

# The Irish Catholic

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## Call for spirit of mission to urge people back for Christmas Mass

Chai Brady, Ruadhán Jones and Jason Osborne

Parishioners across Ireland have been urged to use the festive period to encourage their friends and neighbours who have been away from the sacraments, to come to Christmas Mass and experience anew the sense of community.

It comes as many parishes struggle not only with people who have been away from the practice of their faith for a long time, but also people who got out of the habit during the Covid-19 pandemic when public Mass was forbidden.

Auxiliary Bishop of Armagh, Michael Router has led calls, telling *The Irish Catholic* that "it definitely has to start with the laypeople encouraging each other and providing support for each other to practice their faith".

"We have to engender that confidence in people, but it's difficult because culturally it is not something we are used to doing," Bishop Router told *The Irish Catholic*.

Even if you started with family, Bishop Router said, simply "encouraging family members or friends by bringing up the

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### 'How many more sleeps 'til Christmas?'



Children from Armagh Cathedral Parish participate in the traditional nativity play as they count down the sleeps until Christmas.

### No religion four times higher among Irish journalists

Ruadhán Jones

The number of Irish journalists declaring no religious affiliation is four times higher than the general population, a new study has shown.

Some 55% of Irish journalists said they have no affiliation to a particular religion, considerably higher than the 14% among Irish people more generally, a Dublin City University study found.

Just 35% declared they do have a religious affiliation, with the vast majority (89%) identifying as Catholic and 4% as Church of Ireland. Non-denominational Christianity, Quaker, Hindu and Buddhist were also noted by a small number.

'Religious groups and institutions' are considered the least influential factor/source for Irish journalists, with just 1% saying they are 'very/extremely influential', 17% saying 'slightly/moderately influential', and 48% saying 'not influential'.

The remaining 34% of respondents said they were not relevant to their work or did not answer, the study 'Irish Journalists at Work' shows.

The study also shows that Irish journalists are overwhelmingly left-leaning in their political outlook, with 61% of journalists identifying as 'fairly/very' left wing or 'slightly' left of centre.

**RUADHÁN JONES**

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The Irish Catholic

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# The danger when our media live in a bubble

**A**sk practising Catholics to tell you about their Church and their faith, and on the whole, you get glowing reports. There will be complaints, and stories of inadequacies, and reservations about this or that teaching, and no one knows the faults of the Church – collectively, and in this or that place – better than those who actively belong.

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### Frustration

Hence their frustration with the very different picture of the Church often portrayed in the media, where it appears dogmatic, intolerant and judgmental, an institution that seeks its own interests, that imposes and excludes. In short: a 'no' instead of a 'yes'.

When I speak to groups in parishes or at other events, one of the first questions I inevitably get from committed Catholics is: "why are the media so against us?" By 'us' they generally mean

people of faith or people who are now considered in contemporary Ireland to hold views that are 'old hat'. Many of these people also have to content with the ridicule of their adult children who have given up on religion, or if they haven't fully given up on religion many have certainly given up with the Church.

So, to get the answer as to why the media is so against the Church, you'll have to come to one of my speaking engagements... only joking! The truth is that of all the Irish journalists I have met in over 20 years in this profession, only a handful are truly and deeply hostile towards the Church, in my experience.

For sure, far too many journalists see it as their job as usher in a new society, or banish what they view as 'old ways'. Certainly a lot of journalists think that it is their job to

## Editor's Comment Michael Kelly

**“Some 55% of Irish journalists said they have no affiliation to a particular religion, considerably higher than the 14% among Irish people generally”**

help people come to new 'truths' and we know we've seen recent examples of Irish journalists admitting that they actively keep the truth from people when they judge that people don't deserve the truth.

Overall, though, many journalists are not so much hostile. It's more that they are guilty of groupthink. Let me put it like this, they don't themselves go to church, they don't know anyone who does and therefore it is completely outside of their sphere of knowledge or concern.

### Pandemic

Take, for example, how little interest there was in the media in churches being closed during the pandemic – this is despite the fact that pre-coronavirus a third of Irish people reported that they went to Mass at least once a week.

This week's report from Dublin City University (DCU) casts fascinating light on Irish journalists.

It reveals, among other things, that the number of Irish journalists declaring no religious affiliation is four times higher than the general population.

Some 55% of Irish journalists said they have no affiliation to a particular religion,

considerably higher than the 14% among Irish people generally.

Just 35% declared they do have a religious affiliation, with the vast majority (89%) identifying as Catholic and 4% as Church of Ireland. Non-denominational Christianity, Quaker, Hindu and Buddhist were also noted by a small number.

This partly explains the often ignorant approach to religion in the mainstream media in Ireland, and the views of people of faith.

One also has to factor in the reality that, in many ways, Ireland is a country at war with its past. Many activists-cum-journalists feel that it is their responsibility to expose how dark Ireland's religious past was, while showing very little interest in contemporary Ireland's blindspots, like the huge numbers of children who go missing or are allegedly sexually abused in State care.

The DCU report should be a wake-up call for editors and producers, we need more diversity in media – and that means reflecting your readers, listeners and viewers more accurately rather than living in a bunker of your own creation.

## Call for spirit of mission to call people back for Christmas Mass

### » Continued from Page 1

issue and talking about it and why it is important to go to Mass”.

Dublin-based Fr Bryan Shortall OFM Cap. described Advent as a time of “new beginnings,” and that as such, it's the perfect time to invite people back into the Church community.

“If there was ever a time for a new beginning to return to the sacraments and the Mass, then it's this time,” he said.

The Faithful “need to be creative,” Fr Shortall said, adding that it is about invitation but it is also about asking people to work together to find ways to reengage with Mass and the Eucharist”.

Fr Billy Swan of Wexford echoed the calls, saying that for people who have been away,

engagement with the Faith is the “antidote to everything that we miss”.

“Christmas is an ideal time to invite people back to make that connection with their faith and trust in living God, to live that commitment,” he said, voicing encouragement for those who'd seek to invite their family or friends back to Mass.

“That's the spirit of mission, that's creating a Church of missionary disciples as Pope Francis says, urging people to have confidence to do that, to believe in what we have to offer and share. That's key this Christmas,” Fr Swan told *The Irish Catholic*.

Fr Richard Scriven of Castlecomer parish echoed calls for a missionary spirit over the Advent and Christmas seasons, saying that

“we'd be hoping that that will speak to people who come and who might only be coming on a more casual basis”.

“We'd hope that [Mass] will be an important part of what Christmas is to them. We'll feed that need, that's what we'd be trying to do.”

Parish priest of Wicklow, Kilbride and Bardarrig, Fr Aquinas Duffy said that parishes around the country could do with an initiative similar to a recent Dublin diocese campaign.

“We need something like the ‘Coming back home for Christmas’ campaign Dublin diocese ran, exactly like that, when the Pro-Cathedral had people out on the streets handing out fliers and inviting people,” he said.

“When there's publicity of

an invitation, that does get people to think. When a parish publishes it, priests and parishioners get behind it.”

Meanwhile, Msgr John Byrne of Portlaoise parish described it as “very important” that the Church take advantage of Christmas to invite people to re-engage with Mass and the sacraments again.

“Christmas is definitely a time of welcoming people who don't practice on a regular basis. I think it's important that our Christmas liturgies be done well and I think they ought to be welcoming and warm and definitely I think it's quite appropriate to say we would love to have you every Sunday as part of our worshipping community and you're very welcome here anytime.”

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# Studying occult opens people up to danger and 'dark side' – exorcist

**Chai Brady**

Studying witchcraft and the occult even in an academic setting can open the door to malign spirits, according to a well-known Vincentian priest Fr Pat

Collins CM.

The Dublin-based psychotherapist and expert in deliverance ministry said that while he does not object to research, any course focused on these issues should have a

“health warning”.

This comes as the University of Exeter in Devon, England, announced it would run a one-year post-graduate programme in Magic and Occult Science in September 2024.

In its overview it states students can “Build interdisciplinary expertise whilst exploring your specific interests within the long and diverse history of esotericism, witchcraft, ritual magic, occult sci-

ence, and related topics”.

In the ‘Research’ section it states a student will conduct research using their archival material which includes “sources for rites and rituals” and “West-country witchcraft”. It also states they can access books relating to “séances and Victorian occult activities”.

Fr Collins said a person taking a course such as the MA in Magic and Occult Science in Exeter “would certainly be taking a risk that instead of just being objective, they could become subjectively involved and be open to forces that could be quite malign. Be careful, because if you put your head down a sewer, don’t be surprised if you get a bad smell”.

He said: “I don’t think you can have much objection to a university – they can put on courses for anything they like, but

there should be a health warning on that course. That by studying it you may be infected by it and in a rather negative way.

“It’s like going into a room and there may be an infection, and you might not catch it but on the other hand you might. You’re opening out to the spirit world but you’re not sure what spirits you’re opening out to.”

Everyone has a desire for meaning and purpose in life Fr Collins said, but in a secular culture “very materialistic” people are looking for replacements for Christianity and are getting into magic and the occult. He added: “But replacing one worldview with the another is very problematic, the danger is they are opening out to the dark side”.

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## Priest decries violent deaths in Armagh parish

**Staff reporter**

An Armagh priest has decried a recent spate of violence in his community which has seen the deaths of three people in the last 12 months.

Fr Colum Wright of St Peter’s parish in Lurgan said following the latest killing that too many young people are in “early graves”.

Fr Wright spoke at the homily of Odhrán Kelly (23) whose body

was found on December 3 beside a burning car.

His death comes following that of Natalie McNally (32) on December 18 last year, who was soon to be a mother, and the shooting of father-of-four Shane Whitla (29) on January 12.

Fr Wright said: “We gather for another funeral of another victim of another episode of violence here in our town of Lurgan. Odhrán is the third person here in Lurgan to be robbed of their young and valued

lives in the last 12 months.

“Odhrán should be alive and should be planning for Christmas. Too many like him are in early graves, robbed of their lives of violence – unnecessary violence that brings just not the end of lives, but the beginning of endless loss and misery...for family, friends and communities.”

Fr Wright concluded saying to the family: “All of us know that your hearts are broken.”

## Puerto Rican star swaps rap for the Risen Lord



Daddy Yankee performs in Mexico in November 2015. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

**Jason Osborne**

Popstar Daddy Yankee has shocked fans with the announcement that he’s giving up his life in music in favour of his faith.

The Puerto Rican star, best known for his megahits Despacito and Gasolina.

broke the news to his fans at the final show of his La Ultima Vuelta (Last Lap) world tour.

Yankee (46), born Ramón Luis Ayala Rodríguez, told fans that “Living a successful life is not the same as living a life with purpose”.

“For a long time, I tried to fill an emptiness... that nobody could fill,” he said, adding faith had saved him.

“That’s why tonight I recognised and am unashamed to tell the world that Jesus lives in me and that I will live for him.”

### PILGRIMAGES TO ITALY



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# 'No end in sight' for Catholic college's 'historic' dialogue

**Ruadhán Jones**

There is "no obvious end in sight" for negotiations about a potentially "historic" alignment between a Catholic and a secular college, after a meeting with Government officials sent the two universities back to the negotiating table.

Sources told *The Irish Catholic* that doubts have now arisen about whether the Department for Higher Education is satisfied with

the model drawn up by Mary Immaculate College (MIC) and University of Limerick (UL).

Correspondence seen by *The Irish Catholic* shows that plans to announce a proposed model for structural alignment between the two colleges have been postponed.

The move came "out of the blue" for staff, sources in MIC said, when President Eugene Wall sent out an email on November 27.

In the email, Prof. Wall said that plans to present college officials with a proposed model on December 18 "will not be possible".

The email came the day after Prof. Wall, along with UL governing authorities, met with Minister for Higher Education Simon Harris and other department staff.

He added that "further discussion" between MIC, UL and the Department was needed to "provide ample

time for both parties to fully explore the details of the model proposed, and to decide upon next steps".

Further meetings between the two institutions' presidents and "senior" department officials are now required, Prof. Wall continued, before any model can be put to college authorities. MIC's trustees will now have to wait until sometime in 2024 before they will receive a report from "dialogue group".

Engagements with college staff – who feel they have been "left in the dark" about the negotiation process – which were to take place in late December have also been postponed until sometime in 2024.

While President Wall said he "sincerely hopes" to be able to update staff soon, he gave no definite date.

"These negotiations are complex and ... we must observe due confidentiality until all those with a role in

the deliberations are fully satisfied that we can all move forward in lockstep," said Prof. Wall in his email.

Sources in MIC feel there is now "no obvious end in sight" to the negotiation process.

Negotiations have been ongoing for more than a year as the two institutions seek closer relations – but not a merger, according to Bishop of Limerick Brendan Leahy, who described the negotiations as "historic".

## Irish bishops voice opposition to 'assisted dying' legislation

**Jason Osborne**

The Irish bishops have voiced their rejection of 'assisted dying' proposals currently being considered by the Oireachtas, and called for greater supports for those who are sick and dying.

The bishops were represented by Ms Petra Conroy and Dr Margaret Naughton at a session of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Assisted Dying from the perspective of religious, faith based and other philosophical groups.

Ms Conroy and Dr

Naughton outlined the bishops' stance, saying that death is a natural part of the human condition.

"We do not propose the use of extraordinary or aggressive treatments to prolong life in a way which conflicts with reason, or with the dignity of the person. Our focus is on how people might be helped to experience a good death. We are opposed to the deliberate ending of human life, both for reasons of faith and for reasons connected with the defence of the common

good".

They said people across Ireland are already helped in various ways to approach death with dignity, within the interdisciplinary framework of good palliative care. Assisted suicide, however, "is something very different and we believe that it would undermine the common good in several different ways".

Protestant and Muslim representatives also opposed assisted suicide proposals at the committee hearing last week.

## Christmas behind the scenes...



Primate of All-Ireland Archbishop Eamon Martin and Church of Ireland counterpart John McDowell record their message for RTÉ to be broadcast on Christmas day.

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# Vague wording on the family...a rehearsal for tackling the Christian preamble?



**Mary Kenny**

**T**he proposed amendments to the Constitution – to be made on the question of the family and the ‘woman in the home’ clause – are so bland and ambiguous that it’s possible not many voters will bestir themselves to vote in next March’s referendum.

Less than a week after the Government announced the suggested new wording, they were running into trouble. Having the family based on “marriage or another durable relationship” is so vague that it could open the way to almost any category. It may mean that immigration is difficult to control and regulate if this blurred definition is allowed to pass.

**“It can be just shacking up with a boyfriend or girlfriend casually, or it may be a partnership of decades. It’s as long as a piece of string”**

The usefulness of marriage as a category is that it is a legal contract, entered into willingly and publicly. It is something concrete, on the record, and with a long historical antecedent. Cohabitation – for which the ‘durable relationship’ is a euphemism – may be favoured by an increasing number of people, but it is much more difficult to define. It can be just shacking up with a boyfriend or girlfriend casually, or it may be a partnership of decades. It’s as long as a piece of string.

## Amendment

Our political masters are going to have to review this.

I’m not against amending Article 41.2, where it refers to women’s role. The language is outdated, and it’s women shouldn’t be lectured about their

household ‘duties’: women are responsible adults who can decide on their home duties themselves (and urge menfolk to take more share in the pesky housework too). But an amendment could be wrought with a tweak of the wording – still allowing respect for the values of the home, and its contribution to the common good.

**“Many in the political class would abolish this ornate introduction to the Irish Constitution, on grounds of diversity and modernisation”**

I’m not against, either, recognising that there are different forms of family – I know more than one household where a brother and sister harmoniously share a home, or adult offspring lives with a parent. There’s an argument for acknowledging these variations, but the wording has to be more specific than a ‘durable relationship’ if it is to have a plausible position in the State’s Constitution.

Yet I wonder if these suggested alterations are also a dress rehearsal for tackling a bigger question: the commitment to Christianity which remains in the Constitution’s preamble, being “In the Name of the Most Holy Trinity, from Whom is all authority and to Whom, as our final end, all actions both of men and States must be referred.” It acknowledges obligations to “our Divine Lord, Jesus Christ Who sustained our fathers through centuries of trial”.

Many in the political class would abolish this ornate introduction to the Irish Constitution, on grounds of diversity and modernisation. For the moment, wiser counsels probably advise leaving well enough alone. But it is surely in the pipeline.

## Framing a faithful priest



*The Last General Absolution of the Munsters at the Rue du Bois.*

It was reported that the famous painting of Fr Francis Gleeson blessing the Munster troops in World War I was destroyed. Then, last week it emerged that a second version of Fortunio Matania’s work was found – and sold at auction in Britain for £21,000 (€24,500).

*The Last General Absolution of the Munsters at the Rue du Bois* highlights the role of the Tipperary chaplain to the Irish soldiers in the trenches.

Frank Gleeson was, as I’ve previously mentioned, praised in Robert Graves’ memoir *Goodbye to All That*, as an edifying example of the dedicated Irish priest who served the fallen and wounded.

“The Roman Catholic chaplains,” wrote Graves, “were not only permitted to visit posts of danger, but definitely enjoined to be wherever fighting was, so that they could give *Extreme Unction* to the dying. And we never heard of one who failed to do all that was expected of him, and more. Jovial Fr Gleeson of the Munsters,

when all the officers were killed or wounded at the first battle of Ypres, had stripped off black badges, and taking command of the survivors, held the line.”

A soldier described Frank Gleeson saying Mass on Christmas Day, while in the firing line. “Where he had his little altar was peppered with bullets. He is a grand priest and knows no fear. He is never finished doing all in his power for everyone, even those who are not of the same religion.” Private soldiers from Limerick recalled how, during a battle, Fr Gleeson “stuck to his post, attending to the wounded and dying Munsters...shells dropping all around him.”

Frank Gleeson returned to Ireland, served the Free State Army as chaplain, and became parish priest of St Catherine’s, Meath Street. Ronan O Duinan, a reader of *The Irish Catholic*, wrote a lovely unpublished memoir about Fr Gleeson’s Dublin days.

The purchaser of the painting remains anonymous.

Perhaps Shane MacGowan’s Requiem Mass was exceptional, but I agree with the general principle of ‘no eulogies’ at a funeral. I have found that if they’re flattering, they’re dishonest, but if they’re honest, they’re embarrassing.

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# Ukrainians in Ireland ‘anxious’ as supports slashed

Jason Osborne

The Government's move to limit State accommodation and cut welfare for Ukrainians in Ireland has created "anxiety" and "confusion" among the Ukrainian community here.

Proposals agreed to by Government on Tuesday saw State accommodation for incoming Ukrainians limited to 90 days, while the current rate of welfare, €220 per week, will fall to €38.80 for the period that Ukrainian people are in State accommodation.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper, chaplain to the Ukrainian community in Ireland Fr Vasyl Kornitsky said that the Government's changes, due to take effect in January, have introduced further "uncertainty" into the

lives of Ireland's Ukrainians.

While the measures are set to affect Ukrainians who haven't yet arrived, speaking on *Today with Claire Byrne* on Tuesday, Kate Durrant of 'Welcome to Cork' said that there's "nowhere to go" for Ukrainian refugees who have to leave State accommodation after 90 days.

"They'll be facing an awful situation," Ms Durrant said. "The infrastructure isn't there. The leaving after 90 days and you'll get your full social welfare...I don't even know if it's worth you and I discussing it because we both know there's nowhere to go after 90 days."

Fr Kornitsky said that many members of the Ukrainian community in Ireland are already "very, very stressed and anxious" as a result of the ongoing war in Ukraine and that the weakening support for Ukrainian refugees is

"creating confusion".

"It's impossible to settle down and find something in three months. It takes time. Three months is a very short period," he said, adding that the changes are "quite dramatic, a huge change".

John Lannon, CEO of migrant support charity Doras, said that if the 90-day limit on accommodation is imposed on Ukrainian refugees it will increase homelessness.

Speaking on RTÉ's *Morning Ireland*, he said: "It will put people in precarious positions and it's likely to leave women, children and men on the streets.

"We know that there are already 6,000 people stuck in Direct Provision, who have refugee status, but they can't leave because there's no affordable accommodation."

## Rural schools' moves to integrated education 'deathbed conversions'

Ruadhan Jones

The decision by some rural Catholic schools to change to integrated education in the North has been described as "deathbed conversions" by the bishop of Derry.

The schools' moves to secular education don't necessarily suggest a "strategic" interest in integrated schooling, Bishop Donal McKeown told the BBC's 'The View', pointing toward the financial considerations

schools have.

Bishop McKeown said that "the most expensive teaching goes on in small rural schools, it costs more in the long term".

It's these schools "who are demanding more money in order to keep themselves open – sometimes those moves to integrated education are simply 'deathbed conversions' and not necessarily motivated by a strategic approach," he said.

The bishop of Derry also said he is "keen on integrating education",

highlighting the success of Catholic schools in the area.

"That can happen from schools beginning from where they are and taking in people from unexpected backgrounds," he said, pointing to the example of a Catholic post-primary school in Creggan where the head boy was a Muslim.

"The most internationally integrated school in Northern Ireland is in Dungannon, a Catholic school," he added. "I'm in favour of integration on all sorts of levels."

## Baroness O'Loan introduces pro-life bill in Westminster

Staff reporter

Baroness Nuala O'Loan has introduced a private members bill to Westminster, seeking to reduce the time limit for abortion in the UK from 24 to 22 weeks.

If successful, it will be a small but worthwhile victory that will save the lives of some unborn babies.

Baroness O'Loan said the abortion law is "is desperately out of step with our current medical practice that enables doctors to intervene to save premature babies from 22

weeks gestation".

"This leaves a real contradiction in British law: in one room of a hospital, doctors could be working to save a baby born alive at 23 weeks, whilst, in another room of that same hospital, a doctor could perform an abortion that would end the life at the same stage".

Welcoming the bill, Right to Life UK noted that recent research found the number of babies born at 22 weeks gestation who survive to discharge from hospital tripled since 2018-19.

### Preparing for Bambinelli...



Barntown, Co. Wexford, choir director Ann Stamp and school principal Nicola Roche put the final touches to preparations for Bambinelli Sunday with the local children's choir. Fr John Carroll will bless figures of the baby Jesus at Masses on Sunday, December 17.

### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### Report: Stay at home parents' work worth €54,000 salary

A new study has claimed that the cost to employ someone to do the work of a stay-at-home parent would be around €54,590 per year.

The research is from life insurance and pension provider Royal London Ireland and shows the estimated stay-at-home salary is up from 2022's €53,480.

The yearly 'Stay-at-Home Parent Survey' reveals that more than 90% of people underestimate the monetary value of a stay-at-home parent with only 8% valuing the job at over €50k.

The survey of 1,000 adults estimated the potential salary of a stay-at-home parent at an average of €30,547 in 2023, which represents an increase of €2,087 compared to 2022.

#### Focolare Ireland celebrates 80th anniversary

The Focolare Movement in Ireland celebrated the 80th anniversary of the lay apostolates founding in 1943 by Chiara Lubich.

Bishop Alan McGuckian was chief celebrant at the December 7 Mass in Holy Family Church in Belfast, praising the community's witness.

Members of Focolare representing several countries and from many parts of Ireland including Coleraine, Randalstown, Armoy, Mullingar, Kildare and Dublin joined the Belfast community, rejoicing in the opportunity of being able to spend time together, catch up and renew their commitment, a Focolare spokesperson said.

Bishop of Derry Donal McKeown described the community as a hearth of love and hope, thanking Focolare for its contribution to peace in the North.

#### Kylemore sisters move to new convent

The Benedictine sisters in Kylemore Abbey are set to move into a new monastery on the grounds of their Abbey in Co. Galway.

The move has been in the works since 2010, according to Sr Máire Hickey OSB, and the finishing touches are being put on a new monastery and retreat centre, which the community will move into after Easter 2024.

"We came to Kylemore 1920, having lost our monastery in Belgium in WWI and the plan was to one day build monastery for the Benedictine community," said Sr Hickey. "It has taken 100 years, but we finally got there and are happy and grateful, looking forward to moving in."

#### Ancient bell returns to Tyrone church

A 100-year-old bell which has been out of commission for 20 years sounded again in a historic Co. Tyrone church after being restored.

St Macartan's in Augher, a church built in the 19th Century, held a special ceremony which included the Ulster brass quartet to sound the bell once more.

Canon Noel McGahan PP of Clogher said it was a very significant occasion in the history of the church.

"It will be wonderful to hear the sound of the bell, which will ring twice a day for the Angelus at 12 o'clock and six o'clock calling attention to people to pray," he told the BBC.

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# Breda O'Brien

## The View



# There is nothing simple about the conflict in the Holy Land

**F**or the first time ever, this year some of my second level students queried whether we should be singing, 'O Come Emmanuel, the great Advent hymn. The reason? It refers to Israel, and in particular, to ransoming captive Israel.

Students politely explained that they do not support Israel's action in Gaza and as a result, felt uncomfortable singing this hymn. To say that I was taken aback was an understatement.

In general, teenagers are reflexively pro-Palestinian, sometimes without making any distinction between Palestinians and Hamas. In this worldview, Israel is bad, and Palestine and any of its representatives are good. Some are more nuanced, of course.

When I reflected on it, however, there are influential Evangelical Christians who identify modern-day Israel as being identical to the biblical Israel just as my teenagers do but just in a way that is reflexively pro-Israel.

Dispensationalism, which has influenced these US Evangelical Christians, began in the 19th Century with John Nelson Darby, an Anglo-Irish member of the Plymouth Brethren and former Church of Ireland minister in Delgany, Co. Wicklow. He divided history into various 'dispensations' ending in a 1,000-year reign of grace on earth by Jesus, centred in Jerusalem.

### Influential

Dispensationalism has undergone many modifications since then but remains influential on US politics, most notably through the influence of Pastor John Hagee on luminaries of the Republican Party, including Nikki Haley, Ted Cruz and



Photo: CNS/Harold Levine, courtesy Church of Our Saviour

Mike Pence.

Hagee endorses the modern state of Israel as founded in 1948 as the fulfilment of Biblical prophecies. The organisation that Hagee founded, Christians United For Israel, has more influence on US foreign policy than American Jews do.

Benjamin Netanyahu spoke at a CUFI conference in 2019.

Donald Trump said on his platform, Truth Social: "No President has done more for Israel than I have. Somewhat surprisingly, however, our wonderful Evangelicals are

far more appreciative of this than the people of the Jewish faith, especially those living in the US."

**“O Come Emmanuel originated in Latin texts sung at vespers on the last seven days of Advent”**

It would appal the teenagers having a crisis of conscience about singing 'O Come Emmanuel' that they would have anything

in common with Trump or ultra-conservative Evangelicals who read the Bible as if it were a commentary on 21st Century politics.

Yet neither seem to have the ability to separate the modern Israeli state from the biblical Israel.

O Come Emmanuel originated in Latin texts sung at vespers on the last seven days of Advent in convents and monasteries. Scholars dispute how ancient this practice is, but it is at least 1,200 years old. They were known as the O antiphons because each began with the word, O.

### Antiphons

In the 1800s, a Church of England clergyman, John Mason Neale, came across five Latin verses based on the original seven O antiphons in a hymnbook called the *Psalterium Cantionum Catholicarum*

(originally published in 1710). He translated them into English and they became the Advent hymn known as O Come Emmanuel.

**“Unlike Newman, Mason Neale never became a Catholic, although he did found an order of Anglican nuns dedicated to serving the poor”**

John Mason Neale was influenced by the Oxford Movement, which aimed to recover much of the Catholic patrimony of the Anglican Church. The Oxford Movement's most famous member is probably John Henry Newman, now St John Henry Newman.

John Henry Newman

began life as an Anglican, but one dissatisfied with secular influences on his Church, and their uninspiring liturgies.

Unlike Newman, Mason Neale never became a Catholic, although he did found an order of Anglican nuns dedicated to serving the poor.

The melancholy longing expressed by the hymn fits Advent perfectly. Advent is supposed to not only look forward to the celebration of the birth of Christ at Christmas, but to his return at the end of time.

Unlike what Pastor John Hagee believes, the Bible does not provide a neat timeline for that return. But it does enjoin us to watch, pray and be prepared.

My concerned teenagers cannot be blamed for their lack of historical or theological knowledge. In a visual culture full of noise, it is no surprise that people accept simplistic narratives.

John Mason Neale worried about the thin gruel his own Anglican Church was serving. How would he have reacted to today, where powerful social media barons have far more influence than any Church on young people?

### Gaza


The situation in Israel and Gaza is complex and multi-faceted and not amenable to the kind of simplification TikTok or Dispensationalism prefers. You cannot ignore the brutality of Hamas, and its aim to exterminate Jews, and neither can you ignore the collective punishment of Gaza by Israel, more than likely a war crime.

The plaintive, melancholy words of the seventh verse of one version of 'O Come Emmanuel' prays: 'O come, O King of nations,/ bind in one the hearts of all mankind./ Bid all our sad divisions cease/ and be yourself our King of Peace'.

This Advent, we can only pray Amen to that.

**“It would appal the teenagers having a crisis of conscience about singing 'O Come Emmanuel' that they would have anything in common with Trump or ultra-conservative Evangelicals who read the Bible as if it were a commentary on 21st Century politics”**





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# Sex, money and ‘manure for marriage’



90-year-old Sr Mary Neville MSHR tells Ruadhán Jones about life on the missions

“Holy Rosary Sisters, we love you,” sang the group of Cameroonian women in one of the Irish order’s houses in Dublin city. “And we’ve come to say thank you.”

The women had gathered in Dublin to say thank you to the Irish sisters who taught them in their school in Bemenda, Cameroon. They were deeply grateful for all that the nuns had done for them, timing their visit to celebrate the 90th birthday of one of their “mothers”, as they called them, Sr Mary Neville.

In an emotional thank you, Sr Neville praised the women, many of whom were successful businesswomen, mothers and religious: “Thank you for being instruments in showing God’s love to me,” Sr Neville said. “People say, do you have children – I say, I have many hundreds of them!”

Sr Neville may have been underestimating when she said hundreds, given that her life as a missionary began in 1959 when she travelled by boat, then by plane and



Vera Chilla and Judith Mbuy Nwana celebrate Sr Mary Neville’s 90th birthday. Photos: John McElroy.

finally by car to her new home in Nigeria. When the Cork woman arrived, there was no electricity in the compound and the African state was still a technically a British colony, achieving independence in 1960.

“People were advising us to go out after the ceremonies because there had been trouble in the Congo but we said no, we were going out now,” she tells *The Irish Catholic*. “I think we were the only two whites down in the town

square. It [independence] went off very peacefully.”

“The British anthem was played and the flag went down; the Nigerian anthem was played and the flag went up. I suppose we were all well known. I wasn’t a bit worried or afraid at that time and we had a good six years after that until the coup took place.”

## Coup

The coup Sr Neville refers to came in 1966, precipitating a violent civil war and a near miss for the Holy Rosary sisters when their school was bombed one Sunday morning.

“We were connected to the school with a veranda,” she begins. “We heard the plane going over and it was low. Three of us were saying our midday prayer. One of us got up to see what was happening and the other two of us stayed down and she was annoyed we didn’t get up.”

“Next thing then we heard this almighty explosion and went out then and saw this huge, big balloon of dust and glass and everything. Later, we heard on *BBC World Service* that they had successfully bombed a cathedral. So obviously it was the target, but they had missed the target and got our school.

“Then as we were going toward the school to see what happened, next thing a plane came through the cloud of

dust toward us. We ran in to the bushes and we were all in white and lay down on the ground flat. It came over three times – it was pretty frightening. Thank God nobody was killed.”

Sr Neville visited Ireland in the mid-60s with the intention of returning to the boarding school for girls she taught at. Education was a “privilege” for the girls and boys, she explains, and they took it very seriously.

“The guards were around the room and the prisoners were sitting down. One man was heckling me and I didn’t know what I had done to upset him”

“Sometimes, it was never just the fathers who would pay the fees,” says Sr Neville. “It could be a father, an uncle and a brother. Of course when the children went home at the end of term, these three people or four people would interview them and read out the comments from the teachers. They worked really very hard,” says Sr Neville.

However, despite desiring to come back, war prevented

her and the school didn’t reopen after the summer break. Sr Neville was sent to England to serve as a director of formation, which she describes as a “demanding experience”.

She undertook the work for six years, before heading up to Bathgate in Scotland. She had previously studied for her teaching diploma in Scotland, which provided a formative experience for her approach to the Christian life.

“Some of the girls were with the Legion of Mary and they asked me if I would go with them to a prison in Glasgow, Barlinnie. It has a very violent reputation, nearly dangerous,” Sr Neville recalls.

## Inmates

“I went with them anyway and I was to talk to the inmates and tell them about myself. The guards were around the room and the prisoners were sitting down. One man was heckling me and I didn’t know what I had done to upset him.”

Sr Neville found out his name and wrote to him to ask why he heckled her: “He told me that he and his brothers and sisters were orphans. They were sent to institutions to be looked after and he said the people were cruel and he said if they were God’s representatives, he would never have anything to do with God’s representatives. And of course, I was God’s representative that

day when I was talking in the prison and that’s when he was heckling me.

“I prayed to God, never let me be the cause of letting you down, of hurting a child or in anyway alienating a person from God. I look at that as God influencing my life, to treat everybody with care and dignity. It had a very profound effect on me.”

“We were still getting a big number of vocations at that time in the early 1970s. In the late 70s the drop began to take place, the fall in the numbers”

Sr Neville was inspired to be a missionary by the men and women who came to their school to give an account of their experiences. The example of St Damian of Molokai impressed her.

“I was very taken by the fact that he went there and lived there knowing that he could be affected by the leprosy,” the Holy Rosary sister says. “And he was, he lived and died there. That touched me very deeply. I always said I’d love to be able to go on the missions and do something.”



Srs Mary Neville and Angela Morgan cut into a special cake prepared by the past pupils.

Her call to the Holy Rosary order was perhaps more down to happenstance. There was a nearby order in Cork City, but “it was too near home”, says Sr Neville, while the Holy Rosary sisters were based up in Cavan. “I said, that’s far enough away, I’ll go there!”

After joining the order in 1951, she lived through a great time of change in the Church. The Second Vatican Council resulted in “big changes”, she says.

“There were so many things changing that people of that generation weren’t getting the instruction they needed, which was hard on them. But it’s normal now. My memory of that time was that Catholicism was still very much alive in Ireland”.

## Vocations

“We were still getting a big number of vocations at that time in the early 1970s. In the late 70s the drop began to take place, the fall in the numbers.”

Since then, the order has seen a rise in African vocations, while European ones have rapidly declined. The first Nigerian sisters joined in 1952 – now, there are over 100 Nigerian vocations, 20 plus Cameroonians, two from Sierra Leone, some from Kenya, Zambia and Ethiopia.

After her time in Nigeria, England and Scotland, Sr Neville hoped to go to Brazil or perhaps to Ethiopia, because they had a famine there at the time and she wanted to help them.

But an SOS went out for a science graduate in Cameroon and in 1979, Sr Neville made her way to the east African state. She served first as a teacher and later as principal of Our Lady of Lourdes Secondary School for Girls in Bemenda. It was her students from this time

who came to visit to mark her 90th birthday.

**“She said, sister, if you look at us, so many of us, we’re either divorced or we’re second or third wives – polygamy was the tradition – or we have children and no husband”**

At the end of six years, Sr Neville went on sabbatical, one which had been due to her for quite some time. Having spent most of her life teaching, an almost throwaway question from a former student set the Irish nun on her next path in life – marriage enrichment.

“One of the past students said to me, sister what are you doing about our marriages? I said, me? I’m a nun, I’m white, I will never marry, how can I help you? What are you asking me,” Sr Neville remembers saying.

“She said, sister, if you look at us, so many of us, we’re either divorced or we’re second or third wives – polygamy was the tradition – or we have children and no husband. Because it was more important for the girls to have a child than to have a husband”.

## Heart

“That nearly cut me through the heart,” she continues. “These are the girls we think we’re rearing for the future. And now they’re saying this to me that socially they may be very advanced, but in their personal family lives they’re unhappy.”

As she was going on sabbatical to St Louis Missouri,



Sr Neville along with her fellow Holy Rosary Sisters and past pupils of their school in Bemenda, Cameroon, enjoy the visit of the Cameroonian women who came to pay tribute to their “mothers”.

Sr Neville thought she would apply for a placement as a marriage counsellor. None were forthcoming as she had no experience. So she got down to studying once more and qualified as a counsellor in marital therapy and the theology of marriage.

“When I came back to Cameroon then – the thing she [her instructor] told me, she was a therapist, she said if I could work with happily married couples, I could prevent an awful lot of divorces. That was the light that helped me. Rather than dealing with problematic marriages, I’ll try and help the happy couples.”

It took a whole year of trying before she got one couple on board and when she had one more, she worked to form a team with the husbands and wives. That couple boiled down the problem afflicting their marriages to two points says Sr Neville, asking if I can guess. “One was money and the other was sex – sex and money,” she says.

Sr Neville turned over much of the course to the couples, saying it took a lot of courage for them to step up. “We called it marriage enrichment and they called it, ‘manure for marriage,’” she recalls, laughing. “If you want to grow a nice crop, you will put manure on it. This will help your marriage, it’s manure for marriage.”

**“So many of them said to me, if we didn’t have this we would not be together. We might be in the same house, but we wouldn’t be together”**

“We had our first seminar, it was really only 24 hours, but it was the first time for many of them that they had spent a night alone with their husbands. They nearly always

had in-laws or members of the family in the house. The mother-in-law was always a pest to the daughter-in-law because the daughter-in-law never did anything as good as the mother-in-law and made life terrible for her.”

Sr Neville began her marriage enrichment programme in 1990 and when she left in 2000, 640 couples had passed through her hands. “So many of them said to me, if we didn’t have this we would not be

together. We might be in the same house, but we wouldn’t be together.”

Having already served for 40 years in one position or another, Sr Neville might have deserved a long break. But after another year-long sabbatical, she was back to work, first raising awareness of the missions around the country. After that, she undertook a very new position as superior for a nursing home, before finally getting a well-deserved break.

And then, as I have already written, she had the chance to meet those young girls she taught decades ago; young girls who were now mothers and grandmothers and who still saw Sr Mary Neville and her fellow Irish missionaries as their mothers. It was a fitting testimony not only to Sr Neville’s life and work, but also to the life and work of Irish men and women religious who gave their lives to their adopted children across the world.

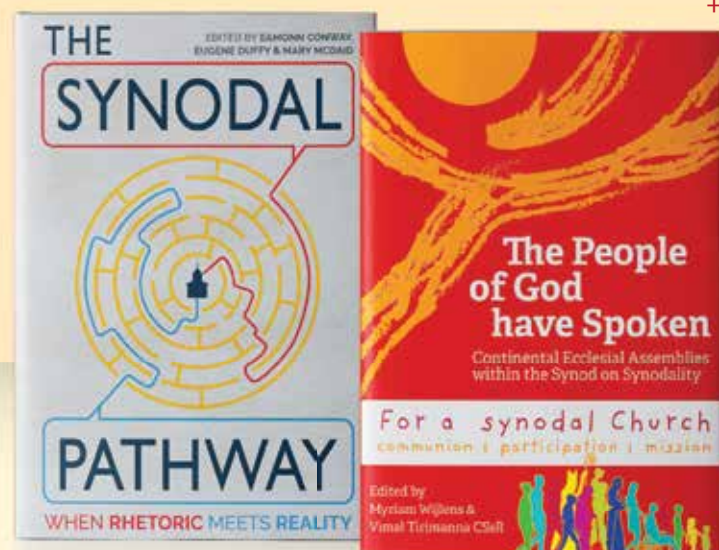


Sr Mary Neville pictured during her time on the missions.

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# ‘I can’t imagine Joe Biden intervening in a papal election’



Historian Jessica Wärnberg explores the history of Rome through the eyes of the popes, she tells **Ruadhán Jones**

**W**hen you walk through the streets of Rome, there’s an aspect you may take for granted, without considering the influence it has had in shaping this once pagan city into the home of Christianity – the papacy.

The history of Rome can’t be separated from the lives of the popes and the people they interacted with, from political leaders to the man on the streets, according to historian Jessica Wärnberg. She is the author of *City of Echoes*, whose subtitle encapsulates her subject – *A New History of Rome, its Popes and its People*.

“The popes are the most enduring aspect of Rome,” she tells me and the way the papacy’s “presence has transformed Rome offers us a unique vantage point on the history of the city”.

“Because the popes are both at the top, after a certain amount of time, and also dealing with the people at the very bottom, you are able to see the city in all of its life, its fabric.

“If you want to understand Rome, you have to understand the papacy,” she says. “The popes have given Rome its most enduring face.”

## Big picture

This is a fact we accept readily, especially as Catholics, to a degree that it often fades into the background. This is something Dr Wärnberg realised when spending a year and a half studying in the Eternal City with scholars and historians, well versed like herself in the city’s history, along with “artists there who didn’t have a scholarly background but had an art project that was related to Italy or Rome and they needed to be there for research”.

“We would walk around the city and I would get asked a lot of questions about why Rome was the way it was,” she continues. “I realised even as a historian who worked at that time on early modern Italy and religion and politics, I knew the answers but hadn’t considered the bigger picture and how incredibly



Pope Francis gives one of his documents to US President Joe Biden during a meeting at the Vatican in this file photo from October 29, 2021. The relationship between the papacy and political power has a complicated history. Photo: CNS.

important this story is for understanding Rome.

“As an outsider when you come in and look at this, it’s actually rather strange that this institution sprang up in this pagan city. And the stories it tells are quite often about ordinary human beings made extraordinary by faith,” she explains.

Dr Wärnberg believes the early Christians would be really shocked, but also pleasantly surprised, by the change Rome has undergone in the almost 2,000 years since Christianity first arrived.

**“For some historians, it is almost like a parasite, credited with killing off a once great empire or else cynically taking up its trappings”**

“When Peter came to Rome, it was a pagan city,” she begins. “The first popes right up to Emperor Constantine (272–337AD), would have been anonymous figures, they would not have been grand. Figures who to most of Roman society, if they knew about them, it was because they were making a nuisance of themselves by refusing to make sacrifices and practising this strange religion that seemed a bit like Judaism, but

following this fellow called Jesus of Nazareth who said all these things that were really contrary to the way Romans did things”.

“I think they would be really shocked if they came to the city these days and realised that actually the strange religion they began to follow, furtively leaving their houses to go up to the Vatican hill, a dusty hill, to venerate St Peter’s bones had been transformed into a global centre of Christianity where the presidents of secular republics go to ask the pope for his advice.”

She finishes her thought by reflecting that “perhaps faith for St Peter means he thought it was always going to end up like that”.

## Endured

The papacy has endured through the ups and downs of Roman history, through the city’s collapse and ruin, through invasions and rebellions, through also the ministrations of deviant popes. For some historians, it is almost like a parasite, credited with killing off a once great empire or else cynically taking up its trappings.

Dr Wärnberg engages with both these claims, dismissing the first and proposing a subtler interpretation for the second.

“I can see why the likes of [English philosopher Thomas] Hobbes said the papacy is crowned on the grave of empire because the pope

did step up as being that figurehead, the pope did go out and negotiate with secular leaders in order to protect Rome.

**“If your authority comes from Jesus telling your predecessor that he’s the foundation on which he’s going to build his Church, that can’t be fought away from you”**

“The Pope did end up having authority over huge swathes of land as a prince and also over the Christian world... And Leo the Great did apparently say, don’t worry Romans, as Rome was falling, you are going to be much stronger with an empire built on Peter than the empire built on the triumph of Rome. There was a self-conscious adoption of these things.”

But, she adds, it wasn’t a cynical move in all cases: “Fundamentally they were filling a power vacuum that needed to be filled in Rome – with the conversion of so many to Christianity, it made sense that it would be the pope”.

If the pope had merely been a new emperor, Dr Wärnberg doubts the

papacy could have survived. Instead, what helped the popes endure “in a way that the empire didn’t is that the foundation of their power is not armies, it’s not wealth, it’s not even political nous and sophistication – it’s that story of Peter”.

