


# The Irish Catholic

**MARY KENNY**  
A western trend: historical ignorance  
Page 5



**DAVID QUINN**  
The coming 'religion' of AI  
Page 10



**BREDA O'BRIEN**  
Focus on suffering Nicaragua this Lent  
Page 7



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## Dioceses succeed in making multi-million euro Covid claim

Ruadhán Jones

All 26 Irish dioceses have now been awarded or are in the process of finalising Covid-19 insurance claims arising out of a loss of vital weekly donations when parishes were ordered to shut by the Government during the pandemic.

The Irish Catholic understands that a number of dioceses, including Ferns, Cork and Ross and Cloyne have recently had claims approved for 2020 for their parishes to partially recoup the donations that the parishes rely on for charitable works, the upkeep of buildings, support for schools and priests' modest salaries.

This newspaper revealed late last year that Dublin Archdiocese – the country's largest – had been awarded a €9.4m settlement for losses relating to the first year of Covid-19 restrictions from insurer Allianz.

Sources familiar with the process have confirmed to The Irish Catholic that many other dioceses have already received settlements for 2020, while settlements for the period when restrictions continued in 2021 are being finalised by insurance assessors.

In total, the claims are expected to amount to several million euro, with further claims to be made for losses incurred due to enforced closures.

» Continued on Page 2

### Keeping our ancient traditions alive...



Young musicians Iona Wu, Adam Joyce, Joanne Shaw and Kian Lee at the launch of the Feis Ceoil 127th competition. Celebrating 40 years at the RDS, where 5,000 competitors from across the island of Ireland perform in 200 competitions, at Ireland's leading national music festival. March 20-31. Photo: Leon Farrell/Photocall Ireland

**MICHAEL KELLY**

Gender is divisive, no wonder people are concerned PAGE 2



**CANA DELIGHT**

Irish pilgrims renew wedding vows PAGES 14-15



**FR ANDREW MCMAHON**

Avoiding a synod echo chamber PAGES 12-13



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## Inside this week

**Sr Mary de Lellis**  
Trailblazing nun  
celebrated for  
maths successes

Page 19



**Questions of Faith**  
Why be religious  
rather than  
'spiritual'?

Page 32



**Fr Silvester O'Flynn OFM Cap.**  
Jesus knows our  
past and accepts  
us Page 34



**Managing Editor:** Michael Kelly, editor@irishcatholic.ie  
**Deputy Editor:** Chai Brady, chai@irishcatholic.ie  
**Multimedia Journalists:** Ruadhán Jones, ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie  
Jason Osborne, jason@irishcatholic.ie  
**Newsroom:** news@irishcatholic.ie 01 6874026  
**Books Editor:** Peter Costello, books@irishcatholic.ie  
**Advertising:** advertising@irishcatholic.ie 01 6874094  
**Accounts:** accounts@irishcatholic.ie 01 6874020  
**Magnificat:** magnificat@irishcatholic.ie  
**Shop:** shop@irishcatholic.ie

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# Dioceses succeed in multi-million euro Covid claim

» **Continued from Page 1**  
This newspaper understands that every diocese either has or will make a claim in due course "to reflect the losses due to Covid" and will "at least ensure that there wasn't an entire loss" a source said.

However, this sum will be distributed to the hundreds of parishes across the country and will go only part of the way to recoup the lost income.

The funds will prove a vital shot in the arm for many parishes which were already run on a shoestring and saw vital donations almost halt during the pandemic.

A source close to the bishops' conference said that it is difficult to predict what income might have been without Covid-19. Regardless, the process of calculating and making a claim for

the losses is "complicated but necessary".

Parishes suffered greatly due to closures during Covid, with a collapse in donations reported across the country. The exact amount varies from diocese to diocese, meaning that each one is to make a separate claim with their insurance providers.

Each parish is responsible for calculating the losses, which will be collated centrally by the dioceses to speed-up the claims process.

Despite the welcome cash injection, many parishes are still struggling and sources have confirmed to *The Irish Catholic* that in many parishes donations have still not returned to the pre-pandemic levels.

As this newspaper went to press this week, a spokesperson for Allianz had not answered questions in relation to the claims.

# Gender theory is a divisive issue and parents are right to be concerned

**I**t is hard to think of a topic that is more controversial now or provokes more intense emotion than the issue of transgenderism.

This is despite the fact that all of the scientific experts say that gender identity confusion is, at least according to the research, an issue that affects a very small minority of people. That is, until recently – more on that later.

### Minority

The small minority is, of course, not negligible nor is the issue something that Catholics can just ignore or pretend doesn't exist. It is of the essence of our Christian faith that all people are made in God's image and likeness and are worthy of dignity and respect – this is a non-negotiable and any forms of unjust discrimination are not merely wrong, they are sinful.

“The science is far from settled on the issue of transgenderism and there is no scientific consensus on the cause, or causes, of gender dysphoria”

I don't pretend to understand everything about transgenderism, and even those medical professionals who have worked with people who report confusion about their gender and studied and researched the issue for decades admit that they have difficulty even explaining it to their medical colleagues who are scientifically-trained.

The latest battleground appears to be in primary schools with both Taoiseach Micheál Martin and Tánaiste Leo Varadkar backing calls for children as young as four to be taught “more about what it means to be transgender”.

As this newspaper reported some weeks ago, Catholic schools have worked for many years to ensure that children who are gender questioning are treated with respect, consideration and support as they navigate these issues.

What is a considerably different matter and one that will be of consider-

able concern to parents (and not just Catholic ones) is the apparent push to foist a radical theory of sex and gender on primary school children.

“The discussion is often treated in the public forum that the issue of gender is just one variable amongst others”

The pastoral outreach that schools have been involved in does not mean the Government can or should force schools to accept and teach a transgender view of sexuality as fact.

### Public debate

Alan Hynes of the Catholic Education partnership insisted that transgenderism is “still a matter of contested public debate, and to suddenly bring that contested public debate within schools is to invite conflict within schools that doesn't belong in schools”.

“Adults will have this debate, it might take us several years, but to simply try to crowbar it into schools, and thereby bring a matter of heated public contestation into the fora of schools, we just don't see that as prudent,” he said.

“Catholic schools have worked for many years to ensure that children who are gender questioning are treated with respect, consideration and support as they navigate these issues”

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**Editor's Comment**  
**Michael Kelly**

The fact is, as Séamus Mulconry of the Catholic Primary School Management Association (CPSMA) pointed out this week, the science is far from settled on the issue of transgenderism and there is no scientific consensus on the cause, or causes, of gender dysphoria.

There is also no explanation for the huge rise in the number of children reporting that they are experiencing confusion about their gender. In Britain, for example, the number of children referred to the Gender Identity Development Service rose from 50 in 2009 to 2,500 in 2020.

“The apparent push to foist a radical theory of sex and gender on primary school children”

At the same time, the affirmative care model has recently been rejected in Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands and the UK. This newspaper has reported extensively on complaints against the NHS gender service in Britain which has now been shut down due to controversy and claims of a lack of rigorous assessment before children were prescribed permanently life-altering drugs.

We have also heard what can only be described as horror stories from the many people who have reported that they felt pressurised to transition to another gender with disastrous consequences for themselves and their families.

“There is also no explanation for the huge rise in the number of children reporting that they are experiencing confusion about their gender”

Yet, the discussion is often treated in the public forum that the issue of gender is just one variable amongst others, and not only that it can be a fluid variable.

Politicians seem unwilling to seriously engage with the issues at stake. Minister for Justice Simon Harris was asked about the issue on Monday and his answer was as simple as it was simplistic: “Facts are facts, and I believe in providing people in our country with facts and with science,” he said. Of course, this ignores the lack of scientific consensus and clear facts around gender.

# Tragic death of son brought Nick Cave back to church

Chai Brady

Music legend Nick Cave has opened up about the role faith has had in dealing with grief after the death of his son Arthur (15) in 2015 and then the death of a second son Jethro (31) last year.

Regarding his recent book, which is made up of conversations with music journalist Sean O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, he said he was glad to talk openly about his Christian faith.

Speaking to the former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams in *The Times*, Mr Cave said writing the book "allowed me to bring the scattered fragments of my thinking about religion together" and since then he has found himself returning to church.

"I don't feel that sudden cold panic I used to feel when I attended church."

## Privilege

He says he thinks that's come from "the privilege" of being

given the opportunity to talk openly about his faith, "and to be taken seriously".

Mr Cave said: "It's words like worship, gratitude, devotion, grace – these words make many people feel deeply uncomfortable, but they are at the heart of it all. The thing is, I've not been a particularly spiritual person. I haven't had that 21st-Century 'spiritual' journey at all. But as far back as I can remember I've had a fascination with the figure of Jesus, way before any notions

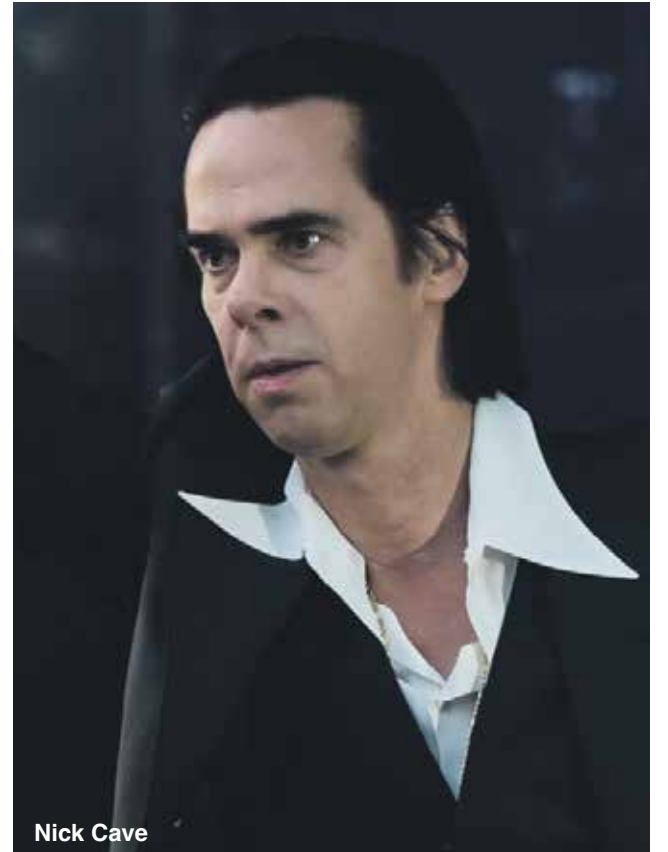
of whether God exists," he said.

He said "the message at the heart of *Faith, Hope and Carnage* – a religious message essentially – is that we have to look beyond our despair to imagine a world worth saving. Hope is an act of the imagination".

## Connected

Mr Cave also told Archbishop Williams that the loss of his son Arthur made him more empathetic and connected to the world.

"It became relational, a kind of vibrational feel within the world that feels like the presence of a third entity. I am part of a vast river of suffering... It was shocking to find that my own tragedy was 'ordinary' on some level. And I felt a part of something. Someone called it, 'the club no one wants to be in'. I found for the first time that I started to become a more complete, fully realised person, as opposed to a personality that was partially formed and fragmented," Mr Cave said.



Nick Cave

## Win St Patrick's Day stamps

An Post has issued two new stamps featuring illustrations from the Book of Kells. The brightly coloured stamps show the profile of the lion, a reoccurring image in the manuscript, symbolising Christ and the resurrection.

Monks of St Columba's order of Iona, Scotland are thought to have produced the Book of Kells, which was brought to the Abbey of Kells in Co. Meath in 806AD following Viking raids on Iona. It was moved to Dublin after Cromwell invaded Ireland in 1649 and placed under the care of Bishop Henry Jones, an alumnus of Trinity College. The bishop donated it to Trinity in 1661, where it has remained ever since.

Designed by Dublin design studio Red&Grey, the two stamps (one national and one international) are based on imagery celebrating the passion, crucifixion and resurrection of Christ.

Unveiling the stamps at Trinity College Dublin, Jack Chambers, Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications said: "The stamps feature some of our most recognisable and iconic heritage images. As we approach St Patrick's day, that global celebration of Irish culture, these stamps will carry these beautiful details from



the Book of Kells to every corner of the globe."

To mark St Patrick's Day, An Post is offering four readers of *The Irish Catholic* the chance to win a prize pack containing a special first day cover and 32 of the specially-commissioned stamps.

To enter, answer the following question: Where is the Book of Kells held today? Answers on a postcard or sealed envelope to arrive no later than Thursday March 16 to:

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## NPHET Prof. queries muted pandemic 'return to Mass' call

Jason Osborne

Former NPHET member Prof. Martin Cormican has said that his experience during the pandemic was that calls for a return to religious services were muted compared to other sectors. He also said that the prioritising of other things ahead of Mass is fundamentally a question of what value society places on religion.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, the professor of bacteriology at the University of Galway said that "my recollection is that there was a spectrum of opinion amongst people I worked with regarding the

extent and duration of curtailment of religious services".

Prof. Cormican has been in the news after it was revealed that he had dissented from a lot of the more draconian decisions of NPHET.

"At the level of society, as a whole, my experience was that advocacy for earlier restoration of religious services was muted, compared to advocacy for restoration of certain other types of group activity," Prof. Cormican said.

"The question as to whether religious services deserved the same or higher priority as other group activities for restoration towards normal was and is more a question about what

we value as a society rather than a question about science or medicine."

Prof. Cormican added that "there were very real Covid related risks whenever people gathered together, for any reason.

"The risk was greater if they gathered indoors and especially if they gathered in large numbers in a small space. The risk of harm was related to how easily the virus could spread and how likely it was that spread of infection would cause severe disease in the group of people who gathered. There were steps available to reduce the risk in any given situation," he said.

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# Catholic homeless advocates condemn plans to lift eviction ban

Jason Osborne

Catholic campaigners and charities have been critical of Government plans to end the ban on evictions at the end of this month.

Speaking Monday night on *Upfront with Katie Hannon*, veteran advocate for the homeless Fr Peter McVerry said he's increasingly coming to see the Government as being on the side of "the owners of capital".

"The majority of people becoming homeless today are coming from the private rental sector, so clearly the ban on evictions is preventing people becoming homeless. It was very effective during Covid, along with the return of Airbnb's into the private residential sector," he said.

"Those two factors saw a huge reduction in homelessness during the Covid years and so I've been a strong advocate for this ban to be extended, and I'm very disappointed that it's not.

"It's clear to me – becoming clearer to me – that this Government are on the side of the owners of capital. It's on the side of big international investment funds, who love to see rents going up. It's on the side of the banks who love to see house prices going up, and it's on the side of the owners of property," Fr

McVerry said, adding, "on their own heads be it".

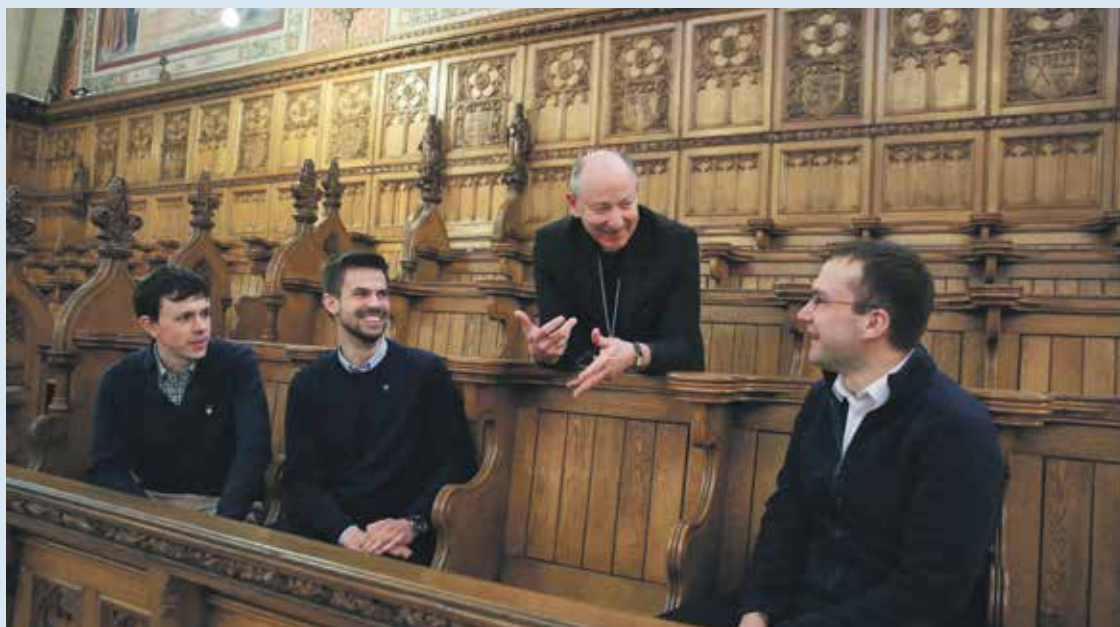
Meanwhile, CEO of housing charity Threshold John-Mark McCafferty warned that the lifting of the ban will see an increase in homelessness in the short-term.

Speaking on RTÉ's *Morning Ireland*, Mr McCafferty said local authorities are already stretched on emergency accommodation and that while a ban cannot last forever and is not an ideal solution in a functioning housing market, the problem is that there is not a properly functioning housing market in Ireland.

Mr McCafferty said that while the number of evictions did increase during the ban, the situation would have been worse had it not been in place.

"I think it's a very superficial analysis to say the numbers for the ban didn't work. I think it's important to look at the counterfactual and to see that, you know, without that ban over the last number of months, things would have been even worse," he said.

## Year of Vocations



Bishop Alphonsus Cullinan marks the Year for Vocations to the diocesan priesthood with seminarians Anthony Hartnett (Raphoe), Killian Heany (Cashel and Emly) and Lukas Nemecek (Czech Republic). Photo: John McElroy. See page 20.

## Two years since last formal Taoiseach-Church meeting

Chai Brady

There has not been a formal meeting between the Office of the Taoiseach and Church leaders for almost two years, Taoiseach Leo Varadkar has confirmed in the Dáil.

The last meeting took place on April 15, 2021, between then-Taoiseach Micheál Martin and the leaders of the all-island Christian Churches, including the Catholic Church, Church of Ireland, Presbyterian Church, Methodist Church and the Irish Council of Churches.

Speaking of the meeting, Mr Varadkar said: "I understand that discussions covered the ongoing contribution to peace building, and the work that Churches undertake on an ongoing basis at community level in Northern Ireland. I recognise the importance of engagement and respect for all communities and traditions on these islands.

"Like public representatives generally, I meet Church leaders informally from time to time in the course of attending official or public events," he added.

Mr Varadkar was responding to a question from leader of the Labour Party Ivana Bacik who asked if he would report on any recent engagements with Church leaders.

# Thousands gather for funeral of murdered Irish Bishop O'Connell



Los Angeles Archbishop José Gomez places the Book of Gospels on the casket of Los Angeles Auxiliary Bishop David O'Connell during his funeral Mass at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels March 3, 2023. Photo: OSV News.

Ruadhán Jones

Irish-born Bishop David O'Connell was remembered as a man "gripped by grace" and "at ease with movers and shakers and also with the moved and shaken" as nearly 5,000 attended a funeral Mass at the

Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels on March 3.

The Mass was the conclusion of a three-day tribute to Los Angeles Auxiliary-Bishop O'Connell, starting with a March 1 memorial Mass at St John Vianney Church in Hacienda Heights.

On March 2 at the cathedral,

local Catholics said farewell to Bishop O'Connell in an all-day public viewing followed by a vigil Mass.

In his homily at the funeral Mass, Msgr Jarlath Cunnane, Bishop O'Connell's classmate and close friend from their seminary days in Ireland in 1971, described him as his "soul friend".

"You're blessed if you have a soul friend," said Msgr Cunnane, the pastor of St Cornelius Church in Long Beach. "And I was blessed to have David".

Bishop O'Connell (69), who was fatally shot February 18, was interred in the cathedral's mausoleum following his funeral Mass.

# A western trend: historical ignorance...

One of the regrettable trends now emerging in several countries across the western world is the erasing, or sometimes even disappearance, of history.

I notice such lamentations on French media, where commentators deplore the decline of historical knowledge. It's also perceptible in Britain and the United States. Douglas Murray, the British author of *The War on the West*, stated, after making a tour of US universities that there is a "wild collapse of knowledge".

## Young people

Young people are being taught only to look on the past as "judge, jury and executioner" on everyone who came before. Everything in the past is seen as dark, bad and stupid: only the present represents progress and enlightenment.

**“There's a growing perception that everything about the past was cruel and negative: only people nowadays can be kind or decent”**

In Britain, a similar picture has emerged – only one in five students studies history after the age of 14; a younger generation is emerging without much sense of the context of historical development. So there's a growing perception that everything about the past was cruel and negative: only people nowadays can be kind or decent.

Parallel attitudes seem to me to prevail in Ireland, where so much of our past



Mary Kenny

is denigrated and disparaged, or simply not seen in a fair and balanced light.

I had a concrete experience of this recently when I was approached by a TV producer working on a new series for RTE's programmes about Irish social history, bearing the title *The Way We Were* (coincidentally, also the title of a recent book of mine).

I hadn't seen these programmes when broadcast last autumn, and so I was sent a link to view them. One, in particular, transmitted in November 2022, focused on love, sex and marriage in Ireland in the latter half of the twentieth century.

## Falsehoods

I thought it a risible compilation of falsehoods, over-simplifications, and statements made as fact without supporting evidence. For example, the broadcaster Mike Murphy said it was appalling that Catholic women like his mother had to promise to "love, honour and OBEY" on marriage. But "obey" has never been part of the Catholic nuptial rite! Mike is confusing it with an older Anglican service (in which "obey") did feature.

The commentary, spoken by Phelim Drew, claimed that "arranged marriages were standard practice" and "very few people married for love" in Ireland in the recent past. No evidence was produced for these statements. The documentary claimed that Irish couples were "clueless about physical intimacy" and knew nothing about sex education because

of a "fatwa" issued by the Catholic Church.

**“All kinds of other claims were made, with the sole purpose of presenting Ireland as a horrible society in which most people were unhappy, miserable and backward”**

In an agricultural country, where the bull was brought to the cow and the filly to the stallion, is it plausible that a rural people knew "nothing" about the facts of life?

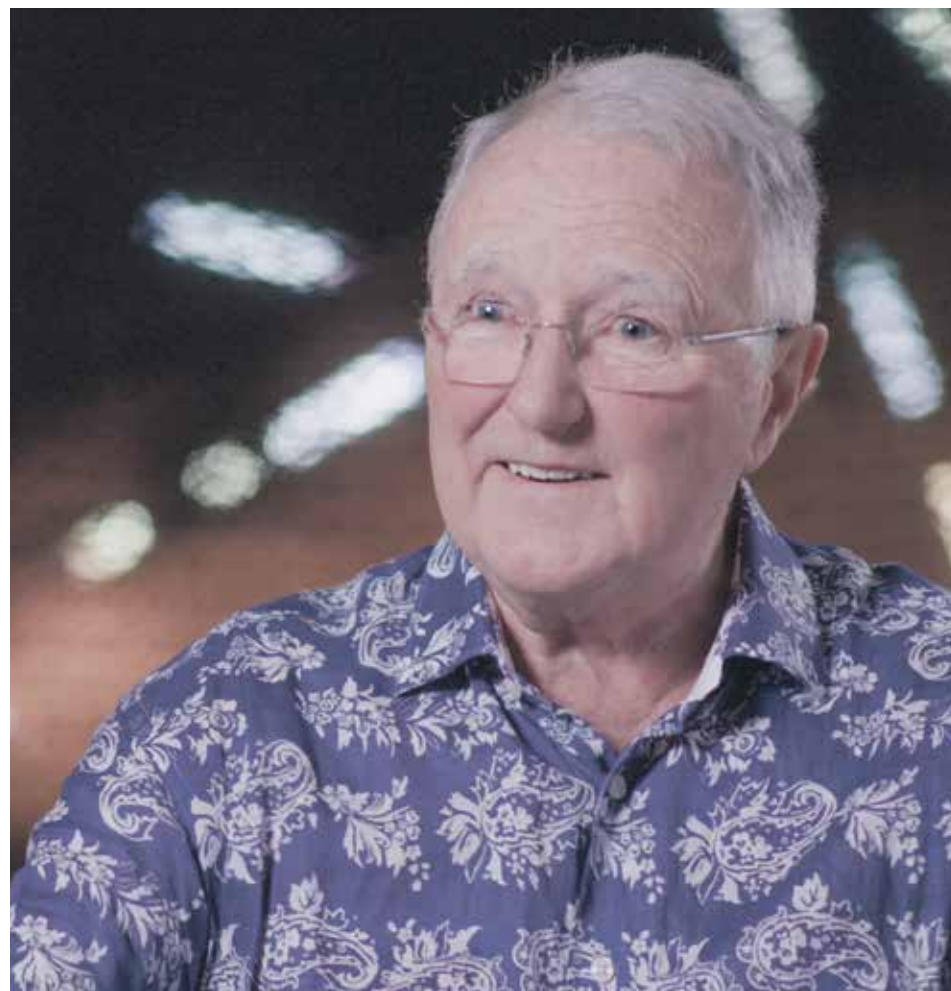
All kinds of other claims were made, with the sole purpose, as far as I could see, of presenting Ireland as a horrible society in which most people were unhappy, miserable and backward – without any balance, nuance, context, or social studies.

## Hypocrisy

RTE's hypocrisy was also blatant: the programme complained that jazz was frowned on back in the day. And who disapproved of it? Radio Eireann! That fact went unmentioned.

This is just what Douglas Murray was referencing – looking at the past in a purely judgemental light, rather than one of honest exploration.

I told the RTE researcher that I was probably the wrong person to participate in a future series, as I believe in history as complex truth, not as shallow tabloid generalisations. Obviously, my approach isn't in line with the spirit of the age.



Broadcaster Mike Murphy participates in RTE's *The Way We Were*.



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## Benefitting from the Benedictine way

An American financial consultant in California's Silicon Valley, Keith Van Sickle, had to present a financial management talk to three start-up companies' boards, composed of venture capitalists. In the same week, it happened that he volunteered to head up a Benedictine schools' finance committee.

The experience of his meetings couldn't have been more different, he recently wrote in the *New Yorker* magazine. "As I went through my PowerPoint slides, the start-up boards were distracted, as usual – texting, talking, asking the occasional non-sequitur question.

