrow, a hundred years older than the Book of Kells, to correspondence between Michael Collins and Winston Churchill, so revealing of their respective personalities; from Michael Davitt's Diary to In Fairyland pictures from the elf-world from the Pollard Collection of children's books. There definitely seems to be something for everyone's tastes.

The exhibition can be viewed online using this link: <https://www.tcd.ie/library/exhibitions/directors-choice/>



The 12th-century Book of Leinster



The great prose satirist Jonathan Swift, Trinity graduate and later Dean of St Patrick's Cathedral was declared of 'unsound mind and memory' in 1742. His death mask is thought to have been taken four hours after his death. He died on October 19, 1745, leaving the greater part of his estate to establish St Patrick's, Ireland's first hospital for the mentally ill.



Correspondence between Michael Collins and Winston Churchill from May to August 1922.



The marriage certificate of James III and the 17-year-old Polish princess Maria Clementina Sobieska (1702-1735) is a lavishly decorated manuscript. That the union took place at all is nothing short of remarkable given the events that led up to it: the bride was ambushed and imprisoned at Innsbruck, there was a subsequent jailbreak, a chase across Europe involving faked illness, a maid in disguise, lost jewels and forged passports among other eventful occurrences.



The girl in the photograph is Kathleen Davitt (1888–1895). She stares intently at the camera, wearing a formal dress and a widebrimmed hat. This albumen print, measuring only 40 x 50 mm, is overexposed, making the child appear almost ethereal. The fragile photograph, cracked and roughly cut at the edges, is stuck to the pastedown of a small leather pocket diary. It is part of a collection of correspondence, writings, journals and photographs belonging to Michael Davitt (1846–1906), founder of the Land League, labour leader and international humanitarian.



World Report

IN BRIEF

Christmas trees burned in front of two Israeli Christian churches

● The burning of two Christmas trees in the early morning of December 26 in the northern Israeli Arab city of Sakhne was carried out “intentionally and premeditatedly,” said the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land.

The first tree was apparently burned at around 3 am near the entrance to St Joseph Melkite Catholic Church; three hours later, shortly after a guard left, the Christmas tree in front of the city’s Greek Orthodox church was burned.

“These two incidents indicate that the perpetrators ... targeted a Christian religious symbol, and through it they targeted not only Christians, but the entire society,” the Catholic ordinaries said in a statement December 26.

Pope Francis accepts resignation of Archbishop Kondrusiewicz days after return from exile

● Less than two weeks after Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz of Minsk was allowed to return to Belarus after a four-month exile, the Vatican announced that Pope Francis had accepted the archbishop’s resignation on his 75th birthday.

In a statement January 3, the Holy See Press Office said that the Pope had accepted the archbishop’s resignation in accordance

with the Church canon that requests that a bishop offers his resignation to the Pope at the age of 75.

Archbishop Kondrusiewicz returned to Belarus on December 24, nearly four months after he was barred from entering his native country after he had spoken in defence of protesters following a disputed presidential election.

Relics of St Maximilian Kolbe installed in chapel of Polish parliament

● Relics of Auschwitz martyr St Maximilian Kolbe were installed in a chapel in Poland’s parliament before Christmas.

The relics were transferred December 17 to the Mother of God, Mother of the Church chapel, which also contains relics of the Polish Pope St John Paul II and the Italian pediatrician St Gianna Beretta Molla.

The relics were introduced formally to both houses of the Polish parliament – the Sejm, or lower house, and the Senate – in the capital, Warsaw, at a ceremony attended by Elżbieta Witek, the Speaker of the Sejm, Senator Jerzy Chróścikowski, and Fr Piotr Burgoński, chaplain of the Sejm chapel.

A December 18 press release from the Polish parliament said that the relics were handed over following numerous requests from deputies and senators.

Paraguay’s Congress responds to legalisation of abortion in Argentina with a minute of silence

● The House of Representatives of Paraguay held one minute of silence for “the babies that will die” a few hours after the Senate in neighbouring Argentina legalised abortion.

In a statement and a video released by the Paraguayan Congress’ press office, the representatives observed the minute of silence upon the request of congressman Raúl Latorre.

“I ask for a minute of silence for the thousands of lives of Argentinian brothers and sisters who are going to be lost, even before they are born, based on the recent decision made by the Senate of the neighboring country”, Mr Latorre said.

Catholic bishop released five days after kidnapping in Nigeria

● A Catholic bishop in Nigeria, who was kidnapped on December 27, has been released unharmed, according to the Archdiocese of Owerri.

The diocese, which is in southeastern Nigeria, announced in a social media post late on January 1 that Bishop Moses Chikwe and his driver, Ndubuisi Robert, had been released by their abductors “unhurt and without ransom”.

“More details to come,” the announcement continued. “To GOD be the glory.” The post was accompanied by a photo, with the words “welcome back our beloved Bishop, God heard [the] prayers of his people”.

Twenty Catholic missionaries killed worldwide in 2020

Twenty Catholic missionaries were killed across the world in 2020, the information service of the Pontifical Mission Societies has said.

Agenzia Fides reported December 30 that those who lost their lives in service of the Church comprised eight priests, three religious women, one male religious, two seminarians, and six lay people.

Previous years

As in previous years, the most deadly continents for Church workers were the Americas, where five priests and three lay people were killed this year, and Africa, where one priest, three female religious, one seminarian, and two lay people gave their lives.

The Vatican-based news agency, which was founded in 1927 and releases an annual list of murdered Church workers, explained that it used the term “missionary” to refer to “all the baptised engaged in the life of the Church who died in a violent way”.

The figure for 2020 is lower than in 2019 when *Fides* reported the deaths of 29 missionaries. In 2018, 40 missionaries were killed and in 2017, 23 died.

Fides said: “Even in 2020 many pastoral workers lost their lives during attempted holdups and robberies, ferociously committed, in impoverished, degraded social contexts, where violence is the rule of life, the authority



A red cross stands beside the grave of US-born Sister Dorothy Stang in Anapu, Brazil, who was assassinated in 2005. *Fides* said 20 missionaries died violent deaths in 2020. Photo *CNS*.

of the state was lacking or weakened by corruption and compromises and in the total lack of respect for life and for every human right.”

Feats or actions

“None of them carried out striking feats or actions, but simply shared the same daily life as the majority of the population, bearing their evangelical witness as a sign of Christian hope.”

Among those killed in 2020, *Fides* highlighted the Nigerian seminarian Michael Nnadi, who was murdered after he was seized by gunmen from

Good Shepherd Seminary in Kaduna on January 8. It said that the 18-year-old was killed after he “continued to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ” to his kidnappers.

Others killed this year included Fr Jozef Hollanders, O.M.I., who died during a robbery in South Africa; Sr Henrietta Alokha, who was killed while trying to save students at a boarding school in Nigeria after a gas explosion; the sisters Lilliam Yunielka, 12, and Blanca Marlene González, 10, in Nicaragua; and Fr Roberto Malgesini, who was killed in Como, Italy.

The information service also highlighted Church workers who had died while serving others amid the coronavirus pandemic.

“Priests are the second category after doctors who paid with their lives due to Covid in Europe,” it said. “According to a partial report by the Council of Bishops’ Conferences of Europe, at least 400 priests died on the continent from the end of February to the end of September 2020 due to Covid.”

Fides said that, in addition to the 20 missionaries known to have been killed in 2020, there were probably others.

White House proclamation honours St Thomas Becket’s martyrdom

The White House issued a proclamation honouring the 850th anniversary of the martyrdom of St Thomas Becket and inviting “the people of the United States to observe the day in schools and churches and customary places of meeting with appropriate ceremonies.”

The proclamation, signed by President Donald Trump December 28, described Becket as “a statesman, a scholar, a chancellor, a priest, an archbishop and a lion of religious liberty.”

It also said Becket’s death “serves as a powerful and timeless reminder

to every American that our freedom from religious persecution is not a mere luxury or accident of history, but rather an essential element of our liberty.”

It urged Americans to “celebrate and revere” the saint’s courageous stand for religious liberty and to reaffirm efforts to end religious persecution worldwide.

The White House acknowledged religious believers everywhere who suffer persecution for their faith, particularly Cardinal Joseph Zen of Hong

Kong and Pastor Wang Yi of Chengdu, China, describing them as “tireless witnesses to hope.”

“To honour Thomas Becket’s memory, the crimes against people of faith must stop, prisoners of conscience must be released, laws restricting freedom of religion and belief must be repealed and the vulnerable, the defenceless and the oppressed must be protected,” the proclamation said, adding that the “tyranny and murder that shocked the conscience of the Middle Ages must never be allowed to happen again.”

Underground Catholic bishop dies in China

According to the Catholic outlet *AsiaNews*, headquartered in Rome, Bishop Andrea Han Jingtao, 99, a leader in the underground Catholic Church in China, died December 30. Han Jingtao was the underground Bishop of Siping.

In his early years growing up in a Catholic family, Han received a high-quality formation and education from the Canadian missionaries of Quebec, who ran the apostolic vicariate in his region of China before the communist revolution.

After Mao Zedong took power, the late bishop was sent to a concentration camp where he would be imprisoned for 27 years (1953-1980) “for refusing to participate in the ‘independent and autonomous’ Church, as Mao Zedong wanted,” *Asi-*

aNews reports.

According to recent statistics provided by *AsiaNews*, his diocese includes some 30,000 Catholics, two-thirds of which belong to the underground Church. It has 20 priests and more than 100 nuns.



Edited by Jason Osborne
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Life dies in the darkness



Pro-life demonstrators react after the Senate passed an abortion bill in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Photo CNS.

Argentina legalises abortion during first 14 weeks of pregnancy

Argentina has legalised abortion during the first 14 weeks of pregnancy, despite strong Catholic opposition and polls showing deep divisions on the issue.

Decision

The Senate approved the bill 38-29 December 30 after a 12-hour debate as supporters with green handkerchiefs and opponents with blue handkerchiefs awaited the decision in the streets during the small hours of the morning. President Alberto Fernández presented legislation in November – it was quickly approved in the lower house – and has promised to sign it into law.

The bishops' conference expressed disappointment with the legislation's approval but said in a December 30 statement it "will continue working with firmness and passion in the care and service of life".

"This law which has been passed will further deepen divisions in our country," the bishops said. "We deeply regret the remoteness of our leaders from the feelings of the people, which have been expressed in various ways, in favour of life, throughout our country."

The bishops also pledged to "continue working on the authentic priorities requiring urgent attention in our country: children living

in poverty in increasingly alarming numbers, a number of (those children) dropping out of school (and) the urgent pandemic of hunger and unemployment, which affects many families."

Abortion legal

The legislation, which makes abortion legal during the first 14 weeks of pregnancy and provides access free of charge through the public health system, was modified slightly to allow for conscientious objection and requiring patients under the age of 16 to have the permission of at least one parent or guardian.

Argentina, home country of Pope Francis and still heavily Catholic, becomes

the fourth country in Latin America to legalise abortion, following Uruguay, Cuba and Guyana.

A November poll by the firm Giacobbe and Associates showed 60% of respondents opposed legalising abortion, with 27% in favour. Polls published in 2018, when the Senate narrowly voted against abortion legalisation, showed a closer division.

The bishops lobbied hard against the bill and demonstrated displeasure with Mr Fernández by forgoing a traditional pre-Christmas meeting with the president and publishing an unflattering assessment of Argentina's deteriorating social situation.

Head of German bishops criticises Vatican

In a wide-ranging interview, the head of the German bishops' conference called for far-reaching changes to the Catholic Church and criticised the Vatican's treatment of the Church in his country.

"I would describe myself as conservative because I love this Church and enjoy devoting my life and my strength to it. But I want it to change," Limburg Bishop Georg Bätzing told the magazine *Herder Korrespondenz*.

His remarks were reported by the

German Catholic news agency *KNA*. Among other things, Bishop Bätzing suggested changing Church teaching on homosexuality. The Catholic Church says homosexual acts are "intrinsically disordered," but homosexuals are to be treated with "respect, compassion and sensitivity" and without discrimination.

Bishop Bätzing also wants Church blessings for couples who cannot marry in the Catholic Church. "We need solutions that are not only effective in

private, but also have public visibility – yet make it clear that no marriage is being solemnised," he said.

