

The Irish Catholic

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Secular education campaign shut down after ethics probe

Greg Daly

A group which campaigned for reduced religious influence in Church-owned schools was forced to close down following a series of complaints to the State's ethics watchdog over controversial funding, *The Irish Catholic* understands.

'Equate: Equality in Education' was established in October 2015, aiming to change the law so that oversubscribed Church-owned schools would not be able to prioritise their own members.

The organisation also campaigned for Faith formation classes to be moved to the end of the school day, for it to be easier for children to opt out of religious instruction, and for the divestment process of faith-based schools to be accelerated.

Ahead of its formal launch, group director Michael Barron said Equate wanted to help bring these changes about during the lifetime of the next – now the current – Government. The organisation, however, folded on November 30 last, claiming that it had been set up in October 2015 "as a time-limited catalyst organisation".

The Irish Catholic understands, however, that the organisation's closure was in fact prompted by an ultimatum from the Standards in Public Office (SIPO) commission, issued at a meeting on October 23 last, forcing it to choose between closure or returning funds it had received from the One Foundation, a philanthropic organ-

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Of Gods and Men monks recognised as martyrs



Pope Francis has recognised the martyrdom of a bishop, seven Trappist monks and 11 other religious men and women killed by extremists in Algeria in the 1990s. The 19 men and women died between 1993 and 1996, while Algeria was locked in a 10-year-long armed conflict between government forces and Islamist rebel groups; the conflict left tens of thousands of people dead.

The story of the seven monks, who had been kidnapped from the monastery of Tibhirine, was treated in the film *Of Gods and Men* (pictured) which won the grand prize at its premiere at the Cannes Film Festival in 2010.

DAVID QUINN

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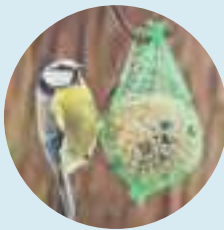
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Green fingers

Winter is releasing its icy grip on our gardens

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Managing Editor: Michael Kelly, editor@irishcatholic.ie

Features Editor: Mags Gargan, mags@irishcatholic.ie

Chief Reporter: Greg Daly, greg@irishcatholic.ie

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

Newsroom: news@irishcatholic.ie 01 6874029

Books Editor: Peter Costello, books@irishcatholic.ie

Layout: Declan Moroney

Advertising: advertising@irishcatholic.ie 01 6874094

Accounts: accounts@irishcatholic.ie 01 6874020

Magnificat: magnificat@irishcatholic.ie 01 6874024

Shop: shop@irishcatholic.ie

Managing Director: Garry O'Sullivan

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Voting to protect the unborn will send a powerful signal to the world



Editor's Comment
Michael Kelly

The starting pistol has been fired on the referendum on whether or not to give politicians the power to legislate to provide for abortion on demand. Truth be told, the battle started a long time ago – a media largely sympathetic with the push for wider access to abortion has been engaged in 'softening up' opinion for quite some time.

The Government decision this week to hold a referendum (probably in late May) was inevitable. Already, people are stepping forward to try to police the debate. A number of politicians have expressed the view that children with Down Syndrome should not be used in campaign material by those working to retain the Eighth Amendment. Of course, what they don't address is the fact that nine out of 10 children in England and Wales diagnosed in utero with the condition are aborted. It's a shocking statistic, and one which should not be ignored by those trying to police the debate.

Struggle

Those who want to retain the pro-life provision in the Constitution face an uphill struggle – powerful forces, often funded from abroad, are lining up to push for wider access to abortion in Ireland. The Eighth Amendment to the Constitution is a powerful barrier in their way. And

it's a provision that can be saved, if the truth of abortion is brought to the people.

Those who support the pro-life position must resist the temptation to become pessimistic or disengaged from the debate. Rather, everyone who cares about life, dignity and equality needs to step up, engage with their local pro-life group and fight for the rights of the unborn.

“Abortion is the most-pressing human rights issue of our times”

Hearts and minds will be crucial to this campaign. Pro-choice advocates are trying to push the line that abortions will be rare in any new legal framework. The evidence, however, is that where abortion is introduced it inevitably becomes more commonplace. Currently, more than one in five pregnancies in England and Wales ends in abortion – that's 20% of all unborn children snuffed out before they even have a chance to be born and make an impact on the world.

Abortion is the most pressing

human rights issue of our times. In the future, generations still to come will look back with horror at this era and the belief that targeting the most vulnerable amongst us for killing was ever deemed acceptable from seemingly civilised societies.

In human rights terms, there is no cause more just or noble than standing up for those who cannot stand up for themselves and giving voice to the voiceless.

The powerless and the voiceless that we are being asked to stand up for in this referendum are the unborn children – those who have no choice when it comes to whether they live or die.

Pro-life campaigners must take heart from the fundamental justice of their cause. They should also be aware that this is not just about Ireland – the retention of the pro-life article in the Irish Constitution will serve as a powerful beacon for the rest of the world. Pro-life campaigners and those who care about human dignity in every corner of the planet will be emboldened to speak out if Ireland says 'no' to abortion and a powerful 'yes' to life.

Education campaign shut down after probe

» Continued from Page 1

isation headed by Declan Ryan, the son of Ryanair founder Tony Ryan.

Mr Ryan was, with former Minister for Education Ruairi Quinn, a member of Equate's advisory board. The One Foundation, which he established in 2004, is believed to have issued over €40 million in grants to various Irish groups before it was wound up in 2013; it had ceased activity before the establishment of Equate.

The October ultimatum followed several complaints being submitted to the State's ethics watchdog, one such complaint having come from Atheist Ireland, which has described Equate as "politically well-connected" and "funded way above the SIPO limits by a body that didn't exist, while enjoying unprecedented access to the Minister for Education and repeatedly welcoming flawed ministerial statements that should have been opposed".

Although the amount donated from the One Foundation has not yet been publicly disclosed, sources believe it was in the region of €500,000, with funds having been needed to pay for three full-time and one part-time member of staff. The organisation also ran a conference on education access in Croke Park last February – an event which was opened by Minister for Education Richard Bruton. Equate also funded extensive public relations

and research work, with SIPO's own records showing Equate as having engaged in intensive lobbying of members of the Oireachtas and the Department of Education.

Irish electoral law requires those who receive donations of more than €100 for the purposes of political campaigning to register as 'third parties', with third parties being prohibited from receiving more than €2,500 from any one donor in any calendar year.

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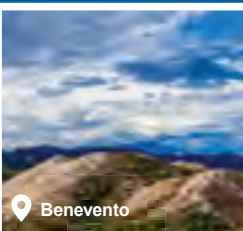
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Referendum will lead to abortion on demand, says Pro Life Campaign

Colm Fitzpatrick

The Pro Life Campaign has said that the Government's decision on the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution is "as bad as anyone could have envisaged: the removal of legal protection from unborn babies and providing for abortion on demand".

On Monday, the Government announced plans to hold a referendum in late May asking citizens whether they want to retain article 40.3.3 of the Constitution, or to repeal and replace it with an enabling provision that will give legislative responsibility on abortion laws to the Oireachtas.

The decision, which followed a lengthy meeting at Government Buildings, is understood to have been unanimous and was in line with expectations. A referendum bill will be drafted in coming weeks to give force to the decision.

Legislation

The Government has said that if the referendum proposal is passed, it will then introduce legislation in line with the advice of the Oireachtas Committee on the Eighth Amendment, which recommended allowing for abortion on demand up to 12 weeks.

Commenting immediately after the Government's

announcement, Pro Life Campaign spokesperson Dr Ruth Cullen said, "It is a very sad and serious moment for our country. Tonight, the Government brought forward a proposal that for the first time in our history would withdraw basic human rights from a group of vulnerable defenceless individuals instead of strengthening their constitutional protections."

No disguise

Dr Cullen added that the Government can't disguise how its proposal is solely about stripping unborn babies of all meaningful legal protections.

"The right to life is an inalienable right. It's not something that can be conferred or withheld by the State at its pleasure. The Eighth Amendment acknowledges this basic right to life; it doesn't claim to be its initiator – merely its protector," she said.

Dr Cullen said that in the coming weeks, it will become clear that the Government's proposal will lead to abortion on demand if voted for in the referendum.

"As people come to realise this, I have every confidence they will vote to retain the Eighth Amendment with a renewed commitment to building a more welcoming society for expectant mothers and their

unborn babies," she said.

Meanwhile, the Church's first 'Choose Life 2018' newsletter has been pub-

lished by Ireland's bishops to promote the Church's position on abortion. Issued on Tuesday, the newsletter

will be disseminated on a weekly basis and is intended to encourage family discussion on the subject.

The Joy of life



American singer Joy Villa who made a clear pro-life statement at Sunday's Grammy Awards ceremony in New York, when the 31-year-old appeared in a customised white gown upon which she had hand-painted the image of a foetus radiating rainbow colours, accessorised with a small white bag bearing the message "Choose life".

Divine Mercy reaches out to young people

Staff reporter

The annual Divine Mercy Conference – which regularly attracts thousands of people to Dublin's RDS – is to step it up a gear this year with the addition of a special programme aimed at attracting younger Catholics.

Hosted in St Paul's Church, Arran Quay, Dublin, on Friday February 16, the event aims to highlight the spirituality of Divine Mercy for younger people. Promising lively music, inspiring talks, testimonies and an opportunity to meet new friends, the event is aimed at people 18 years and older and runs from 6pm-9pm.

Youth event

The main Divine Mercy Conference continues as normal over the course of that weekend at the RDS.

Keynote speakers at the youth event on the Friday evening include Ralph Martin and Keith Kelly.

Registration and refreshments begin at 6pm and the evening will conclude with a reconciliation and healing service presided over by Fr Eunan O'Donnell SDB.

Organisers point out that the church is near Smithfield Luas stop and is served by various buses.

For more information email divinemercury4youth@gmail.com

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Brexit and lack of NI executive creating dangerous vacuum – priest

Staff reporter

The lack of stable government and uncertainty around Brexit are contributing to a climate of uncertainty in which young people in the North can be drawn into paramilitary and other criminal activity, a Belfast-based priest has said. “We need politicians to resolve their present disagreements and this impasse. We need stable government here again,” Fr Martin Magill told *The Irish Catholic*.

“For us here, Brexit is a big contributor to uncertainty. There’s no doubt a sense of concern about what that’s going to look like, in terms of young people in the future and that whole sense of the wider context, European travel, European involvement, and getting jobs,” he said.

Conceding that concerns about Brexit’s impact may

not be having a direct impact in the day-to-day lives of young people in some of the North’s less well-off communities, Fr Magill nonetheless said it remains “part of the mood music”.

Comments

His comments came during a conference on youth workers and paramilitarism, which took place against a background of two paramilitary-style attacks in Belfast the previous night that left a 41-year-old and a 26-year-old with what police have called “potentially life-changing” injuries.

Noting that there was a rise in such attacks last year, Fr Magill said such attacks should not be described as ‘punishment attacks’. “These are abuses of human rights, these are paramilitary attacks, these are life-changing injuries,” he said.

British-style conscience challenges ‘inevitable’ in Ireland – Nuala O’Loan

Greg Daly

Ireland medical professionals will face dilemmas around abortion and conscience similar to those faced by their British peers if constitutional protections for the unborn are abolished, Baroness Nuala O’Loan has said.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* following the second reading in the House of Lords of the Conscientious Objection (Medical Activities) Bill, which she introduced, Baroness O’Loan said: “As Ireland faces into the campaign to repeal the Eighth Amendment, the UK is facing dilemmas which will inevitably come to Ireland”.

The bill, which aims to prohibit discrimination against medical professionals who object on conscience grounds to indirect participation in abortions or the withdrawal of life-sustaining treatment, now passes to the committee

stage.

“There is growing evidence of doctors choosing not to go into obstetrics and gynaecology – the specialism through which women are helped to carry and deliver safely a much-wanted baby – because they may also be required to assist in abortions if they want to progress in their chosen career. The same is true of nurses who must now carry out all the tasks apart from the actual termination of the life of the baby in the womb,” Baroness O’Loan said.

Treatment

Pointing out that “most people don’t become healthcare professionals to participate in end of life treatment indirectly”, she said: “This is what health care practitioners in the UK now face.”

Young British medical practitioners are emigrating to get jobs where they are not obliged to act against their consciences, she added, say-

ing that for Ireland the question must be: “How many Irish doctors, midwives nurses and healthcare practitioners who chose to work in professions which demanded above all that they do no harm, will be forced to be involved in some way with ending life if the Eighth Amendment is repealed?”

While the bill only applies to England and Wales, the Church in Scotland has welcome the passage of the bill, with Anthony Horan, Director of the Catholic Parliamentary Office, calling for a similar bill to be presented in the Scottish Parliament.

“Conscientious objection is a widely respected concept with considerable international and national laws, guidance, and conventions protecting the right,” he said, continuing, “a Scottish Bill would bring Scotland into line with international norms”.

SMA get to the root of family

A programme called ‘The Family Tree’ has been launched in conjunction with Catholic Schools Week, and aims to encourage participants to learn more about family and its importance.

Developed by the Society of African Missions (SMA) the four-week programme emphasises that although families are unique, they all have the same roots and branches.

Using the metaphor that families are trees the first week ‘Our Family: Roots’ focuses on the roots of family and how they make people stronger, with each week focusing on a new theme.

Families are invited to build their own ‘family tree’ from recyclable household waste which they can enter into a competition, with the winners being displayed at the World Meeting of Families event in the RDS in August.

For further information contact Mrs Dymna Mallon, SMA Laity Coordinator at familytree@sma.ie

Education proposals’ adverse effects

Bishops and other Catholic Church education interests have expressed their dismay and opposition to the current proposals outlined by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), which could weaken the status of religion in the primary school curriculum.

The NCCA proposed to have two categories of time allocation, 60% for a minimum State curriculum and 40% for ‘flexible’ time, as a structure for the school day and week.

An adviser from the Elphin Diocese said that this move would have an adverse effect on schools’ ethos and consequently damage children’s religious and spiritual development.

Festival around the corners



Pictured at the launch of the 4 Corners Festival in Belfast are Fr Martin Magill and Rev. Steven Stockman. The 4 Corners Festival seeks to inspire people from across the city to transform it for the peace and prosperity of all. It consists of innovative events designed to entice people out of their own ‘corners’ of the city and into new places where they will encounter new perspectives, new ideas and new friends. The festival this year runs from February 1-11 – see www.4cornersfestival.com. Photo: Bernie Brown

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What are we to make of Hungary's claim on Christian values?

What are we to make of Viktor Orban, the Hungarian leader who is almost certain to be swept back to power in the Hungarian spring election? He is regarded as an 'anti-liberal' and 'semi-authoritarian' by the European Union – and Taoiseach Leo Varadkar was widely criticised in Ireland just for paying a visit to Mr Orban's Hungary.

Orban's political views are indeed hardly liberal and the pictures of razor-wire fences between Hungary and Serbia – keeping out refugees – are indeed distressing. And yet his supporters say that he has put his country on the right track, rescuing it from the doldrums after decades of post-Communist mismanagement, restoring its sovereignty, sense of national self-worth, and placing Christian values and the family at the centre of national life.

Without Orban's courage and greatness, says Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto, Hungary would have been reduced to the same condition as Greece.

Sworn foe

Orban is also the sworn foe of George Soros, the Hungarian-born billionaire, who Orban portrays as seeking to meddle in Hungarian political life, exerting influence through financial power.

Viktor Orban often refers to Hungary's historic role as a Christian nation, and especially to the link with Poland, when, together, the two halted the Ottoman



Mary Kenny



An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar in Hungary to meet Viktor Orban.

invasion of Europe in 1683. With the departure of Britain from the EU, the Visegrad countries – Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, are strengthening their common links – and have invited Austria to join them. Viktor Orban seems to be emerging as the driving force of this group within the EU 27.

But there is a Christian dilemma here. Pope Francis has clearly enjoined us to

shelter the refugee and the asylum seeker: the Visegrad group is opposed to this, while affirming their Christian traditions.

I suppose we must bear in mind that geography always plays a strong part in national outlook. Hungary, Austria and Poland are placed at the very crossroads of Europe: those of us who are island nations have the perspective of distance.

Young minds need support

Eight young students at Bristol University have killed themselves over the past six months. There is no connection between the eight suicides, except that apparently these young people felt depressed and homesick.

What's especially upsetting is that parents in at least one case sought pastoral help from the university authorities on behalf of their son, who they felt was troubled. But the authorities rebuffed the parents saying the students were "adults" and families had no entitlement to contact with them.

Adulthood is something you transition into: it doesn't happen overnight at 18, or, as some would have it, 16. Many young people need care and family protection for much longer than we might imagine.

Acceptance can be wonderful

Beth Morton is a 26-year-old maternity ward receptionist living in Essex with her partner, Danny Bellamy, aged 32. They had no plans to embark on parenthood – Beth was taking the contraceptive Pill. But to her astonishment, and against the odds, she found that she was pregnant. Indeed, she was informed that she was pregnant with triplets.

Multiple births can put a strain on a mother, and Miss Morton was offered a "selective reduction" of the pregnancy – in which doctors would abort one, or even two, of the babies *in utero*. But both Beth and Danny refused. Beth said: "There was no way that we would have considered a selective termination. How could you possibly choose one baby's life over another? We were determined to give all

three of them the best possible chance. I knew it was a risky pregnancy, but I trusted the doctors to look after us all."

The triplets – an adorable trio named Archie, Lola and Ralphie – were induced at 35 weeks' pregnancy, and all are thriving. Beth says that "they may have been a surprise, but I can't imagine life without them now".

We talk a lot about choices these days – and choice, in principle, is not to be disparaged, since it is part of our free will. But sometimes, acceptance is also beautiful and inspiring. Beth didn't choose to become a mother – she was quite evidently avoiding the possibility. Yet when it happened, she was open to life and defied the medics' suggestion that she should "reduce" the pregnancy. *Bravissima!*

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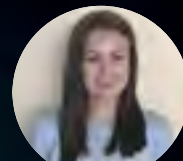
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Catholic schools target social media bullying

Chai Brady

Faith plays a role in encouraging positive interactions between students online, as bullying moves from schoolyards to social media, according to the secretary for the Episcopal Council for Education.

At the launch of Catholic Schools Week in the Killaloe Diocese it was highlighted that this year there will be a year-long catechetical programme working in partnership with the World Meeting of Families 2018. This week the theme is 'Catholic Schools: Families of Faith', which aims to emphasise the school as a Faith community.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Fr Tom Deenihan said that there is a "tremendous opportunity" to tackle issues with social media use in schools.

"Words on social media are the same as words in the yard, and have implications. It seems that the traditional



Altar servers process through St Eunan's Cathedral, Derry, during a Mass celebrated by Bishop Donal McKeown to celebrate the start of Catholic Schools Week. Photo: Stephen Latimer

form of bullying has moved from fisticuffs and name-calling to social media," he said.

"I'm suggesting that when we're celebrating Catholic schools as communities of Faith, we need to look at how our Faith influ-

ences our interactions with each other, and I say that in the context of pupil to pupil, teacher to teacher and even pupil to teacher."

Fr Deenihan said that this would make schools happier places for all students, and that the best

way for schools to combat online bullying is to spread awareness that students are communicating with real people.

Message

"I think we need to be continually putting out the

message that we're made in the image and likeness of God, we are equal in God's eyes, and if Catholic schools can achieve making that point known then I think it is more likely that students will be aware of the implications of what they put up on social media," he added.

During Mass at the launch Bishop Fintan Monahan said the tension between religion and matters secular is sometimes described as "as a choice between Pie in the Sky or Jam where I am!"

He added that Catholic education "allows us to bridge this gap and get the broader picture that educates the total person".