"The monks, in contrast, were fully present. I walked

them through the numbers in great detail while they posed thoughtful and intelligent questions. It forced me to be at the top of my game and it was a memorable pleasure."

Small wonder that some businesses now recommend studying the rules of St Benedict as a training in attentiveness and thought development.

# African Christians face growing Islamist attacks

Chai Brady

A charity that advocates for persecuted Christians around the world has warned that there is an increase in Islamist military groups in sub-Saharan Africa violently targeting Christians.

Church in Chains recently launched their 4th Global Guide which lists 60 countries where 200 million Christians face persecution because of their faith, this ranges from limited persecution to severe. They place special focus on China, Egypt, Eritrea, India, Iran, Nigeria, North Korea and Pakistan – where Christians face severe persecution and threat.

Speaking at the launch, Virginia Chipperfield of Church in Chains said: “One thing that struck us very strongly is the expansion in Sub-Sahara of military groups affiliated to Islamic State. These groups attack Christians, they attack government institutions and forces, they also attack

moderate Muslims.

“They’re increasingly spreading to countries where Christians and Muslims used to live peacefully together,” she warned. “These regions are now experiencing the kind of violence that has beset Nigeria for years.”

The charity also noticed a similar growth of extremism in South Asia, where people of different faiths used to coexist peacefully.

“In each of the South Asian countries in the global guide, extremists from a majority faith are intolerant of religious minorities and Christians, especially in remote rural regions, where they are at risk of violent attack,” Ms Chipperfield said. “This is typified in India, where Hindutva ideology promotes the belief that India is for Hindus only, this leads to an intensification of persecution.”

Another area highlighted by Church in Chains was the increase of government control on religious activities, particu-

larly in Central and East Asia. Giving the example of China, Ms Chipperfield said their government’s “ever-tightening restrictions are part of a campaign to control all religions and make them subject to the communist party ideology”.

Speaking ahead of the event, which was launched by Church of Ireland minister and former Green Party leader Rev. Trevor Sargent, the director of Church

in Chains David Turner criticised the Irish Government’s response to Christian persecution.

Mr Turner said: “The persecution of Christians worldwide has been ignored for far too long by successive Irish governments which have repeatedly stated a commitment to prioritising freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) in foreign policy.

“Regrettably, Irish governments have not followed this through by raising individual cases of persecution of Christians directly with the governments that are actively persecuting Christians or facilitating the persecution of Christians. This new guide demonstrates the overwhelming need for action to give credence to their words,” he said.

## Irish contingent ‘on fire’ to import UK ‘Flame’ faith conference

Jason Osborne

Irish attendees at the Flame National Youth Congress in London likened it to Electric Picnic, saying that people were “buzzing” and that a similar event in Ireland is needed as we have “nothing for young people”.

Organised by CYMFed, the Catholic Youth Ministry Federation of England and Wales, Flame took place Saturday, March 4 and saw just under 10,000 young Catholics

attend from across the UK.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Margaret Cartwright of Vocations Ireland said that it was like Electric Picnic, only “it was on the spiritual side”.

“I think it’s something that could be emulated here, if a few of us could get together,” she said.

“It would be wonderful to put something like this on in Ireland because we’ve nothing for young people.”

Famous entertainment duo Ant and Dec addressed the attendees via livestream, as

Dec’s brother, Fr Dermott Donnelly, had been instrumental in the establishment of the conference.

Sr Eileen O’Connell OP also attended the event, and said that she would “would love to see” a similar event come to Ireland.

“We chatted at lunch time, saying, ‘How could we bring this to Ireland? Where could we do it? Who could we get involved?’

“I’m very on fire about this idea,” she said.

## Poll finds huge support for PSNI’s 50:50 recruitment

Staff reporter

The majority of people who don’t identify as unionist or nationalist in the North of Ireland believe there should be a return to 50:50 recruitment of Catholics and Protestants in the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI).

The Patten Report paved the way for 50:50 recruitment to address the under-representation of Catholics, it was introduced in 2001 when the police

were 92% Protestant.

While numbers grew due to the measure, the number of Catholics in the PSNI have continued to drop since 50:50 recruitment was ended in 2011

More than 2,000 people took part in the poll conducted by Social Market Research, with 46% believing the policy should be reintroduced and 14% against. A third did not agree or disagree.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* in 2019, Archbishop Eamon

Martin called for a return to 50:50 policing, saying: “I think that if Patten’s criteria were applied today I think there would be grounds for let’s say a further five years with a united support across the community, for the 50:50 to return to give it that push up beyond the threshold figure so that communities then would say this is a representative police service and we should encourage our young people to join up.”

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### 6ft sculpture to visit Armagh cathedral

A six foot model of a sculpture by renowned Canadian sculptor Tim Schmalz will be on display in St Patrick’s Cathedral Armagh from March 14-18. Called ‘Let the Oppressed Go Free’, the piece features St Josephine Bakhita releasing human trafficking victims.

St Bakhita is the patron saint of victims of modern slavery and human trafficking, having been kidnapped and sold into slavery herself. She was beatified in 1992 and canonised on October 2000 by Pope John Paul II, becoming the first person from Sudan to be canonised.

### Death of ‘sadly missed’ Brigid Carroll

The death has occurred of Brigid Carroll – mother of Fr John Carroll PP Barntown, Co. Wexford.

Fr John is well-known to pilgrims who have travelled to the Holy Land over the years as a gentle and wise spiritual director.

Brigid was wife of Paddy and mother of Mary, Patricia, John, Alison and Brid, sister of Michael and the late Mary. She is sadly missed by her family, sons-in-law, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, nieces, nephews, relatives, friends.

Her funeral took place on March 7 in the Church of the Annunciation, Clonard.

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## ‘Welcome Mr President(s)’



Fr Ger Dunne OP, chaplain at University College Cork, welcomes Irish President Michael D. Higgins to the refurbished Honan Chapel. President Higgins was joined in his March 2 visit by the president of Malta, George Vella.

## Breda O'Brien

### The View



# Suffering people of Nicaragua should focus our attention this Lent

It was great to see the plight of Nicaraguan Bishop Rolando Álvarez brought to public attention by *The Irish Catholic* recently. The story arose from a parliamentary question posed by Carol Nolan, TD. Deputy Nolan does sterling work drawing attention to unpopular causes, along with many of her fellow Independent and minority party TDs.

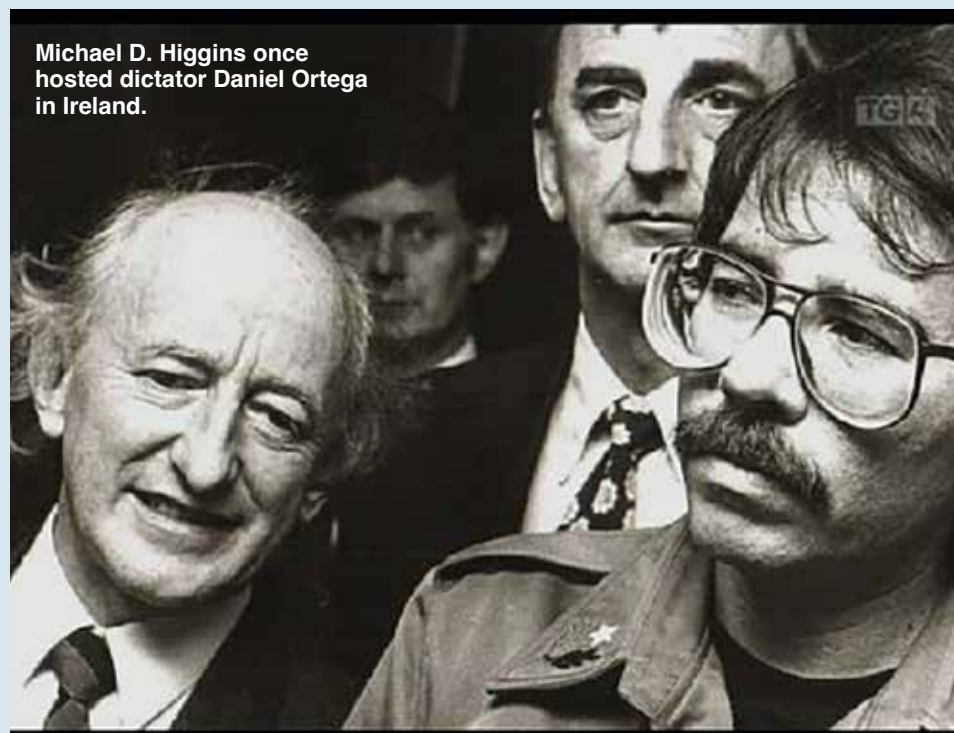
**“A farcical trial took place immediately after and Bishop Álvarez was sentenced to 26 years in prison”**

Nonetheless, it is very difficult to get ongoing information about what is happening to Bishop Álvarez. In brief, he has been under house arrest since August 2022 for being an outspoken critic of the Ortega-Murillo regime. When 222 political prisoners were unexpectedly exiled to the US and stripped of Nicaraguan citizenship and their property in early February, Bishop Álvarez refused to go.

A farcical trial took place immediately after and Bishop Álvarez was sentenced to 26 years in prison.

Dora Maria Tellez was among those who left, after incarceration since June 2021 in horrific conditions in a notorious Nicaraguan prison, El Chipote. Not only was she a former Minister for Health, but she also took place in a famous attack against the previous right-wing Somoza regime, the only woman involved in that particular raid. She broke from the Sandinistas in 1995 and tried to set up a reform movement.

When she was released this February, she did an interview with *Confidencial*, a liberal Spanish online newspaper. She said: “What does the



Michael D. Higgins once hosted dictator Daniel Ortega in Ireland.

regime hope to gain from the sentence they imposed on Bishop Álvarez? Do they think they are going to break him? They're not going to break him. That it's going to bring him to his knees? He's not going to kneel. That Alvarez is going to beg to get out of there? He's not going to. This is a game that Ortega has already lost, and this particular political prisoner is going to blow up in the regime's face.”

### Heroes

Daniel Ortega and his wife and vice-president, Rosario Murillo, were once heroes in Ireland. The Somoza family had oppressed Nicaragua for generations. The Sandinista Liberation Front appeared new, fresh and brave to Irish eyes.

Some 150 idealistic Irish young people in the 1980s travelled to Nicaragua to support the Sandinistas by picking coffee and other activism. Michael D. Higgins and his wife, Sabina, hosted Ortega and Murillo in their home when they visited Ireland.

In fairness to many of

the Irish activists, they remained concerned about Nicaragua when over decades, Ortega and Murillo started taking pages from the classic dictator playbook – amassing immense personal wealth, benefitting members of their immediate family and friends, and cracking down on opposition. The Irish media mostly lost interest in covering the story.

**“People took to the streets to protest, not least because they could see the lavish lifestyle enjoyed by the regime”**

Sadly, Ortega and Murillo often employ religious rhetoric to justify what they are up to. *El19 Digital* is an online media outlet that publishes speeches by Murillo and Ortega in a sycophantic and uncritical way. Here is an extract from a recent speech by Murillo:

“Here Jesus reigns forever, and love reigns...And well,

let's all know how to reflect, value and be better and better, and work with more and more determination, and thank God with more and more Spirit to go forward, because the future is ours.”

At the same time as invoking Christian ideas, the Sandinistas have clamped down on every form of opposition, and in later years, the Catholic Church has been a particular focus of that oppression.

### Crackdown

In 2018, the Sandinistas proposed cuts to pensions. People took to the streets to protest, not least because they could see the lavish lifestyle enjoyed by the regime. The crackdown was brutal.

When the Church protested on behalf of those beaten, tortured, arrested and sentenced to prison without fair trials, Ortega and Murillo began to target the Church systematically. The Church runs many small radio stations. They were closed or curtailed.

Churches were graffitied. Priests and laypeople were arrested and tortured. Since

Bishop Álvarez's recent sentencing, at least two priests have been arrested simply for praying for the Bishop at mass.

### Nicaraguan regime

On March 2, a UN investigative committee declared that it is likely that the Nicaraguan regime has committed crimes against humanity. Jan Simon, Chair of the Group of Human Rights Experts on Nicaragua, identified that “violations and abuses are being perpetrated in a widespread and systematic manner for political reasons, constituting crimes against humanity of murder, imprisonment, torture,

including sexual violence, deportation and persecution on political grounds.”

Nicaraguans need our help and the gift of our attention. Bishop Álvarez will rot in a hellhole unless international attention continues to be focused on him.

We should send emails congratulating Micheál Martin and asking him to continue advocating for Bishop Álvarez and the other 37 political prisoners we know about. This Lent, add prayer and action for Nicaragua to your preparation for Easter, conscious that the oppressed Nicaraguan people cannot even hold a ‘Way of the Cross’ procession.

## PILGRIMAGES 2023

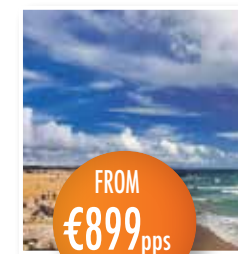
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**“On March 2, a UN investigative committee declared that it is likely that the Nicaraguan regime has committed crimes against humanity”**

# Dana set to launch new St Patrick song in Downpatrick

**Jason Osborne**

Famed singer and Eurovision winner Dana Rosemary Scallon is set to release a new song this month in honour of St Patrick at The Saint Patrick Centre in Downpatrick.

Written and recorded by Dana, *Light The Fire* recalls how St Patrick defiantly lit the flame on the Hill at Slane in 433AD.

Speaking about the inspiration behind her new song, the music icon said that what St Patrick lit was "more than just a fire".

"Patrick was courageous. It could have cost him his life. Those were dark days. They were oppressive. There was human sacrifice," Dana said.

"The fire was symbolic of bringing light and bringing an understanding to what was wrong in those days and changing what was wrong from the darkness into light."

Dana revealed that the inspiration for the song came to her from her brother-in-law, the late Fr Kevin Scallon, who said that that Ireland needed "a new hymn to St Patrick for today" because the message of St Patrick is "not belonging to a past generation and it's not just for Ireland".

"It's a message for today and for the whole world," Dana said.

The centre's director, Dr Tim Campbell, said that it was a "privilege" that Dana had chosen their location to launch the new song March 13, just before St Patrick's Day.

"It was here in Downpatrick that St Patrick began his mission," said Dr Campbell.

"The Centre is renowned for telling the authentic story of Patrick, the slave who found true freedom and whose message of love and faith continues to echo down the centuries. The song has a great message of hope and we look forward to sharing it both at home and abroad."

*Light the Fire* has been recorded with male voices from the Schola Cantorum in St Peter's Cathedral Belfast, as well as with two singers from the Church of Ireland in Downpatrick.

Director of Music at St Peter's Cathedral in Belfast, James McConnell said the Schola Cantorum was very happy to be asked to be part of the project.

"It's a really wonderful song. It's very moving spiritually. Patrick is the one who brought faith to the island and we owe him a lot," he said.

Eurovision winner Dana Rosemary Scallon rehearses her new song celebrating St Patrick.



## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Ferns parishes offer Masses following hospital fire

Parishes in Ferns diocese have offered Masses of thanksgiving that no there was no loss of life in the "extensive" hospital fire in Wexford.

In a statement, Bishop of Ferns Ger Nash said he was "overwhelmed" by the stories of courage, kindness and mercy by emergency services and medical staff.

"I have been told of people who took risks in love and charity, and who went the extra mile to help the sick and vulnerable and remove them from the distressing circumstances of the raging fire," Bishop Nash said.

"It is miraculous that there was no loss of life caused by this extensive hospital fire..."

The fire in Wexford General Hospital on Friday, March 3, resulted in the largest medical evacuation in the history of the State.

### New film censor appointed

Minister for Justice Simon Harris has appointed Dr Ciarán Kissane as the new censor for films and games released in Ireland, on March 6.

Dr Kissane will take up the position of Director of Film Classification in the Irish Film Classification Office (IFCO) after an open competition.

Minister Harris said he was delighted to welcome Dr Kissane, who brings "a wealth of professional experience to this important role".

Dr Kissane has worked in media regulation for almost 30 years and has extensive experience in content classification, strategic planning and organisational development.

In 2022, the IFCO received 979 cinema submissions for classification (consisting of 438 films, 8 short films and 533 trailers) and 1,532 video/DVD submissions, including 20 video games rated as 18 by the Pan-European Game Information system (PEGI).

## Third arrest in UK for silent prayer 'offence'

**Ruadhán Jones**

A pro-life volunteer has been arrested for the second time for the "offence" of silently praying in her head within an abortion facility censorship or "buffer" zone.

It is the third such arrest in the UK since the law was introduced in February of this year.

Bail conditions have been imposed on Ms Isabel Vaughan-Spruce after six police officers attended her arrest on Monday, March 6, according to a statement from Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF).

It is a matter of weeks since the charitable volunteer was found "not guilty" by Birmingham Magistrates' Court, having been criminally charged on the basis that her silent prayers

amounted to intimidation.

"Only three weeks ago, it was made clear by the court that my silent prayers were not a crime," said Ms Vaughan-Spruce.

"And yet, again, I have been arrested and treated as a criminal for having the exact same thoughts in my head, in the same location."

The arrest comes as governments both sides of the border consider

introducing so-called safe access zones around abortion providers on the island of Ireland.

Pro-lifers in the North have stated that they will not take any similar laws "lying down".

"We're not going to take it lying down. We're really going to fight it the whole way," Bernadette Smyth of Precious Life told *The Irish Catholic* on February 16.

## €1 million spent on abortion hotline

**Staff reporter**

Almost €1 million of taxpayers' money has been spent advertising the Government's My Options hotline, according to recently released figures.

The figures were released by the HSE in response to a parliamentary question from TD Carol Nolan about the MyOptions agency, which links women experiencing an unplanned pregnancy with abortion providing GPs. Since 2019, in excess of

€20 million of taxpayers' money has been used to fund abortions and the roll-out of abortion provision in Ireland.

In a separate response, Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly said the HSE also have a management strat-

egy and budget to ensure My Options outbids and stays ahead of "rogue" agencies.

The tactic screens out groups that provide "positive alternatives to abortion," a spokesperson for Pro Life Campaign said.

"Rogue Agency" is a code

word in Minister Donnelly's world for any pro-life group that offers help and support to women facing an unplanned pregnancy, regardless of how exemplary and beyond reproach the group or groups happen to be," the spokesperson said.



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# The coming 'religion' of Artificial Intelligence



One way or another, we are going to be living in a future that is increasingly dominated by artificial intelligence, writes David Quinn

Over the past couple of decades we have already seen how machines such as smartphones and tablets have become so all-pervasive. These are very different from the earlier sorts of machines that made our lives easier in the past, such as washing machines,

dishwashers, cars, vacuum cleaners and so on.

With the exception of TVs, none of these machines had the effect of making us more socially isolated or influencing our opinions. But the smartphone in your hand puts you into a virtual world where you increasingly live online. At least watching TV was mostly a shared activity, especially in the days when there was only one TV in the house and there were lots of family programmes everyone could watch together and talk about afterwards.

## Withdraw

Smartphones often mean you withdraw from other people, even when you are sitting right beside them supposedly watching the same TV show, or even when you are out for a meal together.

The aim of the apps you use or the websites you visit is to make you maximise your time on them. These know what you like and suggest more of the same for you. It is all highly addictive.

But now we see that artificial intelligence (AI) is being increasingly added into the mix and it is becoming ever more advanced and sophisticated.

AI is defined as a computer system that can perform tasks like speech recognition, decision-making, and even hold conversations with you.

Recently, a new form of AI called 'ChatGPT' was launched for public use. You can ask it questions about an almost infinite range of topics and it will quickly search the internet and come back with an answer for you.

**“We are all familiar from science-fiction films with intelligent, talking robots”**

It can imitate writing styles, although not very well so far. You could, for example, ask it to write about abortion in the style of say, me. It will then come back with the typical pro-life argument I might make in something approximating my style of writing.

It is going to get better at this kind of thing very quickly. Schools and universities already know that AI has vast implications for how they examine students, especially when they are given written assignments. It will now be much easier for students to



A robot equipped with artificial intelligence is seen at the AI Xperience Centre in Brussels. Photo: OSV News

ask AI to write their assignments for them. Schools will have to either allow this, or find ways to spot it when a student has asked AI to do their homework.

AI can also write poems, again in the style of particular poets, or simply generate its own from scratch.

We are all familiar from science-fiction films with intelligent, talking robots. That seems to be some way off still, and we don't really know what 'intelligent' will really mean in this context.

But we are not far off AI programmes being able to hold sophisticated conversations with people in a voice you find will soothing and understanding.

**“The Church itself needs to think about this much more. The Vatican has been holding conferences about AI”**

AI will get used to what you like, and dislike and it will tailor its conversation accordingly. It will become a sort of virtual 'friend'. The lonely and socially isolated might well benefit from this, but other people might simply further retreat from the world, preferring to have a relationship with AI than with messy, complicated flesh and blood people. If we are already reducing human contact because of our smart phones, imagine what will happen when we can use those same devices to connect with an AI programme that can converse in a way tailored to us? It is quite likely that children, never mind adults, will like their very understanding, and infinitely patient AI best friend.

Over time, these programmes will grow in sophistication. They will know far more than you do about basically everything, and you might find yourself turning to them for advice. They will seem very wise compared with your own very finite and limited intelligence and it seems likely a growing number of people will delegate some of their decision-making to them.

In the end, they might even seem god-like in their knowledge and intelligence even if all you are really dealing with is a very advanced computer programme that has been created in the first instance by other human beings.

But the machines' ability to form and influence us will be immense. Those ultimately behind these machines will want to programme them in ways that influence opinion and actions in ways that they approve of, unless the machines develop aims of their own. The opportunities for manipulation of the public will be enormous.

Some people will likely come to see AI as a sort of religion-substitute, for what will a seemingly all-knowing, all-wise, increasingly powerful machine seem in the eyes of many but a sort of semi-deity?

## Advanced

The most advanced AI machines will develop followings. It is easy to imagine us coming to believe that these machines are wiser than politicians, priests, our bosses, or anyone else in a position of authority and that we would wish to hand over more and more areas of life to them.

We will likely lose faith in fallible human beings, unless AI turns out to be more faulty than we suspect. But it might also turn out to be even better.

Will some people actually come to worship AI? It seems unlikely to me because

very few of us could actually believe that a machine, no matter how advanced, is actually a god. But they might still be in awe of it, and awe is not too far away from worship. We might feel overawed, because we will feel puny by comparison. We might replace the fear of God, with the fear of the machine. The 'fear of God' does not have to mean literal fear, but it is a healthy respect for the sheer power of God. We might look upon these very powerful machines in much the same way because this is how human nature works.

## Future

What is to be done? It is very hard to know. It is quite likely that this technology will be inserted into our lives in the same way the internet and smart phones have been and will encroach on more and more areas without any proper debate or thought.

**“We are not far off AI programmes being able to hold sophisticated conversations with people in a voice you find will soothing and understanding”**

The Church itself needs to think about this much more. The Vatican has been holding conferences about AI, but the Church at local level needs to as well. Religious and lay people alike need to think about these machines from the point of view of Christian theology, and the starting point must be a strong awareness that these machines could become a kind of very modern idol that we substitute for God before we even know it, and that point could be closer than we think, as in mere years away, decades at most.

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# A new season at Lough Derg – the national shrine to St Patrick

**D**uring the months of March and April this year over 650 young people will take part in Confirmation Retreats at Lough Derg: energy-filled days of faith and fun.

### Three Day Pilgrimage

Running between 1st June and 15th August, the three day pilgrimage on Station Island follows a centuries-old tradition. One of the most arduous Christian pilgrimages in the world, it is undertaken in bare feet and it involves three days of fasting. Pilgrims can arrive on any day of the week. They spend two nights on the island, one of them keeping vigil

in St Patrick's Basilica praying 'the Stations' together with their fellow pilgrims.

It is not for the faint-hearted but, despite the challenges, the Lough Derg pilgrimage still holds surprising appeal for young and old alike. Many of our pilgrims say that it helps them to deal with all that life throws at them throughout the year: it builds up resilience; it strengthens the 'spiritual muscle' to cope with daily struggles. Others appreciate most the unmistakable sense that they can become physically part of a unique tradition that goes back through the generations, often in their own family. Young adults who take on the challenge relish the spiritual

work-out that it offers.

Paradoxically, joy is the most palpable emotion for pilgrims as they board the boat on their final morning: not just the sense of achievement that they have come through the experience, but the deep-down joy of having been touched by God's grace and love and mercy. In our increasingly secularised and individualistic world such opportunities are not easily found. The three day pilgrimage offers a physical, mental, spiritual and digital detox, so valuable in today's hectic lifestyle.

### Day Retreats

May, late August and September

offer a different experience at Lough Derg. On selected dates, a reflective day of prayer in the remote beauty of the island location provides an opportunity to keep your shoes on your feet but to step away from daily routine in a sacred oasis of calm, giving space and time to simply be with the Lord. The day begins at 10.00am with a welcome cup of tea and a scone. The morning offers several prayer experiences centred in the Basilica. A light lunch of soup and sandwiches is followed by an opportunity for quiet time, perhaps with Eucharistic Adoration, before the day closes with Mass at 3.15pm. Booking is essential for these days, mainly for catering purposes. The Day Retreat programme is planned for adults; it is not suitable for children.

### New for 2023!

### Residential Retreats

Different people have different

spiritual needs, and at Lough Derg the team is constantly exploring new ways of making the sanctuary experience of Station Island available to people wherever they are on life's journey. This summer, alongside the three day pilgrimage, we are opening the opportunity of a new residential retreat on two occasions. The retreat will offer full board for four nights. Facilitated by former Benedictine monk, Eoin Madigan, retreatants will explore two fundamental questions: Where do I find God? Where does God find me? Using art, music, scripture and prayer, Eoin will help participants to ponder how they can open themselves to find and to be found by God revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. If you feel the call to step out of the fast pace of life or the need of some spiritual rejuvenation, perhaps a residential retreat on Lough Derg could be an ideal opportunity for you this summer.

## LOUGH DERG

2023 Pilgrimage Season

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**August**

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A pilgrim prays at the foot of Saint Patrick's Cross while others undertake the Station Prayers on the Penitential Beds, the remains of the monastic prayer cells



The statue, "Patrick the Pilgrim" stands on the lakeshore of Lough Derg overlooking the imposing Saint Patrick's Basilica on Station Island in the distance.

