

# The Irish Catholic

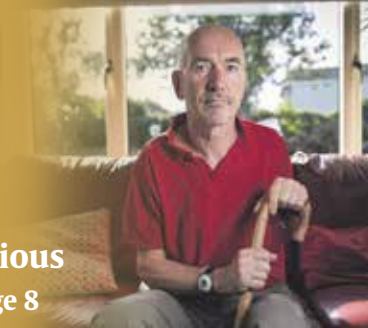
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## Govt demands the immediate release of Nicaraguan bishop

Chai Brady

Tánaiste Micheál Martin has called for the “immediate and unconditional” release of a Nicaraguan bishop who was sentenced to 26 years’ imprisonment after refusing to leave the country for exile insisting he wanted to be with his people.

Mr Martin said he was “gravely concerned” about Bishop Rolando Álvarez (56) and the wider crackdown in the Central American country under authoritarian leader Daniel Ortega.

It comes as the regime announced a new ban on public processions for the ‘way of the cross’, a popular devotion in the mainly-Catholic country.

Mr Martin insisted that the Department of Foreign Affairs is closely monitoring the bishop’s detention “and continues to call for his immediate and unconditional release, as well as that of all other remaining political prisoners”.

“The continued human rights violations, crackdowns on opposition voices, on civil society and on independent



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### Smiling after the Sacrament



Teacher Harriet Flannagan at St Brigid’s N.S., Singland, Co. Limerick, pictured with two of her class pupils Caragh Sheehy and Ruby Kelly after they received the Sacrament of Confirmation at St Brigid’s Church in Singland on Saturday, February 25. Bishop Brendan Leahy presided.

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# Govt demands the immediate release of Nicaraguan bishop

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media, together with backsliding on democratic norms, are unacceptable," Mr Martin said in a written answer to a question from Laois-Offaly independent TD Carol Nolan.

Before his imprisonment, Bishop Álvarez was outspoken in calling on the regime of Mr Ortega to release political prisoners and for democracy to be restored in the country. He was arrested on August 19 last year by police who burst into his Matagalpa diocesan headquarters in a pre-dawn raid.

The charges were treason, undermining national integrity and spreading false news, among others. The prelate was also stripped of his Nicaraguan citizenship.

Ms Nolan welcomed Mr Martin's "strong" response.

"We need to see far more of this unequivocal language with respect to the persecution of the Church that has been gathering pace in recent years, resulting in brutalising levels of pain for Catholic and Christian communities," she told *The Irish Catholic*.

The Tánaiste also stated that Ireland and the EU have used all channels of engagement available to call on the Nicaraguan authorities to "put an end to repression and to restore full respect for human rights in Nicaragua".

"This would include the return of international human rights bodies and NGOs to Nicaragua, as well as the ending of political persecution and the imprisonment of political opponents," he said.

In the statement, the release and exile of 222 political pris-

# A radical plan to create real diversity in schools

There are few things more pathetic and embarrassing to witness than the spectacle of unrequited love. It occurred to me at the weekend when I saw senior figures in the Labour Party talk about their enthusiasm for a potential merger with the Social Democrats.

Holly Cairns, the Social Democrat TD, was asked about the prospects of such a merger: "It's never something that ever comes up in our conversations," she said boldly even before Ivana Bacik could put down a deposit on a wedding venue.

The truth about the Labour Party is that it is no longer really a labour party in any true sense. It no longer stands for the values of working people, it no longer campaigns for a decent standard of living for people who work hard and it no longer tries to understand the struggles or stand with working class communities.

## Fringe

Instead, the Labour Party has become a fringe movement for zealots pandering to the most extreme of their ever-shrinking base (3% in the last poll).

And the irony is that every desperate attempt for relevance, or to steal a march on their opponents, ends in failure.

The party lacks any big ideas, and the ascent of Ivana Bacik to the leadership after decades of failed general election bids, was predicted to lead to a 'Bacik Bounce' that never even amounted to a whimper.

The latest attempt at a big idea is a proposal by the party's education spokesman Aodhán Ó Ríordáin to ban single-sex schools (yes,

oners on February 9 – who were flown to the United States – was welcomed. Those released included priests and seminarians, political and business leaders, journalists, civil society representatives, and students.

Mr Martin said the Government believes those incarcerated should never have been detained and that Ireland and the EU have "condemned the decision to strip them of their Nicaraguan citizenship and of their civil and political rights."

"We have stated that this release must now be followed by dialogue and further actions on the part of the Nicaraguan authorities," he said.

In the latest crackdown against the Church in Nicaragua, public processions of the

the Labour Party loves to ban things).

Forget about parental choice, Deputy Ó Ríordáin knows better than you do what is best for your children.

You might recall that it was Mr Ó Ríordáin who previously called for civil servants to be vetted to ensure that they weren't 'too Catholic' for his liking.

**“The irony is that every desperate attempt for relevance, or to steal a march on their opponents, ends in failure”**

In arguing his case, Mr Ó Ríordáin insisted: "Schools are supposed to reflect the society that they serve yet there still remains a culture of single-gender schools throughout the country".

"The fact that so many of our schools are still separated by gender sends the wrong message to children at a young age about gender equality," he said.

Mr Ó Ríordáin, ironically a former principal in a Catholic school, has also been vocal in his criticism of faith-based schools. Catholic schools, he has argued, make integration of newer communities difficult – this is despite the fact that Catholic schools were integrating newcomers long before the State even had an integration policy. Even now, it is still Catholic schools that

'way of the cross' have been banned in parishes across the country during Lent and on Good Friday. It's expected the regime will force parishes to have them indoors.

President Ortega has continuously attacked the Church in public speeches, most recently last week when he accused the Vatican of being a "mafia organisation". His tirade came after Pope Francis said he was "saddened by the news that comes from Nicaragua, and I cannot but remember with concern the Bishop of Matagalpa, Msgr Rolando Álvarez, whom I love so much, and who was condemned to 26 years in prison, and also the people who were deported to the United States."

## Editor's Comment Michael Kelly



are at the forefront of making sure children from Ukraine are welcomed and thriving in our communities.

Interestingly, there is one form of integration that politicians are unwilling to push. Take the shocking situation where Dublin contains both some of the wealthiest communities, as well as some of the most socially-deprived communities in the country.

Why isn't it a matter of concern to politicians that children from these communities do not mix?

Given that children from wealthier backgrounds are much more likely to go on to third-level education and thus increase their earning potential than children from disadvantaged backgrounds, why the lack of concern?

Surely, if politicians were serious about integration rather than just virtue signalling about the latest trend this would be a matter requiring urgent attention.

We could, for example, bus children from Ms Bacik's leafy Dublin 4 constituency to schools in Ballymun and vice versa from Ballymun to Ranelagh where they could

mix with children from different backgrounds.

**“Forget about parental choice, Deputy Ó Ríordáin knows better than you do what is best for your children”**

What about in Mr Ó Ríordáin's own constituency? Why not bus children from plush Clontarf to schools in challenging communities in the north inner-city and vice versa?

This would surely aid both integration and social mobility. The simple fact is that many children from different socio-economic backgrounds never meet, and then grow up to live separate lives in separate communities.

Why are politicians not concerned about this? Is it simply a blind spot, or is it that they know that their more affluent voters would not support it?

I think we all know the answer.

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# Dropping of 'gender spectrum' from SPHE curriculum welcomed

Jason Osborne

A leading voice in Catholic education has welcomed the dropping of references to gender being "experienced along a spectrum" from the new SPHE curriculum following consultation with the public.

CEO of the Catholic Education Partnership Alan Hynes told *The Irish Catho-*

*lic* that they're "glad to see that the final draft reflects some of our concerns and observations" regarding the proposals for the new curriculum.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) agreed to change a "learning outcome" in a draft for the new SPHE curriculum, according to papers seen by *The Sunday*

*Times* over the weekend.

"Like ourselves, I think parents will be satisfied that the concerns that they communicated to the NCCA through the consultation process have been attended to," Mr Hynes said, continuing, "this was important as parents are the primary educators of their children and their views on questions of morals and values

are of paramount importance within the education system".

It was "very important" that the NCCA give parents due "weight and regard" in terms of producing a final draft for the SPHE curriculum, Mr Hynes said.

**“Parents will be satisfied that the concerns that they communicated to the NCCA through the consultation process have been attended to”**

Catholic schools deal regularly with students presenting with gender-questioning tendencies, Mr Hynes said, adding that they "meet that person where they are".

"We address their needs in consultation with their parents and we don't

believe that school is the place to fight ideological battles...We're more focused on dealing with the person in front of us," he said.

## Minister for Education

Addressing the clarification from Minister for Education Norma Foley that parents will retain the right to withdraw their children from classes that conflict with their consciences or values, Mr Hynes said that some media reports made it seem as if "the opt-out is a new thing that has been issued by the Minister for Education".

"This is a long-standing constitutional right that parents have had since the foundation of the State and it's in keeping with international human rights conventions that Ireland is a part of too," he said.

## Historian: State should bear brunt of mother and baby home redress

Staff reporter

A fellow of the Royal Historical Society has said that the State was responsible for most of the institutions covered by the Mother and Baby Institutions Redress Bill and that the State "will ultimately bear the fiscal liability".

Writing in *The Irish Times* on Monday, Michael Dwyer said that although some politicians and advocacy groups are calling on religious orders who were involved in running the standalone mother and baby homes to pay the redress costs, "it is clear that the State was responsible" for most of the institutions in question.

This comes as the *Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme Bill* undergoes scrutiny, as it was noted that it excludes roughly 40% of former residents who were born in a mother and baby home and spent less than six months as a child in one of the 44 listed institutions.

## Trailer released for exorcist film shot in Ireland



Russell Crowe as exorcist Fr Gabriele Amorth in *The Pope's Exorcist*.

Chai Brady

The trailer for a new film about the famous Italian exorcist Fr Gabriele Amorth has been released, part of which was filmed in Ireland.

Starring Russell Crowe as Fr Amorth, *The Pope's Exorcist* will be released next month, April 7. *The Irish Catholic* understands an Irish priest was consulted during the making of the film.

Some of the shooting locations for the film took place in Dublin, including Trinity College Dublin and

Dublin City Hall, Bray, Co. Wicklow, and Limerick.

Fr Amorth died aged 91 in 2016 and is estimated to have performed about 100,000 exorcisms. He was the world's best-known exorcist who was frequently in the news for his comments on the subject of demonic forces.

He detailed his work in bestselling memoirs *An Exorcist Tells His Story* and *An Exorcist: More Stories*.

The film is directed by Julius Avery and follows Fr Amorth as he investigates the alleged demonic possession of a young boy

and ends up uncovering a "centuries-old conspiracy the Vatican has desperately tried to keep hidden". It is inspired by two of Fr Amorth's books.

Fr Amorth often warned about the danger of occult practices and spoke of the need for exorcists. He said in 2006: "It is very important today because there are so many requests for them. People have lost the Faith, and superstition, magic, Satanism, or Ouija boards have taken its place, which then open all the doors to the presence of demons."

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# Ukrainian bishop: Peace not yet possible after one year of war



Bishop Kenneth Nowakowski speaks during an interfaith prayer service for peace in Ukraine in London. Photo: Marcin Mazur, Catholic Church England and Wales.

## Jason Osborne

While “everybody wants peace” in Ukraine and is striving for it, Ukrainian Catholic Bishop Kenneth Nowakowski has said that at the one year anniversary of the war in Ukraine it’s “not something we can talk about”.

This comes after 12 senators and TDs penned a letter in *The Irish Times* condemning Russia’s invasion of Ukraine while calling for ceasefires, negotiations and peace.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper after travelling to Ukraine last week, Bishop Nowakowski said that “there’s a saying that is a common mantra now: ‘If Russia stops this war, there will be peace. If Ukraine stops fighting, they won’t exist anymore’”.

“We know that thousands and thousands of civilians have been killed, tortured, raped and beaten and I think that everybody, everybody, wants peace, and we need to strive for that, but we also need to strive for peace with justice,” Bishop Nowakowski said.

It is his “ardent prayer” that peace

comes “as soon as possible” so there’s no more need of war commemorations, but he asked “what does peace look like without justice”?

“Is it just a capitulation? Is it that white flag of surrender? I think that’s at this point in time not something we can talk about,” Bishop Nowakowski said.

Meanwhile, the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Union (COMECE) released a statement marking the occasion of the first anniversary of the war, in which its President, Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich SJ, appealed to Russia to “immediately suspend the hostilities and withdraw its armed forces, in full respect of international law and the territorial integrity of Ukraine”.

Ukrainian people “have the right to defend themselves from the brutal and unjustifiable military aggression in order to live a life in dignity, safety and freedom in their independent and sovereign country,” the statement reads.

“We strongly encourage European leaders to maintain their unity in solidarity with Ukraine during and also after the war, while not giving in to fatigue or indifference.”

## Prayer app overtakes TikTok and Google on Ash Wednesday



Hallow App co-founders Alex Jones, Alessandro DiSanto and Erich Kerekes pose together for this undated photo. Photo: CNS/courtesy Hallow

### Staff reporter

A Catholic prayer app soared to the number three spot on the Apple App Store on Ash Wednesday, overtaking the usual top dogs TikTok,

Google, Netflix, Spotify and Instagram.

First launched in 2018, ‘Hallow’ has managed millions of downloads and reached around 150 countries. Last year, the app surpassed 100 million prayers completed through

the service.

Hallow founder and CEO Alex Jones told *The Daily Wire* that “God is doing something pretty incredible,” through the app.

“We never thought in a million years that we might have this many

people from all around the world gathered together in prayer,” he said.

“To be top five in the App Store is truly unbelievable,” Mr Jones said, adding, “Praise be to God!”

## Biblical baby names still most popular

### Chai Brady

Bible-based baby names are still proving very popular in Ireland with the top three boys’ names for babies registered in 2022 being biblical.

The three most popular boys’ names were Jack, Noah and then James.

Jack has held the top spot since 2007, with the exception of 2016, when James was the most popular name. The name Jack is a derivation of James.

Jack was the most popular name for baby boys in all provinces in 2022. Noah held the top or joint top spot in 10 locations including Donegal and Cork City.

For girls, no biblical names reached the top five. Emily came in at number one, followed by Grace at number two and Fiadh at number three.

Emily regains the number one spot for 2022, climbing from third place in 2021 and 2020. Prior to 2020, Emily had been the most popular girls’ name from 2011 to 2019.

Grace and Jack were the most popular baby names where both parents were Irish nationals.

# On Lenten simplicity...

**O**n Ash Wednesday I listened to a thoughtful homily about how we should approach Lent, in a personal capacity. The priest emphasised that we didn't have to quit something for Lent – we could also embrace something, by way of good works, for example, instead. We could devise a schedule for ourselves on what we might do for Lent.

**“Deciding that you won't partake of the pleasure of a particular treat is itself a focus on Lenten abstinence”**

Fair enough. Suggesting that people make an individual decision on approaching Lenten practice is a way of treating congregations like adults. It is also emphasising the value of the voluntary, rather than stressing the dutifully obligatory.

And yet, I think there is something to be said for opting for simple guidelines of fasting and abstinence during Lent. The appeal is just that: simplicity. Renouncing the small indulgences of sweets (or alcohol) for the Lenten season may not be the most original course, but it is a basic form of discipline and focus.

Deciding that you won't



**Mary Kenny**

partake of the pleasure of a particular treat is itself a focus on Lenten abstinence. It reminds you that we are in Lent. As in: “No, I won't have that: we're in Lent.”

## Traditional privations

I am excused from the traditional privations of Lenten practice because of age – and I could probably plead a few infirmities too. But I like to observe modest Lenten rules – such as: keep Wednesdays and Fridays meat-free, and do three days a week sweet and chocolate-free. Forgoing a rasher and a sausage – two of my favourite foods, and add a Clonakilty black pudding for extras! – is hardly the extreme of sackcloth and ashes, but it is a little gesture towards a penitential season.

(Indeed, the meat-free Friday is now recommended – by the Church of England – as being a fitting Lenten practice which also helps the environment, and the fishing industry.)

And the gesture also prompts the idea that one should try and do something positive as well.

When it comes to religious practice, there's a lot to be said for 'keeping it simple'. Don't

overcomplicate life by reinventing the wheel, and constantly devising new initiatives. Following a well-established pattern can free the mind: that's why the original idea of 'protocols' evolved. When the rules are simple, it can give a clear framework of thinking.

**“But the simplicity of quitting something you usually like makes a lot of sense to me”**

Orthodox Jews place much emphasis on just following traditional rules: 'First do, then believe', goes their saying. Doing is central to Judaism, whether that be following the dietary regulations or the mourning procedure of 'sitting shiva' after a death. We inherited many Jewish customs, though St Paul said the spirit of the law can be more important than the exact letter; our Lenten practices, back in the past, sometimes were too harsh, and sense and sensibility need to be part of the measure.

But the simplicity of quitting something you usually like makes a lot of sense to me.

Lent is a time to get back to basics.



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● Delia Barry, the 83-year-old master knitter of Greystones, who confected the Aran sweaters featured in *The Banshees of Inisherin*, has said that she often watches what people are wearing when she's in church, notably their woollens.

Delia has been blessed with an outstanding talent for knitting – she doesn't even need a pattern to design and produce her fabulous knits – so why shouldn't she observe the attire of her congregation? Observing knitwear is a form of research in her line of activity!

Delia is now almost a Hollywood star herself – I hope she's mentioned at the Oscars. And she gives many of her knitting profits to a cancer charity.

## A prospering parish is a community's strength

Local churches and parishes should be buzzing centres of events. There should be lots of things going on centring on the parish. I remember being impressed by the parish newsletter at Omagh's Sacred Heart, just before lockdown, in which so many parish activities were listed, from knitting circles to singing groups, family support, and a range of sporting activities.

Lockdown did much to damage all these ancillary activities in parishes, but hopefully, they will all

come back again.

The Booterstown parish, in south Co. Dublin, is hosting an impressive series of lectures throughout the year which really adds engagement and distinction to the parish. On March 23, Senator Rónán Mullen will be speaking about whether 'Government in Ireland is crowding out freedom of worship?' On April 14, the Hungarian Deacon Zoltán Kunszabo will speak about life and faith under totalitarian systems. On May 25, Prof. Nigel Biggar,

an ordained Anglican, formerly of TCD and now of Oxford will discuss the legacy of colonialism and addressing 'cancel culture'. Prof. Bigger is, literally, a big academic name, since he has challenged some of the strictures of the 'woke' culture. There is a further promising line-up of speakers for the rest of the year.

Events at parishes surely add to the life of the community.

# Ireland welcomes newly appointed papal nuncio

Chai Brady

Pope Francis appointed a new papal nuncio to Ireland over the weekend, following the previous nuncio's posting to Czechia last year.

Archbishop Luis Mariano Montemayor was the papal nuncio to Columbia but will now take the diplomatic reins in Ireland. He succeeds Archbishop Jude Thaddeus

Okolo who appointed 12 bishops in his five-year term.

Archbishop Montemayor was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1956 and was ordained in 1985. The experienced prelate has served in the diplomatic service of the Holy See since 1991.

After gaining a degree in canon law he began his diplomatic work, going to Ethiopia, Brazil and Thailand.

In 2008 the late Pope Benedict

XVI made him titular archbishop of Illici and apostolic nuncio to Senegal, Guinea Bissau and Cabo Verde as well as an apostolic delegate in Mauritania.

Seven years later, in 2015, he was made apostolic nuncio to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). He served in the DRC for just three years before leaving, a move said to be due to health issues. Archbishop Montemayor was appointed during a time an iron-fisted government

was in power. For many months the administration was opposed to the Catholic Church.

In 2018 the archbishop was appointed the papal nuncio to Colombia before his new role in Ireland was announced on Saturday.

Archbishop Montemayor speaks Spanish, Italian, French, English, and Portuguese fluently.

Reacting to the appointment, the president of the Irish Catho-

lic Bishops' Conference and Primate of All Ireland, Archbishop Eamon Martin, said: "I very much welcome today's news that Pope Francis has appointed Archbishop Luis Mariano Montemayor as Apostolic Nuncio to Ireland.

"I pray God's blessings on Archbishop Mariano and look forward to meeting with him when he takes up his appointment in Ireland in the near future," he added.

## Hopes new law will allow more prisoners come home

Staff reporter

A bill currently passing through the Oireachtas which could make it easier for Irish prisoners abroad to serve their sentences at home has been cautiously welcomed by the Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas (ICPO).

### Irish bishops

The ICPO, which was established by the Irish bishops, noted the long wait times for prisoners applying to serve sentences at home – highlighting the need for the Criminal Justice (Mutual Recognition of Custodial Sentences) Bill 2021.

Bishop Paul Dempsey, chairperson of the ICPO, said, "while we have reservations regarding some provisions of the bill, and know that it won't assist everyone interested in applying for repatriation, we believe that

it can form the basis for a workable prisoner transfer system".

The bishop said it is "long overdue" and that it has been seven years since the last Irish prisoner was transferred to serve out their sentence in Ireland.

"In recent years, the transfer process has been beset by delays, with applications often taking several years to be processed. It is widely recognised that serving a sentence close to family, and other social supports, facilitates rehabilitation. This context not only benefits prisoners but also their families and wider society," he said.

The number of Irish prisoners seeking to apply to serve their sentence in an Irish prison each year is small, with 154 prisoners having been transferred since the scheme began in 1996.

## Nineties pop star ordained a deacon

Jason Osborne

The youngest member of the American boy band, Hanson, best known for their 1997 hit single 'MMMBop' was ordained a deacon in the Georgian Orthodox Christian Church in February.

Zac Hanson's ordination to the diaconate took place at St Nina's monastery in Maryland, after he apparently converted to Orthodox Christianity more than a decade ago, influenced by his aunt who is an Orthodox nun.

The same aunt was reportedly present at Mr Hanson's ordination as Deacon Mercurios.

The pictures of the newly ordained deacon with the bishop and his wife were shared on Facebook, captioned: "On behalf of our Holy Diocese, we congratulate Father Mercurios on his ordination as a Deacon and wish him spiritual courage and physical strength to fulfill this high service! Worthly!"