The Catholic School's catechetical programme has four themes or 'moments'. Already passed was Families of Hope, held during the Month of Holy Souls in 2017, this week celebrates Families of Faith, followed by Families of Love in Lent and Families of Joy in April/May.

Waste Reduction measures welcome: Eco Congregations

Susan Gately

Every day in Ireland over 500,000 single use cups and 2.5 million bottles are disposed of through landfill and incineration. Eight million tonnes of plastic leaks into the ocean each year.

The Waste Reduction bill, progressing through the Dáil, aims to ban plastic cutlery / plates and establish a deposit/refund scheme (DRS) for glass, plastic and aluminium drinks containers.

Cutting down

"Anything that helps in the recycling and the disposal of waste in a way that is not damaging the environment or to the human community is good," said Sr Catherine Brennan SSL from Eco Congregations, "but we should be cutting down on all these things because there is a huge issue with waste."

Meanwhile the Conscious Cup Campaign which rewards people for switching to reusable cups is growing. Chains offering discounts include: Butler's Chocolate Cafe (10c), Costa Coffee (35c), Starbucks (35c) and Insomnia (10c). Full list on <https://consciouscup.ie>



160 YEARS of Healing & Celebration in Lourdes



COMMEMORATIVE EDITION

February 11 marks the 160th anniversary of the Marian Apparitions to St Bernadette. To celebrate Our Lady of Lourdes, *The Irish Catholic* newspaper will publish a commemorative edition on February 8 filled with information on the apparitions, St Bernadette and the miracles which have happened since.

Next week's edition of *The Irish Catholic* will feature:

- Accounts of the 1858 apparitions
- Papal visits to the Shrine with photographs
- Biography of St Bernadette
- Recounting the miracles attributed to Lourdes

Faith exploration at Knock



Knock Shrine have just confirmed a new programme of events for the spring/summer months! Events include a diverse and lively mix of workshops and retreats based on music, art, liturgy and family.

Event for the Feast of Fra Angelico

On Saturday 17th February, Fr Michael Dunleavy, OP will facilitate a talk entitled *'Stabat Mater Delorosa: A Day of Reflection on the Mother of Jesus at the foot of the Cross'*. This event is to mark the feast day of Fra Angelico which takes place the following day.

The talk will offer a unique interpretation of one of the most poignant moments in the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary using the art of Fra Angelico and music from Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater Delorosa*.

Day retreats

For those in need of some time-out or spiritual enrichment, the series of *'Quiet*



Days for Busy People' day retreats offer time for thought, prayer and contemplation. Each retreat will focus on a different theme to inspire participants on their faith journey. Retreats take place on the **24th February, 24th March and 28th April** in the Prayer Guidance Centre, Knock.

These events will take place in the Prayer Guidance Centre from 11am-3pm. Fee €30 includes lunch.

Easter preparation for parishes

with Colette Furlong **'Getting the Most out of Holy Week'** with Colette Furlong will take place on **Saturday 10th March**.

This workshop will explore the whole of Holy Week from Palm Sunday to Holy Saturday Morning as a time of personal reflection, but also as the busiest week

in parish life.

There will be helpful hints for Altar Societies, Ministers of the Word and Eucharist and for all who wish to enter into the week more deeply. Resources will be provided and parish groups are welcome.

Fun family day!

Sunday the 19th of August

Mark your diary for a special day here in Knock Shrine to celebrate all things family. Come and enjoy a day full of music, dance, art and crafts, games, fun workshops, and much more for all ages.

This event will be just one part of the National Novena to Our Lady of Knock which takes place from the 14th-22nd August and prior to the World Meeting of Families taking place in Dublin from the 21st-25th August 2018.

Further details to follow! See www.knockshrine.ie or contact the Youth Ministry / HUB on (094) 93 75321 or email: knockyouthministry@yahoo.ie

Choir workshop

'A Joy for all the World' is the official hymn for World Meeting of Families 2018, composed by young Irish composer Ephrem Feeley.

The hymn found its inspiration in the document *Amoris Laetitia* - the Joy of Love, written in 2016 by Pope Francis.

This workshop will provide choirs with music and resources to help them prepare for the World Meeting of Families 2018 and will take place on Wednesday, February 28th at 7.30pm.

Other upcoming events

Scripture summer school

● 13th - 17th June

Jesuit week / week of Ignatian spirituality

● 23rd - 31st July

To book a place at any of these events or to find out more, log onto www.knockshrine.ie

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'Art as a doorway to the Divine: workshop

with artist Róisín de Buitléar and poet John F. Deane' **Saturday 14th April**

Join Róisín de Buitléar as she shares the ideas, design process and development behind her commissioned work 'Pilgrimage' for Knock Basilica. The two glazed halls at the entrance to the Basilica were completed over a two year period in collaboration with the Shrine and award-winning Architects, A&D Wejcherts.

How a poem happens. How a poem works. What is inspiration? How to read a poem. How is it constructed, put together? Language. Imagination. What is the deep value of poetry, especially in a spiritual context? These questions will be addressed.

Using two of his own poems, John F. Deane will illustrate how a poem may be created, read and understood. The workshop will hope to offer new insights into poetry as a whole, inspiration, method, technique and outlook.

Participants will be easily encouraged to follow the process into a new awareness of reading and writing poetry, with a special emphasis, in this case, on a poetry of faith.

This event will take place at Knock House Hotel from 11am-4pm. Fee €30 includes lunch.



Róisín de Buitléar.



John F. Deane.



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Teresa Devlin

When a crisis occurs within families, parents tend to look to trusted advisors; the people who have given them good and sensible counsel in the past. An expanding contributory factor to the crises that can affect families is the internet.

The import of this is that if the Catholic Church wishes to support and assist families in ways that are relevant, priests and religious need to understand the myriad ways in which children can be and are being bullied, harassed or sexually exploited online. Primed with the requisite knowledge and information, people in various Church ministries can provide useful advice to anxious parents and to their children.

Being equipped to navigate the Internet safely allows families – parents and children – to enjoy all of the real benefits, while avoiding the risks, of being online.

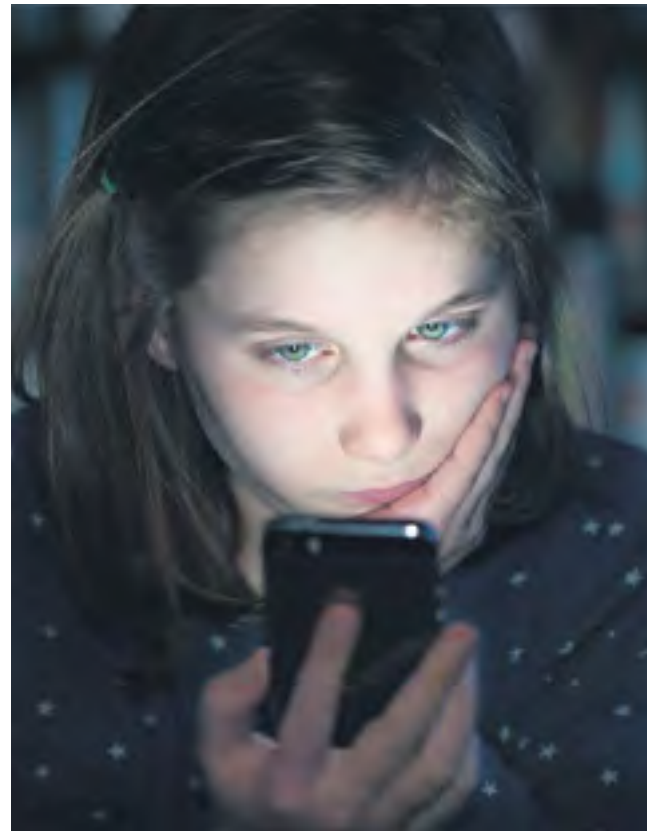
The internet is truly international and trans-global in its coverage and reach, and the Catholic Church cannot and need not attempt to tackle the cyber bullying, harassment and sextortion of children on its own.

Making the internet safer and the users of digital technology more knowledgeable are challenges that lend themselves to working in alliance with other like-minded organisations.

“We need an open and thorough discussion to build awareness, and to mobilise action”

This is not just the opinion of the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI); it is the view of the universal Church under the leadership of Pope Francis, reflected in the recent 'Declaration of Rome'. This comprehensive statement of concern and summons to act was developed and debated at a major International Congress held at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, between October 2 and 6, 2017. This event was organised by a small working group of Church personnel, NGOs, academics, business leaders, politicians, leaders in civil society, and those interested in safeguarding children online.

Child safety in the digital age



The 'Child Dignity in the Digital World' Congress website (www.childdignity2017.org) describes this innovative initiative as follows: “This global problem calls for a global solution. We need an open and thorough discussion to build awareness, and to mobilise action for a better protection of minors online.

“‘Child Dignity in the Digital World’ is the first world congress of its kind that brings together key stakeholders and international leaders from all relevant areas.”

Milestone

This pioneering congress hosted by the Centre for Child Protection at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome set a milestone in the international fight against digital sexual child abuse, providing a historic opportunity to set the global agenda for the fight against online sexual child abuse and for child protection in the digital world.

The 'Declaration of Rome' is detailed and ambitious, and it includes 13 calls to action. At the core of the declaration

is a determination that the Church will encourage and support all organisations and individuals that can have a positive impact – it requires that we build awareness, and that we mobilise action from every government, every faith, every company and every institution.

The declaration also commits the Catholic Church to make whatever internal changes are necessary to help protect children online.

Making an early start, The National Board co-hosted with the Irish branch of NOTA an event entitled Child Safeguarding and Digital Media-Practice and Challenges for Faith Groups in Ireland, in Maynooth on October 12 last. This Irish conference addressed the positive opportunities for children and young people that electronic communications offer, while highlighting the risks of digital media and ways of protecting young users against them.

What we know from experience, which was confirmed at the Maynooth conference,

is that those who plan to abuse children are constantly seeking new ways of grooming and inviting them to participate in abusive activities; and that we need to be constantly active in trying to counter their harmful and countering influence.

The National Board is working on a plan to improve child safety online, which includes clear guidance for use within the Catholic Church. We intend to continue to share our distinctive views with other key players, in order to influence a national debate on this important issue. We want to include children in this plan so that they become co-creators of the initiatives that will best protect them.

One paragraph from the 'Declaration of Rome' is particularly relevant:

Technology companies and government have shown leadership in this fight and must continue to innovate to better protect children. We must also awaken families, neighbours, communities around the world and children themselves to the reality of the internet's impact upon children.

“It is not just a Catholic problem, or a Church problem, or something that lurks unseen on the 'dark web'”

This article is the first step in letting you know that the risk of children's vulnerability to abuse when using the internet is a real and ongoing problem, but one that can be tackled and overcome.

It is not just a Catholic problem, or a Church problem, or something that lurks unseen on the 'dark web'. It is a macro challenge that has to be faced through international coalitions: and it is a micro challenge that needs to be understood and addressed in homes and families.

Working together, we can and will protect the children of Ireland and the world.

Teresa Devlin is CEO of the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland.

The Declaration of Rome can be accessed here: www.childdignity2017.org/fileadmin/downloads/press_releases/20170531/Child_Dignity_World_Congress_Declaration_ENG.pdf



Maria Steen

The View



Fighting against a eugenic reality

There have been exchanges during the week on Twitter and in the mainstream media in which those in favour of legalising abortion have decried those who are against it for trying to make the point that children with disabilities would be particularly vulnerable if the Eighth Amendment is repealed.

Down Syndrome Ireland even got involved, referencing the fact that the Love Both Project was using an image of a little girl with Down syndrome on campaign pamphlets.

They said: "This is very disrespectful to both children and adults with Down syndrome and their families. It is also causing a lot of stress to parents. People with Down syndrome should not be used as an argument for either side of this debate."

They continued: "We are respectfully asking both sides of the campaign debate, all political parties and any other interested groups to stop exploiting children and adults with Down syndrome to promote their campaign views."

A father of a girl with Down syndrome also wrote an article in the *Journal.ie* complaining along the same lines.

He is entitled to his view; but he seems to want to ignore – or be unable to accept – the fact that there are many other parents out there with children who have disabilities too, who do not feel the same way he does.

Families

As for Down Syndrome Ireland, one would think they might understand that not all people with Down syndrome are the same, nor are their parents and families.

There are many parents and family members of children with disabilities – not just Down syndrome – who are extremely concerned about the push to introduce unlimited abortion here, because they know that children like theirs will be the biggest casualty.

In fact, they are so concerned that they are willing to let their images be used to highlight the humanity of their children. Indeed, many people with disabilities themselves feel



the same way and are active pro-life supporters. They are entitled to use their own images as they see fit. They are entitled to campaign as free citizens in this country without a group that is supposed to have their interests at heart attempting to put a gagging order on them.

Trying to stop all people with Down syndrome and their families from exercising their democratic right to campaign is repressive and controlling. It is like the National Women's Council of Ireland saying: no images of women may be used in this campaign because there are women in our organisation who don't like it/ object to it.

“The doctors in Britain regarded her daughter as something of a curiosity”

Pro-life groups wish to support these people and their families and wish to ensure the protection of the law for all babies with disabilities so that they are not unfairly targeted because of their disability. The only way to ensure that would be to ban abortion on the grounds of disability, but of course those in favour of repeal will never agree to such a thing. Ultimately, they think that people should have the freedom to abort disabled babies as they wish.

This is why people with disabilities and their families are so concerned. They know that with the introduction of abortion on demand, which is what

the Oireachtas Committee has proposed, children with disabilities are particularly vulnerable. We only have to look at the statistics from around the world to see this: in Iceland 100% of babies with Down syndrome diagnosed prenatally are aborted, in Britain it is 90%, Europe-wide it is over 80%.

Their fear is that their children will grow up with fewer and fewer others like them. As isolated as they feel at the moment, this will only increase, as it becomes rarer and rarer to see a person with a disability that can be diagnosed prenatally. It isn't just children with Down syndrome who can be 'screened out', but also those with spina bifida, cystic fibrosis and a whole host of other anomalies and illnesses that can be spotted on an ultrasound monitor or other test.

As a friend who has a daughter with Down syndrome told me, another consequence of this is that the medical skills necessary to care for children with disabilities are in danger of being lost as fewer and fewer of these children are allowed to be born. She testified to the difference in culture between here and Britain, where she had lived for a while; the doctors there regarded her daughter as something of a curiosity and did not have the same knowledge or experience of the issues that sometimes arise with children who have Down Syndrome compared with here in Ireland.

There are those, like Fintan O'Toole of the *Irish Times*, who quibble over the figures and say that the percentages only

represent those children who were diagnosed in utero – obviously this is the case – why abort for a disability when you have no knowledge of it? But what he can't deny is the fact that whether it is 100% or 90% or 60%, these babies are far more likely than other babies to be killed in the womb. That is a fact. This is eugenics at work.

The Oireachtas Committee was clearly advised that government focus groups and research found that Irish people feel uncomfortable with the eugenic abortion of children, despite the fact

that the Citizens' Assembly (which was supposed to be representative) voted for abortion up to 22 weeks in the case of a non-fatal disability.

For that reason, in their recommendations, they made only one exception to their general rule that abortion should be freely available. They rejected disability as a stand-alone ground for abortion (which is different from banning abortion on the grounds of disability).

However, with abortion available on demand up to 12 weeks, and in reality up to birth where the woman

says her mental health is affected, people will be free to abort babies with disabilities without even having to cite it as a reason. This is what happens in Germany where the abortion law does not include disability as a ground.

Don't people with disabilities and their families have a right to campaign against this terrible attack on them and their rights? If they haven't a right to be born, how can they exercise any other rights and seek equality for themselves?

Róisín Ingle, campaigning for repeal, recently tweeted: "If you really do care about children and adults with Down syndrome you won't use their images to campaign." To which one might answer: "If you really do care about children – with or without Down syndrome – you won't campaign for the freedom to kill them before they're born."

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Hopeful for the future



Former UCD student president Katie Ascough talks to **Susan Gately** about winning the prestigious Westminster Award

One defining moment in Katie Ascough's life was when she held her dead baby brother in her hand. Her mother, Jaclyn, had miscarried at home. "I remember holding him in the palm of my hand and being shocked by his incredibly human details at just 13



Katie Ascough.

“I’m asking you to fight for your right to speak your mind. Fight for your right to have an opinion and live it fully and without fear”

weeks. He had fingernails and even creases on his knuckles. He had a full body and a face, with perfect little ears. He was so perfectly human, only small," she recounts.

Fortunately he was not her only sibling, and the lively Dublin girl grew up as

the "oldest of seven wild and wonderful children" to parents Tom and Jaclyn. In her late teens she went to University College Dublin to study science where she shot to fame as the surprise winner of the Students' Union presidential elections in March

2017, garnering 36% of first preference votes. It was a very unusual situation as Ascough was known to be pro-life and UCDSU had adopted a pro-choice mandate the previous November.

From that moment she said, she felt she was walking around with a "target on her back".

"From five minutes after I was elected, some students started calling for my impeachment because I was pro-life and it was some of those exact same students who led the impeachment process in October," she told *The Irish Catholic* this week.

The impeachment finally arose four months into her term. Ascough had promised to remain neutral on abortion, but felt she had to withdraw abortion information from the *Winging It* student magazine on the advice of the SU solicitor who said the distribution of the books was "almost certainly illegal".

"The core of it was that nobody should be forced to break the law against their will," she said.

Broken

Opponents insisted this was not the case. The information had been published before without legal consequences. Ascough had promised to remain neutral on the Eighth Amendment when elected, she had broken that promise they said.

Her impeachment in October 2017 endorsed their views, with 69% of the 6,600 ballots cast (20% of the possible electorate) voting to remove Ascough as president. During that time, little was heard from Katie Ascough herself. "It was a hectic time. From memory my focus was on the impeachment process, it was on UCD, it wasn't really my main objective to engage in

national news."

However, after her ousting as president, she put her side of the events to the public in one-on-one interviews with Pat Kenny and Marian Finucane. After a time away, in December she began to work for the Pro Life campaign (PLC).

The UCD impeachment remains a formative experience. The hardest thing, she says, was having erstwhile friends turn against her. "I understand that they were under pressure, there was a lot of misinformation."

Last Tuesday in London, Katie Ascough was awarded the Westminster Award for Human Life, Human Rights, and Human Dignity. "I don't know if I'd call it a vindication," she says. It was definitely a happy ending to the whole impeachment process and everything that went with it.

“Some students started calling for my impeachment because I was pro-life”

"I was blown away by the whole experience," she says, which included a tour of the Houses of Lords and Commons, tea in the Palace of Westminster, and addressing a group of around 50 people in the Committee Room of the House of Lords. Irish Catholic columnist Baroness Nuala O'Loan, Fiona Bruce MP, the chairperson of the All-Party Parliamentary Pro-Life Group in Westminster, and Lord David Alton also spoke.

Lord Alton, said Ms Ascough's example would inspire many to "stand for the rights of all the vulnerable, and insist on the space and liberty to work on campus

or in medicine with a clear conscience according to their best moral principles".

In response Ascough said she hoped the award would give "hope and inspiration to every single pro-life person who is out there - who is struggling to live out their pro-life views in a hostile environment".

To all those who feel belittled or silenced or oppressed for being pro-life - this award is for you, she said.

She concluded, "I'm asking you to fight for your right to speak your mind. Fight for your right to have an opinion and live it fully and without fear. Fight for that right for your friends and family now, and for the generations to come. We might not be able to stop the tragedy of abortion today or tomorrow or next year, but we can do our part to be heard, to be brave, and to be proud to be pro-life."

Speech

In her written speech Ascough described her biggest goal in life as a child - to "fit in" - wearing "matching bracelets, matching pyjamas" to her friends. "But imagine if we never grew out of it?" Yet, that type of conformity has an uncanny similarity to the public debate on abortion, she said.