# Synod process needs to avoid echo chamber and focus on more realistic ways forward



Talk of Irish joy in Prague must have seemed strange to delegates given that the only voices represented were of hurt, anger and alienation, writes **Fr Andrew McMahon**

**W**hile its 'final document' is – at time of writing – still awaited, the European stage of the Synod on Synodality effectively concluded with the widely reported gathering in Prague last month. This stage had begun with the issuing of a working document by the general secretariat of the synod last October. The document was intended to focus the deliberations in Prague – and six other continental assemblies – and guide preparations for these. It drew heavily upon the various national syntheses previously sent to Rome.

This Document for the Continental Stage (the DCS) sought feedback – asking where its contents resonated “with the lived experiences and realities of the Church in your continent”, what “substantial tensions or divergences emerge” and what “priorities, recurring themes and calls to action” might be proposed in consequence. This feedback would ultimately emerge from each continental assembly in the form a final document. These documents will be used to



Archbishop Eamon Martin of Armagh blesses delegates during a prayer walk at a pre-synodal assembly in Clonmacnoise, June 18, 2022.

create the *Instrumentum laboris* (working document) for the first session of the General Assembly of the Synod, in Rome, this October.

**“What form the ‘ecclesial process of discernment’ should take, within each diocese, did not appear prescribed”**

In advance of each continental assembly, meantime, diocesan bishops and their synodal teams were requested to “arrange an ecclesial process of discernment on the DCS, starting with the three questions indicated above”. The fruits of these diocesan discernments were to be gathered and synthesised by the relevant episcopal conference and its synodal committee. The “reflection and discernment” of each episcopal conference would be then “shared within the continental assembly” by a delegation

representing that conference. Hence the presence of Irish delegates in Prague.

**Ecclesial process**

What form the “ecclesial process of discernment” should take, within each diocese, did not appear prescribed. According to a statement from their winter 2022 meeting, Irish bishops referred the DCS on to their individual synodal teams, asking them to review it in conjunction with their own diocesan reports and the Irish national synthesis. The relatively short time between the DCS appearing in October and the Prague assembly may have left the bishops few enough options. A consequence, however, was that the discernment undertaken, at another critical stage in the synodal process, never got beyond a very limited number of people. Moreover, as last year’s diocesan reports had influenced the national synthesis which – in turn – had informed

and been quoted in the DCS, confining the discernment to those who already had a hand in these documents seemed rather circular.

**Controversial**

Perhaps the most controversial ‘discernment’ of this period, meanwhile, came from the late Cardinal George Pell. A reflection on the DCS, penned for current affairs journal *The Spectator*, was published within days of his death in January. Cardinal Pell quoted examples of terminology in the text – “exclusion, alienation, identity, marginalisation, the voiceless, LGBTQ” – and argued these were rooted in a form of ‘neo-Marxist’ thinking, rather than Christian tradition. Their prominence, he believed, resulted in “the displacement of Christian notions of forgiveness, sin, sacrifice, healing and redemption” in the DCS. Cardinal Pell judged it “one of the most incoherent documents ever sent out from Rome”, proposing that

“a knowing few can exploit the muddle and goodwill”.

**“The bishop expressed concern that the discourse was being clouded by ‘sentiment and the tendency to psychologise the matters under consideration”**

While characteristically trenchant, Cardinal Pell’s analysis was not unprecedented. In an interview last November, US bishop, Robert Barron, had shared broadly similar concerns. In secularised cultures, with diminishing religious sensibility, the bishop suspected that conversations – even within Church – ran the risk of conforming to a “sociological framework”. If dynamics around ‘power’ became the ‘paramount’ issue, Bishop Barron feared that the fundamental ques-

tion for Christians – in what lies the greater “moral and spiritual good for this community” – could be overlooked.

**Listening sessions**

The bishop recounted, in January, his experience of “one of the listening sessions for the continental phase” held in his diocese to reflect on the DCS: “I found myself increasingly uneasy with two words that feature prominently in the document and that dominated much of our discussion – namely ‘inclusivity’ and ‘welcoming’.

“But I have yet”, Bishop Barron added, “to come across a precise definition of either term”. The bishop expressed concern that the discourse was being clouded by “sentiment” and “the tendency to psychologise the matters under consideration”.

“The ambiguity of the terms is a problem” he argued “that could undermine much of the synodal process”.

One would not expect Irish



Pope Francis leads a meeting with representatives of bishops' conferences from around the world at the Vatican, October 9, 2021.

diocesan synodal teams to attempt the kind of analysis a Cardinal Pell or Bishop Barron might undertake and, bearing in mind those directions from the bishops' meeting, this was hardly what they were being asked to do. One wonders, nonetheless, as to the extent to which those charged with discernment around the DCS here would have engaged with these kinds of critique – or even been encouraged to do so.

**“The temptation could well have been to settle for an exercise in mutual affirmation – the so-called ‘echo chamber’ effect”**

On the other hand, given that certain viewpoints arising in diocesan reports and privileged in the national synthesis appeared reiterated in the DCS, the temptation could well have been to settle for an exercise in mutual affirmation – the so-called ‘echo chamber’ effect. While that winter episcopal statement spoke, assuredly, of the “deepened reflections” that would be brought to Prague in consequence of the discernment, from where such fresh or critical perspectives might emerge was not that obvious.

What did result from the discernment hasn't really become clear, as the Irish presentation to the continental assembly went on to focus, primarily, on certain issues previously highlighted in the national synthesis. The strongest emphasis was upon those who had experienced abuse in Church contexts in Ireland – detailed as “sexual, institutional, emotional, psychological, physical and spiritual”. This was accompanied by a call for the “open wound” of

abuse to be “comprehensively addressed”. The prioritising of those who had suffered – and continue to suffer – seemed important, even vital, in the circumstances.

Alongside those who had endured abuse, the other main category of people referenced were those perceived as disaffected from – or experiencing discrimination within – the life of the Church. With its call to “Enlarge the space of your tent”, the DCS – as already noted – encouraged emphasis upon themes like ‘exclusion’. The Irish contribution had much to share in return, conveying this as the predominant experience communicated by many women participating in the synodal process, as well as those “in loving relationships that don't accord with Church teaching”, those in second unions and people “identifying as LGBTQI+”.

#### Greater inclusion

In addition to these more predictable categories, a call for “greater inclusion” was made on behalf of youth, single parents, those living with disabilities, and migrants and refugees. Rather a surprise came with the citing of some “who love the pre-Vatican II liturgy” who, while briefly acknowledged in the national synthesis, would hardly have expected to have made it into the Prague presentation. The ‘sense of exclusion’ they had reported appeared to have identified them for mention.

A weakness, though, was the sharing of perceptions in a way that made them appear factual. We heard, for instance, of women's pain “at being denied their agency in the life of the Church”. While several women encountered clearly felt so denied, this does not – of itself – confirm that they actually were. Similarly, the

hurt of some “around harmful and offensive language used in Church circles and documents” was reported. What was meant, presumably, was that these took offence at certain language and labelled it harmful. Whether or not it was, however, remains another question. While it was important to communicate candidly the kinds of grievances heard, greater care with language – ironically enough – would have helped how this was done.

**“A synodal Church can help to redress and bind these wounds. It can help us to be reconciled with ourselves, with God, with one another and with creation.”**

The Irish delegates in Prague spoke, more than once, of the “joy” they sensed the synodal process was generating. This must have seemed remarkable to their audience, given that the only voices represented in the account they were hearing were of hurt, loss, anger or alienation. While these undoubtedly deserved their place within the testimony delivered, the absence of any positive image from contemporary Irish Church life would have been staggering to many.

Moreover, the extent to which there were any grounds for hope largely depended – it seemed – on the fuller embracing of a synodal model of Church: “A synodal Church can help to redress and bind these wounds. It can help us to be reconciled with ourselves,

with God, with one another and with creation.” It was proposed, furthermore, that “much abuse could have been prevented had we been truly synodal, opening and listening to the voices and gifts of all our family.”

#### Healing

It would be hard not to be struck by the sincerity and conviction of those who spoke on behalf of Ireland in Prague, their deep sensitivity towards those wounded and their genuine passion for healing in the life of the Church. For underlining these things, and for their commitment to them, they deserve appreciation. That said, while much of what they advocated was commendable, it is difficult to see how it could amount to a practical vision for the Church – within Ireland or beyond it.

To return, for example, to the complex issue of abuse with which the delegates began: They spoke of the need to “establish the truth of what happened, and why it happened” and implied that renewal in the life of the Church could not come about until it “fully understands the causes” of this wrongdoing. This is undoubtedly a worthy ideal and – perhaps especially around the scandal of clerical sexual abuse of minors – a wider exploration

of the factors at work would seem essential.

**“Paradigms shift, perspectives change and understanding, of its nature, is never something ‘full’ or conclusive”**

As with most phenomena, however, the ways in which various forms of abuse are conceptualised – never mind understood – will depend upon the influences shaping the lens through which these are viewed at any particular moment in time. Paradigms shift, perspectives change and understanding, of its nature, is never something ‘full’ or conclusive.

Alternatively, one could consider the yearning expressed in the presentation for a Church characterised by “all-embracing compassion”: To this end, it urged any “doctrinal, structural, canonical and pastoral changes” necessary, “without destroying communion or losing sight of the person and teaching of Jesus Christ.” Again, a huge mix of aspirations – but what likelihood a “synodal” model of Church would make this a reality?

The Irish delegation might observe the ongoing fall-out from a recent decision of the Church of England's general synod – taken the same week

they were gathered in Prague. Synod's vote to allow the blessing of same-sex unions continues to cause division, with the Bishop of London – who supported it – concerned that “what we have proposed as a way forward does not go nearly far enough for many, but too far for others”. Meanwhile – lamenting it – the Global South Fellowship of Anglican Churches (representing 25 provinces) has renounced communion with the Church of England, arguing that they can no longer “walk together” with those they see as having “taken the path of false teaching”. Surely there is food for thought and synodal learning from this episode?

#### Learning

The Church in Ireland should have time for such thought and learning – having recently been advised by Cardinal Mario Grech to “proceed at a slower pace” on its synodal pathway. Whatever his reasoning, this seems welcome advice. If embraced, it might allow the space for sustained reflection on more realistic ways forward than have emerged from the pathway to date. And, perhaps, more authentic ways too. Please God, we would use this time fruitfully.

**i** Fr Andrew McMahon is a priest of the Diocese of Dromore.

*“I dream of a Church transformed.” – Pope Francis*

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The Irish Catholic

**“Renewal in the life of the Church could not come about until it ‘fully understands the causes’ of this wrongdoing”**

# Pilgrims delight as they renew

**Chai Brady**

Irish pilgrims were delighted to renew their wedding vows in the Wedding Church in Cana during a recent pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

More than 100 pilgrims journeyed to the places associated with Jesus' ministry from February 12-20.

The small town of Cana is famous because it is where the Bible records Jesus turned water to wine at the wedding feast.

More than a dozen pilgrims took the opportunity to renew their wedding vows and had their wedding rings blessed by the spiritual director on the trip, Bishop Donal McKeown of the Diocese of Derry. There was also an opportunity for pilgrims to get a picture with the bishop.

There were also special memories for spouses who were left behind, for those who had died and for those whose relationships had not worked out the way they would've wished.

Pilgrims are pictured before the renewal of wedding vows in Cana. Photos: Chai Brady



Bishop Donal McKeown chats with a married couple after blessing their wedding rings in Cana.



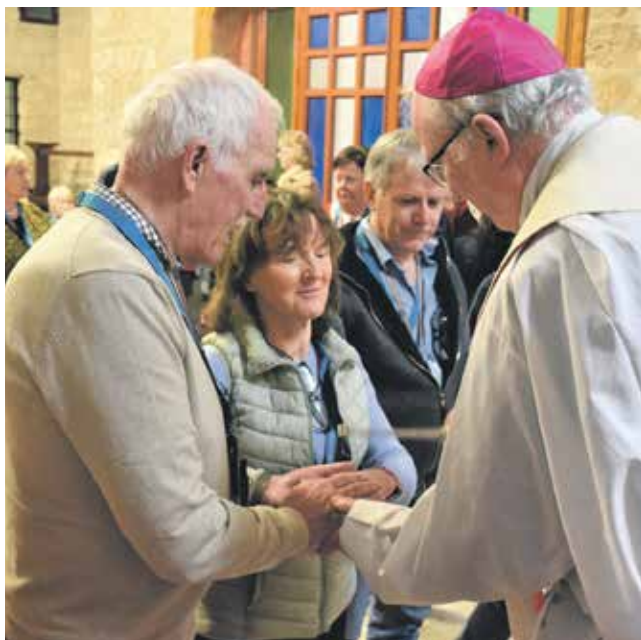
Pilgrims are pictured with Bishop Donal McKeown after renewing their wedding vows.



Bishop McKeown blesses wedding rings in Cana.



Three generations from the same family are pictured with Bishop Donal McKeown in Cana.



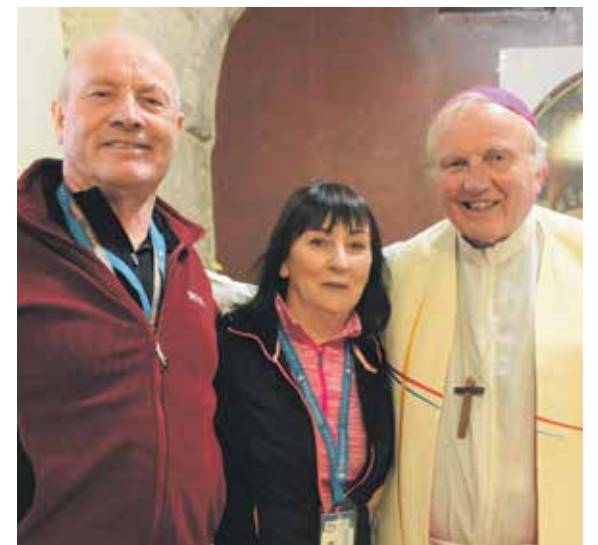
# wedding vows in Cana



A group of pilgrims pose with Bishop Donal McKeown in the Wedding Chapel in Cana.



Pilgrims gather to have their wedding rings blessed in Cana, at the site where Jesus turned water into wine.



# Young migrant communities breathe new life into Irish Church



be found in young migrants who are more accustomed to lively Church groups. However, he said more resources are needed to support them.

## New life

“One of the challenges is we as a Church in Ireland need to recognise, and to animate, and even to promote the different communities that are bringing new life into the Church in Ireland, and to accompany and to really invest our energies and time and talents to accompany these migrant communities,” he said.

After some discernment Fr Nunez Yepez was sent to Ireland straight after his ordination after spending time in China and South Korea. He spent two and half years in Inchicore in Dublin before becoming the parish priest of Darndale-Belcamp.

Coming from a very different background, Fr Nunez Yepez admits the move to Ireland was a “very interesting experience”.

“Particularly because it is very different to my experience back home where probably you still have lots of people going to church, and lots of groups and a more active evangelisation work

The Oblates are working with vibrant young people from around the world who are attracting Irish youth, **Chai Brady** hears

Ireland’s increasing secularism is making it difficult for people to not only understand the call to priesthood but the overall Christian way of life, according to a Dublin-based Oblate.

Hailing from Mexico City, Fr Eduardo Nunez Yepez OMI believes that despite the cultural challenges facing Christians, much hope can



Oblate European Commission for Youth and Vocations (House Foundation, Aix Marseille France).

with all kinds of groups,” he explained.

“Here you feel the need of a new spring in the Church. The people still have Faith but sometimes the ministers, we are in our comfort zone or are a bit comfortable with wherever we are going, and we don’t give the extra time, the extra accompaniment – especially to young people.”

Despite this, Fr Nunez Yepez is adamant the Faith is still alive. “I can say this

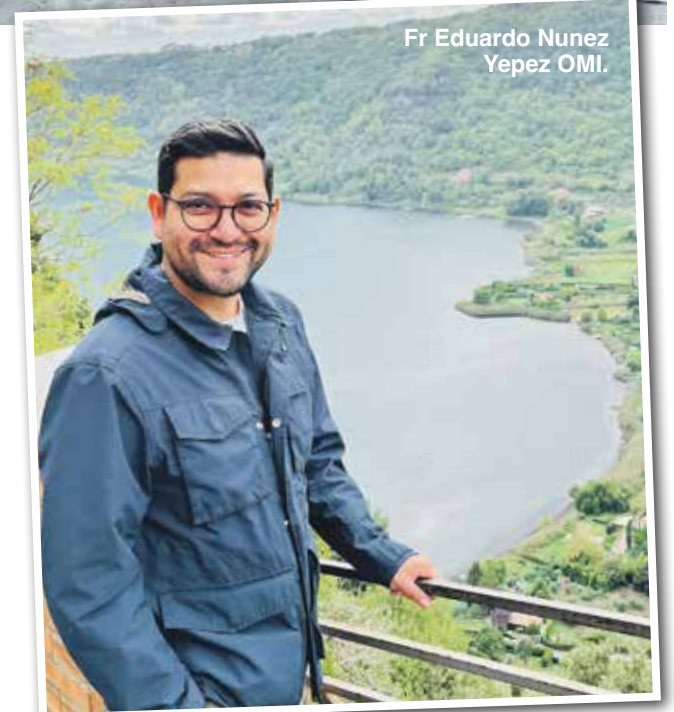
because I’m working also with young migrants in the inner city, especially among Spanish, Italian or Portuguese speakers,” he said.

**“The needs of the mission are many and the Oblate goes to the hearts of the people... to accompany them wherever they are”**

“We meet every Saturday to celebrate the Mass in Spanish or in the Latin languages and there is a very vibrant community – and some Irish young people are joining this community and something is happening there, they are looking probably for friendship, for a community to belong to and this community is providing these spaces for talking about faith, life, friendship – a space for coming together.”

The work he is doing exemplifies the Oblate charism. The missionary order live in community and dedicate their lives to all those who either do not know Jesus or have forgotten him in their lives, wherever they are in the world.

For Fr Nunez Yepez he describes it as “reaching out to where it seems to be difficult. Especially to migrants, to the marginalised, to the groups that nobody looks



Fr Eduardo Nunez Yepez OMI.

after. Part of our motto is to be close to the people. This is the core of the charism”.

At a time when the priesthood is not presented as a viable option to many young people in Ireland – which is reflected in the drastically reduced figures entering seminary – the Oblates are still on the lookout for those who hear the call.

## Vocation

Asked why a young man might consider the Oblates when exploring their vocation, Fr Nunez Yepez said: “To become an Oblate is to discover the love of God in your life. That is the beginning of the vocation. I have

discovered that and everything then comes from that: from discovering yourself as a child of God, beloved, human, and that you are able to give a lot of yourself to others.

**“A young person in Ireland can face many hurdles when considering the priesthood, even among close friends and family”**

“Then probably because of the mission. The needs of the mission are many and the Oblate goes to the hearts of the people... to accompany them wherever they are.”

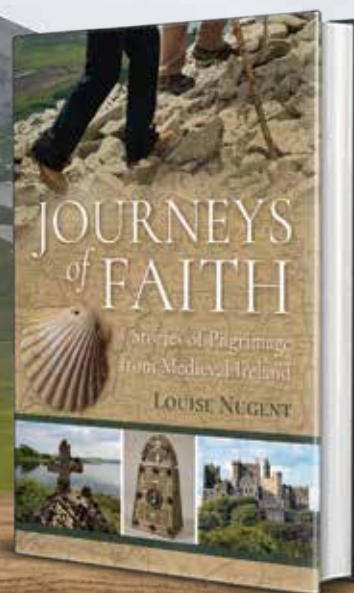
This is particularly important in a secular context, he said “as part of the mission of the Oblates is not to reach out just to the Catholics, or to the ones who have Faith, but also to be able to dialogue with many other realities and help to bring Jesus Christ into that experience also, even in the secular realities”.

A young person in Ireland

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Fr Eduardo Nunez Yepez OMI meets Pope Francis.



can face many hurdles when considering the priesthood, even among close friends and family. When addressing this reality, Fr Nunez Yepez said there's a need for the individual to first and foremost be convinced of their Faith and be accompanied by others who understand the vocation, perhaps by reaching out to a Catholic group who will support their discernment.

**“The Oblates have their own discernment programme run by Fr Nunez Yepez who is the vocations director in Ireland”**

“Probably our friends won't understand what we are feeling, the Christian discernment or the Christian vision,” he said, “when we are surrounded by the people who understand that, it will be easier. But if somebody feels the call – reach out or look for somebody who will accompany us”.

The Oblates have their own discernment programme run by Fr Nunez Yepez who is the vocations director in Ireland.

Regarding the process, he

said they firstly introduce the person in discernment to the Oblate charism and way of life, getting to know the community and the ministry, while accompanying them in their discernment of the call of God in their lives, whatever that may be.

**Community life**

“It is a journey together, so if somebody comes with the intention, we accompany them in discerning and in presenting to them, introducing to them, the Oblate charism and mission and to the community life – that is also the call of our mission as Oblates. The community is an essential part of our call, the Apostolic community,” he added.

Even when a man decides to take the leap, and years later is ordained, he enters a landscape that throws up a plethora of obstacles for a new priest. Fr Nunez Yepez stresses that it is not just priests who are challenged, but those who take other vocational paths and are trying to live a Christian life.

“The priest is one Christian who is responding to the call of God in a particular way. Sometimes we find it difficult to find our place in a very secularised society where the values of Christianity are not present anymore, or it's trans-

forming – also the understanding of our own ministry in these special contexts,” he said. “With the lack of understanding of Christianity or the values of the consecrated life, somebody might say, ‘How can a man or women dedicate their whole lives to the service of others?’

**“It is a way to dedicate your whole life to the service of others, and in giving yourself, you find yourself”**

“There is a lack also of vocations to that service, not just to the priesthood but teachers, nurses or even doctors.”

He adds: “It is a way to dedicate your whole life to the service of others, and in giving yourself, you find yourself. I suppose I find happiness and joy in that, when I meet people and you give a word of consolation or a word of hope, you are also evangelised by them. So we are also in that process of conversion.”

**i** Those who are interested in the Oblates charism or would like to discern a vocation can visit: <https://oblates.ie/vocations/>



Winter retreat in Rome, Italy, with the Oblate European Commission for Youth and Vocations.

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# What we can learn from ‘a conservative radical’



Ireland has never quite grasped the significance of the vision and thought of St John Henry Newman writes  
**Deacon Brett Lockhart**

**T**he death late last year of Fr Ian Ker, (1942–2022) the world’s leading authority on the life and thought of Cardinal John Henry Newman may have gone largely unnoticed in Ireland, but his definitive biography *John Henry Newman* in 1990 did much to explain the significant chapter of Newman’s life that involved the founding of a Catholic University in Ireland in 1854 which later became University College Dublin (UCD).

Newman was received with universal warmth when he arrived in Ireland at the invitation of Cardinal Paul Cullen, but disagreement between the Irish bishops as to the purpose of the university, the extent to which Newman could implement the

ideas laid out in his seminal work *The Idea of a University*, combined with a residual episcopal nervousness about his quintessential Englishness, ultimately resulted in the project stalling and Newman returning to the Oratory in Birmingham.

The legacy of Newman has lived on partly through the Newman University Church in St Stephen’s Green, but somehow Ireland never quite grasped the significance of his vision and thought. The initial refusal by UCD to attend the canonisation of their founder in 2019 echoed mistakes of a century ago. With an inappropriate *hauteur* the university cited concerns about its secular status and were eventually embarrassed into attending only when the Irish Government signalled its intent to be represented. It appeared that once again Ireland had missed the saint and indeed the scholar in their midst.

**“Though not Irish in background, Fr Ker shared the Ulsterman’s habit of upsetting apple carts and speaking plainly”**

A former Anglican, Ian Ker was received into the Catholic Church after university. I first met him in 2011 at Littlemore, the community founded by Newman after he had given up his Anglican parish in Oxford and where he was himself eventually received into the Catholic Church in 1845. The occasion was a televised pro-



Fr Ian Ker. Photo: CNS

gramme about the continuing influence of Newman on Catholic thought. As a former Presbyterian who had been profoundly influenced by the writings of Newman, I was delighted to meet such an authority on the life of this saint whose writings had continued to be so relevant to my own spiritual journey.

## Newman and Vatican II

Subsequently, Fr Ker graciously travelled to Belfast to deliver a lecture at St Brigid’s Parish on

Newman and Vatican II, highlighting Newman’s prescience in anticipating the developments of the council. He coined the term for Newman “a conservative radical” which neatly encapsulated the ability of the cardinal to hold in tension the insights of both progressives and traditionalists. Though not Irish in background, Fr Ker shared the Ulsterman’s habit of upsetting apple carts and speaking plainly. His delight at being photographed outside Martyrs Memorial Free Presbyterian Church during a tour of Belfast revealed a highly developed and often self-deprecating sense of humour. His views on the Church, the bishops and politics were given freely and his sense of indignation knew no bounds if he felt that an injustice had been perpetrated. Whether it be defending the reputation of Newman from his encyclopaedic knowledge of the cardinal’s life and writings or defending the post-Vatican II movements in the Church such as the Neo-Catechumenate he was the firmest of advocates and doughty of friends.

## Literary output

Fr Ker’s literary output was prodigious including a comprehensive biography of G.K. Chesterton and an apologetics best seller *Mere Catholicism*. It was, however, his interpretation and explanation of New-

man’s works for which he will be remembered. He produced over 20 volumes on the subject and there was something singularly just and appropriate when he was publicly acknowledged by Benedict XVI at Newman’s Beatification in 2010 in Birmingham. Many argue persuasively that without him the cause of the greatest English theologian would have been further deferred or missed.

**“It struck me then, and more forcibly on his passing that this diminutive, determined priest had opened up so many possibilities by his life’s work”**

During occasional visits to Burford where Fr Ker was the parish priest of the small Catholic parish of St John Fisher and St John he would have expounded in long walks in the Cotswolds about the influence of Newman on Catholic thought. His erudition was worn lightly, and the importance of good conversation combined with a decent lunch was of inestimable importance. It struck me then, and more forcibly on his passing that this diminutive, determined priest

had opened up so many possibilities by his life’s work.

## Hope

The hope is that the vision and thought of Newman which has had such a profound impact on the Catholic Church, and which has been renewed and re-animated by the work of Ian Ker will take deeper root in Ireland. As the Church in Ireland faces into a bleak winter season wounded by self-inflicted crises the clarity and prophetic insight of Newman is needed more than ever. What Fr Ker achieved was to make his writings better known and accessible and to illustrate the relevance of his thought and insights to the Church in the present age. If our patron saint could be called back to Ireland to bring the Faith, then perhaps Ireland can invoke not just the prayers of St John Henry Newman but more fully discover the treasury of his thought and writings. In doing so it would expiate for two historic sleights in 1857 and in 2019.