Zac Hanson, now Deacon Mercurios, is husband to Kathryn Tucker and father to five children.



Zac Hanson, left, was ordained deacon in the Georgian Orthodox Church.

## Fresh and faithful faces



Bishop Tom Deenihan of Meath diocese celebrated the Rite of Election in the Cathedral of Christ the King, Mullingar on the First Sunday of Lent with catechumens from the parishes of Ashbourne-Donaghmore, St Mary's – Drogheda, Duleek, and Mullingar.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### 'Church's charitable work based on faith' - Archbishop Farrell

Without "rootedness in the life of Christ," our activity is in danger of being reduced to "diffuse activism," Archbishop of Dublin Dermot Farrell has said.

Speaking during a homily at Mass for the Association of Papal Orders, Archbishop Farrell said that the heart of the Christian mission is "communion with the Lord who, in the Spirit, and through his Church, continues to speak to our lives".

"In a world where the things of God are more and more forgotten or marginalised, or deemed insignificant, let us discover anew our unity in faith, our oneness in 'throwing our lot in with Christ,' for the sake of the little ones, the invisible, and indeed - in our weakness and unworthiness - for our own sake," Dr Farrell said.

### Ferns Faithful invited back to Mass after Covid slump

The bishop of the Diocese of Ferns has said a "large number" of people have not returned to Mass after the Covid pandemic, and invited the Faithful to return.

Bishop Ger Nash said in a pastoral letter entitled *Gathering back: rebuilding the Eucharistic community after the Covid pandemic*, that simply tuning in to Masses all over the world is akin to treating Mass as a "product to be consumed when in fact Mass is ideally a relationship".

"I hope you will be gentle with yourself as you think about this, but I also hope that you will be honest in assessing how your life has changed and whether or not it may be time to revert back to a former practice that was seriously altered for the sake of health and safety throughout the pandemic," he said.

## Niamh Uí Bhriain

### The View



# Foot-dragging on Covid-19 inquiry is unacceptable

For many people, the Covid-19 lockdowns and the seemingly never-ending restrictions which were imposed on the public, have faded into memory. The Government, seemingly eager to avoid examining any mistakes made, have been foot-dragging on the establishment of an inquiry into its pandemic response, even though the period saw measures enforced which were unprecedented in the history of the State.

It's vital that we understand just how important that inquiry is, and how unacceptable is the reluctance to scrutinise the policies and decisions that had such profound, and often very negative, impacts on people's lives, their health and wellbeing.

The consequences of the Covid-19 restrictions on access to medical treatments, for example, is thought to be the primary factor in the surge in excess deaths being recorded in Ireland and across Europe.

The latest figures from the EU's agency, EuroStat, shows that excess deaths jumped by 19% across the European states in December 2022, with Germany recording deaths at the rate of 37% above the average (as measured between 2019-2019), and Ireland seeing 25% excess deaths in the same month.

These are alarming figures. Clearly, there needs to be a full, frank and transparent investigation into the effect of policies around Covid-19, how those decisions were made, and what we can learn from the outcomes we're now seeing.

### Forced

Yet now, the same State which forced everyone to stay at home – even to the point of keeping people from saying goodbye to dying parents and loved ones – seems strangely incurious as to what mistakes they might have made during Covid-19 when they gave themselves such sweeping powers.

During the lockdown, when some few TDs – mostly Independents or Aontú – tried to ask for a risk or cost-benefit analysis of the restrictions they were deflected, even told to 'cop on' in the Dáil chamber. The mainstream media which received substantial advertising revenue and even funding from the State during the cri-

sis, seems strangely uninterested in a public inquiry.

But now, voices are emerging that are more difficult to ignore.

A member of NPHE – the expert group established by the Government to manage the national Covid-19 strategy – has published a paper which makes devastating criticisms of the approach adopted by the authorities during the lockdown.

The paper was presented by Prof. Martin Cormican to the Irish Society of Clinical Microbiologists, and says that an assessment of what Ireland's response "ought to have been" is needed – so that "Ireland and the EU could do better if this happens again".

His conclusions are compelling and informative, particularly in relation to striking the balance between preventing immediate harm while taking longer-term negative effects of policy into account.

**“Clearly, there needs to be a full, frank and transparent investigation into the effect of policies around Covid-19”**

He says the use of the phrase “follow the science”, was “both misleading and amoral” – and that “mask use in schools, like so much else that deprived children of their education and childhood, was done to placate powerful interest groups at the expense of the children's fundamental rights”.

He is scathing about the use of fear to persuade the public to accept policies he says were ineffective – and says that the decision to deprive those who were very ill or dying from seeing their loved ones was wrong.

The microbiologist also posited that those who benefitted “in terms of status, power or wealth” from the lockdown and the Covid-19 response need to consider if that influenced their thinking.

Prof. Cormican is professor of bacteriology at the University of Galway and was for many years a HSE national clinical lead in relation to infection control. When the Covid-19 crisis first broke in early 2020, he was a member of the NPHE Expert Advisory Group mon-

itoring research and development, before becoming a full member of the national body months later.

He says that policies were made during the Covid crisis which did not adequately factor in overall health gain and health loss over the longer term – and asks if NPHE “frightened” themselves and the public so much about Covid-19 that “perspective was lost on the wider issues”.

### Fear

“Fear is a dangerous tool when it comes to influencing population behaviour,” he wrote – pointing out that daily news reporting on case numbers generated “disproportionate fear” long after the number of people dying or in ICU had fallen sharply.

While the virus did lead to thousands of deaths – fewer than predicted – it was understood from early in the crisis that older people or those with underlying conditions were most at risk, and some 99% of confirmed Covid-19 cases were not fatal.

Prof. Cormican said that while scientific methods were “used to predict rates of infection, morbidity and mortality in different groups of the population and to assess how policy options would impact on these metrics”, it could have also been used “to estimate the unintended health consequences and social and economic consequences of different policy options”.

“Science is morally neutral. Public policy should not be morally neutral,” he argued, saying that care and compassion were core values.

“Whatever scientific rationale could be advanced for lowering risk of introduction of SARS-CoV-2 by preventing people in health-care settings and other similar settings from seeing the people they loved, it was simply wrong in human terms and should never have been done. There are higher values than infection prevention and control,” he said.

The Galway-based scientist also argues that “the perspective of overall health gain and health loss over the longer term was not adequately factored in” to the Covid response in Ireland.

His is an insider view – and it's revealing that his warnings on “collateral damage” seemed not to be given due consideration.



A man holds a sign outside Sts Anne and Mary's Cathedral in Cork protesting against the ban on public worship during the pandemic. Photo: CNS

“At the very first meeting of the expert advisory group, I was making this point about the consciousness of collateral damage or unintended consequences,” he wrote.

The collateral damage – to older people who died alone, to children whose education has been harmed, to the thousands now dying because they could not access medical assessments for cancer and other conditions for so long, to those whose freedoms were suppressed – is enormous, and must be the subject of an inquiry, precisely because this Government, and the nodding-head opposition, need to learn from its mistakes.

**“Fear is a dangerous tool when it comes to influencing population behaviour”**

If we do not learn from mistakes, we will make those mistakes again. That's probably more of an incontrovertible fact than much of what was claimed to be true during the Covid-19 crisis.

Prof. Cormican's conclusions should be read by Minister Stephen Donnelly, and could form the basis of long-overdue Covid-19 inquiry. This devastating critique from an expert member of NPHE cannot simply be ignored.

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# A fiercely independent religious correspondent

## Kieron Wood August 15, 1949-February 25, 2023



Peadar Laighleis

For a few years in the late 1980s and early 1990s, you could not turn on an RTÉ news broadcast on radio or television without seeing or hearing Kieron Wood, first as religious affairs correspondent and later as legal correspondent.

He cut a distinctive figure with his enunciation of the English language and with his bow tie. He disappeared from the public eye afterwards to practice law and go into print media, eventually as senior assistant editor of *The Sunday Business Post*. In the same time, he wrote several books on diverse topics which reflected his professional and personal interests.

Kieron Wood was born in London on August 15, 1949, son of Rex and Mollie (née Emblem). His father was Australian and was part of an active Catholic family - his father was also a papal knight. Kieron married Maria early and found himself as a father of a young family while still a young man himself.

He was very much the old school journalist, meticulous in checking his sources with superb shorthand skills.

As a traditionally-minded Catholic in the early 1970s, he formed part of a group which gravitated around a priest of the Brighton and Arundel Diocese named Alan Wilders. Many were Irish or had Irish connections. Eventually, Fr Wilders moved to Ireland, to found St Patrick's Academy beside the village of Islandeady, Co. Mayo, just off the main road between Castlebar and Westport. Kieron and his family settled in Co. Wicklow and he was employed by RTÉ.

### St Pius X

In the late 1970s, Kieron became part of a group which brought Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre to Ireland and later arranged for the Society of St Pius X to establish a base here. The other four members predeceased him, but at first they arranged for hotel rooms, then the R & R Music Hall in Rathmines, then a chapel on Crawford Avenue until eventually the former Anglican Church of St John the Evangelist was purchased on Mounttown Road in Dún Laoghaire. He was close



The late Kieron Wood.

to the first resident priest, Fr John Emerson who was subsequently a founder member of St Peter's Fraternity. Kieron and his family assisted with the cleaning and decorating of the church.

**“He was very much the old school journalist, meticulous in checking his sources with superb shorthand skills”**

The indulgent *Quattuor Abhinc Annos* happened in 1984 and in 1985, Archbishop Kevin McNamara instituted a first Friday indulgent Mass in the chapel of the Sacred Heart Convent in Tivoli Road. The Woods arranged another indulgent Mass in a convent in Delgany, Co. Wicklow on first Fridays. Fr Emerson encouraged his people to support this, but he was replaced by Fr Daniel Couture who took a different attitude.

Around this time, Kieron became religious affairs correspondent in RTÉ. He was a breath of fresh air as a lot of religious affairs journalists in Ireland at the time were part of an informal club originally put together by Fr Austin Flannery OP, famous for the English version of the Second Vatican

Council documents and the reordering of St Saviour's Church in Dominick Street in Dublin. Kieron was a head and shoulders above all these.

Kieron was pursuing stories without fear or favour, and many of the senior clergy were aware of his leanings which did not win him many friends in the ecclesiastical establishment. He made a decisive break with the Society of St Pius X in 1988 following the Econe consecrations and consequent excommunications. This is where his role as religious affairs correspondent in RTÉ was almost providential. The traditional Latin Mass in Dublin moved from Tivoli Road to the Daughters of the Cross hospital in Cabinteely, but with no publicity. The relatively-new Archbishop of Dublin, Desmond Connell, wanted to instate a new venue for the traditional Mass, especially after Pope John Paul II called for “wide and generous” application of the 1984 indulgent in his apostolic letter *Ecclesia Dei Adflicta*. Initially, the Poor Clare convent in Harold's Cross was chosen. It was clear that the nuns were having none of it and the designated priest Msgr Moloney told people that nothing could be done. At this point Kieron told him he would be waiting with a camera crew

at the convent on the Sunday morning to interview the people disappointed with the cancellation. Very shortly afterwards, it was announced that the Church of Ss Michael and John, Wood Quay would be the alternative venue. Kieron ensured there was maximum publicity and eventually, there was a congregation of around 500, where the previous congregation in Cabinteely was rarely more than 25.

### Career

Around this time, there was a change in Kieron's career. He got too close to certain stories and two bishops successfully lobbied RTÉ to have him moved out of religious affairs.

**“I think it hurt Kieron that he was deprived of the opportunity to be a full-time religious affairs correspondent”**

Kieron was naturally disappointed, but it opened a whole new avenue as the first legal affairs correspondent in RTÉ. He also produced an instructional video on how to celebrate the Traditional Latin Mass entitled *The Most Beautiful Thing This Side of Heaven*, which became an international bestseller.

Kieron did not have the opportunity to go to university when he was younger, so in 1991, he began studying law in the Honourable Society of the King's Inns in Dublin. Here his journalistic skills stood to him because it is often important to get the text of the law lecturers almost verbatim. Kieron took it down in shorthand and typed it up immediately afterward. Many students paid to purchase these notes.

I began attending the Traditional Latin Mass on a regular basis in summer 1992 and I began studying in the King's Inns that Autumn, so I had two points of contact with Kieron. I think I was introduced to him in the Inns, but he already knew my face from Mass. I got to know his family by sight, or at least I thought I did as I regularly saw a young woman late that year with Maria, but she was not a relative. She was a German student *au pair* named Sabine Zick to whom I am now married.

In the mid-1990s, Kieron and Maria separated and in time, the marriage was dissolved through a Church annulment and civil divorce. Kieron became an expert on family law and divorce in particular. He graduated with first

class honours as a barrister-at-law in 1995 and he published books on *Divorce in Ireland*, *A Guide to the Court of Appeal*, *The Kilkenny Incest Case* and in a more religious direction, *The Latter Day Saints* which describes a scandal which nearly torpedoed Mormonism. Much later he penned a biography of Kay Summersby entitled *Ike's Irish Lover*.

### Wife

In the late 1990s Kieron met his now wife Catherine. Kieron and Catherine were married in St Kevin's Church, Harrington Street in 2008 with Fr Gerard Deighan as celebrant and were building a family. Catherine specifically asked if I would serve the Mass, which I did.

**“Kieron was pursuing stories without fear or favour, and many of the senior clergy were aware of his leanings which did not win him many friends in the ecclesiastical establishment”**

I think it hurt Kieron that he was deprived of the opportunity to be a full-time religious affairs correspondent. He was very successful as a legal journalist and lawyer, but his passion was religious affairs. I think it is a pity that in the traditional Mass situation, he didn't take on a more international role. I also recall the late Msgr Francis Cremin fulminating that Kieron Wood should have been left in religious affairs.

In 2019, Kieron announced that he had Progressive Supranuclear Palsy, a very rare, degenerative brain disease, which killed Dudley Moore, Bob Hoskins, Nigel Dempster and Peter Sarstedt (Where do you go to my lovely?). He could no longer type or text. I had very little contact with him and he went into nursing care soon after.

Kieron died on February 25, 2023. He was predeceased by his son Dominic. He is survived by his wife Catherine, children Tabitha, Laura, Sarah, Timothy, Riain, Grace, Mollie, Billy and Teddy.

Traditional Catholic Ireland has lost a constant and powerful advocate.

*Anima eius et animae omnium fidelium defunctorum per Dei misericordiam requiescant in pace. Amen.*



# Suspect confesses to Bishop O'Connell murder

## Staff reporter

Carlos Medina, the husband of Los Angeles Auxiliary Bishop David O'Connell's housekeeper, has admitted to murdering the bishop, the Los Angeles District Attorney George Gascón has said.

"He admitted that he had done the killing and we believe we recovered the weapon that they were using, and we have other evidence from the bed, certain things that indicate that they were in the place where the killing occurred," Mr Gascón said in Spanish.

Additionally, Mr Gascón revealed that Bishop O'Connell, a native of Co. Cork, had sustained multiple gunshot wounds. In a press conference earlier, it was reported that when Bishop O'Connell was found he had sustained "at least" one gunshot wound to his upper body while in his bedroom, Los Angeles Sheriff's Department (LASD) Sheriff Robert Luna said.

## Funeral

Bishop O'Connell's funeral Mass will be held tomorrow (Friday) at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels at 11am local time. The funeral Mass will be livestreamed.

Mr Gascón said that a deacon found Bishop

O'Connell after he was shot, adding that "the way that the body was" appeared as if Bishop O'Connell might have died of natural causes. When paramedics arrived, it became clear that his death was the result of suspicious circumstances, he said.

Detectives also revealed that they believed that the suspect was not motivated by money. A tipster had reportedly told police that Mr Medina had said Bishop O'Connell owed him money.

Bishop O'Connell was murdered on February 18 in his Hacienda Heights home and authorities were on an around-the-clock manhunt in search of the killer.

**“He admitted that he had done the killing and we believe we recovered the weapon that they were using”**

In detectives' search for the killer, Mr Luna said that Sunday evening they were tipped off about a person of interest in the city of Torrance, which is about a 45-minute drive southwest of Hacienda Heights.

Detectives identified the person of interest as Mr Medina on Sunday evening after the tipster told them

that Mr Medina was exhibiting "strange" and "irrational" behaviour and had "made comments about the bishop owing him money". He was arrested February 20 morning and charged on February 22.

A reporter asked Gascón at the press conference if Bishop O'Connell might have owed Mr Medina money.

## Reasons

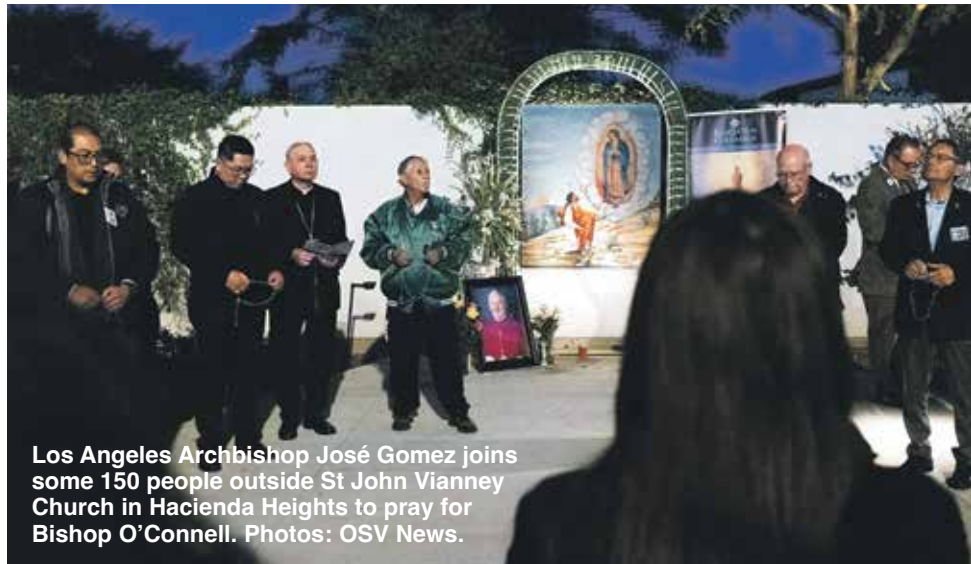
Lt. Michael Modica answered and said: "When [Mr Medina] was interviewed, he spoke, he said several different reasons and none of them made any sense to the investigators. So, we don't believe there's any validity to the owing of money."

A reporter asked Mr Gascón if Mr Medina had used his wife's special access, like a key or lock code, to get into Bishop O'Connell's residence.

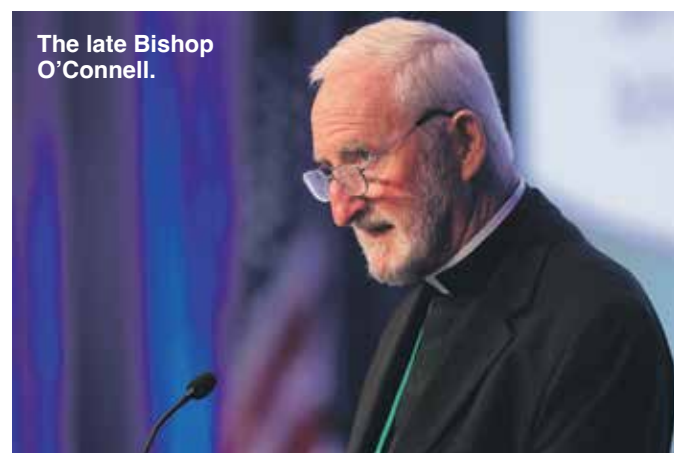
Mr Gascón said that the evidence shows there was no forced entry, "so we'll have to assume that there was a key or some other forms, and he had done some work in the house previously as well."

If convicted, Mr Medina faces 35 years to life in prison.

Bishop O'Connell, who was known as 'Bishop Dave,' served the San Gabriel Pastoral Region of



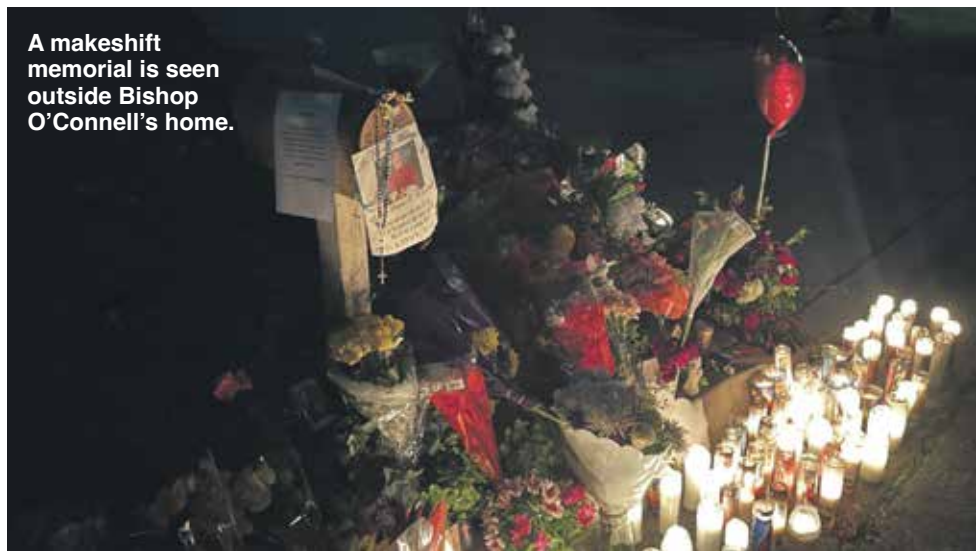
Los Angeles Archbishop José Gomez joins some 150 people outside St John Vianney Church in Hacienda Heights to pray for Bishop O'Connell. Photos: OSV News.



The late Bishop O'Connell.

the archdiocese, which covers East Los Angeles through the San Gabriel and Pomona Valleys.

Born in 1953 in Co. Cork, he was ordained a priest in 1979 after studies in All Hallows College. He immediately began serving in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and held many different positions during his priesthood, in which he ministered to immigrants and those affected by both gang violence and poverty.



A makeshift memorial is seen outside Bishop O'Connell's home.