In addition to homosexual couples, for example, people who remarry after a divorce are not allowed to marry as Catholics without the first marriage being annulled. *KNA* reported that, in the interview, the Limburg bishop also called for reforms of the participation of women in the Church.

Renowned Vatican Latinist Fr Reginald Foster dies on Christmas day

● Fr Reginald Foster, a friar of the Discalced Carmelite Order, passed away on Christmas day at the age of 81.

Originally from Milwaukee in the US state of Wisconsin, Fr Reginald spent almost 40 years as one of the Vatican's foremost experts in the Latin language. He worked in the Latin Letters section of the Secretariat of State from 1970 until his retirement in 2009.

Fr Reginald became known on *Vatican Radio* as the "Latin-lover".

His radio personality was eminently informed by his years of experience as the Latinist of the Popes.

Fr Reginald also received global acclaim for his unique pedagogical method and his presentation of Latin as a living language.

Generations of students, as well as *Vatican Radio* listeners, fell in love with the classical language through him.

He taught for years at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, and held an annual *Aestiva Romae Latinitas*, always offered free-of-charge.

In 2010, the University of Notre Dame awarded Fr Reginald an honorary Doctorate for his contribution to Latin studies.

Administration of Secretariat of State holdings passes to APSA

● With the *Motu Proprio* focusing on areas of competence in economic and financial matters, dated December 26 and published December 28, Pope Francis authorises the transfer of the management of financial investments and real estate holdings owned by the Secretariat of State (including the administration of Peter's Pence), over to the Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See (APSA), effective as of 1 January 2021.

Pope Francis previously announced this decision last August in a letter to the Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin; it was then subsequently developed by a special "Commission of transfer and control" established in early

November.

The transfer marks a significant step towards a centralised management of investments, which decreases autonomy, increases oversight, and demonstrates how Pope Francis not only launches reforms, but accompanies them with guidelines.

At the beginning of the *Motu Proprio*, the Pope writes that "a better organisation of the administration, control and supervision of the economic and financial activities of the Holy See" is fundamental in the reform of the Curia "to ensure transparent and efficient management and clear distinction of competencies and roles".

Pope Francis appeals for help for quake-struck Croatia

● Pope Francis said he is praying for the victims of an earthquake that struck central Croatia December 29, killing seven people, injuring more than 20 and causing extensive damage.

Speaking during the weekly General Audience, the Pope said "I express my closeness to the wounded and to those who have been affected by the quake and I pray in particular for those who have lost their lives and for their families."

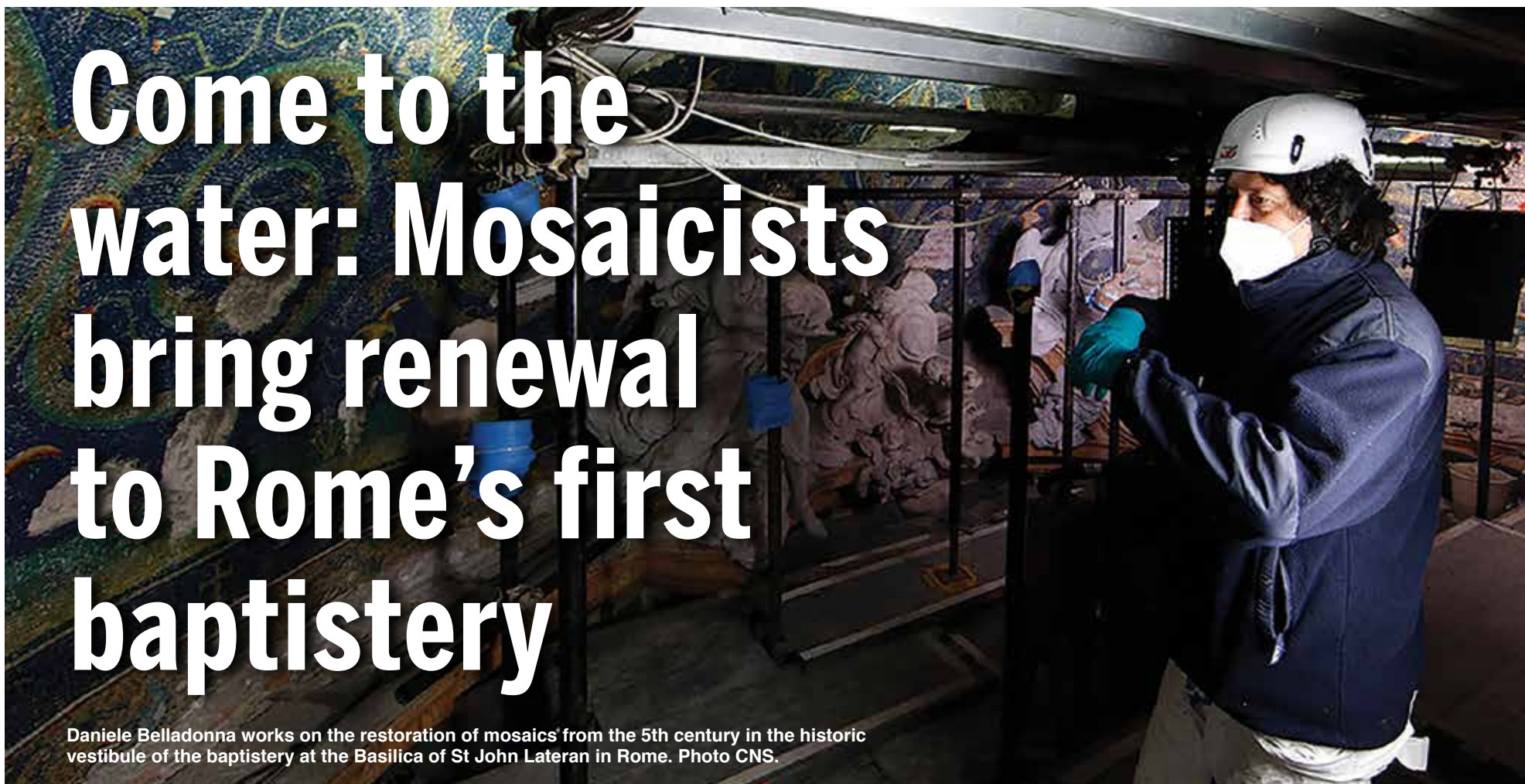
The 6.4 magnitude earthquake was the second to strike the area in two days. Tremors were felt in Croatia's capital Zagreb and as far away as Austria's capital Vienna. Slovenia shut its only nuclear power plant as a precaution.

"I hope that the country's leaders, helped by the international community might be able to quickly alleviate the suffering of the dear population."

The worst hit towns appear to be those of Petrinja, Glina, Sisak and Zazina. The area is still in the throes of aftershocks and officials say rescue efforts continue.

Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic, who rushed to Petrinja, said: "The army is here to help. We will have to move some people from Petrinja because it is unsafe to be here."

Letter from Rome



Daniele Belladonna works on the restoration of mosaics from the 5th century in the historic vestibule of the baptistery at the Basilica of St John Lateran in Rome. Photo CNS.



Carol Glatz

Even though the baptisms the Pope celebrates most years in the Sistine Chapel are better known, the most important place to be baptised in Rome for the past nearly 1,600 years has been the baptistery of St John Lateran.

Baptistery

The ancient baptistery was built in 440 AD just behind the Basilica of St John Lateran, which was the first Christian basilica founded in Rome by Emperor Constantine in 324 AD.

For generations, it had been the only baptistery in Rome, and, according to the baptistery website, there has never been a year since it was built that a baptism has not been celebrated within its walls.

Almost as old as the fifth-century structure itself, there is a half-dome of mosaics from about 450 AD decorating a side chapel, and experts believe they are among the oldest mosaics in Christianity.

“But there’s a problem here. A restoration problem. So the Patrons of the Arts in

the Vatican Museums have stepped forward once again” to dedicate the funds needed to restore the badly damaged and important piece of Christian art and history, Mary Angela Schroth, the project’s coordinator, told *Catholic News Service*.

Most often, water, time and grime are an artwork’s worst enemy, but sometimes the damage is caused by past restorers. That is what mosaicist Roberto Cassio and his small team from the Vatican Museums found when they set up scaffolding and got a close look at mosaics in the chapel’s small apse and on a side wall, Ms Schroth said.

“Cement is too heavy, too rigid and “irreversible” when future repair or removal is needed, he said”

For example, a huge metal clamp juts out from the side wall, jerry rigging into place a large panel of stone mosaics embedded in cement – one of the worst mediums to use for supporting mosaics, Mr Cassio told *CNS*.

Cement is too heavy, too rigid and “irreversible” when future repair or removal is needed, he said. Also, soluble salts in the cement eventually form “crystals” that damage

the mosaic surface.

He said they will remove the cement supports and use a lighter mortar, more in line with current conservation methods.

One restorer in early December was cleaning the marble fragments on the side wall after the cracks and grout work were repaired. Some pieces of dark green serpentine from Greece, red porphyry from Egypt and white palombino from Italy are different shades, Mr Cassio said, since early artisans often culled their materials from assorted Roman ruins and monuments.

Mosaics

Ms Schroth said the mosaics are one of the few examples of “opus sectile” – the technique of cutting and inlaying stone to form pictures or patterns – to still be in the same place where they were created, rather than having been moved to a museum.

“It is a miracle it has survived to our day,” Cassio said.

While the cleaning and repairing of the stone mosaic on the side wall will be fairly routine, the work on the glass mosaics in the apse will be more innovative, Ms Schroth said.

The mosaics in this chapel, dedicated to Sts Cyprian and Justina, are opaque tiles of glass, which offer mosaicists many more colours to choose from than

the limited palette of stones. “It isn’t coloured glass,” however, Mr Cassio said.

There is a different “recipe” for each colour using different minerals and colorants so that when the glass is forged in a furnace, the additives react to the heat, making a unique colour, he said.

“The mosaic emerges as a reflection of divine light”

What made early Rome stand apart from other cities with its mosaic work was the desire that images look more like paintings, he said, so early artisans kept coming up with “new recipes” for new colours, which numbered some 20,000 hues in the 1700s, resulting in “spectacular creations”.

Today there are more than 26,000 colours available, said Mr Cassio, a third-generation mosaicist, who started helping his family’s business when he was 10.

Mr Cassio said using glass and gold mosaics in chapels could create magnificent effects if they were set inclined in a certain way so they could reflect interior and exterior light onto the congregation below.

“The mosaic emerges as a reflection of divine light,” an expression of the divine, he said.

The mosaics – which depict a brilliant blue background covered in leaf spirals and either white angel’s trumpet flowers or calla lilies – are pock-marked with gaps where original tiles have been lost.

Lacunae

These lacunae had been “filled in” using paint during the last restoration in the 1940s, but Mr Cassio said they are working with a 130-year-old mosaic tile shop in Venice to reproduce the missing glass tiles – about 300 kg worth or some 300,000 tiles in 40 colours.

However, “It is important you can tell the difference” between the original work and the new 21st-century touch ups, he said.

According to modern day standards of restoration, a piece of artwork is like a document that must not be altered, but interpreted, and any reconstruction should be recognisable as such.

To do that, Mr Cassio and his team will use tiles with the same colours as the originals, but with “a slightly different tonality” or shade, and they will be set in mortar a few millimetres below the current surface, so even though future restorers will see which parts are new, admirers below will see one smooth, unbroken image.

The symbols of new life from death, sacrifice and purification are replete in

the mosaic’s images of a lamb, doves, white flowers and what may be a silver sword or spear, perhaps evoking the lance that pierced the side of the crucified Christ, from which came out blood and water, signs of his humanity, divinity and baptismal waters.

The baptistery itself, founded on top of a Roman thermal bath, “is linked to the spiritual growth of Christianity and, of course, of our Catholic Church,” Ms Schroth said.

“The story of our Faith is linked to its artistic and historical monuments”

Each element comes together to reinforce “the idea of baptism as renewal, purity, being such a major Sacrament and of course being linked to the importance of this building,” she said.

With the help of the Vatican Museums and its patrons, Ms Schroth said, “we want to make the site of the Lateran baptistery a destination for faith, a destination to understand what is baptism” and how “the story of our Faith is linked to its artistic and historical monuments.”