In his later years Ian Ker was cared for and supported by the Neo-Catechumenate in Cheltenham. His interest never waned and his correspondence and willingness to engage never dimmed. May he rest in peace.

**① Brett Lockhart is a Deacon of the Diocese of Down and Connor.**



Britain’s then-Prince Charles visits an exhibition of Cardinal Newman’s life and work at the Venerable English College in Rome on October 13, 2019, the day of the canonisation of St John Henry Newman. Photo: CNS

# Trailblazing Irish nun celebrated for maths endeavours

Ruadhán Jones

**A**n nun who was the first Irish woman to receive a doctorate in mathematics back in 1931 is set to be celebrated by a Wexford college.

To mark International Women's Day, South East Technological University's (SETU) Wexford campus will launch a new funded PhD in the area of STEM (Science, technology, engineering, mathematics) to celebrate Wexford's Sr Maggie Gough.

## Inspiration

Part funded by Sr Gough's family, the PhD access will allow her story and achievements to provide inspiration and encouragement to current students in the university, the college said in a statement.

"In so doing we are pleased to provide this support and motivation for excellence in memory of an exceptional woman," the March 2 statement reads.

**“Her family were largely unaware of the magnitude of her achievements, but they did know she was a maths teacher”**

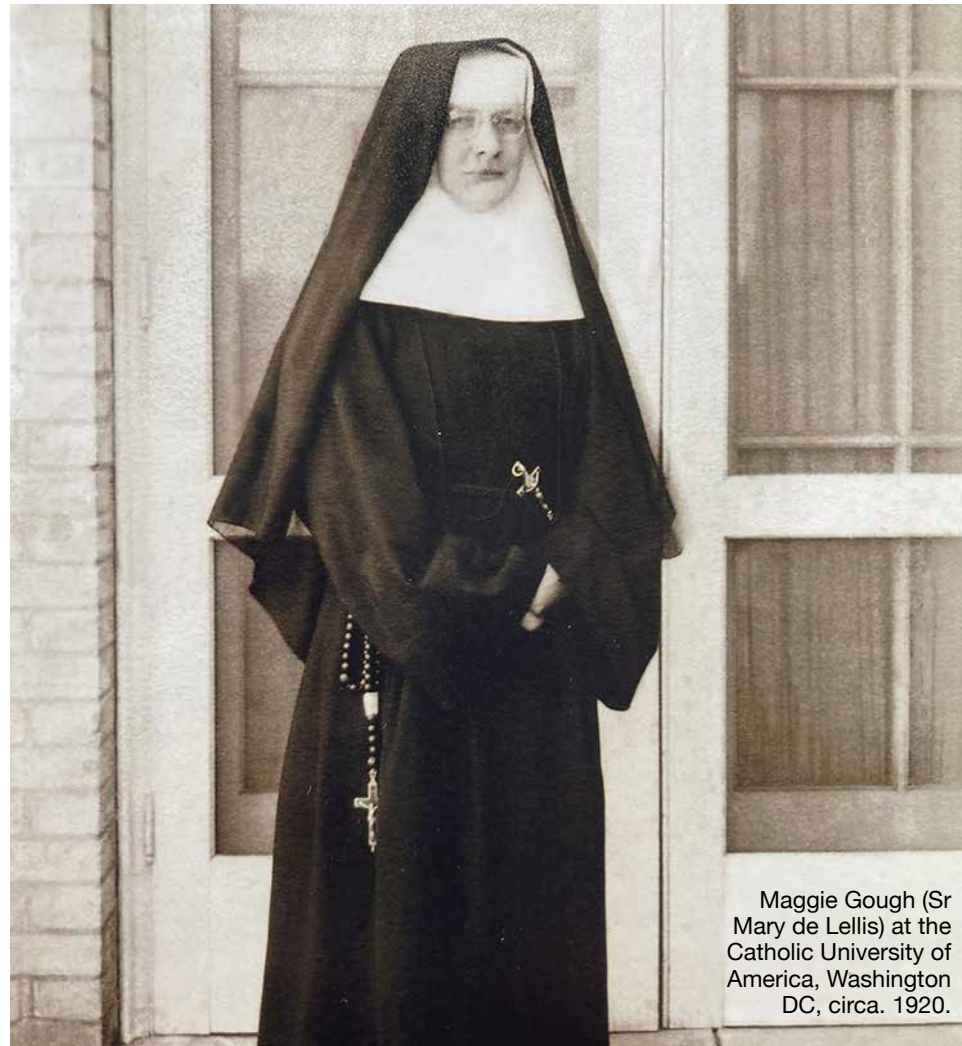
Sr Margaret Mary Gough was born in Wexford in 1892 in the parish of Kilmore. She attended a primary school run by St John of God, which gave her an early exposure to religious life.

However, her future didn't lie in Ireland's south east, as the 17-year-old Wexford girl was one of over two dozen young women from the region aboard the vessel *Irak*. It left Liverpool in August 1909 bound for America and, for Sr Maggie, ultimately Texas.

Many of her classmates sailed with her to Galveston, also headed for the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio. Sr Maggie joined the order in the early 1910s, taking the name Sr Mary de Lellis.

The Wexford native did original research in a highly technical subject at a time when very few women (or even men) got that opportunity.

Jim Moore, grandson of Maggie's sister Lizzie, was born in the same family homestead in Wexford. "She left here with a group of other girls from the area, two of whom we knew," he recalls. "I remember as a



Maggie Gough (Sr Mary de Lellis) at the Catholic University of America, Washington DC, circa 1920.

youngster them coming to visit our home in Kilmore, and everyone being put on good behaviour."

However, Sr Gough never made it back to her native land again, not even for her sister Lizzie's wedding in 1928.

"The problem was that if you came home you had to pay for your own transport," Mr Moore relates. "My grandmother died in 1947 and Sr Mary kept in touch with my grandfather and the family, she was a great letter writer."

"In the 1960s and 1970s, two of her compatriots used to come home and visit our house. Our experience of Sr de Lellis was, every Christmas, letters and presents. Prayer books came for confirmations and communions."

Initially Sr Maggie embarked on a teaching career far from the public eye. In time, however, she was permitted to advance her education and did so in three stages starting in 1920, all at the Catholic University of America in Washington DC.

Her family were largely unaware of the magnitude of her achievements, but they did know she was a maths teacher.

Sr Gough did original research at a high level in a highly technical subject. Her MA in 1923 was awarded for a

thesis on "The Representability of a Number by an Indefinite Binary Quadratic Form".

After a few more years of teaching back in Texas, she earned her PhD with a dissertation entitled "On the Condition for the Existence of Triangles In-and-Circumscribed to Certain Types of Rational Quartic Curve and Having a Common Side".

**“I discovered that she was blind, and may have suffered from what we call Alzheimer's these days”**

Her research supervisor Aubrey Landry also oversaw the doctoral dissertation of Euphemia Haynes, who became the first African American woman to earn a doctorate in mathematics in 1941.

After completing her own education, Sr Maggie taught in San Antonio for over 20 years, and then briefly at Incarnate Word Academy in St Louis, Missouri.

In 1944, she left the classroom for good due to health issues, and returned to Texas to work as an accountant in a local hospital in Forth Worth,

until she retired in 1964.

Jim Moore tried to contact her directly in her later years. "I worked internationally, as an engineer, and in 1981 I was working for an American company. I was down in Texas – now this is pre mobile phones – and I spoke to one of the sisters in San Antonio. Basically, she was saying that Sr Mary probably wouldn't recognise me, she was disabled."

## Alzheimer's

"I discovered that she was blind, and may have suffered from what we call Alzheimer's these days. She was a considerable age, and she died in 1983."

"A lot of people from families in our area would have joined religious orders and entered the priesthood," Mr Moore notes about his grand-aunt. "The St John of Gods was a prominent local order, and there was St Peter's College seminary in Wexford town."

"My aunt made an interesting comment recently that Sr Mary would have gone nowhere if she had stayed here in Ireland, for the simple reason that she came from a very poor background."

"Her father was a labourer with five acres of land! She


would have been used as a skivvy. Going to an order abroad gave her new opportunities."

Sr Gough's achievements and career were fostered and nurtured by emigration to the United States, the statement from SETU says, "a familiar story in many Irish households then. Women of her calibre and level of achievement were very rare in those days."

**“Sr Mary would have gone nowhere if she had stayed here in Ireland, for the simple reason that she came from a very poor background”**

Sr Maggie Gough's legacy and accomplishments will be acknowledged and celebrated this week as SETU, along with Maggie's family, launch the new funded PhD in STEM at the university's Wexford campus.

"No doubt Maggie Gough would be proud to see the opportunity she found and embraced in America now back on home soil," the college says.



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Thursday 23rd February	Lent - A Time of Grace	Michael McGoldrick OCD
Thursday 2nd March	Lent - A Time of Conversion	Joe Birmingham OCD
Thursday 9th March	Lent - A Path of Contemplation	Tom Curran OCD
Thursday 16th March	Lent - A Path of Meaningful Suffering	Matt Blake OCD
Thursday 23rd March	Lent - Praying from the Depths	Felix Okolo OCD
Thursday 30th March	Lent - Power and Wisdom of the Cross	Vincent O'Hara OCD

Date: February 23rd, March 2nd, 9th, 16th, 23rd & 30th

Time: 19:00 - 19:45

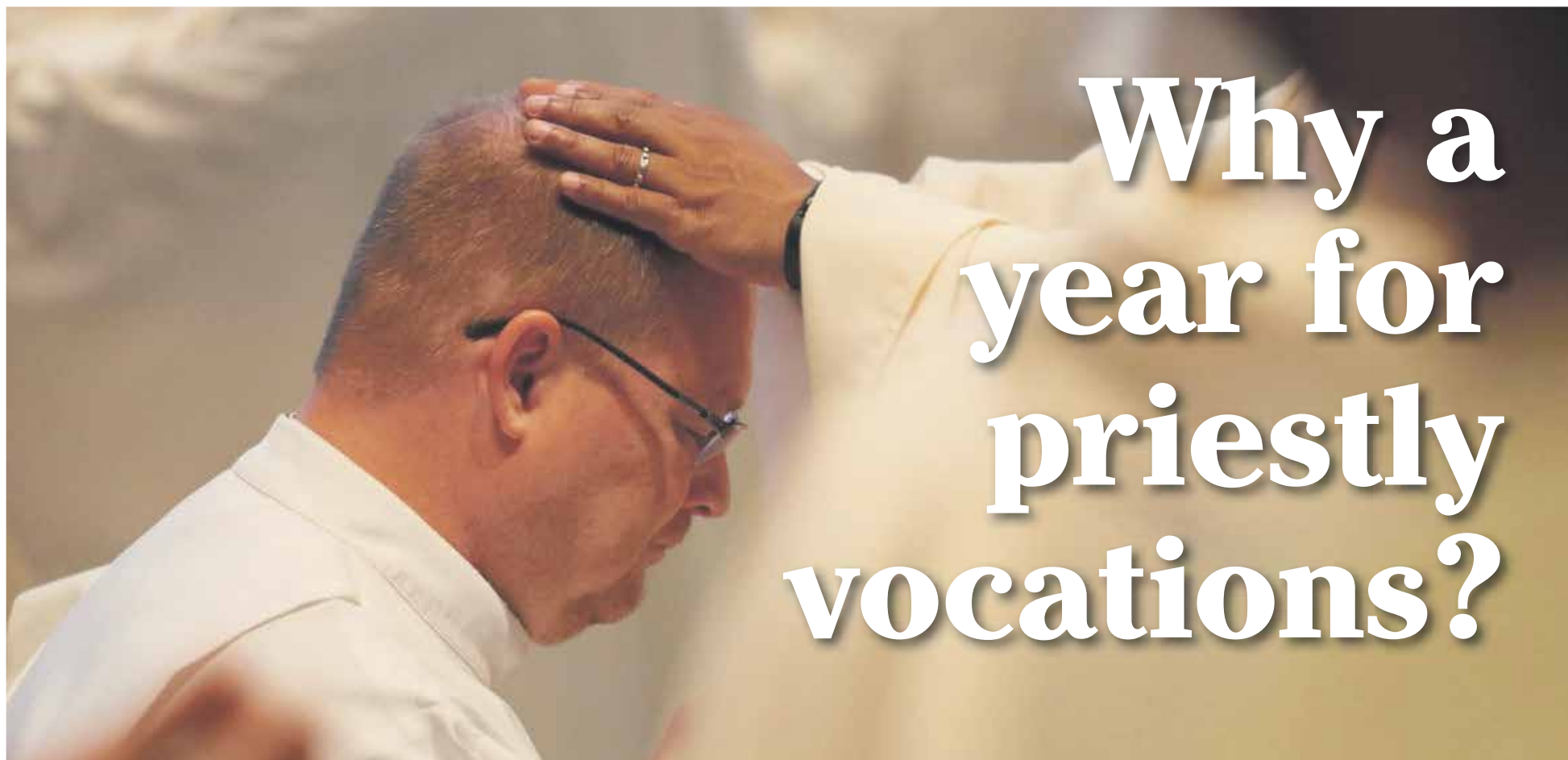
Zoom opens: 18:45

Venue: Avila Carmelite Centre, Donnybrook.

Led By: Carmelite Retreat Team

For further information: [www.avilacentre.ie/lenten-talks/](http://www.avilacentre.ie/lenten-talks/)  
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**“However, Sr Gough never made it back to her native land again, not even for her sister Lizzie's wedding in 1928”**



# Why a year for priestly vocations?



**Fear of clericalism must not be a reason for any reticence in promoting vocations to the diocesan priesthood, writes Bishop Alphonsus Cullinan**

In the synodal conversations which were held around the country in preparation for the Synod on Synodality in the Autumn of 2024, no mention was recorded of the need to promote vocations to the priesthood. This is something which causes sadness for all those who love the priesthood and has serious implications for the Church in Ireland as a whole and especially for those who promote priestly vocations. While there was a very clear and generous appreciation of parish clergy and an understanding of their heavy workload, of aging clergy and their decline in numbers, there was no mention of the need to encourage young men to consider following Jesus Christ in this particular way of life.

In the feedback from parishes around the country and in the synodal synthesis, the solution to the decline in priest numbers was tackled from a different point of view,

namely, lay leadership, lay ministerial roles, married clergy and also the ordination of women.

## Feedback

It is clear from the synodal feedback that today there is a particular understanding of the 'common priesthood of the laity'. Coupled with that there is rightly a sharp criticism of clericalism in all its forms, a clericalism which is frequently associated with the abuse of power. We read in the synthesis that some people considered the structures of the Church exclusive, patriarchal and hierarchical.

**“The sacred role of the priesthood was perhaps downplayed in favour of a particular understanding of the common priesthood of the laity”**

However, fear of clericalism must not be a reason for any reticence in promoting priestly vocations. The structures of the Church are hierarchical and priesthood has, since the beginning of the Church, been confined to male priesthood alone. There is an underlying assumption on the part of some that this needs to change. This is driven by a notion of the Church as being essentially a democratic institution where the voice of the majority can prevail over 'outdated' structures. We must also take into consideration the theological preparation of candidates for the

priesthood in seminaries after the changes in the years following the Second Vatican Council. The sacred role of the priesthood was perhaps downplayed in favour of a particular understanding of the common priesthood of the laity and a sense that old ways need to change. A major theme of the council – the universal call to holiness – was generally given little emphasis, though this is clear from the actual documents of the Council. *Lumen Gentium* Chapter five emphasises that “all the faithful of Christ are invited to strive for the holiness and perfection of their own proper state”.

Whatever the reasons the result now is a general lack of drive on the part of many priests and laity in promoting vocations to the priesthood.

These elements form some of the background to the situation in which we find ourselves. The prevailing culture in this country is one of individualism and secularism. Any belief in an objective truth has for the majority disappeared for some years now. It is not an exaggeration to say that for most people truth is something which is created in the individual's own heart and conscience without regard to past traditions or ways of acting or even to God. Pope Francis outlines a detailed analysis of today's culture in the first part of *Evangelii Gaudium*.

Right across Irish society we are facing a massive failure in every state of life to lifelong commitment. It seems to have reached an all-time low. We know from our own experience among relatives and friends that the lifetime commit-

ment to marriage has changed. What is true for the vocation to marriage is also true for priesthood. We must rediscover the true meaning of love, which gives itself fully to the one it claims to love.

## Generosity

The promotion of generosity and commitment is essential if we wish to promote vocations. St John Paul II often quoted the following line from the Second Vatican Council document on the Church in the modern world *Gaudium et Spes*: “This likeness reveals that man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself” (24).

Modern men and women must be taught and trained in the true meaning of love, in the true meaning of generosity and commitment. There is no point in lamenting the past. We are where we are.

**“Right across Irish society we are facing a massive failure in every state of life to lifelong commitment”**

The Council for Vocations of the Irish bishops' conference has designated a 'Year for Vocations to the Diocesan Priesthood', called 'Take the Risk for Christ' which begins on Good Shepherd Sunday 2023 and ends on the same Sunday of 2024.

'Take the Risk for Christ' will help to focus on the need for diocesan priests who serve God and his people

day in and day out. They administer the sacraments, help to sanctify their people, lead parish communities and groups, visit the sick, help form children in the Faith in schools and parish settings, minister to families, care for the elderly and dying and in many other ways spend themselves in the care of their people.

## Highlight

The year will hold specific events each month to highlight diocesan priesthood in particular. In 2015, Pope Francis called for the 'Year of Consecrated Life' which was well supported in dioceses all over Ireland. Now we focus specifically on diocesan priesthood. The year will be launched with a conference in St Patrick's College Maynooth on April 25 the theme of which is: Evangelisation and Mission. The keynote speaker will be Archbishop Rino Fisichella of the Vatican Dicastery for Evangelisation and there will be a panel of speakers comprised of Gavin Ashenden (former Church of England minister), Fr Brendan Kilcoyne and Jennifer Kehoe with a discussion and audience participation facilitated by Wendy Grace. (See details on [www.vocations.ie](http://www.vocations.ie)) The year will begin officially with Mass on RTÉ on Sunday April 30 celebrated by Bishop Larry Duffy and myself.

We are in great need of diocesan priests. Will we give up and lose faith that God is still calling? Or will we confidently and consistently promote vocations to the priesthood? May this year 'Take the Risk for Christ' yield great fruit.

In the end, of course, all vocations depend on God graciously calling a new generation to become companions of Jesus. Recognising our dependence on this grace, we need to commit ourselves once again to daily prayer for vocations, and that is something I hope each of you who read this will feel invited to do.

**“Modern men and women must be taught and trained in the true meaning of love, in the true meaning of generosity and commitment”**



# Out&About

## Come, Holy Spirit...



**LAOIS:** Bishop of Kildare and Leiglin Denis Nulty confirms children in Portlaoise parish on February 25. He confirmed 361 young people over February 24-25 in Portlaoise.



**DUBLIN:** Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications Jack Chambers (right) unveils the new Book of Kells stamps with David Mc Redmond, CEO of An Post. The national and worldwide stamps for posting St Patrick's Day greetings within Ireland and abroad are available at selected post offices and from [anpost.com/shop](http://anpost.com/shop), with free delivery.



**DUBLIN:** Archbishop of Dublin Dermot Farrell joins students at Dublin City University for Mass on Ash Wednesday on February 24.

### INSHORT

#### Evangelium announces 'joyful' conference

Evangelium's annual conference on evangelisation for young adults promises a "joyful Christian environment" when it takes place on Saturday, March 25.

The conference offers a "stepping stone for those seeking a deeper understanding of their faith", said Evangelium spiritual director Fr Damien Lynch.

"We're meeting a need that young Catholics feel today," Fr Lynch continued. "A need for good talks, good liturgy and some good chat over good food, all in a joyful Christian environment."

Guest speakers include the co-founder of Evangelium Fr Marcus Holden, who will speak on the importance of evangelisation; Catholic

writer James Bradshaw, who will lead a workshop on the persecuted Church; and Fr Francis Gavin, who will give a talk on Christian doctrine.

The event begins at 9am in DCU All Hallows and concludes at 6pm. Tickets cost €38 and include dinner, refreshments and a social. Visit [evangelium.ie](http://evangelium.ie) or Eventbrite to book a ticket.

#### 30 students attend pro-life summit

Over 30 third level students and young professionals attended Students for Life's Student Summit over the weekend of February 25-26.

The residential pro-life training took place in Glencomeragh, Co. Tipperary and featured workshops and talks on effective ways to communicate the pro-life message, delivered by guest speakers from home and abroad.

TD Mattie McGrath encouraged attendees to become actively involved in politics and to consider running for election to increase pro-life voices.

Meanwhile, Amrita Kaur from England testified to the importance of the abortion reversal treatment. She explained how, after taking an abortion pill, she regretted it.

Seeking the reversal treatment, she was put in touch with Irish-born Dr Dermot Kearney who assisted her. She told the young Irish people that now she is "overjoyed" to have her beautiful one-year-old daughter Ahri-Storm in her life.

#### 'No ministry of truth please minister'

Independent Senator Rónán Mullen has called on Minister Catherine Martin to ensure full

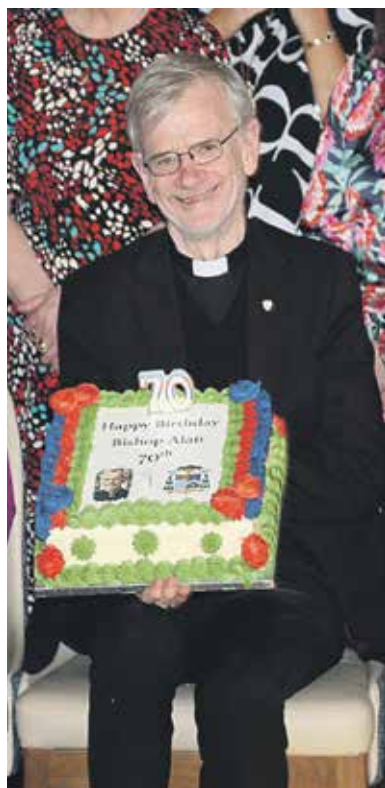
transparency on all the operations of the newly appointed Working Group on Media misinformation and disinformation.

Speaking in the Seanad on Wednesday, March 1, Senator Mullen warned against the Government and media vested interests and media vested interests undermining "the valuable work of citizen journalists".

"The last thing Ireland needs is a new 'ministry of Truth'", Senator Mullen said.

"This must be about enabling free citizens to think and express free thoughts. For that, they need accurate, not controlled, information."

He criticised the inconsistency of "fact checkers" who on occasion were "notoriously partisan" on contentious issues.



**DONEGAL:** Bishop of Raphoe Alan McGuckian is pictured with a cake presented to him by Kilmacrennan Parish to mark his 70th birthday on February 26. Photo: Monica McGettigan



**ARMAGH:** The Primate of All-Ireland and Archbishop of Armagh Eamon Martin prays at the Candle of Atonement in St Patrick's Cathedral on the day for survivors and victims of abuse on February 24.



**DUBLIN:** Fr John Harris OP gives ashes to Gráinne Smyth of Oireachtas Catering after celebrating Ash Wednesday Mass for Oireachtas members and staff in Leinster House.



**KERRY:** Fr Pdraig Walsh PP catechises children about Jesus and prayer before joining Mass with their parents in Our Lady and St Brendan on Sunday, February 26. Photos: John Cleary



**KERRY:** Fr Francis Nolan is pictured with parishioners from Fenit, Churchill and the Spa on a visit to St Brendan's Statue Fenit.



**KERRY:** Redemptorist Fr Laurence Galliher and Fr Tadhg Fitzgerald PP prepare for the first Sunday night of the mission at St John's Church, Tralee, led by the Redemptorist Order Limerick.



**KILKENNY:** Minister for Education Norma Foley joins students from St Johns Senior School in learning about arts and crafts, on February 24.

Edited by Ruadhán Jones  
Ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie



Events deadline is a week in advance of publication



**WATERFORD:** On Sunday February 26, the Ukrainian community in Waterford and the surrounding areas gathered for prayer and music to mark the first year of the war in Ukraine. The event was organised by the Ukrainian Church in Waterford and was attended by Bishop of Waterford and Lismore Alphonsus Cullinan and the Ukrainian Ambassador to Ireland Larysa Gerasko as well as the Metropolitan Mayor. Yevheniia Yemelianova (7) holds some wheat, the symbol of Ukraine, as she listens to some of the Requiem Concert. Photos: John McElroy.



**WATERFORD:** The Ukrainian community gathers in Waterford Cathedral to mark the first year of the war in Ukraine.



**WATERFORD:** Olga Doroshchuk, Soloist and Mezzo Soprano, performs during the Requiem Concert on Sunday in Waterford Cathedral to mark the first year of the war in Ukraine.



**DUBLIN:** Former President of Ireland Mary Robinson is pictured with Trocaire CEO Caoimhe de Barra on February 28 at the launch of a book commemorating the 50th anniversary of the charity's launch by the Irish bishops' conference.



**WATERFORD:** A civic reception was held in Waterford City Hall to mark the enormous service of the Franciscan and Dominican friars to the people of Waterford and its hinterland since the 13th Century. Sadly, both orders are now leaving the city. Pictured is the Mayor of Waterford, Cllr John O'Leary, making a presentation to Fr Joe Condren OFM, Vicar Provincial.

## ANTRIM

Lectio Divina takes place each Friday in St Joseph's church after 7pm Mass and on Monday in St Comgall's church after 10am Mass in Antrim parish.

## ARMAGH

A triduum of prayer to St Patrick to take place in St Patrick's Cathedral March 14-16. Mass on the three mornings at 10am and on the three evenings at 7.30pm. Talks will include: Tuesday March 14, 7.30pm, A time to look back, Archbishop Eamon Martin; Wednesday March 15, 7.30pm, a time to give thanks, Fr Peter Burns CSSR, Rector of Clonard Monastery; and Thursday March 16, 7.30pm, a time to look forward with hope and with joy, Bishop Michael Router.

## CARLOW

Holy hour takes each Monday in Lent at 7pm in St Clare's Church, Graiguecullen, while Stations of the Cross take place at 10am on Mondays followed by Mass.

## CLARE

A series of Lenten talks on the theme 'Lord teach me to pray' begins on Monday, March 13 from 8-9.15pm in Maria Assumpta Hall, Ennis parish.