Prayers were offered for the happy repose of the soul of Bishop O'Connell.

# 2023 GUIDE TO RETREATS

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# Why are our young people so broken?



Is there a deeper existential crisis which social media is making worse, asks **David Quinn**

Ireland is supposed to be the most liberated it has ever been, and yet at the same time we seem to witness a surge in mental health problems among young people, especially adolescent girls, and not just in Ireland, but in many other countries as well.

The entire liberal project of maximum personal choice is premised on the notion that the freer we are to pursue the kind of life we want, liberated from almost all constraints, the happier we will be. However, things do not seem to be working out that way. This is not to say the answer is to go back to a time when there were more restraints, but it is certainly to say that the place we are in is not what was expected. More freedom, according to liberal thinking, should be leading to improved happiness and therefore to better mental health as well.

A major new report from the US highlights the scale of the problem there. It is produced every two years by the Centre for Disease Control, and it surveys high school students (equivalent to secondary school pupils in Ireland).

One of the areas it looks at is mental health. It finds that 42% of students said they “experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness” over the past 30 days, an awful figure. That is up from 28% in 2011.

## Crisis

Over one in five (22%) said they “seriously considered attempting suicide” in the last month. That is a crisis. Even if we believe that, deep down, most respondents did not really mean this, it is still a very worrying figure and it compares with 16% in 2011.

There are very big differences by sex. The number of girls who said they had “experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness” in the last 30 days was 57%, compared with 29% of boys.

The number of girls who made an actual suicide plan in the last year was 24% compared with 12% for boys.

Thirteen percent of girls who responded to the survey actually



attempted suicide, and 7% of boys did so.

These figures ought to have alarm bells ringing everywhere.

What is happening in Ireland? We do not know for sure because we do not have a similar survey to the American one in this country, but child psychiatrists are warning that we have a big problem.

Dr Mary Cannon and Dr Michele Hill have said that children’s hospitals were dealing with “astronomical” numbers of young people who self-harmed.

**“Children’s hospitals were dealing with ‘astronomical’ numbers of young people who self-harmed”**

Dr Hill added: “Despite all the awareness campaigns...the rates of moderate to severe mental health conditions, the rates of self-harm and suicidal ideation, are not going down. They are going up.”

What is happening? A lot of the increase seems to coincide with the rise of social media, and especially smart phones which began to become all-pervasive from around 2012.

Psychologist Jean Twenge in her book, *iGen*, standing for ‘internet generation’, examines the trends. As the front cover of

her 2017 book puts it, “today’s super-connected kids are growing up less rebellious, more tolerant, less happy and completely unprepared for adulthood”.

The first one of the trends she mentioned, namely the fact that the generation born after 1995 are less rebellious might strike some people as surprising.

## Survey

But the abovementioned US survey reports that teenagers are having sex less often and with fewer partners than in 2011. It also reveals that they are less likely to be drinking alcohol or using drugs.

For example, the number who reported drinking alcohol in 2011 was 39% whereas in 2021 it was 23%.

In 2011, almost half reported they had ‘never had sex’ (remember, those being surveyed are between the ages of 13 and 18), while in 2021 the figure was 30%.

This is a good thing, obviously, but it is linked to a worrying trend all the same because it means that children are meeting less often than they used to. And why is that? It’s because they are hooked up to the internet all the time and therefore are spending a lot more time alone and that seems to be worsening their mental health.

Why are girls being affected more than boys? For a start, girls seem to be more prone to problems like depression and anxiety anyway, and secondly

social media seems to prey on girls’ insecurities more. Social media allows people to compare themselves with everyone else all day long. People obviously post online the best and most glamorous version of themselves, and it is very hard to compare with that.

**“What is happening? A lot of the increase seems to coincide with the rise of social media”**

When you see the fantastic time everyone else seems to be having (which often isn’t true at all), it is easy to feel like a failure and a ‘loser’. This increases feelings of anxiety and hopelessness. Boys appear less likely to engage in these constant comparisons because they are more likely to be playing games online, rather than looking at pictures of each other.

On the other hand, boys are far more likely to be watching porn, and not of the old *Playboy* variety, but far more extreme than that, and often violent as well.

This is having a distorting effect on them, and it is also worrying girls because they wonder if boys’ expectations of sex are being shaped by what they are watching, and the answer is yes. This is also increasing anxiety levels.

But is there another factor that is being missed? Is there a

deeper, existential crisis going on, which social media is making worse, namely the absence of a sense of an overarching meaning and purpose in life, something that is supplied in abundance by religion.

It cannot be this alone because religion across the Western world has been in decline for a long time and the surge in mental health problems among young people has really only surged in the last 10 years.

## Religious practice

But multiple studies have shown that religious practice helps to protect people against mental and physical ill-health. There are no guarantees of course. Plenty of religious people have both mental and physical health problems, but the odds of experiencing these seem to be worse when a person is not religious.

Religion helps people to gain a proper sense of proportion, to provide a deeper context for life’s setbacks, to understand suffering and accept it with more equanimity, to have an overarching sense of meaning and purpose, to know that ultimately God is in charge.

When you don’t have any of these things, or haven’t found some kind of substitute, however inadequate that might be, you are more likely to feel lost and at sea, especially when you suffer setbacks, which are an absolutely inevitable part of life.

This is why we need to look at whether there is a link between poor mental health among young people and the decline of religion. A person who lacks an overarching sense of meaning and purpose has certainly built their life on insecure foundations.

**“Religion helps people to gain a proper sense of proportion, to provide a deeper context for life’s setbacks, to understand suffering and accept it with more equanimity”**

# Killaloe mulls radical parish amalgamation

## Ruadhán Jones

Parishes in the diocese of Killaloe are being consulted on plans to cut the number of parishes from 58 to 15.

In meetings held in February and March, two plans for the future of the diocese are being presented to parishes for consideration.

Fr Albert McDonnell, the diocese's chancellor, told the parishes that "radical" structural change is needed now as the Church in Ireland is "at a minute to midnight".

Fr McDonnell proposed that the diocese's 58 parishes be amalgamated into 15 larger parishes based on the current pastoral areas.

These larger parishes would be "communities of communities", maintaining multiple churches but identifying one or two where Mass would be celebrated every Sunday.

## Lay-led liturgies

The changes would require lay-led liturgies in the other parishes, Fr McDonnell said, or moving Sunday Mass to a Wednesday – a change that needs Vatican approval.

The change would also free "up energy for evangelisation"

and sharing the Gospel by removing the "burden" of compliance from multiple areas into one administrative centre.

Fr McDonnell proposed a single bank account for the parish as well, but this change would also require Vatican approval.

## Amalgamation

The amalgamation would be "radical", the diocesan chancellor admitted, but added "it would be a powerful statement of our belief in the Gospel and our desire to keep the Gospel alive".

"The situation is quite serious. We are at a minute to midnight. If we don't do something radical quite soon, we won't have the energy to do it."

The second proposal, delivered by Kerry priest Fr Ger Godley, was for pastoral areas with multiple parishes working together.

This model, already partly practised in Killaloe, enables parishes to work together and coordinate activities, Fr Godley explained. Priests meet regularly to draw up a rota of activities, splitting their time evenly between the parishes in their area.

Parish teams, including pastoral councils, liturgy groups and parish secretaries, become increasingly important in this

model, Fr Godley said, adding later that it is "crucial" to "nurture the local Christian community" by developing leadership teams.

The Bishop of Killaloe told *The Irish Catholic* that there is no timeline for these proposals. The consultation process is at an early stage, "planting the seed

and seeing where it goes", Bishop Fintan Monahan said.

"If any amalgamation has to happen it has to be done with huge consultation," he added, saying they are not pre-empting the result. "I'm sure a lot of Irish dioceses will have to do this in years to come. But timing is a concern, is it right to do now?"

We want to get it right."

Killaloe began their process of reflection and conversation about the future shape of the diocese in mid-February and meetings will continue until the end of March.

At present, Killaloe have 23 parishes without a resident priest and less than 50 priests under the age of 75.

## Students gather for life



Young attendees are pictured at the Students For Life Student Summit. The annual event, which brings third level students and young people together to learn more about pro-life activism, took place in Glencomeragh House, Co. Waterford at the weekend.

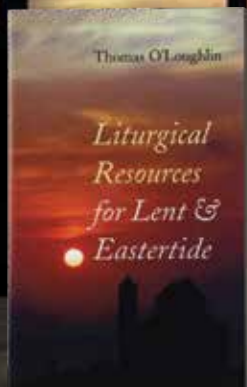
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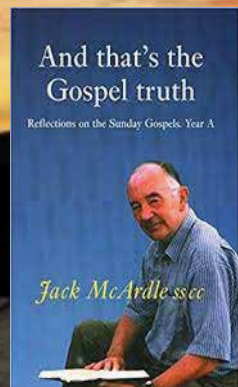
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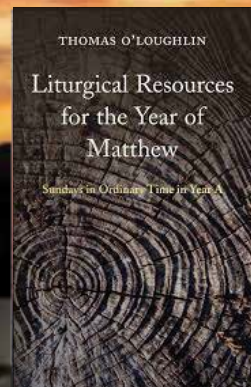
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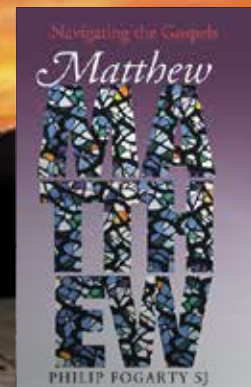
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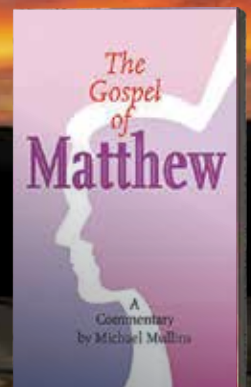
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# A solemn service marks one year of

**Jason Osborne**

February 24 saw the one year anniversary of the outbreak of war in Ukraine, and both Ukrainian and Irish communities gathered in Donnellycarney parish to mark the occasion.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper, Chaplain to the Ukrainian Community in Ireland Fr Vasyl Kornitsky said that the one year anniversary was a "very anxious day" for all Ukrainians.

"The 24<sup>th</sup> of February was really a very anxious day for Ukrainians because it brought back many memories, what people experienced back home in Ukraine, so we decided – the Ukrainian community and also the Irish community, with Fr Michael in Donnellycarney – we wanted to organise some kind

of prayer vigil or an evening where we can get together not only to pray, but also to grieve and to mourn and just to be together, so we decided to have a candlelight prayer vigil," he said.

People were "very emotional," Fr Vasyl said, as they prayed, grieved and celebrated Ukraine in spite of the "darkness of war".

"It was a very difficult day for us. Even when I woke up that morning, I knew it was going to be a difficult day. We gathered like a community, like a family, to grieve, to mourn, to pray and to reflect but most of all to pray for peace so that the war would end soon and people can go back to their homes," Fr Vasyl said.

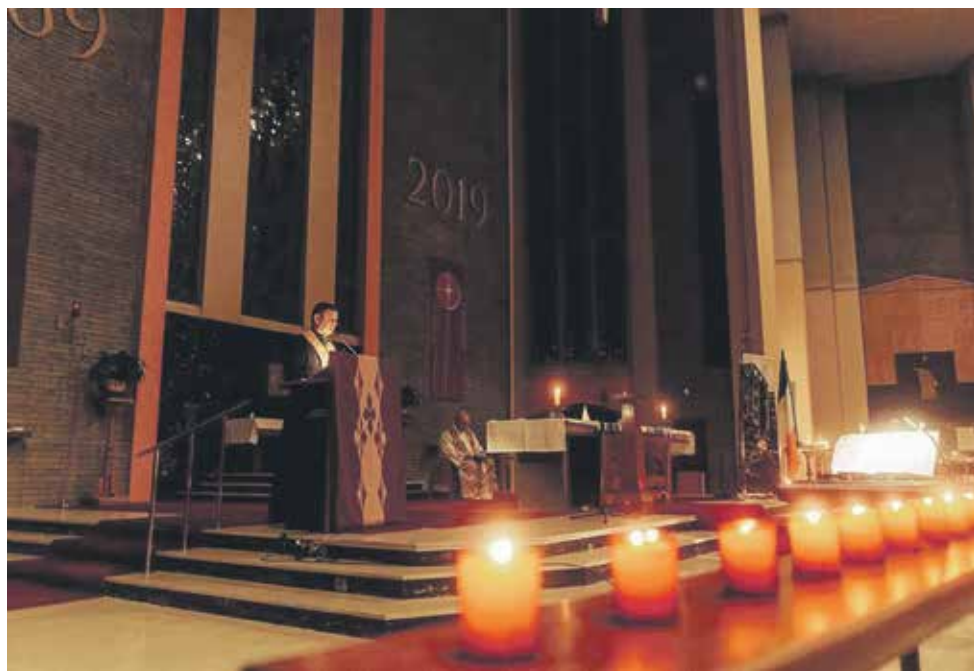


Children in traditional Ukrainian dress sing during the service.



Music accompanies the service as candles stand atop the altar rails

# war in Ukraine



Fr Vasyl Kornitsky preaches during the service in Our Lady of Consolation Church, Donnycarney, to mark one year since the war in Ukraine began.



A large crowd attends the service.



Music accompanies the service as candles stand atop the altar rails.

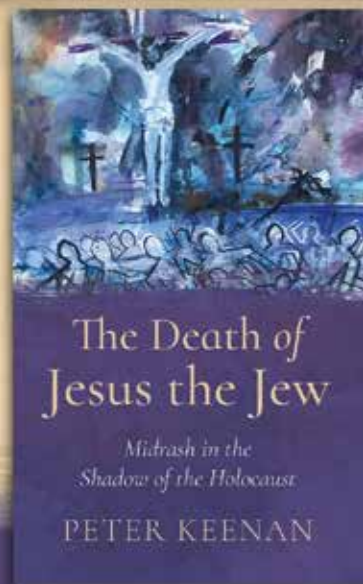


Fr Michael O'Grady sits in prayer during the service.



Children carry candles to the altar during the vigil.

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# Rescuing the Apostle to the



Surveying the view from the top of Slieve Patrick, site of the largest monument in the world to the patron saint.



**Walking the byways and valleys where St Patrick first ministered is a unique way to re-discover his greatness, writes Michael Kelly**

**F**ar from the green beer, parades and novelty costumes, if one wants to get to know the real St Patrick there are few better ways to do than to travel to where he and his disciples walked some 1,600 years ago.

The tradition holds that on his return visit to begin evangelising, St Patrick sailed up Strangford Lough on the east

coast and arrived at a landing point at the Slaney River.

He quickly met with a local chieftain Dichu, who was so impressed with Patrick's teaching that he offered him a barn at Saul. This was just four miles from Downpatrick, and it was here that St Patrick built his first wooden church and ever since there has been a Christian presence on this hill, overlooking the very lough that was the gateway to his arrival.

## Resting place

Downpatrick, from the Irish Dún Pádraig - meaning 'Patrick's fort', is the traditional resting place of the man who would become known as the 'apostle to the Irish'.

In fact, Patrick was even known as 'the last apostle' for it was considered that he brought the Gospel "to the ends of the earth".

Patrick now lies buried in the shadow of Down Cathedral alongside his fellow patrons Brigid and Colmcille.

There has hardly been a time in my life when I was not aware of St Patrick. Some of my earliest childhood memories were donning the shamrock and celebrating the feastday with my family. I was acutely aware of the legends surrounding the patron saint when I was a child, and read St Patrick's

own writings at university. I grew to love the theological depth, but also the hagiography that sometimes makes it hard to sift fact from legend.

In a quest to deepen my love for St Patrick and the rich heritage he represents, I travelled to Downpatrick to walk where he and his disciples had walked and learn more from the very ground that is steeped in traditions associated with the saint.

**“Patrick now lies buried in the shadow of Down Cathedral alongside his fellow patrons Brigid and Colmcille”**

My first stop was the St Patrick Centre in the middle of the town. It is the only permanent exhibition in the world about Ireland's patron saint. The multimedia experience brings to life St Patrick using his own words and evoking his life and times and the pagan Ireland to which he came first as a slave, and then returned to evangelise.

I was joined by about a dozen other people who ranged from those curious to learn more about Patrick, others from the Republic who had



Taking in the natural beauty of the Mountains of Mourne.

never travelled north of the border before, a few who were having a camino reunion and maybe even one or two who weren't entirely sure why they had come.

Our intrepid and ebullient pilgrim guides Martina Purdy and Elaine Kelly soon put us at our ease and a minibus full of strangers were soon friends as we made our way to first starting point the beautiful Ballyhornan Beach for a spectacular coastal walk along sandy trails and clifftops to St Patrick's Well by the sea.

The centre offers a range of experiences from half-day to longer, and I had chosen to be part of what they call 'the journey' which is a five-day, four-night experience based at the beautiful Passionist Monastery in Crossgar, Co. Down.

## Mixture

The days are a wonderful mixture of walking, an opportunity to hear from Martina and Elaine about the beautiful and important sites along the way, time to get to know and chat with fellow pilgrims and some welcome relaxation.

After our walk to the historic Ardtole church, our day concluded with afternoon tea in the oldest golf club in the world in the medieval port town of Ardglass.

It was soon back to the monastery for dinner and relaxation with space to attend Mass if pilgrims desired, reflect in the monastery gardens, journal or simply relax ahead of another day of walking.

The following day brought us through the sweeping Mountains of Mourne to the seaside village of Rostrevor.

The morning visit to the Holy Cross Benedictine Abbey on the outskirts of Rostrevor was a highlight for me, where the community offered pilgrims the traditional monastic hospitality.

The monks were generous with their time and shared freely about their monastic way of life, spirituality and ecumenism before offering the pilgrims the traditional blessing on our journey.

It was then onwards to Kilbroney to ring the 10th Century St Bronagh's Bell to mark the start of our walk where we made our way from Rostrevor to the heart of the Mournes.

After another meal that can only be described as a feast of comfort food and a restful night at the Tobar Mhuire Monastery, the following day we were off back to Downpatrick.

**“I was joined by about a dozen other people who ranged from those curious to learn more about Patrick”**

Departing from the St Patrick Centre, we followed the pilgrim way with Martina and Elaine to make our way to the Quoile River on the outskirts of Downpatrick. It was here that our pilgrimage was to make our way to Inch Abbey – but by a different means.

Though initially met with a little trepidation from some, the idea to canoe down the Quoile was embraced by all and we were soon on our way. Most of our pilgrims had never canoed before, but after a little tutoring were soon experts as we manoeuvred down the river to Inch Abbey.

Inch Abbey is where the legend of St Patrick driving the snakes out of Ireland was written, and it proved the perfect location for a much-needed picnic before boarding our canoes for the return journey.

It was then a short walk uphill towards Saul where St Patrick died on March 17.

Lunch (and a libation) at the

popular local hostelry The Barn was a welcome respite and a lovely opportunity for pilgrims to share our experiences of the days, not least the new-found interest in canoeing for many.

The afternoon saw us return to Downpatrick where we arrived as pilgrims to the grave of St Patrick.

## Monument

The following day saw us early to make our way to Slieve Patrick to view the world's largest monument to St Patrick. After a little time exploring the majestic views, it was off to St Patrick's Healing Wells at Struell – an ancient pilgrimage and pre-Christian site which features a well in which St Patrick himself was said to have bathed.

Then it was off to the seaside again as we boarded the minibus for nearby Newcastle for lunch at the beautiful Harbour Inn.

The afternoon saw us make our way into the heart of the Mourne Mountains for an afternoon ramble on forest paths along Saint Patrick's Way descending back into the seaside town along the Shimna River.

There was time for a stick of rock or an ice cream by the sea before heading back to the monastery at Crossgar for dinner and an opportunity to share our reflections on the experiences of the days.

The following day saw a return to the St Patrick Centre and an opportunity to explore the town including the famous Gaol, the majestic Down Cathedral and, of course, time for one last prayer at the huge stone that covers the final resting place of St Patrick.

**📌 The St Patrick Centre offers a range of experiences as well as the world's only permanent exhibition dedicated to Patrick, for more information see [www.saintpatrickcentre.com](http://www.saintpatrickcentre.com)**

# Irish from 'Plastic Paddy'



Ring the 10th Century Bell of St Bronagh.



The walks were also an opportunity for fellowship.



Pilgrims got in touch with nature as some wild goats joined us for part of the journey.



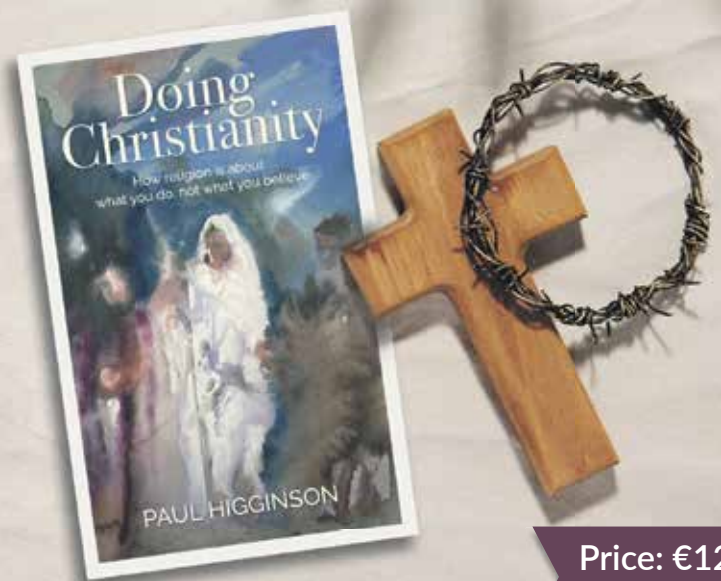
Pilgrim guide Elaine shows the ropes.



Canoeing to Inch Abbey, where some of the hagiography about St Patrick was written.

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# An invitation to walk with Christ...



The Holy Land is once again buzzing with pilgrims from all over the world, including many from Ireland, writes **Michael Kelly**

**W**hether through the eyes of faith or as a tourist, the Holy Land is an unforgettable destination. It is an intoxicating mix of culture, religion, history, architecture, sun-soaked beaches and world-class cuisine.