Carol Glatz is a correspondent with *CNS*.

Does the Vatican have a double standard on papal privacy?



John L. Allen Jr

One certainly can't accuse the Vatican of being part of what Italians call the "no vax" crowd, meaning resistance to the Covid-19 vaccines. Not only did the Vatican nip a Catholic form of such opposition in the bud recently by signing off on the morality of the vaccine, but on December 2 the Vatican announced that its own personnel will begin receiving the vaccine in the second half of January.

“The one question the statement did not address, however, is whether Pope Francis will receive the vaccine”

A statement from Andrea Arcangeli, director of the Vatican's office for health and hygiene, said the Vatican has acquired an ultra-low temperature refrigerator to store the vaccine, and that injections will be delivered in the Paul VI Audience Hall, beginning with health personnel and those with greatest contact with the public, as well as the elderly.

The one question the statement did not address, however, is whether Pope Francis will receive the vaccine. That question has been put to Vatican spokespersons on multiple occasions since the advent of the vaccines, who have maintained a steadfast silence on the grounds that it's a matter of the Pope's "private life".

Last March

A similar tone was struck last March, when Pope Francis pulled out of his annual Lenten retreat on the grounds of having a cold, and many wondered if it was actually Covid. At the time, a Vatican spokesman insisted the Pope did not have Covid, but he refused to say whether the pontiff had been tested – leaving one to wonder, obvi-



Pope Francis walks past Rome police officers during his Christmas message and blessing delivered from the Hall of Blessings at the Vatican December 25. Photo CNS.

ously, how they could be so sure he was Covid-free if he hadn't.

“These visits were always unannounced, in order to avoid a mob scene wherever Francis went”

This longstanding fetish about preserving the Pope's privacy comes to mind in light of a new documentary set to premier tomorrow night on the Italian network RaiTre called *Solo Insieme*, meaning "Only Together," about the pontiff's previously private outings on Fridays once a month to visit private homes, prisons, hospitals, families, former prostitutes, migrants and refugees and recovering drug addicts, which began as part of his Jubilee Year of Mercy in 2015.

It was announced at the time Pope Francis was making these visits, but there

was never any press coverage because they were characterized as "strictly private." It turns out, however, that Francis had a camera crew from Vatican TV following him all the while, and now that footage has been turned into a glitzy new documentary written by a celebrated Italian screenwriter with the assistance of well-known Vatican reporter Orazio La Rocca.

TV commercials

The voice-over comes from an Italian actress named Nicole Grimaudo, who's sufficiently famous here that she was once chosen to replace Antonio Banderas in TV commercials for the Barilla pasta brand. The title of the film is a reference to Francis's celebrated March 27 *Urbi et Orbi* address in an empty St Peter's Square, as Italy's coronavirus pandemic was at its peak, when he said, "We can't move forward on our own, but only together."

These visits were always unannounced, in order to avoid a mob scene wherever Francis went.

Outtakes that have been released ahead of the film's

premier tomorrow night feature several moving scenes, including one where a teary-eyed Francis encounters a group of ex-prostitutes rescued from the street by an Italian Catholic movement known as the "Community of Pope John XXIII" and tells them he wants to "humbly ask forgiveness for the violence that you suffered, including from people who call themselves Christians or Catholics".

At another moment, we see a playful Pope Francis joking that his security team may have been too tired for it, but when a family called asking him to come, he said yes. The nonna (grandma) who answered the door was so dumbstruck she couldn't really speak except for uttering "My God!" as tears began to roll down her face. Francis is seen reaching out to give her a playful smack and then a hug.

It's not that there's anything inappropriate about the Vatican lifting the veil on the Pope's privacy like this. On the contrary, watching the Pope practice the corporal works

of mercy in such a moving way is inspirational, and may move countless people to do likewise – especially when, as expected, the documentary is translated into other languages and makes its way around the world.

“Moreover, one could also argue that the same potential for evangelical good applies to the vaccine question”

The fact Francis consented to being followed around by TV cameras doesn't make these gestures insincere. Instead, it means he's accepted the hard truth that pretty much anything he ever does for the rest of his life will become public sooner or later, so he might as well try to squeeze some evangelical good out of his exposure.

However, it's difficult to resist the conclusion that

the Vatican is awfully selective about when to invoke the Pope's "private life" as a reason for refusing to provide information, given that they're obviously willing to set aside that privacy when it suits their purposes.

Moreover, one could also argue that the same potential for evangelical good applies to the vaccine question. The reason so many other leaders have taken their shots in public, including President-elect Joe Biden in the US, is precisely to inspire others to do the same, and many Catholics might be swayed by knowing that the Pope too is getting the shot.

We'll see how the Vatican chooses to handle the information flow when the injections begin later this month. In the meantime, tomorrow night's broadcast on RaiTre, among other things, offers a reminder of the double standards that sometimes come into play navigating the boundaries between public and private when Popes are involved.

i John L. Allen Jr is Editor of *CruzNow.com*

Letters

Letter of the week

May Ireland's new archbishop be 'a voice out of the fire'

Dear Editor, It was with great delight that I received the announcement that Bishop Dermot Farrell was to become the new archbishop of Dublin diocese. Having been the President of St Patrick's College in Maynooth and doing wonders in the Diocese of Ossory, I'm sure he has the experience, pastoral capability, courage, wisdom and gravitas to tackle the many problems he will no doubt face in the future – it will be no mean feat. Although I was unsure who would be appointed by Pope Francis for this greatly challenging position, it now seems obvious to

me that Bishop Farrell is perfect for the position. In many ways he has big shoes to fill, Archbishop Diarmuid Martin is a force to be reckoned with. Particularly regarding his tackling of the atrocious and horrific scandals of the past, but like he has said himself, he is ready to retire and is tired – it's time for someone else to lead the flock of Ireland's largest archdiocese. It is a challenging time and there is a need for someone to do something different, the Church needs someone to be intuitive, innovative and vocal on important issues even if it's unpopular

in order to handle the great odds stacked against the Church in Ireland. The issue goes deeper than just the drastic financial repercussions wrought by this terrible virus the world faces. For many, many years people have been drifting away from the Church, it is all about re-evangelising now, or the 'new evangelisation' as announced by Pope Benedict XVI in 2010. Let's hope Bishop Dermot Farrell can be a voice out of the fire.

Yours etc.,
Jonathon Murray
Tallaght, Co. Dublin

The Christians of the Holy Land must endure and prosper

Dear Editor, Although it was sad to read about the desperate situation our brother and sister Christians are facing in Bethlehem due to the effects of Covid-19 on their tourism industry (the tourism industry being 90% of Bethlehem's income), it was heartening to see how important their faith is and how they still have hope. The birthplace of our Lord almost seems like a mythical place for those of us living thousands of miles away in Ireland, but there are real people, real Christians holding the fort in the Holy Land doing their best to get by and live lives devoted to Christ.

Let us hold them in our prayers as those in the Holy Land face challenges – even before lockdown and the advent of this virus – that people in Ireland fortunately do not have to nowadays. I hope the holy places will always be visited by those who worship Christ, they have huge significance and can help connect us to the story of Our Lord and the suffering he endured to save all of us in this world of sin. May the Christians in the Holy Land endure and prosper there forever despite the trials and tribulations they undoubtedly face – particularly now.

Yours etc.,
Mary O'Connor
Blanchardstown, Co. Dublin



Bishops should go to courts about suppression of worship

Dear Editor, On Christmas Eve 1986, the High Court delivered an injunction against the Government at the application of a single citizen. The issue was important and time bound; the Government planned to sign an international treaty without holding a referendum, the court understood the urgency. The ensuing Supreme Court case meant that future treaties, of which there have been several, have had to be put to the people. The Government has suppressed public

worship with neither justification nor consultation. Their overreach of power has defied the Constitution and the Declaration of Human Rights on freedom of religion and worship. Those with the *optimum locus standi*, or natural entitlement to bring a case are the Catholic bishops, who preside over the majority of worship in Ireland and who of course under Church Law are the guardians of Catholic worship. It is excellent that a case has recently been brought by a

private citizen but this should not preclude a suit by the bishops. If the bishops believe there is a strong reason why they should not look for a judicial remedy against the suppression of worship, they should tell us. If not, they should have recourse to the courts with the same urgency shown in the case of the late Mr Crotty v An Taoiseach.

Yours sincerely,
Maurice O'Brien
Blackrock Road, Cork

Lockdowns seem to be doing more harm than good

Dear Editor, It seems that many of our medical spokespersons are trying to out-virtue-signal one another as to who can recommend the most stringent constraints on the liberty of the healthy population of the country. They seem still to believe that restrictions on the freedom of individuals and society can by some mysterious process known only to themselves, despite the wealth of hard data to the contrary, control the spread of a virus. Never has a phenomenon been so extensively stud-

ied as this virus, and it is becoming increasingly clear that lockups may very well increase overall mortality in the longer term. I would suggest that the harms done by lockdowns will increase dramatically in coming months, as we see the ill effects of the diversion of our health service to focus on one illness only for almost a year come to pass. Non treatment of chronic inflammatory diseases, delayed diagnoses and treatment of cancer and circulatory disease, the social and

psychological impact of these extraordinary societal restrictions on mental health, not to mention the economic impact. Poverty and despair cause increased mortality across all age groups including infant mortality. Such considerations seem not to feature in the calculations of the good doctors who influence the rules and regulations to an alarming degree. May I suggest that rather than seeking to "protect the health service" from those unfortunate enough

to need medical help this winter for problems other than cough and fever, the emphasis of professional bodies and health planners should be to call for immediate investment in staff recruitment, training, remuneration, improved working conditions and an increase in bed capacity—our provision is currently one of the lowest in Europe per head of population.

Yours sincerely,
Anne Mc Closkey
Waterside, Derry

facebook community

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

New Oireachtas Group to stand up for life and dignity of all

Very good start to a political revolution that will take many years. Saint Cardinal Newman in his essay 'The Isles of the North' refers to such a rebirth after the barbarian destruction of Europe. Saint Columba setting off must have felt like this. – **Hugh O'Rourke**

God bless them! – **Aurelian O'Dowd**

Bro. Kevin 'heartbroken' as food queues increase due to virus job losses

The government give themselves and civil servants pay increases, all the money allocated for these pay increases should be going to Bro. Kevin and people like him. – **Mary Cosgrove**

I had the pleasure of getting to know Bro. Kevin when I lived in Smithfield, Dublin and would attend daily Mass with them in the Capuchin friary each morning. A true ambassador for our Catholic faith. God bless him. – **Paul J. Brosnan**

An amazing man and those who help him. – **Martha Bergin**

They do great work. – **Breda Ennis**

Bethlehem Christians send Christmas message of hope

Pray that the Christians of the Holy Land, especially in Bethlehem and Bethany, may know freedom in a united land in which people of all faiths live in harmony. – **Günther Simmermacher**

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

Where is the evidence churches are dangerous spaces?

Dear Editor, Where is the evidence that people, spaced out in church services, all facing towards the altar and not towards one another engaging intimate conversations, are in danger of Covid transmission? Or where is the danger in well run restaurants, where tables are wellspaced out and partitioned off, with people at individual tables all from one grouping or family household? Really, it is galling where people, who have taken all possible precautions, measured against objective standards, are told by sanctimonious officialdom, anxious to be seen to be doing something by upsetting well run and regulated enterprises, that their activities are not allowed? The reason for the current spike in Covid cases is more likely to be due to people, travelling home from devious locations, many from larger cities, engaging in excited and close conversation with those they have not seen for a while. As unusual as it may seem, in such convivial circumstances, social distancing is a necessary precaution.