While university culture remains strongly 'pro repeal' of the Eighth Amendment, she told *The Irish Catholic* that she sees hopeful signs for the future of free speech in universities. "People are starting to finally speak out. We've a long way to go but I've definitely seen more involvement with students on the life issue in the last few weeks and months. It has just been organic and really great to see. I do hope that it continues."

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Speaking up before the blow falls



We cannot be silent about aborting babies with disabilities, writes **David Quinn**

The issue of Down syndrome has featured fairly prominently in the abortion debate so far and is likely to feature more prominently in the weeks to come. The reason is simple; huge numbers of babies diagnosed with Down syndrome (DS) are aborted.

Denmark is a prime example. In Denmark, there is a national screening programme for disabilities like DS and almost every pregnant woman avails of it. When a woman is told her baby has DS, there is an average 98% chance that she will opt for an abortion, a horrifying statistic.

With very rare exceptions, the only babies with DS who are born in Denmark are those who were not screened while still in the womb. About 15% are not screened prior to birth.

Denmark and Iceland are the two worst examples in Europe, but Britain and France also have frighteningly high rates of abortion of children with DS.

Intervention

Last week, there was an important intervention in the abortion debate by Down syndrome Ireland, the major charity that helps people with DS and their parents.

The statement asked that the issue of DS be left out of the debate. It said: "We are respectfully asking both sides of the campaign debate, all political parties and any other interested groups to stop exploiting children and adults with DS to promote their campaign views.

"We would also like to remind campaigners on both sides of the debate that people with Down syndrome listen to the news and read media articles, including social media content. We ask that the tone of the debate is respectful towards all people



British actress Sally Phillips and her son, Olly, featured in *A World Without Down's Syndrome?* on BBC TV.

with disabilities."

In truth, this statement was really directed at pro-life advocates because pro-choice advocates have not raised the issue of Down syndrome at all. The reason they haven't is because it does not suit them. They do not want the public to know what is happening in countries like Denmark, Iceland and the UK.

How should the pro-life movement respond to the Down syndrome Ireland statement? Should we leave the issue of Down syndrome out of the debate? I don't believe we can, and very importantly neither do other parents of children with DS, and people who have DS themselves.

“People like Kevin are not here just to give us warm and cosy feelings during the Special Olympics”

For example, Anne Trainer, who has a son, Kevin, with DS, is extremely concerned that so many babies with this condition are being aborted internationally. She said so in an article in *thejournal.ie* last year.

She wrote: "I believe the debate on the Eighth Amendment needs to hear from families like mine. People like Kevin are not here just to give us warm and cosy feelings during the Special Olympics. Their lives matter. Their human right to life matters. Children like Kevin are facing extinction in

other countries."

Parents like Anne have every right to speak out in this debate, despite the statement from Down syndrome Ireland.

In Britain, there is a group called Don't Screen Us Out that consists of parents of children with DS and of people with DS, and they highlight the mass aborting of babies with Down syndrome.

There is another group called Down Pride, led by a Dutch woman named Renate Lindeman. It is similar in nature to Don't Screen Us Out.

A young woman with DS named Charlotte Fien has addressed a UN committee to object to aborting people like her.

A young man with DS, Frank Stephens, recently addressed a Congressional committee in the US on the same topic.

Other examples can be given. The point is that many parents of children with DS, and those who have DS themselves, do not object to the issue of Down syndrome being raised in abortion debates.

It will be countered that the Oireachtas abortion committee has not recommended that disabilities like Down Syndrome be a ground for abortion. This is true, but also misleading because it will not prevent the aborting of babies with non-fatal disabilities like DS.

In Germany, disabilities of any kind are not a specific ground for abortion but many children with disabilities are aborted in any case. They are aborted

of abortions take place), and after that on various grounds, including the mental health ground, theoretically right up to birth.

In the UK, roughly 97% of the almost 200,000 abortions which take place there each year are performed on grounds of 'mental health'. If a perfectly healthy baby can easily be aborted for this reason, so can a baby with a disability.

“In Denmark the overwhelming majority of babies with detectable disabilities are aborted”

In other words, don't be fooled into thinking that the aborting of babies with disabilities will be forbidden under the recommendations of the abortion committee. That is very far from being the case.

Also, don't be fooled into thinking that the 12-weeks cut-off for abortion on any grounds will be an obstacle

to aborting babies with disabilities. It will not. As mentioned, they are aborted in Germany under the 'mental health' ground.

Doctors like Peter Boylan say we ought to 'trust' doctors. Presumably he would consider Danish doctors to be trustworthy, and yet in Denmark the overwhelming majority of babies with detectable disabilities are aborted. Therefore, the 'trustworthiness' of doctors offers these babies no protection.

Finally, there are those who object to us saying that aborting the disabled is a form of eugenics. Eugenics means 'well born'. It is the philosophy which says that only those who are able of body and mind should be born. If aborting the disabled, precisely because of their disability is not eugenics, then nothing is. We cannot be silent about this. We have a moral duty to object.

David Quinn is author of *How we Killed God* (and other tales of modern Ireland). Publisher: Currach Press.

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"I see David Quinn and Breda O'Brien [of The Iona Institute] as a fundamental part of our democracy"
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- Sunday Times columnist, Brenda Power.

"My Blood was boiling watching David Quinn"
- Ray D'Arcy

Out&About

Priest praised for church fix



CORK: The community at St Joseph's Church, Castletown-Kinneigh, in the parish of Enniskeane and Desertserges, made a surprise and joy-filled presentation to their much loved Parish Priest Fr Tom Hayes, after Christmas Day Mass. This was in appreciation for all the work he has done in completing an extensive renovation of the church over the past year. Photo: Shane Cronin



KERRY: Catholic School Pobalscoil Chorca Dhuibhne celebrates the launch of Catholic Schools Week with Bishop Ray Browne. Pictured from the front left are Antóin Ó Braoin Séiplíneach, Hannah Ní Laoithe, Méabh Nic Gearailt and Hilary Ághas. From the back left: Tomás Kenny, an tEasbog Ray De Brún, Pádraig Firtéar Príomhoide, Ath Jim Sheehy, Maxime Ó Súilleabháin, Bethany Ní Mhaolrúnaigh, Bláithín Ní Shíthigh agus Pádraig Ó hAinniféin.



GALWAY: The Carmelite community of Nuns in Loughrea hosted a thanksgiving ecumenical service during the week of Prayer for Christian Unity led by Bishop John Kirby, Bishop of Clonfert and Rev. John Godfrey, Church of Ireland Pastor in Aughrim in Mount Carmel.



CAVAN: Dr Martin Mansergh at St Ernan's Church of Ireland, Kingscourt with Rev. Jim Hagan, Rev. William Steacy and Fr Gerry MacCormack pictured following the recent service to mark the week of prayer for Christian Unity.



FRANCE: Samantha Slater (second from left) from Ruhama, a Dublin-based charity that works with women affected by prostitution and trafficking, attends a conference in Paris with other international charities who ran unique campaigns featuring silhouettes of women with different names. Ruhama's video can be found at <https://youtu.be/9PmAxwFv4>

Edited by Chai Brady
chai@irishcatholic.ie



Events deadline is a week in advance of publication



DUBLIN: St Mary's Parish Church choir raised funds to help local schools, the parish and the Society of St Vincent DePaul during a concert featuring soprano Niamh Murray, accompanied by Charles Pearson on the organ and the Enniskerry Concert Choir.

SLIGO: Chaplains gather from the Christian Churches at Sligo University Hospital. Back row, left to right: Fr Brian Conlon, Fr Stan Kardas, Fr Brian Conway, Rev. Jeremy Nicholl, Archdeacon Isaac Hanna. Middle row: Domhnall Mc Loughlin, Grainne Mc Cann and Fr John Carroll. Front row: Sr Catherine Gilligan, Rev David Clarke and Maria White. Photo: Frances Muldoon.



INDIA: Children from West Bengal's Flame of Hope Home for Special Care Children with their new bikes provided by Mary Immaculate College students and staff during their annual service learning project. Pictured with Sr Ann Francesca and the children are: Cian O'Brien, Billy Stone, Jack Phelan, Sheila O'Callaghan, Fr Eamonn Conway, Dr Emer Ring and Kate Coke from Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.

IN SHORT

An invitation to all engaged couples

In the run-up to the feast of St Valentine, all engaged couples are invited to join at the 12 (noon) Mass in St Malachy's Church, Armagh on Sunday, February 11 for a special blessing.

Families and the wider parish community are invited to join on the day.

"It promises to be a special celebration as many young couples gather to pray for God's blessing at this

special time in their lives," according to organisers.

"The celebration will help couples to look forward to their wedding day and realise that the sacrament of marriage isn't a single moment but 'a reality that permanently influences the whole of their married life'."

Parish cell groups for all interested

An invitation has been extended to everyone to experience a cell meeting by

the Kildare Parish Cells of Evangelisation.

Parish Cell meetings are hosted on a fortnightly basis in Leixlip, Confey, Celbridge, Straffan and Newbridge in Co. Kildare.

The dates are: January 23, February 6 and 20, March 6 and 20, and April 10 and 24.

Further information can be found by contacting Bridie Clancy at 086 380 7917 or email: leixlipparishcells@gmail.com.

However family cell meetings – a cell meeting for parents/grandparents/expectant parents and

babies/toddlers – will be hosted in Our Lady's Parish Centre, Leixlip on Tuesdays from 1-2pm. Volunteers will lead the meeting, prepare refreshments and help with toddlers.

It is a space where families can reflect on scripture, pray and play. Meeting dates are: Jan 9 and 23, February 6 and 20, March 6 and 20, and April 10 and 24. Further information can be found by contacting Kate Cavanagh at 086 413 2511 or by email: leixlipparishcells@gmail.com, website: www.parishcellsireland.net.

ANTRIM

The 11th meeting the Creation Care Network will be in Lowe Memorial Presbyterian Church Hall, 191 Upper Lisburn Road on Saturday March 10, at 10am. Anyone interested in creation care is welcome to come and discuss or just listen.

ARMAGH

Eucharistic Adoration in St Malachy's Church daily from 6am to midnight, and all night on Wednesdays. Adoration chapel, Edwards Street, Lurgan, adoration on weekdays from 9am-9pm.

Lenten Retreat Day: A 'day with a difference' will take place in St Vincent de Paul Centre, Chapel Lane, on Tuesday February 27 from 10pm-2pm in preparation for the WMOF, with reflections on family life. Booking essential at Parish Office (028 37522813). Tea/coffee and light lunch provided.

CLARE

Pray and play has resumed at the Cathedral of Ss Peter and Paul in Ennis at 11.30am Mass on Sunday. If you want your children to learn about their faith in a safe, fun and supervised environment, we invite all children up to First Holy Communion ages.

Divine Mercy Chaplet prayer group meets every Tuesday in the Cathedral of Ss Peter and Paul in Ennis at 8pm in chapter room. There will also be a short Lectio Divina after the chaplet.

CORK

Life in the Spirit Seminar in Knockavilla Community Centre (Innishannon/Knockavilla parish). Introductory night on Friday February 2 at 7.30pm, followed by 7 weeks Life in Spirit Talks, every Friday, from February 9 to March 23 at 7.30pm. Tel. 087 4589133.

A pro-life Mass is held on the last Friday of every month at the Poor Clares monastery, College Road, at 7.30pm.

A meeting will be held on the forthcoming referendum on the Eighth Amendment in Macroom on Friday February 9 at 7.30pm in the Castle Hotel. Speakers include Alan Daveron and Joe Walsh who have travelled nationwide promoting awareness of the Eighth Amendment's importance.

Maria Vadia and Fr John Keane will lead a day of prayer, praise, worship and healing in Rochestown Park Hotel, Douglas on Sunday March 4, commencing at 9am and concluding with Mass at 5pm. Registration not required. Contact Celia on 087 2405568.

DERRY

Dungiven Parish: Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Monday to Friday, 8am-noon and 3-9pm.

A 'Celebration of Family' will take place in St Mary's College, Derry, on Saturday February 3, from 10am-6pm.

DUBLIN

Divine Mercy Devotions in the Church of Three Patrons, Rathgar every First Friday at 7pm. Mass, Benediction, chaplet and blessing with relic of St Faus-

tina. Confessions available.

The Dublin 15 Faith and Justice Group welcomes new members and currently meet on the first Friday of the month in Harts-town Church. Contact Fr Joe 087 6632944.

Our Lady of Knock prayer meetings take place on the last Thursday of every month in St Gabriel's Nursing Home, Glenayle Road, Raheny, from 8pm-9pm.

Our Lady of Lourdes Novena in the Oblate Parish of Mary Immaculate, Tyrconnell Road in Inchicore on February 2-11, Monday to Friday Mass 10am, Novena service 7pm. On Saturday 10: Mass and anointing of the sick at 11am and Sunday 11 a torchlight procession following 7pm Mass.

FERMANAGH

A Mass to St Peregrine for all the sick is prayed each Wednesday evening in St Patrick's Church, Derrygonnelly at 7.30pm. www.churchservices.tv/derrygonnelly

KERRY

Share The Living Word of God: A six-week programme of prayer and reflection, creating a presentation and giving talks and reflections to one another on Tuesday January 23 and 30 from 7.30pm to 9pm, and Tuesday, February 6, 13, 20 and 27 from 7.30pm to 9pm in the Ardferret Retreat Centre.

KILDARE

A centring/contemplative prayer group meets in the Old Baptist-ry of St Michael's parish church in Athy every Thursday at 8pm. For more info ring Dolores at 086-3474679.

LOUTH

A Centre Prayer Meeting is held at Mount Oliver (near Ballymascanlon, Dundalk) every Wednesday evening at 7.30pm. Contact 00353 863623361 from Northern Ireland or 0863623361 from ROI.

The Rosary will be prayed for the protection of life every Saturday at 3pm at The Square Dundalk.

ROSCOMMON

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament at St Croan's Church, Ballymoe, every Monday 10-11am and Thursday 8-10pm. Also at St Bride's Church, Ballintubber, every Wednesday 7.30-8.30pm.

SLIGO

Latin Mass in Carraroe church on the last Sunday of each month at 3pm.

WICKLOW

Midweek Lenten study programme begins February 21 with a penitential prayer service in thanksgiving for the gift of the earth, and an introduction led by Archdeacon Rountree and Fr Kennedy.

Eucharistic adoration, St Mary and Peter Church, Arklow, every Tuesday & Friday 2-7pm & Sunday 2-5pm.

St Patrick's Prayer Meeting on Thursday evenings at 8pm in the De La Salle Pastoral Centre, Wicklow. Come for prayer, scripture, music and a cuppa.

World Meeting of Families countdown is underway!

With the World Meeting of Families 2018 (WMOF2018) fast approaching the countdown has begun as parishes make plans to celebrate the historic occasion from August 21 to 26, now just months away.

It's been just under 40 years since a Pope has visited Ireland, and hopes are high that Pope Francis will be able to make the trip to Dublin. The Vatican is expected to confirm his attendance in the coming weeks, but all indications are that if his health maintains he will be the first Pope in Ireland in the 21st century.

The Irish Catholic will be running a weekly update on the preparations and events already taking place in each diocese across Ireland.



Singers from the choirs of St Flannan's and Colaiste Muire perform during Mass at the launch of Catholic School's Week 2018 (CSW18) in St Flannan's College, Ennis. Celebrating Mass, Bishop Fintan Monahan notes the connection between CSW18, and the World Meeting of Families. Photos: John Kelly

WMOF2018 is an opportunity for a renewal of family and Faith in the Church



Fr Arnold Rosney

“There is no family that is ideal. Plates fly in every family. There are however great families who struggle, at times heroically. The celebration of a World Meeting of Families would be hypocritical were it to be a celebration that ignored this struggle.” These words from Archbishop Diarmuid Martin rightly set the context for the World

Meeting of Families, which will take place in Dublin from August 21 to 26. The world meeting is the ninth such gathering, held every three years since it was established in 1994 by St John Paul II.

Pope Francis has chosen the city of Dublin and Ireland to host the meeting in 2018. We pray the Holy Father will have the health and strength to walk amongst us for this exciting event. And for the Church in Ireland? I believe it is a wonderful God-given opportunity to renew family and faith in the Church.

Killaloe programme of parish preparation

In preparation for the meeting Pope Francis wrote a beautiful and inspiring letter entitled 'Amoris Laetitia - The Gospel of the Family, Joy for the World'. In nine chapters the Pope

offers a series of reflections on the family: the Joy of Love in the Gospel, Experiences and Challenges of Families, Love in Marriage, Pastoral Perspectives and Journeying with Weakness.

The national preparation in Ireland has well and truly begun and I would like to acknowledge the leadership from the World Meeting Office in Dublin.

In the Killaloe diocese we established a steering group comprising of laity to see how we can support families in our parishes. The mission of the team is to build on the wonderful work already taking place, and develop it for the future in the areas of family, life, and evangelisation.

What worked well and continues to be simple initiatives tailored to families.

Events like 'Baby Jesus Sunday' in Advent, resources for Christmas and Holy Family, celebrating Baptisms, Confirmation and First Holy Communion Masses. Recently, we prepared a Confirmation booklet for all schools and parishes focusing on the family meeting. We continue to support parishes and groups in celebrating family and Faith.

From the perspective of social media we established Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram feeds, and every month we produce an e-newsletter with world meeting updates.

The introduction of the 'Amoris programme' for the Church in Ireland afforded us the opportunity to visit the clusters in the diocese, and to encourage them to engage with the online resources and the family conversation. We began by

hosting a conference on the family with speakers such as Maria Steen (Iona Institute), Fr Harry Bohan, Martin Kennedy and Killaloe Youth Forum with over 150 in attendance.

We celebrated a liturgical launch in every parish celebrating our diocesan family. Since then many of our parishes have hosted family events celebrating anniversaries and significant moments and continue to do so.

In the coming months the Icon of the Holy Family will visit the diocese and reside in the parishes of Kilkee, Ennis, and Birr from July 2-12th. These are just some of the many events we have and are celebrating.

World Meeting and reality of family life

In preparing for the world event, I was struck by the different realities in our diocese.

From depopulation, to the busyness of family life, financial worries, the challenges of keeping a teacher in a school with falling pupil numbers, to the demand for entry in urban centre schools, lack of sufficient broadband, the social problems facing young people, the danger of losing the post office, or Garda station, or local doctor, and a feeling that some places are forgotten.

On the other hand, I rejoiced at the huge involvement of so many in our parishes.

Those who live their Faith through music ministry, readers and Eucharistic ministers, leadership roles, pilgrimages to Taize, Lourdes, Knock, Croagh Patrick, involvement in John Paul II awards, St Vincent de Paul, Trócaire and so much more.

And of course not forgetting our young people who bring a dynamic to parish ministry that keeps us forever young.

Therefore, if the family meeting achieves anything, I hope it will re-invent and reinvigorate what it means to be community in Killaloe. If community is anything it's family, and the local Church has a very important part to play in this task.

A Church that offers a message of hope and life to our families who gather with us on a Sunday and are looking for something more than the world is offering.

We have not just a good news story to share, we have a great news story to share for ourselves and another. To

be with the sheep and smell like them, to walk with the story of family, to share the joys and hopes, the trials and tribulations. To point out that God walks with each of us in our stories.

I believe this message is central to the celebration of the World Meeting of Families 2018 and is offered to our Christian communities from the beautiful Loop Head Peninsula across the Shannon to the Slieve Bloom Mountains in Offaly.

I encourage you to be part of this exciting journey for our families. Come and see!