A group of pilgrims prepare to walk the Via Dolorosa in February 2023, which is the path Jesus took towards his crucifixion. Photos: Chai Brady

Sunday February 12 saw 107 intrepid pilgrims set off from Dublin Airport for the trip of a lifetime to the Holy Land, we were most definitely pilgrims and not religious tourists. Bishop of Derry Donal McKeown was our spiritual director as we prepared to walk in the footsteps of Jesus in the land where he chose to be born.

Nestled in the heart of the Middle East, the territory that we refer to as the Holy Land is the land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Eastern Bank of the Jordan River roughly corresponding to the modern State of Israel, the Palestinian Territories, western Jordan, and parts

of southern Lebanon and southwestern Syria.

The land is holy to Jews, Christians and Muslims. But it is also a bustling melting pot and the crossroads between Europe and the East.

### Jewel

The jewel in the crown is Jerusalem, claimed by both Israelis

and Palestinians as their capital. For believers, it is the only city that exists twice – in both heaven and on earth. The city has been destroyed at least twice, besieged 23 times, captured and recaptured 44 times, and attacked 52 times – and yet it stands.

Perhaps we're used to seeing Jerusalem in the news

because of sporadic clashes in the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This has led unfairly to a feeling abroad that the city and wider region is unsafe. It is an unfortunate caricature, and one we are all-too-familiar with at the height of the conflict in Northern Ireland where tourists avoided our many

*"I dream of a Church transformed."* – Pope Francis

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wonderful sites over fears of violence.

The Holy Land is most important as a site of pilgrimage. It has been visited by Jews for over 3,000 years and Christians close on 2,000 years to visit the sites associated with the life of Christ. Christianity has had such an influence on the culture and language of the western world that towns like Nazareth, Bethlehem, Capernaum, Cana and of course Jerusalem roll off the tongue and conjure up the biblical scenes.

What is remarkable about most of the sites in the Holy Land is how comfortably the ancient sits with the modern.

Our first destination was Nazareth, today the largest Arab city in Israel. As one ascends the slight incline in Nazareth towards the Basilica of the Annunciation – the site where Christians believe that Mary was told by the Angel Gabriel that she would become the Mother of God – there is a falafel and shawarma shop (one of the region's finest) seemingly hewn in the rocks that make up the foundations of the modern church and next to the first century cave where the tradition is the event happened.

**“ Perhaps we’re used to seeing Jerusalem in the news because of sporadic clashes in the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict”**

It was here that we celebrated the first Mass of our pilgrimage with *Lady of Knock* resounding throughout the hills of the Lower Galilee Mountains.

No visit to a Middle Eastern city would be complete without a visit to the marketplace or *souq* and Nazareth is no exception. Starting at the top of El-Bishara Street it occupies a maze of narrow, winding streets and one can haggle for a bargain and shop for anything from household goods to reli-



Taking turns to carry the cross, Irish pilgrims walk the streets of the Old City in Jerusalem along the Via Dolorosa - the Way of Suffering.

gious souvenirs to local spices and unfamiliar fruits.

Nearby is the small town of Cana of wedding feast fame where the Bible records that Jesus turned the water into wine. Enterprising locals never miss an opportunity to sell locally-produced wine to pilgrims and tourists, but it is known more as a nice gift for a couple to have a toast at their wedding than any gold medals.

On our pilgrimage, couples relished the occasion to renew their wedding vows where the miraculous feast had occurred. There were also special memories for spouses who were left behind, for those who had died and for those whose relationships had not worked out the way they would've wished.

**Boat ride**

No visit to the northern region is complete without a visit to the Sea of Galilee where pilgrims can take a boat ride and visit sites like Tabgha – the site of the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes – and Capernaum where Jesus spent a lot of his time.

Heading south one crosses into the West Bank and therefore the Palestinian Territories. It is named for the fact that it is the land on the western shore of the River Jordan. It is here where the Bible records that Jesus was baptised by John the

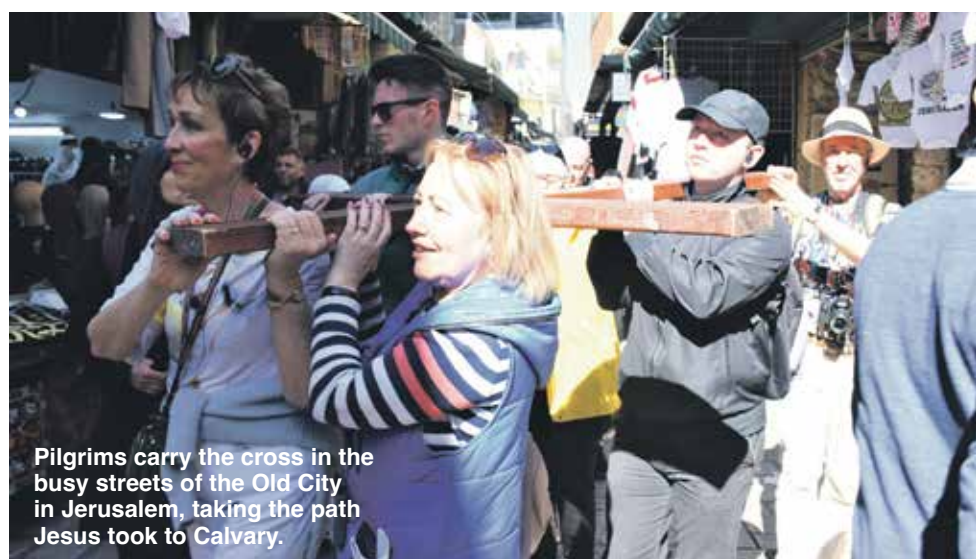
Baptist. The narrow stretch of water known as the baptismal site is the border with Jordan and was a closed military zone until relatively recently due to the presence of many landmines, now thankfully cleared making the site accessible for pilgrims to renew their baptismal vows.

**“ A brief drive west brings us to the ‘little town of Bethlehem’ where Jesus was born”**

Going further south in the Jordan Valley one approaches a phenomenon that should be missed by no visitor – the Dead Sea. So great is the salt content in the sea, that one floats neatly on top of the water. The minerals in the sand are revered for their supposed healing qualities and many shops on the seashore sell the mud and other salts.

A brief drive west brings us to the ‘little town of Bethlehem’ where Jesus was born. Though Christians today make up only about 12% of the town's population, it is a place where the decorations stay up 12 months of the year and every day really is Christmas.

It was here that we were greeted by the city councilman




Pilgrims carry the cross in the busy streets of the Old City in Jerusalem, taking the path Jesus took to Calvary.



Fr Eamon Kelly LC, of the Legionaries of Christ, gives a tour at Magdala, the home of St Mary Magdalene.

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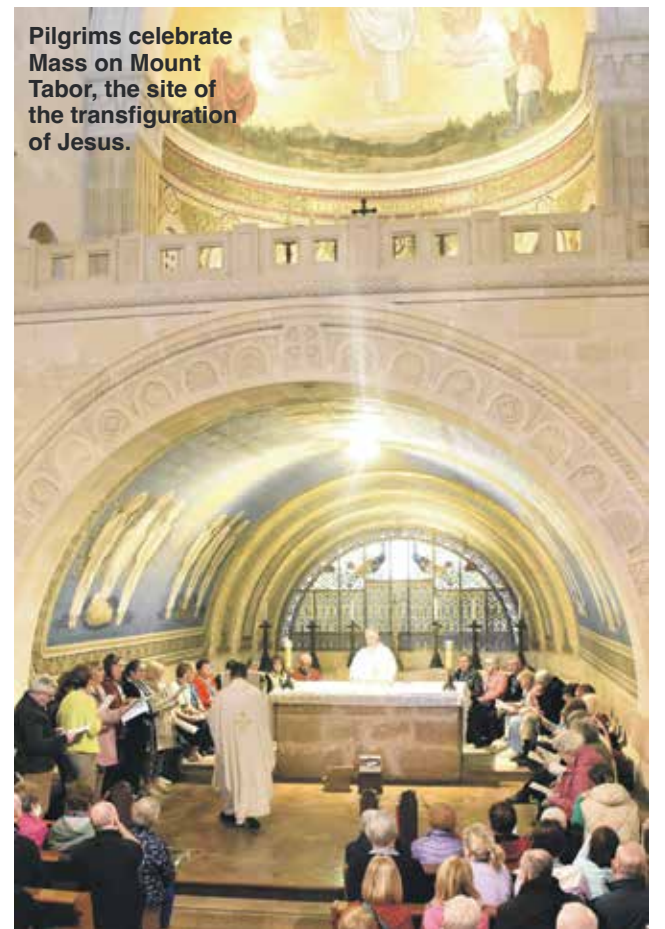
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Singers at Mass in the Church of the Transfiguration.



A young pilgrim reads during Mass atop Mount Tabor.



Pilgrims celebrate Mass on Mount Tabor, the site of the transfiguration of Jesus.

Anton Salman, himself part of the Christian minority, who spoke about the hopes and dreams of the local Christian community. But it was also a story of struggle – the Christian population is going down, many are feeling forced to go abroad in search of a better life.

Christian solidarity is at the heart of the pilgrimages organised by *The Irish Catholic*, and Mr Salman pleaded with the Irish pilgrims to speak of their experiences and to pray for the Christians – the living stones – of the Holy Land.

**Centrepiece**

The centrepiece of the city in the aptly-named Manger Square is the Church of the Nativity where one can ascend the few steps to the ancient site revered as the birthplace of Jesus. The nearby Milk Grotto Church is a popular destination due to a tradition that the powder from the rocks mixed with water has miraculous properties for couples having difficulty conceiving.

Jerusalem is just eight kilometres from Bethlehem through the Israeli security barrier that divides Israelis and Palestinians and serves as a constant reminder of that peace process that has been so near, and yet remains so elusive.

Today it is home to almost a million people and while one street resembles any modern European city, the next is an ultraorthodox Jewish neigh-

bourhood. Cross the road and one is in the heart of Muslim Jerusalem. The Old City with a dizzying array of shops and restaurants sits at the heart of this.

The highlight for our pilgrims was to walk the *Via Dolorosa* to re-enact Christ's journey to Calvary which leads one to The Church of the Holy Sepulchre which contains the site of the crucifixion, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Here pilgrims and visitors of every background and tradition mingle and one can reach down and touch the site believed to be where the cross of Jesus stood as well as enter the small chamber where his body was laid and his apostles found empty on the first Easter Sunday.

Everyone brings something of themselves to the Holy Land – whether it is prayers of petition, prayers for healing, in thanksgiving or even just curiosity. As we depart for our return trip to Ireland, one can't also help thinking that we leave part of ourselves here in this Holy Land where God walked amongst us.

**i** Michael Kelly is Editor of *The Irish Catholic* and author of the book *An Irish Pilgrimage Guide to the Holy Land* available in all bookshops and from [www.columbabooks.com](http://www.columbabooks.com) priced £14.99/€16.99. He will lead two pilgrimages to the Holy Land in October, for more information you can email [michael@irishcatholic.ie](mailto:michael@irishcatholic.ie) or see **Page 20**.



Pilgrims are pictured outside the Church of the Transfiguration on top of Mount Tabor.



Priest of the Archdiocese of Armagh, Fr Barry Matthews concelebrates during Mass in the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth.



A pilgrim reads at Mass in the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth.



Irish pilgrims prepare for Mass in the basilica in Nazareth.



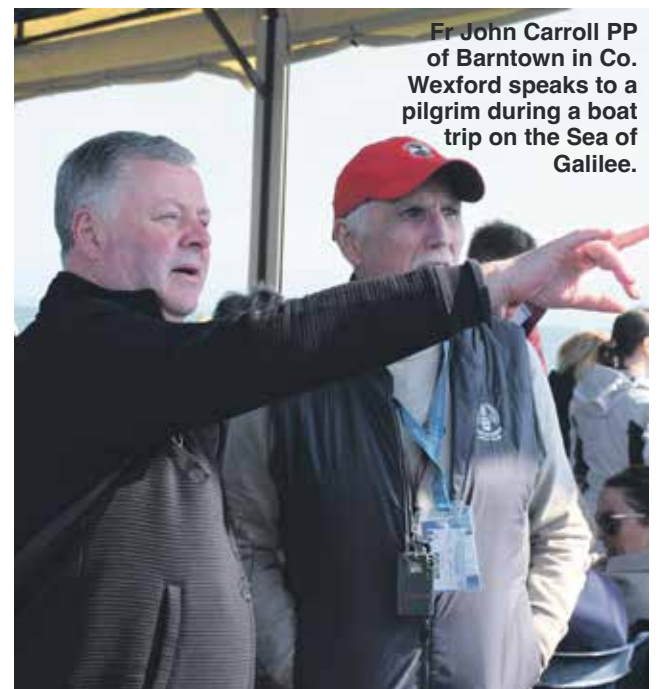
The Irish flag is raised by a pilgrim during the boat trip.



Bishop Donal McKeown speaks to pilgrims while they sail on the Sea of Galilee.



Pilgrims prepare to embark on a boat trip on the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus walked on water.



Fr John Carroll PP of Barntown in Co. Wexford speaks to a pilgrim during a boat trip on the Sea of Galilee.



Fr Paul O'Boyle PP of Clane and Rathcoffey for the Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin concelebrates Mass at the Milk Grotto in Bethlehem.



Anton Salman, a local Palestinian politician, speaks to pilgrims about the political situation before lunch in the Peace Centre in Manger Square in Bethlehem.



Bishop McKeown prays with pilgrims at the site where Jesus was believed to have been baptised on the Jordan River, on the border of Israel and Jordan.



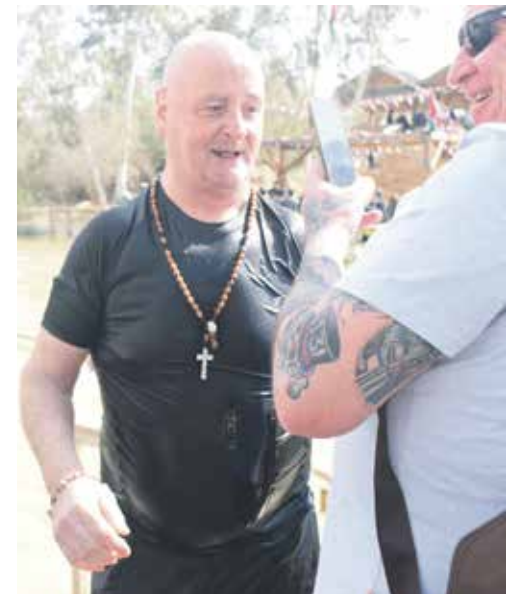
Pilgrims celebrate Mass at the Chapel of the Milk Grotto of Our Lady in Bethlehem.



A pilgrim sings a hymn at the site where Jesus is believed to have been baptised.



A pilgrim renews his baptismal vows in the Jordan River at Qasr al-Yahud, the site Jesus is believed to have been baptised at.



A happy pilgrim exits the water of the Jordan river after renewing his baptismal vows.

# THE SYNODAL TIMES

MARCH  
2023 ISSUE

The Synodal Times was in Prague, Czech Republic to report on the gathering of the of the Continental Assembly of the Synod with representatives of 39 European Episcopal Conferences present. Read our 10-page coverage, including interviews and analysis of the outcomes, by Gerry O'Hanlon and Eamonn Conway

We take a look at the Synod proceedings in England, Wales and Scotland and ask – are Catholics disappointed with the lack of Synodal discussions there? Is there hope for progress in that regard?

We also circle back to the looming issue of abuse with a report on the investigation into claims against L'Arche founder Jean Vanier.

Scottish Church abuse whistle-blower and author Brian Devlin asks 'Do we get the bishops we deserve?' in a thought-provoking piece.

Owen O'Sullivan writes about the contentious issue of Church and homosexuality.

Acclaimed Latin American theologian Rafael Luciani continues his series on Synodality.

**Read these and other stories in the March issue of *The Synodal Times*.**

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# Out&About

## Promoting peace in Europe



**FRANCE:** Secretaries general of Justice and Peace Europe met in Paris recently, where they discussed provisions for electing a new president at the next general assembly as Irish-born Archbishop Noel Treanor (centre, back row) takes up his new function of nuncio to the EU.



**CAMBRIDGE:** Irish members of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem attend the annual Mass of the UK region on Saturday, February 18: Thomas Kilduff (Cavan), PJ Ward (Carrickmacross), Mary Walker (Monaghan) Lucia Smith (Connemara) and Brian Plunkett (Loughcrew).



**DUBLIN:** Lord Mayor of Dublin Caroline Conroy (second from left) is joined by charity CEOs as Dublin City Council launches the annual charities ball. Pictured with her are (from left) CEO of AsIAM Adam Harris, CEO of Children in Hospital Anna Gunning and the CEO of the Capuchin Day Centre Alan Bailey, February 22.

### INSHORT

#### Prayers for peace needed this Lent – Archbishop Martin

Prayers, charity and sacrifice for peace and refugees are needed this Lent, Archbishop Eamon Martin said on Ash Wednesday, February 22.

The world has experienced death and suffering on a large scale in the last year, the Primate of All-Ireland said in a statement.

“I encourage families to pray together in a special way and to fast for world peace and for the alleviation of the suffering of refugees who are living amongst us,” said Archbishop Martin.

The three pillars of Lent – prayer, charity and sacrifice – are needed “now more than ever”, he continued.

Referencing the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, Archbishop Martin said that we “must continue the unfinished work of peace and reconciliation”.

“During Lent we should place a guard over our social media use and learn that as Christians working together

on this island we should build bridges in a spirit of collaboration for the greater good,” the statement finishes.

#### Humanitarian needs at ‘all time high’ say charities

Global humanitarian needs are at an all-time high, yet funding levels remain “desperately insufficient”, Irish charities have told the Irish Government.

Irish NGOs met with Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs Micheál Martin TD on February to discuss the “devastating impact” of multiple humanitarian crises and Ireland’s role in reaching those most in need.

“Global humanitarian needs are at an all-time high, yet funding levels remain desperately insufficient,” said Dochas CEO Jane-Ann McKenna.

“We urge the Government to use its political and diplomatic weight to address this urgent and significant challenge and in doing so to support human rights, civil society space and progressive policies on the world stage.”

The charities also pushed the Government on how it will make Ireland’s commitment to spend .7% GNI on development assistance by 2030 a reality.

#### Galway novena 2023 announced

The 39th Galway cathedral novena is to take place March 6 to March 14 on the theme ‘Faith in challenging times’.

Cathedral PP Fr Peter Rabbitte invited people of all ages, faiths and backgrounds to attend and “find solace, comfort, hope, understanding and love from a loving father”.

Fr John Gerard Acton CC added that the novena, “which means so much for the people of Galway and beyond, constantly adapts and changes to meet the needs of God’s people in changing and challenging times”.

A variety of speakers will address the novena, including Bishop Michael Duignan, All-Ireland winning manager Mickey Harte and Alpha Youth Ireland director Gerard Hanley.

For more information, contact [novena@galwaycathedral.ie](mailto:novena@galwaycathedral.ie)



**MAYO:** Queen's University Belfast students and members of the Catholic Chaplaincy team enjoy a weekend at Knock Shrine on the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, February 11.



**GALWAY:** Sr Clare-Marie of the Poor Clares in Galway takes charge of the kitchen to prepare pancakes for pancake Tuesday, February 21.



**LIMERICK:** Bishop of Limerick Brendan Leahy launches Fr Columba McCann's book *Becoming Human, Becoming Divine: the Christian Life according to Blessed Columba Marmion* in Glenstal Abbey on Saturday, February 18.



**GALWAY:** Bishop of Clonfert, Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilnefora Michael Duignan greets young men and women after Mass in St Mary's Church, Claddagh, ahead of Youth 2000's annual ball on Sunday, February 19.



**KILDARE:** Students from St Brigid's Ticknevin couldn't let Shrove Tuesday pass without sampling a few pancakes on February 21.

Edited by Ruadhán Jones  
Ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie



Events deadline is a week in advance of publication



**LEITRIM:** Pictured are members of St Joseph's Rosary Group, Leitrim Village, who raised €5,000 at a coffee morning for Syria and Turkey. Leitrim Village resident Ros O'Sullivan is currently in Syria, as head of emergency operations with Concern Worldwide. Pictured are: Sinéad Tracey, Maureen McDonagh, Mary Healy, Bernie Molloy, Anne Guckian, Ciarán Tracey, Bernie McSharry and Gemma Guckian.



**DUBLIN:** Carmel and John Leonard, Co. Limerick, are pictured at the launch of the St Valentine's exhibition of wedding day photos of couples who were married at the Newman University Church over the past 60 years.



**KERRY:** Fr Padraig Walsh PP Our Lady and St Brendan's Church Tralee gives the blessed ashes to a young child at early morning Mass on Ash Wednesday, February 22. Photo: John Cleary.



**TANZANIA:** Sr Donatha Paul Urassa OLA celebrates her final profession to the order with head of the Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles in Ireland Sr Kathleen McGarvey on February 18.



**TANZANIA:** Sr Donatha OLA is pictured after making her final profession to the Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles in Mwamapalala to OLA Congregational Leader Sr Mary T Barron (left). Also pictured are Bishop of Shinyanga Liberatus Sangu, who was the main celebrant, and Sr Kathleen McGarvey.

**ANTRIM**

Talk on the theme 'Why bother about synodality in the Church?' takes place Saturday March 4 from 10.30am-1pm in St Comgall's PS. Dr Nicola Brady, chair of the National Synod Committee and Fr Timothy Bartlett, delegate for Diocesan Pastoral Planning, to provide reflections.

**ARMAGH**

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

**CARLOW**

The rosary will take place every Thursday during Lent beginning at 3pm in St Clare's Church, Graiguecullen Parish.

**CLARE**

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

**CORK**

A catechesis for adult faith formation is being held each Sunday and Wednesday at 8pm until March 22, in the Sacred Heart church hall, Western Rd. A Medjugorje prayer meeting takes place every Wednesday night at 8pm in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament in the Third Order chapel, Holy Trinity Church, Fr Matthew Quay. First Saturday devotions take place in the Church of the Ascension, Gurrabraher with Fr Marius O'Reilly. Begins at 9.30am. Rosary, Mass, meditation for 15 minutes and Confession.