Yours etc.,
Andrew Moran
Woodford, Co. Galway

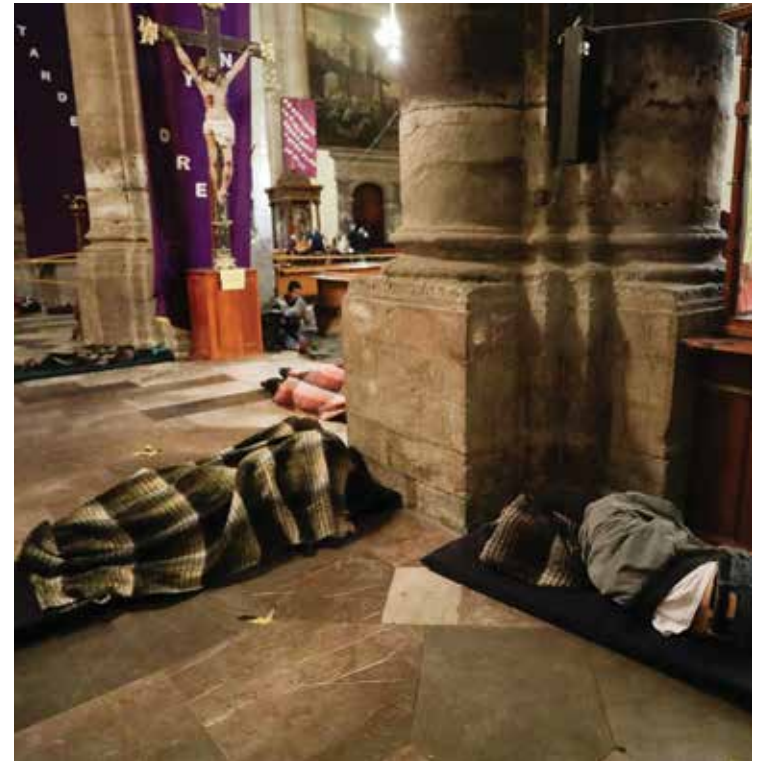
Letters to the Editor

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

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

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

📷 Around the world



▲ **MEXICO:** Homeless people sleep after celebrating a New Year's Eve dinner at Our Lady of Solitude Catholic Church in Mexico City. Photos: CNS

◀ **CHINA:** People gather to celebrate New Year's Eve in Wuhan.



CROATIA: Cardinal Josip Bozanic of Zagreb, Croatia, celebrates the first Mass in the Zagreb cathedral on Christmas Eve, nine months after the cathedral was severely damaged in an earthquake.



AUSTRALIA: Fireworks explode over the Sydney Harbour Bridge and Opera House during a show to celebrate the New Year. Australians were asked to stay home and watch the fireworks on television this year due to the pandemic.



BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA: Migrants walk toward the forest in Bihac, Bosnia-Herzegovina following a fire at migrant centre 'Lipa'.



VATICAN: People pray outside St Peter's Square during Christmas Eve at the Vatican.



What is your practice?

Today, the common question in spiritual circles is not, “What is your church or your religion?” but, “what is your practice?”

What is your practice? What is your particular explicit prayer practice? Is it Christian? Buddhist? Islamic? Secular? Do you meditate? Do you do centring prayer? Do you practice Mindfulness? For how long do you do this each day?

“Discipleship is about more than one prayer practice”

These are good questions and the prayer practices they refer to are good practices; but I take issue with one thing. The tendency here is to identify the essence of one’s discipleship and religious observance with a single explicit prayer practice, and that can be reductionist and simplistic. Discipleship is about more than one prayer practice.

A friend of mine shares this story. He was at a spirituality gathering where the question most asked of everyone was this: what is your practice? One woman replied: “My practice is raising my kids!” She may have meant it in jest, but her quip contains an insight that can serve as an important corrective to the tendency to identify the essence of one’s



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

discipleship with a single explicit prayer practice.

Monks have secrets worth knowing. One of these is the truth that for any single prayer practice to be transformative it must be embedded in a larger set of practices, a much larger “monastic routine”, which commits one to a lot more than a single prayer practice. For a monk, each prayer practice is embedded inside a monastic routine and that routine, rather than any one single prayer practice, becomes the monk’s practice. Further still, that monastic routine, to have real value, must be itself predicated on fidelity to one’s vows.

Hence, the question “what is your practice?” is a good one if it refers to more than just a single explicit prayer practice. It must also ask whether you are keeping the

commandments. Are you faithful to your vows and commitments? Are you raising your kids well? Are you staying within Christian community? Do you reach out to the poor? And, yes, do you have some regular, explicit, habitual prayer practice?

Monastic

What is my own practice?

I lean heavily on regularity and ritual, on a “monastic routine”. Here is my normal routine: Each morning I pray the Office of Lauds (usually in community). Then, before going to my office, I read a spiritual book for at least 20 minutes. At noon, I participate in the Eucharist, and sometime during the day, I go for a long walk and pray for an hour (mostly using the Rosary as a mantra and praying for a lot of people by name). On days when I do not take a walk, I sit in meditation or centring prayer

for about 15 minutes. Each evening, I pray Vespers (again, usually in community). Once a week, I spend the evening writing a column on some aspect of spirituality. Once a month I celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation, always with the same confessor; and, when possible, I try to carve out a week each year to do a retreat. My practice survives on routine, rhythm, and ritual. These hold me and keep me inside my discipleship and my vows. They hold me more than I hold them. No matter how busy I am, no matter how distracted I am, and no matter whether or not I feel like praying on any given day, these rituals draw me into prayer and fidelity.

“My practice survives on routine, rhythm, and ritual. These hold me and keep me inside my discipleship and my vows”

To be a disciple is to put yourself under a discipline. Thus, the bigger part of my practice is my ministry and the chronic discipline this demands of me. Full disclosure, ministry is often more stimulating than prayer; but it also demands more of you and, if done in fidelity,

can be powerfully transformative in terms of bringing you to maturity and altruism.

Living in solitude

Carlo Carretto, the renowned spiritual writer, spent much of his adult life in the Sahara Desert, living in solitude as a monk, spending many hours in formal prayer. However, after years of solitude and prayer in the desert, he went to visit his aging mother who had dedicated many years of her life to raising children, leaving little time for formal prayer. Visiting her, he realised something, namely, his mother was more contemplative than he was! To his credit, Carretto drew the right lesson: there was nothing wrong with what he had been doing in the solitude of the desert for all those years, but there was something very right in what his mother had been doing in the busy bustle of raising children for so many years. Her life was its own monastery. Her practice was “raising kids”.

I have always loved this line from Robert Lax: “The task in life is not so much finding a path in the woods as of finding a rhythm to walk in.” Perhaps your rhythm is “monastic”, perhaps “domestic”. An explicit prayer practice is very important as a religious practice, but so too are our duties of state.

“For a monk, each prayer practice is embedded inside a monastic routine and that routine, rather than any one single prayer practice, becomes the monk’s practice”

Family & Lifestyle

The Irish Catholic, January 7, 2021

Personal Profile

A woman after Our Lady's heart

Page 34



Bringing the pub experience home



While Irish cuisine can seem simple or plain, it is nothing if not hearty. Colcannon, Irish stew, chowder and potatoes of all kinds – they're hearty, filling and rely on a limited selection of ingredients. I read recently the account a nun gave of her childhood in the West of Ireland in the early 1900s. Potatoes and fish were the staples and if the weather was bad, you had eggs instead – that was that.

Over time, these Irish dishes found a home in the pubs and carveries of Ireland, which began to reflect the best of Irish cooking. In addition, the efforts of skilful cooks and access to new ingre-



With pubs and carveries closed, Ruadhán Jones recommends some hearty Irish foods to cook at home

dients has created delicious new dishes and given fresh twists to favourite classics. 'Pub grub' is no mean thing, and some of the finest meals can be had in Irish pubs.

As a result of Covid-19, however, these dishes can be added to a long list of good things unavailable to us. At least, not by the usual means – but we can have a go at

making them ourselves! Here are just a few suggestions of dishes you can try at home to create your own carvery special.

Beef and stout stew

The perfect dish for a cold winter's day, beef and stout stew is a staple of modern Irish cuisine. Combining two of our most

famous culinary creations – stout and stew – it provides a richly textured version of the traditional Irish stew.

An added bonus are the light and fluffy suet dumplings. I remember getting stews when I was younger and picking out the dumplings to eat. With the soaked-up juices, they were a real treat. The stew recipe is fairly standard, with the addition of a pint of stout. I recommend trying Donal Skeeahan's recipe for an especially rich meal. This stew could also be used as a lovely filling for a Guinness pie!

For the dumplings, a uniquely Irish creation, here is a simple recipe:

Sift 100g self-raising flour and a little salt into a bowl. Stir in 50g of shredded suet, some parsley and then enough water to make a soft dough. Shape them into balls and add to the stew for the last 30 minutes of its cooking.

Dublin Coddle

Before we became so heavily reliant on the potato as our primary sustenance, we had a varied cuisine which included more meat and fish than 18th and 19th century Ireland. One of the dishes which was particularly popular in the 17th century was Dublin Coddle.

» Continued on Page 33

Family News



AND EVENTS

HEALTH MINISTER ANNOUNCES CRITICAL CARE EXPANSION

The Minister for Health, Stephen Donnelly TD, has announced a strategic multi-year plan to expand adult critical care capacity from 255 beds to 446 beds.

Work on the plan has already begun and will see 321 adult critical care beds in place by the end of 2021, compared to 255 at the start of this year. This will be funded by €52 million allocated in Budget 2021.

This funding will also allow for education and training initiatives to increase the critical care workforce and for investment in critical care retrieval services.

Completion of Phase Two will see a further 117 beds added through the development of new build capacity at five prioritised sites, including St James's Hospital, the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital, St Vincent's University Hospital and Cork University Hospital.

Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly said: "This investment will help our health service to deliver the right care in the right place at the right time."

HOMELESSNESS FIGURES DOWN ALMOST 2,000 THIS YEAR

Peter McVerry Trust, the national housing and homeless charity, has welcomed a further reduction in the number of people recorded as homeless.

The November 2020 figure revealed a monthly decrease of 243 people to 8,484, meaning that over the last 12 months the number of people accessing emergency accommodation has reduced by 1,964, or 19%.

Pat Doyle CEO of Peter McVerry Trust said, "It has been a year of enormous challenges for society, but the silver lining for people in homelessness is that housing has become more readily available and fewer households have lost their homes this year."

"There has been a huge amount of work done by local authorities and housing associations to provide pathways to housing for people impacted by homelessness. Peter McVerry Trust has been able to help 1,300 people secure a home and this week alone 17 single people and families will move into a home in time for Christmas."

9 OUT OF 10 STUDENTS STUDY IN CATHOLIC SCHOOL, NEW EDUCATION DATA SHOWS

Nine out of 10 students in Ireland attend primary schools with a Catholic ethos with 8 per cent of primary school students in Irish language schools. Half of secondary school students attend Catholic-ethos schools with 3.6% in Irish language post-primary education, according to the Department of Education report. In 2019, there were 153 multi/inter denominational and 250 Irish-language primary schools with 352 multi/inter denominational and 69 Irish language secondary schools.

Meanwhile, the number of people taking up apprenticeships after secondary school more than doubled over the past five years, rising from 8,317 in 2015 to 17,829 in 2019. Numbers in full-time higher education, including universities, institutes of technology and colleges, rose by 3% to 185,474 between 2015 and 2018.

The Department of Education report, also reveals those studying part-time or in flexible way, including remote online learning, has increased steadily, rising by more than a third from 6,015 in 2015 to 9,207 in 2018.

Making God's kingdom a reality today



In this series we have been exploring the depth of meaning in the John Main prayer which we say before meditation. We have examined each of the key phrases in the prayer and now I want to reflect on its overall meaning and how it mirrors the prayer variously known as the 'Lord's Prayer' or the 'Our Father'.

Meditation changes our way of seeing and therefore our way of being in the world; it makes us appreciate the importance of rooting our doing in our being, so that the quality of our doing is informed by the quality of our being. As we discover who we really are in the depths of our being, and deepen our relationship with God as the ground of all being – as we begin to see everything through that lens, the quality of our seeing changes and deepens. And we can more easily figure out how each unique situation calls for us to respond.

“But meditation especially because it lets go of thought, the primary gateway of the desires and demands of the ego”

The Lord's Prayer begins with the words 'Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name' just as the John Main prayer begins Heavenly Father. The Lord's prayer continues: 'Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'

It is good that the prayer contains that phrase 'Thy kingdom come' because the core of Jesus' teaching was about the kingdom of Heaven or the kingdom of God and how we can access it here and now. Unfortunately, for many

Mindful living

Dr Noel Keating



centuries, the Christian tradition has misunderstood those words as pointing to the need for personal salvation, the need to secure a place in the heaven in the next life by doing what we are told.