Fr Arnold Rosney is Killaloe Diocesan Director for the World Meeting of Families 2018. Twitter @KillaloeDiocese, email: WMOF2018@killaloeDiocese.ie

Please contact World Meeting of Families correspondent Chai Brady with photos, news or articles relating to your parish or diocese's WMOF2018 preparations and events for inclusion in the weekly update:

email chai@irishcatholic.ie • 01 6874020
Twitter @ChaiBradyIC



Day for consecrated life: reflecting Christ's light to the world

In 1997, Pope St John Paul II instituted a day of prayer for women and men in consecrated life. This celebration is attached to the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord on February 2. The Feast is also known as Candlemas Day, the day on which candles are blessed symbolising Christ who is the light of the world. So too, those in consecrated life are called to reflect the light of Jesus Christ to all peoples.

Pope Francis sees the role of men and women religious as transforming the world with their radical call to consecrated life. Perhaps because he is a Jesuit, religious have taken on a central role in his ministry and the Pontiff rarely travels overseas without scheduling at least one meeting with religious. During these encounters, Francis encourages religious to embrace their character and bring Christ to the world – particularly what he describes as the existential margins.

The Pope clearly enjoys the encounters which usually take place in the context of a dialogue where he explores the joys and the hopes, the sorrows and despair of religious life in the contemporary Church.

Cheerfulness and hope, for Francis, are the cornerstone of religious life.

During a recent visit to Peru, he said that laughter is the best medicine for religious men and women to overcome the temptation of feeling too important or being too busy to serve others.

A joyful self-awareness can help those in religious life to not “slack in the work of evangelisation” and keep clear from a Messiah complex, the Pope told priests, seminarians and men and women in consecrated life from various parts of Peru.

Spiritual ability

“Yes, learning to laugh at ourselves gives us the spiritual ability to stand before the Lord with our limitations, our mistakes and our sins, but also our successes, and the joy of knowing that he is at our side,” the Pope said during the January 20 meeting

However, he also told them “to laugh in community and not at the community or at others.”

Pope Francis offered two prescriptions for laughing at oneself. First, “talk to Jesus and Mary” and ask for “the grace of joy” he said, and second, “look at yourself in the mirror”.

His remark was followed by laughter and applause, then someone in the audience shouted, “narcissism”. Not missing a beat, the Pope added: “And this is not narcissism. On the contrary, it’s the opposite. Here the mirror serves as a cure.”

In his speech, the Pope said religious men and women must be marked by joy and gratitude, “which enlarges the heart and inspires us to service”.

“When the young talk with elderly priests and religious and ask them questions, ‘their eyes will shine, and they will begin to dream’”

The faithful, he added, “have a sense of smell” that allows “them to distinguish a functionary of the sacred from a grateful servant.”

“The people of God are patient, but they also know who serves and heals their wounds with the balm of joy and gratitude,” the Pope said.

Priests, seminarians and consecrated men and women are also called to be signs of communion and unity, which means to discern what everyone has to offer while respecting each other’s differences.

In doing so, they can

distribute the gifts they have received “while being enriched by that of others”.

“We must be on guard against the temptation of the ‘only child,’ who wants everything for himself, because there is no one to share it with,” Pope Francis said.

“Try to care for your brothers and sisters; try to keep them happy, because happiness is contagious,” the Pope said.

Urging his listeners to look to their roots and be “people of memory”, he told them to recall the moment when they felt God looking at them and calling them.

They should not only pray, but should sit and “let God look at you”, he said. “The most valuable thing a religious has is the gaze of the Lord.”

Greatest memory

Elderly priests and religious are “the people of greatest memory”, Pope Francis said.

“It is important that our communities keep memory alive and that there be dialogue between the youngest and the oldest,” he said.

Saying that older people sometimes feel abandoned, he urged his listeners to send young priests, sisters and seminarians to talk to elderly priests and bishops.

“They say nuns don’t age because they are eternal,” he added, to laughter.

When the young talk with elderly priests and religious and ask them questions, “their eyes will shine, and they will begin to dream”, he said.

Paraphrasing the prophet Joel, he added: “And if the young make the old dream, I assure you that the old will make the young prophesy. Care for your roots.”



The wider human family – what it takes and what it gives

Hugh MacMahon SSC

Celebrating 100 years of Columban mission

Living together in harmony as a family, with its day-to-day stresses, provides its own challenges but living together with people from different cultural, social and generational backgrounds adds another layer of demands.

Now many religious and missionaries are coming to realise that it is well worth the effort. Painful lessons are being learnt in the process but it opens up new possibilities and unexpected benefits.

In the house where I am living there are five Chinese students, one Korean and myself so I am learning on a daily basis what inter-cultural living means.

None of my companions are Columbans though they are in Ireland because they are sponsored by the Columban Fathers to do studies in theology and counselling. Four are priests and two are not.

All of them can either speak English or are at language school so that solves most of the language problems. The fact that I speak Korean and some Chinese helps. The majority of them are Chinese and enjoy cooking so that also solves the meals problem. However they are surprised that I sometimes eat ice cream after a warm meal. It does not make sense in Chinese thinking.

Opportunities

Living together provides opportunities to experience such cultural differences while getting an inside view on events in other parts of the world. But the greatest benefit is having your thinking challenged by someone coming from a completely different tradition and in having to explain your own world to them.

I was not long in the community before I was asked why Ireland has changed so much. In China and Korea, amongst Catholics at least, Ireland has long been seen as an exemplary Christian country, producing many courageous Catholics and missionaries despite its historical struggles.

Now Chinese students coming to Ireland hear of unthinkable changes. What has happened? I had to explain that I have been out of the country for most of my life and am still trying to understand what has happened myself.



The Dublin Catholic Chinese community outing in Myshall, where St Columban was born.



The Columban House in Maynooth village.

But I have also been forced to start looking for better answers.

Social changes aside, watching the Chinese and Koreans behaving so reverently at prayer and liturgies makes me conscious of how casual we have become in many of our religious attitudes.

“The basic message of Christianity is quite simple so their questions make me wonder why we get so worked up over words”

They have a strong sense of the presence of sacred and show their respect by their gestures, attentiveness to ritual, wearing the correct vest-

ments and observing silence.

In our casual conversations they discuss their difficulties with Western theological thinking and ask me to explain some of the carefully nuanced philosophy-based language they have to read.

The basic message of Christianity is quite simple so their questions make me wonder why we get so worked up over words and insist on precise distinctions in language few use today.

Previously I never questioned the fact that non-Europeans have to learn English and Latin terminology, as well as the Western way of thinking, in order to understand the God of Scripture. From our after-supper chats I get some idea of their own ways of thinking about God and spirituality but wouldn't it be great if they were speaking from their own terminology and logic?

Back on a more mundane

level, the way the whole group gets enjoyment out of preparing a meal together and how festive celebrations often revolve on making or cooking dumplings as a group, reminds me of how community-centred they are. They are also naturally considerate of others. The Irish used to be more involved in each other's celebrations and activities but now we do things on our own or in twos.

“Contact with the non-Western world gives people a chance to break out of narrow thinking”

The community I am living with is not strictly Columban and Columbans are not traditionally community-minded in the sense of living together.

When they were founded exactly 100 years ago the



members were all Irish and though they soon welcomed candidates from the US, the UK and Australia, these shared the same language and had similar backgrounds.

They also worked mainly in parishes that were often a day or two's walk from each other so community living was not a priority. However thirty years ago they began to accept applicants from the countries in which they worked so now there are members from the Philippines, Chile, Peru, Fiji and even China.

They discovered that working and living together constructively does not happen naturally or overnight. People with different backgrounds, not to say individual preferences, will take on the challenge of living and working together only when they share a clear purpose and have had some training in overcoming the practical difficulties.

Effort

The effort is one worth making, for missionaries at least. They go abroad to Myanmar, Pakistan or China to share their Christian hope with people who have completely different approaches to life so the opportunity to live and learn together is a good start. It can also be a sign, in

regions where there are racial or religious tensions, that peacefully living together cross-culturally is possible and beneficial.

Back in a country like Ireland, contact with the non-Western world gives people a chance to break out of the narrow thinking that an insular society like ours can get caught up in. There are two sides to every story but unless you hear the other side, you think there is only one.

Even if a long-term stay abroad is not in your plans, you can join in mind-broadening experiences.

Program

One program that the Columbans sponsor is AITECE, an opportunity for people with a third-level degree and some teaching experience or ability to spend a year in a Chinese university sharing their interests and English-speaking skills with Chinese students and getting a sense of what China has to offer in return. (See www.aitece.ie)

Then there are mission magazines such as *The Far East*, the possibility of going as a lay missionary for a short period or taking up the challenge of becoming a fulltime international missionary and getting the cross-cultural training that requires.

We know from experience that we learn more about ourselves and the world by living as part of a family than we would on our own, but even more can be learnt by being part of a 'family' with members from different cultures, national histories and backgrounds.

Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles

“Live in the most intimate union with God. Do not forget His presence in your lives, but bring Him with you wherever you go, into the heart of your work.” – Fr A Planque, OLA Founder.



The call to Consecrated Life has always been and remains today a radical call to respond in a very particular way to the God of love.

There are many forms of Consecrated Life, each one with its own specific identity or 'spiritual DNA'.

The Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles (OLA) is an international group of religious women. The congregation was founded by Fr. Augustine Planque, SMA in 1876 for the formation, education and the betterment of the life of the African woman and girl child.

The image of Mary with the Apostles in the Upper Room at Pentecost forms the basis of our 'Cenacle Spirituality'. Our motto is 'With Mary the Mother of Jesus'.

“Mary is for us the ideal model: a woman of faith and prayer; a strong, humble woman, ready to serve and full of hope.”

Mary is for us the ideal model: a woman of faith and prayer; a strong, humble woman, ready to serve and full of hope.

We entrust all we do to Mary. We draw strength and inspiration from the experience of Our Lady with the women and the Apostles in the Upper Room, who were filled with the love,



Sr. Maura Cranney on Mission in Africa



joy and energy of their Pentecost experience. Following their example, we strive to be signs of hope for all peoples to whom we are sent

Sr Maura Cranney answered God's call to be a 'sign of hope' for others by joining the OLAs soon after turning 18 years of age. She has worked as a teacher for many years in Ghana and Tanzania. Reflecting on her commitment to Consecrated Life, Sr Maura has no regrets about the path she chose as a teenager.

"Life has not always been easy but it has been fulfilling and satisfying. If a lay movement had been available to a younger me, would I have made that choice instead? I think not. The energy that has strengthened and empowered me all

these years lies in the love of God deep within my own being and my feeble response to it. This has been encouraged and enabled to deepen and grow by the companionship found within the communities of the Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles. The call of God was not only to serve His people but to a way of life that asked for total giving. The years have confirmed that any giving is returned a hundred fold, pressed down and flowing over."

Like Sr Maura, Tyrone native **Sr Dolores Kearney** also spent some years on mission in Ghana and Tanzania. Sr Dolores is currently on mission in Nigeria. Next month, she will mark 50 years of being a 'sign of hope' for others.

“I believe that God has carved me in the palm of His hand. God is constantly knocking at that door, encouraging me to follow in His way.”

"I have worked as a nurse in Ghana, Tanzania, Nigeria and Ireland since my first profession in 1968. The thoughts of retiring have never crossed my mind. Last year, I began a new mission at the OLA Formation House in Ibadan, Nigeria. I am here as a witness, and to offer my support to the young women who are discerning their call in life. Starting a new mission at this stage of my life is a big challenge. However, in the knowledge of God's deep love for me, I feel very secure. I believe that God has carved me in the palm of His hand. God is constantly knocking at the door, encouraging me to

follow in His way. Am I answering this call? Yes, to some extent but I have a lot more to do!"

For **Sr Eithna Synott**, her relationship with God also forms a central part to living-out her calling in life.

"I qualified as a medical doctor in 1979. Two years later, I crossed the shores to Africa. There was a great need for my medical skills where I was sent. These needs were sometimes beyond even what I learnt in medical school. The Divine Physician was called on a lot!

"I came home in 1993. Since my return I have been fund-raising for our mission projects. I have also worked in an A&E, been medic to the Mourne

Mountain Rescue team, doctor to groups climbing Mount Kenya and Kilimanjaro. In my capacity as a doctor, I have had the privilege of accompanying groups to Lourdes on many occasions.

"There is still a great trust in Religious. I am often asked by those I encounter to remember their intentions in prayer. These people know you are there for them and find our presence reassuring.

"Cenacle Spirituality gives me faith in myself because I know I have God beside me. I can relate to the chaos that must have prevailed among the Apostles following Good Friday. After a busy day, there is something very reassuring about spending time with the Lord in the Upper Room."



Sr Eithna Synott



Sr Dolores Kearney with OLA Novices at the OLA Formation House in Ibadan, Nigeria

CONTACT US:

vocations@olairland.ie

info@olairland.ie

www.olairland.ie

“May the World Day of Consecrated Life be a timely occasion to rediscover the centrality of Jesus in our lives.” – Pope Francis.

Capuchin Franciscan Friars



Brothers of the People

As Capuchin Franciscan Friars we are called to be 'Brothers of the People', men of reconciliation, forgiveness and peace, who live the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ by following the life of St Francis of Assisi.

Since our very foundation we Capuchins have been known as 'Brothers of the People'. This is a title that means a lot to us and in many ways unites our core spiritual gifts of fraternity, minority and detachment very well. These gifts provide the framework for our way of life, namely to be brothers in mission who seek to respond to the needs of others whatever and wherever they may be.

Towards the end of his life, our founder Saint Francis of Assisi directed the Friars to be open to discovering what God wanted them to do and as a result of this, Capuchins have continued to find new and, often creative ways, to be close to the people of God.

“Capuchins have continued to find new and, often creative ways, to be close to the people of God.”

At the beginning of the Year of Mercy Pope Francis brought the earthly remains of Capuchin Saints, Padre Pio and Leopold Mandic who were famous for their devotion to the Sacrament of Reconciliation / Ministry of the Confessional to Rome declaring them patrons of the year

and apostles of Mercy. Over 5,000 Capuchins from all over the world came to Rome for this event. When the Pope addressed the assembled Friars he reminded all Capuchins that we are called to be men of reconciliation, forgiveness and peace.

Everyday we try to live up to this call. In fact these three attributes are intrinsic to everything that we do as Capuchin Friars. We aim to carry the seeds of reconciliation, forgiveness and peace with us into our fraternities and into our ministries.

Anchor point

Our daily lives vary so much it is always important for us to have an anchor point that keeps us grounded and stable. For us as Capuchins, that anchor point is prayer. Although we actively serve in various ministries, we are contemplatives at heart. Our time spent in prayer each day, keeps us rooted and plugged into the Presence of God. It allows us to bring the people and experiences of our ministries to God and it allows us to open more to God's presence in and through our ministries. In all of our fraternities

We aim to carry the seeds of reconciliation, forgiveness and peace with us into our fraternities and into our ministries.

we come together morning and evening for meditation and prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. We also celebrate Eucharist daily as a family gathered around the table of the Lord.

These simple acts unite us with the Lord and with one another as brothers.

As Spring begins the Church sets aside some time for us to reflect upon Consecrated life and each year when this time comes around we face new challenges. However there is a constant; that God is with us. Saint Francis came to realise in his own life the importance of this constant presence of

Love and how by operating from a place where we are open to what this brings can, and will, transform not only us, but the entire world.

Our mission

As Capuchin Franciscan Friars we are called to be 'Brothers of the People', men of reconciliation, forgiveness and peace, who live the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ by following the life of St Francis of Assisi. We do this in many ways dependent upon our own skills and talents. We minister as chaplains in hospitals, hospices and even a shopping centre! We provide spiritual support through our nine Friaries in Ireland. We have Irish Friars serving as missionaries in South Africa, Zambia, South Korea, New Zealand and Western



America. We provide practical support to the poor and homeless through the work of the Capuchin Day Centre in Dublin and the Kilkenny Food Project. We support the Catholic education of the students in St Francis College Rochestown, a school we founded in 1884. But in all these ministries the important thing for us as Capuchins is not so much what we do, but rather how we do what we do, living as brothers in a spirit of Gospel peace and joy.

Year of Capuchin Vocation

In September 2017 at Knock shrine we launched a 'Year of Capuchin Vocation'. This dedicated year is an opportunity for us as Capuchins to reflect on our own way of life and to help us keep the Gospel flames burning brightly within our fraternities and

to invite others who may be interested in our way of life to get in touch. We ask you to keep us in your daily prayers.

If you would like to know more about what's going on in the Capuchin world, look out for our quarterly publication 'Capuchin Connection' that's distributed free of charge through all our Friaries and Churches. You are also welcome to visit our website www.capuchinfranciscans.ie or to follow us on Facebook or Twitter.

Brother Martin Bennett OFM Cap.

Vocations Promotor & Coordinator of Vocations Ministry for the Irish Capuchin Franciscan Friars.

E-mail: capuchinvocation@gmail.com





Our next vocations weekend takes place from **February 9-11, 2018**. Contact Sr Sarah at: vocations@glencairnabbey.org · For more details visit our website: glencairnabbey.org



The Cistercians at Glencairn Abbey... following in the way of St Benedict

St Mary's Abbey, Glencairn is the only Cistercian monastery for women in Ireland. Our monastery is located in the Blackwater Valley, about three miles upstream from Lismore, Co. Waterford.

At the heart of the monastic life is the search for God. We seek God and follow Christ in a life of prayer and community, solitude and simplicity, work and hospitality.

We follow the Rule of St Benedict, an ancient source of monastic wisdom that continues to guide many people in search of an authentic spiritual path in today's world.

The sisters came to the diocese of Waterford and Lismore from Staplehill Abbey in Dorset, England on March 10, 1932. We have been a praying presence in the diocese for 86 years, meeting seven times each day in the Abbey Church where the full liturgical Office is chanted, as well as the celebration of daily Mass.

Glencairn offers a place of prayer and hospitality to all who come. We have a small guest house and are in the process of constructing a new guest house and hospitality centre.

Hospitality

We welcome school groups, parish groups, senior citizens and youth groups. All are invited to share in the community prayer and hospitality.

The purpose of our monastic community is to love and follow Christ guided by the Rule of St Benedict. Each sister has set out on a spiritual journey, a journey towards deeper union with Christ, a journey from forgetfulness of Christ

Sr Liz's story...

I entered Glencairn on the Feast of the Epiphany 2013 at 40 years of age – obviously a late vocation. In truth God had been calling a long time but my answer was always no.

I come from a traditional catholic family but had drifted from the church in my late teens; mostly I still went to Mass (less hassle than explaining why not) and I didn't pray. I think I still believed that God existed but he was irrelevant in my life. I wanted to be self-sufficient.

After college I worked in IT which challenged me and was busy. However, I wasn't motivated by career or money or possessions. I'm not saying that as a virtue, I just wasn't. Marriage or family too just never seemed to be for me. I was drifting through life.

In my late 20s I realised how empty my life was and in one moment, I knew that God adored me and he was the answer to my need. I began to pray and read and go to daily Mass and frequent Confession. I didn't join prayer groups or the like, I've never been much of a joiner.

While God was now a huge part of my life, it didn't still have a plan. The thought about religious life kept lurking but to me Nuns were the teachers and Nurses and missionaries, certainly not introverted computer

to mindfulness of Christ, a journey from sin to grace, from confusion and disorder to purity of heart, a journey from the ego to the real self, a journey from a self-centred life to a Christ-centred life, from a secular culture to a faith culture.

Today there are 29 sisters in the community at St Mary's Abbey, Glencairn. Most of the community are from Ireland. We also have sisters from

programmers! God really should call 'suitable' people!

I resolutely avoided thinking about the matter and continued drifting. But God persists. I never visited a convent or monastery but was familiar with Mount Mellary from hill walking and knew they had nuns too so I went there to see. And there, I saw ordinary men praising God together as best they could and I thought "I could do this". Admittedly, not the highest motivation but it was my 'yes'.