## CORK

Way of the Cross takes place on Fridays during Lent at 7pm in St Peter and Paul's Church in Cork City.

A catechesis for adult faith formation is being held each Sunday and Wednesday at 8pm until March 22, in the Sacred Heart church hall, Western Rd.

A Medjugorje prayer meeting takes place every Wednesday night at 8pm in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament in the Third Order chapel, Holy Trinity Church, Fr Matthew Quay.

## DONEGAL

Lenten 'Sycamore' programme, an informal course about the Faith and its relevance, takes place in Stranolar Parish centre from 8-9pm each Thursday in March.

## DUBLIN

Legion of Mary men's conference on 'Pope Benedict's warnings on the dictatorship of relativism' takes place Friday, March 10, 7.30-9.30pm. Guest speaks Fr Vincent Twomey and Fr Columba Toman. Venue is De Monfort House, Morning Star Ave.

Taizé prayer takes place in Newman University Church, St Stephen's Green, on Tuesdays from 6-7pm.

## GALWAY

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

## KERRY

Ceiliúradh na nOg day takes place Tuesday, March 14 in Brandon Hotel, Tralee, celebrating the faith of young people in post-primary schools in Kerry diocese.

## KILDARE

Naas parish is hosting a Zoom gathering for Lent on March 9 from 7-7.30pm. To register and receive a zoom link, contact office@naasparish.net.

The Legion of Mary will lead the Stations of the Cross on Friday's during Lent at 3pm in the Church of Our Lady and St David, Naas.

## LAOIS

The rosary will be prayed for Lent Monday to Saturday at 6.30pm and at 3pm on Sunday in the Church of the Assumption, the Heath, Portlaoise parish.

## LIMERICK

Adoration will be held every Wednesday, Thursday and Friday during Lent in the Adoration Chapel, Abbeyfeale from 10am-8pm.

## LOUTH

Maria Vadia, who fled communist Cuba and became a Catholic, to address 'Encountering Christ' gathering in St Mary's Church, Knockbridge, Dundalk, on Saturday,

March 11 and Sunday, March 12.

## MAYO

The next Latin Mass in the Extraordinary Form (Tridentine) will take place on Sunday, March 12, at 5:30pm in Knock.

## MEATH

The Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal to host a 'Light the Fire!' event for St Patrick's Day, March 17, in Slane. Begins 5pm with Vespers on the Hill of Slane followed by a rosary procession to St Patrick's church. Mass at 6pm with main celebrant Bishop Denis Nulty followed by Eucharistic Adoration.

## TIPPERARY

Three-part series of talks on the mystery of the Eucharist begins Tuesday March 14, 7.30-8.30pm in St Oliver's Parish Church, Clonmel, E91N578. Topic is 'The Eucharist: holy bread or something more?' by Fr Patrick Cahill.

Morning prayer takes place after 10am Mass in St Mary's church, Clonmel parish. For the duration of Lent, an evening Mass is on at 7pm, Monday-Friday, excluding Tuesday when a Station of the Cross takes place at 7pm.

## TYRONE

The Seven Joys of Our Lady fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order meets each second Tuesday of the month in St Brigid's chapel, Brocagh, Clonoe Parish, at 7pm followed by exposition of the Blessed Sacrament from 8-9pm.

## WESTMEATH

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place in the Cathedral of Christ the King, Mullingar, Monday to Friday from 2-7pm.

## WEXFORD

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

Rosary and devotions at Rocklands Shrine to Our Lady of Wexford take place every Monday at 3pm.

# World Report

## IN BRIEF

### Vocations decline worse where priests serve larger flocks

● The decline in the number of priests, seminarians, and new vocations to the priesthood in the United States appears to be more pronounced in parishes where priests serve more parishioners, according to a report commissioned by the organisation Vocation Ministry.

Vocation Ministry aims to train and encourage priests, educators, and the Catholic laity to support and expand vocations programmes in parishes and schools. It has held over 135 workshops in more than 50 dioceses.

The study found that there are fewer new vocations in large dioceses where priests do not have a chance to get to know their parishioners and encourage budding vocations. The report's authors point out that their findings should be taken into account when considering merging Catholic parishes.

### Mourners pray for migrants killed in shipwreck off Italian coast

● Archbishop Angelo Raffaele Panzetta of Crotona-Santa Severina joined other faith leaders, local officials and members of the public March 1 in praying for migrants aboard a wooden boat who died in a February 26 shipwreck off the southern Italian coast.

The coffins of those whose bodies were recovered from the water were lined up at the local sports hall in Crotona to

allow people to pay their respects to the deceased.

The boat, crowded with about 200 passengers heading to Europe, smashed into rocky reefs and broke apart before dawn amid rough seas.

According to *Reuters*, at least 65 people died, with 12 of them children, including a baby.

At least 82 passengers survived and dozens more people were still missing.

### Thousands in Mexico march in defence of the family

● Thousands of people demonstrated in front of the Congress of the Union, Mexico's federal legislature, last week demanding that lawmakers draft and pass laws protecting the true rights of Mexican women and children.

The march, held in Mexico City, was called by the Citizens' Initiative and the National Front for the Family (FNF) platforms.

According to a statement, Rosa Mary Morales, spokeswoman for the FNF, charged during the massive demonstration that some groups seek to "impose their ideas and seek to sow fear in legislators, the people, and even the media".

"They don't understand that Mexico is a [different reality] and that we all want peace and tranquillity for ourselves and our children," she said.

### Prosecutors challenge McCarrick medical report

● Prosecutors are challenging the medical report claiming former cardinal Theodore McCarrick is not competent to stand trial on charges he sexually abused a teen in the 1970s.

McCarrick's legal team filed the report February 27 in Massachusetts' Dedham District Court based on a medical evaluation that found McCarrick, 92, is suffering from impaired cognition.

That report is now impounded by the court. Assistant Norfolk District Attorney Lisa Beatty said the state will now bring in its own expert to evaluate McCarrick to determine if he can go to trial.

The schedule for the state's evaluation is not currently set, but both sides will be back in court in April for a status conference.

Any eventual ruling on McCarrick's motion to be declared incompetent is not likely for months. McCarrick was not in court for the hearing.

## Portuguese bishops announce steps to end sexual abuse in the Church

The bishops of Portugal on Friday, March 3, began taking concrete steps to respond to a damning investigative report last month that estimated well over 4,000 children have been victims of sexual abuse within the country's Catholic Church since the 1950s.

Meeting in a plenary assembly in Fátima, the Portuguese Episcopal Conference announced the creation of all-lay diocesan commissions and a memorial to victims that will be unveiled during World Youth Day, taking place in Lisbon August 1-6, among other measures.

"We reiterate our deep gratitude to all the victims who have given their testimony over the last year. Without you, it would not have been possible to reach today. Thank you," said Fr Manuel Barbosa, a spokesman for the bishops' conference.

"We also want to leave a word of courage to all the victims who still harbour the pain in the depths of their hearts," he added, announcing that a "specific group" will be created, which will follow the model of the independent commission.

In addition, the diocesan commissions that had already been created will now be "made up only of competent laypeople in the most diverse areas of activity, with the possibility of having an ecclesiastical assistant," the bishops decided.

Another initiative announced was the creation



A church is seen on the day Portugal's commission investigating allegations of historical child sexual abuse by members of the Catholic Church in Portugal unveiled its report, in Lisbon on February 13. Photo: OSV News/Pedro Nunes, *Reuters*

of a memorial for victims of abuse. After World Youth Day, the memorial will be moved to a location outside the conference's headquarters.

Fr Barbosa also reiterated the request for forgiveness directed at "all victims of sexual abuse within the Catholic Church in Portugal," adding that "this request will be made public in April," in Fátima, during the bishops' next assembly.

The bishops pledged to provide "spiritual, psychological, and psychiatric monitoring" to all victims and

that it will have "zero tolerance towards all abusers and towards those who, in some way, concealed the abuses practiced within the Catholic Church."

Many of the priests and other alleged perpetrators of abuse identified in the independent commission's final report, issued February 13, have long since died.

But on Friday, the commission, which was authorised by the bishops' conference, provided the bishops with the names of still-active priests who have been accused. Those allegations

still must be investigated, the bishops stressed.

"I cannot remove someone from the ministry just because someone accused him," explained Bishop José Ornelas, president of the conference.

"We only have names, it is very difficult. To move forward, it is clear that we need to have data, and this list that we receive only has names," he said, adding that "if there are other documents that reach us to, first, identify who the possible abuser is and what he did wrong, we will take appropriate action".

## Murders after elections forces Nigerian diocese to evacuate

Dozens of people reportedly were murdered in post-election attacks on villages in Nigeria's Benue State March 1, according to a diocesan official.

In an exclusive interview with *ACI Africa* on Friday, March 3, Fr Remigius Ihyula, the director of Justice and Peace Commission (JPC) of the Catholic Diocese of Makurdi, described the violence. He said that staff members at the diocese have been evacuated by the military.

During the attacks, Fulani men armed

with military gear descended on the Benue State capital, Makurdi, Fr Ihyula said.

"We keep wondering how ordinary herders can lay their hands on military gear. The only possible scenario is that they are getting help from the authorities," the priest speculated. The vast majority of the Fulani tribes are Muslims, while the majority of victims are Christian.

Fr Ihyula said that his colleagues

were helping to resettle villagers that had been displaced from their homes by armed men on separate dates between February 23 and March 1.

"As I speak to you, there are ongoing attacks in several places. An eyewitness called me on the day of the elections [February 25] informing me that people were being slaughtered in Tyopav village. Then more attacks were reported from Anwase village. The reports of attacks kept coming," the Nigerian priest said.

## Catholics face 'new moment' for Church teaching on war

Offering a comprehensive but engaging overview of both traditional and modern Catholic teaching on war and peace, Cardinal Robert W. McElroy of San Diego spoke

March 1 at the University of Notre Dame, assuring his audience that the Catholic Church will never be done

speaking out about war and peace.

This year, he pointed out, marks two important anniversaries of Church teachings on war and peace: the 60th anniversary of St John XXIII's 1963 encyclical, *Pacem in Terris* ("Peace on Earth") and the 40th anni-

versary of *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*, the 1983 letter of the US Catholic bishops on questions of war and peace.

However, Pope Francis, Cardinal McElroy told his audience, has combined and woven together statements

about war and peace from his papal predecessors in a new and important way "that places nonviolence rather than the just war ethic as the dominant prism through which we can evaluate decisions in situations of deep conflict," he said.





Edited by Ruadhán Jones  
Ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie

## A sad vigil...



A Greek Orthodox priest stands next to the site of a train crash near the city of Larissa, Greece, March 2. Rescuers searched for survivors in the mangled, burned-out wreckage of two trains that slammed into each other March 1 in northern Greece, killing more than 40 people in the country's worst rail crash. Photo: OSV News/Alexandros Avramidis, Reuters.

## Church in Spain vows to resist new 'anti-life laws'

Catholic bishops in Spain have bitterly criticised new laws liberalising abortion and gender reassignment in their latest clash with the Socialist-led government of Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez.

"We are not doing well – indeed, we are following a path of ruin for the person and society," Bishop Demetrio Fernández of Córdoba said in a February 26 letter to the Faithful.

"It is as if all the demons had been unleashed, and we see lies, violence, human rights violations and evil in all its forms emerging everywhere. We cannot confront such evil with a political program

– the demons can only be expelled with prayer and fasting."

The bishop made the comments as new laws were enforced allowing 16-year-olds to obtain abortions up to 14 weeks without informing their parents, and to re-register their gender without medical or legal procedures.

The new "Organic Law on Sexual and Reproductive Health," enacted February 16 by 185 votes to 154 in Spain's 350-seat Congress of Deputies, also will criminalise prayers outside abortion clinics and introduce a registry of doctors who refuse to terminate pregnancies. In addition, the law

liberalises sex education and provides free morning-after pills.

The "Law for Real and Effective Equality of Trans Persons and Guaranteeing LGBT Rights", also enacted February 16 against opposition from feminist groups and Spain's General Judiciary Council, will allow those over age 12 to declare a gender change with court approval.

Parallel measures, enacted in 2014 by Denmark, also were adopted February 1 for those over 18 in Finland but have been blocked over the past year in Sweden, France and the United Kingdom.

Bishop Fernández said

animals currently enjoyed more rights in Spain than unborn children, and urged an awakening of consciences in "a society which seems numbed and drugged".

Meanwhile, another bishop said Spain's "social, cultural, familial and personal crisis" was reflected in the political scene, adding that the country needed leaders "who listen to their consciences before consulting the polls".

"This all began decades ago with the secularisation process, and it has led to an eclipse of reason and conscience," Bishop José Ignacio Munilla of Orihuela-Alicante said in a Lenten pastoral letter.

## Order of cloistered nuns leaves Nicaragua after 22 years

The Trappist Sisters of Nicaragua, whose religious order arrived from Argentina in 2001, announced that they have left the Central American country after 22 years of work and service.

In a February 27 post on their Facebook page, the nuns explained: "We, the Trappist Sisters of Nicaragua, have voluntarily left the country" and said they made the decision because of "reasons the order has," the "lack of

vocations," and the "old age of several sisters, etc."

"We will always remain united in prayer, in friendship, and in the love that the Lord has given us during these 22 years," they added, announcing their "new destination is Panama".

The first Trappist sisters arrived in Nicaragua in January 2001 from the town of Hinojo in Argentina and founded the Holy Mary of Peace monastery in the Chontales district of

the country.

In recent days, the nuns handed over the monastery to the Diocese of Juigalpa, which has not yet made a statement on the transfer.

Although the nuns didn't mention anything in their communiqué about their residency status in Nicaragua, the General Directorate for Migration and Foreigners has issued summons to various religious and foreign missionaries in the last two weeks.

## Vatican roundup

### Pope rules cardinals must pay rent on Vatican housing

● Cardinals and other senior Vatican officials who have been living rent-free in Vatican-owned apartments in Rome will now have to pay "ordinary" unsubsidised rates, Pope Francis said.

A rescript written by Maximino Caballero Ledo, the prefect of the Secretariat for the Economy, and signed by the Pope on February 13 said that Vatican entities are now prohibited from offering leases, rentals or property use free-of-charge or at low-cost prices.

Rate standardisation also will be applied to those staying in Vatican guest houses, including the residence where Pope Francis chose to live instead of the papal apartments.

Instead, properties owned by the Vatican and Vatican-related entities must charge the same rates to top Vatican officials as would be applied to those not affiliated with the Vatican.

The new order applies to cardinals and top management personnel of offices of the Roman Curia, including the Roman Rota, a Vatican tribunal.

The new rules went into effect immediately following the Pope's meeting with Mr Caballero on February 13. Its contents were published by *Vatican News* March 1.

### Six sainthood candidates closer to canonisation

● Pope Francis has moved six candidates for sainthood closer to canonisation.

In a meeting with Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, prefect of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, the Pope signed decrees February 23 recognising a miracle attributed to the intercession of an Italian religious sister and the heroic virtues of five others: two laywomen, two priests and a religious woman.

The process for being proclaimed a saint includes a study of the candidate's life and writings to determine whether he or she lived the Christian virtues in a heroic way.

A miracle attributed to the candidate's intercession is required for beatification and another miracle is needed for canonisation.

With the Pope's recognition of a miracle through her intercession, a beatification ceremony can be planned for Sr Elisabetta Martinez, founder of the Congregation of the Daughters of St Mary of Leuca.

The Italian, who lived 1905-1991, founded the congregation to care for young children and single mothers.

The miracle reportedly involved saving a foetus experiencing blood clots and other complications; the baby was born in good condition in 2018.

Five other candidates for sainthood will become

"venerable" after Pope Francis recognised their heroic virtues:

Francisca Alcover Morell, a Spanish writer and laywoman, defended the Church in newspapers during the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s, penning nearly 600 articles on Catholic teaching before her death in 1954.

Italian lay woman Albertina Violi Zironoli was a schoolteacher who educated young women in post-war Italy to give them better work opportunities. She was deeply involved in the Focolare movement and instilled Christian values in her children despite resistance from her husband. She died in Rome in 1972.

Capuchin Fr Giulio Bocci, also known as Fr Giuseppe di Sant'Elpidio, was an Italian priest passionate about helping others discover their vocation.

Brazilian Sacred Heart Fr Aloisio Sebastiao Boeing died in 2006. He was a longtime spiritual director in his congregation's novitiate as well as for many priests and founded the Marian Fraternity of the Heart of Jesus for consecrated religious and lay women.

Ursuline Sr Maria Margherita Lussana, who died in 1935, co-founded the Congregation of Ursuline Sisters of the Sacred Heart and opened a boarding school which allowed poor girls to attend for free and took in orphans.

# LetterfromUSA

Rachel Hoover

Among Catholics, the sacrament of Matrimony is in freefall. Over 50 years between 1969 and 2019, Catholic marriages declined 69% even as the Catholic population increased by nearly 20 million, according to Georgetown University's Centre for Applied Research in the Apostolate.

In 2021, as US Catholics largely emerged from the restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic, weddings were still down more than 30,000 from 2019's pre-pandemic number of nearly 132,000 marriages celebrated.

However, fuelling the decline is a broader cultural crisis of dating that is also leaving single Catholics struggling to meet each other in person, or even online.

A 2021 survey by the Institute for Family Studies asked people under 55 who desired marriage why they were not married: 58% said, "It is hard to find the right person to marry".

**“Most of the people I meet in Chicago aren't interested in having a family anytime soon, let alone having a relationship or life centred around faith”**

When Roxane\*, 23, logged onto CatholicMatch, she found very few matches near her home in Maryland. To broaden her scope, Roxane tried the dating app Hinge, and found two men who claimed to be Catholic, "but sitting in church for one hour a week was too much for them," she told *OSV News*.

## Long-distance relationships

Some in her situation form long-distance relationships; the CatholicMatch Instagram account regularly posts success stories, many about long-distance couples. But that doesn't appeal to Roxane.

"I feel a connection more when I'm with the person physically so that I can see the expression, the body language, and how he treats other people," she said.

Matt, 23, also struggles to meet fellow single Catholics in-person. He said the dating scene was pretty good at his Catholic university, but following graduation, it's hard to find like-minded Catholic women.

"Most of the people I meet in Chicago aren't interested in having a family anytime soon, let alone having a relationship or life centred around faith," Matt told *OSV News*.

He also suspects that many women don't feel the need for a man, at least until they're older and financially established. In his experience so far, Matt said, "I'd say a lot of women wouldn't ever put something like that above their career in this age range: early to mid-20s."

Elizabeth, 31, established her career in her 20s, but also actively searched for a spouse.

"I didn't think it would be that

## Dating culture crisis fuels Catholic marriage vocation collapse



A file photo shows a couple holding hands during a late-night Mass at the Benedictine church in Illinois, USA. Catholic weddings have dropped 75% in 50 years – but the reasons for the decline are more complicated than many older or married Catholics assume: among them, it's hard for single practicing Catholics to meet each other. Photo: *OSV News*.

difficult since I knew a lot of women who met their husbands very young," she told *OSV News*.

## Online dating

She tried online dating, joined a local Catholic young adult group, and told friends and family she was open to meeting anyone they knew. She even employed a matchmaker. While Elizabeth succeeded in meeting people – Catholic and non-Catholic – nothing panned out.

"Most of the Catholic men were initially attracted to me, but lost interest when they learned that I planned to have a career," she said. "The non-Catholics (and some of the Catholics) stopped seeing me when they realised that I wasn't going to have sex with them (before marriage)."

She also found that most of the Catholic men she encountered were "rather uninteresting".

"They didn't seem to have much to talk about. There was no joking or flirting," she said. "They tended

to have few hobbies and interests, when compared to other men I tried to date."

**“Dating seems like job interviews until you reach a certain threshold where you are finally real with each other”**

Other young Catholics told *OSV News* the Catholic young adult scene is also posing a challenge to form real connections – including problematic dynamics they do not typically find in non-Catholic peer groups.

"When you walk into an event with evangelicals, someone will say 'hello' to you right away, and draw you into their group conversation if they are in one," Sara Perla, 40, told *OSV News*.

"I have been invited to things with Catholics in which I walk into the room, not knowing anyone but the host, and no one even looks up ... and

when you try to start a conversation, you hit a brick wall," said Ms Perla.

Jacob, a software engineer in his mid-20s, says he's found a friend group and a few dates through a young adult program run by his archdiocese in the Midwest. But he also notices a lack of conversation skills among his peers at these events.

## Conversation skills

"Some of the men tend to steer towards intense intellectual, deep, theological discussions, which makes it harder for people who aren't interested in that to participate. ... There are a lot of people who are very political, and everyone's got vastly different opinions," said Jacob.

Many single Catholics say they struggle to find anyone "in the middle": someone with genuine faith and a commitment to chastity, but without a super-strict approach to Catholicism that goes beyond Church teaching.

There's confusion, too, about how to show interest in a potential partner, and even how dating works.

"Sometimes girls drop hints or act interested but guys completely have no idea about this, because they're overthinking: 'Is she dropping a hint or just being friendly?' At the same time, guys don't tell girls how they feel and tend to beat around the bush because they're afraid of rejection," said Jacob.

## Shopping mindset

If single Catholics do manage to start dating, other problems arise along the way. One is what Daniel, 39, calls a "shopping mindset."

He sees most Catholics coming into dating with checklists of criteria for their future spouse and a reluctance to share their true selves. "Dating seems like job interviews until you reach a certain threshold where you are finally real with each other," said Daniel.

Daniel said he had never experienced this "incredibly awkward and stilted social climate" with non-Catholics: "You certainly had anxieties and people using each other, but not this high fear of sharing oneself preventing connection and relationship."

Even when a relationship is finally established, addiction, psychological wounds, and abuse can still ruin it.

Elizabeth did get married at age 30 – later than she had hoped – to a non-Catholic man. He professed to be religious and supportive of her goals, but turned out to be deceptive and abusive. He divorced her six months later.

**“There was no discussion of warning signs of domestic abuse, of which there were many. There was no discussion of what would make a marriage valid or invalid”**

When asked if the Church could have helped prevent this situation, Elizabeth told *OSV News*, "Yes, absolutely." She describes the premarital counselling offered through the Church as "woefully inadequate".

"There was no discussion of warning signs of domestic abuse, of which there were many. There was no discussion of what would make a marriage valid or invalid. ... Now that I'm trying to prepare for an annulment, I have a much clearer understanding of the Catholic definition of marriage than I ever did as part of my wedding prep," said Elizabeth.

If her marriage is declared null, Elizabeth can attempt a valid Catholic marriage again. But given today's dating landscape for Catholics, that might be a long road.

\*Some names have been changed to protect privacy.

❶ Rachel Hoover writes for *OSV News* from Nashville.

# What do Pope Francis' latest financial measures mean?



Pope Francis gives his weekly general audience on February 22, in the Vatican audience hall. Photo: CNS



Andrea Gagliarducci

A new rescript from Pope Francis will mean an increase in the cost of housing for senior Vatican officials, a belt-tightening measure that is part of a broader effort to centralise the assets of the Holy See.

Dated February 13, the rescript was not published in the bulletin of the Press Office of the Holy See but was instead pinned up inside the Vatican, where it was photographed and published for the first time in the blog *Messa in Latino*, and soon after publicised by *Vatican News*.

The document explains that Pope Francis has decided to abolish “any arrangement for the use of free or advantageous lodgings for cardinals, heads of dicasteries, presidents, secretaries, sub-secretaries, managers, and equivalents”. The prices of flats intended for other employees would not be affected.

Relatedly, on February 20, Pope Francis reiterated in a motu proprio titled “The Native Law” that the assets

of the Holy See belong to the Holy See. Prior to this, various Vatican entities have had complete autonomy over how they allocate and manage buildings. Now the Pope has established, by law, that the management belongs solely to the institution of the Holy See, further centralising the control of finances.

On the one hand, Pope Francis continues his fight against ecclesiastical privileges. But, on the other hand, he strikes a Vatican system that, albeit with limitations, had the advantage of making work in the Holy See accessible to all.

## The rescript

The rescript of February 13 came following a hearing granted to the prefect of the Secretariat for the Economy, Maximino Caballero Ledo.

The motivation for the decision, the document explains, is that of “meeting the growing commitments that the Holy See is facing for the fulfilment of the service of the universal Church and the needy” and, therefore, the need to “reserve to the Apostolic See more resources also by increasing the revenues of the real estate management”.

Apartments can no longer be for office use or outside the market price. It is also added that “the proprietary institutions will have to apply to the aforementioned subjects the same prices applicable to those who do not have an office in the Holy See or the Vatican City State”.

Exceptions can only be authorised by the pope, which makes every decision highly centralised.

**“In reality, the Vatican apartments, especially those traditionally intended for dicastery heads or cardinals, are large in size, prestigious, and, in any case, in expensive area”**

Pope Francis' choice affects a Vatican system that was born precisely to allow everyone – employees and department heads – to work in the most dignified way possible.

There are about 5,000 Vatican employees, split between the Vatican City State administration and the Holy See. They all receive a salary, which is generally modest. In the Vatican, there are 10 levels of remuneration, ranging from €1,300 per month for the first level to approximately €2,400 per month for the 10th level, which can be increased by €250 based on merit.

The cardinals of the Roman Curia currently have a remuneration of between €4,500 and €5,000 a month, which includes the €1,500 of the “cardinal dish” (*piatto cardinalizio*) due to every cardinal in the world. A bishop or archbishop head of a dicastery

receives between €3,000 and €4,000.

The reasoning is that these salaries could afford a market-priced rent. In reality, the Vatican apartments, especially those traditionally intended for dicastery heads or cardinals, are large in size, prestigious, and, in any case, in expensive areas. In many cases, it would take an official's full salary to cover the full-market price.

For the Holy See, however, the important thing is that everyone could have the opportunity to work in the Vatican. Hence, the controlled price system is favoured because the small Vatican City State has no taxes. Therefore, the employees have a net salary without taxes.

## Economic crisis

The move is not the first tightening of Vatican finances under Pope Francis. In 2021, the Pope established that, starting from April 1 of that year, the remuneration paid by the Holy See to the cardinals be reduced by 10%, while the income of the other superiors was trimmed by 8%. There was also a further 3% cut for salaries for clergy and religious in the 10 functional and non-management levels. Furthermore, seniority increases were also suspended until April of this year.

The provisions did not apply only to the institutions of the Holy See but also to the Vicariate of Rome; to the Chapters of the Vatican, Lateran, and Liberian Papal Basilicas; to the Fabbrica di San Pietro; and to the Basilica of San Paolo Fuori Le Mura.