But when Jesus uses the expression the 'the kingdom of God' he is not talking about the next life but this one, about here and now, the eternal now if you like. He is telling us that there is a way that we can live connected to God and one another in this world, wherever we live, today, right now. The prayer says 'Thy kingdom come, thy will be done'. Not, my will be done, but your will be done; God's will not ours. In other words, we are called to be willing, not wilful. As Richard Rohr notes: "To pray and actually mean 'Thy Kingdom come', we must also be able to say 'my kingdoms go.'"

When we meditate, the repetition of our mantra and the letting go of thought are a symbol of all that we are called to let go in our daily lives as our small but personal contribution to making God's kingdom a reality in the world today.

But how do we learn to distinguish between the desire of the ego and the will of God? This is where meditation comes in, as do all forms of prayer. But meditation especially

because it lets go of thought, the primary gateway of the desires and demands of the ego. In meditation, we move from the head to the heart, we move from a mode of doing to a mode of being. And it is in that mode of being that we discover who we truly are in the depths of our being – we discover the seed of an intimate relationship that was planted when we were born. And we learn that the daily practice of meditation enables that seed to take root in our hearts and our relationship with God to grow. Every time you meditate, you choose love. And every time you choose love - in prayer or in actual connection with another person - every time you choose love, you connect with the divine at a level of experience deeper than you can comprehend.

As we grow in meditation, we learn to live in the present moment, aware of the love that always surrounds us. And we



learn to tolerate and accept our limitations and imperfections because we come to know we are loved for who we are, not for how we are in any given moment. We learn that God does forgive us our trespasses, our failings and we learn to forgive those who trespass against us. We don't have to

be perfect to be loved, we have always been and will always be loved. And we are called to appreciate this truth and to try to live life from that perspective; to live out our lives alert to the present moment, responding with a radical yes to what it asks of us.

Meditation acts as a portal, a gateway, to the universal; it makes us keenly aware of our unity. It moves us beyond a sense of an individual relationship with Christ to an understanding that we are all called to be one with Christ and hence with one another. The Lord's prayer does not contain the words 'I' or 'me' or 'mine' but the words 'our' and 'us' appear many times.

Every time we sit in meditation, as we allow ourselves to be present to reality – in all of its ordinariness and extraordinariness – we leave ourselves open and vulnerable to a graced encounter with love that has the capacity to transform us so that we can play our part in building the kingdom of God where we live, today. I invite you now to spend some time in the stillness and silence of meditation where you can begin to experience that truth for yourself.

📌 After 40 years in the education sector Noel Keating was awarded a PhD for his research into the child's experience of meditation and its spiritual fruits. Noel now leads, in a voluntary capacity, a project which offers free in-service to primary schools who may wish to consider introducing meditation as a whole-school practice. Noel is author of *Meditation with Children: A Resource for Teachers and Parents*.

» Continued from Page 31



This dish is effectively an Irish fry turned into a casserole, combining bacon, sausage and potato in a dish which is 'coddled' or slow cooked. When cooked well, the juices should be fairly thick and plentiful, and the is invariably served with soda bread to mop up.

“I picked up a copy in a charity shop and was pleasantly surprised by the quality of the recipes”

While it is traditional to simply boil the rashers and sausages, I recommend frying them lightly first. I've made this recipe a few times and I find frying them gives a little extra colour and seems to help the sausages to retain more flavour. It's up to you! For a good recipe, try the *The Complete Irish Pub Cookbook*. I picked up a copy in a charity shop and was pleasantly surprised by the quality of the recipes.

Scrumptious sides

The first two recipes make great main courses and are sufficient in themselves. However, if you would like to add a little extra colour and flavour to your dinner, then I would recommend another Irish staple, red cabbage, with a sweet-and-sour twist. Cooked with apples and flavoured with spices, it makes a sweet, but tangy side for any dish. The best version is a German variant, which *Simplyrecipes.com* provide a good recipe for.

No list of Irish dishes would be complete without some sort of potato recipe. I don't know if it's true, but a saying was attributed to Irish emigrants to America, that “a day without potatoes is a day without nourishment”. There are plenty of dishes to choose from – boxty cakes (potato pancakes), champ and col-

cannon are the best known and with good reason.

Colcannon is a traditional Irish dish served often at Halloween. Some chefs will mix in lucky charms or coins, much in the fashion of barmbrack. Sufficient as a dish in its own right, it would also make a great accompaniment for the stout stew.

There are many recipes, but the basics are cabbage and mashed potato which are mixed together and either served straight away, or else baked for 30 minutes to create a potato casserole. Other ingredients can include spring onions, kale or leeks and for a richer recipe, you could add a splash of cream.

Delicious desserts

When you think of Irish desserts, you're as likely as anything to think of apple tart or apple crumble. That at least is what it brings to my mind and when we were younger, we had it with such frequency that my sister once exclaimed “not apple tart again!” But though they are the classics, there are a number of modern Irish desserts which are worth trying out.

The first is Irish whiskey trifle, a good dish with which to warm the cockles! Trifles are said to have a stronghold in Ireland, although our modern efforts can't match the pomp and circumstance of the

19th century English extravaganzas. Typically, Irish trifle is a combination of flan, canned fruit and jelly, combined with cream and custard and soaked in sherry.

For a spruced-up version, I recommend using macaroons, sherry and Irish Whiskey, as well as raspberry jam and homemade custard. It makes for as wholesome an experience as you can get at home, while still remaining very manageable. For this recipe, I would once again recommend the excellent *The Complete Irish Pub Cookbook*.

“I would also recommend adding more Irish Cream than most recipes advise as they are often more chocolate flavoured and less distinctive”

But this leads me finally to what I consider to be the *pièce de résistance*, the Irish Cream cheesecake. This is an unbaked cheesecake which uses no gelatine, and yet still maintains a creamy and firm consistency due to the high chocolate content. It makes use of the popular Irish Cream liqueur (such as Baileys) which lends a sharpness to an otherwise sweet dessert and adds a bit of flare.

The one thing to remember about this dessert is that it will need plenty of time to refrigerate in order to set properly. Ideally, it is best left overnight or at least cooked the morning of. I would also recommend adding more Irish Cream than most recipes advise as they are often more chocolate flavoured and less distinctive. I hope this list helps you bring some of the hearty goodness of pub-grub home!



Faith — IN THE — family



Bairbre Cahill

We went walking in Glenveagh yesterday. It is a walk we have done many times but this time we took a notion and walked it backwards, beginning at the end and ending up at the beginning. What has always been a nice walk was transformed. Coming from a height, down now towards the lake, with the hills in the background and a winter sun breaking through was breathtakingly beautiful. Had we not taken a different course we would not have seen it.

It is not the first time over recent months that we have taken a different route. With the restrictions on travel our reliance on the beauty of our own county has increased and we have ventured off well-worn paths to explore new possibilities. Our understanding of and appreciation for Glenveagh has grown immeasurably. Walking the path now from the castle to the head of the glen we know that off to our left is a path that takes you up through woodland into another valley where the golden eagles were reintroduced to this wonderful wild place. Venturing off the main path to the right a sheep track takes you over the stream and up around and behind Dooish, to a tumbling stream and further up to a height where we have stood and watched deer. We have seen how a small river flows along between the hills before it tumbles down in to the waterfall you see from the main path. So when we stand now on that well-worn main path we are aware of the 'more' that we have seen, the perspective that we have because of where we have ventured to.

In many ways I could talk about Glenveagh in terms of epiphany – an opening of our eyes, a realisation, a new way of seeing and knowing. As we celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany now I find myself wondering about how our eyes have been opened over the past year. Are we open to new ways of seeing and knowing? I think it is wonderful timing that Pope Francis has invited us to a year of reflection on *Amoris Laetitia* – *The Joy of Love*, his apostolic exhortation about family life and love. Pope Francis makes it very clear that he sees the family as an image or icon of God. In the relationships of family life he sees an echo of the Trinity. If

we want to know what holiness is, Pope Francis suggests we should look at the love that is lived out day by day in families. He does not simply mean in the Holy Family of Mary, Joseph and Jesus but in our families, messy and noisy, complex and wonderful as they are. In *Amoris Laetitia* as well as in all Pope Francis' other writing he reminds us constantly that we live in a world charged, brimming over with the presence of God.



In these weeks and months of Covid restrictions it is painful and frustrating not to be able to attend Mass. We may well question the rationale of many of the guidelines. It would be a terrible mistake however to fall into the trap of feeling like victims, feeling that, because we cannot receive the Eucharist we are bereft of God's presence. The generosity of God's goodness and grace is not limited.

The impact of a few days of terrible weather, the touch of cabin fever added to the normal niggles of family life and amplified by the strain of constant Covid vigilance had left me feeling wound up, hassled and somewhat overwhelmed as we headed off on that walk yesterday. We left the path at one stage and came down to the shore of the lake. I hunkered down watching the winter sun reflecting off the water as it gently rippled. The sun was a white orb at the top of the glen. It occurred to me that it was not unlike a monstrosity holding the Eucharistic host during exposition. Here for me was a moment of Eucharistic gratitude, of healing reconciliation, of confirmation of God's grace. A change of direction – a new perspective – an epiphany.

This pandemic has sent us all on a journey that we could never have expected. Let's be open to the new perspectives it may offer, the epiphanies it may present us with.

A woman after Our Lady's heart

Personal Profile



Jason Osborne

Attempting to follow in Our Lady's footsteps, Sarah Deegan places the utmost emphasis on our common foundation as children of God, whether it's in her work as a secondary school teacher or in her work with the Legion of Mary. Her faith is wrapped up in the Legion, with her parents being strong proponents of the work it does and fostering a Marian spirituality in their own home.

"I grew up in a Catholic household anyway to begin with. Both my parents were and are in the Legion of Mary, they have been for most of their lives – they actually met in the Legion of Mary, so the Legion of Mary is going to be mentioned a lot during this interview," she laughs.

“There I met the Faith community that I think is just so important on your journey in the Faith”

"We grew up as a practicing Catholic family. Our family life consisted of daily, for the most part, but then over the years, weekly, rosaries together, so we always try to pray it together at least once a week. Going to Mass every Sunday, so it was, I suppose, handed to me on a silver platter in many ways."

Asked whether she always took her faith as seriously as she does

Sarah Deegan (left).



now, she offered a "no", before explaining the necessary steps her faith went through in order for it to blossom into its current form.

Faith

"It was more, you know, growing up as a kid it was just something that we did, it was just habitual. That it was something I'd taken for granted in many ways, but what changed for me was over the, just the last couple of years really, of being in college doing my undergraduate. There I met the Faith community that I think is just so important on your journey in the Faith.

"What really changed it for me because I suppose with growing up in a Catholic family, outside of the walls of your home, that sense of Catholicism isn't so much there when you're in school for a lot of people. But it was then in university that I found, of course, the Legion of Mary in my university, and I got to know people of like mind and that's what changed it for me. It not only became then just something that I did – it was in the walls of my home – but then something that I did in my life with friends. And, of course, your family is where your foundations are set, but it's so important to be

able to be the person that you are outside the walls of your home. And that's what helped me big time, was being able to be that person that I was with friends and then of course, with that as well, being able to be that person of faith with your friends. It's just so important."

“Sarah sees her proximity to her students as providing her with an ideal opportunity to show them God in her actions and attitudes towards them”

With the faith well established in her, Sarah described the renewed confidence she found in dealing with those of all faiths and none. A common report these days is that young people of faith struggle to get by without slander or social hostility coming from different quarters – Sarah observed differently.

Friends

"Maybe I'm just blessed, but I've found that with the group of friends that I have, I've found just, my confidence as a Catholic began to grow because, like I was saying, I was practicing my faith at home, but then also outside with my friends so what ends up happening really was that I started to build this confidence that it didn't really seem to matter who I was with, I was just so comfortable with who I was. With that, I noticed that a lot of people who, say, wouldn't share the same faith or ideals as me were very tolerant, very tolerant of my beliefs and a lot of them seemed to actually admire that."

This openness and willingness to share God with those of

different backgrounds makes Sarah ideal for the job she finds herself doing – a secondary school teacher. Initially planning on primary teaching, an experience of teaching high school students in Spain with whom she could "relate" proved decisive in reorienting her towards secondary teaching. Far from forcing her beliefs on her students, Sarah sees her proximity to her students as providing her with an ideal opportunity to show them God in her actions and attitudes towards them.