**DONEGAL**

A healing service takes place in the Franciscan Friary, Rosstownlagh,

on Sunday, March 5, beginning with rosary at 2.45pm and followed by Mass and a healing service at 3pm.

Retreat in Ards Friary from March 3-5 on 'St Francis and the Earth Community' led by Fr Philip Baxter and Bro. Ade Green.

**DUBLIN**

Lectio Divina takes place on Mondays after 10am Mass in Donnybrook pastoral centre.

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

A series of Lenten reflections 'From Penny Catechism to the Catechism of the Catholic Church', take place in St John the Baptist parish centre, Clontarf. Next talk on Monday, March 6 at 7.30pm on the theme: 'Getting it all straight: the early Church coming to understand what has happened'.

**GALWAY**

Galway Novena begins Monday March 6, runs until Tuesday, March 14. The theme is 'Faith in challenging times'. For more information, contact novena@galwaycathedral.ie.

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

**KERRY**

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

**KILDARE**

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

**LAOIS**

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

**LIMERICK**

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

**LOUTH**

Taizé prayer for 18-40-year-olds takes place Friday, March 3, 8-9pm followed by tea/coffee in "Bethany" 34 Point Road, Dundalk A91 Woc9. Tel. 042-9331602.

**MAYO**

The next Latin Mass in the Extraordinary Form (Tridentine) will take place on Sunday, March 12, at 5.30pm in Knock.

**MEATH**

St Mary's Parish choir, Navan, is working to build up the tenors and basses among their number. Music and training provided every Wednesday evening from 8-9:30pm in St Anne's Resource Centre.

**TIPPERARY**

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

**TYRONE**

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

**WESTMEATH**

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

**WEXFORD**

Divine Mercy devotions take place the first Tuesday of the month at 7pm in Wexford Friary, including Mass and blessing with the relic of St Faustina. Rosary and devotions at Rocklands Shrine to Our Lady of Wexford take place every Monday at 3pm.



# World Report

## IN BRIEF

### Petition for release of Nicaraguan bishop given to embassy in Mexico

● The Actívate and Solidart platforms have delivered a petition with 11,000 signatures to the Nicaraguan embassy in Mexico City condemning the human rights violations committed by dictator President Daniel Ortega and demanding the release of the Bishop of Matagalpa, Rolando Álvarez.

Members of both platforms held a peaceful demonstration and a prayer vigil in front of the Nicaraguan embassy to express their condemnation of the abuses and violations of human rights in the Central American country.

The Ortega regime on February 10 sentenced Bishop Álvarez to 26 years in prison, accusing him of “treason” and stripping him of his Nicaraguan citizenship.

### Rector: More pilgrims to Guadalupe than before pandemic

● Msgr Salvador Martínez, rector of the Guadalupe Basilica in Mexico City, noted that after two years of pandemic restrictions the Marian shrine “has resumed the impetus it had before and sometimes with greater strength”.

Speaking with ACI Prensa, the Mexican priest stressed that “many

people have returned after having been isolated for a long time or having had to refrain from coming to the basilica”.

“Some pilgrimages had to be suspended for two years, some for up to three years. Now they have regained great strength, [and are] very well organised.”

### Archbishop asks for prayers following new earthquake in Turkey and Syria

● Antoine Chahda, the Syrian Catholic archbishop of Aleppo, Syria, asked for prayers after a new 6.4-magnitude earthquake shook Turkey and Syria on February 20.

In a statement to ACI Prensa after the earthquake Archbishop Chahda encouraged prayers “for us because all the people are out on the streets, the whole city. It was horrible, very terrible, we’re all trembling”.

According to the US Geological Survey, the quake occurred three kilometers southwest of Uzunbağ, Turkey, near the Syrian border, at 8.04 pm local time.

This was one of the most intense of the thousands of aftershocks that have followed the February 6 earthquake, which to date has claimed more than 47,000 lives and more than 122,000 injuries in the border region.

### Four key women opt out of German ‘Synodal Way’

● Ahead of the German Synodal Way’s final meeting this month, four prominent participants — all of them women — officially announced they were quitting the controversial process.

The theology professors Katharina Westerhorstmann and Marianne Schlosser — together with philosopher Hanna-Barbara Gerl-Falkovitz and journalist Dorothea Schmidt — raised fundamental objections about the direction and the conduct of the German event on February 22, reported CNA Deutsch.

The Synodal Way was “casting doubt on central Catholic doctrines and beliefs,” the women said in a statement published by the newspaper Welt. They also accused organisers of ignoring the Vatican’s repeated warnings and interventions.

What is more, the departing delegates — three of whom are university professors, and two are Ratzinger Prize winners — accused the process organisers of using pressure tactics not commensurate with synodality.

In response to a request for comment from CNA Deutsch, the communication directors of the Synodal Way, Britta Baas and Matthias Kopp, offered a brief statement February 22: “The presidium of the Synodal Way has notified the decision with regret.”

## Papal envoy: Syrian sanctions ‘benefit no one’

Isolating Syria from the international community through sanctions “benefits no one” and complicates relief efforts to the millions left homeless after earthquakes devastated the country, said a top Vatican official who visited Turkey and Syria.

“We are still in the middle of this tragedy because it is not certain that the tremors are over,” said Archbishop Claudio Gugerotti, prefect of the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches, in an interview published on February 23 by the Vatican communications department.

The archbishop travelled to Syria and Turkey, February 17-21 to express Pope Francis’s closeness to the earthquake victims and coordinate relief efforts to the region. He met with Catholic relief organisations and religious congregations working on the ground as well as with the leaders of Catholic, Orthodox and Muslim communities in the region.

While relief in Turkey can be more organised because of cooperation with the Turkish government, Archbishop Gugerotti said, Syria is a “broken country” crippled by more than a decade of war and sanctions, which makes oversight of aid nearly impossible.

He described the long wait needed to obtain a visa to enter the country and said that money transfers are “impossible” due to international sanctions that were strengthened in 2011.



Archbishop Claudio Gugerotti, prefect of the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches, meets a group of earthquake victims in Aleppo, Syria, February 19. Photo: CNS/Flavio Pace, courtesy Dicastery for the Eastern Churches.

In a meeting with priests and monks from various Orthodox churches, February 23, Pope Francis prayed that sanctions would not prevent urgent aid from reaching the earthquake victims in Syria.

### Sanctions

The US Treasury department February 10 announced a 180-day exemption to its sanctions on Syria for “all transactions related to earthquake relief efforts,” yet analysts said the long-term effects sanctions have had on the country’s infrastructure is likely the biggest challenge to distrib-

uting aid in the country.

The archbishop called on countries contributing to Syria’s international isolation to consider “not only the political end” of their policies, but also “the concrete good of the people that live in the country”.

“We have destroyed a reality, we have not built democracy,” he said. “When we work to change a political situation,” and it does not work, nations must ask “what is the alternative? Because the alternative is chaos”.

Much of the territory affected by the earthquake in Syria is controlled by rebel

groups through which aid must pass to reach its destination, but some groups block the aid entirely. Archbishop Gugerotti said that countries providing aid through these groups “don’t verify where this money goes and to whom”.

Where the government is unable to provide organised relief, religious communities are intervening. Archbishop Gugerotti cited the work of a Franciscan community in northern Syria who find “more or less legal” channels to deliver aid, without which, he said, “the people would have nothing”.

## EU watchdog raises concerns after arson attacks on churches

Following a devastating arson attack on a historic church in Germany — and several prior incidents in Paris, France — a European watchdog has raised concerns over hate crimes targeting Christian churches on the continent.

The 1,000-year-old Church of the Elevation of the Cross in Wissen, a community in the Westerwald region, was severely damaged by an arson attack on February 10, reported CNA Deutsch.

The parish priest in charge, Fr Martin Kürten, described the attack as “arson directed with fearsome single-minded-

ness,” targeting the historic high altar and causing damage estimated to run to several million euro.

The attack also devastated the morale of the local community and left a deep “void,” the priest said. “What is scary is the single-mindedness and brutality with which the attacker proceeded,” he said.

German Police have arrested a 39-year-old man in connection with the attack, but authorities say his motives remain unclear, CNA Deutsch reported.

“How would you feel if you heard

that your parish or the church you go to will have to suspend the service due to an arson and vandalism attack?” asked Madeleine Enzberger, executive director of the Observatory for the Intolerance and Discrimination Against Christians (OIDAC).

“Surely multiple questions come to mind like ‘Why would someone do this?’” Ms Enzberger added.

Auxiliary Bishop Ansgar Puff visited the church on February 16, CNA Deutsch reported. “I share the grief of the people of Wissen,” he said.

## Catholic leaders open church in UAE’s interfaith Abrahamic Family House

The three Abrahamic religions — Judaism, Christianity, and Islam — now share a common place to worship in the predominantly Muslim United Arab Emirates with the opening of the Abrahamic Family House in Abu Dhabi.

Such was the dream of Pope Francis and Grand Imam Ahmed Al-Tayeb, who in 2019 signed a historic pledge calling for peace and brotherhood between religions and nations. Four years later a synagogue, church, and mosque sit opposite a

secular visitor pavilion in an interfaith complex meant to encourage goodwill and understanding.

Representing the Pope for the first prayer service at the new St Francis of Assisi Church was Cardinal Michael Fitzgerald, a past president

of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

“The place of prayer should also be a place of joy, and I hope that this will be true for all of us here present,” Cardinal Fitzgerald said at the Sunday prayer service at the new church.





Edited by Jason Osborne  
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## Ashes to ashes, dust to dust



Fr Sandro Tomasevic from Croatia, places ashes on the forehead of Palestinian Catholics during Ash Wednesday Mass in the Church of St Catherine in Bethlehem, West Bank, February 22. Photo: OSV News/Debbie Hill

## Jesuits: New restrictions against Fr Rupnik possible after credible abuse accusations

The Society of Jesus said it will open a new internal procedure on Jesuit Fr Marko Rupnik after receiving abuse accusations with a “very high” degree of credibility against the artist.

According to a February 21 statement on the Jesuit website, the accusations the religious order received span from 1985 to 2018 and include claims of spiritual, psychological, and sexual abuse, and abuse of conscience.

Fr Rupnik, 68, has been informed of the accusations but has refused to meet to discuss them with the order, the statement said.

The order said the internal procedure is in

the beginning stages, but possible results could include further restrictions on Fr Rupnik’s ministry up to and including his dismissal from religious life.

During the internal procedure, the Slovenian priest’s ministry will remain under restrictions, the Society of Jesus said. Going forward, Fr Rupnik also is barred from performing any public artistic activity, especially in religious environments.

In mid-December, the Jesuits invited any alleged victims of Fr Rupnik to contact their investigative team.

Fr Rupnik’s superior, Jesuit Fr Johan Verscheuren,

told the *Associated Press* and *La Repubblica* that 14 women and one man came forward to share their stories.

“Many of these persons have no knowledge of each other and the facts narrated concern different periods,” the Jesuit statement said.

The first complaints against Fr Rupnik became public last year in early December after Italian websites published stories with reports that Fr Rupnik had abused consecrated women in the Loyola Community.

In the nearly three months since then, reports of alleged abuse by Fr Rupnik with then-young women under his spiritual

guidance have continued to be published, using aliases for the women’s names.

In a statement dated December 2, 2022, the Jesuits said the order had put Fr Rupnik under restrictions for a complaint received in 2021.

The Jesuits later confirmed that Fr Rupnik had incurred an automatic or *latae sententiae* excommunication for absolving an accomplice in confession of a sin against the Sixth Commandment.

The excommunication was lifted by the Vatican in May 2020, the same month it had been officially declared.

## Opposition mounts to assisted dying expansion in Canada

The legislative effort to delay broadening Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) eligibility to individuals solely afflicted with a mental illness by a year is forging ahead, but there are signs Canadians are not comfortable with moving forward.

Bill C-39 passed the House of Commons February 15, and one day later it was read for the first time in the Senate chambers. But polling data released jointly by the Angus Reid Institute and the nonpartisan think tank Cardus two days before the vote shows

Canadians have trepidations about the federal government proceeding with plan to expand access to assisted suicide.

Among the 1,816 Canadians surveyed, only 31% support MAiD for those with a mental illness.

51% of participants opposed the notion and 18% (327) responded “not sure/can’t say”.

Rebecca Vachon, health programme director at Cardus, a Christian social-thought think tank, characterised these results as a “wake-up call” for Minister

of Justice and Attorney General David Lametti.

“The minister needs to back off from expanding medically assisted suicide to people suffering from mental illness,” Ms Vachon told *The Catholic Register*, based in Toronto.

“Then the government should work to ensure Canadians can access all mental health and social services they need before even considering the possibility of expansion”.



## Newly-discovered asteroid named after a pope

● The Vatican Observatory announced the naming of four newly-discovered asteroids after notable Catholics, including Pope Gregory XIII, who began the tradition of papal astronomers and observatories.

Christopher Graney, a scientist at the Vatican Observatory, said in a press release that the Working Group for Small Bodies Nomenclature (WGSBN) of the International Astronomical Union published its latest batch of named asteroids in early February.

The newly-named asteroids include “560974 Ugoboncompagni,” which honours Ugo Boncompagni (1502–1585), Pope Gregory XIII. Gregory commissioned the astronomer Fr Christopher Clavius, SJ — who also has an asteroid named after him — to reform the calendar in the 16th century, leading to his namesake Gregorian calendar, still in use today.

The other three names honour Jesuit priests who work or worked at the Vatican Observatory.

“562971 Johannhagen” honours Jesuit Fr Johann Hagen (1847–1930), director of the Vatican Observatory from 1906 to 1930. “551878 Stoeger” honours Fr Bill Stoeger, SJ (1943–2014), a cosmologist and theologian at the Vatican Observatory. Finally, “565184 Janusz” honours Jesuit Fr Robert Janusz (b. 1964), currently on the staff of the observatory.

## Priest from Ukraine gives Pope a cross made out of rubble

● Fr Vyacheslav Grynevych vividly remembers the first day of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine one year ago.

The Catholic priest woke up to a phone call: “Father, wake up because the war has started.” “I understood that my life would never be the same as before,” Fr Grynevych said.

As the executive director of the Catholic charity Caritas-Spes, Fr Grynevych soon found himself coordinating humanitarian efforts from a basement bomb shelter in Kyiv, also taking in 36 other people, mostly children, and their pets within the first week of the war.

In the past year, Fr Grynevych and his team

at Caritas Internationalis have worked tirelessly to provide food, shelter, protection, and health and psychological support to 3 million people within war-torn Ukraine.

A few days ahead of the Ukraine war anniversary, the Catholic priest was able to speak one on one with Pope Francis at his Vatican residence to share with the Pope updates on the Church’s humanitarian efforts on the ground.

Fr Grynevych presented Pope Francis with a cross made out of broken glass and rubble from destroyed buildings in Kyiv in an emotional moment during their meeting.

“I wanted to share with him the stories, the places that we see, the eyes of people,” Fr Grynevych said.

## Pope Francis: Free yourself ‘from the dictatorship of full schedules’

● Pope Francis said Ash Wednesday that Lent is a good time to examine ourselves in the light of truth, to let go of distractions like overbooked calendars, and to improve our relationships with God and others.

“Let us set out on the path of fasting and use these 40 days to take stock of ourselves, to free ourselves from the dictatorship of full schedules, crowded agendas, and superficial needs, and choose the things that truly matter,” the Pope said February 22.

“This,” he said, “is the favourable time to be converted, to stop looking at ourselves and to start looking into ourselves”.

Pope Francis marked the start of the season of Lent, the penitential period before Easter, with Mass at the Basilica of Santa Sabina on Rome’s Aventine Hill.



# Letter from Rome



John L. Allen Jr

## John Paul II's legacy is alive and well and living in Kyiv

Three leaders of NATO member states – and, as it happens, three Roman Catholic laity deeply involved in politics – all issued stirring defences of Ukraine this week, as the one-year anniversary of its war with Russia approached.

US President Joe Biden delivered a forceful speech in Warsaw February 21 in which he vowed that the free world “will not tire” in its support for Ukraine, thundering that “tyrants” such as Russia’s Vladimir Putin only understand the word “no”, while his host, Polish President Andrzej Duda, insisted that “Ukraine must win this war”.

At the same moment that Presidents Biden and Duda’s tête-à-tête was playing out, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni was in the Ukrainian city of Bucha, site of a 2022 massacre by Russian forces that left nearly 500 people dead, to tell Ukrainians that Italy “will be with you until the end”.

“You’re not alone,” Ms Meloni told the Ukrainians. “We will fight for your freedom.”

### President Duda

In his own speech February 21, President Duda explicitly cited the example of Pope John Paul II, whose support of the Solidarity movement in Poland in the late 1970s and 1980s helped set the dominos in motion that led to the collapse of the Soviet empire.

“The pope, St John Paul II, spoke of solidarity,” Duda said. “Nobody can oppose what we obtained through solidarity. Thanks to our efforts, we broke the chain of communism and we entered the free world. We helped open up the Iron Curtain.”

### “Duda perceives that the Western defence of freedom in central and eastern Europe are in continuity with the vision of John Paul II”

“This was thanks to human solidarity, and today it allows us to help the Ukrainians,” the Polish leader said.

In a joint news conference with Biden, Duda again made a glowing reference to John Paul.

The defeat of the Soviets, Duda said, was in part “thanks to the movement of Solidarity, of course, here in Poland; thanks to the determination of the people; thanks to the influence exerted by St John Paul II, whom we admire so much”.



US President Joe Biden delivers remarks outside the Royal Castle in Warsaw, Poland, February 21, ahead of the one year anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Photo: OSV News/Evelyn Hockstein, Reuters

Biden, Duda and Meloni, to say the least, are very different kinds of Catholics.

Biden is an old-school American Catholic liberal, politically cut from the same ethnically Catholic, working class cloth as, say, the late Governor Mario Cuomo of New York. Duda, on the other hand, is a Polish Catholic nationalist, a product of the country’s Law and Justice Party which enjoys strong support in the more traditional quarters of Polish Catholicism.

Meloni, though a self-described “Christian”, has never really worn her faith on her sleeve. Among other things, she has a daughter out of wedlock with her longtime partner Andrea Giambruno. She’s essentially a secular conservative, more interested in economic policy and foreign affairs than the culture wars, and her roots aren’t in Catholic social activism but in Italy’s post-fascist right-wing circles.

### Divergences

Despite those divergences, Biden, Duda and Meloni today are united in their support for Ukraine and opposition to Russia. Whether they’re aware of it or not, Catholic social teaching as articulated after the Second Vatican Council, with its emphasis on human rights, democracy and personal freedom, likely has influenced their

outlook. Duda perceives that the Western defence of freedom in central and eastern Europe are in continuity with the vision of John Paul II; whether Biden and Meloni would put things that way almost doesn’t matter, because they’re operating out of the John Paul playbook regardless.

### “Biden and Meloni might do well to steal a page from Duda and become more explicit in appealing to the spiritual underpinnings of their positions on Ukraine”

Pope John Paul II’s legacy, in other words, is alive and well and living in Kyiv.

The spirit of John Paul II is also thriving today in Washington, Warsaw and Rome – anywhere, really, where Catholics involved in public life, whatever their ideological differences on other fronts, are once again involved in trying to sustain a moral campaign of resistance to Russian-imposed tyranny.

As a footnote, Biden and Meloni might do well to steal a page from Duda and become more explicit in appealing to the spiritual underpinnings of their

positions on Ukraine, since Putin is attempting to position himself and Russia as the great defenders of religious faith against the increasingly godless West.

### Putin

In his state of the nation address February 21, Putin cited recent developments within the Anglican Communion, including the blessing of same-sex unions and the idea of using gender neutral vocabulary in talking about God, as harbingers of a looming “spiritual catastrophe”.

“May God forgive them for they know not what they do,” Putin said.

“Look at what they do with their own peoples: the destruction of the family, cultural and national identity, perversion, and the abuse of children are declared the norm,” Putin continued. “And priests are forced to bless same-sex marriages”.

“We have to protect our children from degradation and degeneration,” Putin insisted, “and we will.”

However self-serving that sort of rhetoric may be, there’s no denying its appeal in regions such as sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and much of Asia, where religious faith and traditional morality still play enormous

roles in shaping culture – and, not coincidentally, where most governments so far have stayed non-aligned.

To the extent that Western leaders can make clear that their resistance to Russia’s offensive is a cause with religious and spiritual roots, it could help broaden the pro-Ukraine coalition by blunting one of Putin’s more effective rhetorical tropes.