Real purpose

So I visited Glencairn, attracted by the Divine Office, the balance of the life (work and prayer), the beauty of the place, the kindness of the sisters and that they had a real purpose in praising God and praying for the world. I'd already procrastinated enough and knew I was coming. It was all grace. Giving up the work which I'd depended on for so long for security was surprisingly easy. And I had no idea what I'd do if it didn't work out but that I couldn't go back to my old life.

My family and friends was supportive once they got over the 'bombshell' as Mama called it. Needless to say, they didn't see me as someone who'd 'join the nuns' any more than I did.

Japan, America, India, the United Kingdom and Uganda.

We work to earn our living in various work areas: the manufacture of Eucharist Bread, the production of cards, garden and farm work.

All aspects of our life – silence, solitude, lectio divina, study, care of the earth, simplicity of life, vegetarian diet – contribute to building up a faith community centred on the search for God.

Sr Angela's story...

I was born and grew up in Dublin in a large Catholic family, there are seven of us, and I am the youngest girl. My parents have great faith and this was a big influence on us as we grew up and still is.

However, like most young people of that time, almost all of us fell away from any real practice of our faith once we left home. I have no doubt that my parents' constant prayer for me has played a huge part in my path to monastic life and growing relationship with God. I admire them and am so grateful; they have never stopped questioning and growing in their faith. Now we have great chats!

After finishing school I studied for a degree in environmental biology at University College Dublin and followed this with a master's degree in similar studies in Aberdeen, Scotland. I had always been interested in the natural world, caring for

my head; in fact nothing could have been further from my mind. I assumed that one day in the not too distant future I would get married like my siblings. In my late twenties I became interested in working with people, I had begun to volunteer at a homeless centre in Dublin at the weekends and I loved it.

I took a year out to work abroad as a volunteer with disadvantaged children and families in a small village in rural Poland. This was a life changing experience for me and when I returned home I began to look for work in the caring professions. I was fortunate to get work in the homeless services in Dublin.

For the first time in my life I felt I was doing something really meaningful, helping other people gave me inner strength.

Seeing their great poverty and struggles I began to question more and more the harsh, consumerist society I found myself living in where everything seemed to

as insight meditation or nowadays as mindfulness. This practice helped me through an especially low period in my life, it helped me to connect with something deeper within me. I attended retreats and workshops and began a daily practice. However during one very memorable retreat I realized clearly that although I loved the wisdom of the Buddha that this was not the path for me.

I found that I simply couldn't turn my back on this person, Jesus, this friend from my childhood who had given his life for me even though at the time I had little understanding of what this meant. A deep desire to know him and a love for him grew in my heart. I began to explore my faith with great enthusiasm and a sense of discovery and excitement. I attended Mass again.

I was led to a Christian spiritual centre near my home. I began to read and to pray daily. I knew quite quickly that I would dedicate my life to this wonderful discovery. The desire to belong to a praying community grew and grew.

“Looking back over this journey I can now clearly see God's guiding hand in it all”

From there it was simply a matter of God placing Glencairn under my nose in the form of an article in the weekend newspaper! A monastic experience weekend was coming up. I emailed Sr Sarah and we agreed that I would attend.

After several visits and an extended live-in during which I was supported in the discernment of my vocation, I entered the community at Glencairn.

Looking back over this journey I can now clearly see God's guiding hand in it all, leading me, and creating a desire for him in my heart. It has been an amazing and also challenging journey so far. I have a great sense of fulfilment here. Monastic life at Glencairn has all I need to be happy, all that I had been searching for in my life. I am very happy here and so grateful to God for this wonderful gift of a monastic vocation.

revolve around getting and spending in a never ending circle, and happiness often sought in fleeting pleasures. I wondered about other ways to live.

Ever since childhood I had desired to live in the countryside. When a suitable job came up in Kilkenny I moved to a small village several miles from the city. The slower pace of life suited me. I had time for walks in nature, for reading and solitude. I began to slow down.

I became interested in meditation, specifically Buddhist Vipassana meditation – also known



the environment and living in harmony with the world around me. I imagined I would become a Greenpeace activist...saving the whales or such like!

I worked in the area of science for several years after obtaining my qualifications, in Scotland and later returning to Ireland. I enjoyed the work very much. I had always loved the sense of excitement and discovery that comes with the Sciences.

Like all young people I had plenty of friends, an active social life, relationships, holidays. Religious life never entered



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With photographs by Valerie O'Sullivan



A Year in the Life: Glencairn Abbey portrays the colour and variety of life in a female religious community. Nestled in the rich heartland of County Waterford, the Sisters of St Mary's Abbey live out their days through work and prayer, following the Rule of St Benedict. There is a true mysticism and rhythm to their daily life, which is intertwined with the seasons of nature and liturgies of the year. The proceeds from this book go towards the Abbey's building project.


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St. Mary's Abbey
Glencairn

World Report



Edited by Chai Brady
chai@irishcatholic.ie

IN BRIEF

Cameroon cardinal decries violence as Church burnt

● A Cameroonian cardinal has spoken out against the recent use of military violence in the country's Southwest Region against English-speaking separatists, saying local forces need to respect human life. "You don't bring peace by violence, and violence begets violence," said Cardinal Christian Tumi, Archbishop Emeritus of Douala.

"I have heard about the destruction and killings... and I think that it has to be condemned. We as Cameroonians should respect lives and the life of everybody," he continued.

Military forces have been burning down villages in Cameroon's Southwest Region, seeking separatist forces. Most recently, the town of Kwa Kwa, Matoh and the surrounding area was set on fire, which destroyed homes and the rectory of the local Catholic Church.

Italians change wording of Lord's Prayer, Germans decide not to

● The German bishops' conference have decided to stick with the traditional wording of the Lord's Prayer while the Italian bishops' conference have decided to change the words in their translation of the Roman Missal.

The decisions comes after French bishops decided that beginning early December last year, French Catholics would change the line, "lead us not into temptation", to the equivalent of "do not let us enter into temptation".

Remembering Holocaust is taking responsibility – Pope

Pope Francis emphasised that remembering the Holocaust helps us overcome "so many deplorable forms of apathy towards our neighbour" in a speech at a conference in Rome.

Addressing participants of the Rome International Conference on Responsibility of States Institutions and Individuals in the Fight against Anti-Semitism in the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) area, the Pope mentioned three key words: responsibility, indifference and memory.

"We are responsible when we are able to respond. It is not merely a question of analysing the causes of violence and refuting their perverse reasoning, but of being actively prepared to respond to them," said the Pope.

Hatred

He said that hatred in all its forms is not the only enemy, but even more fundamentally it is indifference, as it "paralyses and impedes us from doing what is right even when we know that it is right".

I do not grow tired of repeating, he said "that indifference is a virus that is dan-



Pope Francis stands next to two young members of Catholic Action movement as they release balloons from the window of his studio overlooking St Peter's Square. Photo: CNS

gerously contagious in our time, a time when we are ever more connected with others, but are increasingly less attentive to others".

Recalling the recent commemoration of International Holocaust Remembrance Day, the Pontiff underlined that "in order to recover our humanity, to recover our human understanding of reality and to overcome so many deplorable forms of apathy towards our neighbour, we need this memory..."

In addition, the Vatican's permanent representative to the OSCE marked Holocaust Remembrance Day with an appeal not to forget the les-

sons of the past.

At an OSCE Permanent Council meeting, Msgr Janusz Urbanczyk said: "The Holocaust teaches us that utmost vigilance is always needed to be able to take prompt action in defence of human dignity and peace."

Differences

Quoting Pope Francis, who said that the cruelty perpetrated in Nazi extermination camps is still alive today, Msgr Urbanczyk said that "the International Holocaust Remembrance Day should help us to 'go beyond evil and differences', and open every possible pathway of peace and

hope in our world of today".

"In the face of the outright barbarism of the Holocaust, in the face of the attempted destruction of an entire people, in the face of a cold, relentless violence and darkness, the international community, states and individuals must strive to live out the principles of peace, justice, solidarity and reconciliation.

"They must do so for the simple reason, as Pope Francis explained after having prayed in utter silence in the concentration camp in July last year, that 'cruelty did not end at Auschwitz and Birkenau,'" he said.

Cardinal calls for prayer after two school shootings in US

A US cardinal has called for prayers for the victims killed and injured in a pair of school shootings in Kentucky and Texas.

After the second shooting in two days, Cardinal DiNardo, president of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, said Christians experience the pain of the family and friends of the victims "as if it were our own".

"We pray for eternal rest for those who have died. Let us pray, too, for the families, teachers and friends who must now endure the suffering of losing those

dearest to them," the cardinal said.

"We stand in solidarity with the children who face a long road to recover from serious injuries. May they find comfort in a loving community," he said.

He also called for people to reach out "in compassion to assist the grieving".

Shooter

Police said a 15-year-old male student was arrested at Marshall County High School in Benton, Kentucky, last week after two people died and 18 were

injured after a shooter opened fire before classes began.

Kentucky Gov. Matt Bevin said the teenager faced murder and attempted murder charges.

The slain victims were a boy and a girl, both 15, state police said. The girl died at the scene and the boy died in hospital.

A day earlier in Texas police arrested a 16-year-old high school student in connection with a shooting that left a 15-year-old girl injured in an incident at a school cafeteria.

Church responds as Philippines volcano spews

The social action arm of the Catholic Church in the Philippines has appealed for donations for the relief and rehabilitation of families affected by the ongoing eruption of Mount Mayon in Albay province.

Over 70,000 people have already been evacuated to temporary shelters as the volcano started spewing col-

umns of ashes as high as ten kilometers this week.

Fr Rex Paul Arjona of the Diocese of Legazpi said most of those affected by the eruption are farmers who live and work within the volcano's six-kilometre radius permanent danger zone.

"Their lives are disrupted and their means of livelihood suddenly became inaccessible,

that is why they need all the help we could give," said the priest.

Needs

Fr Arjona said the immediate needs of the affected communities include sleeping mats, mosquito nets, blankets, face masks, hygiene kits, firewood, food, water, toilets and communal kitchens.

Parishes around the diocese have already activated their respective parish disaster response committees that set up soup kitchens.

Church facilities are also being opened to house the most vulnerable evacuees, such as pregnant and lactating mothers, people with disabilities and the elderly.

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Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun, retired bishop of Hong Kong.



People pray during Mass at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Beijing.

A Chinese cardinal is warning that an alleged Vatican request to underground bishops to resign in favour of bishops belonging to the state-run Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association would “be giving the blessing on the new strengthened schismatic Church”.

Cardinal Joseph Zen, the 86-year-old retired Bishop of Hong Kong, wrote an open letter on Facebook responding to a story published in AsiaNews stating Archbishop Claudio Maria Celli, a long time Vatican diplomat, requested that two underground bishops recognised by the Vatican resign their positions in favour of their state-sanctioned counterparts.

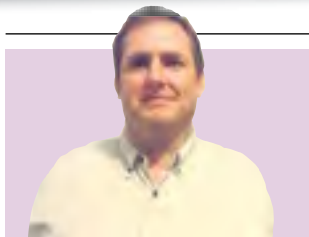
The two bishops being asked to step aside are 88-year-old Bishop Peter Zhuang Jianjian of Shantou in southern Guangdong province and 70-year-old Joseph Guo Xijin of Mindong in Fujian Province. The two state-backed bishops - who were excommunicated when they were consecrated illicitly - are Bishop Huang Bingzhang and Vincent Zhan Silu.

According to the report, Zhuang was in tears when the request was made, and Guo was told signing the document was a condition of his release from detention.

Facts

In his Facebook post, Zen said “many different versions of the facts and interpretations are creating confusion among the people. Many, knowing of my recent trip to Rome, are asking me for some clarification.”

Zen said he asked Archbishop Savio Hon Tai Fai, the former secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples and now Vatican ambassador to Greece, to speak to Pope Fran-



Charles Collins

cis about the case in October, and stated the Pontiff was “surprised and promised to look into the matter”.

“Given the words of the Holy Father to Archbishop Savio Hon, the new facts in December were all the more a shocking surprise to me,” Zen wrote.

The cardinal said he had a private meeting with the Pope on January 12, and the Pontiff assured him he told Vatican officials “not to create another Mindszenty case”.

“The letter said there was only one Catholic Church in China and encouraged unity in their profession of Faith”

Cardinal József Mindszenty was a Hungarian archbishop imprisoned by the Communist government from 1949-1956. During the short-lived Hungarian revolution, he escaped to the US embassy in Budapest, where he lived for 15 years. In 1971, he was allowed to leave the country, and died in exile in Vienna four years later.

“I was there in the presence of the Holy Father representing my suffering brothers in China. His words should be rightly understood as of consolation and encouragement more for them than for me,” Zen said.

“Please, notice that the problem is not the resigna-

Vatican intervention in China bishop appointments ‘bad deal’

tion of the legitimate bishops, but the request to make place for the illegitimate and even excommunicated ones,” Zen wrote. “Many old underground Bishops, though the retirement age law has never been enforced in China, have insistently asked for a successor, but have never received any answer from the Holy See. Some others, who have a successor already named, may be even already in possession of the Bulla signed by the Holy Father, were ordered not to proceed with the ordination for fear of offending the Government.”

Parallel

The Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association was established by the Communist government in 1957 to oversee Catholic churches independent of the Vatican. An underground Church loyal to the Pope exists parallel to the state-sanctioned entity.

In 2007, Pope Benedict XVI wrote a landmark letter in which he said full reconciliation “cannot be accomplished overnight”, but added that “for the Church to live underground is not a normal situation”. The letter said there was only one Catholic Church in China and encouraged unity in their profession of Faith,

granting some validity to the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association and permission for Catholics to participate in the official Church.

On occasion, the two sides have mutually agreed on individual bishop appointments, however, current President Xi Jinping has made efforts to re-assert government control of religion in the country. Late last year, the Communist Party revised its ‘Regulations on Religious Affairs’, which will be implemented February 1, and it calls for greater ‘Sinicisation’ of Chinese Christians.

“I acknowledge myself as a pessimist regarding the present situation of the Church in China, but my pessimism has a foundation in my long direct experience of the Church in China,” Zen wrote in his Facebook post.

“From 1989 to 1996 I used to spend six months a year teaching in the various seminaries of the official Catholic community. I had direct experience of the slavery and humiliation to which those our brother bishops are subjected.”

Zen served as Bishop of Hong Kong from 2002-2009. The former British colony has religious freedom as part of the agreement with Britain

leading up to the transfer of the territory to China.

The cardinal is considered one of the leading proponents of taking a hardline approach with the Communist government in China, as opposed to seeking an accommodation with the regime.

“Some say that all the efforts to reach an agreement is to avoid the ecclesial schism. How ridiculous!”

Those seeking accommodation seem to have the upper hand in the Vatican’s Secretary of State, which has been trying to resolve this issues with China, including the appointment of bishops, freedom of worship, the regularisation of the state-sponsored Church, and the establishment of diplomatic relations (currently, the Vatican has relations with the ‘Republic of China’ on Taiwan).

Zen previously said he thought Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin had a “poisoned mind” on China and is more interested in diplomacy than he is the Catholic faith.

In his Facebook post, Zen reiterated his stance, saying the Vatican is “selling out” the Catholic Church in China.

“Some say that all the efforts to reach an agreement is to avoid the ecclesial schism. How ridiculous! The schism is there, in the Independent Church!” Zen wrote.

“The Popes avoided using the word ‘schism’ because they knew that many in the official Catholic community were there not by their own free will, but under heavy pressure. The proposed ‘unification’ would force everybody into that community. The Vatican would be giving the blessing on the new strengthened schismatic Church, taking away the bad conscience from all those who are already willing renegades and those others who would readily join them,” he continued.

Zen also acknowledged his public criticism of the Communist Party and the Vatican’s diplomatic efforts are causing problems in the healing of the rift between the two sides.

“Am I the major obstacle in the process of reaching a deal between the Vatican and China? If that is a bad deal, I would be more than happy to be the obstacle,” the cardinal said.

Letters

Post to: Letters to the Editor, The Irish Catholic,
23 Merrion Square North, Dublin 2,
or email: letters@irishcatholic.ie

Letter of the week

Rules made to be broken

Dear Editor, Pope Francis' convalidation of the marriage of two flight attendants while he was in Chile has drawn predictable ire online, with paid and amateur commentators alike shouting down the Pope for somehow 'cheapening' the Sacrament of Marriage. It's early days yet, but it seems likely that a similar reaction will meet Bishop Brendan Leahy's proposal that the Church consider changing its rules about where weddings can take place.

Supposedly it somehow denigrates marriage if it is celebrated other

than in a church, and for the Pope to open up the possibility of marriages happening elsewhere pulls the rug out from under those who are trying to support what so often seems a beleaguered institution.

Perhaps this is so, but opponents of such proposals should consider how it has only been since the Council of Trent in the 16th Century that the Church required marriages to be celebrated in churches and with witnesses – including priests! Before then all that was needed for a

sacramental marriage to be valid was for a man and a woman to commit freely to marry each other, and for this to be consummated.

Arguably, this arrangement – shifted on pragmatic grounds to the dismay of a sizable number of the bishops and all the cardinals at Trent – was more in line with both Scripture and Tradition than the rules the Council introduced.

*Yours etc.,
Gabriel Kelly,
Drogheda, Co. Louth.*

Deputy Micheál Martin has taken his own road

Dear Editor, I was very surprised and taken aback to hear Micheál Martin publicly tell the nation the way that he intends to cast his vote in the proposed Referendum. I am wondering why he decided to do so in Dáil Éireann before the date has been announced. He gave his viewers the understand-

ing that he agonised and thought deeply about voting to take away the basic right of others as the election slogan is 'Pro Life – Pro-choice' I regard it as a misnomer, why? What choice is offered to the little child?

As leader of the soldiers of destiny 'Fianna Fáil' whose foundation motto is 'De

chun gloire Dé agus Onora na hÉireann – For the glory of God and the honour of Ireland', I believe he has gone a different route to former Taoisigh of his party, surprised many members and ignored the duty of the nation to cherish all the children of the nation equally.

In my view I believe that what he did and where he said it was untimely and unnecessary. "Be not the first by whom the new is tried, nor yet the last to lay the old aside."

*Yours etc.,
Fr Patrick Marron,
Fintona, Co. Tyrone.*

Is this a bubble or a civilised society?

Dear Editor, Anyone looking in from the outside at Dáil Éireann devoting three days this week to debating whether or when it may be right, justifiable and acceptable to kill a baby and deprive an innocent human being of the right to life, must wonder if we in Ireland live in a bubble or in a civilised society. Whither human rights? Whither equal rights for all? Whither our so-called 'compassionate society'?

*Yours etc.,
Mary Brien,
Castletroy, Limerick.*



Part of Dolores' wonderful legacy has been omitted

Dear Editor, Dolores O'Riordan's recent sudden, tragic death, devastating for her children, family, community and all who loved her and her music, shocked people worldwide. Her music, vibrant life, words and sad death got wall-to-wall media coverage in all aspects – except for one glaring omission, which doesn't fit the current group-think on how abortion impacts women.

Interviewed by *Rolling Stone* magazine in 1995, Dolores spoke about the effects of abortion on women, saying: "It's not good for women to go through the procedure [abortion] and have something living sucked out of their bodies. It belittles women. Even though some women say, 'Oh, I don't

mind to have one,' every time a woman has an abortion, it just crushes her self-esteem smaller and smaller and smaller."

O'Riordan's observations about abortion are in line with studies that show women often suffer after abortion including depression, anxiety and even risk of suicide.

Those advocating abortion who consider themselves feminists often tell women that abortion is empowering; however, Dolores O'Riordan's comment that abortion "belittles women" is more on the mark. The fact that 50% of aborted babies are female, is also conveniently ignored by abortion advocates.

Dolores' tragic death generated huge Irish media scrutiny of all aspects of her work, life and words. But her pro-life, pro-woman words are airbrushed out of the narrative. This omission, tells us all we need to know and highlights the need for the people of Ireland to recognise that they aren't always hearing the full story. Before any decisions are made on removing Ireland's life-saving Eighth Amendment, the people deserve to hear the truth about abortion and its negative impact on women lives.