Secular school

"The school that I'm in at the moment – it's a very small school. It is a secular school, so it's a non-denominational school, so initially I was a bit nervous about that, you know, I wondered about what position might that leave me in in particular, but actually it's been a huge blessing because of course, I wouldn't, say, openly address my faith in the sense of, you know, saying a prayer at the start of class or anything like that...it's more just being like that – a witness, in a way, to the Faith through just, I suppose, little comments here and there, that they seem to take onboard. But I think the biggest thing that has helped me in the school with my faith is being able to take each student as a child of God and to treat them accordingly which has helped me big time.

"It's more important to them to be treated with love and respect than, you know, to actually be taught the school subjects, so it's just been a wonderful blessing in bringing out the best in me in being able to treat them that way, and then also to be able to bring them that sense of God's love in the best way that I can. It's been a wonderful journey so far I have to say."

Sweet Treats

Laura Anderson



A traditional treat: cherry almond loaf cake

This is an old-fashioned family favourite that remains ever popular. It is an essential recipe for every baker's repertoire. There is nothing better with a cup of tea in the evening with its crunchy crust and delicious buttery inside studded with sweet pops of cherry.

Ingredients

- 200g red glace cherries
- 190g butter
- 175g golden caster sugar
- 3 medium eggs
- 1 tbsp lemon zest (about 1 medium lemon)
- 1 tsp almond extract
- 200g self raising flour + 1tbsp
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 75g ground almonds
- 2 tbsp milk
- Flaked almonds for the top (optional)



Preheat the oven to 180°/160°Fan/Gas mark 4. Grease and line a 900g/2 lb loaf tin. This also works well in a square or round tin if you prefer. Prepare the cherries by first quartering them and then rinsing them in a sieve to remove any excess syrup. Using a paper towel pat them dry as best as possible. Toss them in 1tbsp of flour. All of these steps will help prevent them from sinking too much during baking. Some level of sinkage is inevitable in a cherry cake so don't panic if it happens to you, it will still taste great!

Using an electric whisk, beat the butter and sugar together on high for about two minutes until pale and creamy. Reduce speed to medium and beat in the eggs one at a time. Then add the almond extract and lemon zest. Working in parts, sieve and then fold

in the flour gently until it is fully combined. Toss about two-thirds of the prepared cherries in the ground almonds and then fold these along with the milk into the mixture. Pour this into the prepared tin. Use the back of a spoon to smooth the level of the loaf. Lay the remaining cherries on top and gently poke them just under the surface. This should ensure you will have some fruit near the top of your loaf. Sprinkle the flaked almonds on top at this point if you are using them. Bake in the oven for about 30 mins until golden brown on top, then cover with foil to stop it browning too much and bake for a further 30-40 mins until springy to the touch and a skewer inserted into the middle of the cake comes out clean. The cooking time will vary depending on what shape tin you use. Leave to cool in the tin for about 15 mins before transferring onto a wire rack to cool fully. This cake freezes well so it's a good recipe to double up and make two at a time. It will last for a week if kept in an airtight container.

TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



RTÉ let itself down with juvenile anti-religious humour

The Christmas to New Year season is a rich time for TV and Radio programmes with a religious flavour. Much of the material is made up of repeats so I'm always on the lookout for something different.

The mockumentary **Death to 2020** (Netflix) was ideal viewing for New Year's Eve – a scattershot and satirical review of a tumultuous year with a high-profile cast including Hugh Grant, Samuel L. Jackson and Lisa Kudrow. There were plenty of laughs, too much gratuitous bad language and to a great extent the targets were predictable – Donald Trump and Boris Johnson got the usual trashing but there were plenty of digs at Joe Biden (uncomfortably, most were about his age), and even some mild send up of the 'woke' crowd. The satire was turned off however when it came to 'Black Lives Matter', when the tone changed to preachy.

Not preachy

Definitely not preachy was **The Goes Wrong Show: The Nativity** (BBC One). I'm a fan of the series having seen the live Goes Wrong Show and was looking forward to this, but while there were very funny moments (of a slapstick kind) I thought they crossed over the line of respect a few times which was a pity. The



Hugh Grant was just one of the high-profile stars of *Death to 2020*.

Nativity is a story beloved of and sacred to Christians and while experimenting with the story to present it in a creative contemporary way is fine in my opinion (e.g. BBC's own Liverpool Nativity from a few years ago) there needs to be an underlying respect and even better when there's understanding and warmth.

Much worse was the atrocious 'God as rapist' skit that formed part of the **NYE Countdown Show** (RTÉ One). These are normally insuffer-

able so I don't bother, but looked back when I heard rumblings of a controversy. I did like the music (was impressed by Prof. Luke O'Neill's performances) but the mock news items from 'Waterford Whispers' were embarrassing – the low point of Aengus MacGríanna's news reading career. This was the kind of juvenile anti-religious humour usually found late on RTÉ 2, but on a high-profile RTÉ One show it was particularly

inappropriate, crass, tone deaf and offensive. By early afternoon Saturday, RTÉ had issued an apology, but, while welcome, it was minimalistic, and didn't express any regret or 'purpose of amendment'. Their initial report of the apology was rather understated too, referring to complaints by "a number of people", when by its own account it was "around 600". By Saturday evening it was over 1,100 and counting.

You couldn't fault **The Cork Nativity** (RTÉ One) on the respect front – just five minutes long it was an endearing presentation of the Gospel story, read by a variety of people from Cork city and county. It was described as "a hope-filled journey, celebrating the county's diversity, culture, places and sights" and it lived entirely up to expectations. It was warm and sincere as we met lots of people, young and older, and many involved in works of service – the priest, the staff of emergency services, teachers, Cork Penny Dinners and more.

Commended

Also to be commended is **The Tullamore Nativity** (RTÉ News Now), a presentation by the Christian traditions of the town. I liked Fr Joseph Gallagher's introduction when he spoke of "a light that only Christ can bring" and, with Covid-19 in mind,

PICK OF THE WEEK

THE SONG OF THE LONGING HEART

EWTV Saturday January 9, 9.30pm

See how one Church musician and composer creates the beautiful music that is an integral part of our sacred liturgy.

NEW! VATICANO

EWTV Sunday January 10, 8.30pm, Monday January 11, 7.30pm, Tuesday January 12, 2.30pm

An interview with Cardinal George Pell, who spent 405 days in prison after being accused of sexual abuse before Australia's highest court overturned his conviction and freed him.

GREAT IRISH INTERIORS

RTÉ One Wednesday January 13, 7.30pm

As one of the most famous castles in Ireland, Kilmore Abbey, has served as a project of romance, a holiday home and a convent school over the course of its 151 year history.

"a road that we've never gone before". Rev. William Hayes, of the local Presbyterian community explored the concept of the 'loving Word' as he reflected on the beginning of St John's Gospel. There was a mixture of prayers and readings as well as some socially-distanced music from local singers and musicians, mostly school going.

A Christmas Leap of Faith

(RTÉ Radio 1) was a leisurely reflective programme for early Christmas morning. Selected voices from the Mornington Singers, the Palestrina Choir and the St Mary's Pro-Cathedral Girls' Choir added a seasonal musical flavour, journalist Ellen Coyne spoke of her return to Catholicism, Alice Leahy

reflected on homelessness and how radio is a common and convenient way for them to stay connected. Rev. Chris Kennedy referred to the 'ache of Covid' and I'm sure many could relate to that. Margaret Slater, chaplain at the Mater Hospital described the particular challenges posed by Covid-19 for her work, while Sr Colette of the Poor Clares joined in from Galway. She found that in coronavirus times they were getting lots of letters and visits from people in the need of prayer – a good formula for 2021.

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Music

Pat O'Kelly



Bach's cantatas to bring us to the Epiphany

Before moving to Leipzig in 1723, Johann Sebastian Bach held several positions as organist and choirmaster in Arnstadt, Mühlhausen, Weimar and Cöthen. In Weimar he served under Lutheran Duke Wilhelm Ernst (1662-1728), who had a penchant for religious devotions and aimed to maintain the Church's ancient musical tradition. This was to Bach's advantage giving him a very solid foundation for his own ecclesial compositions.

While he had already written a number of cantatas suitable for the Christmas season, in the autumn of 1734 Bach decided he needed something fresh and set about six new ones covering the period from Christmas



Johann Sebastian Bach Day to the Epiphany. However, with time and his busy schedule against him, he felt compromise was necessary. The result was a combination of old and new with the

end product having six self-contained but linked works whose component parts form a single cohesive cycle.

Interestingly, Bach only began working in earnest on what we know as his six-day Christmas Oratorio in December 1734. He drew his texts from the nativity narratives of St Luke and St Matthew with the non-biblical parts of the libretto written most likely, though not completely certain, by Christian Friedrich Henrici (1700-1764) with additional contributions from Bach himself.

Pseudonym

Henrici used the pseudonym Picander when he established himself in Leipzig in 1721 and

supplied Bach with numerous sacred texts, over the years, including those of the St Matthew and St Mark Passions – the latter work now unfortunately lost.

With time of the essence, the pragmatic Bach, who obviously believed in the old "waste not, want not" maxim, turned to three earlier secular cantatas, composed for specific royal occasions and unlikely to be heard again. With some modifications and Picander's new texts, he was half-way there.

Adding three new, in all but name, cantatas Bach directed the first performances during the festive season from December 25, 1734 to January 6, 1735 and dividing the

premieres between Leipzig's main churches of St Thomas and St Nicholas, close to each other in the old town.

Oratorio

The oratorio's six-day sections primarily follow Bach's usual cantata format with chorales, choruses, recitatives and arias. The tenor is given the further role of evangelist – something similar to, but not as extensive as, that in his passions. The introductory movement of the second day differs from the other choral openers. An expressive orchestral sinfonia, oboes represent shepherds with flutes and strings denoting the angelic choir.

Throughout the work there are some wonderful

arias and duets not least Our Lady's tender alto lullaby in day two. An alto aria in day three describes Mary's innermost feelings about the miracle of the Saviour's birth and a jaunty soprano and bass duet addresses the Child while emphasising love and devotion.

It is uncertain whether the oratorio was repeated in Leipzig during the composer's lifetime after which, like most of his music, it was consigned to oblivion. Even Mendelssohn's enthusiastic Bach revival in the late 1820s and 1830s failed to retrieve it. However, following a Berlin performance in 1857, the piece gradually found its niche in choral societies' repertoires worldwide.

BookReviews

Peter Costello

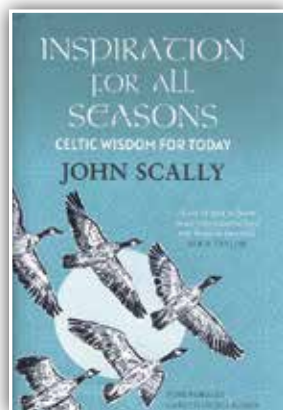


Inspiring thoughts and words from Celtic sages and modern writers

Peter Costello

Inspiration for all Seasons: Celtic Wisdom for Today

by John Scally
(Black & White Publishing, Edinburgh, £14.99)



Coming to hand just at the end of one year and the beginning of another, with many changes of all kinds in the offing here in Ireland, and around the world, this book was a delightful surprise.

Here, for once, is a book on "Celtic wisdom" that lives up to the author's expectations and the reader's hopes. I enjoyed greatly from the first pages, and warmly commend it, and would suggest that here is a book that will outlive its moment of publication. St Francis and G.K. Chesterton would have loved it, or at least parts of it. But that is the joy of the book there is something here either in the edited materials or the author's own words, for everybody.

It is pervaded by the influence of John O'Donoghue, all those books beginning with Anam Cara and so many others. John Scally may well become 'a soul friend' too to many of his readers. But it was also enjoyed by Alice Taylor who is in touch with the feelings that move many ordinary readers.

The material is arranged over the course of a year, but according to the ancient seasonal calendar of the Celts. It does not end, so much as recycles, for with winter ending another spring begins.

It is an anthology of extracts, poems and essays by the author and comments from friends deeply engaged as poets in the real depths of Celtic wisdom and the societies of yesterday and today that produce it. It also contains - which books of this kind rarely do - a strain of real humour and amusing witticism.