In August 2021, Pope Francis decided to abolish the “token” (a sort of refund/salary) intended for members of the Chapter of St Peter's if the members of the chapter already had a salary or an income.

## Real estate

How many properties are owned by the Holy See? The Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See (APSA), which now has the entire administration of the Holy See in its charge, administers 2,400 flats and about 600 offices and commercial premises. The overall value of the Holy See real estate is estimated to be between €2 billion and €3 billion.

Some 70% of the APSA houses are assigned to employees of the Holy See at a rent generally 40% lower than the market value of rental housing in the same areas. The remaining 30% is instead rented to outsiders who request it at a monthly rent 15% lower than the apartment's market value.

The other Vatican body that manages real estate assets is the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples, the ancient Propaganda Fide. According to estimates, the dicastery owns about 500 apartments in about 60 buildings, managed so far independently by the central administration of the Holy See.

They are rented at market price, according to a 2015 dicastery release. It should, however, be noted that the renovation costs of the buildings, when there are any, are borne by those who live there and that the property then returns to the availability of the

Holy See.

The lay employees of the Vatican are organised into an association with a dedicated and constantly updated website. One of the last posts said that the basic salary is being revised upward, with a maximum ceiling of 5%. However, the employees complained that the percentage did not consider the rent increase.

**“The annual budget has not yet been published but there is already talk of a forecast of a liability that goes beyond 200 million euros”**

The APSA had notified several employees – with a registered letter dated December 15, 2022 – that the rent would be adjusted for inflation, which varies from 8% to 10%. Therefore, the salary adjustment could not cope with the rent increase. Now, the tightening that concerns the heads of departments could have the same effect.

Will there be a future in which the Vatican secretary of state no longer lives in the Apostolic Palace? And how much should he pay in the lease? Or will some particular situations be part of the exceptions?

These are questions that remain open. However, the Vatican's need, first of all, to accumulate capital should be noted. The annual budget has not yet been published – it usually happens at the end of July or the beginning of August – but there is already talk of a forecast of a liability that goes beyond 200 million euros.

Also adding to the expenses of the Curia was the crisis of the Institute for the Works of Religion (IOR), commonly known as the Vatican Bank.

Even the collection of Peter's Pence was not optimistic. According to the numbers released on June 16, 2022, Peter's Pence earmarked €55.5 million in 2021 to support the activities promoted by the Holy See in carrying out the apostolic mission of the Holy Father, and €9.8 million were instead allocated to projects of direct assistance to the needy. As a result, Peter's Pence spent €65.3 million, only partially covered by funding, which settled at €46.9 million.

The measures, therefore, are designed to resolve a liability that promises to be very heavy. At the same time, however, they risk throwing the Vatican system into crisis. Who will ultimately be able to lead a dicastery? Who is supported by an excellent economic situation (personal or the result of donations), and who will have the Pope's approval to control expenses? Or, at the very least, this could be the case if there are no adjustments made to these latest decisions.

**i** Andrea Gagliarducci is an Italian journalist for Catholic News Agency and Vatican analyst for ACI Stampa.

# Letters

Post to: Letters to the Editor, The Irish Catholic, Unit 3b, Bracken Business Park, Bracken Road, Sandyford, Dublin 18, D18 K277 or email: letters@irishcatholic.ie

## Letter of the week

# Govt must protect God-given institution of marriage

**Dear Editor,** Regarding the front-page article by Chai Brady and Jason Osborne [*The Irish Catholic* – February 9, 2023] where parishes warn of Dublin City's menacing decline: This wonderful article gave us a chilling reminder of just how close we have become to total anarchy.

Of course, this decline of law and order is not a recent course of events. It has been over the past two decades, taking its toll slowly but surely on our youth and the disadvantaged of our towns and cities.

Drugs, the use of guns, knives, beatings and anti-social behaviour has laid waste to a whole generation of our youth where sadly their short life is just another drug incident report.

In my humble opinion, the real and sad reality is the loss of the family unit where the mother and father are a strong and stable influence, on their children.

Sadly the family unit is being torn to shreds by successive governments, the Sacrament of Marriage is being degraded,

dismantled stone by stone, so its final destruction is sadly being played out nightly in our towns and cities with children as young as 12 years old running riot.

It is surely time we as people demand of our leaders that they spend our money wisely on protecting and enhancing the family unit and the God-given institution of marriage with the mother and father, given the respect as guardians and protectors of the children. If this measure were given priority, the State would have to spend far

less on providing prison places with our underprivileged getting a real and meaningful education and taking their rightful place in the Ireland of tomorrow.

We as a nation have sadly lost our way, after all, wasn't Jesus himself the proud son of Joseph and Mary who looked after their son until his end.

*Yours etc.,  
John Browne  
Roscrea, Co. Tipperary*

## Do not be dragged into mythology around Brigid

**Dear Editor,** The piece by Breda O'Brien, entitled 'Attempts to co-opt St Brigid are offensive' [*The Irish Catholic* – February 9, 2023], seems to me mired in academic argument.

Surely the point is that media commentary on St Brigid/Brigid was, as I complained in this page, handed over to the pro-abortion advocates, courtesy of their friends in the media.

Coverage was always going to be about Celtic goddesses because the coverage they absolutely fear is the abortion of female babies in the womb.

So let's not get dragged into the mythology stuff. They love that.

The abject failure of the complaints division of the BAI [Broadcasting Authority of Ireland] to do its job is clear, so too the failure of the pro-life people to unite under one leadership and enforce journalistic standards.

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



## Political correctness and God as a father

**Dear Editor,** It is reported that the Anglican Church is thinking about changing the words of the Our Father to make the prayer more acceptable to those who perceive the Church to adhere to patriarchal as opposed to gender neutral terminology. In addition, a media vox pop amongst some Irish Catholic priests gleaned some support.

I couldn't help thinking of the fact the Jesus himself called God his father and, as incarnate man—God, he had to have a mother and father. God the Creator did not become incarnate, but his word did.

Jesus also referred to himself as the Word and Son of Man having taken his humanity from Mary and his divinity from God. He even said: "I am in the father and the father is in me."

Jesus is, and was man, and as such he ascended glorified into Heaven.

Let's suppose he called God his mother that would mean Jesus had two mothers. To be human he had to have a mother to give birth to him and a father to generate him.

Yes the Scripture refers to God as love and having the tenderness of a mother but ever since the creation humankind has understood that God created us male and female in his image and likeness (with respect to some of his attributes).

No matter how political correctness tries to frame it every person born has to have both male and female parents to be human.

Apart from the fact that eliminating the word father from the Lord's own prayer, which he prayed and taught his disciples to pray, the extent of the revision required to update the Bible, all the prayers in Christendom and all the traditional hymns, not to mention the millions of Christian books would occupy more than a lifetime.

*Yours etc.,  
Loretto Browne  
Ashbourne, Co. Meath*

## Some priests need refresher course in theology

**Dear Editor,** Gender neutral pronouns cannot be used for God as this would be to take away from who God is, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is and always has been communicated to the world as being 'Father' and 'Jesus' was the image of the father in the person of the son, he was great high priest and king which are all male roles.

That does not, of course, mean that God has a sex or gender; he doesn't. However, the terms 'He' – 'Father', 'Son',

'Priest', and 'King', are used so we understand the role God plays in the universe and most importantly in our lives as the Godhead, as our father.

God is described as 'Family' because in him you have fatherhood, sonship and the essence of family which is 'Love' – the interpersonal love who is the Holy Spirit, and woman, to a finite extent, in a limited way, embodies that Love: Only the Blessed Virgin Mother was the most perfect human embodiment

of the love of God in the Holy Spirit. This is how both man and woman are intimately connected to God through the roles of mother and father in his Church. Christ the bridegroom and his Church, his bride.

The teachings behind Christianity are very deep and complex and require a level of understanding that Christian leaders, especially many priests, just don't have and their beliefs that religion must reflect social norms and

modern society is evident. They need to reconsider their ministry or take a refresher course in theology. Ordinarily I would be surprised by such suggestions coming from Catholic priests but as far left ideologies have been slowly seeping their way into Catholicism for years, by like-minded individuals within the priesthood of the Catholic Church, it does not surprise me.

*Yours etc.,  
Christopher Carr  
Middleton, Co. Cork*

## God's truth on marriage

**Dear Editor,** In his letter [*The Irish Catholic* – February 2, 2023] Daithi O'Muirneachain seeks to sideline the Church's Eucharistic practice regarding the divorced and remarried (without a decree of nullity). His case is based on a limited appreciation of New Testament teaching.

In Mark 10:11-12 Jesus teaches unambiguously about marriage indissolubility: "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery." Luke 16:18 and 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 teach

similarly.

In Matthew Jesus begins his teaching with the declaration "What therefore God has joined together, man must not divide" (19:6). What leads to misunderstanding is the following verse 9: "I say to you: whoever divorces his wife except for 'X', and marries another, commits adultery; and he who marries a divorced woman commits adultery." The Greek word used by Matthew for the 'X' exception is 'porneia'. This is not the standard Greek word in the New Testament for adultery which is 'moicheia'. So what is this 'porneia'

exception? Catholic Biblical scholarship believes that Jesus is making a very limited exception for marriages between blood relatives that were considered invalid under Jewish law. This view of the Matthew exception is supported by the fact that unlike Mark and Luke, Matthew wrote his gospel with a Jewish audience in mind.

In God's eyes, somebody who is divorced and remarried (without a decree of nullity) is either still married to their first spouse – or they are not. How much does God's truth matter to us?

*Yours etc.,  
A.P. Breen  
Bronx, New York, USA*

## Letters to the Editor

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

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

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

# Your Faith

The Irish Catholic, March 9, 2023

## Saint of the Week

St John of God:  
Holding out God's  
healing hand

Page 31



# Acting like Christ this Lent



**T**his Lent, Jonathan Roumie has a full plate at work – and an empty one at home, he told *OSV News*, thanks to some “heavy fasting” he plans to undertake between now and Easter.

“Fasting is super-powerful,” Mr Roumie said. “Any time I do it, stuff just starts opening up, and (there’s) clarity. I just keep thinking of when the disciples were asking Jesus why they couldn’t cast out certain demons, and he (said), ‘You’ve got to pray and fast more.’ ... There’s a spiritual power that comes from disciplining your body that way.”

The actor, who plays Jesus in the streaming hit series *The Chosen*, stars in the recently



**Jonathan Roumie, of *The Chosen*, fame says he’s doubling down on God this Lent, writes Gina Christian**

released film *Jesus Revolution*, portraying evangelist Lonnie Frisbee, a leader of the “Jesus People” movement in Southern California during the late 1960s and early 1970s. The revival saw thousands of youth from the nation’s “sex, drugs and rock ‘n’ roll” counterculture flock to churches such as Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, California, while imparting to mainstream Christian denominations a new openness to

marginalised groups.

With audiences already accustomed to seeing him onscreen as Jesus, Mr Roumie was a natural for the part, since the charismatic Frisbee cultivated a Christ-like appearance, growing long hair and a beard while donning a robe and sandals for his ministry.

“I think he was proud of that fact,” said Mr Roumie, who researched Frisbee’s life extensively for the film. “He recog-

nised that he looked like Jesus and he said, ‘There’s no one else I’d rather look like.’ ... He was a fan of St Francis of Assisi, and he would borrow from Catholic traditions in many ways.”

The role marks a shift for Mr Roumie, who described Frisbee as “a bit of a tortured soul ... with deep, deep wounds”.

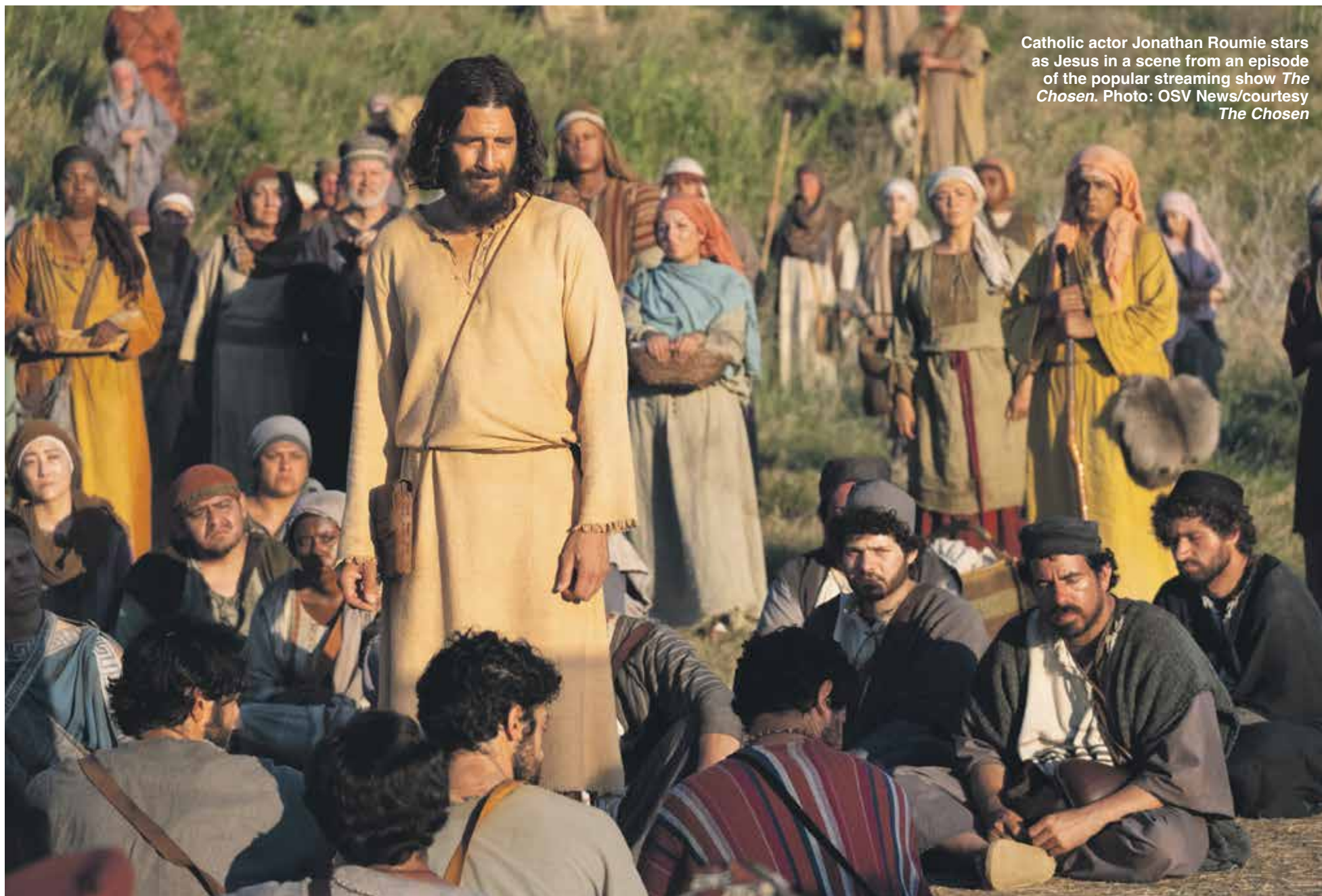
### Childhood

Abused and neglected throughout his childhood, Frisbee experimented with drugs and alternative spiritualities as a teen, eventually moving to San Francisco’s Haight-Ashbury district during the 1967 “Summer of Love,” when some 100,000 youth flooded the city. Following what he would later call a “clear as crystal” vision, Fris-

bee recommitted his life to Jesus Christ, left art school and embraced full-time ministry.

“In the film, we focus on his time where he’s got God sort of lifting him up and sending him out as an apostle with these amazing, charismatic spiritual gifts – gifts of the Holy Spirit in very overt ways,” Mr Roumie said. “When you talk to some of the people that saw him do ... healings, (they say) it was like walking with an apostle. It was that extraordinary.”

At the same time, Frisbee struggled with the effects of his childhood abuse. His marriage ended in 1973, and a decade later he found himself estranged from the Church while battling an addiction to cocaine. Frisbee eventu-



Catholic actor Jonathan Roumie stars as Jesus in a scene from an episode of the popular streaming show *The Chosen*. Photo: OSV News/courtesy *The Chosen*

ally returned to his faith and reconciled with several former colleagues as he battled AIDS, to which he succumbed in 1993.

"He wasn't a god," Mr Roumie said. "He was a man that God used fully, to his service."

**“Mr Roumie said he was initially hesitant to share his Catholic faith so openly, even when divine providence offered opportunities to do so”**

Although the film spans only the golden years of Frisbee's life, Mr Roumie said that some of his fans "may be a little thrown" by his latest role, including those who are surprised "when they hear me speak in my normal accent, because they just expect me to have a Middle Eastern accent (as in *The Chosen*) wherever I go. ... When you spend so much time in people's homes on their televisions as this character, they just begin to think of you as that, no matter what you do."

In commercials for the prayer app *Hallow*, for which he voices Lenten reflections, Mr Roumie even pokes fun at himself over the prospect of being confused

with Christ.

Yet in a sense, art and life aren't all that far apart, he said.

"I rely on my faith so heavily and sacramentally," Mr Roumie said. "Before I start any round of filming, I'll go to Mass, I'll go to Confession, I will try to spend some time in adoration when I can."

#### **Divine Office**

He also prays the Liturgy of the Hours – also known as the "Divine Office" – which is the public prayer of the Church that the Faithful have prayed together since the time of Jesus to sanctify the day – and it complements the Mass or Divine Liturgy.

"It's pulling from Scripture, and you just feel so much more connected to God and what he's asking of you in your life," Mr Roumie said. "It feels like you're clearing out the communications lines ... to be able to hear what (God) is trying to transmit to you."

Mr Roumie said he was initially hesitant to share his Catholic faith so openly, even when divine providence offered opportunities to do so.

"During the pandemic, I first started praying the Divine Mercy chaplet and the rosary online. ... I hadn't ever done anything like that before," he said. "I'm like, people are going to know I'm Catholic, and it's not exactly a great career move."

But "even non-Catholics

started tuning in and buying rosary beads," said Mr Roumie, who has gained broad ecumenical appeal through his acting and speaking – enabling him to invite others to draw closer to Christ, while communicating the beauty of the Catholic Faith.

**“Mr Roumie said watching others respond to that call has made speaking about his faith ‘worth every ounce of discomfort’”**

Christian unity "speaks very deeply to me," Mr Roumie said. "I feel like Christ does not prefer his body to be fractured, and so any way that I can help repair that is in the interest of serving him. ... That's part of my function in the arts, in this ministerial way: to bring people together under the banner of Christ."

Mr Roumie said watching others respond to that call has made speaking about his faith "worth every ounce of discomfort".

"I had committed to surrendering to God. This is what I'm feeling called to do, and I'm going to do it," Mr Roumie said. "God will have my back. He's had my back."



Jonathan Roumie and Kelsey Grammer star in a scene from the movie *Jesus Revolution*. Photo: OSV News/Dan Anderson, Lionsgate

# Striving for hope, ‘the best of things’

## Faith in film



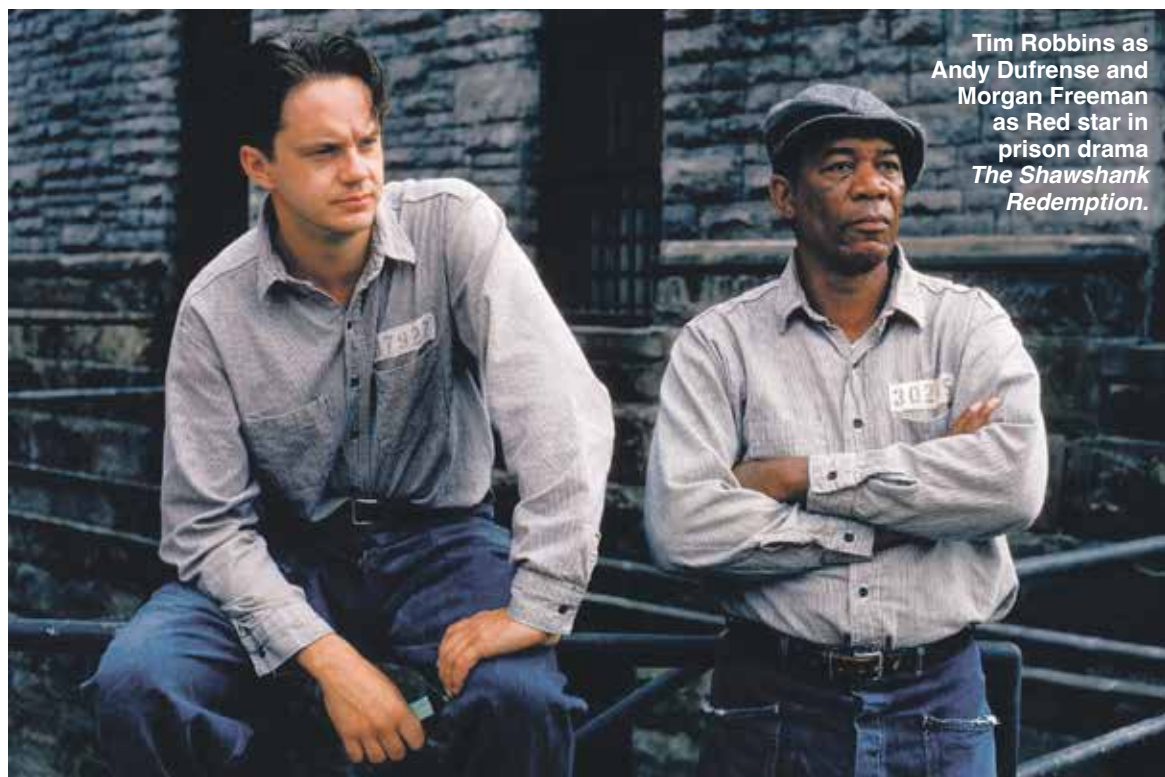
### Ruadhán Jones

It's hard to measure how good or great a film is, but when you've topped the premiere fan review site (IMDb) for more than 20 years, you must have done something right. What makes *The Shawshank Redemption's* (1994) success even more remarkable is that it was a flop on release. It only came to fame through video and DVD rentals, as well as being shown on TV.

**“Andy Dufrense does his best to improve the experience of the prisoners by practical alterations to their surroundings, most notably in his library”**

It's quite a simple story really. Andy Dufrense, played by Tim Robbins, is convicted of murdering his wife and her lover, although he claims he is innocent. He is sent to Shawshank prison and receives the brutal treatment we have come to expect of prison movies.

But this one's different. Once inside, he begins to form friendships with a small group of prisoners, notably Red played by Morgan Freeman, through whose eyes and laconic voiceover we see the film's action. Red begins to notice a difference in Andy, an insouciance at odds with his surroundings, a calm and poise that seems beyond his natural capabilities.



Tim Robbins as Andy Dufrense and Morgan Freeman as Red star in prison drama *The Shawshank Redemption*.

The film spans three decades, and as their friendship grows, they talk and reflect on the prison experience. In the midst of violence and corruption, they work to retain their poise and ultimately the film rests on whether Red will grasp the internal freedom, independent of surroundings, that comes from hope, or if will continue to live a life without freedom.

I've watched *The Shawshank Redemption* several times now, proving to myself at least that American critic Roger Ebert was right when he described it as being like a good friend, improving with familiarity and always worth revisiting.

With *Shawshank*, there's nothing that will tire you. It's a meditative film that wants to draw you into contemplation of its themes. And that is while addressing plenty of tough social issues like corruption, miscarriages of justice, the threat of physical violence, hypoc-

risy. Andy Dufrense does his best to improve the experience of the prisoners by practical alterations to their surroundings, most notably in his library. There's no solipsistic stoicism here.

### Nudging

But the action is rooted in something deeper and it envelops you, gently nudging you along until you find that you have come to be one of the inmates, joined in their admiration for Andy Dufrense. He is a Christ-like figure, drawing people into a community of love and affection.

Director and scriptwriter Frank Darabont said the main theme he was trying to convey was the way in which we can become imprisoned in our lives. The prison works as a metaphor. We get locked into our way of living, so that we can't see a way out. We have lost hope.

But as Red points out in a conversation with Andy, hope is

a dangerous thing. It can turn a man crazy, looking for something he can't have. But the poignant story of an old man, Brooks, who having been incarcerated all his life kills himself after being released because he can simply see no way forward, shows that hope is also what keeps a man going.

“Remember Red,” Andy says. “Hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies.” Andy is a metaphysical man, as he also shows in his appreciation for music, saying that it reminds us that “there are places in this world that aren't made out of stone. That there's something inside... that they can't get to, that they can't touch. That's yours.”

But it is not a general metaphysics, it's definitely a Christian one. There are all sorts of delicate allusions to it, like a sparring over Bible quotes between the crooked warden and Andy; or the Bible in which Andy hides the key to his

sanity, a little rock hammer. And lastly, there's the image of Andy escaped, arms held aloft as the camera looks down on him, an image of the man who freed us by the cross.

The film is elevated by its central performances. Every man fits his part, from the menacing, foul-mouthed guard to Freeman and Robbins. The voice over, delivered with Freeman's typical class, is somehow elegant even while maintaining the character of a largely uneducated old prisoner.

**“The fact is that they're all very well known, very skilled professionals – but they keep to the basics here, conveying what needs to be known with a minimum of fuss and a maximum of effect”**

Meanwhile, Robbins manages to convey just the right amount of smarts and other-worldliness to convince you that he is a man, even if the image of the divine lives closer to the surface in him than in those around him.

It's a deliberate and distinctly Christian film, right to its roots and one which deserves its exalted place in film history. Not just for the story, but also how it's told. It never overplays or indulges. In a sense, I couldn't tell you who directed the film, who wrote the score, who was behind the camera. The fact is that they're all very well known, very skilled professionals – but they keep to the basics here, conveying what needs to be known with a minimum of fuss and a maximum of effect.

This restraint I think is part of its enduring legacy, in that it never grows old or tiresome – it strives for the same kind of subtle, enduring good that it preaches.

## Saint — of the — week

By Jason Osborne



St John of God.

## St John of God: Holding out God's healing hand

Best known for his work in healthcare, especially in Ireland where many healthcare sites bearing his name dot the land, the Portuguese saint John of God is celebrated by the Church March 8.

Born in 1495, Joao Cidade had an unsettled and haphazard early life, being orphaned at a young age before finding employment as a shepherd, a soldier, a construction worker and bookseller in both Spain and North Africa. His early life is too adventurous to be recounted in its fullness here, but it's worth reading about as another example of God's ability to draw a heavenly path with 'crooked lines'.