*Yours etc.,
Oliver Maher,
Harolds Cross, Dublin 6.*

Exorcism is nothing to be embarrassed about

Dear Editor, It is really about time that the Catholic Church in Ireland looked anew at the issue of exorcism and exorcists. In our increasingly materialistic culture such things are a source of embarrassment to many, including many clergy, but without a supernatural foundational our Faith makes no sense.

It is important to take into account the scientific explanations of alleged cases of demonic influence but generally the Catholic Church has been quite rigorous in this regard. The problem today is that more than a few priests and bishops seem reluctant to emphasise such traditional beliefs and practices in the face of secular scorn.

*Yours etc.,
Michael Sherlock,
Corbally, Limerick City.*

Mass-goers in short supply

Dear Editor, In the editor's comment of 11/01/18, a European survey is cited that found 36% of Irish adults attend Church services at least once a week. Frankly, I find this hard to believe.

A random head count in my parish last year found that a total of 392 people attended the three Sunday masses. That's no more than a small percentage of parishioners. A similar situation exists in the neighbouring parish.

In the past two years, four 30-something couples moved into my avenue. All are lapsed.

*Yours etc.,
Michael Galvin, Kilmore, Dublin 5.*

The host in the hand...

Dear Editor, Whenever there is a threat from infectious disease, the sign of peace at Mass is usually highlighted as a high-risk practise that should be discontinued, along with Communion from the chalice. Communion on the tongue is actually a higher risk factor, given that it is not unknown for the communicant's saliva to be transferred to my fingers despite my best efforts to avoid it, and I have no way of cleaning my fingers.

Would it not be appropriate at high-risk times to ask those who regularly receive on the tongue to take communion in the hand, at least for the duration of the risk time?

*Yours etc.,
Fr Brendan McConvery CSSR,
Belfast, Co. Down.*

Is canon law now optional?

Dear Editor, The front page of your newspaper last week was scandalous. I am deeply distressed to see the Holy Father and His Excellency Bishop Leahy undermine the Sacrament of Marriage even further. The marriage that took place on the airplane was most likely a stunt that was arranged in advance and breaches canon law in several ways. I guess canon law is just optional for the modernist. Life is very difficult for us faithful Catholics who are trying to raise children in this secular world. We wish our shepherds would defend Catholic truth. Lord, give us back our ancient fervour.

*Yours etc.,
Lee Walsh, Dunmore East, Co. Waterford.*

Letters to the Editor

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

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

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

📷 Around the world



▲ **HOLY LAND:** Palestinian children play in the Al-Shati refugee camp in Gaza City.
 ▼ **VATICAN:** Members of the Italian Red Cross attend an audience led by Pope Francis in Paul VI Hall. The Pope told them their rescue of migrants at sea and care for them is a “prophetic sign”. Photos: CNS



USA: Supporters of comprehensive immigration reform, including a path to citizenship for ‘Dreamers’ – undocumented migrants who arrived in the US as children – march near Disneyland in Anaheim, California.



KOREA: Firefighters put out a hospital fire in Miryang, South Korea. Pope Francis prayed for those who died and were injured and offered encouragement to emergency personnel. At least 37 people, many of them elderly, died and dozens were injured in the fire at the hospital, which had no emergency sprinkler system.



IRAQ: A man from the Yezidi minority and young people pray at a shrine being rebuilt after it was destroyed in 2017 by Islamic State militants in Bashiqa.



PHILIPPINES: Lava flows from the crater of Mount Mayon volcano in Albay. Church charities and communities have rallied to help people affected by the eruption.

How does God act in our world?



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

There's an oddity in the gospels that begs for an explanation: Jesus, it seems, doesn't want people to know his true identity as the Christ, the Messiah. He keeps warning people not to reveal that he is the Messiah. Why?

Some scholars refer to this as "the messianic secret", suggesting that Jesus did not want others to know his true identity until the conditions were ripe for it. There's some truth in that – there's a right moment for everything – but that still leaves the question unanswered: Why? Why does Jesus want to keep his true identity secret? What would constitute the right conditions within which his identity should be revealed?

That question is centre-stage in Mark's gospel, at Caesarea Philippi, when Jesus asks his disciples: "Who do you say that I am?" Peter answers: "You are the Christ."

Then, in what seems like a surprising response, Jesus, rather than praising Peter for his answer, warns him sternly not to tell anyone about what he has just acknowledged. Peter seemingly has given him the right answer and yet Jesus immediately, and sternly, warns him to keep that to himself. Why?

Simply put, Peter has the right answer, but the wrong conception of what means to

be the Messiah.

In the centuries leading up to the birth of Jesus and among Jesus' contemporaries there were numerous notions of what the Christ would look like.

“Simply put, Peter has the right answer, but the wrong conception of that answer”

We don't know which notion Peter had but obviously it wasn't the right one because Jesus immediately shuts it down. What Jesus says to Peter is not so much: "don't tell anyone that I'm the Christ" but rather "don't tell anyone that I am what you think the Christ should be. That's not who I am."



Who do you say I am?

Like virtually all of his contemporaries and not unlike our own fantasies of what a saviour should look like, Peter no doubt pictured the saviour who was to come as a Superman, a superstar who would vanquish evil through a worldly triumph within which he would simply overpower everything that's wrong by miraculous powers.

Such a saviour would not be subject to any weakness, humiliation, suffering, or death and his superiority and glory would have to be acknowledged by everyone, willing or begrudgingly. There would be no holdouts; his demonstration of power would leave no room for doubt or opposition.

He would triumph over everything and would reign in a

glory such as the world conceives of glory, that is, as the ultimate winner, as the ultimate champion – the winner of the Olympic medal, the World Cup, the Super Bowl, the Academy Award, the Nobel Prize, the winner of the great trophy or accolade that definitively sets one above others.

When Peter says "you are the Christ!", that's how he's thinking about it, as earthly glory, worldly triumph, as a man so powerful, strong, attractive, and invulnerable that everyone would simply have to fall at his feet. Hence Jesus' sharp reply: "don't tell anyone about that!"

“Matthew recasts the scene so that, in his version, Peter does understand the Messiah correctly”

Jesus then goes on to instruct Peter, and the rest of us, who he really is a saviour. He's not a Superman or superstar in this world or a miracle worker who will prove his power through spectacular deeds. Who is he?

The Messiah is a dying and rising Messiah, someone who in his own life and body will demonstrate that evil is not overcome by miracles but by forgiveness, magnanimity, and nobility of soul and that these are attained not through crushing an enemy but through loving him or her more fully. And the route to this is paradoxical: the glory of the

Messiah is not demonstrated by overpowering us with spectacular deeds. Rather it is demonstrated in Jesus letting himself be transformed through accepting with proper love and graciousness the unavoidable passivity, humiliation, diminishment and dying that eventually found him. That's the dying part.

But when one dies like that or accepts any humiliation or diminishment in this way there's always a subsequent rising to real glory, that is, to the glory of a heart so stretched and enlarged that it is now able to transform evil into good, hatred into love, bitterness into forgiveness, humiliation into glory. That's the proper work of a Messiah.

In Matthew's gospel this same event is recorded and this same question is asked and Peter gives the same response, but Jesus' answer to him here is very different. In Matthew's account, after Peter says: "you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God", rather than warn him not to talk about it, Jesus praises Peter's answer. Why the difference? Because Matthew recasts the scene so that, in his version, Peter does understand the Messiah correctly.

How do we imagine the Messiah? How do we imagine triumph? Imagine glory? If Jesus looked us square in the eye and asked, as he asked Peter: "how do you understand me?" Would he laud us for our answer or would he tell us: "don't tell anyone about that!"

Family & Lifestyle

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The fight against domestic violence

With 40% of those women who experience domestic violence first experiencing it during pregnancy or soon after childbirth, it is clear that relationship abuse is a crisis in Ireland.

Domestic violence appears in many shapes and sizes which can range from verbal and emotional abuse to sexual and physical abuse. Usually an abusive relationship includes a mixture of derisive activities, which at times can be difficult to identify.

In order to combat this phenomenon an Irish charity is reaching out to all women to give guidance on when a relationship has turned abusive, and advice on how to deal with this type of



Colm Fitzpatrick explores relationship abuse in Ireland

situation.

COPE Galway, a local charity which provides outreach services, recently launched a new booklet, 'Parenting in the Context of Domestic Violence', as part of a global awareness campaign concerning violence against women. It covers topics from talking to children about domestic abuse and how to manage contact and access with a non-cooperative ex-partner. It

also explores coping mechanisms and strategies for mothers whose parenting has been undermined through abuse.

Speaking about the release of the booklet, Ciara Tyrrell, Senior Childcare worker of COPE Galway, told *The Irish Catholic*, "A familiar and common thread was that after women had separated from their partner because of abuse, the abuse did not end – because of access visits, texts,

and court appearances. The abuse actually continued and the women still felt like they were being controlled.

"Another theme was the parenting part. Parenting can be really stressful for a single parent and parenting in the context of domestic violence can be extremely difficult, especially with children in the middle of it all."

Details

Ciara explained due to these situations women asked for support, even down to the tiniest details such as: "What should I specifically say to partner?"

The book is a result of listening to women in an abusive situation who highlighted

the parenting struggle after separating. It was developed by COPE Galway Waterside House who consulted with women on the Waterside House Service User Refuge Forum (SURF). Their hope is that by sharing both their experiences of parenting in the aftermath of an abusive relationship and by outlining what worked for them, they may be of some help to women going through similar experiences.

"The book is by women for women", explained Ciara. "There's lots of direct quotes from women and really practical tips. The how to say, the what to say, and the what to do. It's very easy to read."

Prof. Pat Dolan of the UNESCO

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Family News

AND EVENTS

New cancer-fighting test is announced

In Ireland, an average of 40,000 new cases of cancer are diagnosed each year, so it's good news that a recently developed blood test is making leaps and bounds in changing the way doctors screen for cancer. Scientists at Johns Hopkins University in the US have developed a test that screens for eight common forms of cancer and helps identify the location of the disease.

The efficacy of the new procedure varies from cancer to cancer – for example – the test's ability to find cancer ranged from a high of 98% for ovarian cancer to a low of 33% for breast cancer.

Nickolas Papadopoulos, senior author and professor of oncology and pathology, said: "The use of a combination of selected biomarkers for early detection has the potential to change the way we screen for cancer, and it is based on the same rationale for using combinations of drugs to treat cancers."

WEIGHING UP THE SCALES: For gym-goers, weight-losers and even hypochondriacs, a new form of smart scales has hit the market providing you with all the accurate numbers you will – or won't – want to see!

QardioBase scales go beyond just measuring your weight by also tracking heart rate, water percentage, body fat, bone mass and muscle mass. It keeps a record of these vitals so you can compare these differences over time. The advanced sensor system gives great accuracy, quicker measurements and because it recognises each person automatically, it's the perfect gadget for the whole family. It even has a unique pregnancy mode to cater for all mothers-to-be.

The scales are simple to set up and use Bluetooth and Wifi technology to sync your data with your Qardio App automatically, allowing you to easily set goals and achieve them.



Flora, fauna and fun – swapping Facebook for forests

For kids that are in danger of replacing real life with virtual reality, a new initiative offers them the chance to overcome their nature deficit. Bord na Móna are asking more teachers and school-kids to get involved in Eco Rangers, a primary schools programme which attempts to help children reconnect with nature in a fun and interactive way.

Speaking at the launch of Eco Rangers, Bord na Móna's Sara Byrne said: "Unfortunately, more and more we are seeing young kids spending too much time on I pads and Playstations. All research indicates that direct exposure to nature is essential for healthy childhood development and for the physical and emotional health and wellbeing of children.

"Classes to embark on Eco Safaris, nature walks, where they can map out nature trails, look at and investigate flora and fauna, take photos or draw pictures and document what they see."



Learning to shed light, not heat

In the coming weeks and months we'll be hearing a lot about the Eighth Amendment and the right to life of our smallest human beings. It'll be a tough time for anyone who puts themselves out there to speak on all the issues involved.

I'm a bit of a social media addict and I can already see how things are heating up in online forums. If you decide to venture onto Twitter or comment on any Facebook forum, you have to be prepared to face a certain amount of negative comment. Sometimes, you may feel upset and knocked back by the level of vitriol.

As Christians, we all want to do our best to show compassion to mothers who are in difficult, sometimes desperate situations. We also want to respect and protect the most basic human right, the right to life. It can be easy to decide to take the path of least resistance and not get involved at all or to stay silent when the subject is mentioned by family, friends or work colleagues. We reassure ourselves that we're on the right path ourselves and as long as we decide to vote to protect life we don't really need to enter the fray.

C.S. Lewis said "courage is not simply one of the virtues but the form of every virtue at the testing point". It takes courage to swim against the tide and to speak out for what is right when we might be the only one in the crowd with a different viewpoint.

Important issues

We also have to arm our children with the tools they need to engage on these important life issues. Older teenagers and young adults need to be able to explain why

A parent's perspective



Maria Byrne

they believe what they believe.

I was at a pro-life meeting recently and one of the speakers, Petra Conroy, outlined an excellent approach to adopt when what we believe as Catholics, or as pro-life advocates, may seem to be at variance with some of the strongly held views in the society around us. Petra, coordinator of Catholic Comment, otherwise known as Catholic Voices Ireland, shares a unique vision about how we as Catholics can speak confidently and convincingly about the Catholic faith, or at this particular time, the pro-life issue, but in a very positive, compassionate way.

Petra started by teasing out



some of the reasons why the pro-life issue can be difficult to talk about compared to topics like our association with various charities or our work to support sponsored events for sick children or our enthusiasm for being involved with caring

initiatives like the Christmas shoebox appeal.

Why is talking about valuing the life of a child not in a similar category? A lot of our reticence is framed where abortion is presented as the compassionate solution. We are asked to respect women's choices and to resist oppressing women. Who doesn't want to be respectful and kind?

“We have to harness children's passion and channel it in the most productive way”

The pressure can be relentless when values that are close to our heart are under attack and even more so when those values are to do with protecting real people in real life situations. Often, our reaction is to go into fight or flight mode and keep the head down or, we can go to the other extreme and, as Petra said, "go in all guns blazing and strike a blow for the faith or the pro-life cause".

As a student many years ago, I used to love heated debates on all sorts of topics. When dealing with our older children, we have to harness their passion and channel it in the most productive way. I really like the Catholic Comment method as it guides people in a way that helps them to examine their motives and focus on what they are really trying to achieve.

Praise from people who agree with us because we won some slugging match on

social media won't bring us one step closer to changing people's attitudes. The Catholic Comment approach, which uses something called reframing which throws light instead of heat, just might.

Reframing a debate is a way of moving a discussion or argument out of a negative framework and moving away from a fight or flight response. We might be presented with a sad story about a woman who travelled to England for an abortion because her baby had life-limiting condition. This is called the frame; in other words, what makes it difficult to discuss with friends or family?

Next step

The next step in interacting is to find a shared value. I notice that even when poles apart from others, we can find some values we share. It could be a desire to ease hardship or suffering or a misplaced attempt to support women.

We have to move beyond that to the final step which is to present a positive vision, one that respects life, supports and nurtures mothers and their babies and that starts a conversation that could make a real difference.

If we have a personal experience, bring it into the interaction; maybe it's as simple as hearing your baby's heartbeat for the first time or talking about a sibling or relation with a disability.

Whatever it is that makes you value all life, spread that good news and speak out. Your vision and witness will give courage to others and we can create a country where every life really does count.

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Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway, who wrote the forward for the booklet said, "This booklet is both welcome and timely in that it firstly outlines the challenges and solutions of trying to parent well while living with domestic violence; but also, its authorship includes those with first-hand experience".

Not only is information readily available from the booklet, but COPE Galway also provides refuge accommodation, information, support and court accompaniment to women and their children experiencing domestic violence. There is an Outreach service for women in the city and county who are in abusive relationships and who need support and information on their options.

This outreach service is particularly important because of the myths that surround domestic violence and also the fear that many women experience in this type of abusive environment.

"There's a huge trust issue. Some women will come into the service and say 'I've walked past this door so many times and something has pushed me to come in'", said Ciara.

Situation

"They've been living in the situation for so long that an abuser has worn them down. They think that they might be over-reacting. The abuser may also tell them that if they speak out, they'll make the situation more difficult."

COPE Galway has been providing social services in Galway since the 1970s, and employs over 100 people in a wide variety of roles including social care professionals, childcare workers, community support workers, chefs, cleaners and administrative support staff. The employees are supported in their work by a committed team of over 150 volunteers.

"There's more awareness now. We are really pushing the awareness so that people are more informed about our service and will come to it," explained Ciara.

Not only are partners affected by abusive relationships, but children are also impacted in the cross-fire. This may express itself through emotional problems like depression, behavioural outbursts like



Elaine Cosgrove, COPE Galway Domestic Violence.

aggression or even physical illness like vomiting. Often children find it difficult to convey how they're feeling about the abusive dynamic and as a result demand more parental attention, which can come in the form of bad behaviour. Ciara also pointed out that many parents also seek support with situations like family events such as birthday parties, where children can get upset with the presence of an abusive parent.

"Children are affected emotionally and socially. Some children are very resilient and they have other supports in their life," explained Ciara. "However, some children internalise it a lot, and find it difficult to say what is going on. Sometimes they even blame themselves."

It can be difficult to realise the extent to which domestic violence can affect one's life"

Communication is key. As difficult as it is, children know what is going on so you need to communicate with them, and check their feelings. They need to know that the abusive relationship is not a result of something they've done."

Through COPE Galway, children are provided with a range of supports including one to one support, therapeutic play and play therapy. If a child is considered to be in danger, a Social Work Department will be notified to keep both parent and child safe. This type of support can help ameliorate negative

behaviour a child is exhibiting by laying out boundaries and also help them realise that they are not culpable in creating or developing the abusive relationship.

Christiane Blodau, Service Coordinator at COPE Galway Domestic Violence Refuge Service commented that one woman said, "I did not realise how much my child blamed herself for what happened. It was only years later that it all came out. You have to reassure your kids that it was never their fault".

Some women use our service a number of times before making up their mind and taking action"

COPE Galway are able help women and children in these challenging situations and help pave a path forward to end cycles of abuse. By recognising that domestic violence is a crime and an abuse of human rights, the charity remains steadfast in its vision eliminating the structures in society which lead to abuse by providing temporary accommodation, supplying information and respecting the autonomy of each woman.

Although it can be difficult to realise the extent to which domestic violence can affect one's life, it is vital to identify it so that the first steps can be made in addressing it. For those who are unsure as to whether it is an element in their relationship or if fears are inhibiting action, Ciara believes that seeking support is the best step forward.

"Seek support and come and talk," she says. "We provide a 24-hour confidential service. Nobody here will judge and nobody will make decisions for you. In fact, some women just want to come and talk and get emotional support."

"Open your eyes to what is really going on. Some women use our service a number of times before making up their mind and taking action. Others learn how to cope and deal with it. Everyone is different".

For more information about the new booklet, "Parenting in the context of Domestic Violence" and domestic violence in general, see: <http://www.copegalway.ie>

Dad's Diary

Rory Fitzgerald



My mother turned 70 last weekend. The coming months are brimful of celebratory events with her vast coterie of friends and family. Yet she was slightly ambivalent about the day itself, perhaps because she has sadly lost some close friends in recent months.

In the end, she decided to book a nice hotel in Dublin, and to spend her birthday quietly with dad. My brothers and I decided she was being far too philosophical and so we immediately hatched a plan to surprise her, to liven up the occasion.