John Scally is a well-established broadcaster and author with some 40 books to his credit, mostly relating to the GAA and rugby matters. But all that, he says, is only in his "spare time".

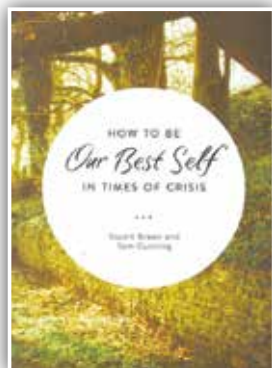
With a doctorate in theology, his "real job", so to speak, is as Beresford adjunct assistant professor of ecclesiastical history in the department of religions and theology, Trinity College Dublin. So perhaps reaching out to large numbers of people may come more easily to him than it does to many other theologians.

Self-Help in hard times

Peter Costello

How to be Our Best Self in Times of Crisis

by Stuart Breen and Tom Gunning
(Veritas, €7.99)



As human beings we seemed made to thrive at times in moments of danger. Yet the present pandemic, being what it is, created great and unexpected troubles: physical, mental and spiritual.

This little book by two writers experienced in self-help may prove of great use to those wanting, in a brief form, some immediate help in coping through established means.

Stuart Breen, for instance, is involved in the Irish Tai Chi Chuan Association. Tom Gunning is involved in religious instruction for young people and is the co founder of the Parable Garden Educational Projects in Co. Wexford. Images from this walkway are used in the text to great effect, and it seems to be a 'must-see place'.

The central idea of this booklet lies in the fact that in dealing with any crisis we have to have care for our bodies, our mind and our spirit. We have to treat not just a single symptom, but the whole person. By ceasing to lament the changes and danger that have come upon us, we can find our way back to our "best selves". We have to live with and within the world instead of trying to escape it.

Those who will be feeling the effect of the new levels of lockdown will greatly benefit from these brief pages. But they should not be an end in themselves, but perhaps the first step on a journey of a thousand miles that will lead to new things, and for many that will involve the discovery of new depths in the old, and great benefits in the new world, a world which can be made new every day.

A Pope with his eye

Let us Dream: The Path to a Better Future

by Pope Francis with Austen Ivereigh
(Simon & Schuster (£10.99))

Peter Costello

This new book by Pope Francis is a very striking one. It contains, which is unusual in Papal works, pages of autobiography of the three periods of his own personal moments of isolation, moments akin to that which millions are passing through with Covid-19.

But, it also contains comments on such things as the harsh treatment of the Uyghur's in Xinxiang, with millions in concentration camps for reorientation.

The French edition of this book is entitled *A Time to Change* which is more imperative, more challenging than the version here. Dreams are not enough, the Pope is suggesting, action is needed and all Catholics must be part of it.

“Dreams are not enough, the Pope is suggesting, action is needed and all Catholics must be part of it”

One is reminded of that line in Yeats about our own troubled era now being marked: "In dreams begin responsibilities". It is those unfaced up to responsibilities that present the greatest challenges to states,



communities, institutions (such as the Church), and to individuals.

By one of those new departures that some would once have called providential, a Catholic president of the United State of America will be in office to take action. A practising Catholic, one imagines that President-Elect Joe Biden will have

been reading this very book over the Christmastide.

The book breathes a personal warmth that will melt many an icy heart. Not so much a sign of the time, but a sign for the future. The Pope's critics call on him to lead to serious reforms. But journalists do not sit and have to face the lives and

The eventful history of Kerry in Tudor Days

Deeds Not Words: The Survival of the Fitzmaurices Lords of Kerry 1550 to 1603

by Martin Moore
(Gabha Beag publications, €20.00)

J. Anthony Gaughan

This splendid study examines the political and military roles of the Fitzmaurices, Lords of Kerry and Barons of Lixnaw, in the Tudor Years of 1550 to 1603. It shows their involvement in local, national and international events of the sixteenth century, from their links to the Kildare revolt of the 1530s through the Desmond rebellions (1569-1583) and the Nine Years' War. The work provides detailed accounts of a number of fascinating events during that period. One such was the battle of Lixnaw in July 1568, hitherto for the most part overlooked by historians.

In April 1568, Thomas Fitzmaurice Sixteenth Lord Kerry,

and his forces raided the territory of the Earl of Desmond, taking "1,100 kine, besides household stuff and broke two churches". In the following July, Desmond mustered his forces and allies and devastated the lands of Thomas Fitzmaurice. Those who survived the onslaught took refuge in the fortified castle at Lixnaw. Desmond and his forces laid siege to the castle. However, skillfully making use of his knowledge of the geographical features of the area, Fitzmaurice succeeded in routing the vastly more numerous invading force.

Another such event was the siege and capture of Glin Castle in July 1600. Sir George Carew arranged his canons around the castle. He was holding the knight's young son as a hostage. In a parley with the knight he threatened to kill his son if he did not order the surrender of the castle. This he refused to do. Eventually, after a courageous and determined defence, the government 80-man

garrison were overcome and put to the sword.

“A wanted man, he succeeded in evading capture until the end of the war”

The siege and capture of Listowel Castle was equally dramatic. Thomas Fitzmaurice, Eighteenth Lord Kerry, was one of the leaders of the Irish rebels. His castle at Listowel was the last to hold out in Munster against the English. In November, Sir Charles Wilmot and his forces attacked the castle. After a courageous defence lasting three weeks the garrison surrendered when the castle was mined. The 18 men of the ward were hanged and women and children were allowed to depart. In the confusion after the surrender, an old woman smuggled Patrick, the five-year-old son of Thomas, to safety. However, he was located by

Readers should note that *The Irish Catholic* circulates throughout the island of Ireland and the book prices listed are the retail price recommended by the Irish or British publishers, in either euros or sterling, as a general indication of what purchasers may expect to pay.

- and his mind - on the future



Pope speaking at Christmas 2020 in Rome.

experiences of 1.2 billion Catholics, largely in Latin America and Africa. From Dublin, Washington, London and Paris the view is very different to that in Peru, Central Africa, or indeed parts of Argentina, where the real face of Catholicism is to be seen, with its pinched faces, swollen bellies and lack of schools.

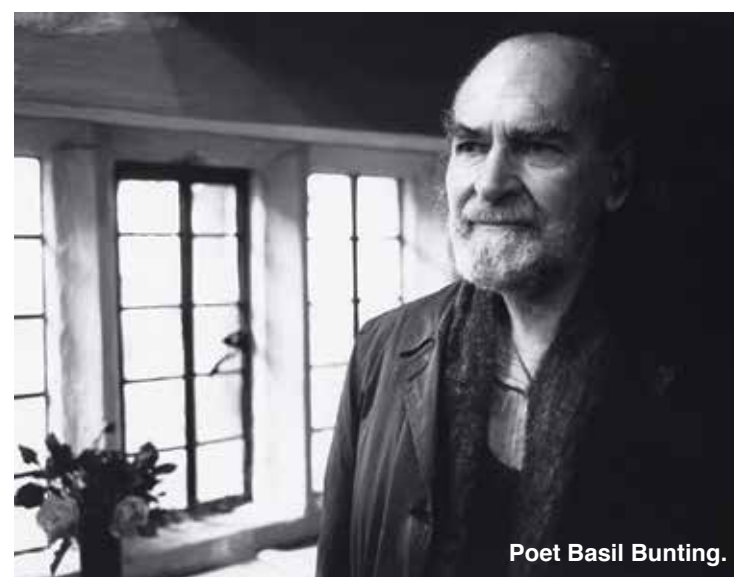
This book can outline the problem, but one man alone cannot change the ways of a world which does not want to change, whose great ambition is to “get back to normal”. The origins of the world’s problems, dear reader, as the Pope knows only too well, face each of us every day in the mirror.



Austen Ivereigh taking an overview of Rome.

“It is those unfaced up to responsibilities that present the greatest challenges to states, communities, institutions (such as the Church), and to individuals”

A Poet’s Lost Year by Desmond Egan



Poet Basil Bunting.

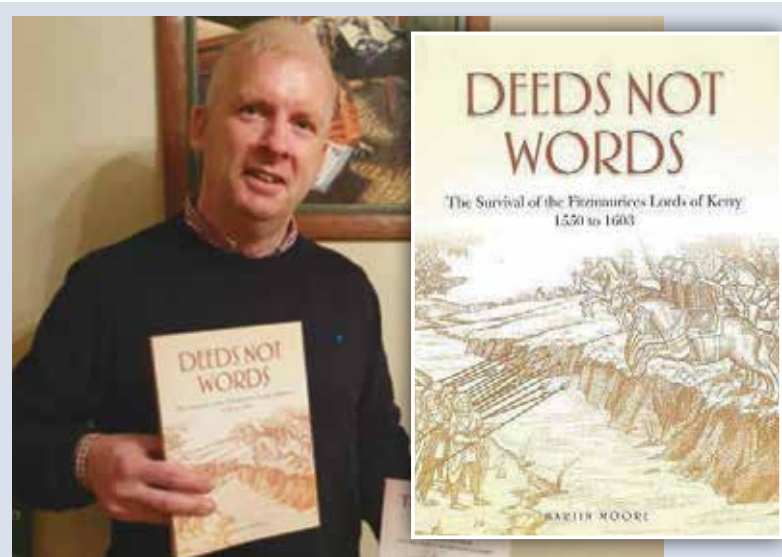
Readers may forgive me at this season of peace and goodwill, having already written about my most enjoyed book of last year (*The Irish Catholic* December 24, 2020), for concluding here my thoughts about 2020 with something I wrote during this Covid-19 year, which - I now discover - seems curiously ad rem:

A Poem for 2021

*Bunting said he used to be a poet
around the time of Briggflatts
but in the documentary
he pours a visitor tea with
such shaking vehemence it's as if
nothing else mattered just then
nothing
as if the meaning of everything were there
beyond reach of any words*

God in that battered teapot

Editorial note: Basil Bunting’s long poem *Briggflatts*: an autobiography (1966) was hailed on its appearance as the recovery of a major poet, through whose modernist poetry flowed a wide variety of influences, Quaker piety, Ezra Pound, a love of music. Mr Bunting said he wished to restore to current use the sheer sound of words, the musicality of creation. The television documentary referred to can be seen online.



Author Martin Moore holding a copy of his new book ‘Deeds Not Words’.

Wilmot who sent him to London to be raised as a Protestant.

After the capture of Listowel Castle, Fitzmaurice joined Hugh O’Donnell in Ulster and later accompanied him on his way south to Kinsale. On the way some of O’Donnell’s forces made a detour and re-took some of the castles in

Fitzmaurice territory from their English garrisons. Fitzmaurice was involved in the Battle of Kinsale. After the catastrophic Irish defeat he retreated to Ulster with O’Donnell. A wanted man, he succeeded in evading capture until the end of the war. Then he petitioned the lord deputy

of Ireland for mercy. On the instructions of James I, he was pardoned and restored to his lands on condition that he allowed his son and heir Patrick to be fostered and brought up a Protestant.

Thereafter Fitzmaurice was obedient to the crown, although he was never free from suspicion. He sat in parliament in 1613, where his claim of precedence over Lords Slane and Courcy was decided in his favour.

In 1618, a dispute arose between him and his Protestant son Patrick, for whom he had failed to provide a promised marriage settlement. For this - and later because he was suspected of treason - he spent two periods in prison. He died on June 3, 1630 and was buried at Cachel in the chapel of St Cormac.

Patrick succeeded as Nineteenth Lord Kerry. The Fitzmaurices continued to be one of the most influential families in North Kerry until 1783, when the then Lord Kerry, an absent landlord residing in Paris, sold most of his patrimony to Richard Hare.

Leisure time

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A gift in your will to Irish Hospice Foundation is a meaningful way to help ensure no-one faces death or bereavement without the care and support they need.

Email Clare Martin at clare.martin@hospicefoundation.ie or call 01 679 3188



www.hospicefoundation.ie



Your heart for the homeless

Merchants Quay Ireland reaches out with kindness to people living on our streets, sleeping in doorways, suffering and alone.