“If your authority comes from Jesus telling your predecessor that he’s the foundation on which he’s going to build his Church, that can’t be fought away from you; you can’t lose it in a war because it’s not like all of these worldly trappings.”

## Army

The popes do have an army of a kind, but these as Dr Wärnberg points out are the “armies of Heaven” – the saints. This army is unassailable by worldly power, but it underpins papal power, she says.

One of the interesting elements that comes out in Dr Wärnberg’s book is the influence of Christian women, particularly saints, on the development of Rome and the papacy. Writing the book, she had no premeditated plan to foreground the contribution of women – it came about organically because of the key place they have from the very beginning.

“It’s something that, as I reflected on the book after I wrote it, I realised there were quite a lot of women in there, key women,” the young historian reflects. “You have Phoebe, the interlocutor of Paul, Priscilla, the



Pope Francis arrives for a prayer service in an empty St. Peter's Square at the Vatican March 27, 2020. The Pope's lonely walk through the streets of Rome was an iconic moment for Italians, highlighting the close connection between the papacy and Rome. Photo: CNS/Guglielmo Mangiapane, via Reuters.

wife of Aquila, Paul's friends from before he came to Rome. And going right through the medieval period, down perhaps to the nun who stopped the man who tried to assassinate John Paul II, women appear in this story over and over again."

**“Even just the pope being resident primarily in the environs of the Vatican is something that happened in the 1800s. Before that he was very much in the city, in the Quirinal”**

The fact is that “women were important parts of this story and they do emerge”, she says. “It is possibly that phenomenon of saints, the fact that they could be anybody from the very beginning, means that many of the people who are going to be venerated and recorded are going to have been women. So their stories have been preserved where they might have been forgotten were it not for that tradition in the Church.”

One of the consequences of Church structure being reasonably fixed and stable, lasting a long time, can make us think “it has always been that way”, according to Dr Wörnberg. In fact, many aspects of the papacy are quite new.

“Even just the pope being resident primarily in the environs of the Vatican is something that happened in the 1800s. Before that he was very much in the city, in the Quirinal. But revolution meant that he wanted to be further from the centre,” she explains.

The change in the election of the pope is another, perhaps surpris-

ing, element. When we think about the election of the pope, “we think of the cardinals going into the conclave and being guided by the Holy Spirit. However, people also know that there are other interests and influences that are involved in the election of the pope even today”, Dr Wörnberg states.

“I think the people who are most aware of that are Catholics. It might look a different way in our time – hopefully nobody is going to start storming the conclave and looting. I don't know who would be our equivalent of the emperor, perhaps Joe Biden? That he's going to try and intervene in the next papal election – I can't imagine it.”

### Relationship

The changing relationship between the papacy and political powers is another theme that emerges strongly from the history of Rome, says Dr Wörnberg. Again, the example of interference in papal elections spring to mind.

“But also the popes have gone to secular leaders for protection in times of distress when Rome was being encroached upon, and when their own office is being encroached upon. That has been for the good if you think of Pepin the Short (714–768) and Charlemagne (747–814) protecting Rome and expanding the papal states.”

For the popes at the time, this was definitely very good, Dr Wörnberg says. But “that's something that has really changed and become more challenging for popes in the modern world, because the world and the papacy have become much wider apart in terms of their aims and their principals.

“And yet at the same time you have people like Emmanuel Macron and Trump visiting the pope and wanting to have a public image of accord and friendship – or even

to speak out and agree with them about something they said.”

**“He's an integral part of Rome, he makes us very proud to be Roman, it's a positive force in the city”**

This relationship between the pope and secular figures “can be both a positive thing and really quite compromising, something that endures into our own day”.

But regardless of changes, regardless of the relative popularity or sanctity of a particular pope, the papacy as an institution continues its hold over the Roman and Italian imagination right up to the present day.

Dr Wörnberg asked contemporary Romans if they can imagine Rome without the papacy. Their response surprised her.

“Every single person I asked, whether they were atheist, cultural Catholic, devoted Catholic, said no it cannot happen, he's an integral part of Rome, he makes us very proud to be Roman, it's a positive force in the city.

“Certainly if you think about recent crises the city has faced, like during the coronavirus pandemic, for Italians broadly, tuning into seeing the Pope speaking from St Peter's Square was a huge event and lots of Roman's I spoke to said they got goosebumps.

“There's definitely a connection there and a feeling that this is a tie that's inextricable, a feeling quite strong among most of the people I've spoken to,” she says.

**Dr Jessica Wörnberg's new book *City of Echoes – A New History of Rome, its Popes and its People* published by Icon Books is available for purchase in store and online for £21.99.**



Author Dr Jessica Wörnberg

# In 2023, does marriage really still matter?



We are rapidly moving far beyond the family based on the love of one man and one woman for the good of children, writes **David Quinn**

The Government has announced that two more referendums on the Constitution are to be held. The date of the vote will be March 8. Given that Christmas looms, this gives very little time for a proper debate.

One of the two referendums will be on carers, and the second on the definition of the family.

The first one has Article 41.2 in its sights. This is the clause that seeks to protect mothers from being forced out of the home by “economic necessity”.

## The clause

This clause is always mischaracterised as saying a woman’s place is in the home. But it doesn’t do that at all. It simply seeks to protect mothers in the home if that is what they want. It is true that the assumption was that it would be mothers, not fathers, who would mind the home, but this assumption was commonly shared across society. It was considered an advance by many if it was possible for a mother to stay at home and not be forced into paid employment.

Ireland was extremely poor back then, and jobs were often backbreaking. Even children had to go out to work sometimes. If someone could

stay at home instead, this was considered a very good thing. When the 1937 Constitution was passed, ‘mod-cons’ like washing machines and dish-washers were basically unheard of. Housework is demanding today. It was far more demanding until relatively recent times.

Most men were working on farms or in factories. These jobs often required strength and could be risky. It made sense that it was mostly men who did them.

So, when we judge Article 41.2 today, we should keep in mind the economic circumstances of the country until fairly recently.

**“The new wording will devalue the place of the home in the Constitution and that is a good enough reason on its own to reject it”**

The main objection to the clause is that it is sexist and outdated because of the assumption it is only women who would want to stay at home and look after the house and children.

But this means the Government could have chosen to replace the word ‘mothers’ with ‘carer’ or ‘parent’. However, it has gone much further than this. The reference to the home is gone from the proposed new wording, and so is the commitment, however theoretical it was in practice, to protect the home from “economic necessity”.

The new wording will devalue the place of the home in the Constitution and that is a good enough reason on its own to reject it.

The second referendum wants to redefine the family again. We redefined marriage in the name of ‘equality’ in 2015 in order to let same-sex couples marry. But I wrote at the time that in the name of equality we would have to elevate non-marital relationships to more or less the same level as marital ones.

In other words, we would have to follow up the ‘marriage equality’ referendum with a ‘family equality’ one, and this has now proven to be the case.

The current Article 41.1 recognises the family “as the natural primary and



A polyamorous family from Georgia recently appeared on US television to explain how life works with multiple partners in the same home.

fundamental unit group of Society”.

The family it recognises is based on marriage. The proposed new wording will say the family is based on marriage “or another durable relationship”. But what does this mean? It seems incredibly ambiguous and open-ended.

EU law already refers to “durable partners”, which means people who have been cohabiting for two or more years.

## Cohabitation

This elevates cohabitation to a level close to marriage, and we have already done this in Ireland. But a “durable relationship” means something more than this. Leo Varadkar has already made that clear.

When he was announcing the two referendums last week, he mentioned families headed by lone parents, or grandparents, or a guardian.

We were told, correctly, that the family is much more diverse today. It seemed to be automatically assumed that this is a good thing and that the Government is simply recognising reality.

But two questions remain. First, what is a “durable relationship”, and secondly, is there still a justification for saying that the family

recognised by the State is based on marriage?

On the first question, it was reported this week that the Cabinet has been given a memo warning Ministers that it could become easier for immigrants working here to bring in family members with them on the basis of a “durable relationship”. How many family members are we talking about?

**“A judge in New York last year granted three men in a relationship some of the protections of married couples”**

The same memo said this might not happen, but that is not very reassuring. A recent opinion poll showed that 75% of the public are concerned about numbers coming here to live. They think we cannot cope. The proposed referendum could easily make this problem worse.

We might also ask whether a man who has been living with a woman and her child, who is not his biologically speaking, will be considered to have developed a “durable relationship” with the child if he and the mother break up?

Will he be able to claim access rights?

Or what about people in polyamorous relationships, that is, involving three or more people? That could be a woman and two men, a man and two women, three women, three men and so on.

In some American states, polyamorous relationships already have legal rights. For example, a judge in New York last year granted three men in a relationship some of the protections of married couples.

Judge Karen May Bacdayan opined that perhaps the “time had arrived” to recognise relationships not based on monogamy.

Why couldn’t that happen here under the proposed constitutional wording? It is hard to see why it would not.

If polyamorous relationships are granted recognised, why not polygamy? A court would not recognise a second wife as a legal wife per se, but it could easily say a “durable relationship” exists that should have certain protections.

This would then bring us far beyond the family based on the monogamous marriage of a man and a woman and the attached vision of the family of mother, father and child.

Same-sex marriage already had put to the idea that the family of mother, father and child deserves special protection and recognition, and the proposed ‘family equality’ referendum would declare that marriage per se is not very important. Even monogamy might be dispensed with in the name of “diversity” and “inclusion”.

As Judge Bacdayan said in the case mentioned above, “Do all nontraditional relationships have to comprise or include only two primary persons?”

The Irish Supreme Court may soon find itself contemplating a similar question if the Government’s new wording is passed on March 8.

Meanwhile, we should contemplate as a society whether the family consisting of a married mother and father with children is still of special importance, or whether it is now a matter of total indifference to us whether every child or no child is raised by their own mother and father together?

A sensible society will say that every child deserves a good mother and a good father who have committed to one another through marriage. But I think we have increasingly lost sight of this vision, and certainly the Government has. Hence its latest attempt to redefine the family.

# Studying the occult can open door to evil – exorcist



If you stick your head in a sewer don't be surprised by the smell, a Dublin priest tells

**Chai Brady**

**R**esearch into the idea of magic throughout history and understanding human reasoning regarding the supernatural is not a unique concept.

However, even the academic study of topics such as witchcraft and the occult can open the door to malign spirits, according to a well-known Vincentian priest who specialises in deliverance ministry.

Prolific author and psychotherapist Fr Pat Collins CM said that while he does not object to research, any course focused on these issues should have a “health warning”.

## Occult studies

This comes as the University of Exeter in Devon, England, announced it would run a one-year postgraduate programme in Magic and Occult Science in September 2024. In its overview it states students can “Build interdisciplinary expertise whilst exploring your specific interests within the long and diverse history of esotericism, witchcraft, ritual magic, occult science, and related topics”.

In the ‘Research’ section it states: “You will conduct original research using our archival materials which include sources for rites and rituals, meanings of belief, Westcountry witchcraft and folklore, along with ancient and Arabic sources.

“The Bill Douglas Cinema Museum also has a large collection of books, ephemera and artefacts on



**“I don't think you can have much objection to a university – they can put on courses for anything they like, but there should be a health warning on that course”**

the history of magic lanterns, phantasmagoria, optical illusions, photography, Victorian magic and music hall performance, with many items relating to séances and Victorian occult activities.”

Fr Collins told *The Irish Catholic* that the idea of a university, certainly in the western world, is that people should be able to study anything – even flat Earth theory, despite most people thinking it daft.

He said: “If that's what you want to study there is a history there and you can become au fait with the history, and there are modern groups that still maintain the world is flat. Certainly magic has been a characteristic of human history down through the ages and so has supernatural or paranormal interests, so all of those can be studied just as a matter of curiosity and finding out what human beings believe.”

Fr Collins gave the

example of psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carl Jung, who had a lifelong interest in the paranormal and conducted a large amount of research into the occult. “He went off and travelled to different countries and looked at some of the esoteric beliefs and activities they were involved in, now that wouldn't mean that he would subscribe to them, he would just say from an objective point of view: ‘this is what people think and believe,’” he said.

Fr Collins said a person taking a course such as the MA in Magic and Occult Science in Exeter may not have the same scientific approach, and “would certainly be taking a risk that instead of just being objective, they could become subjectively involved and be open to forces that could be quite malign. Be careful, because if you put your head down a sewer, don't be surprised if you get a bad

smell”.

“I don't think you can have much objection to a university – they can put on courses for anything they like, but there should be a health warning on that course. That by studying it you may be infected by it and in a rather negative way,” he warned.

## The spirit world

“It's like going into a room and there may be an infection, and you might not catch it but on the other hand you might. You're opening out to the spirit world but you're not sure what spirits you're opening out to. For anyone who would be an exorcist you would need to know a good deal about all of that.

“It's hard to be objective all the time without in some way buying into beliefs and practices that are part of the course and insofar as a person would do that, whether they are Christian or secular, they are opening out to the spirit realm – but they have no control over what spirits are going to impinge upon them.”

Often the occult, witchcraft, paganism etc., is a replacement for the religion people have abandoned, Fr

Collins stated, quoting GK Chesterton who said: “When men choose not to believe in God, they do not thereafter believe in nothing, they then become capable of believing in anything.”

**“To me, it is yet another sign of the tide of Christianity going out and people returning to old wisdoms, which are pagan”**

Everyone has a desire for meaning and purpose in life Fr Collins said, but in a secular culture “very materialistic” people are looking for replacements for Christianity and are getting into magic and the occult, “But replacing one worldview with the another is very problematic, the danger is they are opening out to the dark side”.

He believes that the university has seen a gap in the market, as there is a lot of interest in these subjects, which will draw a lot of students and will help with the income of the university.

“To me, it is yet another

sign of the tide of Christianity going out and people returning to old wisdoms, which are pagan. The Fathers of the Church said that the evil spirits worked through those beliefs, and they would not have the modern political correctness in saying they're all equal and all worthy, they say no, some of them are rather dangerous,” Fr Collins said.

“Certainly you are open to negative spiritual influences, illusions, false inspirations, temptations and even oppression. They [students] are naively going into something and they do not know what they're dealing with. Then they come to people who are in the ministry of exorcism and deliverance saying, ‘I need deliverance’, and then when you track back to where this entered, how did it enter, you could find ‘I did an MA on this sort of stuff, and I got rather involved’ and maybe that's how it started.”

He added his advice for anyone taking such a course would be to say the ‘Our Father’ as well as Ephesians 6:16 every time before starting.

# Facing the pain of dealing with 'ferocious' addictions



Spiritual exercises can help give freedom to address the crutch of addiction, Chai Brady hears

**W**hat is it that really matters to you personally? A basic question that should be asked of any person suffering an addiction, and only the individual is able to answer, according to a Jesuit priest based in the North, who has been helping ex-prisoners.

Part-time prison chaplain from Armagh, Fr Brian Lennon SJ, who has been working for peace and with prisoners in the North for decades, told *The Irish Catholic* there has been a "tsunami of addictions of all kinds" on the island. He runs a programme called Dialogue for Diversity, part of which assists prisoners struggling to overcome their addictions.

Fr Lennon has delivered courses in Maghaberry prison with author and counsellor Martina Killeavy over the past five years. About 350 prisoners have completed the six-session course.

## Spiritual exercises

Following this Ms Killeavy published a book based on the spiritual exercises they both developed, called *Freedom From the Prison of Addiction: Spiritual and Secular Wisdom*. The book is based on the spiritual exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola – the founder of the Jesuit order – and the AA's 12-step programme.

"The country is coming down with addictions, ferocious problems. People often think of addictions as having to do with alcohol and other drugs, but there are other addictions, there



are huge gambling and sex addictions," Fr Lennon warned. In addition, he said there are addictions that are not seen as negative but have huge personal and societal impacts on the individual and the family.

Fr Lennon explained: "There is also then an addiction that is often not mentioned, which is money. You have people earning vast amounts of money, why do they need the money? Why are they doing that? And then other people choosing between heating their house and a loaf of bread."

**“People try to overcome addictions on their own and most of them can't do that, overcoming is very difficult, and it also involves people falling back several times”**

Prison populations have much higher rates of addiction than the population, but as the title of the book suggest, everyone with an addiction is in their own type of prison. Fr Lennon says for this reason the exercise can be adapted to any situation.

He said: "So it's really

aimed at people who are working with people who are addicted, parish workers, spiritual directors, obviously chaplains in prisons and addicts themselves. It's a serious meditation, it's not a book to be read on its own merits. I can tell you myself, you don't give these courses without being challenged by them yourself.

"People try to overcome addictions on their own and most of them can't do that, overcoming is very difficult, and it also involves people falling back several times."

When a person is faced with asking themselves honestly, 'What is it that really matters to you?', the question tends to be avoided according to Fr Lennon as "it can throw up a lot of pain, because we don't have what we want".

"Turning to an addiction can cover up the pain temporarily, and of course if you're suffering from depression or anxiety, and an enormous number of people turn to drink, drugs, power, or sex or whatever can cover this up. It doesn't do the job that people are looking for," he said.

"We're saying the freedom can only come by really opening yourself up to the pain of that question and also realising that we

need help, and for a Christian we do have the enormous compassionate help of our Lord. And our Lord understands a bit about prison because he was in prison himself, albeit for only one night, but many of the early Christians were in prison for much longer, and they understand that stuff from the inside."

## Prayer and assistance

However, this is not an attempt to encourage people to pray and wait for a magic wand to solve everything Fr Lennon insists, prayer can help to galvanise a person into action with the help of the Lord to get support. He points to AA, narcotics anonymous and gamblers anonymous, adding that there should also be assistance for those addicted to money.

It's well known that addiction causes enormous suffering to children in a plethora of ways, whether that be a household in which there is drunkenness, violence, sex abuse, and even an absent parent due to working long hours "chasing money".

Fr Lennon said: "All of this has to do with lack of freedom and the spiritual exercises are full of two things, one is respect for the individual and the

individual's journey. People look for God on mountaintops and in visions and all the rest it, it's in their own lives they can find God.

**“It isn't that this stuff gets them off addictions, it's part of a jigsaw”**

"Secondly it's full of compassion. The questions are tough, they really are, and the impact on children is a very big thing. So if people are working in a parish, they're working with groups, these meditations are there to help them. They wouldn't deliver them the way they are in the book, they absorb them themselves, and then adapt them to their own situation. But it's all about asking questions, obviously the only person who can answer the question is the person who the question is addressed to, I can't tell you what really matters to you nor can anyone else, and that's a question to dig deeper into."

A sad reality is that some of the addicts in prison are just the ones who were caught by the authorities, whether that be for driving under the influence of alcohol or

drugs, or committing another crime connected to their need to satiate the dependency. An addiction can be a ticking time bomb, and at some point a reckoning occurs.

## Direction

Fr Lennons reiterated the need for a person to initiate the core change from within themselves, adding: "I've seen people, I've looked at their eyes, and you're getting the same story. Then some day you look at their eyes, and their eyes are different, and I say 'Oh my God something is going on in there'. But why? How did it happen? I think it is a mystery, I think it is a gift and I think prayer can help, but people need help with prayer, and it can be much easier to pray in a group that is being led."

The sessions they ran in prison occurred in a lot of silence, the reason Fr Lennons explains is that it stops any "slagging conversations" among prisoners as well as the danger of one person dominating the group. It is also because "if I ask you some of these questions you might be tempted to give an answer that will make you look like a big guy, or a good guy, but I'm saying 'No, the answers is for you yourself,





don't tell me the answer, tell yourself the answer or better still tell the Lord the answer – but that is much deeper and it's much more personally challenging – and the guys responded to that”.

### “We have a desert out there in terms of mental health support”

“It isn't that this stuff gets them off addictions, it's part of a jigsaw, but if they get some kind of stirring and seek help, then

all the other help is around them from psychological services, counselling and self-help services such as AA and NA and the rest of it,” he said.

However, due to Stormont being defunct and the stalemate between Sinn Féin and the DUP showing no sign of relenting, there is a loss of leadership in areas such as mental health and addiction. While someone may look for support, they may not be able to readily receive it.

Fr Lennon also runs a project that brings people from divided political and religious groups together to listen to one another.

### “So if you want to vote, go and find out what your values are, who you're voting for and what the outcome is. Votes can have a real impact”

#### Local communities

He said: “One of the things that comes up in the dialogue group that we do with divided groups, Republicans, Loyalists and southerners, they're all from the local communities and one of the big issues that they really focus on and in which they find huge commonality is mental health issues and the lack of funding for mental health issues.

“It is outrageous, when you think of the harm this stuff does, and the North or south are definitely not poor. And yet we have a desert out there in terms of mental health support. The need for mental health support is enormous and there's a need for a wider look at our values in society. What kind of society are we producing if it's based on consumerism? And what impact does that make on the climate? What we're doing with our consumer economics is blowing the place up.

“We have a whole economic model, we have a whole value system, and a whole advertising system that plays right into lots of addictions and that plays particularly with people who are more economically marginalised because they look at things and say, ‘We need this’ and ‘We need that’, but a lot of these needs are manufactured by advertisers,” Fr Lennon said.

The North “pays for the price” for its divisions, and there is also a price to be paid for the divisions on the island of Ireland, he contended, “People are not taking account of the reality of other groups on the island and their identities, and the price of that is there's no Stormont in place. So if you want to vote, go and find out what your values are, who you're voting for and what the outcome is. Votes can have a real impact.”

#### A peaceful resolution

Fr Lennon would know this intimately, having been involved in dialogue between people on all sides during the years of the Drumcree stand-off in Portadown in which he tried to help broker a peaceful resolution.

The issue related to an Orange Order march which now no longer goes through the mainly Catholic area along the Garvaghy Road, where Fr Lennon lived. He feels the issue still has not been resolved; the community divided.

While much of the violence of the past has died down, Fr Lennon believes Brexit has made a huge impact on the work that is being done to heal divisions, and in fact has exacerbated them.

He said: “It's made life much more difficult and loyalist communities feel very isolated, also the Unionist communities see themselves as dependent on the London government and the London government seems to me to have extremely little interest in Northern Ireland and I think regarding the Brexit debate, most of the Tory politicians seem to be very surprised at people raising the question of Northern Ireland; as to what that had to do with anything as they were talking about Britain. They seem to have forgotten that Northern Ireland is still legally part of the United Kingdom and if you're going to take the United Kingdom out of the EU it's going to make an impact on Northern Ireland, so you have got a very messy situation there.