I booked flights from England for a mad overnight dash to Dublin. In an act of wild optimism, I set the alarm for five o'clock. In the event, of course, my biological alarm clock, in the shape of our toddler, had me awake by four, so my 'lie in' until five never quite materialised.

As I left, all was forgiven as she said, "I will miss you, Dad" and gave a sad, theatrical pout as I stepped out into the darkness to begin the journey to Dublin, by car, ferry, bus, train and plane.

On that gloriously child-free journey, I had time to think back on all those happy years with my mother. She remains endlessly kind, joyful, friendly and quietly wise. Wherever she goes, she somehow instantly connects with people. Whether she meets a Somali taxi driver, or a lad from Kerry, or an elderly lady from Mayo, within two minutes my mother will have a glow in their heart, a smile on their face – and she will have their life story.

Popular

She was an absurdly popular teacher in our local girls' primary school, where she touched many young lives with her kind words, warmth and sensitivity. I got great kudos as a young lad around the village: "Are you Mrs

Fitzgerald's son?" girls would squeal, "Oh my God, she's so nice, she's the nicest teacher in the school!"

Even now, as she goes shopping, her former pupils, many now mothers themselves, smile brightly and exclaim, "Hello Mrs Fitzgerald!" Many will recount some small thing she said or did that gave them confidence and belief in themselves. She did the same for us, her sons.

Last weekend, we lured her to a lovely restaurant on Dawson Street, and it was there we pounced, to much delight! We spent a happy, talkative evening together, just the five of us again. We even brought her to a posh nightclub for a drink, "No break dancing," the bouncer said to her, with a wink towards her walking stick.

My mother remains always a teacher, always able to awaken fresh reserves of compassion"

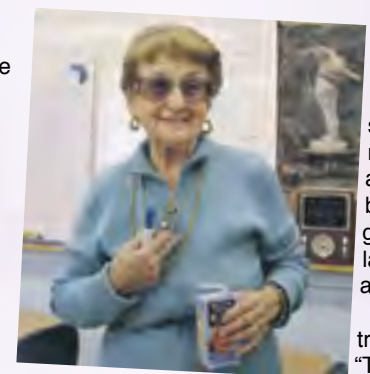
Amid the fun, and the reminiscences, my mother was reminded of a small poem, written by her old professor, the poet Séamus Ó Néill: "Bhí subh milis ar bháscrann an doras, ach

mhúch mé an corraí ionaim a d'éirigh, mar smaoinigh mé ar an lá a bheadh an bháscrann glan, agus an lámh beag – ar iarraidh."

A rough translation is: "There was jam on the

door handle, but I quenched the anger that arose in me, for I thought of the day, when the door handle would be clean, and the little hand, missing."

Such thoughts bring a tear to the eye of any parent, and put in proper perspective such minor childish transgressions. My mother remains always a teacher, always able to awaken fresh reserves of compassion in the heart. And so after meeting her you go home, warmer and wiser.



Youth Space

The gift that keeps on giving

'Cathy' describes the transformative powers of a Dublin Catholic Youth Group

The 'Transformer: Life in the Spirit' seminar was an absolutely incredible experience. From the moment I walked through the door there was a most beautiful sense of welcome, joy and peace. As I entered the large spacious room jam-packed with young joyful Catholics, the vibrant and exciting atmosphere told me something special was taking place here.

The seminar was run by Living Water, a Catholic charismatic youth group based in Dublin city. When the group announced that this seminar series was going to take place I was so excited, as I had heard so much about the success of 'Life in the Spirit' programmes internationally.

I had been practising my Faith up to that point for about three years. Growing up in a traditional Catholic family, I left my Faith in my teenage years seeking fulfilment elsewhere. I was drawn back by an encounter I had with the Lord where I experienced the Holy Spirit and the real and living presence which he has in my life.

Relative

This occurred when a relative of mine, who was very close to the Lord, asked if I would like him to pray with me. I said yes, but wasn't taking it all that seriously. However, as he prayed with me, I felt within me a most powerful, and yet peaceful, sense of what I now know to be the Holy Spirit. It was so intense and beautiful that I couldn't ignore it.

This propelled me to go further into my faith and relationship with God through His Church. After a while though, things became challenging – those around me who hadn't had

such an experience couldn't understand the change in me and I couldn't understand how everyone didn't 'get it'. Studying in university, I encountered many reactions to my beliefs and many questions. This left me feeling quite isolated and in a sense, fearful, of what others thought of me.

“I was, I must admit, expecting the Holy Spirit to make some sort of 'wow' appearance for me as he had done before”

It was around this time when the 'Transformer: Life in the Spirit' series began. As part of the course, we received free Scripture books containing a passage for each day to reflect on and pray with. I found

that Scripture was truly coming alive and speaking directly to my heart in a powerful way.

There was also a weekly talk given at 'Transformer' by experienced invited speakers. These talks were sequenced to look at aspects of the Good News, such as 'The Love of the Father' in a fresh and relatable way. These talks impacted me greatly and I drew such inspiration from them.

Outpouring

I was most looking forward to the 'Outpouring of the Holy Spirit' evening on week six. I was, I must admit, expecting the Holy Spirit to make some sort of 'wow' appearance for me as he had done before. However, it was in the following days and weeks when things began to unfold. I began identifying new areas of healing

and growth in my life.

For example, shortly after 'Transformer' I began to experience a desire to do some form of mission work. This desire would have frightened me before but now I was unafraid and bursting to start working for the Lord.

This revealed another gift God gave me through 'Transformer' - his courage. This enabled me to let go of so much unnecessary fear and to take a leap of faith in doing mission work. I said yes and haven't looked back since.

This is only one of many gifts the Lord gave me at this time. There are still graces I am only recognising now which were given through the Life in the Spirit programme. It has truly transformed my life in a most beautiful and profound way.

Cathy.



As Christians, we have the greatest gift in the world of knowing Christ. But it doesn't stop there – he wants us to be filled to the brim with him and his JOY! He wants to give us the "Peace the world cannot give" (John 14:27). He wants to use us to lead others to him and to set this world ablaze. We have been given the gift of his Holy Spirit through Baptism.

The 'Transformer: Life in the Spirit' series is essentially a way we can say 'yes' and receive anew the power of Holy Spirit that will work in and through us in a powerful and mighty way as never before. He wants to set us free and use us to set others free.

“We are so blessed in Ireland to have so many youth groups building the faith, and especially Living Water taking on this challenge”

This is our time to show the world who our God is and how powerful and wonderful He is.

So is 'Transformer' for you? Yes! I firmly believe every Christian around should complete this 'Life in the Spirit' series. We are so blessed in Ireland to have so many youth groups building the faith, and especially Living Water taking on this challenge and setting up this 'Transformer: Life in the Spirit' series.

If you are between 18 and 39 and are seeking more joy, peace, love or fulfilment in your life, Living Water's 'Transformer' series is for you.

i The Transformer Series will take place on Wednesday evenings at 7pm for January to March 2018 in the Edith Stein Room, St Teresa's Church, Clarendon Street, Dublin.



Green Fingers

Paul Gargan

Winter is releasing its icy grip on the garden

As winter slowly releases its grip on the garden, our list of jobs to be done expands. As ground conditions are wet, stay off grass as much as possible.

Clear all paths, patios, decking and steps of algae and moss to prevent slips and accidents. Use a deck scrub or powerhose if it is a big job.

Cut all the old leaves of epimediums and hellebores right down to ground level. On epimediums this is done to encourage new leaf growth, which will in turn provide dramatic autumn colour. With hellebores it's because the new flower stems are beginning to push up and it gives them more light. Don't compost hellebores leaves with blackspot – bin them.

Wisteria must be pruned twice a year, once in mid-summer and now. Go over the whole plant cutting all side shoots back to two buds. The buds are not swelling yet, so are less likely to be

damaged. Cut back Virginia creepers and ivies where they have invaded gutters, under roof tiles and around doors or windows. Shorten the main stems of all overly tall climbers such as hydrangea petiobris.



Shoots

Prune standard apple and pear trees by cutting out damaged, diseased or dying shoots, or any which are crossing another or are growing back into the middle of the tree. The finished tree should be wine glass-shaped, with all the shoots having their own share of sunlight, with good air circulation.

If you have soft fruit bushes that are old and unproductive, rejuvenate them by pruning now. Pick two or three of the oldest branches, which will be the thickest and least productive. Cut them as

close to the base of the plant as possible. Repeat every year and soon you will have a bush full of vigorous young growth and in full fruit production again. Don't be tempted to cut all in one go, this will only result in masses of soft sappy shoots that will not fruit for years. The exception is autumn fruiting raspberries. These you cut now and every year to about 2cm or 3cm above ground level. As with all fruiting bushes, mulch them with a good thick layer of homemade garden compost.

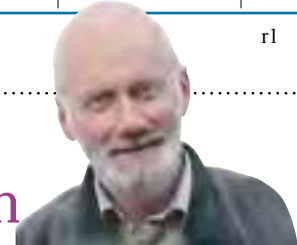
Hang fat balls to feed blue tits close to any plants that are prone to aphid infestations. As the birds are waiting for their turn to feast they will pick off any pests that are over-wintering on the plants.

To make fat balls, mix some seeds (e.g. sunflower), with dried fruit (e.g. sultanas) and porridge flakes. Put them in an empty plastic pot or container and pour in melted lard. Leave until they are hard, then cut off the plastic and hang in an empty onion or orange net.

Put up bird boxes now to encourage nesting in your garden.

TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



Remembering victims of the 'merciless'

Last Saturday was Holocaust Memorial Day and also the day An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar declared (on BBC Radio 4's **Today** programme, curiously) that he would campaign to liberalise Ireland's abortion laws.

To mark the former, **Nationwide** (RTÉ 1) last Friday evening broadcast a moving programme featuring the Island of Ireland Peace Choir on a visit to various sites in Poland. Their visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau was the most emotional, having a deep effect on choir members, and on presenter Damien Tiernan who accompanied them. Tiernan emphasised that they were not tourists, rather were they visitors and mourners.

No matter how many times you hear the story the sight of those huge piles of shoes, and those empty poison gas cans have an intense impact. The group got some historical context when they visited the factory of Oscar Schindler, now a museum. They also got to sing in an amazing church in the salt mines and in a basilica on the site of a 13th Century Cistercian monastery.

Choir leader Phil Brennan explained the origins of the choir, comprised of Catholics and Protestants and inspired by links that grew out of the Omagh bombing, especially with Clare Gallagher, a musi-



The railway leading to the gates of Auschwitz concentration camp.

cian who was blinded in that atrocity. Now they continue to spread the message of peace.

Brennan explained why they had come to Poland – to remember the “victims of merciless people”. This kind of thing still happens today, he said, and now it was ‘time for humanity to tune in to a new frequency’ and ‘to care for our fellow brothers and sisters’.

He found it a “numbing experience” and one of his choir members reckoned, that despite everything, it would happen again.

Later that evening, Holocaust Memorial Day was also marked on **The Leap of**

Faith (RTÉ Radio 1) when presenter Michael Comyn spoke to Yanky Fachler of the Jewish Historical Society of Ireland, who told the little known story of three Jewish-owned hat-and-ribbon factories in Galway, Castlebar and Longford that saved dozens of European Jews from the Holocaust.

Factories

Businessman Marcus Witztum set up the factories at a time when Seán Lemass wanted to establish business links to encourage overseas investment. The factories provided significant local employment but Witztum

also manage to leverage the situation so that Jewish people could move to Ireland in the pre-war days when discrimination was rampant in Germany.

We learned some other useful information too – Holocaust Memorial Day was on January 27 as this was the day the Russians liberated Auschwitz, but it is largely a European remembrance day, the Jewish people having a different day of commemoration, shortly after Passover.

Interestingly, when Comyn spoke of the death of the Jews in the Holocaust, Fachler said he preferred the word “murder” as that was what it was, and among so many others his own grandparents were murdered.

He noted “the industrialised nature of the Holocaust, the fact that it was Government policy to exterminate”. He criticised Ireland for being



RTÉ's Damien Tiernan.

PICK OF THE WEEK

CATHOLIC LIVES

EWTN, Saturday, February 3, 10pm

David Kerr speaks with Kathy Sinnott, a former MEP.

THE CHURCH UNIVERSAL

EWTN, Monday, February 5, 2.30pm; Friday, February 9, 10.30pm

About the EnCourage apostolate, which offers support to parents of children with same-sex attraction.

Magical Sites

RTÉ 2, Wednesday, February 7, 10.55pm

The children visit the round tower at Glendalough, learning about monastic life.

reluctant to take in Jews in the pre-war period when the discrimination was obvious, and lamented that people can see evil happening and do nothing about it.

Related themes featured on **Sunday Sequence** (BBC Radio Ulster) last weekend. Author Heather Morris spoke about her new book *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*, which tells the fascinating story of Lale Sokolov, a Jewish man who survived the death camp, probably because he had a role – tattooing serial numbers on the inmates – a practice that registered and dehumanised at the same time.

It was a job he hated but it gave him privileges that he used to help others in the camp. Remarkably, this was more of a love story than anything else, as Sokolov met the love of his life, Gita, in the camp. Both survived and met

again after the war. A proposal of marriage followed immediately, and eventually they escaped Eastern Europe and lived happily in Australia.

Earlier in the show there was a curious item on ‘Jerusalem syndrome’, a condition I’d never heard of. Apparently when some people, whether Christian or Jewish, visit the Holy Land, especially on pilgrimage, mental disorders develop or are amplified and sometimes they imagine themselves to be Biblical characters.

Interestingly, dealing with them involves co-operation between both the Israeli and Palestinian authorities. We could surely do with more of the latter.

boregan@hotmail.com



Aubrey Malone

Film

When the silence ends on the western front

Journey's End (12A)

They wait. They joke about soup. They snap off one another. Days pass. The spring offensive looms...

We're in France in March 1918, the last year of World War I. The ‘Boche’ still has some fight left in him and is about to descend on a group of British soldiers in a trench in Aisne.

A young recruit joins them. He doesn't look as if he's too long out of school. He's done some service and is anxious to do more.

He's introduced to an officer who's engaged to be married to his sister. He



Sam Claflin stars in *Journey's End*.

Excellent
★★★★★

joined the regiment to meet him.

The man isn't friendly to him. He has a drink problem. Is this the reason? Or is it because he knows they're all

going to die?

It's one of the conundrums of ‘the last gentleman's war’ – it was anything but – that so many people were lined up like nine pins for ‘Jerry’ to

mow them down so easily in March 1918.

To get their minds off the inevitability of their impending doom they banter with one another. They talk about anything except the war. They whistle in the graveyard. And, yes, they joke about soup.

Play

Based on a play written by R.C. Sherriff in 1928, this is an incredibly powerful film. It's so relentlessly claustrophobic that when battle finally breaks out you're almost relieved. As they are. The wait is over. Now all that remains is to do or die. Theirs not to reason why.

For the young soldier – Raleigh (Asa Butterfield) – it's

a baptism of fire, a trip into the valley of death. Journey's end.

This isn't the ‘jolly good show, old chap’ Britain we're used to. The fear is so great you can almost taste it, all the more so for being sublimated.

All of the cast are great. I have to mention Paul Bettany as Uncle but it's Sam Claflin's film. He's the fiancé of Raleigh's sister. He imbues every scene with such varied expressions you never know what he's going to say or do from one moment to the next. He's as confusing to himself as he is to us. This is a man literally falling apart at the seams but still barking out orders at people.

In a Q&A session after

the press show of the film, its director Saul Dibb, a very affable and unassuming young man, said: “This isn't just a film about war. It's a film about people at war with themselves.”

A good observation. It reminded me of a 1961 feature with Laurence Harvey called *The Long and the Short and the Tall*. Soldiers shouted at each other a lot in that too but this is much more atmospheric. The attention to detail is astounding.

At times it's too painful to watch. And I don't just mean the bloodletting. You can't fail to be moved by the subtle, sensitive, soul-searching. See it.

BookReviews

Peter Costello



Irish poets speaking for themselves

The Poet's Chair: Writings from the Ireland Chair of Poetry (UCD Press, €20.00 each volume)

Peter Costello

The Ireland Chair of Poetry Trust was established in 1998 jointly by Queen's University Belfast, TCD, UCD, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, and An Chomhairle Ealaíon.

Every three years a distinguished poet is selected to hold the Chair as Ireland's Professor of Poetry. During their tenure each poet passes a year attached to each of the universities in turn for a residency. Aside from informal contact with students and readers, while in residence the poet makes one formal presentation a year.

These are now printed in individual titles for each poet: John Montague, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Paul Durcan, Michael Longley, Harry Clifton and Paula Meehan [pictured] so far in the series. The current holder of the chair is Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, appointed in 2016, and a volume by her will follow in due course.

For those familiar with some of the poets their lectures will prove of great interest. But I suspect that for those less familiar with this field, all of these will prove very illuminating. And how the voices vary.

Thoughts

The wonderfully down to earth Paul Meehan – her title *Imaginary Bonnets with Real Bees in Them*, sums up her work very well, couples with the extraordinary imaginative flights of Paul Durcan, the sturdier Northern thoughts of John Montague and Michael Longley: overall a wonderful conspectus of the current range of Irish verse.

The reflections of the well travelled Harry Clifton on the position of an Irish poet in the rustbelts of Ireland and Britain, in Europe as whole, and in America, go to the very heart of the way modern Irish poets now work out their lives.

A celebrated poet lifted up by his faith

Hopeful Hopkins, essays

by Desmond Egan
(The Goldsmith Press, €20.00)

Noel Barber SJ

In these essays, Desmond Egan sets himself a clear goal: to correct the image of Fr Gerard Manley Hopkins as a “sick and self-lacerating person” and to present “the energetic, witty and hope filled” person that existed alongside the “physically frail, hypersensitive, nervous and thought-haunted” man.

In presenting this “hopeful Hopkins”, he takes aim at those who argue that his Dublin years were particularly sad. Egan accepts that there were melancholic moments in Dublin but rightly insists that there was more to his Dublin life than these.

He veers towards denying that the dark Dublin sonnets were descriptions of Hopkins's own desolation, and strongly suggests that it would be wrong to identify the feelings of desolation in these sonnets with the feelings of the poet. He then presents the happy Hopkins that comes out in the diaries, journals and letters and emphasises the support Hopkins's firm Faith must have given him.

These essays are not exclusively about Hopkins's personality. There is an essay on the modernists' reception of Hopkins, which produces a vigorous defence of Hopkins against their less than enthusiastic assessment.

Opposition

In the essay on Joyce and Hopkins Egan establishes against heavy weight opposition, that Joyce was well aware of Hopkins. An essay on Hopkins and Hiberno-English begins with the amusing, if rather condescending, letter of Hopkins to his sister in which he mocks the everyday use of English in Ireland. It serves as a starting point for a discussion of the Irish language's influence on the English we speak in Ireland.

There is an interesting essay on Hopkins and the late James McKenna. The essay ‘Hopkins, Neurosis and Art’ takes up some of the themes of the first essay ‘Hopeful Hopkins’, but contains some puzzling and needless repetition from that chapter.

The essay ‘Varieties of Exile’ explores the impact that physical, artistic and intellectual exile had on Hopkins and on a number of other writers. Hopkins gave poetic expression to the experience of exile in ‘To be a Stranger’.

The value of this book and Egan's strength is his treatment of the poems.

The essay on ‘As Kingfishers Catch Fire’ is the best study of that poem I have seen. Egan with the eye and feeling of a poet illuminates Hopkins's



Illustration for *As Kingfishers Catch Fire* by G.M. Hopkins.

metrical complexity, the developing significance of the metaphors, and the influence of Greek. All this and much more in the interest of grasping the inscape of the poem so that one will forever read it with new feeling and understanding.