### Pope Francis

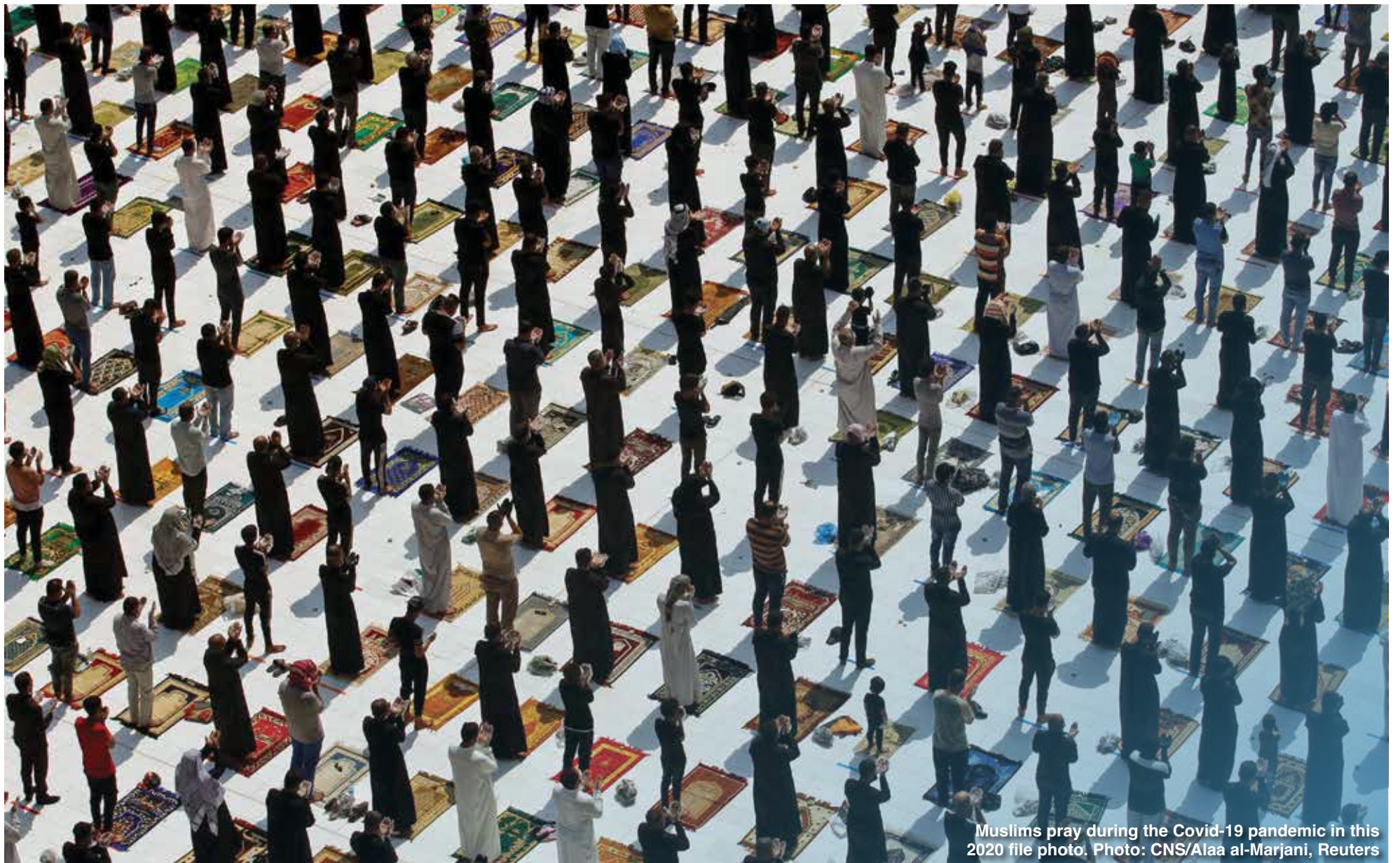
For his part, Pope Francis has tried to remain even-handed on the conflict, expressing keen sympathy for Ukrainian victims of the war while also suggesting some legitimacy to Russia’s claims of NATO aggression. Yesterday during his General Audience, Francis said that “real victory” in Ukraine “cannot be built on ruins”.

In that sense, Francis is sort of the yin to John Paul’s more aggressive yang. Time will tell whether these two papal forces are actually complementary, and together can help restore harmony to the geopolitical cosmos.

For now, it’s enough to note that although there’s only one pope at a time, Ukraine proves that two papal legacies definitely can share the same stage.

John L. Allen Jr. is editor of *Crux*.

# Expanding outreach to Islam, Vatican establishes diplomatic ties with Oman



Muslims pray during the Covid-19 pandemic in this 2020 file photo. Photo: CNS/Alaa al-Marjani, Reuters



Elise Ann Allen

In yet another sign of Pope Francis's consistent outreach to Islam, the Vatican announced February 23 that it had established full diplomatic relations with Oman, further extending the Holy See's relations with the Arab and Muslim worlds.

In a joint statement, both sides said the move was born of a desire to promote "mutual understanding and further strengthening friendship and cooperation," and voiced confidence that the decision serves the interests of both nations.

They said that a Vatican apostolic nunciature in Oman and an Omani embassy to the Holy See would soon be established, and envoys named to fill the new posts.

With last Thursday's announcement, the Holy See now enjoys

diplomatic relations with every country on the Arabian Peninsula apart from Saudi Arabia. In total, the Vatican now has diplomatic relations with 184 of the 195 nations recognised by the UN, which includes 193 member states and two observers, the State of Palestine and the Holy See.

Beyond Saudi Arabia, the nations with which the Vatican does not yet have full diplomatic relations include China, North Korea, Vietnam and Afghanistan.

Oman, a Sultanate, is bordered by the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen, as well as the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea.

**“Pope Francis has also been consistently outspoken about the ongoing war in Yemen, often condemning what he has said is the indifference of the world to the conflict”**

Pope Francis has made outreach to the Arabian Peninsula a priority, having visited the United Arab Emirates in 2019 and the Kingdom of Bahrain last November. In both places, he participated in high-

level interfaith meetings aimed at promoting dialog among religions.

## Document on Human Fraternity

In Abu Dhabi, the Pope signed a joint "Document on Human Fraternity" with the Grand Imam of al-Azhar, Ahmed el-Tayeb, which has become the basis of his outreach to the Muslim community, and is often quoted by Francis when he visits Islamic nations.

Following the Pope's visit and the signing of the document, Abu Dhabi established a Higher Committee of Human Fraternity, an independent national committee whose members include Vatican officials, representatives of various religions, including Judaism and Islam, as well as peace activists and UN representatives.

Pope Francis has also been consistently outspoken about the ongoing war in Yemen, often condemning what he has said is the indifference of the world to the conflict, and lamenting the impact the violence is having on children.

In 2017, the Sultanate of Oman assisted in the location and rescue of Fr Tom Uzhunnalil, an Indian priest who had been kidnapped in Aden, Yemen, and who spent 18 months in captivity before Omani authorities helped secure his release.

At the time, Oman coordinated with officials in Yemen to locate Fr Uzhunnalil, who was considered a "Vatican employee," and after the priest's release, the Vatican formally thanked Oman for its role in the rescue in a public statement.

Like many other countries on the Arabian Peninsula, Oman is a majority Muslim nation where Islam has been declared the formal state religion, and which is governed by Sharia Law.

## Religious freedom

However, despite the enforcement of Sharia, Oman insists that religious freedom is also guaranteed, and that its Basic Law prohibits discrimination of any kind on a confessional basis.

The Catholic Church in Oman belongs to the Apostolic Vicariate of South Arabia, which is headquartered in Dubai, and which is currently led by Bishop Paolo Martinelli, who was appointed in May of last year.

There are just four parishes in Oman and 12 priests, yet the Vatican in a separate statement Thursday voiced hope that with the establishment of full diplomatic relations, "the Catholic Church in Oman, through priests and religious, will continue to contribute to the social welfare of the Sultanate".

Oman has a population of roughly 4.5 million, mainly Arabs, but with a

significant portion of foreign workers who come mainly from other Middle Eastern countries, the Philippines, India, and Pakistan.

Most Catholics in the country are foreign workers, coming either from the Middle East, the Philippines, and India.

## Independent

Previously under British control, Oman has been independent since 1971, and functions as a monarchy with a sultan system, currently led by Sultan Tariq bin Taimur Al Sa'Id since January 11, 2020, who governs from the capital city of Muscat.

At an administrative level, Oman is divided into 11 different governorates, which are in turn divided into 61 provinces.

Its government operates with a bicameral system including a chamber of democratically elected officials, an advisory council of elected representatives serving 4-year terms, and a State Council, the Majlis Al-Dawla, members of which are named by the Sultan.

Like nearly all countries in the Persian Gulf, Oman's economy largely hinges on the hydrocarbon sector, specifically the production of natural gas.

# Letters

## Letter of the week

# Is the synod a con job?

**Dear Editor,** I have only recently become familiar, via a conversation with one of my granddaughters, with the concept of gaslighting.

Gaslighting is characterised as a form of psychological manipulation in which a dominant party attempts to sow self-doubt and confusion in the mind of someone else. Typically, gaslighters are seeking to gain power and control over the other person, by distorting reality and forcing them to question their own judgment and intuition.

Am I the only one who feels gaslit by the current synodal process that has become part-and-parcel of the Church both in Ireland and internationally?

When the synod process was launched in Ireland in March 2021,

your own newspaper carried the very enthusiastic comments of Bishops Paul Dempsey, Michael Router and Fintan Gavin [*The Irish Catholic* March 18, 2021] encouraging Catholics to “let off steam” and insisting that everything was on the table.

“Speak freely,” we were told at my parish gathering when someone raised the issue of female ordination. One facilitator even explained that it was about getting enough voices together for women priests so that the Pope and the Vatican would have to listen. Was I witnessing, I wondered, a revolution whereby the voices of people in the pews were at last forming the decisions of the Church?

But, ever since the synod submissions have gone to Rome, cardinal

after cardinal and even Pope Francis himself have been at pains to point out that the process cannot in fact change things like the doctrine around women priests.

Cardinal Mario Grech even said recently in an interview that people who thought the synod could change doctrine had misunderstood the process – despite the fact that bishops told us that everything was on the table!

I'm left with the distinct impression that I have indeed been gas-lit and I am not alone.

It all begs the question: is the synod process a con job? I hope not, but only time will tell.

*Yours etc.,  
Brian McGinn  
Newry, Co. Down*

## Return to God's law

**Dear Editor,** There is much talk about preserving the ethos of Catholic schools. One way to do that successfully would be to erect in every classroom a copy of God's holy law – the Ten Commandments.

How much better a society we would be if everyone lived by the Ten Commandments.

I wonder how many of our secondary school children leave school unable to recite the Ten Commandments? I wonder, indeed, how many of our teachers leave school every afternoon unable to recite the Ten Commandments? Maybe ignorance is bliss after all.

*Yours etc.,  
Brid Lawlor,  
Ballyfermot, Dublin 14*



## Missionaries are our ambassadors

**Dear Editor,** Flicking through a few recent issues of *The Irish Catholic* after returning from travelling, I was struck by your unwavering focus on the work of Irish missionaries abroad. Though obviously dwindling in numbers, it is a great source of pride that wherever the world's

poorest and most vulnerable people are living, we have Irish missionaries living alongside them.

Thank you for highlighting them and the lives of the people they work with.

*Yours etc.,  
Carmel Foley  
Letterkenny, Co. Donegal*

## Understandable bishops want to focus on diocesan vocations

**Dear Editor,** Religious have nothing to fear. They have World Day of Prayer for members of the Institutes of Consecrated Life on February 2. This includes prayers for vocations and those in formation. Priests too have a World Day of Prayer for Priests, on the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This remembers vocations and those in seminaries. It is understandable that the

bishops should focus on vocations to the diocesan priesthood, given their great desire to staff all their parishes [*The Irish Catholic* – February 2, 2023].

“Ask and you shall receive, for he who asks always receives,” says the Lord.

*Yours etc.,  
Fr Noel Mc Keown OP  
Dominican Priory  
Newry, Co. Down*

## facebook community

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

### Number of nuns in Ireland halved in just 20 years

Discerning a call to any religious vocation is much different now. 20 years ago if you were a regular Mass-goer, you would be welcome to discern a vocational call. But we can see a much more stringent formation of vocations now which is good. Blaming Vatican II is just looking for Brownie points. The Catholic Church is going through change with the Holy Spirit in charge. Change for the better. Not the first time either. Jesus I trust in you. – **Brendan Gallagher**

### Nicaraguan bishop sentenced to 26 years in prison by Ortega regime

It's beyond understanding. God Bless him. – **Deirdre Quinn**

What is going on in the world? – **Eilish Higgins**

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

## Refugees are welcome – God says so

**Dear Editor,** I see much discussion now about the proper and appropriate response to refugees given that Ireland is experiencing such a crisis. For me as a Catholic, it's actually very simple: time and again in the Bible God instructs his people to welcome strangers (refugees, asylum seekers, migrants) and make them feel at home.

For a Christian, that's the end of the discussion – God has spoken.

*Yours etc.,  
Denis Foley  
Naas, Co. Kildare*

## Exposing fake news

**Dear Editor,** The Government has now launched a high-level task-force (sounds serious) to tackle the issue of misinformation and fake news. This is surely a welcome moment: maybe now senior politi-

cians will be called out on nonsense like ‘pregnant person’ and the po-faced claim that men can have wombs.

*Yours etc.,  
Niall Walshe  
Salthill, Co. Galway*

## Letters to the Editor

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

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

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

# Your Faith

The Irish Catholic, March 2, 2023

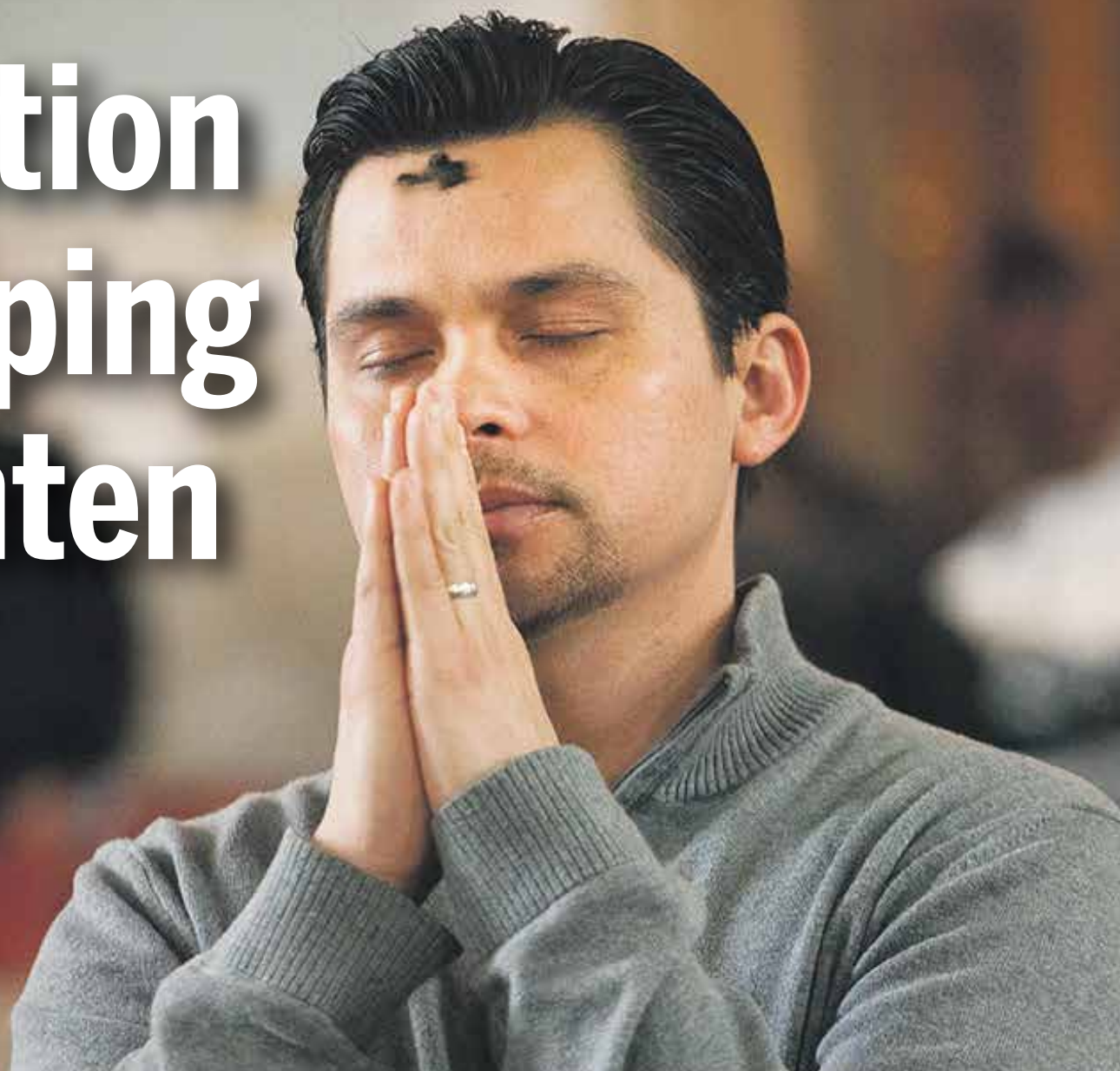
## Questions of Faith

Why does a good God allow suffering?

Page 32



# Inspiration for keeping the Lenten fast



**A**t this moment of the Church's year, as Christians begin the long period of Lent, my thoughts always turn to Muslim friends and to various conversations which I have enjoyed on the subject of fasting.

'How much do Christians fast?' is a question they always ask. I suspect they already know the answer. Not a lot when compared with the daily fast that Muslims keep so strictly during the month of Ramadan. I used to feel faintly embarrassed about my pathetic little efforts on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. More recently I have learned to avoid naïve comparisons. Dialogue is ill-served by exercises in religious one-upmanship. When a more settled and personal



**Both Christians and Muslims fast, pray and give alms. Can we learn anything from one another, asks Fr Michael Barnes SJ**

friendship has been established it is possible to prise behind the clichés. What do we expect fasting – and prayer and almsgiving and all the other Lenten practices of faith – to do for us? What part do they play in the living out of those ancient patterns of holiness which are inscribed in our sacred texts and traditions? And what can Muslims and Christians learn from each other?

There are, of course, many

similarities between Christianity and Islam in terms of actual religious practice. Each of the 'five pillars of Islam':

Shahada - the statement of belief;  
Salat – prayer;  
Zakat – almsgiving;  
Sawm – fasting; and  
Hajj – pilgrimage;  
has its parallel and a similar purpose in Christianity. Prayer in both traditions is an act of

remembrance and praise, putting God first and returning all God's favours to their ultimate source. Fasting is intended to promote a proper sense of priorities and develop self-discipline. Almsgiving redresses the balance in God's creation and reminds people of the needs of the poor. Even statements of belief and pilgrimages, for all that they differ in many particulars, have certain fundamental points in common.

In both Islam and Christianity religious life begins with the initiation of a public commitment which then takes the form of a sometimes arduous journey. In both that journey is punctuated by moments of withdrawal for prayer, for acts of self-discipline, and not least for remembering that God expects a faith which

does justice.

Once we probe a little deeper, subtle and sometimes more obvious distinctions make themselves felt. Prayer in Islam conjures up images of serried ranks of worshippers all bowing in the direction of Mecca. This, however, is no act of mindless regimentation. For the Muslim prayer is a public exercise which brings the entire *umma*, the community of faith, into a very physical submission to God. In conversation with Muslims I have noted a certain sense of what Catholics would call the 'communion of saints'. Prayer, even when practised alone, is never a solitary effort. Muslims experience a solidarity in faith, not just with their fellow-believers but with the spiritual universe of

protectors and prophets. Muslims pray with the body, standing, bowing and prostrating. God is the centre of prayer but the act of turning the head to each side establishes bonds with one's companions and acknowledges the support of guardian angels.

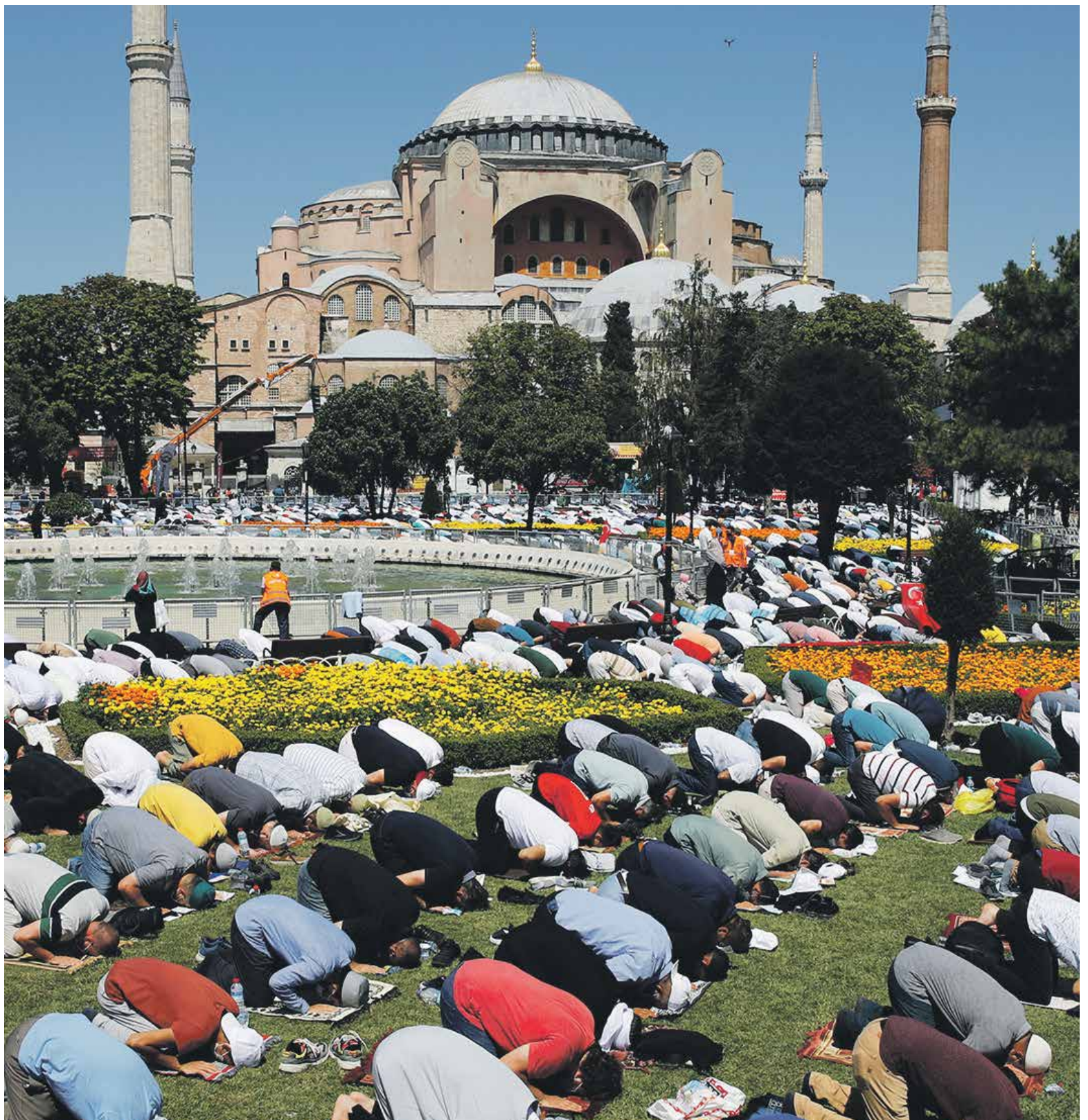
Fasting is not an occasional act but a regular ritual. The breaking of the fast, at dusk on each day of Ramadan, is another very public ritual which brings the community together. Prayers are said, a single date is eaten and a sip of water drunk, a welcome respite after hours of restraint. Then food and drink are dispensed to all present. As with the rhythm of the prayer, fasting is a public not a private matter - and so is the thanksgiving celebration which marks the end of each day. People act together, rising at the same time, observing prayer times and keeping the fast, then together offering all back to God as the night closes in.