“It has improved recently to a degree, but the more improvement in terms of

making the flow of goods into Northern Ireland from Great Britain into Northern Ireland the better,” he added.

### “Everyone has the possibility of coming out of the prison of addiction, it can be done, so many have done it, it is possible”

Despite the political strife, Fr Lennon said that for whoever may be suffering from an addiction any time is the perfect time to address it.

He added: “Christmas is an awful time for an enormous number of people, and if you're suffering from an addiction and you have children, give them the best Christmas present you could give them which is actually to face into your own addictions.

“Everyone has the possibility of coming out of the prison of addiction, it can be done, so many have done it, it is possible. It's very hard for people who are stuck in the middle of an addiction to believe that, so it is one of the things to say to people – encourage them that there is hope, and there is hope for you.”

**i** Freedom From the Prison of Addiction: Spiritual and Secular Wisdom is available from: *The Jesuit Centre For Faith and Justice, Dialogue For Diversity, Messenger Publications and from Amazon.*



Fr Brian Lennon SJ

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# Out&About

## The Church's youthful face



**LOUTH:** Bishop of Meath Tom Deenihan and members of the Upper Room youth group and their leaders the Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal are pictured in St Mary's Church, Drogheda, for the feast of the Holy Souls.



**ARMAGH:** During Mass on November 24, the Knights of St Columbanus remembered the deceased knights and supporters of the society. At the end of the Mass Fr Barry Matthews blessed their new banner and asked God's blessings on the work that the knights are engaged in.



**CAVAN:** Pictured are PJ Fleming, Ann Burns and Derek Eakins with Fr Gerry MacCormack, Kingscourt on the occasion of the conferring of Papal Awards from Pope Francis for their outstanding witness and exceptional service in a generous and sustained way to the parish and the wider church community. Photo: Paul Callaghan.

### INSHORT

#### Papal Nuncio to lead 2024 grandparents pilgrimage

New Papal Nuncio to Ireland Archbishop Luis Mariano Montemayor has been announced as Chief Celebrant at the National Grandparents Pilgrimage at the Shrine of Our Lady of Knock on July 28, 2024, to coincide with the World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly.

Archbishop Montemayor agreed to lead the pilgrimage during a meeting with Catherine Wiley, founder of the Catholic Grandparents Association (CGA) and her husband Stewart.

Ms Wiley presented the archbishop with Pope Benedict XVI's prayer for

Grandparents, as well as the CGA's medal of St Joachim and St Anne with their grandson Jesus, created by the CGA to commemorate the establishment of the World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly proclaimed by Pope Francis in 2020.

Ms Wiley said "It was a joyful friendly trusting meeting. Archbishop Luis Mariano made us feel at home in his kindly, wise, smiling presence.

"He was very interested in what the Catholic Grandparents Association has achieved over the last 20 years, particularly with the innovation of grandparents days in schools, our national pilgrimage to Knock and the subsequent growth of the CGA worldwide."

The meeting ended with Archbishop

Montemayor blessing Mr Wiley and his 19-year-old grandson, George.

"Archbishop Montemayor made us feel like family. I pray that he will find in us a loving, trusting, loyal family as he begins his mission in Ireland," said Ms Wiley.

#### Kerry school breathes life into church nativity

In a collaboration between art and faith, art teacher Ann O'Shea Daly of Mercy Mounthawk Secondary School and eight of her students renovated the cherished Nativity statues at the Holy Cross Dominican Church in Tralee town.

"This creative endeavour not only

highlights the talent within our community but also underscores the intersection of artistry and spirituality," said Ms Daly after the task was completed.

The renovation project involved a meticulous process that was undertaken with "passion and dedication", said the Kerry art teacher.

"From restoring weathered paint to enhancing intricate details, to remaking parts in clay and being fired in the kiln, every step of the renovation is a testament to the fusion of artistic skill and reverence for the spiritual significance of the Nativity scene."

The unveiling of the renewed statues was welcomed by members of the local Dominican community.

# Christmas

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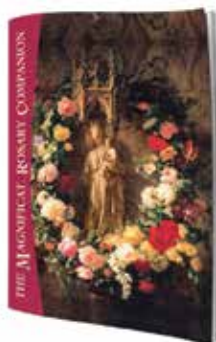
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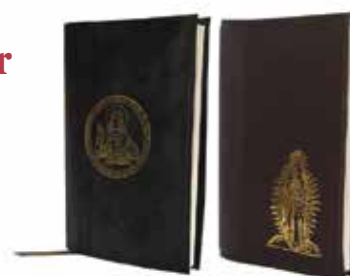
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**ARMAGH:** Cardinal Sean Brady is pictured with members of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta (SMOM) after celebrating Mass with Fr Stephen Wilson, at Tullysaran Chapel. Prayers were said for all deceased members of the Northern Ireland Region of the Order of Malta. Photo: Eilis.



**LONDON:** Thomas Kilduff (Cavan), Marek Matuszyk (Krakow, Poland) are pictured after the investiture of the new knights and dames.



**LONDON:** Donnacha Fahy (Clare), Karen Singarayer (Westminster) and Santana Luis Westminster enjoy the investiture.



**LONDON:** On Saturday, November 25, ten new Knights and Dames of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, including some Irish men and women, were admitted into the order. The investiture took place at the Cathedral of St George, Southwark, London in the presence of the Grand Prior Archbishop of Southwark John Wilson, KC\*HS. Pictured are Roberto Rocco, Aaron Kiely, Julie Justin, Donnacha Fahy, Richard Goodridge, Graham Monet, Donato Tallo and Thomas Kilduff.



**LONDON:** Chevalier Douglas and Dame Eve Newton (Plymouth) enter St George's Cathedral.



**KERRY:** Pictured are some of the students who helped to renovate the statues: Sarah Hobbert, Sr Edel Mary, Jolin Weng, Aine Newsome, Grace Somers, Dominika Matysek, Nicole Hartmann, Cayden Lawlor, Chloe Mason, Ann O'Shea Daly (art teacher), Fr David McGovern and little Lily Daly at the front on the ground. Photo: Kerry's Eye



**KERRY:** Mercy Mounthawk Secondary School art teacher Ann O'Shea Daly (centre back) is pictured with some of her students who helped to renovate the crib statues for Holy Cross Dominican Church, Tralee. Back row – Fr David McGovern, Ann O'Shea Daly with Lily Daly and Sr. Edel Mary. Front row – Jolin Weng, Aine Newsome, Dominika Matysek and Grace Somers. Photo: Kerry's Eye

Edited by Ruadhán Jones  
Ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie



Events deadline is a week in advance of publication



**DUBLIN:** Transition Year students from St Mary's Secondary School Baldoye help out at the 'Log On Learn' classes for Senior Citizens on Tuesdays from 11am to 12.10 pm. Absolute beginners are welcome to come learn about emails, social media, buying online, booking flights, Whatsapp etc. For further details, contact Joey Ryan at 01 832 5591 or email him at j.ryan@stmarysbaldoye.org.



**DUBLIN:** Members of the Ukrainian Catholic community gather in Our Lady of Consolation, Donnycarney on the fourth Saturday of November, when Ukraine honours the memory of the victims of the Holodomor of 1932-1933 and at 1921-1923 and 1946-1947. Photo: Artem Kulnych



**CAVAN:** John Tully, sculptor, is pictured at the recent unveiling of The Stone of Remembrance at St Mary's Cemetery, Kingscourt for all babies and children who have died and left a footprint in the lives of the parents and families. This project was planned, executed and overseen by the Kingscourt Parish Pastoral Planning Team and the Parish Bethany Bereavement Support Team.

### ANTRIM

St John's Parish Falls Road to celebrate a children's liturgy for P3-P7 students during the 12pm Mass beginning Sunday sharing the Gospel through story, arts and crafts in a child friendly way.

### CAVAN

Lectio Divina takes place every Tuesday for 30 minutes in the Conference Room (Ss Patrick and Felim Cathedral) behind the altar after 10am Mass.

### CLARE

Mid Clare Youth Connect meets on a monthly basis in Fahy Hall/Church of Our Lady, Roslevan, Ennis for games, learn about their faith and grow in friendship. For more information contact Fr Donagh O'Meara on 087 232 2140 or Myriam Black on myrblack@gmail.com or Joanne O'Brien on joannebrien07@gmail.com

### CORK

First Friday devotions take place in St Patrick's Church, Whitechurch, with adoration from 6-8pm, beginning with two hearts devotion from 6-7pm followed by a holy hour of reparation until Benediction. First Saturday Fatima devotions take place during Adoration 11am-12pm midday, with Confessions 11-11.45am. Benediction takes place at 12pm, with Mass 12.10pm.

### DERRY

The annual Ballinascreen Parish Christmas Carol Service will take place in Holy Rosary Church at 6pm on Sunday, December 17.

### DONEGAL

Alcoholics Anonymous Amazing Grace Group, Buncrana, has five meetings per week: Sundays at 8pm, Tuesdays at 8.30pm, Thursdays at 11.30am, Fridays 8.30pm, and Saturdays at 11.30am. If you think you may have a problem with alcohol, please come along. Venue for all meetings is St Teresa's Room.

### DOWN

Lectio Divina in Newry Cathedral takes place in the Parish Centre on Thursday after 10.30am

Mass, usually getting underway by 11.15am.

### DUBLIN

Rathmines Young Adults group to meet for a carol singing rehearsal on December 14 at 7pm.

Abiding Together youth group for women (18-35) who want to journal, chat and listen meets via Zoom on Thursdays at 8pm. Contact fleming-mairead@yahoo.com

Advent Rorate Mass followed by rosary and litany to be celebrated in St Saviour's Priory at 7am on Saturday, December 16 and December 23.

Part four of a Theology of the Body series for all Christians takes place Friday, December 15, at 7pm on 'The great mystery of marriage' in 23 Merrion Sq North, D02 XE02.

### FERMANAGH

A novena Mass to St Peregrine, patron of those who have cancer, is celebrated every Tuesday at 7pm in Holy Cross Church in Lisnaskea. It is also live streamed at Churchservices.tv/lisnaskea.

### GALWAY

A Youth 2000 prayer group takes place in Church of St Oliver Plunkett, Renmore, on first Fridays at 8.15pm.

### KILKENNY

St John's Parish Scripture group meets in the presbytery at 7.30pm each Thursday to reflect on Scripture texts for the following Sunday's Mass.

### LAOIS

The rosary will be prayer at the grotto of the Church of the Assumption at 8pm on the first Friday of every month. The Divine Mercy Chaplet is prayer at 3pm every Sunday in Portlaoise parish church.

### LEITRIM

Daily rosary at 6pm in St Joseph's Church, Leitrim Village.

### LOUTH

Oasis of Peace addiction recovery group takes place in the Oasis of Peace Centre, Collon, on the last Saturday of every month from 12-1.30pm. Contact 085 8101614.

### MEATH

Fr John Byrne to continue his introduction to the Bible on Mondays at 12 noon via the Kells webcam, accessible on www.kellsparish.ie. This year he will introduce the St John's Gospel and each session will last 25 minutes. For queries, you may contact Fr John on email: jplowebyrne@gmail.com

### MONAGHAN

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place every Friday in St Joseph's Church immediately after 10am Mass, ending at 6pm.

### OFFALY

Tullamore parish to host an eight-week Bible study course in January and February 2024, beginning on Monday, January 8, at 7.30pm in Tullamore parish centre with tea after.

### ROSCOMMON

Bishop Barron's *Catholicism* series will be presented in St Patrick's Castlereagh Parish Office (attached to the Parochial House, F45D284) on Mondays at 8-9.30pm.

### SLIGO

St Patrick's Church, Stranhill, to host 'The Way of Gentleness', an advent journey at 9pm on Monday, December 18, in person and online at churchservices.tv

### TYRONE

A one hour interactive YOUCAT programme, for those aged 16+ years, takes place on Thursdays in Ardstraw Oratory, on 7 Main Street, Newtown Stewart, starting at 6.30pm. For further information contact 028 81661445 or email ardstraweast@derrydiocese.org.

The rosary is prayed in St Mary's Church, Killyclogher every Monday after 10am Mass, and in Corpus Christi, Mountfield every Thursday evening at 8pm.

### WEXFORD

Church of the Immaculate Conception recites the rosary twice a day, in the morning at 9.30am and in the evening at 8pm. The prayer is broadcast via the church's webcam on www.churchmedia.ie



# World Report

## IN BRIEF

### World's 'largest living Nativity scene' opens in Colombia

● Since December 2, the Faithful in Barranquilla, Colombia, have been able to visit the staging of "the largest Nativity scene in the world" where 90 actors interpret the moments before and after the birth of Jesus.

The Nativity scene is set up on an 18,000-square-meter park (about 4.5 acres) that in previous years has been installed in other Colombian cities such as Bogotá, Medellín, and Cali. The initiative began in 2010, promoted by Colombian Fabián Rojas, manager of Nativity World, the company in charge of the tours billed "the largest Nativity scene in the world".

The company's website notes it has been recognised four times by Guinness World Records: for being "the largest Nativity scene in the world" and for the "greatest number of figures in a Nativity scene" (Colombia 2010-2011), as well as for the "greatest number of good wishes" written by attendees on a "wailing wall" and the "greatest number of human replicas that move in a Nativity scene" (Mexico 2011-2012).

### Climate activists vandalise St Mark's Basilica in Venice

● Climate activists vandalised the facade of the nearly 1,000-year-old St Mark's Basilica in Venice, Italy, reportedly defacing it with mud and chocolate milk as part of an environmental demonstration.

Demonstrators with the group Last Generation poured "mud and Nesquik" onto the front of the cathedral, according to the Associated Press. There was "no immediate word" of permanent damage to the structure, the news

wire said.

Several media outlets reported that the activists said they were "sound[ing] the alarm" because Venice "is a city that is sinking because our governments have not acted against the climate crisis".

"Today those of you who are here to take pictures and see this church have a privilege," the demonstrators reportedly declared. "You are the last to be able to see this church above sea level."

### Pope gives Syro-Malabar Catholics Christmas deadline to end dispute

● Telling Syro-Malabar Catholics in India's Archdiocese of Ernakulam-Angamaly that he does not want to see anyone excommunicated, Pope Francis pleaded with the priests and faithful to end their dispute over the way the Eucharist is celebrated.

With some priests calling into question the authenticity of his previous letters and his appointment last August of a special envoy, Pope Francis communicated with members of the archdiocese in a video released December 7 "so no one has any more doubts about what the Pope thinks," he said.

"In the name of the Lord, for the spiritual good of your Church, of our Church, I ask you to heal this rupture. It is your Church; it is our Church. Restore communion; remain in the Catholic Church," the Pope said in the video.

Also December 7, the Vatican released a letter from Pope Francis to Cardinal George Alencherry accepting his resignation as head of the archdiocese and as major archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church.

After years of debate about tradition, Latinisation and modernisation of the liturgy, in 1999 the synod of bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church issued uniform rubrics for the celebration of the Eucharist, called the Holy Qurbana by members of the Eastern-rite Church.

They were trying to end a situation in which some priests faced the altar during the entire liturgy, while others faced the congregation throughout the liturgy. The bishops' decision was to have the priest face the altar during the eucharistic prayer but face the congregation during the Liturgy of the Word and again after Communion.

## Macron to invite Pope to Notre Dame's December 2024 reopening

A year from the reopening of the Notre Dame Cathedral in the heart of the French capital, the cross is again overlooking Paris from the top of the newly installed wooden spire. On December 8, 2024, the most famous cathedral in the world will welcome the Faithful again. The French president said he will extend an invitation for Pope Francis to attend the historic moment.

"Never has anyone alive seen Notre Dame as we shall see it," Fr Olivier Ribadeau Dumas, rector-archpriest of the cathedral, told OSV News.

On November 28, Parisians saw the spire of the "dame" of the city reinstalled – its upper part was placed over its wooden structure, 315 feet above the ground. On December 6, its cross was lifted into the air by a crane and installed on top.

"It was a spectacular moment," Fr Ribadeau Dumas told OSV News. "Now you can really make out the silhouette of the cathedral. It is the most visible symbol of the cathedral's resurrection."

The rector of the cathedral welcomed President Emmanuel Macron at Notre Dame's reconstruction site on December 8, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, together with Archbishop Laurent Ulrich of Paris. In accordance with the French 1905 law of separation of



French President Emmanuel Macron touches the top of the spire of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris December 8, which was ravaged by a fire in 2019 that sent its spire crumbling down, as restoration works continue a year before its reopening to the public. Photo: OSV News/Christophe Ena, Reuters

Church and state, the cathedral is the property of the French state, although it is assigned to the Archdiocese of Paris for Catholic worship.

"Since April 2019, the entire nation has been rebuilding," President Macron told reporters. "And it's very moving to be here a year before. You can see the extraordinary progress of the work on this nave, the choir and the frames and the spire," he said.

In an interview with France 2 television, Mr Macron said he would invite Pope Francis to attend the

cathedral's reopening. "I hope so, in any case we'll invite him," he said when asked about the Pope's possible presence. "The invitation will be extended. But it's not for me to answer on his behalf," he added.

Mr Macron, in his sixth visit to the reconstruction site, climbed to the scaffolding of the newly installed spire. The spire, Notre Dame's iconic topping, collapsed April 15, 2019, amid a fire that shocked France and the whole world. After debates on how it should be rebuilt, French and Church

authorities decided to rebuild the spire exactly the same as before.

During his visit, the French president paid a special tribute to General Jean-Louis Georgelin, who oversaw the restoration site until his sudden death during a mountain accident on August 18, 2023. His name has been engraved on a beam of the spire. "It is thanks to him that the work will be completed on time," Fr Ribadeau Dumas told OSV News.

## Italian bishop suspends godparent and sponsor selection

In order to study the most appropriate ways to restore the actual purpose of the role of godparents and sponsors, the bishop of Massa Carrara-Pontremoli in Italy, Mario Vaccari, has decided to suspend their selection for the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation for three years.

The Vatican instruction on choosing confirmation sponsors states in Chapter IV that the preferred choice is the baptismal godparents, but it does not specify that it has to be them.

In a decree published on December 3, the prelate explained that he made his decision because the changing social context has led families to prioritise "emotional ties or good social relationships" over pastoral ones when choosing the godfather or godmother.

This, he pointed out, causes the

educational and accompaniment role of the godparents in the Christian life of the baptised or confirmed to be reduced "to a simple liturgical presence".

This can even lead to an "open contradiction" between the requirements of the Church for the selection of the godfather or godmother in order for them to fulfil their functions "and the demands of the families".

Consequently, Bishop Vaccari explained, the decision has been made that from January 7, 2024 – the date on which the decree comes into force – the office of godfather or godmother in the Baptism of children, the confirmation of adolescents and adults, as well as in the Christian initiation of adults, will be suspended *ad experimentum* ('as an experiment').

The bishop added that during

this period the diocesan Liturgy and Catechesis Commissions, together with the Catechumenal Service and in constant liaison with the Presbyteral Council, will verify compliance with the decree and study "possible new forms of accompaniment that bring back and recover the true ecclesial meaning" of godfather and godmother.

Bishop Vaccari is not the first Italian bishop to make a decision of this type. In March, Bishop Giacomo Cirulli suspended the appointment of godparents for the Dioceses of Teano-Calvi, Alife-Caiazzo, and Sessa Aurunca for three years.

The prelate also stated that this was an *ad experimentum* measure in order to recover the "identity and mission" of this role.

The archbishop of Catania, Salvatore Gristina, took the same measure in October 2021.





Edited by Jason Osborne  
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## 'O come, let us adore him...'



The Nativity scene is revealed and Christmas tree is lighted in St Peter's Square at the Vatican December 9. The creche is a reproduction of the scene in Greccio, Italy, where St Francis of Assisi staged the first Nativity scene in 1223. Photo: CNS/Lola Gomez

## Latin American bishops support Guatemalan cardinal amid threats

The Latin American and Caribbean bishops' conference has expressed solidarity with Cardinal Álvaro Ramazzini of Huehuetenango, Guatemala, after the prelate said he had been told that judicial officials are seeking his arrest and the country's outgoing government sent a strongly worded letter to the apostolic nuncio.

The conference – commonly known as CELAM – said in a statement that it “expresses solidarity and closeness” with Cardinal Ramazzini “in the face of false information that has been

spread in recent days and constitutes an attack on his dignity and moral integrity”.

The December 4 letter signed by a conference president, Archbishop Jaime Spengler of Porto Alegre, Brazil, and the executive council continued, “Cardinal Ramazzini is a witness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ incarnated in the poorest, whose voice reveals the feelings of a people who seek ways to express their just demands. This is the mission of the entire Church and that is why we stand alongside Cardinal Ramazzini, echoing his

struggles and concerns”.

The concern for Cardinal Ramazzini comes amid tensions in Guatemala, where President-elect Bernardo Arévalo is scheduled to take office on January 14, but has confronted attempts by the federal prosecutor's office to disqualify his Seed Movement (Semilla) political party and attempts to undermine his election and obstruct his transition to power.

Mr Arévalo overwhelmingly won an August 20 runoff election on an anti-corruption agenda, taking nearly 61% of the vote.

The cardinal said in a November 30 radio interview that he had been told of plans to have him arrested. He also revealed that the government of outgoing President Alejandro Giammattei sent a strongly worded letter to the apostolic nuncio in Guatemala City.

“He literally told me this is a very strong letter against you,” Cardinal Ramazzini said the nuncio told him. “I have not had access to that letter, nor did I ask him to show it to me because I did not think it was prudent.”

## US priest dies after attack during apparent rectory break-in

A Nebraska priest has died after being attacked in the rectory of his parish in the early morning of the Second Sunday of Advent.

Fr Stephen Gutsell was found “suffering from injuries sustained during an assault” December 10 at the rectory of St John the Baptist Church in Fort Calhoun, Nebraska, where he served as pastoral administrator.