“Egan makes the case cogently that not to see the joyful side of Hopkins is to miss an essential quality of the man and his life”

Similarly, his analysis of the Dublin sonnets of desolation reveals the strength and illumination of these poems. Egan illuminates, as only a

mastery literary critic can, the brilliance of Hopkins's technique. As in the case of ‘As Kingfishers Catch Fire’, one's reading of the Dublin sonnets will be deeper and richer.

Attention

Egan makes the case cogently that not to see the joyful side of Hopkins is to miss an essential quality of the man and his life, but it is a pity that he did not give greater attention to Hopkins' spiritual writings and particularly to his retreat notes of 1883 and 1889. The retreat notes force one to ask if the hope of Hopkins was a cloak masking what he called his “self-loathing” and to seek the source of such self-loathing.

Perhaps on this theme Egan will produce another book of fine essays.



Gerard Manly Hopkins.



A digital age presentation of Patrick Kavanagh

Love's Doorway to Life: An Alternative Biography of Patrick Kavanagh

boxed set of three discs, scripted and narrated by Úna Agnew and Art Agnew
(Eist Audio Productions; www.eist.ie, €25.00)

These days, with perhaps fewer young people reading books, this three-disc set may well be the ideal modern way of presenting a great poet. The creators are quite aware of the divided views that Kavanagh [pictured] aroused in his life time.

Now there is general recognition for his status, especially as poet of religious sensitivity. In these discs the compilers have arranged the poetry as part of a narrative of the poet's life. For many there will be no better way than this way to encounter Kavanagh. The individual voice is important in poetry, and here it is allowed space to come across, especially in the spiritual dimension to the poet's life and work. **P.C.**

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.

The varied voices of three Irish poets

Peter Costello

A Little Book of Ledwidge: A Selection of Poems and Letters of Francis Ledwidge

compiled by John Quinn, with an assessment by Seamus Heaney (Veritas, €9.99)

India to Ithaca

by Paula Lahiff (€10.00; €12.50 including postage, contact paulalahiff@gmail.com)

Santiago Sketches

by David McLoughlin (Salmon Poetry, €12.00)

In Ireland the role of the poet has been respected since prehistoric times. Among the Gaels the poet was an artist, a judge, and an arbiter of all aspects of life. Some of the respect in which such wordsmiths are still held has been reflected in the widespread mourning for the death of Dolores O'Riordan.

But poets come in all kinds of shapes: the poet with an academic post, the young people using poetry to express their complicated feelings and desires, the performance poet who entertains in the back room of the local pub; the variants are endless...

In these books under review we have a varied selection of poets, all of interest, all worth reading, in their very different styles.

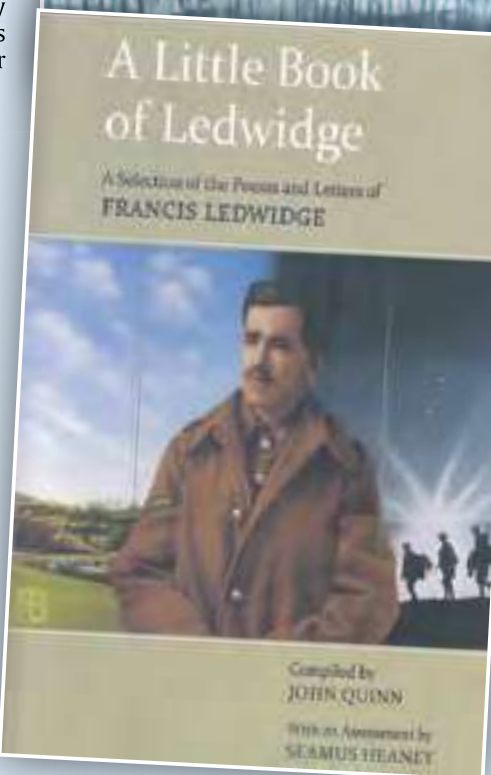
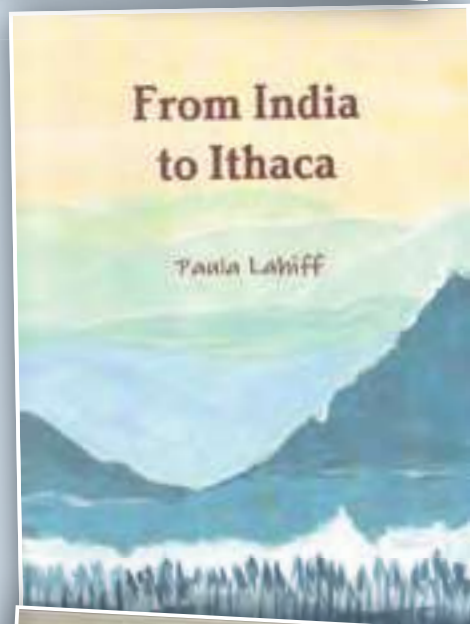
Francis Ledwidge belongs to a large category, the talented poets whose careers were overshadowed by the gigantic status of such figures as Yeats, Kavanagh and Heaney. These days he is seen (given the various forms of commemoration going on) as a Great War poet, one of the company with Owen, Sassoon, Graves and others. But this in a way does him an injustice. He was a poet who took his inspiration, his daily stimulations, from the natural life of his rural home, a natural world which war and revolution distorted.

“Paula Lahiff has long been a member of local writing groups in the places where she and her family have lived”

In this selection writer John Quinn presents a moving selection of both his poems and his personal letters, to which the late Nobel Laureate extends his blessing.

Paula Lahiff is a poet representative of a great many in Ireland. She has long been a member of local writing groups in the places where she and her family have lived. These groups are these days an important part of Irish social and literary life.

This collection relates passages in her life that have inspired her, from her birth in South India to the West



of Ireland. On the rerun voyage from India as an infant she contracted polio. The disease passed but came back upon her in the form of post-polio syndrome.

She recounts her life's odyssey in a very moving way as a poet who writes out of a kind of necessity to record those concentrated moments of her own life that she values. She captures in her poems a great deal of life pain, the pains of illness and parting and of family life. But also moments of recalled loveliness such as a butterfly brushing her cheek to land on the cooling earth.

This is a collection well worth encountering for its startling observations, and its gentle though sometimes sharp with words.

For the occasional poet like Paula Lahiff poetry is a recreation, for a poet like David McLoughlin, poetry is a way of life, or perhaps life itself. He is very much a poet of our time, a young man of varied cultural experience, from middle class Dublin to the Kerry Gaeltacht to the labyrinth of Spanish life and literature, and now urban America. His early connections focused on Ireland very much, but here he devotes his new book to his Iberian experiences.

“The focus is on the experience of Santiago itself, what it means and what it gives”

Countless people (as we know from these pages) have written about their experiences on the Camino to Santiago de Compostella. But those writers seem only to have experienced the Way and the other pilgrims. Here, for once, the focus is on the experience of the city itself, what it means and what it gives, but so few receive or understand.

The poet combines his prose with his poems in a way that reminded me of the Basho's 'Narrow Road to the Deep North', a great work of literature that should be better known. The city is described, or rather sketched, in prose, but the poems are used for those more intense moments of insight and feeling. This all works very well. The book represents a distinct advance in his work. Those who want to experience something of the inner Spain through an Irish imagination will value this book.

Perhaps he may be able to achieve something of the same kind again to describe his transpantine experiences in Brooklyn. His feelings for at least seven cultures of Ireland, Europe, and the Americas, make David McLoughlin a unique voice in modern Irish writing.

The World of Books

By the books editor

Trump and the dark places of the earth

For a man holding what many still see as the most powerful position in the world, President Trump has an uncanny instinct to express in the brutal language of the bar and locker-room the opinions of some of the most uninformed people in the United States.

Taste will not allow me to repeat here what he had to say about certain West Indian, South American and African countries. These nations undeniably have great social and political problems, but he seems unaware of the role that the US has played in creating the conditions in these places. The US has been deeply involved in Haiti and Liberia, countries covered by his remarks.

The media in reporting his comments about Haiti were themselves very selective, focusing on the aftermath of the recent disastrous earthquake. But that in a way only serves to conceal the past.

Having never been to either place I am forced to reach down some of the books on my shelves.

Here, for instance, is my copy of H. Hesketh Prichard's *Where Black Rules White: A Journey Across and About Hayti* (1900) — the title alone is redolent of the age of imperialism.

Critics of Trump's remarks described Haiti as “the first black-founded republic”: but in fact after the abortive effort of Toussaint L'Ouvreture, the country finally become sovereign as a monarchy in 1820, which turned into a nominal republic, then into an empire in 1849, and back to a chaotic republic. Prichard was sent out to the island in 1899 for the then brand-new *Daily Express*. For the British journalist Haiti was an illustration of the fact that Blacks could never run a modern state.

Haiti was ruled directly by the US from 1915 to 1935, and then by a series of US-supported dictators. Given the attitude of the US, expressed in the Monroe Doctrine, to interfering European states, the chronic social and political problems of the Haiti can be laid directly at the door of the US.

The years of the tyrant Dr François Duvalier were dramatised by Graham Greene in his novel *The Comedians* (1965). That was a disturbing book, but Haiti under the Duvaliers was terrifying. The poor country since then has not had much chance to improve.

Intelligence officer

Earlier Graham Greene had visited Liberia in 1935. The account he wrote of this, *Journey Without Maps* (1936), remains the best of his travel books. He later returned to West Africa as an intelligence officer during World War II.

For a later issue of the book he noted that this stay allowed him to settle in and not notice things that had disturbed him as a tourist. “I have begun to forget what the visitor notices so clearly — the squalor and the unhappiness and the involuntary injustices of tired men.”

This first West African Black republic was founded as a home for freed US slaves in 1820 by the Society for the Colonization of Free People of Color of America. The idea was that liberated slaves would be sent back to Africa, where they would become the Black colonial overlords of other Blacks. They effectively seized possession of native peoples and rulers. The US colonists formed a new ruling elite, with American names, which lords it over the others to this day.

The dubious origins of Liberia were exacerbated later by the activities of the Firestone Tire Co. which set up in 1925 the largest rubber tree plantation in the world, which was seen as an essential US strategic resource.

Firestone took over the control of the state's finances to ensure the repayment of a loan they had made to Liberia to build the harbour the company was the main user of. The debt crippled the country down to 1952.

When the need for rubber began to decline in the last century Firestone let its poor workers go, causing further poverty. The country remains a sort of quasi-slave state, its national banner (a single star and stripes) a notorious ‘flag of convenience’ for badly-run shipping companies.

As with Haiti, what might have been a landmark of Black freedom has been hopelessly corrupted for the benefit of the US.



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The Irish Catholic

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Crossword Junior Gordius 217



- ACROSS**
- In the comics and films, this hero came from the planet Krypton (8)
 - It's usually the last word of a prayer (4)
 - Fools (6)
 - Twelve months (4)
 - The Titanic sank when it hit one (7)
 - A slightly cheeky smile (4)
 - Glass container of liquid (6)
 - Toy that looks a bit like a baby (4)
 - Newspaper boss (6)
 - A blacksmith's workshop (5)
 - Parts of the body between your shoulders and your wrists (4)
- DOWN**
- Travelling by boat (7)
 - Group of lions (5)
 - Really sad (9)
 - A shade of dark blue, or a country's force of ships (4)
 - Started (5)
 - Cloth wrapped round a wound (7)
 - The USA is the United _____ of America (6)
 - Closer (6)
 - Human-like machine (5)
 - A person who was born before you were is _____ than you (5)

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTIONS

GORDIUS No.335

Across – 1 Dot 3 Window ledge 8 Energy 9 Marauder 10 Shorn 11 Hours 13 Fails 15 Defiant 16 Perusal 20 Dry up 21 North 23 Hatch 24 Mea culpa 25 Tycoon 26 Mendelssohn 27 Pas de deux

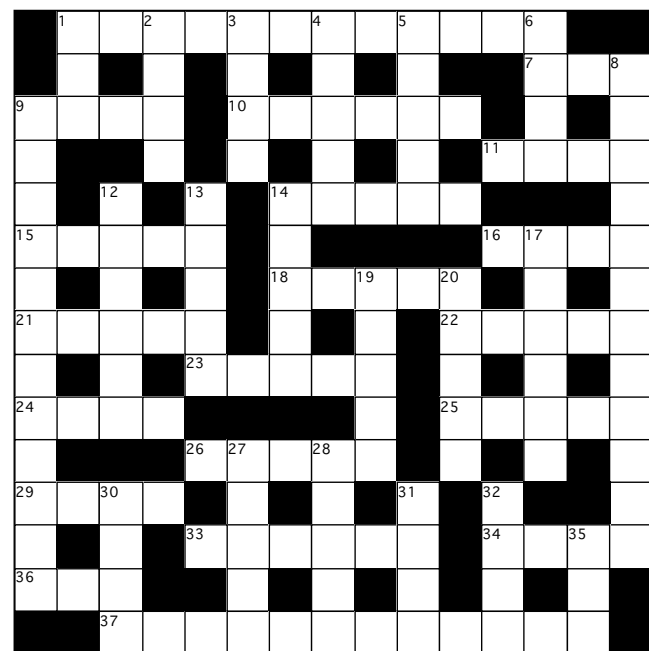
Down – 1 Dressed down 2 The God of Small Things 3 Wagon 4 Dominic 5 Leach 7 Err 13 Fined 14 Sleep 17 Soft-soap 18 Cymbals 19 Ordain 22 House 23 Haydn 24 Mum

CHILDREN'S No.216

Across – 1 Traffic jam 7 Glance 8 Togs 9 Tied 11 Track 14 Air 15 Ivy 16 Angry 18 Paint 19 Fat 20 Garbage

Down – 2 Relative 3 Fence 4 Idea 5 Jet 6 Magic 10 Dancing 11 Tractor 12 Argue 13 Keyhole 17 Off 18 Pet

Crossword Gordius 336



- ACROSS**
- Is it the power of nuns' and monks' dress that it becomes automatic? (5,2,5)
 - Eggs (3)
 - Legal document, such as that of habeas corpus (4)
 - Popular statutes are related matrimonially (6)
 - Each of the two (4)
 - West African country formerly known as the Gold Coast (5)
 - I want to be confused with an American writer (5)
 - Mural structure on the outskirts of Walsall (4)
 - Bitter, pungent (5)
 - Awaken us amongst fish-eggs (5)
 - At the perfect moment (2,3)
 - A cask is capital in North Africa (5)
 - As always, Vere is confused (4)
 - For all the world, a broken heart (5)
 - Part of a teapot (5)
 - To Georgia, it will walk thus (4)
 - Put up with, undergo (7)
 - A friend takes in one bucket (4)
 - Digit on the foot (3)
 - His work in the Sistine Chapel is High Renaissance, in more ways than one! (12)
- DOWN**
- In favour of (3)
 - Book of the Bible found between groove G and track I (4)
 - Give out, broadcast, radiate (4)
 - Squalor (5)
 - As pale as a dam can be (5)
 - In Africa, it's just the country to leave, it seems (4)
 - Vulnerable spot in a Greek hero's foot (8,4)
 - Where wet gilt can be the makings of a boxer... (12)
 - ...acknowledge an officer, making us late, somehow (5)
 - As yet, not leased out (5)
 - A ring disrupted the wood pattern (5)
 - Treaty, agreement (6)
 - Take a test again (5)
 - Twelve (5)
 - Nip (5)
 - Customary (5)
 - That part of the agenda is a mite confused (4)
 - Breaking news will have had one in stitches (4)
 - Recess found in a church (4)
 - I would love to say these words in a marriage ceremony! (1,2)

Sudoku Corner 217

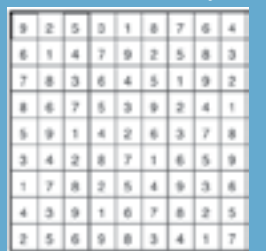
Easy

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

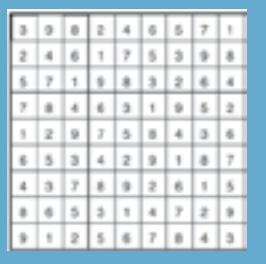
Hard

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

Last week's Easy 216



Last week's Hard 216





Fr Bernard Cotter

Notebook

A public demonstration of a community's love

I AM ORDAINED almost 34 years and for over 30 years of that time, I have been doing baptisms all wrong. For that first 30 years, nearly every baptism I did was private. Parents would ring me with the news of a birth and I would make arrangements with them alone.

When baptism day came around, I would usually be the sole representative of the parish present. Sacristans left it to me to turn on lights and heat and have the materials ready in place. Apart from the note in the parish newsletter, the parish generally had little awareness that baptisms were ever taking place in the local church.

Once a year, I would make a big effort to find a baby for the Easter vigil or Easter Sunday morning Mass. But because baptism was seen as a private matter, celebrating the event at a public ceremony seemed too much of a spectacle for many, and all sorts of arguments were produced as to why it was impractical.

Over those 30 years, I noticed how private faith became. Those participating in the baptisms seemed to be doing something for themselves, with no wider



consequence. Often these participants disappeared from church view for the seven years until First Communion. The baptisms I participated in rarely resulted in active participants in the parish. Private faith followed on from private baptisms.

Different perspective

A few years ago, I became aware of a different perspective. In the

parish to which I was assigned in 2012, identity is a vital matter. We are a small rural community in the hinterland of big towns, so it is important for us to have our own identity. Baptism, I discovered, contributes to this. Baptism teams were formed, with the purpose not only of catechising the young children and their families, but also of assimilating the new young families into the local community.

WHAT IS A BAPTISM TEAM? Parents are the best experts at talking to parents: they have the experience. In our parish, baptism arrangements are made with the parish secretary, who tips off the baptism team. Then two parents from the team visit the family. They bring information about the sacrament and about the parish (always on the lookout for volunteers). They come along to the ceremony to help the young parents (organising readings, music, etc.). One promise we have made is that when more than one family is involved in baptism ceremonies, there will be music. It makes it!

Not only will this benefit the parish, but it will equally keep the local school well supported, as well as the GAA etc.

Baptisms today are far from private. They take place once a month (only) and often involve a few families. Baptism team members attend the ceremony on behalf of the parish. Often the particular Saturday doesn't suit a family, so they are also offered the option of having their baptism at any Sunday Mass. These events go down a treat, as some parishioners would never be at a baptism apart from those during Saturday evening or Sunday morning Mass.

(Time constraints are served by anointing the baby with the oil of catechumens beforehand and by making sure Holy Water is available. The congregation renews its baptismal promises with the baptism family and the key ceremonies of the sacrament follow: water, Chrism, the white garment, candle and the ephphatha. Then we stand and pray for them in the Bidding Prayers and once the collection begins everyone knows it won't be long more!)

And private baptisms are a thing of the past – and hopefully private faith too.

When needs must...

I was spoiled in my first parish. The sacristy was equipped with everything! In my second parish of three churches, things were more haphazard. I will never forget my first baptism. I found myself with a full church – but no holy oils!

A visit to the nearest house produced no olive oil, but three options – diesel, suntan oil and Johnson's Baby Oil. In desperation, I took the latter – and for many years after, there was a bottle of consecrated baby oil in the sacristy (don't tell the canon lawyers!). Thank God the Church always 'supplies' when we, her ministers, fail.



Please help the poor, needy and abandoned

This man in Ghana was wrongfully imprisoned, abandoned by his family and nearly starved to death. Happily, the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart were able to help him with food which The Little Way Association enabled them to buy. There are still millions of people without the basics of life, some because of natural disasters and others because of war and social unrest. Priests and religious are there to help the victims, and the Little Way can channel your donations to them without deduction of any kind.

Today, please remember those in gravest need and make a gift to The Little Way Association's fund for the hungry, sick and deprived. You can use the coupon below or give online at tinyurl.com/lwadonations. Thank you, and may God reward your generosity.



"Love can accomplish all things. Things that are most impossible become easy where love is at work."

- St Therese

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

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

All Little Way benefactors share in a daily Mass offered for their intentions in the Missions.

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