**“This lovely word has connotations of being known to God, becoming deeply anchored in God’s love”**

Almsgiving, formalised as a sort of tithe or wealth tax, is a further dimension of public commitment - this time to the less fortunate members of the community. But the motivation is rooted less in ‘charity’, a free giving away of an over-abundance, than in a recognition that all assets are held as a trust from God. In the Quran it is said that “They will question you concerning what they should bestow voluntarily. Say: ‘whatever good thing you bestow is for parents and kinsmen, orphans, the needy and strangers and whatever good you do God has knowledge of it’ (2.211). Like everything else in Islam, almsgiving has a primarily theological purpose. However much it may sound like legal prescription, it is the motivation - to align one’s every act and desire with the will of God - which counts.

The last time I attended the breaking of the fast, we were told that prayer and self-denial and almsgiving had one purpose only - to increase *taqwa* or ‘God-consciousness’. This lovely word has connotations of being known to God, becoming deeply anchored in God’s love. The fasting month of Ramadan builds up a communal solidarity which witnesses to the unity of God. At its best Islam is a tradition which celebrates the God of creation, God as the first and last enlivening force which holds the whole of that creation in being and invites human beings to participate in and be responsible for the fruits of God’s generous love.

But where do the traditions differ? What holds Judaism, Christianity and Islam together is the priority ascribed to the Word of God which is spoken in the world. Jews, Christians and Muslims fast and pray and give alms out of obedience to God’s command. But that Word is received in different ways; or, to put it another way, it is communicated in different ways and therefore evokes different human responses. Strictly speaking for Muslims God reveals his will; for Christians, of course, God reveals himself. In Christianity



Muslims attend Friday prayers outside the Hagia Spphia mosque in Istanbul, Turkey. Photo: CNS

the Word is not ‘enbooked’, as in Islam, but made flesh. The particular form which obedience to the Word takes - what it implies in human terms - gives our respective faiths a particular flavour.

### Repent and believe

For Christians, of course, there are many imperatives. The Gospel is full of them, from the ‘repent and believe’ of Jesus’s first preaching of the Kingdom to the ‘do this in memory of me’ spoken over bread and wine at the Last Supper. There is the invitation to the tax-collector to ‘follow me’, the command to the fishermen to ‘put out into the deep’, the intriguing counter to the question of John’s disciples, ‘come and see’. Why so many? Perhaps

because we human persons in all our pride and perverseness require a good deal of probing and cajoling if the Word of God is to make a home in our hearts.

That is what makes Christian prayer and pilgrimage - the ‘framing activities’ of the Christian version of the ‘five pillars’ - more personal. The metaphor of the journey brings together the many different dimensions of the human relationship with God. We begin with the well-meaning assent to ‘repent and believe’ and end with the desolation of ‘sit here while I pray’. From the sober self-confidence of Ash Wednesday to the poignancy of Holy Week, there is an intrinsic stillness, even a loneliness, about Lent. Discipleship can

be a painful business, not because of any asceticism we may practise, but because the very unpredictability of the journey may make us feel uncomfortable. Repentance is risky; it calls for difficult choices to be made.

### Determination

What makes it all possible, however, is not the grim determination to succeed but another imperative, the words which follow the Gospel reading for Ash Wednesday. ‘Pray like this.’ Jesus’s own prayer, his relationship with the one he calls Father, is the heart of all Christian living, the life-line of Lent. To pray in these words is not a preparation for the way; it is, more exactly, prayer *on the way* - a prayer in

company with the one who is himself the Way.

Lent is like Ramadan in the sense that the community of faith is formed by several weeks of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. But Ramadan is essentially a daily round, a ritual which marks time and measures the rhythms of life. At the end of each day the process is repeated, until the entire spiritual and physical universe is gathered around a single point of time and creation is restored to a new harmony. The map of time which Christians seek to draw is more complex. Lent intensifies the relationship which the command to follow opens up. Indeed it is itself a pilgrimage in which through personal companionship with Jesus we are drawn more deeply into the intimacy of God’s act of self-communication.

**i** Fr Michael Barnes SJ is a theologian who has been involved in inter-religious dialogue for many years.

**“The breaking of the fast, at dusk on each day of Ramadan, is another very public ritual which brings the community together”**

# A beautiful film is a feast for the senses

## Faith in film



### Ruadhán Jones

One of the more curious and eclectic sections on the Vatican's 1995 list of important films is the 'art' section. At least one of their choices, however, is unlikely to be controversial as it is often considered the greatest 'arthouse' film of all time – Stanley Kubrick's 1968 sci-fi extravaganza, *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

**“Why alien intervention should be any more compelling than divine I don't know and I'm not sure Kubrick does either”**

Although often considered an intellectual film, the ideas behind it are not especially profound. If you scratch the surface you quickly realise they are quite silly. But as an experience of something beautiful it is a treat, a feast for the eyes and the ears and a triumph of style over substance.

The plot is hard to summarise as there essentially isn't one. The film begins in prehistoric times when our ape-like human predecessors are visited by a strange futuristic looking silver bar.

Then we cut to 'the future', now the past, when men traverse the universe in comfortable space crafts. They too have discovered a strange futuristic bar, which prompts a famous journey through space with an AI computer going haywire (“I'm sorry Dave, I'm



A still from *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

afraid I can't do that”) and finally a cinematic rendering of infinity, a beautiful kaleidoscope of lights and colours.

However, it's not the story but the themes that are meant to knit the film together. In this sense, it's an impressionistic vision of man's technological and moral development. It begins with our first ancestors discovering their intellectual capabilities, before immediately turning them to destructive use. And later, we humans follow the same path, evolving technologically but not morally.

Where it all gets quite silly and confused is the fact that an alien life force of some kind is meant to have sparked this development by leaving behind their odd bars of metal. Why alien intervention should be any more compelling than divine I don't know and I'm not sure Kubrick does either.

He stated later that it was his and co-creator Arthur C. Clarke's

intention to leave the meaning of the film open to interpretation. That is, to my mind, a cop-out indicating either that the story doesn't make sense or the storyteller doesn't care.

### New-age mysticism

Given that Kubrick was professional and an artist, I'm certain he cared, but the background to *2001*'s worldview is just too confused to make sense. According to Clarke, a well-known science-fiction writer, the film is shaped by a hodge-podge of new-age mysticism, Zoroastrianism and evolutionary theory. The film seems to propose an evolution of man to the point of being a disembodied force within creation.

But put such considerations to the side and watch *2001: A Space Odyssey*; don't go in expecting profundity, do go in hoping for beauty. Kubrick has an eye for a striking image, as well as a good gut-

instinct for touching, humorous and occasionally shocking tableaux. His visual gag of cutting between man's first weapon – a bone – to a nuclear warhead floating in space is as funny as it is disturbing.

Some of the most unnerving sequences revolve around the disembodied AI computer, HAL. Kubrick turns HAL's all-seeing camera/eye into a malevolent force, eking emotion out of this emotionless computer. Half a century later and his predictions are eerily prescient as modern AI proves to be just as wild and unpredictably mad.

HAL is just one example of Kubrick's interest in the material developments of his sub-created world. He revels in the imagined details of space travel, including zero gravity toilets, floating pens and galactic real politick. His film-world is – philosophy aside – complete and fantastic in the good sense.

Kubrick was also a master craftsman with a real love for the techni-

cal side of filmmaking. Although *2001: A Space Odyssey* is made in 1968 without the kind of special effects available today, it stands the test of time.

Perhaps it gets away with it because the film is so spare for something so extravagant and visually stimulating. You don't notice the camera jumping around, striving to create any feeling or mood; only occasionally does it linger on a shot or scene longer than is necessary.

**“Rather than underscoring the emotions, the music accompanies the visuals at a distance”**

The climax really comes with a visualisation of infinity that has become the benchmark for all future science-fiction films, a kaleidoscope of lights impossible to capture on the page – they simply have to be seen.

The last aspect to consider, the one which completes the film's artistic pretensions, is Kubrick's use of classical music. Traditionally, a film has a score composed to underline the emotional beats of the visuals. But Kubrick famously chose excerpts from the works of Wagner and Hungarian composer György Ligeti among others.

Rather than underscoring the emotions, the music accompanies the visuals at a distance. It is what makes the experience a feast for the senses, beautiful imagery and music combining in this apology for artistry.

Perhaps it is the love of beauty in *2001: A Space Odyssey* that inspired the Vatican to add it to the list of important films. It is a beauty in many ways void of meaning, but it is at least a point of connection between a Catholic worldview and a secular, a common love for the beautiful thing.

## Saint — of the — week



St Katharine Drexel

# St Katharine Drexel: Understanding almsgiving through the saints

The three pillars of Lent – prayer, fasting, almsgiving – enrich our spiritual life during this penitential season. But they can also be challenging.

Saints can shed light on our journey. So let's begin with almsgiving and look to St Katharine Drexel as a profound example of the depth to which this practice calls us. Born in 1858, she was the second person born in what is now the United States to be canonised as a saint and the first one born a US citizen.

In many ways, Drexel is a saint for our time. She died in 1955 at the age of 96, and her feast day of March 3 – the anniversary of her death – stands like a beacon at the beginning of Lent.

Born in Philadelphia into great wealth, Drexel was a debutante, a world traveller, a well-educated girl who made the society pages. Using the jargon of the Gilded Age, when extravagant displays of

wealth marked success, she had every opportunity to marry “well”.

But Drexel heard a different call. Like a page out of today's news, the plight of people of colour in the US troubled her. On a European tour, she met Pope Leo XIII and encouraged him to send more missionaries to serve Native Americans. The pontiff replied by asking her why she didn't become a missionary.

Eventually, Katharine forsook her status to found an order of missionary nuns and dedicate her life and fortune to serving Native and African-Americans. Reportedly, this prompted a late 19th-Century headline that could have been ripped from today's tabloids: “Gives up Seven Million.”

Among Drexel's achievements: the founding of Xavier University in New Orleans, the first Catholic university in the US for African-Americans; 145 missions for Native Americans; and a system of black

Catholic schools. Drexel battled segregation until a heart attack forced her retirement in the 1930s.

Drexel's sanctity had its roots at home: her father and stepmother were pious and generous, reminding us that the example we give our children makes a difference. Another lesson: unlike Drexel or the rich young man of the Gospel, we may not be called to give up everything, but our faith challenges us all to give sacrificially and to reject the false idols of status and wealth.

At her canonisation in the year 2000, the Vatican cited a fourfold legacy for St Drexel: A love of the Eucharist and perspective on the unity of all peoples; courage and initiative in addressing social inequality among minorities; her efforts to achieve quality education for all; and selfless service, including the donation of her inheritance, for the victims of injustice. She is the patron saint of racial justice and of philanthropists.

# Building a faith foundation for Gen 'Z'



Dennis Coday

A couple of weeks before my three sons left for college, I took each to dinner. They chose the restaurant, reflecting their personalities: a Thai place, a steak house, a premium burger grill. I picked up the tab, but I wasn't there for dinner. I wanted to talk.

I gave each a copy of a card a cartoonist friend had given me some years before. Spoofing a Monopoly game card, it depicted Pope Francis letting a bird out of a cage and the caption: 'Get out of hell free!'

**“I know it all sounded overly dramatic to 18-year-olds excited for life's next chapter, but I worry about my sons”**

I told each son to put the card in his wallet as a reminder that he could come home any time. Nothing he could ever do, I said, should ever make him feel like he couldn't come home. No circumstances would close our home, our love, to him. I couldn't promise I wouldn't be angry or disappointed or saddened by these unknown, unimaginable actions, I said, but I would always welcome him home.

If you ever feel like you're in hell, use the card and come home, I told them.

I know it all sounded overly dramatic to 18-year-olds excited for life's next chapter, but I worry about my sons.

I know they are not evil young hooligans. I can't imagine them getting arrested or kicked out of school. I know they are fine young men respected by their peers, teachers and bosses.

I wanted them to embrace college life fully. Learning is more than classwork and studies. I told them to explore, to seek out new, different people and experiences. Have fun!

But I also know that exposes them to bad things and bad people. It exposes them to things and events that could hurt them, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Bad things do happen. Sometimes even the best people make bad choices.

I also know they face challenges my generation never faced at the same age. A 2019 study by global health service and insurance company Cigna found that "loneliness was at epidemic levels" and the loneliest cohort is Generation Z, people born after 1996. Nearly 79% of Gen Z respondents reported feeling lonely.

The Springtide Research Institute, which issues an annual 'State of the Religion and Young People' report focused on "the lived realities of young people as they navigate shifting social, cultural, and religious landscapes," is finding similar data.

Born into an era of personal and social upheaval, Gen Z doesn't remember a time before the war on terror. They watched families struggle through financial crises in the Great Recession.

They are more likely to have grown up amid diverse family structures - single parent and multiracial households - at a time when gender roles are blurred. Their lives are integrally entwined with technological innovation and ubiquitous media.

According to the Springtide Insti-

tute, "Identity today is increasingly seen as something that each individual personally constructs piece by piece, rather than something handed down from a prior generation or imposed by a community."

On the Jesuitical podcast of *America* magazine, Springtide's executive director Josh Packard was more colloquial: "As they are looking at the detritus of social life around them, (young people) are trying to figure out how to make a meaningful life out of it."

What's a parent to do? "You want to be one of the sticks out of which they build their spiritual home. That is a longer play," Mr Packard said. You do that by forming relationships with them so that you can be part of their conversation with life.

**“I want to make sure they made the connections they needed to stay emotionally and mentally healthy”**

My wife and I - perhaps unwittingly - laid out such a game plan years before. We grounded our boys in our faith tradition through Catholic school, religious education and sacramental preparation. We modelled personal prayer and church attendance for them. We talked openly and honestly about beliefs and practices. This was their foundation. The conversation continued as we prepped for college.

On campus tours, I made sure we found the chaplaincy and tried to meet the staff. Whether my sons joined those activities was up to them - and the dynamics of the ministry staff - but at least introductions were made. It was one resource among many.

My major concern wasn't whether or not they attended Sunday Mass. I want to make sure they made the connections they needed to stay emotionally and mentally healthy.

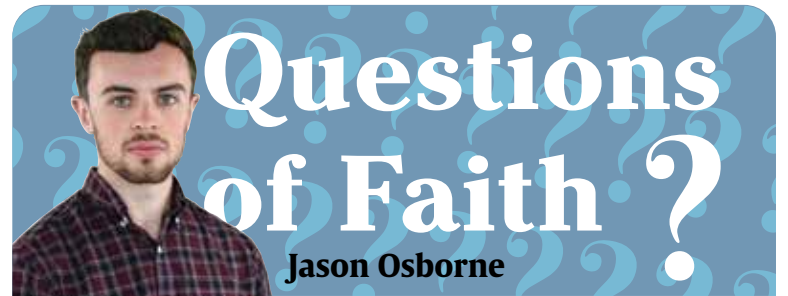
I encouraged them to join as many extracurriculars as their studies allowed. I suggested they check out campus ministry service projects but also other activities that matched their interests and are grounded in justice values - Engineers Without Borders, tutoring, choral groups and volunteering at a children's hospital. I wanted them to meet caring mentors who, in Mr Packard's words, would continue the conversations we had started.

And then we let them go.

My wife and I phone and text regularly, but not often. We visit only occasionally. One thing we insist on is that they come home for the holidays. Spring breaks and summers are theirs, but the holidays are for home.

It was tough but so far so good. None has used his card - yet.

**i** Dennis Coday has 35 years of experience as a writer and editor in Catholic media.



## Questions of Faith?

Jason Osborne



## Why does a good God allow suffering?

If there's one, unavoidable reality in our world it's that of suffering. No matter how you try to buffer or shore up your existence, suffering will manifest itself one way or another. The only way to avoid it would be to neither love nor feel - but would such a life be any different from suffering, anyway?

While life is full of good things, it's often the wounds and the blows that afflict us here that leave the biggest marks on us, the deaths, illnesses, accidents and more. Into this human experience, then, comes Christianity, with its claim that God is good, and so is his creation. This apparent contrast, between the Church's claims of God's goodness and the human experience of suffering, has naturally led many to ask: Why does a good God allow suffering?

As with so many of life's harder questions, there must remain some room for mystery here. No one knows exactly why God created the world as he did, and why he has allowed it to progress as it has. We know who God is, but sometimes his ways can be difficult for us to fathom - and that's to be expected. His infinite, divine perspective is likely to be quite different to our limited, human one. With that said, though, if we look at who we know God to be and what he wants for us, we can begin to get a sense of the answer.

### Lazarus

A good starting point for this is to be found in the gospels, specifically when Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. Upon hearing of Lazarus's illness, he says, "This illness is not unto death; it is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it" (John 11:4). He then proceeds to stay in place for two more days, during which time Lazarus dies, throwing his sisters Martha and Mary into the depths of grief.

When Jesus arrives, Martha confronts him, saying, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died". In the conversation that follows, Jesus drives home the point to Mar-

tha that he is "the resurrection and the life" and that those who believe in him, though they die, in the end, will live. Despite this, Jesus himself weeps when he sees the sisters' and the community's mourning. Describing him as "deeply moved" throughout this, the account tells us that Jesus proceeds to call Lazarus out of the tomb, back into life.

Why did Jesus delay his arrival upon hearing that Lazarus was sick? Why did he allow Lazarus to die and Martha and Mary to mourn for days before doing anything about it? Because it revealed the truth about him, even as faith in him in the midst of suffering today continues to.

Most of us, for most of our lives, see God as little more than a cosmic vending machine - we insert prayer and out of God comes the desired result. The story of Lazarus, and all suffering, allows us to see the truth of our situation - God is not a means to our ends, no matter how understandable those ends may be, but the end itself. Let us fear that in pursuing God for his own sake, our sufferings will be forgotten and go unanswered, Jesus reassures us as he reassured Martha that he is "the resurrection and the life". He is the one who puts things right.

Christianity reveals to us that the world ultimately begins with paradise and ends in greater paradise still, but the grand sweep of history we're living through has been dubbed by tradition the "vale" or "valley of tears". Our journey here is often conducted through darkness, towards new life, but that overarching view can be very difficult to see from the midst of the trial.

The Church proclaims a good God, but it's not without reason that the core symbol of our Faith is of a man tortured to death upon a cross. It's also important to note that the 'Good News' the Church is compelled to share is Christ's resurrection - his victory over death, and all suffering. To partake in that victory we have to know him, and we come to know him in suffering alongside him, in developing our relationship with him.



Students participate in a March for Life.



# A requiem for an older brother



Several weeks ago my older brother George died. His death was somewhat of a shock since he had been in relatively good health until a week before he died. His story is worth telling. No community, Mircea Eliade once said, should botch its deaths.

Although highly intelligent and motivated, George never got the chance for higher education. Our family was large and living on a small farm that could not support us. He, like other older members of our family, ended his schooling early to enter the work force to help support the family. In this, he was not unique. In the second-generation immigrant community where we grew up, a lot of his generation, both men and women, had to do the same. His story, like many others like him, was one within which he had to renounce his own dreams for the good of others.

**“He ended up with a very large family, that is, with people from all over the world considering him their brother, their mentor, their trusted friend”**

His story is a story of dedication to faith, to family, to Church, and to community. For the most part, he was conscripted by circumstance. Although he was very bright, perhaps the brightest in our



**Fr Rolheiser**

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

family, circumstances dictated that he leave school after the eighth grade to help support the family. Consequently, he never really had a chance to do what he wanted in life, both in terms of a career and in terms of getting married and having a family; and for him the great sacrifice wasn't career, but marriage.

## Commitments

George was never meant to be a life-long bachelor, but his life and commitments never quite allowed for marriage and led instead to a life of celibacy (in much the same way as this plays out for a priest or a vowed religious). Nevertheless, as for a vowed celibate, in the end, it served him well. He ended up with a very large family, that is, with people from all over the world

considering him their brother, their mentor, their trusted friend. Since his death, there has been a flood of letters, emails, texts, phone calls, and messages from people everywhere expressing what George meant to them. He died celibate, but he died a loved man.

However, all of this came at a price. Those of us who were privy to his private frustrations, know the price his soul paid for his dedication. He needed, at times, simply to vent at a safe place vis-à-vis the frustrations and tensions he was carrying, times when he couldn't fully emulate the patience and selflessness of Jesus. However, he always expressed his frustrations at a safe place, where his venting couldn't hurt anybody. He was always bigger than his frustrations. The deepest part of him was always

gracious and laced with humour. He brought laughter into every room he entered.

## The Church

Moreover, he was a man of faith and of the Church. The Church was an integral part of what he thought of as family and he gave himself over fully, both to the little rural faith community within which he lived and to the larger Church. For more than twenty years he helped lead a lay formation program and assisted in the youth ministry in his home diocese. The dedication and talent he brought to those programs were recognised by many. Indeed, at one point the local bishop came up to him and said, “George, I have only [one] question for you, do I ordain you now or do you want to go to the seminary for a few years first?” Ministry as a priest would have been a dream come true for him, but those of us who knew him also know why he turned down that invitation. He still had some commitments inside of family and community that he felt he could not abandon. That choice might be questioned; but again, it was made out of dedication and selflessness,

putting the needs of others before his own.

In the Gospel of John, the author describes how, after Jesus was already dead, soldiers came and pierced his side with a lance and “immediately blood and water flowed” out of his dead body. An interesting image! Life flowing out of a dead body! After Jesus died, his followers felt themselves nourished by him in an even deeper way than during his life. From the spirit he left behind, they sensed a rich outpouring of life and cleansing.