According to a December 10 press release from the Washington County Sheriff Mike Robinson, the county's

911 emergency dispatch received an emergency call that day at approximately 5:05am reporting an attempted break-in at the rectory.

Deputies arrived within six minutes and took a suspect into custody while the injured priest was transported to the University of Nebraska Medical Centre in Omaha, where he later died from his injuries.

Sheriff Robinson said the investigation is ongoing and told local media he does not believe the death is related to the deceased priest's 2007

conviction for embezzling more than \$125,000 (€116,188) from a former parish, for which he received five years' probation and was returned to ministry following a successful residential rehabilitation program.

The priest's final bulletin message to his flock spoke of St John the Baptist, their patron, who is “to remind us of what we all should be preparing to receive in the Advent season” before asking God's blessing on them and their families “in this wonderful season of grace”.

## Vatican roundup

### Vatican unveils Nativity scene honouring St Francis of Assisi

● The Vatican unveiled its annual Nativity scene Saturday, paying special tribute to the origins of the beloved tradition on its 800th anniversary.

The scene in St Peter's Square depicts not only Mary and Joseph standing beside the manger but also St Francis of Assisi, who organised the first Nativity scene in a cave in the Italian village of Greccio on Christmas Eve in 1223.

Cardinal Fernando Vérgez Alzaga, the president of the Governorate of Vatican City State, presided over the December 9 inauguration ceremony. Over a thousand people gathered in the square for the event, which included moments of catechesis, an explanation of how the scene was put together, and the signing of seasonal hymns.

The Vatican's Greccio-inspired Nativity scene does not include live animals and people as St Francis' original did, but it does feature life-sized terracotta figures, crafted by renowned Neapolitan sculptor Antonio Cantone.

At the centre of the scene is the now-empty manger, where a figure of the newborn saviour will be placed on Christmas Eve. On one side of manger, Mary kneels, flanked by Joseph, while on the other side, St Francis of Assisi stands in a pose of wonder.

### Pope: Vatican Nativity scene should prompt prayers for the Holy Land

● Pope Francis said that the Vatican's Nativity scene this year should compel people to think of the Holy Land — both of Christ's birth in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago and also of the conflict currently engulfing the region.

“While we contemplate Jesus, God made man, small, poor, defenceless, we cannot help but think of the drama that the inhabitants of the Holy Land are experiencing, demonstrating to these brothers and sisters of ours, especially to children and their parents, our closeness and our spiritual support,” the Pope said.

The Pope made his remarks in a morning audience in Paul VI Hall with two delegations who had donated, respectively,

the Christmas tree and the Nativity scene, or creche, that will be displayed in St Peter's Square this year. The unveiling of the Nativity scene and lighting of the Christmas tree took place on Saturday evening.

As the Pope recounted during today's audience, St Francis had just returned from his own pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1223 and was struck by the similarity of Greccio's caves to the landscape of Bethlehem. The connection prompted the saint to call together both friars and local men and women to replicate the scene of Christ's birth.

### Pope asks Mary to watch over Ukrainians, Palestinians, Israelis

● Mary's conception, free from original sin, shows that the destiny of humanity lies in life, brotherhood, harmony and peace rather than death, hate, conflict and war, Pope Francis said on the feast of the Immaculate Conception.

“Your person, the fact that you exist, reminds us that evil does not have the first nor the last word,” the Pope said to Mary during a prayer ceremony December 8 while seated in front of a Marian statue in central Rome.

Reciting his prayer while seated, the Pope asked Mary to “turn your merciful eyes on all people oppressed by injustice and poverty, tried by war.”

He asked that she “Look at the martyred Ukrainian people, at the Palestinian people, at the Israeli people, plunged back into the spiral of violence.”

# Letter from Rome

## Gaza pastor stresses spiritual life for Advent



Elise Ann Allen

As the Church begins its Advent and Christmas seasons, the pastor of Gaza's lone Catholic parish stressed the importance of stepping up one's spiritual life amid the tragedies of war, and said the Pope's attention to them has been a major consolation.

"It is truly a tough time," said Fr Gabriel Romanelli, an Argentinian priest who has served in the Holy Land for over 25 years, and who for the past six years has been pastor of the small Holy Family Catholic parish in Gaza.

In an interview with Fr Ibrahim Nino, Director of the Media Office at the Latin Patriarchate, posted to the patriarchate's website, Fr Romanelli noted that since the war in Gaza broke out following an October 7 surprise attack on Israel by Hamas militants, both Pope Francis and Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin patriarch of Jerusalem, have been in constant contact with him and his parish.

**"In this dark hour, in the hour where one experiences Golgotha, nearness is important"**

Fr Romanelli was in Rome to attend the September 30 consistory in which Cardinal Pizzaballa got his red hat, and has been unable to return to Gaza since. He has been communicating with parishioners through the associate pastor.

"The nearness of His Beatitude and His Holiness Pope Francis is very important because in this dark hour, in the hour where one experiences Golgotha, nearness is important," Fr Romanelli said, saying, "This gives strength and courage to the parish".

Pope Francis "calls us daily to check on us, despite his also big responsibilities and duties for the Church. And through a simple phone call, he gives us his blessing," he said.

Israel is currently seeking to eliminate the presence of

Hamas in Gaza following the October 7 attack, which left 1,200 people, mostly civilians, dead and triggered the deadliest Israeli-Palestinian violence in decades.

So far, thousands of Palestinians have been killed by Israel's retaliatory attacks and over three-quarters of the Gaza Strip's population of 2.3 million people have been displaced.

According to Palestinian health officials, several hundred civilians have already been killed since a recent 7-day truce ended. That short-lived ceasefire allowed more than 100 of the roughly 240 Israelis abducted by Hamas on October 7 to be returned, although 138 people remain in captivity.

### Shelter for Christians

Fr Romanelli said that after the war began, Christian families immediately took shelter in both the Latin and Orthodox churches in Gaza, but that some families left after the bombing last month of the 12th Century Saint Porphyrius Greek Orthodox Church in Gaza, which left 18 people dead, including one Caritas worker and her husband and young daughter.

Since then, some people with foreign passports have been able to flee Gaza, but there are still more than 600 people taking shelter in Holy Family parish, Fr Romanelli said, saying, "When the Pope calls daily and blesses them, of course this encourages them."

"Times of war are hard, and not a blessing, that is why we need to pray and work for peace. Even though some love to inflict wars, for various reasons, we are the children of God, and as Jesus said, blessed are the peacemakers," he said.

Of the 2.3 million people in the Gaza Strip, around 1,017 are Christian, and of these, only around 135 are Latin-rite Catholics, including priests and religious sisters. The rest are Orthodox Christians.

Despite its small numbers, the parish still hosts numerous activities, including two daily Masses, the recitation of the rosary, and various groups for young people, men, women, and altar servers who assist at Masses. They also have a school with around 2,000 students, most of whom are Muslim.

The Catholic Church runs three out of five Christian schools in Gaza with the help of two orders of nuns, the Rosary Sisters and the Missionaries of Charity, and they also oversee numerous charitable projects.



An injured Palestinian woman gestures after an Israeli airstrike on a house in Khan Younis, in the southern Gaza Strip, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas. Photo: OSV News/Mohammed Salem, Reuters

Both Pope Francis and Cardinal Pizzaballa, Fr Romanelli said, have been understanding of those who have chosen to stay at the parish or in their homes in Gaza, despite Israel's evacuation orders for the northern portions of the Gaza Strip.

"They had to decide whether to move from the north to the south. Parents had to make a decision, but people said, where shall we go?" Fr Romanelli said, noting that most Catholic buildings are in Gaza City.

**"These are very hard times, but there has been great trust in God's divine protection"**

When orders came in to evacuate, "People did not know where to flee to: to a place where there is no water, food, or electricity? It was dangerous as bombings were taking place both north and south. They chose to remain where they were, trusting in Jesus, so they truly felt the presence of God," he said.

Continued phone calls

from the Pope and Cardinal Pizzaballa, he said, have "expressed to the Christians the love, compassion and involvement of everyone around the globe; the efforts of many to bring about a ceasefire, to end the war and bring a just peace".

### Solidarity

Fr Romanelli recalled how in a recent statement, the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem asked families in the Holy Land to forego major celebrations for the Church's Advent and Christmas seasons this year, in solidarity with those who are suffering.

"There is great shock and sadness" amid the community, Fr Romanelli said, saying his people have strong faith, but "they remain human, and sadness is normal to be experienced. Even our Lord Jesus Christ, God incarnate, wept. These are very hard times, but there has been great trust in God's divine protection".

In terms of how Advent and Christmas will be observed in Gaza, Fr Romanelli said there will be no big celebrations, in compliance with the patriarchate's request, in order to show solidarity with those

who have lost loved ones or who have been wounded, with some of the dead still under the rubble.

While the traditional parish and school activities will not take place, Fr Romanelli said they are encouraging parishioners to "prepare spiritually for Jesus to be born in our hearts and lives by cleansing the grotto of our hearts and experience the simplicity of a grotto".

"Also with the help of Our Lady who carried Jesus, to allow her to birth Jesus in us and take an example of the virtues of St Joseph, we are trying to find an opportunity to renew our spiritual life," he said.

Speaking of the importance of the sacraments, Fr Romanelli said the meaning of Advent as a time of preparation and repentance has been forgotten, but it remains a key opportunity for Christians "to examine our hearts and repent."

"We need to return to the pillars of our faith, to read and meditate on the Word of God, to attend adoration, and go to Confession," he said, noting that there is a tendency to focus more on the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist,

two of the three so-called "Sacraments of Christian initiation".

However, "We tend to forget that we need spiritual healing, we forget that we can die spiritually, but there is a solution for everything, and it's through Confession and repentance. This is the main goal," he said.

Fr Romanelli also stressed the importance of charity and of using Advent as a time to help those in need, especially those suffering due to the war.

He voiced hope that charity would be shown "to the people of the Holy Land, including Gaza, as everyone is affected both in Gaza and the West Bank, where many have lost their jobs".

Acts of mercy are also important, such as visiting the elderly and others who are isolated and alone, he said, insisting that even checking on a neighbour who lives by themselves is an act of mercy.

"In sum, we should renew our spiritual life whether through Confession, penance, and repentance," he said.

Elise Ann Allen is senior correspondent for Crux

# Russia cracks down on Catholic Church in occupied Ukraine



Gina Christian

Russian occupation authorities have banned the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and other Catholic ministries in occupied areas of Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia region, according to the Church's main communications office in Kyiv.

The UGCC announced on its website December 7 that it had obtained a copy of an order signed by Yevgeny Balitsky, the Kremlin-installed head of the area's military-civil administration, declaring that the UGCC had been banned and its property was to be transferred to his administration.

Also banned by the order were the Knights of Columbus and Caritas, the official humanitarian arm of the universal Catholic Church.

The UGCC said in its statement the document, written in Russian and dated December 26, 2022, had only now come to its attention. An image of the order, which the UGCC said had been published on Mr Balitsky's official website, was included in the UGCC's online statement.

## The order

The order declared that the UGCC's activities were in "violation of legislation on religious and public organisations of the Russian Federation".

According to the document, UGCC leaders work "in the interests of foreign intelligence services," while UGCC parishioners had participated "in riots and anti-Russian rallies in March-April 2022".

The order also claimed that UGCC churches and buildings stored "explosive devices and firearms weapons" and distributed "literature calling for the violation of the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation".

The order accused UGCC communities of "active participation ... in the Zaporizhzhia area in activities (of) extremist organisations and



Soldiers walk near a Christmas tree in front of St Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv, Ukraine, December 6, amid the Russian invasion. Photo: OSV News/Thomas Peter, Reuters

propaganda of neo-Nazi ideas".

The document said that the Knights of Columbus were "associated with the intelligence services of the United States and the Vatican".

Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Knights of Columbus have aided over 1.4 million Ukrainians, providing more than 7.3 million pounds of humanitarian supplies as well as 250,000 care packages and 400 wheelchairs.

**“It does seem to reflect the things they were saying about the (Ukrainian) Greek Catholic Church”**

The order did not provide an explanation for its action against Caritas, but listed several specific entities in the Caritas network that were banned: Caritas Canada; "Caritas USA," an apparent reference to

Catholic Charities USA, the entity's actual name; Caritas Polska; Caritas Czech Republic; and two Caritas agencies in Ukraine, Caritas Donetsk and Caritas Melitopol.

Researcher Felix Corley of Forum 18 – an Oslo, Norway-based news service that covers religious and intellectual freedom violations in several countries – told OSV News December 7 that the language of the document, the origin and timeline of which he is investigating, is consistent with previous accusations by Russia against the UGCC.

"It does seem to reflect the things they were saying about the (Ukrainian) Greek Catholic Church – the allegations that they were storing explosive substances and weapons, and that the Church was hostile to the Russian administration ... (and) having concerns about foreign organisations" such as Caritas and the Knights of Columbus, Mr Corley said. "The phraseology is completely in line with the sort of things that

(Russia) was doing and saying, that (the UGCC) was distributing literature calling for the violation of the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation" and promoting "neo-Nazi goals".

"It has all the kind of classic accusations they're making against the (Ukrainian) Greek Catholic Church," said Mr Corley.

## Seized priests

He added there has been no update on the fate of two Redemptorist priests, Fr Ivan Levitsky and Fr Bohdan Geleta, who were seized in November 2022 from the Church of the Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos in Berdyansk located in the Zaporizhzhia region. Fr Geleta is known to suffer from an acute form of diabetes.

Both priests had refused to leave their parishioners following Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, which continued attacks launched in 2014 against Ukraine. Two joint reports from the New Lines Institute and the Raoul Wallenberg

Centre for Human Rights have determined Russia's invasion constitutes genocide, with Ukraine reporting some 114,885 war crimes committed by Russia in Ukraine since February 2022.

Russian media reported the priests had been detained for "subversive" and "partisan" activities against Russian forces, who claimed to have discovered explosives, weapons and "prohibited literature" in the church. According to Russian media, the two Redemptorists had rallied area residents to resist Russian forces, and had organised prayer services in support of Ukraine.

The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church's Archiepiscopal Exarchate of Donetsk said the arrests were in retaliation for the Ukrainian government's search of the Pechersk Lavra, a Kyiv monastery also known as the Monastery of the Caves, which is under the authority of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Moscow Patriarchate.

Shortly after the priests

were captured, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, said he had received "the sad news that our priests are being tortured without mercy".

In October, Mr Balitsky told Russian state-owned media outlet *RIA Novosti* that Russia should restore its historical empire by invading and occupying the Baltic States.

He said that without Russia, the Baltics have "been made into a herd of wordless, trembling creatures".

Mr Balitsky said Russia "will correct this by the power of Russian weapons ... to return our people, our subjects" so that "the whole world does not turn into the Sodom and Gomorrah that is happening in Europe now".

OSV News was awaiting a response to its request for comment from both the Knights of Columbus and Caritas officials in Ukraine.

**i** Gina Christian is a national reporter for OSV News.

# 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

### Harmful practice of broadly labelling all individuals

**Dear Editor,** I write with a heavy heart in response to the regrettable events that transpired in Dublin on November 23, culminating in riots that have left our community shaken. I implore the Church to take a more resounding and active role in advocating for peace and dialogue during these tumultuous times.

In the face of such discord, the Church possesses a unique ability to inspire unity and reconciliation. I urge Church leaders to speak out more fervently. Dublin needs the guidance and moral

compass that the Church can provide more than ever, we see how quickly things can descend into violence.

While it is essential to condemn the violence unequivocally, I would also like to caution against the who express concerns regarding immigration as 'far-right' and 'thugs'. Such categorisations oversimplify a complex situation and hinder the prospect of meaningful dialogue. The Church, in its advocacy for peace, should encourage a more nuanced understanding of the factors contributing to these events,

fostering an environment where diverse perspectives can be heard and addressed.

By taking a stand against violence and promoting dialogue, the Church can contribute significantly to healing the wounds within our community. Let us unite in prayer for peace and implore our Church to play a leading role in guiding our society toward reconciliation, understanding, and a shared commitment to a better future.

*Yours etc.,  
Dana Harte  
Enniskerry, Co. Wicklow*

## Disheartening decline in birth rates

**Dear Editor,** It is disheartening to continue to read about the decline of birth rates, particularly in Ireland, which was once among the last EU states to maintain a replacement-level birth rate [*The Irish Catholic* – November 30, 2023]. The current rate of 1.78 babies per woman, though higher than some EU countries, is still below the necessary replacement level.

The theory of the 'low fertility trap', as proposed by demographer Dr Wolfgang Lutz, suggests that sustained birth rates below 1.5 children per woman may lead to an irreversible downward spiral. This calls for urgent attention from both the Church and society at large. The cultural shift towards choosing childlessness and having very small families as the norm only exacerbates this challenge.

Rory Fitzgerald's article rightly points out the impact of the Church's teachings on contraception and family life, emphasising the divisions stemming from the 1960s and the papal encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. It is essential for the Church to revisit and reinforce these teachings, not only as a matter of religious doctrine but as a guide to a fulfilling and meaningful life.

While acknowledging the hardships associated with embracing *Humanae Vitae*, it is crucial to recognise the benefits that large families bring – a powerful network of security, belonging, and practical support.

*Yours etc.,  
Paula Cairns  
Portlaoise, Co. Laoise*



## Failure to respect school ethos and parents' rights

**Dear Editor,** Ruadhán Jones's article citing concerns about the absence of any spiritual dimension from the senior cycle draft National Curriculum and Assessment Council (NCCA) Social Personal Health Education (SPHE) curriculum was most welcome [*The Irish Catholic* – November 23, 2023].

Catholic Secondary Schools Parents Association, in common with its partner national parents' associations from other school types, have been totally excluded from all interactive phases of the SPHE curriculum consultations. The clearest example of this was on October 2, the NCCA organised round table 80-person stakeholder consultation. There was not one

secondary parent representative invited!

Because of what was experienced at the previous defective junior cycle SPHE consultation this time round we encouraged parents to send us copies of their submissions. Almost 100 parents did so and their detailed submissions are now being analysed and these very clearly show that parents are opposed to the proposed teaching on gender ideology, ethical pornography, critical race theory and that Catholic parents want any new curriculum delivered within the context of stated school ethos.

Reference in the article to concerns "raised by Joint Managerial Body/Association of Management of Catholic Secondary

Schools (JMB/AMCSS)" deserves greater scrutiny in that it conflates two very distinct organisations. JMB is a secular company representing a range of school types including both the Catholic sector and the non-denominational Educate Together sector. An Assistant General Secretary of JMB is also deputy chairperson of NCCA, the body that drew up the new curriculum that totally fails to respect school ethos and the rights of parents.

*Yours etc.,  
Alan Whelan  
President, Catholic Secondary Schools  
Parents Association  
Killarney, Co. Kerry*

## Fatherlessness and societal issues demand attention

**Dear Editor,** The tragic stabbing incident that unfolded on November 23, resulting in a riot, highlights deep-rooted issues that extend beyond the immediate act of violence.

The acknowledgment of the role that racism played in escalating the situation is crucial.

David Quinn's article [*The Irish Catholic* – November 30, 2023] rightly broadens the debate beyond the immediate concerns of far-right influences and policing failures. It draws attention to the collapse of tradi-

tional respect for authority, family breakdown, and the implications of immigration policy and the asylum system. These factors, often considered taboo, deserve thorough examination to comprehend the multifaceted nature of the challenges faced by our society.

The link between the decline of religion and the erosion of a strong sense of right and wrong is particularly noteworthy. A responsible debate about immigration is equally essential, addressing questions about social cohesion, assimilation, crime

rates, and the impact on housing supply.

Moreover, the correlation between fatherlessness and societal issues, as highlighted by the article, demands attention. A comprehensive study on the presence of responsible older male role models in the lives of those involved in the riots would contribute significantly to understanding and addressing the root causes.

*Yours etc.,  
David O'Brien  
Marino, Dublin 3*

## Geese who are blissfully unaware of Christmas

**Dear Editor,** Turkeys don't vote for Christmas but many humans, most of them Christians, do vote for euthanasia and assisted suicide. Suicide is objectively wrong though I make no judgement here on the subjective guilt of people who have died that way. To assist anyone in such an act is formal cooperation in murder, even if freely requested by a patient. There should never be a vote on any matter that is clearly grievously immoral in a country that has a Christian majority.

But if this appeal to morals has no effect on some legislators perhaps an appeal to their own self-interest might. Once legalised, this measure will inevitably be widened in time to allow for sick, disabled and generally unwanted people to be put down. People who might have no desire at all to end their lives will be pressurised in all sorts of devious ways by uncaring relatives and fake hospital ethics committees to sign their own death warrants. These latter will claim to be "acting in the patient's best interest". I can give many examples from Holland and Belgium. So, it could well come to pass that those who legalise this evil today will be the victims of their own legislation at some future date when their own children want to get rid of them as nuisances and get their money.

Old or sick priests who are taking up a hospital bed for a long time or are deemed "undesirable" by leftist governments will be obvious targets also, given the anti-Catholic climate in our country at present. Hence, I would say of priests who stay silent now on this issue that they are like geese who are blissfully unaware of Christmas.

*Yours etc.,  
Fr Richard O'Connor  
Prof. of Theology, The Angelicum, Rome, Italy*

## 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, December 14, 2023

An  
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Lesson

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delayed gratification

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## Spend this Advent season with the saints

**A**dvent prepares us for Jesus' coming at Christmas and for his coming into our lives afresh. And no one knows how to get ready to welcome Christ better than the saints.

They express their love for him by putting him first in their hearts. They make room for him by clearing out the clutter of sins and faults. The saints pursue holiness by embracing the Lord's teaching and lifestyle. They respond to his graces by practicing spiritual disciplines like prayer, Scripture study, fasting and almsgiving. And the saints express their love for God by reaching out to others with the Good News. They especially dedicate themselves to caring



**No one knows better how to prepare for welcoming Christ than the saints, writes Bert Ghezzi**

for the poor and marginalised.

So, let's make the most of this Advent and spend it with four representative saints, imitating the ways that they opened their hearts to Jesus.