Joao eventually settled in Southern Spain, in Granada, where he crossed paths with St John of Avila. On St Sebastian's Day in 1537, Joao experienced a major religious awakening while listening to John of Avila preach, but it wasn't a straightforward path to sainthood from there. Moved by St John's preaching, Joao finally grasped just how much God loved him, but was also deeply struck by how little he'd done to love God

in return.

In the wake of this momentous conversion, Joao experienced what we would today call a mental breakdown. He took to the streets, beating himself publicly, tearing at his clothes and crying for God to have mercy on him. He disturbed the public, many of whom considered him mad, and as a result he was brought to Royal Hospital in Granada, which housed the mentally ill of the day.

We can't say that they treated the mentally ill of the day, as the 'treatment' meted out was unbelievably harsh. He was isolated and bound in chains, while being beaten and starved too. It's understood that he was visited here by the man whose preaching had turned his life upside down, John of Avila, who encouraged Joao to tend to others rather than merely enduring personal hardship for his sins.

Not long after this, Joao regained his composure and determined to ensure that no one had to endure what he himself had gone through. Before leaving the hospital behind, he begged the

staff to treat the patients in their charge more tenderly, with compassion, asking them to see the humanity in those they tended to.

He first set to work tending to the poor, establishing a house where he could look after them – doing his own begging to provide for many of their material needs. He went on from this to receive some medical knowledge and training from the Jeremites, a religious order who specialised in caring for the sick. He went forth empowered, and displayed a real skill in nursing for those he took into his care.

Establishing a hospital and shelters, Joao gathered a band of followers around him, whom he organised into the Order of Hospitallers, who were approved by the Vatican in 1572 as the Brothers Hospitallers of Saint John of God, who today care for the sick in countries around the world – including in Ireland.

St John of God remains an example for us in tending to the sick with care, and an awareness of the dignity with which God has endowed them.

# Hail Mary, full of grace



Jem Sullivan

Throughout the seasons and feasts of the liturgical year, the Church pauses to give special honour to Mary, mother of Jesus, the son of God. As mother of the Church, we turn to Mary as our mother in the order of grace for she brings about the birth of all believers in the Church.

**“It is this mystery of Mary’s humble birth and her childhood that prepared her for the unique role she plays in salvation history”**

The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that in giving birth to her spiritual children, Mary continues her unique role in God’s plan of salvation to reconcile humanity to its original dignity and vocation

to live in communion with God.

We are reminded that Mary, whose faith is an outstanding model for all Christians, was herself born into a family and raised by her parents, St Joachim and St Anne. It is this mystery of Mary’s humble birth and her childhood that prepared her for the unique role she plays in salvation history.

## The Nativity of the Virgin

The exquisite painting, *The Nativity of the Virgin*, from the National Gallery of Art in Washington, was completed around the year 1400. It is the work of the gifted Sienese painter, Andrea di Bartolo.

The panel was once part of a much larger altarpiece with a large cycle of beautiful images that tells, in visual form, the story of the birth and childhood of Mary.

Other panels in the same altarpiece depict St Joachim and St Anne sharing food with the poor and making temple offerings of grain. Also shown was the presentation of Mary in the Temple, a moment of great joy and pride for her saintly parents.

This elegant image, however, takes us back to the very beginning of Mary’s life as the artist shares his vision of the birth of Mary.

The setting of this altarpiece scene is the ordinary interior of the family home of St Joachim and St Anne. The canopied room

painted in gold is framed by rounded arches and painted with a deep blue ceiling covered with golden stars.

Into this warm, intimate room we are invited to join in the prayer of thanksgiving of this family as they welcome the newborn child who would, one day, become the Mother of God.

On the right, we see the haloed figure of St Anne reclining on a bed behind a parted red curtain. She is about to wash and purify her hands, a ritual custom after childbirth.

On the left we see the haloed St Joachim, father of Mary and grandfather of Jesus. He waits patiently outside the room, his face alive with a mix of emotions of expectant hope and anticipation.

The newborn Mary is dressed in a white robe with her infant head framed by a golden halo. The young child is held gently by one of the women in the foreground, while another woman beckons softly to her.

**“We are reminded of God’s plan of salvation to reconcile the world to friendship with God through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, son of Mary”**

A third woman dressed in blue stands at the door with a plate of food that will nourish St Anne. This woman looks directly out at us as if to invite us into this warm interior scene so we too can share in the joy of this family.

## Salvation

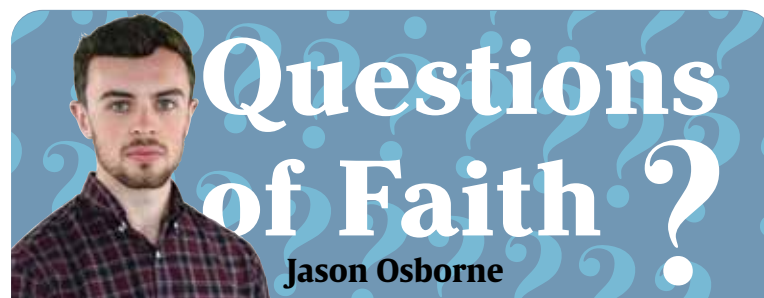
Andrea di Bartolo paints this quiet, intimate family scene in a way that conveys the humble joy with which St Joachim and St Anne welcomed the birth of their newborn daughter, Mary. We are reminded of God’s plan of salvation to reconcile the world to friendship with God through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, son of Mary.

We join with St Joachim and St Anne in praise of God for sending his divine son Jesus, the word made flesh, into human history. His coming into our world began with the Immaculate Conception and the birth of Mary, mother of Jesus, mother of the Church, and our mother in faith.

**i** Jem Sullivan teaches catechetics at The Catholic University of America in Washington. She is the author of *The Beauty of Faith: Using Christian Art to Spread the Good News*.



The 15th Century painting *The Nativity of the Virgin*, by Andrea di Bartolo is seen in this undated photo. Photo: CNS/National Gallery of Art



Jason Osborne

**Why be religious if you can just be spiritual?**

This is a common refrain in our times: I’m definitely spiritual, but I’m not religious. Or again, I personally believe in a higher power or a god, but I wouldn’t associate with a religion.

I’ve heard this line personally on many occasions, and I think it expresses the fact that many people are aware that there’s more to reality than physical matter, that there’s a spiritual or immaterial side to existence, but they’re not comfortable with “organised religions” (as they often put it) for a variety of reasons.

The reasons are many: they might believe a “personal” experience to be more authentic, or they might take issue with many of the abuses and distortions of religion that we’re unfortunately all too familiar with.

These are valid insights and ought to be commended – a personal experience of God is often a key part of conversion, and indeed a personal relationship with God in Jesus Christ is, or ought to be, at the very heart of Catholicism. Similarly, all those who know and love God ought to recognise many of the faults and failures that have unfolded and been allowed to proceed under the nose of many religions – and sometimes with the explicit endorsement of them.

Despite this, it has to be asked: is personal, private, spirituality without a community the optimal way forward? I, and the Church, would answer with a resounding “No”! Isn’t it likely that other people have felt that same spiritual yearning that you feel? Isn’t it likely that others have encountered “something” beyond themselves that they wanted to know more about, too?

In every area of human endeavour, having more people to confer with is a good thing, as it increases the pool of knowledge and expands the horizons of what’s possible for us. When it comes to spirituality, who’s to say, as mentioned, that others haven’t gone before you and addressed the realities that you’ve just encountered?

From a Catholic perspective, we would argue that those spiritual sentiments many feel are just the tip of the iceberg – an invitation into deep, faithful and lasting relationship with him that sees us transformed. God loves us, and wants us to know and love him too as it’s for that that we were created.

God desires that we should follow the threads of our experience back to him, having riddled creation with evidence that allows us to learn and understand many things about him: “Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made” (Rom. 1:20).

He also left this “evidence” in our hearts, which speaks to the religious and non-religious alike: “With [man’s] openness to truth and beauty, his sense of moral goodness, his freedom and the voice of his conscience, with his longings for the infinite and for happiness, man questions himself about God’s existence. In all this he discerns signs of his spiritual soul. The soul, the seed of eternity we bear in ourselves, irreducible to the merely material, can have its origin only in God” (CCC 33).

Another line of argument is that humans are social creatures; why would that which is deepest to us be the only thing we’re not social about? Namely, our spirituality? Just because we share that which we value most with others doesn’t in the slightest make it any less personal. Rather, I would assert that it makes it more personal, as the shared spiritual experience of a community goes a long way towards increasing the presence of the spiritual in our lives.

This is why Christ founded a Church, rather than sending us all forth alone to live private, siloed spiritual lives. We need fellowship, and we need each other’s council and guidance. Without that, we’re remaining on the shore, merely flirting with the ocean of love that is God.



# Waiting for the angel to come



**T**he night before he died, Jesus struggled mightily to accept his Father's will. The Gospels describe him in the Garden of Gethsemane, prostrate on the ground, "sweating blood", and begging his Father to save him from the brutal death that awaited him. Then, after he finally surrenders his will to his Father, an angel comes and strengthens him.

This begs a question: where was the angel when, seemingly, he most needed it? Why didn't the angel come earlier to strengthen him?

Two stories, I believe, can be helpful in answering this.

## Martin Luther King Jr

The first comes from Martin Luther King Jr. In the days leading up to his assassination, he met angry resistance and began to receive death threats. He was courageous, but he was also human. At a point, those threats got to him. Here is one of his diary entries.

"One night towards the end of January, I settled into bed late, after a strenuous day. Coretta had already fallen asleep and just as I was about to doze off the telephone rang. An angry voice said, 'Listen, nig., we've taken all we want from you; before next week you'll be sorry you ever came to Montgomery.' I hung up, but I couldn't sleep. It seemed that all of my fears had come down on me at once. I had reached a saturation point.



## Fr Rolheiser

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

"I got out of bed and began to walk the floor. Finally, I went to the kitchen and heated a pot of coffee. I was ready to give up. With my cup of coffee sitting untouched before me, I tried to think of a way to move out of the picture without appearing a coward.

**“The words I spoke to God that midnight are still vivid in my memory”**

"In this state of exhaustion, when my courage had all but gone, I decided to take my problem to God. With my head in my hands, I bowed over the kitchen table and prayed aloud. The words I spoke to God that midnight are still vivid in my memory.

"I am here taking a stand for

what I believe is right. Now I am afraid. The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they too will falter. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left. I've come to the point where I can't face it alone.' At that moment I experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never experienced him before." (*Strive Toward Freedom*)

Notice at what point in his struggle the angel appears.

## Dorothy Day

In her autobiography, *The Long Loneliness*, Dorothy Day shares this story. As a young woman, along with the man she loved, she had been somewhat militant in her unbelief. Indeed, their reluctance to enter the institution of marriage was meant as a statement of their non-acceptance of traditional Christian values. Then

she conceived a child and its birth was the beginning of a radical conversion for her. The joy she felt holding her baby convinced her that there was a God and that life had a loving purpose. She became a Roman Catholic, much to the chagrin of the man she loved, the father of her child: he gave her an ultimatum: if you have this child baptised, our relationship is ended. She had the child baptised and lost that relationship (though they continued as friends). However, she now found herself a single mother with no job and no real vision or plan as to where to go now in life.

**“Her prayer was one of raw need and helplessness, of an admission that she no longer had the strength to go on”**

At one point, she became desperate. She left the child in the care of others and took a train from New York City to the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, DC. In her

autobiography, she describes how she prayed that day, how desperate her prayer was. Like Jesus in Gethsemane and Martin Luther King in Montgomery, her prayer was one of raw need and helplessness, of an admission that she no longer had the strength to go on. Essentially, she said this to God: I have given up everything for you and now I am alone and afraid. I don't know what to do and am lacking strength to carry on in this commitment.

She prayed this prayer of helplessness, took the train back to New York, and not long after found Peter Maurin sitting on her doorstep, telling her that he had heard about her and that he had a vision of what she should now do, namely, to start the *Catholic Worker*. That set the path for the rest of her life. The angel had come and strengthened her.

## Human strength

Notice at what point in these stories the angel makes its appearance – when human strength is fully exhausted. Why not earlier? Because up to the point of exhaustion, we don't really let the angel in, relying instead on our own strength. But, as Trevor Herriot says, "Only after we have let the desert do its full work in us will angels finally come and minister to us".

**“Only after we have let the desert do its full work in us will angels finally come and minister to us”**

# Jesus knows our past and yet accepts who we are

**T**he highlight of the liturgical year is the renewal of our baptismal commitment to Christ at the celebration of Easter. Today's Gospel (John 4: 5-42), the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman at the well, is the first of three stories in John's Gospel which throw light on the graces of Baptism.

This is a rare Sunday when all three readings touch on the same subject. The reading from Exodus 17:3-7 tells how the people were tormented by thirst. The story of the Samaritan woman will reveal a variety of thirsts. The water in the well will slake physical thirst for a period of time, but the living water that Jesus will give "will turn into a spring inside a person, welling up to eternal life". St Paul refers to this gift in the second reading: "The love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Romans 5:5). After being baptised (washed) with water, the new Christian is anointed with Christ to express a personal friendship with Christ, his divine forgiveness and a sharing in his priesthood.

## “The village well was the meeting place for women where they enjoyed a chat”

The story begins when Jesus, tired and thirsty, sits down beside the well. Along comes this local Samaritan woman with her bucket to draw water. She is surprised that this Jewish man would ask her for a drink. The barriers of history and hatred kept the two tribes apart but friendship can transcend barriers. Friendship begins with accepting a person, regardless of barriers. She expresses her surprise that this Jew would ask her for a drink. He then raises their conversation to a higher level. "If you only knew what God was offering and who is saying to you: Give me a drink, you would have been the one to ask, and he would have given you living water." She is smart enough to know that he is talking about different kinds of thirst. She wants this living water.

She must have been a very lonely woman. The village well was the meeting place for women where they enjoyed a chat. She came on her own, and at mid-day when all others stayed

## The Sunday Gospel

Fr Silvester O'Flynn OFM Cap.



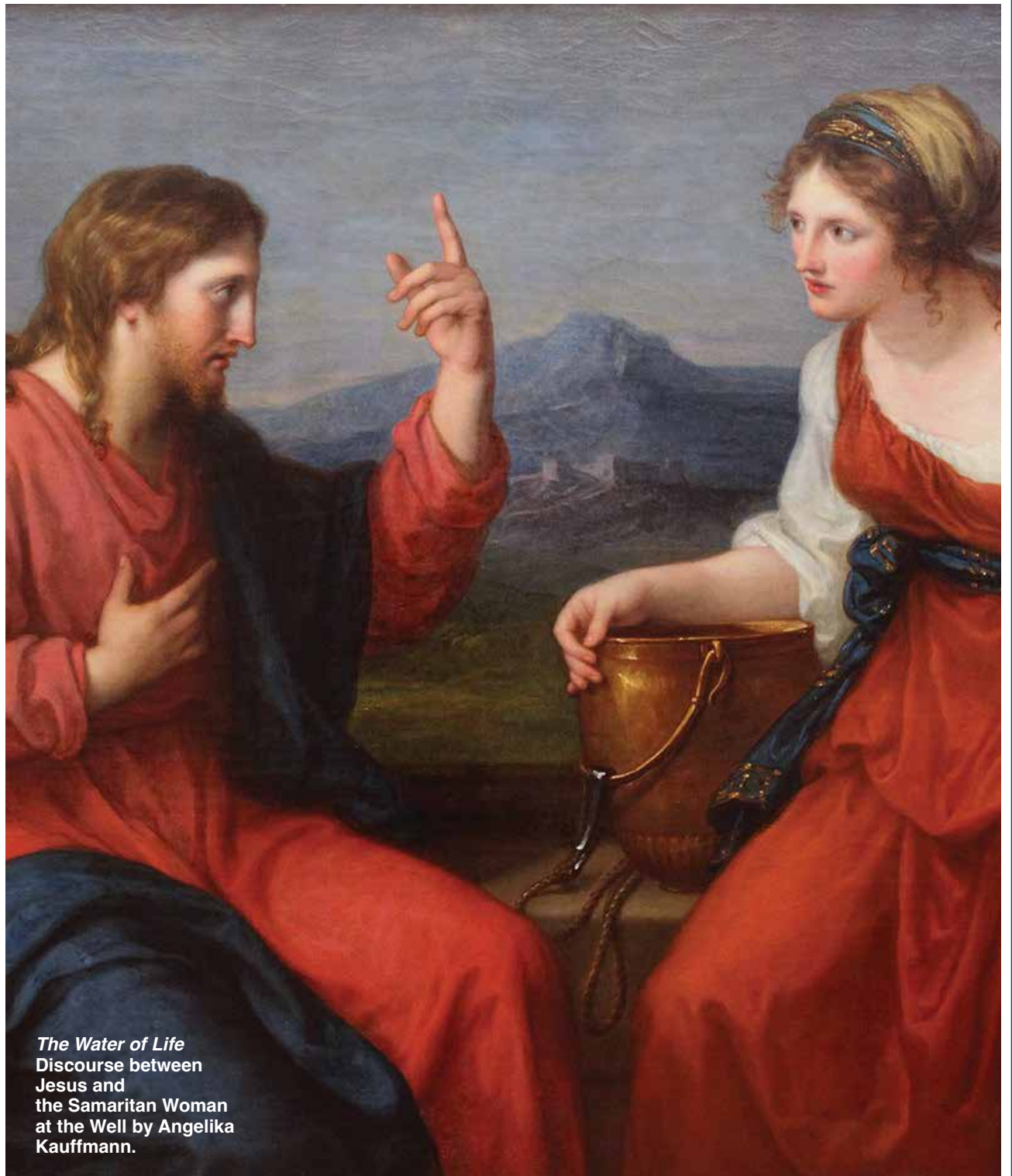
in the shade. It seems that she is ostracised, and one can understand why when the details of her affairs emerge. She has had five husbands and now has her sixth partner. Jesus will be her number seven, always the number of God's presence in John's Gospel. At last, she has found a real friend, a forever friend, a leave me never friend.

## Cleansing water

Her immoral past thirsts for cleansing water. In Jesus she has found someone who knows her past yet accepts her. Later in the story she will invite the people in the town who had rejected her, to come and see "a man who has told me everything I ever did; I wonder is he the Christ". She has found a forgiving Saviour who transcends not only social barriers but also the barriers of sin.

Forgiveness is wonderful, but she has another problem, about worship. Where are people to assemble to worship and thank God? Jews would say that it must be in the temple in Jerusalem but the Samaritans had their place on Mount Gerizim. The original split between the Jews and the northern tribes arose from taxation demanded for the building of the temple in Jerusalem. The northern tribes were asked to contribute more than the tribe of Juda (Jews) who had the temple at their doorstep! On returning from exile in Babylon, the Jews who were rebuilding their temple absolutely refused the offer of help from the Samaritans. So, where should the priests lead the people in worship? Jerusalem or Mount Gerizim? Jesus tells the woman that it is not a question of geography. "God is spirit, and those who worship must worship in spirit and truth." True worship shares in the glory of the Father, through the Son in the unifying presence of the Holy Spirit. Lent is a time to develop our relationship with the divine Friend, Saviour and Priest.

A member of Alcoholics Anonymous once told me: "For years I was drinking from the wrong wells." Then he found Jesus waiting at a well to be his friend, saviour and priest. The Catechism of the Catholic Church takes the scene at the well to describe prayer: "The wonder of prayer is revealed beside the



*The Water of Life  
Discourse between  
Jesus and  
the Samaritan Woman  
at the Well by Angelika  
Kauffmann.*

well where we come seeking water: there, Christ comes to meet every human being. It is he who first seeks us and asks us for a drink. Jesus thirsts: his asking arises from the depths of God's desire for us." Then follows a most beautiful definition of prayer. "Prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours. God

thirsts for us that we may thirst for him" (Catechism, 2560). To me this was an eye-opener. Prayer doesn't start when I kneel down or make the sign of the cross. Jesus was already sitting beside the well waiting for me. All he asks for is an empty bucket... empty time and a bit of space in my thoughts.

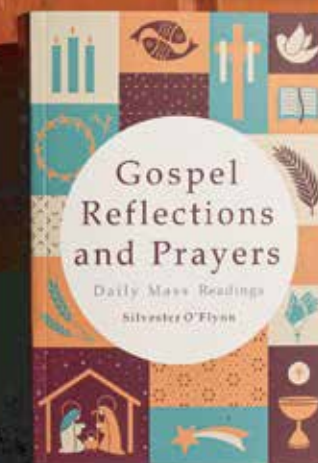
## Prayer

My friend, be not afraid. Here, take a seat beside me. Trust me and relax a little. Lend me your empty bucket and open up your heart to receive my love. Just be yourself. I already know your sins and failures. Accept yourself. I do not ask you to be anybody else. It is you that I love. Let me come to you to help you. Open up your heart and discover what a wealth you have inside. Do you know who is in your heart? From the day of your Baptism the Holy Spirit has been poured into your heart. Your deepest thirst will be satisfied by the Holy Spirit, a fountain of living water in your baptised soul.

Come to meet me at the well every day. Meet me in a quiet church...or your favourite chair...or in reading the Bible. All I ask for is the bucket of your emptiness that I might fill it with my Spirit of love.

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# TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



## Childishly trying to push boundaries

The trailers for the new comic drama series **The Dry** (RTÉ One, Wednesdays) looked promising as were the first few minutes, with recovering alcoholic Shiv trying to engage in conversation with a guy in the airport drinking morning pints. But he accused her of being “an f-----religious nut”. Then they launched into a shouting match with constant and intense swearing combining the F-word with the name of Jesus. It was a gratuitous insult to Christians, in a way that wouldn't happen to any other group, and showed a complete lack of respect, at a time when ‘#Respect’ is fashionable in some quarters. It came across to me as a studied insult, someone trying to childishly push boundaries. You'd expect such juvenile stuff on RTÉ Two, but this was prime time RTÉ One, and heavily promoted.

When the Church is involved in works of service it draws people in, engages young and old, and even gets the Church good press. Of course, it's not all the Church does and sometimes getting bad press indicates that the Church is getting it right.

### Trócaire

**Nationwide** (RTÉ One, Friday) covered one of the Church's best-known works of service – Trócaire, on the occasion of the organisation's 50th birth-



Roisin Gallagher plays Shiv, a recovering alcoholic who returns home to her family in Dublin after her life in London falls to pieces.

day. Colm Flynn presented the segment (he's everywhere!) and of particular interest were the interviews with people in the developing world who have benefitted from Trócaire initiatives, especially the story of Josiane Umumarashavu, who appeared on the iconic Trócaire box when she was a child. Many of her family were murdered during the Rwanda genocide but thanks to Trócaire she had received an education and now had a family of her own. Bishop William Crean, Chair-

man of Trócaire spoke of this work being simply a “Gospel imperative”.

### Social Democrats

I came across a few telling snippets during the week. Recently Holly Cairns TD became leader of the Social Democrats. In an interview on **Today With Claire Byrne** (RTÉ Radio One, Thursday) she was glad of the outcome of the marriage referendum and the repeal of the Eighth Amendment, but I detected no sense of any awareness of

the one third of the electorate against those changes. She wasn't pushed on this, but there was one useful point – she won her original council seat by just one vote, showing the importance of everyone voting, whether election or referendum.

### Richard Boyd Barrett TD

On **Drivetime** (RTÉ One, Thursday) Richard Boyd Barrett TD (People Before Profit) was discussing a document from his party that suggested a wealthy elite might deploy the media, fascist gangs and even the defence forces against an elected left-wing government. Far-fetched I thought, though I could agree with him on disillusion and alienation in the electorate. He seemed oblivious of the fact that those of a conservative inclination can be just as disillusioned as those concerned about issues like housing. I don't think politicians in the Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael parties appreciate the level of disillusion among conservatively-inclined people after several betrayals – e.g. politicians flying the pro-life flag to get votes, and then bringing in abortion legislation. I think this alienation led to a lot of pro-life people deeply distrusting the government line during the pandemic. Presenter Sarah McInerney challenged the TD about some of the left-wing rhetoric – e.g.

### PICK OF THE WEEK

#### SUNDAY MORNING LIVE

**BBC ONE SUNDAY MARCH 12, 10.30AM**

Sean Fletcher and Holly Hamilton host the show that puts the heart and soul into Sundays, bringing faith and ethics to the topics of the day.

#### PATRICK'S PEAK: AN IRISH PILGRIMAGE

**EWTV SUNDAY MARCH 12, 4PM**

Take a prayerful pilgrimage along Ireland's scenic west coast as Bob Dolan follows St Patrick's path up the famous Croagh Patrick to ask God's blessing for his work establishing the Church in Ireland.

#### GIVE UP YER AUL' SINS

**RTÉ ONE ST PATRICK'S DAY, 12.05PM**

The story of Ireland's patron saint, St Patrick, who used the shamrock to explain the Holy Trinity. The animation relates his continued importance to the Irish people.

suggestions that the Government was doing nothing on affordable housing.

### Civil servants

On the **Press Preview** (Sky News, Thursday) guest reviewer Jenny Kleeman spoke of issues arising when civil servants got work with political parties when they left government employment. This was in the context of Sue Gray (of the partygate report) joining the staff of the Labour Party – she would be in possession lots of sensitive information. She thought civil servants feared their impartiality would be under question if they had “eyes on a future political role”. She might also have mentioned journalists' work being influenced, muted and

selective perhaps, if they were eyeing up lucrative PR work for a political party or government body in the future. The discussion drew my attention to a term I hadn't come across before – ‘gardening leave’ – a period between leaving one job before taking up another if there were conflict of interest or confidentiality issues.

### Education

Finally, it was good to hear on **It Says in the Papers** (RTÉ Radio One) last Monday morning that the Catholic Primary Schools Management Association was calling for transgender issues not to form part of the education of primary school children – timely and sensible I think.

# Film

Aubrey Malone



## Irish Oscar hopes hinge on Banshees and Cailín Ciúin

Remember 1989 when all the Oscar heat was centred around *My Left Foot*? We had enormous success that year. The same energy is building around *The Banshees of Inisherin* for this weekend's gong-fest.

Notwithstanding my misgivings about Martin McDonagh's quasi-trad parable, like the rest of the country I'll be rooting for Messrs Farrell, Gleeson, Keoghan and McDonagh on Sunday night.

It's probably a David and Goliath struggle for us to actually come away with any statuettes at all but even to be nominated in such a prestigious event is a victory. And the only thing you can say for sure about the Oscars is that there's nothing you can say

for sure about the Oscars.