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Please pray for the beatification of

Little Nellie of Holy God

"May God enrich with every blessing all those who recommend frequent Communion to little boys and girls proposing Nellie as their model"

— Pope St Pius X, June 4, 1912

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Missionaries of the Sacred Heart bring hope to the poorest people living in over 48 countries worldwide.

Please help us with a gift in your Will

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MSC Missions Office, PO Box 23 Western Road, Cork. Tel: 021-4545704 Email: info@mscmisions.ie

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When you remember Trócaire in your Will, you bring hope to people living in the world's poorest places

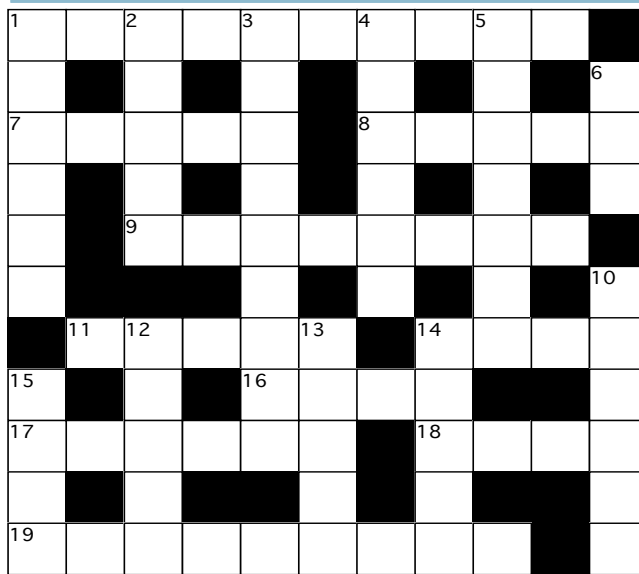
trócaire

It's easy to get started, and we'll help you every step of the way. Call Grace Kelly on 01 629 3333, email grace.kelly@trocaire.org or write to me at Trócaire, Maynooth, Co Kildare.

One day, parents and their children will tell the story of how your legacy of love changed their lives. Thank you for considering a gift to Trócaire in your Will.

Crossword Junior

Gordius 364



Across

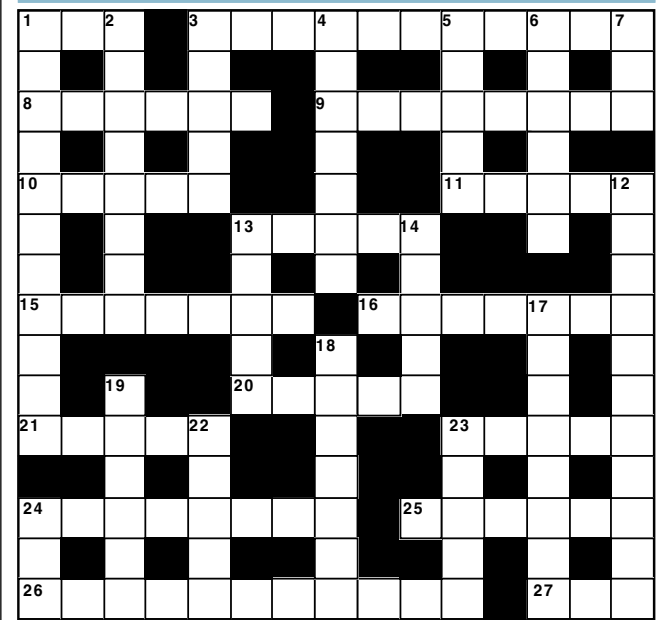
- 1 This machine will clean your cups and plates, knives and spoons for you (10)
- 7 A spy is sometimes called a secret _____ (5)
- 8 Fortunate (5)
- 9 Hibernating creature at the Mad Hatter's tea party (8)
- 11 It comes out of the spout of a boiling kettle (5)
- 14 China and India are in this continent (4)
- 16 Jump (4)
- 17 The final score if neither team manages to score (3,3)
- 18 Tourists like to go up the Leaning Tower of _____ (4)
- 19 Someone travelling on a bus or train perhaps (9)

Down

- 1 Person giving out the cards (6)
- 2 How fast you're going (5)
- 3 There is a famous one at Niagara in America (9)
- 4 Fionn Mac Cumhaill tasted the _____ of Knowledge (6)
- 5 Reasons for people to be let off (7)
- 6 Colouring you might put in your hair (3)
- 10 This fruit has a slippery skin (6)
- 12 Has a chat (5)
- 13 Large, juicy fruit (5)
- 14 William Tell shot it from his son's head (5)
- 15 Call out when you see a pair in this card game (4)

Crossword

Gordius 489



Across

- 1 One's offer at an auction (3)
- 3 & 8 You must look up this Michelangelo masterpiece when you're in the Sistine Chapel! (3,8,2,4)
- 9 A monkey destroyed the ram's tome (8)
- 10 Tenet, fundamental item of belief (5)
- 11 Enemy of Dr Who (5)
- 13 Looks like it's Mayo first to get damp (5)
- 15 Sure, get confused by some body language (7)
- 16 Mix crab with ice to be sharp-tongued (7)
- 20 Fewest or smallest (5)
- 21 Shiny type of paint (5)
- 23 Workers' organization (5)
- 24 One might get a sore calf out-of-doors (2,6)
- 25 Piece of parchment (7)
- 26 One moves furniture around in a spirited way! (11)
- 27 Starters made of an extinct bird (3)

Down

- 1 A grand gibbon moved to this land visited by Gulliver (11)

- 2 Game not found in well-insulated homes? (8)

- 3 Jewelled headgear (5)
- 4 Mice go a different way for sport with The Ash (7)
- 5 Planned to disrupt the media (5)
- 6 How hurtful it is to a person, to be found in bins ultimately (6)
- 7 Fruit with a hard shell (3)
- 12 A thick alien wanders to find equipment in Cook's domain (11)
- 13 The message of a parable (5)
- 14 Unspoken, but understood (5)
- 17 Remind Bo about this Spanish resort (8)
- 18 It stores retail information on a package (3-4)
- 19 Happy (6)
- 22 Containment within a city by military force (5)
- 23 Untouched by the censor (5)
- 24 As quiet as a snake can be (3)

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Sudoku Corner

364

Easy

	9			2				6
	5	8				9		
2	6						3	4
			7	3		6	1	9
9	3						4	7
7	1	4		9	8			
3	8						6	5
		1				3	7	
6				5			9	

Hard

					6		7	9
					8		4	3
4	3	5						
	1		4		2			
	2						4	
			7		9			6
						7	1	6
8		3		5				
1	9		2					

Last week's Easy 363

7	6	2	9	4	1	5	8	3
4	9	3	2	5	8	6	7	1
8	1	5	6	3	7	4	2	9
2	5	4	1	9	6	7	3	8
1	7	6	3	8	5	2	9	4
9	3	8	7	2	4	1	5	6
3	2	7	4	6	9	8	1	5
6	8	1	5	7	3	9	4	2
5	4	9	8	1	2	3	6	7

Last week's Hard 363

7	6	9	4	2	1	5	8	3
1	2	8	5	9	3	7	6	4
3	4	5	6	7	8	2	9	1
4	1	3	2	5	9	8	7	6
5	9	7	1	8	6	3	4	2
6	8	2	7	3	4	9	1	5
2	5	1	8	4	7	6	3	9
8	3	4	9	6	5	1	2	7
9	7	6	3	1	2	4	5	8



Fr Bernard Cotter

Notebook

Every new day is significant

DID YOU EVER NOTICE

how days' significance changes over the years? In my early years, those quiet days between Christmas and Epiphany had little character. One day was like another, merely time reserved for lolling around, eating sweets and watching television.

Then one year my mother died, a couple of days after New Year's Day. Her last 10 days on earth began with a St Stephen's Day hospital admission and her slow passing away occurred precisely during that period that had previously had so little import. January became my mother's month forever (it was also her birthday month).

Father

My father had a similar effect on May. His 98th birthday on May 22 in 2015 was marked by a party the following Sunday, attended by those he was most fond of. The following day he died suddenly, after lunch in his favourite hostelry. May, which had previously been exam month, or start-of-summer month, then became my dad's month – and will always be, the month of his birth and death.



My favourite lightweight summer novel is *One Day*, by David Nicholls. It charts the on-again, off-again relationship between Dexter and Emma, from student life to adulthood. Its unique approach involves taking one day, July 15 (St Swithun's Day) and presenting snapshots of their relationship on that day each year. Right at the end the deeper significance of the day is revealed,

however, as at the point when Dexter and Emma finally decide to make a life together, the life of one of them ends suddenly – for such is life.

The novel is not just the story of two fictitious characters, but in some way of every life. We each of us build up a store of anniversaries each circling year, days we will never forget,

Reflective

In one vision of time, the linear version, every year is a complete unit in itself, with no relationship to what precedes or follows it. In another more reflective vision, there is continuity between years: we are on a spiral path, with each year having a bearing on the next. Each year draws us closer to the goal of our lives.

Their memory evokes a prayer...

On my breakfast table I keep an annually-updated list of names for each month, including anniversary dates for Cork & Ross colleagues, and significant dates for family and friends over my whole life (and pets are remembered too!). Each day, someone comes to mind, and their memory evokes a prayer, or a thought, or sometimes a note or phone call. Saints' feast days remind me of people who share their name; these lead to occasional messages also. Each year becomes a treasury of personal links. Keeping a personal calendar supplements the civic anniversaries recorded by every calendar: I recommend it.

One of the many things I like about the parish where I minister is its 30-year anniversary list, to which parishioners are added automatically when they die. As well as ensuring that no one is forgotten, the list builds links within the parish, as one parishioner's special anniversary coincides with another's, in the unfolding spiral of parish life.

Incidentally, the evening my mother died, my father, out of the

blue, asked the date. Told that it was January 4, he began to rack his brains, convinced that the date resonated for some reason. It turned out to have been the date his own father died, exactly 50 years before.

Every new day is significant, it's someone's birthday, someone's anniversary, the day of someone's passing to new life; one of those days will be yours and mine too. Treasure each day. Remember anniversaries. And Happy New Year!

A beautiful idea for Advent 2021

● Tablets and smartphones allow Catholics to surf the Internet and find Mass at a time that suits, especially now that lockdown prevents attendance in person. Over Christmas, those who surf will have seen beautifully decorated churches, each a testament to the hard work of volunteers. It's intriguing how common Advent wreaths have become – and how slow they are to disappear, lasting in some places into January, when Advent is well gone. The wreath with its purple ribbons and evergreens giving way to a white candle surrounded by red-ribboned holly is a really beautiful sight: an idea for Advent 2021 perhaps?



COULD YOU HELP TO SAVE A POOR HELPLESS CHILD

The Little Way Association receives numerous requests from missionaries throughout the world asking for help to feed, support and educate needy, deprived children. Due to COVID-19 they are faced with many sufferings. They tell us of orphaned children left alone with no one to love or care for them, of families so poor that they cannot afford to send their children to school, and of street children, totally abandoned, hungry and homeless, experiencing much anguish and hardship during their most tender years. The whole future of these children often depends upon whether a missionary can find sufficient funds to care for them.

Your New Year's gift will mean a chance of health and happiness for a deprived child



"Jesus wills that we give alms to Him as to one poor and needy. He puts Himself as it were at our mercy; He will take nothing but what we give Him from our heart, and the very least trifle is precious in His sight."

- St Therese

We wish all our friends and benefactors a very happy and peaceful New Year.

May St Therese reward you in a special way for the sacrifices you make to support our work, and may she obtain many graces for all our benefactors during 2021.

In our modern age of materialism and selfishness when so many are searching for an authentic spirituality, Therese's little way of simple love for God and others has a powerful appeal. Perhaps we too can join her on the 'little way'.

As 2021 begins, please consider making a gift to The Little Way Association's fund for children.

Every euro you send will be gratefully received and sent without deduction, to enable a missionary priest or sister to carry the love, care and compassion of Christ to a deprived, abandoned or orphaned child.

Thank you, and may God reward your generosity.

Crossed POs and cheques should be sent and made payable to:

THE LITTLE WAY ASSOCIATION
 Sacred Heart House, 119 Cedars Rd, Clapham Common, London SW4 0PR
 (Registered Charity No. 235703) Tel 0044 20 76 22 0466
www.littlewayassociation.com

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