**St Thérèse of Lisieux (1873–1897)**

We are attracted to St Thérèse because she was an ordinary person. Raised in a faithful Catholic family, she was doted

on by her father, teased by her sisters and suffered the pain of loss. Her youth was troubled by her mother's death and by two sisters entering the convent. But on Christmas 1887, Thérèse experienced a conversion that released her spiritual sadness. "Love filled my heart, I forgot myself, and henceforth I was happy," she said.

The next year, when Thérèse was only 15, the

bishop allowed her to join the Carmelite convent at Lisieux. She wanted to become a missionary and a martyr, but soon realised that neither option was open to a cloistered nun. So she sought the Holy Spirit for another way to serve the Lord Jesus. Reflecting on Scripture, Thérèse learned to do the loving thing in every situation, which she discovered was the fuel that fired the faith of martyrs and saints. Doing the least of actions for love became the secret of her "little way".

What does a 19th Century nun have to do with us? Juggling the duties of family, work or school, navigating freeways and keeping up with the digital world, we

don't have much time for pursuing holiness, do we? But that's where Thérèse sets the example for us. Her simplicity shows us that we, too, can be holy.

**Venerable Matt Talbot (1856–1925)**

For 16 years, Venerable Matt Talbot was a daily drunk. Then one day, an unanticipated conversion transformed him and he became a model penitent following Jesus Christ.

As a child of a poor family in Dublin, Matt had to forgo school for a job. After a year of basic education, he started working for a wine seller. And Matt started drinking heavily at the early age of 12.

His father beat him and made him change jobs – but nothing could stop Matt’s habit. He said that when he was intoxicated, he occasionally thought about the Blessed Mother and prayed an off-handed Hail Mary. Matt speculated later that she had something to do with his conversion.

**“At a time when addictions to alcohol, other drugs and pornography are running rampant, Matt Talbot stands as an exemplar of the ways to freedom and holiness through Jesus”**

One day in 1884 everything suddenly changed. Matt had been out of work several days and expected his buddies to take him drinking. When they snubbed him, he made a decision that transformed his life.

When he arrived at home, his mother said, “You’re home early, Matt, and you’re sober!” He replied, “Yes, mother, I am and I’m going to take the pledge”. The next day he went to Confession and took the sobriety pledge for three months.

But Matt extended three months of going without alcohol into 41 years. In 1891, Matt found community support by joining the Franciscan Third Order. He lived the rest of his life quietly, working and praying. St Paul VI declared him venerable in 1975.

At a time when addictions to alcohol, other drugs and pornography are running rampant, Matt Talbot stands as an exemplar of the ways to freedom and holiness through Jesus.

#### **Blessed Anne Mary Taigi (1769-1837)**

A model woman, Blessed Anne Mary managed a large household in Rome for nearly five decades. She handled finances with little money, patiently cared for a difficult extended family and entertained a constant stream of guests. She did all this full of faith and good cheer.

At age 21, Anne Mary married Domenico Taigi, a servant in a Roman palace. They had seven children, two of whom died in childbirth. Early in her marriage,

Anne Mary experienced a religious conversion. She simplified her life, initiating practices of prayer and self-denial that she pursued the rest of her life in following Jesus Christ.

Anne Mary took the spiritual lead in her family. The day began with morning prayer and Mass, and ended with reading lives of the saints and praying the rosary. The Taigis had little of their own, but Anne Mary always found ways of providing for those who had less. She also took in her hard-to-get-along-with parents and her widowed daughter, Sophie, with her six children.

Domenico’s violent temper often disrupted the family. But Anne Mary was always able to calm him and restore peaceful relationships. In his old age, Domenico gave this touching tribute to his wife:

“With her wonderful tact she was able to maintain a heavenly peace in our home. And that even though we were a large household full of people with very different temperaments.

“I often came home tired, moody and cross, but she always succeeded in soothing and cheering me. And due to her, I corrected some of my faults. If I were a young man and could search the whole world to find such a wife, it would be vain. I believe that God has received her into heaven because of her great virtue. And I hope that she will pray for me and our family.”

We may imagine that becoming a saint requires heroics like founding a religious order or converting people in faraway places who have never heard of the Gospel. But Blessed Anne Mary shows us that the daily faithful care of a family requires more than enough heroism to make us holy.

#### **Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati (1901-1925)**

Pope St John Paul II celebrated Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati as a man of the Beatitudes. Athletic and strong, he devoted himself to the weak and malformed. He was wealthy, but he lived in poverty so he could give everything to the poor. He was gregarious, but a lover of solitude. He was rambunctious, the life of every party, and a practical joker, but at prayer he was solemn, reflective and quiet.

As a teenager, Pier Giorgio made friends of the poor in Turin’s back streets and gave them whatever he had – his

money, his shoes, his overcoat. “Jesus comes to me every morning in holy Communion,” he replied to a friend who asked why the hovels did not repulse him. “I repay him in my very small way by visiting the poor. The house may be sordid, but I am going to Christ.”

Pier Giorgio saw the need for social change to relieve the causes of poverty. At the university, he decided to major in mechanical engineering so that he could work with miners, who were especially disadvantaged. He was a leader in student political organisations and actively opposed Benito Mussolini and the Fascists.

**“When Jesus comes as the Bridegroom to wed the Church, we do not want to be as unprepared as the five foolish virgins in the parable”**

At the same time, he was the organiser of student parties, games and ski trips to the Alps, where he would lead his friends in prayer. Afterward, they relaxed and enjoyed food, wine, cigars and songs.

Blessed Pier Giorgio has become the hero of contemporary young Catholics. They recognise his high Christian ideals, still held while pursuing the same pleasures that they enjoy. They gravitate to this handsome and charming saint who delighted in reciting the poetry of Dante, praying the rosary in a booming voice and spending a night in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

#### **Christ’s final coming**

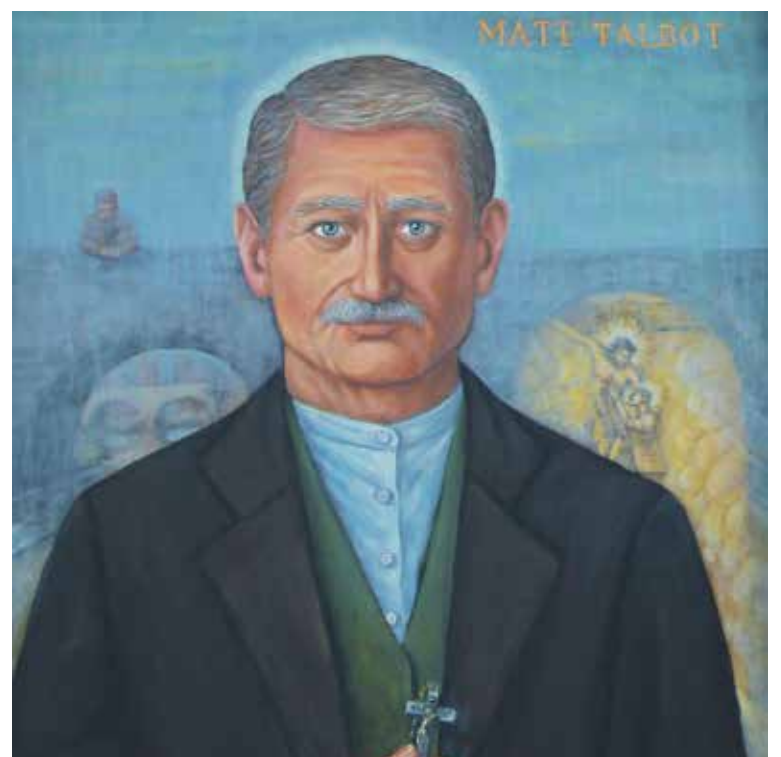
Advent anticipates not only Jesus’ coming to us as a baby, but it also expects his final coming in glory. Since the Father alone knows the day of the end, the Lord cautioned us always to be watchful and to conduct ourselves in uprightness. When Jesus comes as the Bridegroom to wed the Church, we do not want to be as unprepared as the five foolish virgins in the parable (see Mt 25:1-13).

So this Advent, following the saints, may we decide always to love God above all and to do the loving thing in every circumstance.

**i** Bert Ghezzi is the author of many books including *Voices of the Saints* and *The Power of Daily Prayer*.



St Therese of Lisieux



Venerable Matt Talbot is pictured in an undated painting. Photos: OSV News



Italian Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati is pictured in an undated photo. Photos: OSV News

**“If I were a young man and could search the whole world to find such a wife, it would be vain. I believe that God has received her into heaven because of her great virtue. And I hope that she will pray for me and our family”**

# Insta-culture and a powerful Advent lesson on delayed gratification



Scott Richert

**W**hen my sisters and I were young, my mother would spend all of Advent baking cookies and making candy. That may hardly seem remarkable; after all, countless millions of Christmas cookies are baked and consumed every year between Thanksgiving and Christmas Day. But my mother didn't eat any of the cookies she baked, and neither did we – not before Christmas, that is. Every sugar cookie, Polish wedding cake, fruit cookie, square of fudge, and chunk of peanut brittle was packed away in vintage green Tupperware or metal tins (depending on whether they were intended for us or for relatives and friends), to be brought out only once Christmas Day had dawned.

Four or five decades later, that seems remarkable, because what economists call “delayed gratification” is simply not part of modern life anymore – and that's as true of Catholics and other Christians as it is of the average person. Fifty years ago, the question “What do you want for Christmas?” meant something different than it does today, when a couple of clicks on Amazon can satisfy the desire of a child of any age with next-day (or even same-day) delivery.

When I was a child, I thought as a child, which meant that, of course, I wanted to eat just one sugar cookie hot out of the oven or sneak one piece of fudge. But Mom never let me do so, because satisfying my desire wasn't the point of her baking. In fact, if anything, the purpose of all of her preparations throughout Advent

was the opposite: to increase my desire, and to direct it toward its proper end.

If you eat it before Christmas, a Christmas cookie is just a cookie.

## A bigger lesson

My mother entered into eternal life in the early morning hours of November 1, All Saints Day. Through the days and nights before she quietly passed from us, my father and my sister Monica and I held those hands that had mixed and shaped and baked all of those cookies just a few feet away from where the hospital bed was set up in the living room of the house that had been our family home for all but a handful of months of my parents' 56 years of marriage. Polish wedding cakes and peanut brittle were the last things on our minds as we pre-

pared ourselves and one another for a life without her.

But a few days later, when Fr Charles Hall, the priest who had anointed Mom seven weeks earlier and who would celebrate her funeral Mass on November 6, asked us for a particular memory of Mom that would help him to understand who she really was, the first thing that came to mind was her Advent baking. Everything we do reveals something about where our heart lies. Too often, by necessity as much as by choice, we are caught up in the here and now. There's work to be done, bills to be paid, clothes to be washed, children to be fed.

But as much as necessity may seem to force our hand, there's an element of choice in our actions as well. And that choice involves not simply what we do but why

we choose to do it. I do not know, and of course, I cannot ask her now, whether Mom intended to teach us a lesson with her Advent baking. But as we talked with Fr Charles, we realized that she had done just that. To be a Christian means to live always with a sense of longing, of that joyful expectation tinged with sorrow that comes from knowing that the greatest desire of our heart will never be fulfilled in this earthly life. That, perhaps more than any other part of the Christian experience, is a reality that the modern world rejects.

A few hours after our mother passed from this life, my sister and I stood beside our father in the church where we had first received the gift of faith, and we sang with all the saints in glory of the life yet to come. And as we prayed for the repose of my mother's soul, we gave thanks for the years we had spent with her, and for the cookies and sweets through which Mom had prepared us all for living that day and the rest of our lives in the deep longing for, and joyful expectation of, our reunion before the throne of God.

**i** Scott Richert is publisher for OSV.

**“Everything we do reveals something about where our heart lies. Too often, by necessity as much as by choice, we are caught up in the here and now”**

# Pray the news, pray the media, and imbue the culture with Christ



**Sr Nancy Usselman**

**T**hough they're gifts from God, living and working behind our media screens can sap our energy and leave us feeling listless and spiritually dry. Growing our spiritual lives while immersed in a digital world requires a media spirituality that centres us in Christ, the perfect communicator.

Blessed James Alberione developed Pauline spirituality to root modern-day communicators and media users in the Word and the Eucharist. Bl. Alberione's spirituality of communications follows the example of the greatest evangeliser and lover of Christ, the apostle St Paul.

## Pauline spirituality

In Bl. Alberione's thinking, St Paul did not wait for people to approach him, but instead he went forth to proclaim Jesus to every person he encountered in the ancient world – Jew, Greek, Roman or Arab. His message always drew on the culture around him, making connections for people with the stories, poets and orators of the times. Paul realised that cultural stories often touch upon humanity's deepest yearnings. When in Athens, he went to the Areopagus, the 'public square' of learning and philosophising, there discovering altars raised to various gods. When he saw the altar to an "unknown god,"

Paul found the hook to attract his audience. Human beings long for a connection with our creator, in whose image and likeness we are made. So, he quotes from their poets and writers to speak to them of the One God, creator of all, and of Jesus Christ, Redeemer of humanity. He started with the people's culture to address their deepest desires and lead them to Christ.

In 1958 Bl. Alberione wrote about how media apostles must imitate the example of Paul: "St Paul held all peoples in his heart. He affirmed that his heart had opened wide to embrace all nations. In his intentions, his prayers and his desires all were present. We are to have love for people, therefore, and show it especially towards those who live in the darkness of ignorance. We are also to nourish zeal for the salvation of all people not with words, but with action – the apostolate performed with fervour and love."

## The public square

The darkness of ignorance proliferates our media feeds. We can prayerfully consider how to address the intellectual confusion of our day through our media interaction. St Paul guides our approach in communicating the truth of the human person and humanity's ultimate search for God, through a passion for the Gospel and love for each human being we encounter, in-person and online.

To be authentic communicators of truth, we need to be imbued with Christ, the goal toward which we tend as missionary disciples. The Pauline media spirituality of Bl. Alberione roots us in Jesus Master, as Way, Truth, and Life for humanity, present tangibly in the Word of God and the Blessed Sacrament. These are the pillars of a

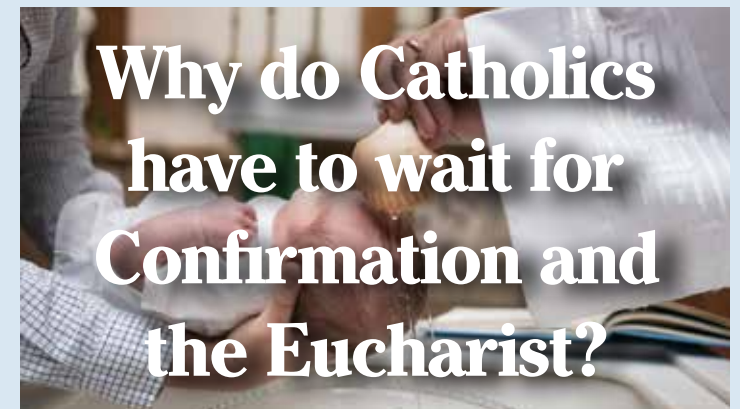
media spirituality. As communicators, we listen attentively to the Word in the scriptures, meditate on it, and sit at the feet of the Master present in the Eucharist. There, like Mary, we experience "the better part" (Lk 10:42) and become imbued with Christ so to go forth and communicate Christ in the digital spaces and with our neighbours face-to-face. As disciples of Jesus, like Paul, we enter the 'public square' with the Gospel of Christ seeking to change hearts by pointing out the beauty, truth and goodness of God present in the world and in the cultural stories of our day. Each one of us can do our part.

## Praying the media

Though we are surrounded by media and sometimes feel the need to break away to pray in silence, we can also pray the media we use each day. We can pray the news. As we scroll through our social media feeds, or watch a news broadcast, or listen to a podcast, we consider the situation in our world. We offer intercessory prayers for all that we heard or read. Instead of feeling anxious and disturbed by the news, we make this a regular practice to grow in media mindfulness and discernment regarding media messages and to raise up the needs of the world to God.

St John Paul II called Bl. James Alberione "the Apostle of the New Evangelisation," who gave the Church a spirituality for everyone who engages with media. To be Christ's missionary disciples, we can pray the media we use each day and communicate Christ in the Areopagus of the digital culture.

**i** Sr Nancy Usselman, a Daughter of St Paul, is director of the Pauline Centre for Media Studies in Los Angeles and a media literacy education specialist.



**Q: Why do Orthodox Christians confirm their infants at Baptism and also permit babies to receive the Eucharist, and why do Catholics wait?**

**A:** Thank you for your interesting question! First, it's not only Orthodox Christians who confer all three sacraments of initiation at the time of Baptism – Eastern Catholics do this as well.

For some background, the universal Catholic Church includes not only the Latin (a.k.a. 'Roman') Catholic Church to which most of us Catholics in the West belong, but also a number of smaller Eastern Catholic Churches. Eastern Catholics are fully Catholic and fully in union with the Pope, but they follow a slightly different form of canon law, and they are organised into their own dioceses led by their own bishops.

Often, individual Eastern Catholic Churches are connected to a particular geographical area and culture. (For example, Byzantine Catholics are generally of Slavic descent, and the Syro-Malabar Church has its roots in India.) Because of cultural and historic reasons, Eastern Catholics have their own distinctive liturgical traditions and customs.

The difference in customs regarding the Christian initiation of infants amounts to a difference in emphasis between the broad liturgical traditions of Christian East and West.

In the Church's early days, when most Christians were adult converts, it was standard practice for the local bishop to baptise each new Christian personally, conferring Confirmation in the same ceremony as the Baptism. As Christians grew more numerous and as more Christian parents brought their children to be baptised, it became impractical for the bishop to baptise and confirm every new Catholic. Eventually, it became clear that other clergy would need to celebrate most baptisms.

In the Christian East, there was a great emphasis on the fundamental theological unity of the sacraments of initiation, which is why Eastern priests confirm and give the Eucha-

rist to the babies they baptise.

In the Latin Catholic West, there was a greater sense of the importance of maintaining a direct connection with the diocesan bishop as the father of the local diocesan church. For Latin Catholics, the Sacrament of Confirmation came to be celebrated at a separate, later ceremony – the idea being that even if a simple parish priest celebrated an infant's Baptism, the child could still be confirmed by the bishop himself.

For Latin Catholics, the history of our practices surrounding first Communion is long and rather complicated, as customs varied across the centuries. But our modern practice of children receiving their first Communion around the age of seven – the canonical "age of reason" – was established by Pope Pius X in 1910 with his decree *Quam Singulari*.

**Q: Sometimes I become distracted at Mass and only really get refocused when I hear the consecration bells. Is that a sin?**

**A:** No. If you are accidentally getting distracted on occasion, this is not a sin. The Catholic Faithful have an obligation to attend Mass by being physically present on Sundays and holy days of obligation; but the Church's law doesn't and can't require the Faithful to have their minds perfectly focused for the entire length of the liturgy.

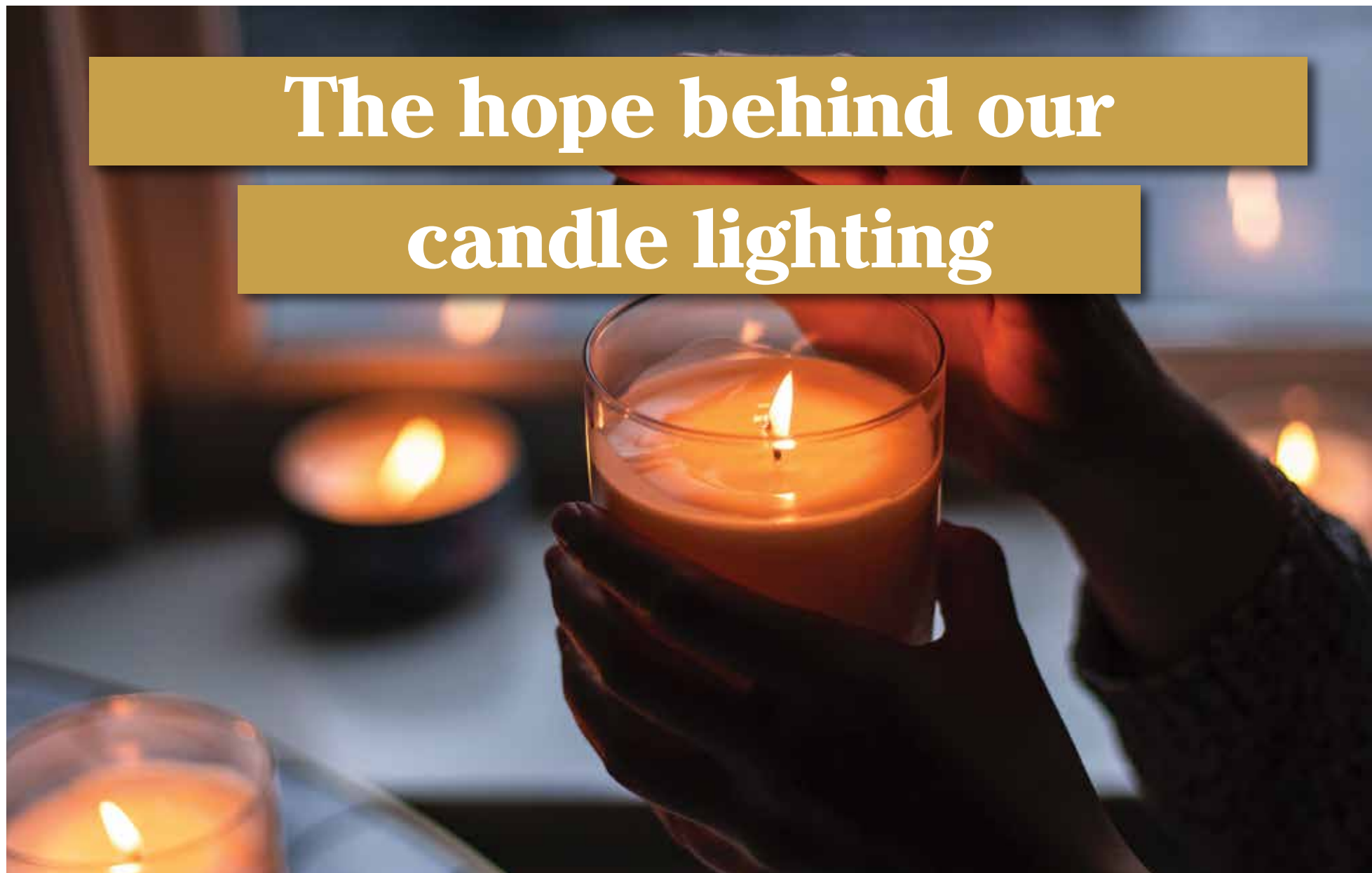
Of course, the more focused we reasonably can be, the better. Sometimes there are actions we can take to minimise distractions – perhaps turning off gadgets or taking time before Mass to recollect ourselves – and we should do what we can in this regard.