I would have put my house on Chadwick Boseman to win Best Actor in 2021 but he didn't. That's what we love about the event – the surprises.

*Everything Everywhere All at Once* is expected to sweep the boards in most of the categories. Will it? I'm sitting on the fence on this one. A lot of things boil down to money and promotional clout. Often the wrong people win. I once wrote a book about the vested interests of the voters in AMPAS, the Arts and Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. This year I expect them to get it wrong again.

Colin Farrell is a possible for Best Actor in *The Banshees*. Favourite is Brendan



Colin Farrell and Barry Keoghan in *The Banshees of Inisherin*. Fraser for *The Whale*. Second favourite is Austin Butler who did such a great job in *Elvis*. Will he get the sentimental vote because

of the recent death of Elvis' daughter?

It seems like category fraud putting Brendan Gleeson in the Best Supporting

Actor slot. Surely he's on the screen as much as Colin in *Banshees*. His co-nomination with Barry Keoghan here means they'll probably cancel one another out.

McDonagh is a past winner as Best Director. This could work against him. It's one of the reasons why Steven Spielberg probably won't scoop Best Director for his highly acclaimed *The Fabelmans*. The smart money is on Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert, the co-directors of *Everything Everywhere All at Once*.

Cate Blanchett is tipped to win Best Actress for *Tar*. Her main threat comes from Michelle Yeoh for *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. And yes, it does seem to be

everywhere.

*The Banshees* has an outside chance of winning Best Picture if *Everything Everywhere* doesn't nab this too. Ke Huy Quan seems to be a shoo-in for Best Supporting Actor for it. Poor Brendan.

Could Kerry Condon win in the Best Supporting Actress category? Get the rosary beads out. She isn't too far behind Angela Bassett (for *Black Panther*) in the betting.

I'll eat my hat if *An Cailín Ciúin* wins Best International Film but what an honour for a small country like ours even to be in the running against all the big guns. Stranger things have happened. Keep the faith here too. *Go mbeidh an fórsa léi.*



# BookReviews

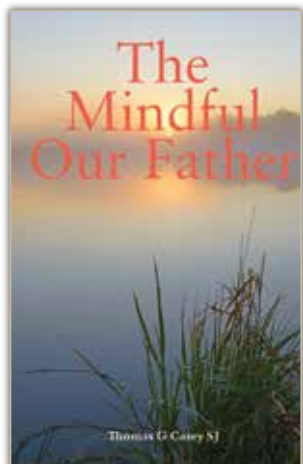
Peter Costello



# A varied selection of recent Lenten reading

Peter Costello

I have long been a believer in that the old Catholic Truth Society type of publication in the form of pamphlets and smaller books was an effective system of reaching people. These days with more competition for attention the short effective read is far better than a long discourse, written in over-theological prose. What people long for are writers that they find approachable, supportive and warmly spiritual.



**The Mindful Our Father**  
by Thomas G. Casey SJ  
(Messenger Publications,  
€14.95/£12.95)

Thomas Casey, after a long career in many parts of the world teaching and lecturing, is now exploring in various ways aspects of mindfulness and religion.

This book slowly deconstructs the Our Father phrase by phrase. This is very much a book to be taken in slow motion. But the *Pater Noster*, as it was once commonly called, is a unique prayer: it was expounded to the disciples of Jesus by Jesus himself.

This makes it unique. Rather than being a human composition, it is so to speak, a direct gift from Jesus. This in the eyes of Christians makes it something special. And yet how often it is rushed over from the familiarity it has for many people since childhood. It is recited though with no real mental attention, no “mindfulness”



Hugo Douglas Hamilton, *Reclining Woman with Child*, In an interior, National Gallery of Ireland as part of their exhibition of pastel paintings.

of what the words are and what they say.

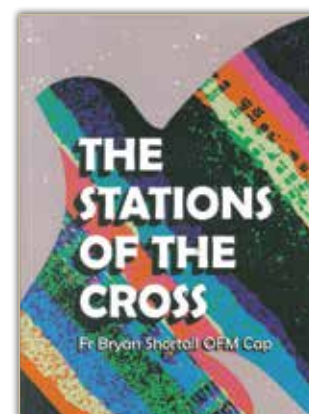
A local reader who had read this and the next book remarked to me that this was a book which could change people's lives. That this seemed true says a great deal for the skill with which Thomas Casey has put it together. This then is a book that really works. It is, as a monk quoted by the author says, a great treasure, not locked away, but one kept in full view, yet all too often ignored. Here it is so to speak presented in slow-motion, phrase by phrase, in which each one is given the careful attention it deserves. Not to be missed.



**Our Wounded God: Beyond, Beside and Within Us**  
by John Cullen  
(Messenger Publications,  
€6.95/£6.00)

As a former editor of *Intercom* and having experience in Africa and with the homeless, John Cullen, is now chaplain to a Catholic care home in Hammer-smith, London. The Stations of the Cross which as devotion must date back to the time of Constantine and his mother Helena are still followed by many in Dublin's churches as those who visit churches “after hours” so to speak.

But this ancient devotion is quietly and effectively renewed in the context of our days to make the events part of a society scene we can all recognise and involve our minds and imaginations with.



**The Stations of the Cross**  
by Fr Bryan Shortall OFM Cap  
(Veritas, €9.99/£7.99)

Fr Shortall is an experienced priest, currently based in the National Shrine of St Padre Pio

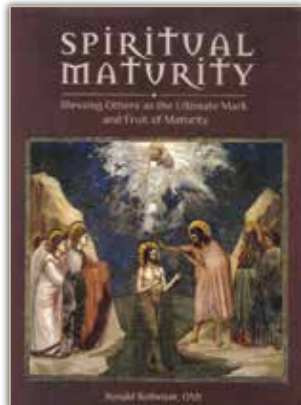
in the Capuchin Priory, Church Street. His book on the Stations of the Cross is adapted for use in just such a setting, for individual use and group prayer.

This too seeks to use a personal style written with a sense of the past but with a very contemporary context. In a former church he had a fine set of stations but when the friary closed the set were returned to the nuns who made them. He created another set for himself during the Covid crises.

Hence this little book emerges from those recent dark days with the hope of being of service to ordinary devotees in their devotions. They make a contrast with the book above; but that contrast is of good purpose, for it will

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.

encourage readers to explore the two approaches. And this must surely be a fruitful experience for all.



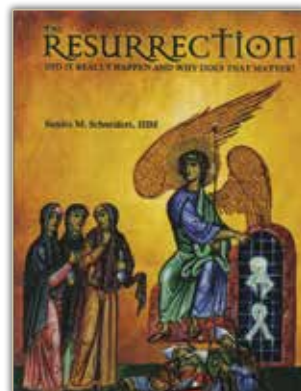
### Spiritual Maturity: Blessing Others as the Ultimate Mark and Fruit of Maturity

by Ronald Rolheiser OMI

Ron Rolheiser, from his base in Canada, is one of the most widely read Catholic columnists in the world, and rightly so. This is quite an affecting book, which reveals all the virtues people read him for.

At school with the Jesuits many years ago I heard a great deal about the virtues of "Christian maturity", though the wise words at the time seemed to have little effect. How I wish we had been given this little book then. Its maxims for how to treat and respect others are most moving. It is a book I would commend to everyone, even to those without "a religious bone in their bodies" for it contains advice on the true meaning of real maturity.

Reading it may, I think, be a transforming experience for many people. These are only a few pages, but they are wonderful, and on the cold grey day on which I write they present a real tonic. He shows by blessing others, we bless ourselves. The power of a few words of kindness and love can put great changes under way. Definitely a book to read.



### The Resurrection Did It Really Happen and Why Does that Matter

by Sandra M. Schneider IHM

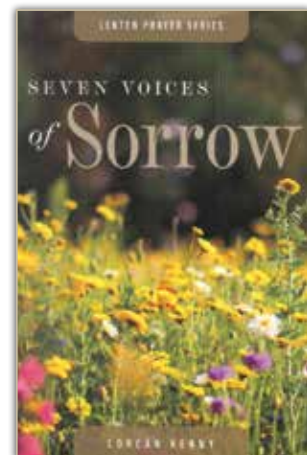
Now in Lent, we are facing the Easter season. But as the author points out, since the Enlightenment the rise

of "the scientific point of view" has undermined the once general view of the truth of the Resurrection among Christians. Sr Schneider however explores this real problem in a very different and effective way.

Central to her argument is what phenomenological philosophers describe as a "saturated phenomenon", events which burst their boundaries or our capacity to absorb them. One such event, she says, was 9/11. Another, she suggests, was the Resurrection. She is not here dismissing the "scientific point of view". She is exploring, and in a very enlarging way, another and different approach to the events of Easter.

This is only a short book, but there are no problems in reading it, and I suspect it may enlarge and enhance the traditional views and beliefs of many. An ideal book, or rather booklet, to read in Lent to prepare for Easter.

(Both titles from Tsehali Publishers, Loyola Marymount University, One LMU Drive, UH 3012, Los Angeles, CA, \$9.95 each; they are exclusively distributed throughout Ireland by PD Books in Wicklow at €9.95; contact PaulDaly@eist.ie; mob: 087-278-9390)

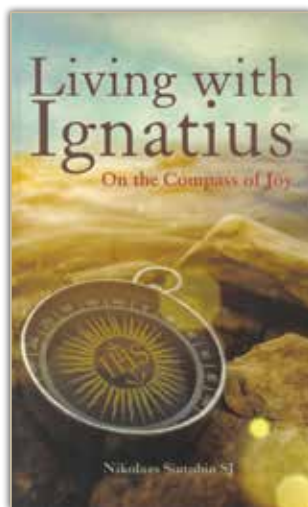


### Seven Voices of Sorrow

by Lorcan Kenny  
(Lenten Prayers Series / Veritas, €9.99 / £8.99)

This is the third in the author's Lenten series "Seven voices", other volumes of which have already been reviewed in these pages. His *donnée* is to take people named by tradition as involved in the Easter story, from Mary of Magdala to Tamar, the woman at the well. Each comes in a Hiberno-English and a Gaelic version. Each is appropriately illustrated with a monochrome image.

In form and poetic treatment rather reminds the reader of a medieval mystery play? It has the same scriptural echoes, the immediacy of voice and appeal. These little volumes would in fact adapt very well to a staged performance in the hands of a creative director. Perhaps, indeed, Lorcan Kenny's creations could well have a future life as a regular theatrical event for presentation at parish level. Meanwhile the voices are individually moving and revealing, and will appeal in their varied natures to many readers.



### Living with Ignatius: On the Compass of Joy

by Nikolaas Sintobin SJ  
(Messenger Publications, €9.95/£8.95)

The author is a Flemish Jesuit, some of whose work has been published in Ireland before. He is, among other things, a specialist in Ignatian spirituality. This is not strictly a Lenten book, but a reminder to readers that there is a whole year of living around Lent. The emphasis of this little book is not to expound a set of doctrines, but as he says a set of tools, which will enable us to live our lives with a greater engagement with our feelings so we can in effect grow more aware of ourselves and others, our place in creation, and our relationship with God.

He proposes out of the thought of Ignatius a direction – finding aid in our spiritual life, one that points always to the "true north" of the Creator. This book is an important little contribution to the on-going Ignatian celebrations.

## The softly revealing art of pastel



Edgar Degas, *Two Ballet Dancers in a Dressing Room*, NGI.2740, National Gallery of Ireland

**Pastel Revealed**  
Exhibition at the National Gallery of Ireland  
Curators: Niamh MacNally and Adrian Le Harivel  
25 February – 5 June 2023; Print Gallery | Admission free

### Peter Costello

The new spring exhibition in the Print Gallery in the National Gallery is, as the very title suggests, "a revelation". According to the curators, Niamh MacNally and Adrian Le Harivel, it is intended to highlight the richness of the Gallery's pastel collection, with works spanning four centuries.

It displays a number of skilled practitioners from both Ireland and abroad, working across Europe, "and will highlight how the pastel technique has changed over time". This it certainly does in remarkable ways.

### Renaissance

Drawing in pastel goes back to the Renaissance, often providing a swift method of capturing passing impressions. In this show the first part is devoted to the artists of the 18th century. They are accomplished but they seem to deal mainly with society beauties and people on the "grand tour", having a record made of their vast to classical scenes.

One by Hugh Douglas Hamilton is a little more striking: a mother playing with her child on a couch before an open window with a view over the Bay of Naples (c.1789).

At first sight it seems a loving evocation. It is only on closer examination that one realises that the backdrop to this charming domestic scene shows the smoking peak of Vesuvius across the water: a half hidden suggestion by the

artist that the passing day of family life can (recalling Pompeii and the buried cities of Naples) be destroyed in a few moments. Memento mori indeed.

**“What really catches the eye are the examples of pastel for the last century, so very different from the calm settled contentment of the Georgian era”**

Hugh Douglas Hamilton and Rosalba Carriera are the main featured artists. Striking as these earlier pastels are, what really makes the show are the more recent pieces. Pastel fell out of use, the curators tell us, and faded from use only to be revived later by artists like Whistler and Degas. The Degas on show, of ballet girls behind the scene, is a familiar one, but still lovely to see. But what really catches the eye are the examples of pastel from the last century, so very different from the calm settled contentment of the Georgian era.

### Maurice Marinot

Some pieces stand out. Those by Maurice Marinot, better known as a glass maker and designer, are very striking with curious echoes of Blake, Palmer, Calvert and others of that ilk. But the Irish pieces really stand out. A very striking portrait, which I cannot recall ever seeing before, of Constance Gore Booth (one of Yeats' girls in silk kimonos in "the light of evening at Lissadell"), by her Parisian friend the Swedish artist Anna Nordgren.

For some people this alone would be worth

going to see. Also new to my memory is a portrait of Sinéad Bean de Valera (1936) by Sean O'Sullivan, which lifts the overshadowed wife of the great man into her own expressive female self. (These two could be seen as small female contribution to the Decade of Commemoration.)

### Kernoff

I thought the Kernoff portrait of Sean O'Casey a disappointment, expressing only part of the playwright's character. These portraits of his cannot be compared with his urban and rural scenes, but they formed an important part of his income though his clients were often slow to pay. (As I know from seeing them, these clients received urgent little postcards in green biro from Stamer Street, pleading for the delayed payment.)

Much more powerful are images from the suite that Brian Bourke devoted in 1988 to Heaney's version of the Sweeney saga, a legend that haunts so many poets and writers of the last century. The treatment is wild and savage, well expressing the despairing nature of the ancient Gaelic legend itself.

This is only a small show as NGI exhibitions go these days, but is full of interesting, expressive, and even powerful images, and well worth a visit.

[Readers interested in learning more about the making of pastels today and their role in art history might like to see a recent article in the *Financial Times*, "The tiny Paris pastel shop that changed art history," by Imogen Savage, December 16, 2022, available on the FT website. It is an evocation of a lost world.]



# Leisure time

## The Gift Of A Lifetime

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[www.hospicefoundation.ie](http://www.hospicefoundation.ie)



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— 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.

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[www.mscmissions.ie](http://www.mscmissions.ie)

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

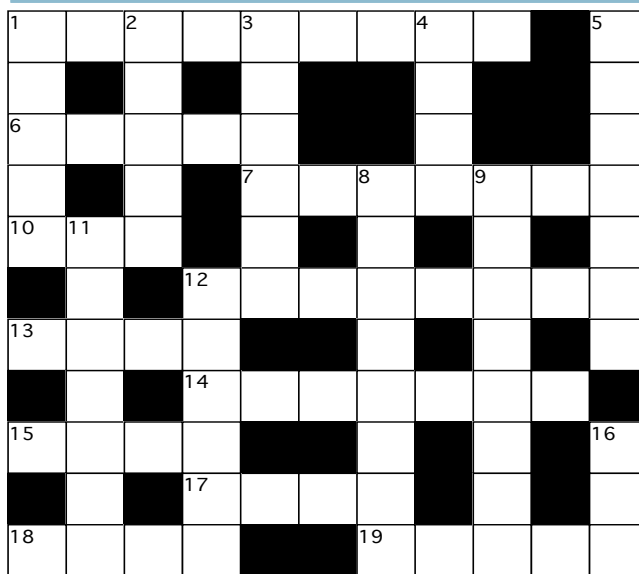
**Trócaire**

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](mailto:grace.kelly@trocaire.org) or write to me at Trócaire, Maynooth, Co Kildare.

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

### Crossword Junior

Gordius 473



#### Across

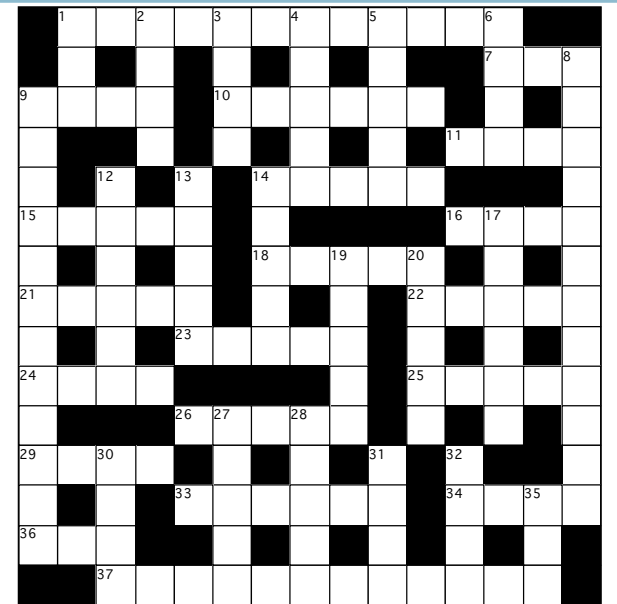
- 1 Lucky (9)
- 6 Snarl (5)
- 7 The world's largest bird (7)
- 10 Something to play with (3)
- 12 All the bones of the body (8)
- 13 Plunge into the swimming pool (4)
- 14 Tasty yellow dessert (7)
- 15 Town in Offaly (4)
- 17 Wicked (4)
- 18 Make something with needles and wool (4)
- 19 Go in (5)

#### Down

- 1 Quarrel (5)
- 2 Spacious (5)
- 3 Open with a key (6)
- 4 Rip (4)
- 5 Shoving (7)
- 8 Someone who gets people into trouble (8)
- 9 Where addresses begin with www (8)
- 11 "Tell me what you think, I'd like to have your \_\_\_\_\_" (7)
- 12 "Don't tell anyone - it's a \_\_\_\_\_!" (6)
- 16 It might be made of toffee or chocolate, perhaps (3)

### Crossword

Gordius 601



#### Across

- 1 More than one person can access the money in this bank facility (5,7)
- 7 Unconscious (3)
- 9 Boast (4)
- 10 Suitable for tillage (6)
- 11 This leaping insect destroys a leaf (4)
- 14 Attempt to learn (5)
- 15 'Ink' for a printer (5)
- 16 A little kiss (4)
- 18 Moves with bounding steps (5)
- 21 Foe (5)
- 22 Mistaken (5)
- 23 Pacific island country, capital Apia (5)
- 24 In physics, charged particles (4)
- 25 Desert in Israel (5)
- 26 Adhere (5)
- 29 Mislaid (4)
- 33 Burning fiercely (6)
- 34 Electrical connection (4)
- 36 Small (3)
- 37 The monitor leapt about, relating to the city (12)

#### Down

- 1 Jam container (3)
- 2 Character in "Othello" (4)
- 3 Town in Galway (4)
- 4 Map, graph (5)
- 5 Leered (5)
- 6 Work strenuously (4)
- 8 American celebration on the last Thursday in November (12)
- 9 One's sister's husband, perhaps (7-2-3)
- 12 A hospital's resident surgeon (6)
- 13 Salvors (5)
- 14 Scene of America's infamous witch trials (5)
- 17 Ample, sufficient (6)
- 19 Wooden board (5)
- 20 Pigs (5)
- 27 Vegetable such as a potato (5)
- 28 Muscular injury (5)
- 30 Noah's son has redesigned the mesh (4)
- 31 A chime (4)
- 32 Expectorate (4)
- 35 Container for ashes (3)

### SOLUTIONS, MARCH 2

GORDIUS NO. 600

**Across** – 1 Nobel Prize 6 Scab 10 Tenon 11 In the pink 12 Scarlet 15 Laden 17 Heat 18 Ilex 19 Hopes 21 Chantry 23 Hiker 24 Spud 25 Aide 26 Noddy 28 Rashers 33 Raconteur 34 Place 35 Desk 36 Gridlocked

**Down** – 1 Note 2 Bank clerk 3 Lunar 4 Rhine 5 Zeta 7 Child 8 Baking soda 9 Wealthy 13 Lech 14 Thunder 16 Six hundred 20 Paperback 21 Crayons 22 Ribs 27 Ducks 29 Aired 30 Hippo 31 Deer 32 Mend

CHILDREN'S No. 472

**Across** – 1 Headlamps 6 Lemonade 8 Market 10 Today 12 Editor 13 Mouse 14 Flask 17 Airmail 18 Rolled 19 Atlas

**Down** – 1 Half-time 2 Aimed 3 Adam 4 Pier 5 History 7 Dandelion 9 Kites 11 Austria 14 Far 15 All 16 Keep 17 Act

### Sudoku Corner

473

#### Easy

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

#### Hard

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

#### Last week's Easy 472

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

#### Last week's Hard 472

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

Notebook

Fr Billy Swan



# Deliver us Lord from evil

**THE POPE'S EXORCIST** is a new movie that stars Russell Crowe who plays the role of Fr Gabriele Amorth who was an exorcist for the Vatican and the Diocese of Rome until his death in 2016. The film puts the spotlight on the occult, how we view the existence of evil and the person of Satan. Whatever view we take, it is impossible for Christians to deny the evidence in the gospels of Jesus' battle with evil spirits who tormented people and his ultimate defeat of the evil one on the cross. To all his followers, he taught them to pray: "Deliver us from evil."



Russell Crowe plays Fr Gabriele Amorth in *The Pope's Exorcist*.

He would not have done so if evil was benign or just a mere nuisance to us living as we should.

According to Paul, as Jesus was involved in a combat with evil, so too his followers would share in that spiritual struggle "against principalities, powers... the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). Other early saints were also clear in their understanding of Christian witness doing battle with powers that pull us away from God, destroying communion and tearing us apart from within. The writings of monks like

St Benedict and John Cassian clarify how transformation of our fallen nature by the grace of Christ does not come without a struggle or sacrifice. That is why, in the rite of Baptism, from the very beginning, prayers of exorcism were included so that the newly baptised would enjoy protection from the evil one and share in Christ's victory in this life and the next.

**Lent**

On the first Sunday of Lent, the Church places before us the

temptations of Jesus to make it clear that Lent is the time to face our demons, turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel. We note from the temptations of Jesus what are the breaches in our defence. The first is sensual pleasure. Jesus is hungry and is tempted by food. We are all prone to addictions – to food, alcohol, drugs, pornography or whatever promises another 'hit' or 'high'. We can also be addicted to applause or affirmation. What's the antidote? Fasting. Second, Jesus is tempted to replace his Father with another, or to worship a false god. Here is the heart of temptation – to replace true worship of the living God with something or

someone other than God. What's the antidote? Prayer, which pulls us back in line and keeps God as our ultimate good. Lastly, Jesus is tempted with earthly power and prestige. The ego loves power. Followers of Christ don't love power but service. This is what love does – it wills the good of another and serves that good. What is the antidote to power? Almsgiving and charity. Mercy in action puts others first and makes us humble.

*The Pope's Exorcist* will get us talking again about the powers of darkness. Let it not be a distraction from the far more subtle and spiritual combat we face to live faithfully every day. "Deliver us Lord from evil. Amen."

**St Patrick's Day**

As St Patrick's Day approaches, the story of our national saint will be told again in schools, parishes and homes around the country. What strikes us about the story of Patrick's life are the human categories that connect our lives with his – categories such as suffering, meaning, vocation, forgiveness, mission, exile, human trafficking, slavery, immigration and redemption to name just a few. That is why Patrick is no plaster saint but a fellow sinner whose life was transformed by God's choice and mercy. Because of the response of one man to God's call, countless lives were changed by the Gospel he shared. As it was for Patrick, God calls us not just for ourselves but for others.

**The transfiguration and Irish Catholicism**

Last Sunday's Gospel story of the transfiguration got me thinking about our own faith tradition here in Ireland. The radiant divine light that shone from Jesus did not come from outside him but from within his human nature that was permeated by his divinity. This led St Irenaeus to say that "the glory of God is the human person fully alive". Has this doctrine of deification ever found itself at the centre of Irish Catholic spirituality? The revival of Christian faith in Ireland needs to embrace this Good News, believe it with fresh hearts, celebrate it in the liturgy and by proclaiming it anew, make it the foundation for a renewed humanity, Church and society.



## LITTLE WAY TURKEY-SYRIA EARTHQUAKE APPEAL

We have all seen the terrible destruction and suffering caused by the recent earthquakes which have hit large parts of Turkey and Syria. We know you are as heart-broken as are we by some of the events taking place, including the death of whole families and of little children. These brothers and sisters of ours need our prayers and support. The Little Way will send as much, by way of funds, as you our supporters make possible. This will be utilised by one or more of the Catholic and international aid organisations capable of bringing vital food, water, medical aid and shelter, as well as loving care to the thousands of traumatised victims in Turkey and Syria.

**THE NEEDS NOW ARE IMMENSE**

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

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**DONATIONS FOR THE MISSIONS ARE SENT WITHOUT DEDUCTION FOR ANY EXPENSES.**



**Please consider making a gift to The Little Way Association's earthquake appeal for the relief of suffering victims.**

Every euro you send will be gratefully received and forwarded without deduction.

Thank you, and May God reward your generosity.

**Our benefactors will be glad to know that a Mass is offered each day for their intentions.**



"We can never have too much confidence in our God Who is so mighty and so merciful."

- St Therese

**PLEASE HELP CATECHISTS TO TEACH THE FAITH**

Catechists, working in unison with their local priests, play an extremely important role in proclaiming and teaching the Catholic Faith. Many missionaries ask the Little Way for help to support and maintain their catechists who very often witness to Christ in the face of extreme poverty or persecution.

**Please can you spare a donation to support a catechist?**

**WELLS NEEDED**

Missionaries repeatedly appeal to The Little Way for funds to sink wells in order to provide clean, safe water, the lack of which causes much illness and many medical needs. On average, women in Africa and Asia walk around three hours every day to fetch water, often in scorching heat.

**Can you help provide a well?**