But God understands that we are human and our active minds wander sometimes. The important thing is just that we keep turning our focus back to the Mass whenever we catch our attention straying.

**i** Jenna Marie Cooper, who holds a licentiate in canon law, is a consecrated virgin and a canonist whose column appears weekly at OSV News.



# The hope behind our candle lighting



In the days of apartheid in South Africa, Christians there used to light candles and place them in their windows as a sign to themselves and others that they believed that someday this injustice would end. A candle burning in a window was a sign of hope and a political statement. The government didn't miss the message. It passed a law making it illegal to place a lit candle in a window, the offense being equal to owning a firearm; both were considered equally dangerous. This eventually became a joke among the kids: "Our government is afraid of lit candles!"

And well they should be! Lit candles, more than firearms, overthrew apartheid. Hope, not guns, is what ultimately transforms things. To light a candle as an act of hope is to say to yourself and to others that, despite anything that might be happening in the world, you are still nursing a vision of peace and unity that's based upon something beyond the present state of things and upon deeper realities and powers than what the world admits. To light a candle is to state publicly that you believe that, at the end of the day, more than what you see on the evening news will shape the final outcome of things. There are other powers also at work. To light a candle is an act of political defiance and an act of hope.

## What is hope?

First, it's not wishful thinking. I can wish to win a lottery, but that wish, in itself, contains no



**Fr Rolheiser**

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

real power to make it happen. Second, hope is not simply temperamental optimism, an upbeat temperament that always sees the bright side of things. An unwavering optimism about things can sometimes be helpful, but it's no basis for hope; like wishful thinking it lacks the power to make its own dream come true. Finally, hope is not simply shrewd observation and common sense, a talent for sorting out the real from the fluff. Useful as this is, it's still not hope. Why not?

Because hope doesn't base itself upon a shrewd assessment of the empirical facts, but upon belief in a deeper set of realities: God's existence, God's power, God's goodness, and the promise that flows from that.

There's a story told about

**“Hope doesn't base itself upon a shrewd assessment of the empirical facts, but upon belief in a deeper set of realities: God's existence, God's power, God's goodness, and the promise that flows from that”**

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin that helps illustrate this. Teilhard wasn't much given to wishful thinking or even to an optimistic temperament; he tended rather toward a lonely realism. Yet he was a man of real hope. For example, on one occasion, after giving a conference where he laid out a vision within which ultimately unity and peace will be achieved on earth in a way that parallels the vision of Scripture, he was challenged by some colleagues to this effect: "That's a wonderful, idealistic vision of things, but suppose we blow-up the world with a nuclear bomb, what happens to your vision then?" Teilhard replied, "that would set things back some millions of years, but this will still come to fruition, not because I say so

or because the facts right now indicate that it will, but because God promised it and in the resurrection of Jesus has shown that he is powerful enough to deliver on that promise".

Hope, as we can see from this, requires both faith and patience. It works like yeast, not like a microwave oven. Jim Wallis, the founder of Sojourners, expresses this colourfully: "All politicians are alike," he says, "they hold a finger up and check which way the wind is blowing and then make their decisions in that direction. That will never change, even if we change politicians. So, we must change the wind! That's hope's task – to change the wind!"

## Changed

When we look at what has morally changed this world – from the great religious traditions coming out of deserts, caves, and catacombs and helping leaven whole cultures morally, to apartheid being overthrown in South Africa – we see that it has happened precisely when individuals and

groups lit candles and hoped long enough until the wind changed.

**“We light candles of hope because God, who is the ultimate power, has promised to establish a kingdom of love and peace on this earth”**

We light Advent candles with just that in mind, accepting that changing the wind is a long process, that the evening news will not always be positive, the stock markets will not always rise, the most sophisticated defences in the world will not always protect us from terrorism, and secular liberal and conservative ideologies will not rid this planet of selfishness.

However, we continue to light candles and hope anyway, not on the basis of a worsening or improving evening newscast, but because the deepest reality of all is that God exists, that the centre holds, that there's ultimately a gracious Lord who rules this universe, and this Lord is powerful enough to rearrange the atoms of the planet and raise dead bodies to new life. We light candles of hope because God, who is the ultimate power, has promised to establish a kingdom of love and peace on this earth and is gracious, forgiving, and powerful enough to eventually make it happen.

# Witnessing to Jesus with humility and boldness



Is 61:1-2a, 10-11  
Lk 1:46-48, 49-50, 53-54  
1 Thes 5:16-24  
Jn 1:6-8, 19-28



**“R**ejoice in the Lord!” is the invitation we hear this

Third Sunday of Advent, when God’s word calls us, once again, to enter into the mystery of the Incarnation, soon to be celebrated in the great feast of Christmas. Traditionally called Gaudete Sunday, the theme of rejoicing in the Lord echoes through the readings and into our hearts and lives. We may ask – in the midst of this seasons’ rejoicing, do we pause in prayerful reflection

**“His witness began in the womb, as he leaped for joy at the Visitation of Mary and Elizabeth, his mother, and culminated in his ultimate witness of martyrdom”**

to give thanks to God for the immeasurable gift of his son Jesus? Will I make the words of the psalmist – “my soul rejoices in my God,” my daily Advent prayer?

Isaiah tells us that God anointed him to proclaim a message of liberation and joy. Once he receives the spirit of the Lord, his mission reaches out to the needy and oppressed. For the lowly and the broken-hearted, his words must have been a source of com-

fort and great hope.

Isaiah also announces a year of favour from the Lord, a jubilee year that occurred once every 50 years in Israel’s history. This was a special time of restored equality and justice, when the land was left fallow, debts were forgiven, and prisoners set free. Jesus’ coming into the world inaugurates God’s Kingdom, now come to earth in a definitive time of redeeming grace that the world longs for.

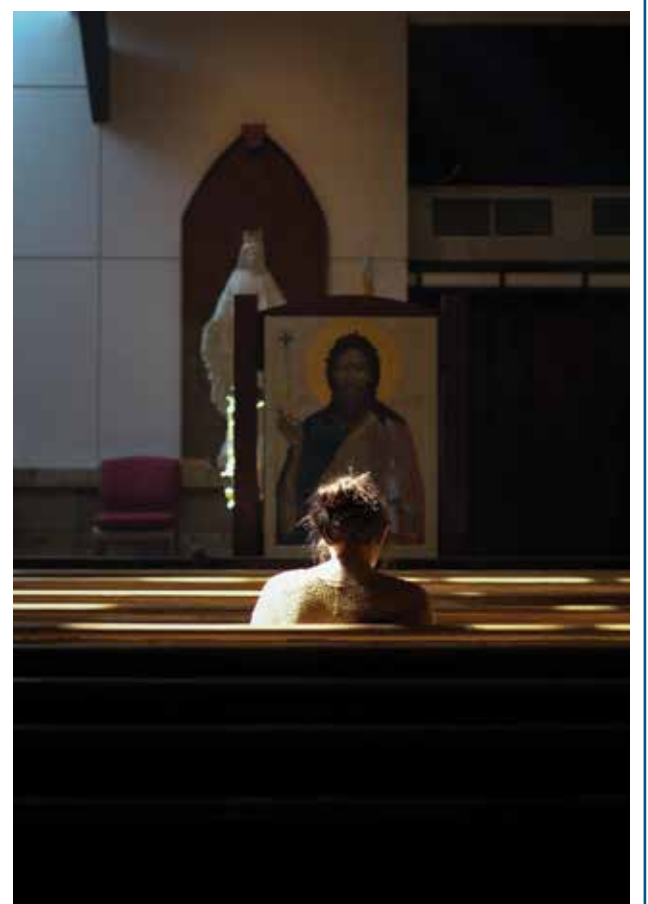
St Paul continues the theme of rejoicing as he describes the kind of people we become as we await the coming of Christ. He encourages the early Christians to rejoice always, to pray constantly, and to discern the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Wise words of spiritual advice and a good road map for the Advent season.

Another guide we are given for our spiritual journey is the figure of John the Baptist, the Advent saint par excellence. In the Gospel, he tells us that he is the one

sent by God to witness to Jesus, the light of the world. His witness began in the womb, as he leaped for joy at the Visitation of Mary and Elizabeth, his mother, and culminated in his ultimate witness of martyrdom. His entire life pointed to Jesus’ coming, as he made “straight the way of the Lord”. From John the Baptist we learn that our Christian witness is rooted in humility and boldness. We learn from this saint of Advent to fix our gaze on the Lord Jesus, so that our hearts will overflow with Advent joy as we welcome Jesus in faith praying, “speak to me, Lord”.

Question: How are you called to witness to Jesus with humility and boldness?

**i** Jem Sullivan holds a doctorate in religious education and is an associate professor of Catechetics in the School of Theology and Religious Studies at The Catholic University of America in Washington, DC.



# TV & Radio Pick of the Season

## A Christmas Hero

**RTÉ Two Sunday December 17, 11.40am**

A guardian angel shows a disillusioned war veteran what he means to others and that his life makes a difference.

## Songs of Praise

**BBC One Sunday December 17, 1.15pm**

Sharing the Joys of Christmas: Rev. Kate Bottley visits County Durham to find out why one primary school has joined forces with the residents of a local care home to spread the joy of Christmas through the annual church nativity play, plus an extra special performance from the Bocelli family of Joy to the World from St Paul's Cathedral.

## Buttons - A Christmas Tale

**RTÉ One Sunday December 17, 4.00pm**

An orphan receives a visit from a guardian angel, who comforts her with the story of another child's search for a family. Children's fantasy, starring Angela Lansbury.

## Carols by Candlelight from Knock Shrine

**EWTN Sunday December 17, 8pm**

Experience the sights and sounds of Christmas from the Marian Shrine in Knock. This beautiful concert of Christmas carols, sung by candlelight, will lift your spirits and bring joy to this wonderful season.

## In Concert:

### Christmas in Vienna

**EWTN Monday December 18, 6am**

Christmas in Vienna is one of the most prestigious classical concert productions in Europe. Each year, the concert takes places in the glamorous Wiener Konzerthaus and brings together a quartet of the best international vocalists.

### Keep Christ in Christmas, a Catholics Come Home special presentation

**EWTN Monday December 18, 10am also Thursday (night) December 21, 12.30am**

A tour behind the scenes of the making of 'Santa's Priority', a Christmas evangomercial and discover what a small group of Catholics are doing to combat the secular war on Christmas and to glorify Jesus, the reason for the season.



**Brendan O'Regan**

## The Bells of St Mary's

**Film 4 Wednesday December 20, 11am**

After the success of *Going My Way*, Bing Crosby returned as Fr Chuck O'Malley in Leo McCarey's nine-Oscar-nominated drama. This time he's sent to St Mary's Academy, an inner-city school run by the glacial Sr Mary Benedict (Ingrid Bergman). The film ends with a very individual take on the traditional Nativity play.

## Father Brown

**BBC One Wednesday December 20, 1.45pm**

Fr Brown attempts to overturn a miscarriage of justice while rehearsing for the Kembleford Christmas pantomime.

## The Heart of Saturday Night Christmas Special

**RTÉ One Thursday December 21, 11.10pm**

Una Healy and Loah present a festive edition of the music programme, with performances by Mary Black, Nathan Carter, Aoife Ní Bhriain, Shiv and Ryan McMullen and the Crash Ensemble.

## Handel's Messiah

**RTÉ Lyric FM Friday December 22, 7pm**

Join Paul Herriott this evening for a recorded performance of Handel's Messiah, featuring the Irish Baroque Orchestra and Chamber Choir Ireland under the direction of Peter Whelan.

## Witness

**RTÉ Radio One Friday December 22, 10.05pm**

Topical religious affairs with Siobhán Garrigan.

## The Bishop's Wife

**BBC Two Friday December 22, 9am**

Family comedy drama about an angel who assumes human form to help a bishop repair his marriage and build his dream cathedral.

## Country Christmas

**BBC Four Friday December 22, 8.30pm**

Country Christmas 2023,

hosted this year by country music stars Amy Grant and Trisha Yearwood, brings some of country music's most beloved artists together for a night full of festive classics.

## Daybreak with Evonne Ferguson

**RTÉ Lyric FM Saturday 23 December 7am**

A festive musical selection to reflect the coming Christmas season. Also, Anja Murray celebrates the humble robin - how did they become such a symbol of Christmas?

## It's A Wonderful Life

**Channel 4 Saturday December 23, 4.30pm**

Frank Capra's evergreen comedy-drama stars James Stewart, depressed and suicidal. An angel must show him how wonderful and worth living his life really is.

## Celine Byrne's Christmas Selection Box

**RTÉ One Saturday December 23, 8.25pm also Christmas Day 9am**

Irish operatic star Celine Byrne introduces a selection of her favourite performances from RTÉ's past Christmas music and carols shows.

## Vox Nostra

**RTÉ Lyric FM Christmas Eve, 7am**

Vlad Smishkewych presents music from the last thousand years to cheer your spirits as we head towards the Twelve Days of Christmas.

## Mass

**Raidio na Gaeltachta Christmas Eve, 11am**  
Mass from Séipéal Cill Éinde, An Spidéal, Co. Galway.  
Celebrant: An tAthair Daniel Gallagher.

## Solemn Mass of Christmas Eve in Rome

**EWTN Christmas Eve, 6.30pm**  
Live from St Peter's Basilica in Vatican City, the Holy Father presides at Midnight Mass on the Solemnity of the Birth of Our Lord.

## Midnight Mass

**RTÉ One and RTÉ Radio One Christmas Eve, 11pm**  
From St Francis' Basilica, Bolsward, Netherlands - a Eurovision broadcast, with translation and commentary by Fr Thomas McCarthy OP.

## Songs of Praise

**BBC One Christmas Eve, 1.15pm**  
Carols for Christmas Eve: Aled



An image of the stage adaptation of *The Sound of Music*. Photo: CNS.

Jones is in Sheffield City Hall for a celebration of carols, with guests Katherine Jenkins, Strictly's Tommy Blaize, the BBC Young Choristers of the Year and Michael Ball.

## The Sound of Music

**BBC One Christmas Eve, 2.50pm**

Classic film version of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical in which a novice nun (Julie Andrews) leaves her convent to accept a position as governess to a large family.

## Carols from Kings

**BBC Two Christmas Eve, 6.40pm and Christmas Day, 9am**

A celebration of Christmas from the candlelit chapel of King's College, Cambridge, led by the dean, Dr Stephen Cherry, with the world-renowned choir under the direction of Daniel Hyde.

## Christmas Carols on ITV

**ITV Christmas Eve, 10.30pm**  
BAFTA award-winning presenter and singer Jane McDonald hosts a traditional Christmas Eve celebration from St Elisabeth's Church in Greater Manchester.

## Midnight Mass

**BBC One Christmas Eve, 11.40pm**  
Christmas Midnight Eucharist is celebrated by the dean of Portsmouth Cathedral, Dr Anthony Cane, in a candlelit service full of well-known carols and music.

## Witness to Christmas

**RTÉ Radio One Christmas Day, 8pm**  
Siobhán Garrigan is joined by guests for an hour of festive conversation and music from the West of Ireland.

## Mass for Christmas Day

**RTÉ One and RTÉ Radio One Extra Christmas Day, 10am**  
With the clergy, choir and parishioners of St Columbanus, Kildalkey, Ballivor, Co. Meath, in a Eurovision Mass shared across the continent.

## RTÉ Lyric Live

**RTÉ Lyric FM Christmas Day, 7pm**

Paul Herriott brings us a playlist of Christmas music from around the world. Radio Stations from across the European Broadcasting Union present some of their nations' favourite Christmas music.

## The Blue of the Night with Bernard Clarke

**RTÉ Lyric FM Christmas Day, 9pm**

An evening largely governed by sacred music, including works from the Bach Family Archive, which JS. Bach maintained himself: 300 years of the Bachs.

## On Christmas Night

**BBC One Christmas Day, 11.35pm**

As Christmas Day draws to a close, the story of the first Christmas from Luke's Gospel, when angels appeared before shepherds, proclaiming the news of Jesus's birth.

## Centuries of Christmas with Vlad Smishkewych

**RTÉ Lyric FM St Stephen's Day, 7am**

Join Vlad for a millennium of festive music, exploring the roots and branches of the musical traditions around the Christmas season.

## Lead Kindly Light: Reflections on the life of John Henry Newman

**EWTN Thursday Dec 28, 8am**

Deacon Stephen Morgan and Fr James Bradley discuss John Henry Newman's call to the Catholic Faith and the many sacrifices he made to follow God's will.

## Fiddler on The Roof

**RTÉ One Thursday December 28, 8.20pm**

In pre-revolutionary Russia, a Jewish peasant with traditional values contends with marrying off three of his daughters with modern romantic ideals amid growing anti-semitic sentiment. He has many chats with God.

## Amazing Grace

**BBC Two Thursday (night) December 28, 1.35am**

Movie featuring Aretha Franklin recording the most successful gospel album of all time, *Amazing Grace*. Crafted from footage originally captured in 1972.

## Hidden Figures

**Channel 4 Friday December 29, 5.40pm**

Taraji P. Henson, Octavia Spencer and Janelle Monáe star as three extraordinary women, whose genius in mathematics and engineering made a significant contribution to the space race. Themes of prejudice and racism, with positive treatment of religion.

## Réalta Órga Ríogacha

**Raidio na Gaeltachta Christmas Day, 10am**

Fr Brian Ó Fearraigh reflects on the year that has passed, and on the Christmas season, with atmospheric hymns and music to buoy our spirits this Christmas morning.

## Mass for Christmas Day

**Raidio na Gaeltachta Christmas Day, 11am**

Ó Séipéal Cill Éinde, An Spidéal, Co. Galway. Celebrant: An tAthair Daniel Gallagher.

## Chariots of Fire

**BBC Two Christmas Day, 11.15am**

Oscar-winning drama. Two rival British runners push themselves to the limit in their quest to make the 1924 British Olympic team, but neither is prepared to compromise on his principles.

## Urbi et Orbi

**EWTN Christmas Day, 11am, RTÉ One 11.45am**

Pope Francis shares his Christmas message and blessing with the City and the World, from the balcony of St Peter's Basilica, Vatican City, with commentary and translation by on RTÉ by Lydia O'Kane.

## Archbishops' Message

**RTÉ One 12.10pm and RTÉ Radio One, 1.05 pm.**

The Anglican and Catholic Primates of All-Ireland, respectively Archbishop John McDowell and Archbishop Eamon Martin, present their traditional shared message and blessing for Christmas, this year focusing on the theme of peace.

## The Cork Nativity

**RTÉ One Christmas Day, 12.20pm**

The people of the rebel county tell the Gospel Nativity story. Another chance to see this beautiful and heartwarming short film, which won the USA's leading religious media prize, a Wilbur, in 2021.

# BookReviews

Peter Costello



## Finding God's many gifts in the rush of everyday life

**The Universe Provides: Finding Miracles and Inspiration in Unexpected Places,** by Eddie Gilmore (Darton, Longman & Todd, £9.99)

Peter Costello

At the beginning of December and the coming of the Christmas season, Eddie Gilmore had only been a couple of weeks in Ireland. He came here to work at An Síol, the L'Arche residence down in Callan in Co. Kilkenny.

This book of his experiences will give the readers a brilliant idea of the lifetime's experiences elsewhere that he brings with him, undoubtedly for the great benefit of our society.

Earlier he had some 28 years of experience with L'Arche, but since 2017 he has been the chief executive officer of the Irish Chaplaincy which supports Irish people, often in a low social ebb across the United Kingdom. This would always have been a difficult position given human nature at times, but it has been, I suspect, even more difficult in the benighted state of that country in the last few decades.

### Variety

But Eddie Gilmore is not concerned at heart with politics, but with human beings, in all their extraordinary variety. The ravages of Covid-19 are still only passing off in so many places, but they hit many very hard.

And still do; most of us will know people still affected by 'long Covid', as the lingering blight of the post-infective state has come to be called.

This memoir is developed around his own adventures and memories strung across all the weeks of the year with all its different stages in natural life and celebration. Celebration indeed might be taken as the keynote of this warm-hearted and deeply sensitive book.

Eddie Gilmore, the new face of L'Arche, Callan.



Anyone with their own experience of the Irish diaspora, Irish prisoners in British jails, and older members of that community who left home in the 1940s and 50s in search of a better life that proved as hard to find for many as it did at home.

**“We can glimpse the miracles and opportunities that are in our midst and use them for the benefit of all”**

**“Clearly Callan has acquired a tremendous force of nature who, one suspects, will get great things done before he has even unpacked”**

The loneliness of many of those isolated from both family in Ireland and the alien society around them is often heartbreaking.

### Praise

A reviewer can hardly better the words of Cardinal Vincent Nichols in praise of this book: “From a faith-filled perspective, and drawing on his own personal, musical and professional experience, Eddie shows us how important it is to have hope in our lives and to be connected with each other and the world in which we live.

“In this way, we can glimpse the miracles and

opportunities that are in our midst and use them for the benefit of all – the universe does indeed provide!”

**“We must mend the world one day at a time, one act at a time, a good act, every healing gesture, lights a candle in the dark world”**

That at least is what the blurb says, but it does not tell the half of it. Once begun this book

which proceeds by foot, bus, train, and bicycle, moves all over the place. Eddie Gilmore is a man of tremendous verve and vitality, humour and humanity that there is hardly a pause before page 192.

There it ends, or I suspect pauses for a moment before going on again. Clearly Callan has acquired a tremendous force of nature who, one suspects, will get great things done before he has even unpacked.

### Tremendous

Though the pace is tremendous all the way, he and those he meets in person or on Zoom manage to impart a great deal of wisdom, some culled from other cultures, as much as from experience.

Jonathan Sacks is quoted, “We must mend the world one day at a time, one act at a time,” and “A good act, every

healing gesture, lights a candle in the dark world.”

But these acts do not have to be grand. Above this passage is an anecdote about a visit to the Irish centre decades before, where one Pat Muldoon saw Eddie's eyes light up at the sight of his bowl of steaming Irish porridge – Eddie breakfasts often on little more than a bowl of rice Korean style – left it at his place with the simple comment, “Be nice to yourself”.

I hope that the Gilmores in their new Irish home will be able to plant and raise in Callan yet another Japanese style garden. But up to now the universe has been very generous to him in what it has provided.

(An Síol, 42 West Street, Callan, Co. Kilkenny R95 E628, can also be contacted on email at [admin@lararchekilkenny.ie](mailto:admin@lararchekilkenny.ie); or tel. +353 (0) 567725628.)

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.

## How to cross the generation barrier



Sr Francis Dominici Piscatella receives Communion during a Mass marking her 110th birthday at the Dominicans' motherhouse in Amityville April 20, 2023. Photo: OSV News

**Lift Up Their Hearts: Visiting Older People, Guidelines and Resources,** by Mary Threadgold RSC (Messenger Publications, €6.95)

**Peter Costello**

This little booklet presents the essence of the experience of many years that Sr

Mary Threadgold has worked with patients of all kinds, especially the elderly. It falls into two parts, the first dealing with the skills to be used in befriending those who are aging or have dementia.

The second part moves beyond this practical care to these more delicate matters of spiritual care especially those that have reached their very last days. Her ideas are

very supportive, and will be immensely helpful to those faced with the passing of a parent, a friend or neighbour.

Again she presents readers with her experiences and with approaches that they will find effective and rewarding: "I find in the past the things they enjoyed, music, poetry, singing songs; of the importance of allowing

the free flow of what they want to remember, or they are able to remember."

Aside from all her advice in part two, she adds in an appendix a good selection of traditional Catholic prayers. Nothing is so redolent of the past than the prayers and hymns we shared with our mother or older relatives in those long vanished days.

## Imogen - a unique exhibition at the Coach House Dublin Castle

**Peter Costello**

Imogen Stuart RHA has long been a fixture of the Irish art scene, and her works can be found in so many church and religious foundations, that many people will be familiar with her skills as a wood carver without knowing they are.

Last week RTÉ One broadcast a film about her created by her grandson cineaste Emile Dinneen, but currently (and until February 18, 2024) the Office of Public Works is hosting a representative exhibition of her work in the Coach House Gallery, Dublin Castle (close to the Chester Beatty Library and Museum which is always worth a visit). Admission is free. This is a unique vision of her work over some 70 years.

As our picture (courtesy the OPW) clearly demonstrates this is an exhibition for all the family, and touching the exhibits is allowed. So that young art enthusiasts can with their own hands feel the faces emerging



A young girl interacts with the Imogen exhibition.

from the wood in which they are imagined by the artist: a great experience.

Imogen was born in Germany in the last years of the Weimar Republic, before the advent of Hitler in 1932. She married Ian Stuart, the son of novelist Francis Stuart and Iseult Gonne, Maud Gonne's daughter.

She is one of a fractured clan,

but as an artist her background is of less import. To the visitor she is very much her own person. She is very much influenced too by a mixed artistic heritage, but the style of the Irish Romanesque can be seen in her many pieces.

The OPW has brought together some 60 small and medium scale works in wood, stone, marble, bronze, cast iron

and also on paper created from 1947 down to the present day. The religious themes that are a part of her outlook since the 1950s place her as one of the few authentic religious artists in the Ireland of our era.

This is an exhibition to be enjoyed by all the family, in one of the finest settings to be found in Central Dublin.

## Christmas books

By the books editor

The papers and the bookshop windows are full of Christmastime promotions. Everyone is spoilt for choice. So I thought I should act like an editor and provide details of what seems to be an essential selection which all will enjoy.

**Dear Gay: Letters to the Gay Byrne Show, a hand written history of modern Ireland,** compiled by Suzy Byrne (Gill Books, €26.99)

For a full quarter of a century Gay Byrne was the leading daytime broadcaster. His radio show received a constant stream of letters from his listeners all over the country. They treated Gay like an honorary uncle.

They poured out to him their hopes and fears, not just for themselves but for the nation and how it was changing all around them. Of course, many of these were funny; many, though serious at the time, can be read with amusement, but others remain enshrined in their loneliness and agony.

As he read them out he entered into a sort of continuous dialogue with the people of Ireland, about every topic under the sun, and sometimes from darkness too.

A selection of these has now been assembled by the broadcaster's daughter Suzy. The Gay Byrne touch still continues, as she provides an illuminating commentary on them and the time they come from.

Dear Gay she claims is "a sweeping handwritten history of a radically changed Ireland and a fitting tribute to Ireland's best-loved broadcaster".

**Milltown: a history,** by David Costello (Wordwell, €50.00)

This is a local history of the South Dublin village and district that spans 4,000 years, yet as is so often the case the events of the 19th and 20th Century dominate.

Still that aside, all local histories are important. They are always the product of a loving attention to details. Those concerned with the history of south Dublin will want this.

Those who live elsewhere, however, should think of buying and reading their own local history. The more we try to know about the past, the more we will be able to learn. (The author is no relation of the Books

Editor, in case readers are wondering.)

**An Eye On Ireland,** by Justine McCarthy (Hachette Ireland, €23.99)

Author McCarthy entered journalism in the "male dominated world of the 1980s". In her career she has been able to cover a huge range of topics in a rapidly changing Ireland.

But was there ever a time when Ireland was not rapidly changing, I wonder. However, for young adults she will bring issues they have heard about alive. But I thought it was the women journalists of the 1960s who broke the mould, or so they told us.

Still we all have tendencies to think that when we were young we were the ones (as they say) 'present at the Creation'.

**The Lamplighters of the Phoenix Park: A Unique History of One of Ireland's Most Famous Places,** by Donal Fallon, with Frank and John Flanagan (Hachette Books, €32.20)

Frank and John Flanagan relate their family's 150-year-old connection with the Victorian gas lamps of the Park. Anyone walking through the park must have wondered about these.

The events in the public life of the Park over that time are woven into an unique family chronicle. The Flanagans and other working people of the city, however, were those who gave the city its identity.

The common people are the real heroes of a nation, and not so much the belauded patriots and others. A great read altogether, another personal story of universal interest.

**Raised by the Zoo: My life with Elephants and Other Animals,** by Gerry Creighton (Gill Books, €22.99)

Gerry Creighton was a leading figure in RTÉ's long running show *The Zoo*. The title is literally true. His father worked for the zoo, and Gerry joined the staff in his teens. He is now retired.

What there is to be known about the zoo and its traditions from a Victorian institution into an important player in ecological survival and education, Gerry Creighton knows. This delightful and entertaining book is one which the whole family will enjoy, as they enjoyed the show which he animated.

# Classifieds

The deadline for advertising in the classifieds is 10.30am, the Friday before publication. Contact the Classified Team on 01 687 4027 or email [advertising@irishcatholic.ie](mailto:advertising@irishcatholic.ie)

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**DAILY MOTION**

**NDLP** – Catholic music channel free to watch on [www.dailymotion.com](http://www.dailymotion.com) [#NDLP] contact details [notredamelapucelle@protonmail.com](mailto:notredamelapucelle@protonmail.com)

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*Remembering*

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**We will pass on the flame of faith.**

For over 130 years, *The Irish Catholic* has been a voice of hope and inspiration for Catholics in Ireland. Help us pass on the flame of faith by remembering us in your Will.

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**The Miracle Prayer**

Dear Heart of Jesus,  
In the past I have asked for many favours.  
This time I ask for a special one. (mention here)  
Take it, dear Heart of Jesus, and place it within your own broken Heart where your Father sees it.  
Then, in his merciful eyes, it will become your favour, not mine. Amen.  
Say this prayer for three days.

S.D

**The Miracle Prayer**

Dear Heart of Jesus,  
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Then, in his merciful eyes, it will become your favour, not mine. Amen.  
Say this prayer for three days.

M.T.D

**By choosing to leave a gift in your will to Missio Ireland, you are choosing to share God's love with those who need it most.**

To learn more about the Holy Father's official charity for overseas mission, call Fiona on 01 497 2035 or visit [www.missio.ie](http://www.missio.ie)




**Bethlehem Care & Hospice Trust**

Bethlehem is in lockdown, businesses mostly shut down, with high unemployment. People are afraid to go out. Despite concerns for their personal safety our nurses continue to provide care to the sick and the dying in their own homes.



For more information and to help please visit:  
[www.bcandht.ie](http://www.bcandht.ie)



Bethlehem Care & Hospice Trust is a registered charity in the Republic of Ireland (20206049).

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# Leisure time



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See first-hand how your kind donations and legacy bequests work to bring hope and relief to people who've slept rough overnight.

To find out more please ring Shauna at 01 524 0139.

*We'd love to meet you*

**A hot meal. A helping hand. A fresh start.**

Please pray for the beatification of

## Little Nellie of Holy God

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

— Pope St Pius X, June 4, 1912

## Will the MSC Missions

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

**Please help us with a gift in your Will**

Contact:  
MSC Missions Office, PO Box 23 Western Road, Cork.  
Tel: 021-4545704 Email: [info@mscmissions.ie](mailto:info@mscmissions.ie)

[www.mscmissions.ie](http://www.mscmissions.ie)

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

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

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

**trócaire**

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Be there for others after you're gone.

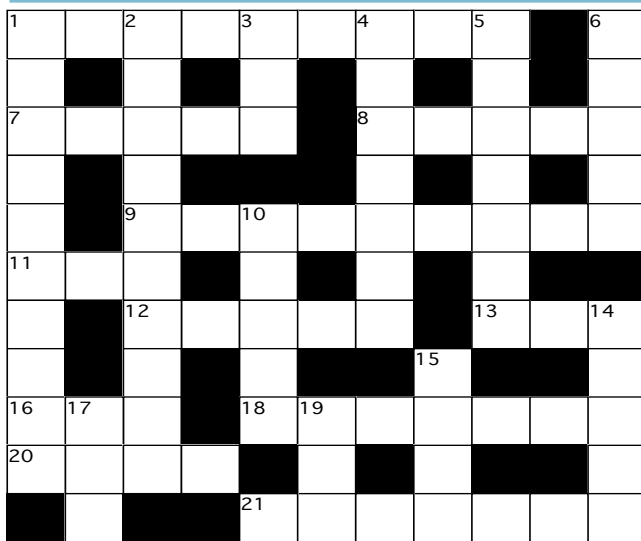
A gift in your will to Irish Hospice Foundation is a meaningful way to help ensure no-one faces death or bereavement without the care and support they need.

Email Anna Sadlier at [anna.sadlier@hospicefoundation.ie](mailto:anna.sadlier@hospicefoundation.ie) or call 01 679 3188

 Irish Hospice Foundation

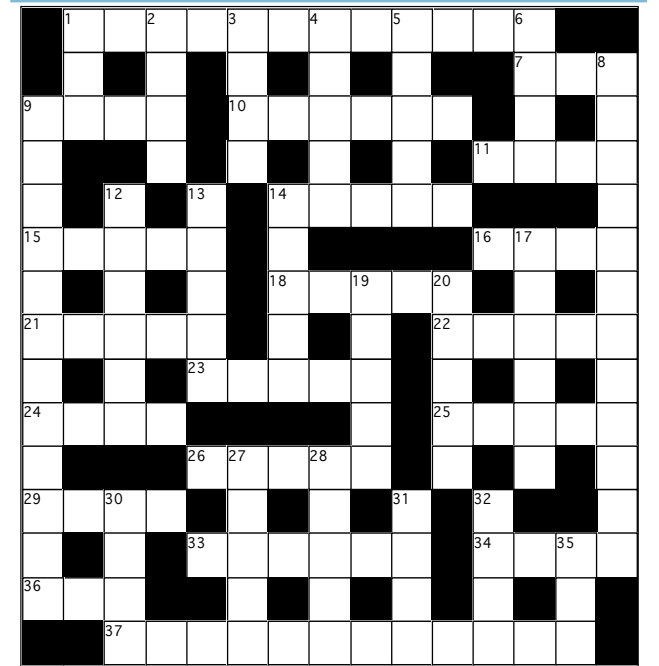
[www.hospicefoundation.ie](http://www.hospicefoundation.ie)

## Crossword Junior Gordius 513



- Across**
- 1 King of Ireland who died during the Battle of Clontarf (5,4)
  - 7 Out in front (5)
  - 8 A room on a ship (5)
  - 9 These animals have babies called joeys (9)
  - 11 Ocean (3)
  - 12 Exhausted (5)
  - 13 Small barrel (3)
  - 16 This weight measure is the same as about 1016 kg (3)
  - 18 'Harry Potter and the Deathly \_\_\_\_\_' (7)
  - 20 Up in the air (4)
  - 21 'Specs' (7)
- Down**
- 1 Person who made and mended things in a forge (10)
  - 2 Having fun on a rink (3-7)
  - 3 Signal 'yes' with your head (3)
  - 4 You might find apple trees here (7)
  - 5 Remove what is clogging up something (7)
  - 6 Magicians' sticks (5)
  - 10 The opposite of South (5)
  - 14 Strong, short blasts of wind (5)
  - 15 This sign in a sum tells you to add (4)
  - 17 Black liquid you put in an engine (3)
  - 18 Feel poorly (3)

## Crossword Gordius 641



- Across**
- 1 Part of the New World where they principally speak Spanish or Portuguese (5,7)
  - 7 Take goods or money by force (3)
  - 9 Applied a colorant (4)
  - 10 One's selection (6)
  - 11 The holy sacrifice (4)
  - 14 Historic English diarist Samuel (5)
  - 15 Local or colloquial way of phrasing things (5)
  - 16 Reverberate (4)
  - 18 Section of the choir also known as countertenors (5)
  - 21 Keen (5)
  - 22 Seasonal show, abbreviated (5)
  - 23 Uniform jacket (5)
  - 24 Primates scatter peas (4)
  - 25 A smell (5)
  - 26 Confidence tricks, swindles (5)
  - 29 Trans-national currency (4)
  - 33 An afternoon nap in Spain, Mexico, etc (6)
  - 34 Plant on which grapes grow (4)
  - 36 Sweet potato (3)
  - 37 Non-amateur (12)
- Down**
- 1 Produce an egg (3)
  - 2 Neat (4)
  - 3 It connects the head to the torso (4)
  - 4 American elk (5)
  - 5 Mr Balboa, a boxer played by Sylvester Stallone (5)
  - 6 Operatic song (4)
  - 8 Title held by the pope, referring to his principal diocese (6,2,4)
  - 9 As intended, on purpose (12)
  - 12 English language name for An Daingean, or the Kerry peninsula on which it is situated (6)
  - 13 Clever or chic (5)
  - 14 Not ornate (5)
  - 17 Gorge, narrow valley (6)
  - 19 Parasites, or 'correct' marks (5)
  - 20 Item of cutlery (5)
  - 27 Native American tribal leader (5)
  - 28 Old Testament Israelite leader (5)
  - 30 It enables wheelchair access beside steps (4)
  - 31 Cab (4)
  - 32 Use it to roast meat or bake bread (4)
  - 35 No score (3)

## SOLUTIONS, DECEMBER 7

- GORDIUS NO. 640
- Across** - 1 Bus 3 Counterfeit 8 Christ the Redeemer 9 Claymore 10 Noble 11 Light 13 Flair 15 Needful 16 Funfair 20 Human 21 Young 23 Farce 24 Cautious 26 Tom-tom 26 Greasepaint 27 Fir
- Down** - 1 Bicentenary 2 Scrabble 3 Caste 4 Nuclear 5 Royal flush 6 Enough 7 The 14 Rouen 17 Aperitif 18 Amnesia 19 Future 22 Gains 23 Float 24 Cog
- CHILDREN'S No. 512
- Across** - 1 Coat hanger 6 Obedient 7 Raft 10 Yells 12 Sheep 14 When 15 Rage 17 Rapier 18 Lace 19 Tissue
- Down** - 1 Choir 2 Ace of hearts 3 Hair 4 Nanny 5 Rattle 8 Ash 9 Ten 11 Eagerly 13 Praise 14 Waist 16 Seven

## Sudoku Corner 513

**Easy**

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

**Hard**

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

## Last week's Easy 512

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

## Last week's Hard 512

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

Notebook

Fr Martin Delaney



# Hollow out a space for Christ this Christmas

On a recent visit to one of my parishioners I noticed a most fascinating centrepiece on the table of her front room. Underneath a protective glass dome was the most perfectly created birds' nest. The nest was almost so perfect that I thought it had been somehow manufactured by a machine. Breda told me how her late husband, who at the time was living with dementia, had gone for a walk in their garden and had returned with this magnificent birds' nest. John suggested that Breda put it on display encased in glass because, he said that "no human being could create something so perfectly".



the life of my God will deepen and mature within me." I thought of that beautifully crafted nest in Breda's front room. It was prepared from

As I drove away from Breda's home the image of that beautiful birds' nest lingered in my mind. Then I began to be aware of nests everywhere. High up in the bare trees in these late Autumn days there are little bunches of nests. The spiritual writer, Joyce Rupp speaks of the nest as a beautiful image for Advent. As the birds have worked hard to prepare the nest which will be welcoming for an egg and the future young life, our task is to get a Christ-home ready within our own lives. To quote Rupp: "I am trying to prepare a dwelling place for the Lord, a warm, well-hollowed, hospitable place where

very ordinary everyday things like twigs, dry grasses, pebbles, mud and feathers. Some birds use moss and spider webs while thrushes make their nests from a mixture of clay, decayed wood and cow dung. Those everyday fragments reflect what Patrick Kavanagh referred to as the 'bits and pieces' of our everyday lives; the twigs of our trials and tensions, the pebbles of our patience and pain, the straw of our struggles and strivings, the mud

of our humanness and growing, the dry grass of our surrender and daily dying.

At the recent November Masses of Remembrance in our parishes we lit more than 120 candles for people who had died within the parishes or connected closely to parishioners. Many of those who came up to light the candles were not expecting to be facing into Christmas 2023 without this special person sitting at their festive table. Those life changing

experiences of pain and loss and grief are some of the building materials for so many Advent nests this year. And yet God will come, and it is in those very raw experiences of life that he asks us to hollow out a welcoming space for him this Christmas.

## A poem for peace

Rarely has the gift of peace been so badly needed as it is in our world this Christmas. Here are some timely lines from Maya Angelou's beautiful poem 'Amazing Peace':

...Into this climate of fear and apprehension, Christmas enters, Streaming lights of joy, ringing bells of hope And singing carols of forgiveness high up in the bright air. The world is encouraged to come away from rancour, Come the way of friendship.

It is the Glad Season.

Thunder ebbs to silence and lightning sleeps quietly in the corner. Flood waters recede into memory. Snow becomes a yielding cushion to aid us As we make our way to higher ground.

Hope is born again in the faces of children It rides on the shoulders of our aged as they walk into their sunsets. Hope spreads around the earth. Brightening all things, Even hate which crouches breeding in dark corridors.

In our joy, we think we hear a

whisper. At first it is too soft. Then only half heard. We listen carefully as it gathers strength. We hear a sweetness. The word is Peace. It is loud now. It is louder. Louder than the explosion of bombs.

We tremble at the sound. We are thrilled by its presence. It is what we have hungered for. Not just the absence of war. But, true Peace. A harmony of spirit, a comfort of courtesies. Security for our beloveds and their beloveds.....

## The truth at Christmas

In the school nativity play, little Jimmy had only one line to remember. He was to stand and say: "I am the light of the world." However on the night of the production, he froze at the sight of so many people and forgot his line. His mother was seated in the front row and began mouthing his line for him. Following her cue Jimmy said, "My mother is the light of the world".



## Please make feeding school children, staff and families in Haiti your Advent gift to Our Lord

Sr Barbara Thomas is Provincial of the Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Haiti. She has written to The Little Way Association to ask us to continue supporting the children at their school in a poor area of Port-au-Prince, where 60-70% of children and families are food insecure. "There is so much violence and poverty in Haiti," writes Sister, "gangs were even confiscating food transports and demanding large payments for release." Despite these very bad times the Sisters have kept the school open, providing a safe space to nurture the children, helping them, their families, the staff and volunteers. They currently are serving 270 students, from 6 to 14 years old, from 220 families, including teachers and employees, many of whom also rely on the school for their only meal each day. Sr Barbara pleads: "Would it be possible for your Association once again to provide merciful assistance? With gratitude and hope, we offer our prayers for your sacrifice and service."

Your kind gift will be forwarded to the Sisters without deduction to provide nutritious food for the school children, staff and families. The children's well-deserved and necessary education cannot succeed without proper nutrition. Your support can make this possible.

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

**THE LITTLE WAY ASSOCIATION**  
Sacred Heart House, 119 Cedars Rd, Clapham Common, London SW4 0PR  
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Please tick if you would like an acknowledgement

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Address

IC/12/14



"Our Lord does not look so much at the greatness of our actions, but at the love at which we do them."

- St Therese

### Mission Chapels

St. Therese, our patroness, wished to spread the Gospel throughout the world "until the end of time". We receive many requests for help from bishops and priests to build, renovate or complete their mission chapels. We are often asked for funds to provide a permanent roof for a chapel. In many places the only roofing chapels have is made of straw or other flimsy material which, as you may imagine, is easily damaged or destroyed in bad weather.

Your donation will help a priest in a mission country to provide a decent chapel for his congregation, a fitting place for the celebration of Holy Mass.

### MISSIONARIES NEED YOUR MASS OFFERINGS

In these difficult times, missionary priests overseas rely more than ever on Mass stipends for their daily subsistence and in order that they may continue to minister to their poor communities

We like to send a minimum stipend of €6.50 or more for each Mass.



The picture shows the home of one family where all live and sleep in one room. The children eat a nutritious meal at school before going home – to little or nothing for supper.