**“We will be nourished by his humour and the lightness he brought into a room, a quality that manifested both his intelligence and his zest for life”**

George also left behind that kind of a spirit. Everyone who knew him will continue to drink from his spirit – his selflessness, his sacrificing his dreams for family and Church, and his willingness to carry frustration and tension for the sake of others. Not least, we will be nourished by his humour and the lightness he brought into a room, a quality that manifested both his intelligence and his zest for life.

He lived a good life. He died a loved man. He will be remembered fondly by a large family – for whom he sacrificed his own chance for marriage and having a family of his own.

**“The deepest part of him was always gracious and laced with humour. He brought laughter into every room he entered.”**

# Learning to listen attentively to God

Last Sunday we were with Jesus on the Mount of Temptation. Today we see him on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt 17:1-9). It's such a contrast of experiences, from temptation to the vision of divine glory. He took with him Peter, John and James and went up a high mountain where they could be alone. Climbing the mountain is a struggle, but when the summit is reached it's worth it. One now gets a panoramic view of the winding of rivers, the meeting of roads, the outline of fields and coastline. It's an experience that opens up the mind. The poet, William Blake, described it admirably:

"Great things happen when men and mountain meet

This is not done while jostling in the street."

It is not surprising that, in the Bible, mountains are associated with divine encounters. It was on a mountain that Moses received the Ten Commandments, Elijah experienced a mystical meeting with God, and it was the Sermon on the Mount that outlined the charter of Christian living. The three apostles were granted a tiny glimpse of divine glory, something they would never forget. Moses and Elijah appeared to them. Moses represented the law and Elijah represented the prophets, the two sources of wisdom in the past. Peter would have stayed there forever but it wasn't to be. They had to come down to the jostling in the street of stern reality. However, memory kept the experience alive.

**Remember that Jesus warned us that when the blind lead the blind, both fall into the pit"**

The same three apostles witnessed the dreadful agony of Jesus in Gethsemane. Later, as pillars of the early Church, they experienced many difficult times. The Second Letter of Peter lets us know how they tapped into this special bank of memory. "We were with him on the holy mountain" (II Pet. 1:18). The voice from above which the apostles heard affirmed the identity of Jesus and the importance of listening to his teaching. "This is my Son, the Beloved; he enjoys my favour. Listen to him."

## The Sunday Gospel

Fr Silvester O'Flynn OFM Cap.



In this technological age there are many voices competing for our attention. Remember that Jesus warned us that when the blind lead the blind, both fall into the pit. Some of this false leadership has serious consequences. We can see from the voices of Russia regarding the invasion of Ukraine that truth is the first victim of war. As we saw last Sunday, lies are the chief weapon of the devil.

### Mental diet

Lent is a good time for asking ourselves who directs our lives. The shepherd psalm reminds us that the voice of the Lord guides us along the right path. But are we listening to the Lord? We are very aware nowadays how much our physical diet affects our state of health. But are we equally sensitive to the effect of our mental diet on our spiritual health? Anybody who feeds the mind with a diet of pornography or noisy, violent films or games is asking for trouble. A serious Lent may mean cutting back on the time we give to compulsive radio, obsessive television and internet addiction. Some people recommend a 'digital detox day' once a week. Even a digital detox hour each day might be a good start. We need to learn how to listen to God, to listen attentively to other people and even learn how to listen to our own inner feelings. To listen with attention is the first step in loving.

When St Teresa of Kolkata became internationally known she met with many world leaders. She was handed many business cards with the promise of financial help if she needed cash for any project. In return, she would give her own business card, five short lines. "The fruit of silence is prayer: the fruit of prayer is faith: the fruit of faith is love: the fruit of love is service: and the fruit of service is peace". Everybody seeks inner peace. It cannot be bought. It's like trying in vain to grab hold of a butterfly. One must be still and let it land on the hand. This stillness creates the space for prayer...which develops faith...which enkindles the fire of love...which reaches out in service.

Pray for the gift of silent



The transfiguration of Jesus is depicted in a stained-glass window at St Aloysius Church in Great Neck, New York. Photo: CNS

listening to the Lord. In our busy, noisy world today it is difficult to listen attentively. Our attention span nowadays is only a fraction of what it was before the age of technology. People flee from silence by turning up the volume or inserting earphones. Many years ago the poet, T.S. Eliot, wrote that people have "Knowledge of speech, but not of silence/Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word". His observation is far truer today.

**"This quiet moment of gratitude at the end of the day will greatly increase your awareness of God's presence in your life"**

The apostles Peter, John and James remained steadfast through the dark days by remembering that day of vision when, as Peter

recalled, "We were with him on the mountain."

One of the most helpful books I ever read was called *One Thousand Gifts* by Ann Voskamp. She is married to a pig farmer, mother of a young family while working as a journalist, but at the end of each day she reflected and made a note of one gift of God or blessing she received that day. It inspired me to do the same. I miss an odd day. I used to note it in my diary but rarely do it now. This Lent I have resolved to use the diary again to record some blessed moment or experience. One blessing is enough to record each day. This quiet moment of gratitude at the end of the day will greatly increase your awareness of God's presence in your life.

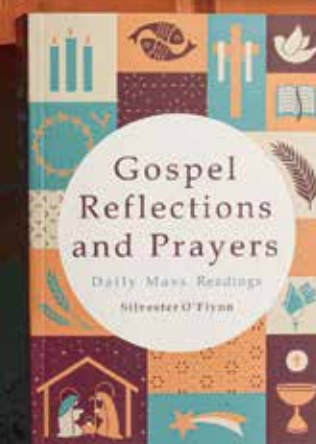
One final thought. If you think you are a million miles from God, guess who moved! During Lent, come back to God. "This is my Son, the Chosen One. Listen to him."

### Prayer

O God, who have commanded us to listen to your beloved Son, be pleased, we pray, to nourish us inwardly by your word, so that, with spiritual sight made pure, we may rejoice to behold your glory.

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# TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



## When pro-choice is not very pro-choice

There is much debate about single-sex schools versus mixed schools, with our current arrangements favouring choice and diversity of school models.

I listened with interest to the discussion on **Drivetime** (RTÉ Radio One, Wednesday) when Aodhán Ó Ríordáin TD (Labour) was very much against single-sex schools. His view was based on equality arguments, but presenter Sarah McInerney gave him quite a grilling. She had attended a single-sex school and seemed quite happy with it. She put it to him that choice was important. And then he said it – “choice is not as important as equality”. Hmm...if that had been Labour Party policy in 2018 they would have campaigned to retain the Eighth Amendment (an explicit equality measure), but instead they prioritised choice over equality. Make your mind up!

### Report

Deputy Ó Ríordáin referred to a recent report that suggested no difference in outcomes between both school types, so now he had something to back him up, though he would have been on stronger ground if the report showed single-sex schools to have worse outcomes. Several years ago, there was another report, one that



Mixed or single-sex? Schools were a hot topic this week. Photo: CNS

suggested an advantage for girls in single-sex schools. So which report do we believe? The more recent one? He dismissed the earlier viewpoint as “something that people wanted to believe”...but couldn't the same be said for the latest report?

### Antipathy

Many of the single-sex schools are religious run, and I wondered if antipathy towards them was part of the problem. Barbara Ennis, principal of Alexandra College, spoke trenchantly in

favour of having the single-sex option – she said the Constitution guaranteed parental choice. Yes, there was mixing of the sexes in real life, as Mr Ó Ríordáin pointed out, but she said school was not real life, rather a construct for the purpose of education. That line begs some serious questions for another day!

### Bishop David O'Connell

On a morning marked by news of violence, I was impressed by an interview on **Morning Ireland** (RTÉ Radio One, Thurs-

day) when Rachael English spoke to Fr Jarlath Cunnane, an Irish priest in Los Angeles about the murder of his friend Bishop David O'Connell. His tribute was gracious. He said Bishop O'Connell was good at friendship and relationships in general, with friends from all strata of society – among the movers and shakers as well as “the moven and the shaken”. He had worked long with deprived communities, including among the gangs in the area. How ironic and tragic that he too should die in a shooting when he and Fr Jarlath had ministered at many funerals of gun victims. And sadly, this was also the morning that the same programme covered the awful shooting of PSNI officer John Caldwell near Omagh – shot in front of his own child, with many other children in the area at the time. More disturbing details about the shooting were outlined later on **Today with Claire Byrne** (RTÉ Radio One) by Alan Rodgers of *The Ulster Herald*. Mr Caldwell, he said, was targeted in a situation where he was helping his community. Another guest, Daniel McCrossan of the SDLP described it as a “cruel, barbaric evil act of terror”, with “a recklessness that showed no regard for human life”.

### Sex-ed

There's trouble brewing too on the sex-ed front. On **Drivetime** (RTÉ Radio One,

## PICK OF THE WEEK

### SONGS OF PRAISE

**BBC ONE SUNDAY MARCH 5, 1.15PM**

To mark International Women's Day, Claire McCollum visits Glasgow to uncover stories of women of faith throughout the ages, including Glasgow's very own St Enoch.

### SAVOURING OUR FAITH

**EWTN SUNDAY (NIGHT) MARCH 5, 12.30AM**

The 'passion play' has been performed every decade since 1680 by the villagers of Oberammergau, Bavaria. Fr Leo Patalinghug explores how their Catholicism preserves time-honoured traditions of faith and culture.

### PANORAMA

**BBC ONE MONDAY MARCH 6, 8PM**

Marianna Spring investigates how Elon Musk's ownership is transforming one of the world's most influential social media platforms.

Thursday) it was reported that parents would have the option to withdraw children from sex-ed classes. You would have thought that would not be controversial, with the prophets of choice rushing to defend it. But no, in her introduction presenter Sarah McInerney said, in relation to the optout, that “not everyone thinks it's a good idea”. She quoted an Irish Human Rights Commission public consultation report which said the right to religious freedom or belief didn't give the right to opt out if “relevant information is conveyed in an objective and impartial manner”. The information is minimal enough, it's the values

parents might be worried about – if, as is likely, values that are not universally accepted are being pushed there's an obvious problem. And then there's the question of age appropriateness – a parent's choice again, one would have thought.

On a lighter note, **Gardeners' World** (BBC Two, Friday) featured a beautiful 'paradise garden'. It was at a British mosque, but, considering the potential for religious symbolism and the biblical resonance, a meditation garden would surely enhance any Christian church.



Pat O'Kelly

# Music

## Irish absence was strange given important anniversary

The National Symphony Orchestra (NSO) celebrated its 75th birthday last month with its NCH concert repeated the following evening in Waterford's SETU Arena.

The events were not without administrative difficulties when original conductor Jonathon Heyward, falling victim to Covid-19, was forced to withdraw. However, stepping in at short notice, his replacement, dynamic Chinese Lio Kuokman, kept the show on the road.

The music on offer, strangely without an Irish input to suit the occasion, was strongly central European even if Mozart's Fifth Violin Concerto is a borderline case with its finale having a particularly Turkish flavour



The dynamic Lio Kuokman, reflecting the popular musical taste of the 1770s.

Playing her Francesco Ruggeri fiddle dating from 1697, I was a little disappointed

with Italian soloist Francesca Deago's performance despite her broad dynamic range and winning virtuosity in her first movement cadenza.

### Opening

The concert had opened with Polish Grazyna Bacewicz' wartime *Overture* with its dominant timpani leaving us without doubt as to its Morse code influence. Dvorák's 8th Symphony found the NSO in splendid form responding to Maestro Kuokman's panache with playing awash in musical expression and excitement.

Two other recent NSO concerts had principal conductor Jaime Martín on its rostrum and soprano Danielle de Niese as its soloist. Their first programme brought Poulenc's

one act opera *La voix humaine* while their second retained a Gallic orientation with Ravel's *Shéhérazade* before turning to Mozart's *Exultate, jubilate* motet.

Ms de Niese caught the beguilingly oriental atmosphere in *Asie*, which opens Ravel's exotic score but I was less smitten by her Poulenc, although admittedly *La voix humaine* is difficult to pull off. The protagonist spends her time either on the phone or waiting for it to ring as her fiancé is determined to end their relationship. There was a simple but effective stage setting – a chaise longue, a small table and the 'shared-line' phone.

Danielle de Niese's performance had a depth of

characterisation especially when other mystified callers interrupted her anguished conversation. By the end I wondered would the telephone cable be the instrument of her suicide.

Opera on a more elaborate scale comes to the Bord Gáis Energy Theatre on March 5, 7, 9 and 11 when Irish National Opera presents Richard Strauss' *Der Rosenkavalier*. Conducted by Fergus Sheil, London-based Bruno Ravella directs with sets and costumes by Gary McCann in Malcolm Rippeth's lighting.

### Female roles

The three main female roles bring together Celine Byrne as the aristocratic Feldmarschallin, Claudia Boyle as

Sophie and Paula Murrihy in the 'breeches' part of Octavian. There is an interesting twist here in that Octavian also acts as an alleged maid in Act III, but then this is opera after all.

German bass Andreas Bauer Kanabas takes the role of boorish Baron Ochs (actually ox in German) with his prurient eye on the horrified Sophie. The large cast – there are about thirty roles – also includes Rachel Croash, Carolyn Holt and Samuel Dale Johnson.

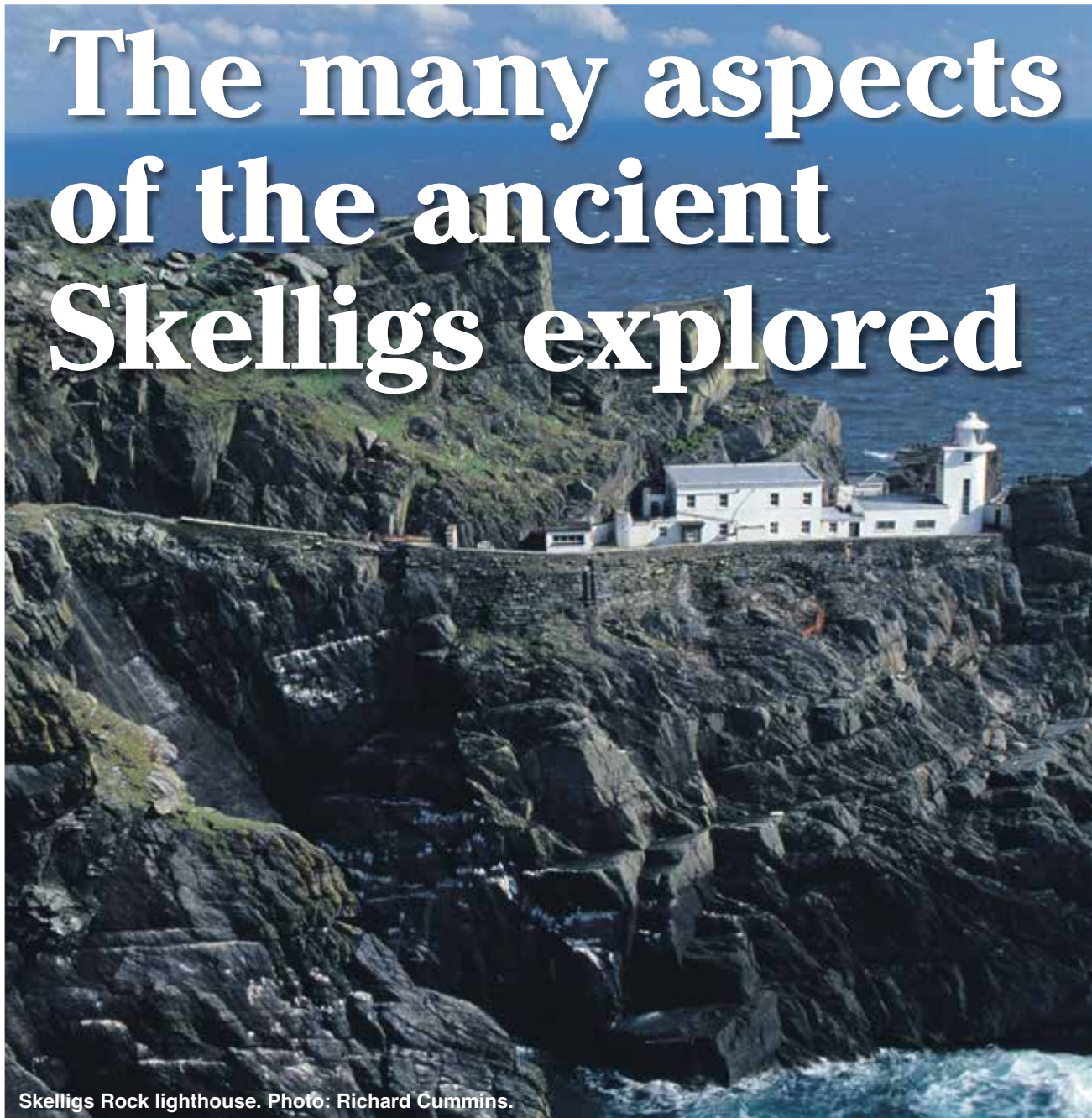
*Der Rosenkavalier*, set in the Vienna of Empress Maria Theresa, had its première in Dresden in 1911 and soon established itself in the repertoires of opera houses worldwide.

# BookReviews

Peter Costello



## The many aspects of the ancient Skelligs explored



Skelligs Rock lighthouse. Photo: Richard Cummins.

## Sidelights on the Skelligs I

An excerpt from Patrick Weston Joyce, *English as We Speak it in Ireland* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1910), pages 324-325.

In his essay on the "Skellig Lists" in *Irish folk life* contributor Shane Lehane overlooks this interesting and important notice of the custom by the Victorian scholar of all things Irish, Patrick Weston Joyce - he of *Irish Names of Places* and numerous other works - from one of the last books he published.

Born in 1827, Joyce (who was by way of being a cousin of James Joyce) is an engaged eyewitness of local traditions, writing about the years immediately before the Great Famine, when marriage was entered into with more relish than it was in later decades of the century, and when old folk

traditions were truly alive in the mouths and minds of the people rather than of academics.

\*\*\*

Skellig, Skellig List - On the Great Skellig rock in the Atlantic, off the coast of Kerry, are the ruins of a monastery, to which people at one time went on pilgrimage - and a difficult pilgrimage it was.

The tradition is still kept up in some places, though in an odd form; in connection with the custom that marriages are not solemnised in Lent, i.e. after Shrove Tuesday.

It is well within my memory that - in the south of Ireland - young persons who should have been married before Ash Wednesday, but were not, were supposed to set out on pilgrimage to Skel-

lig on Shrove Tuesday night: but it was all a make-believe.

Yet I remember witnessing occasionally some play in mock imitation of the pilgrimage. It was usual for a local bard to compose what was called a 'Skellig List' - a jocose rhyming catalogue of the unmarried men and women of the neighbourhood who went on the sorrowful journey - which was circulated on Shrove Tuesday and for some time after.

Some of these were witty and amusing: but occasionally they were scurrilous and offensive doggerel. They were generally too long for singing; but I remember one - a good one too - which - when I was very young - I heard sung to a spirited air. It is represented here by a single verse, the only one I remember.

As young Rory and

Moreen were talking,

How Shrove Tuesday was just drawing near;

Fur the tenth time he asked her to marry;

But says she: 'Time enough till next year.'

'Then ochone I'm going to Skellig:

O Moreen, what will I do? 'Tis the woeful road to travel;

And how lonesome I'll be without you!'

Here is a verse from another:

Poor Andy Callaghan with doleful nose

Came up and told his tale of many woes:

Some lucky thief from him his sweetheart stole,

Which left a weight of grief upon his soul:

With flowing tears he sat upon the grass,

And roared sonorous like a braying ass.

**The Book of the Skelligs**, edited by John Crowley and John Sheehan, photography by Valerie O'Sullivan (Cork University Press, €49/£43.90)

**The Great Lighthouses of Ireland**, by David Hare (Gill Books, €27.99/£24.99)

Peter Costello

The filming in the recent past of two episodes of the continuing Star Wars franchise has transformed the world-wide perception of the Skellig islands with their 1,400-year history as a renowned site of Early Christian Ireland.

It even led to a "family friendly, fun filled weekend festival", which had only to do with modern fantasy culture. But many associated with the Office of Public Works were very concerned about what was coming to pass and rightly so. We have to face the fact that all tourism promotion ventures are not equal, and some do more harm than good in boosting the local economies, damage that can eventually destroy what so many people came to see.

But here is a book which more than compensates for all that. It is a simply stunning compendium on all aspects of the islands, a sort of holistic integrated treatment of the archipelago that is endlessly fascinating in itself.

It has been put together by John Crowley and John Sheehan, and largely photographed by a single photographer Valerie O'Sullivan, which gives the book a wonderful integrated single vision of the place.

The editors, both of whom are attached to Cork University College, assembled a group of 26 contributors who have provided some 50 articles of a very varied kind, some scientific, some historical, others purely meditative and literary.

### Geology

It starts very properly with the geology of the islands, with the very bedrock that gives the Skellig skyline that extraordinary shark's tooth appearance that so appealed to the American film producers. They responded to the sensational appearance, but the writers here are creating a fact-based treatment. The first four sections deal in fact with flowers and animal life, the birds notably the puffins and gannets, whose cries and squawks in the breeding season are an essential part of the atmosphere.

I was struck especially

by Vincent Hyland's essay, entitled "The Galapagos of Europe". Well, I thought at first, where are the finches, lizards and tortoises that were so important to Darwin in the Pacific. But once he gets under the surface of the sea, down into the depths, he reveals an extraordinary world teeming with life and colour.

Having created this solid ground in the natural environment, the book then turns to various aspects of the Skelligs in Irish monasticism and history, standing as it did then at the edge of the "known world". There follow pieces that deal with medieval architecture of the island, which is indeed incredible given the difficulty of working on such a location.

**“Though recent archaeological work has investigated many aspects of monastic life, it has not yet answered all the queries that may arise”**

The monks are long gone. But in modern times the islands have not been quite devoid of a population: there have been the operators of the light house since 1826, and a profile by one of the editors deals with Grellan D. Rourke, who passed some 40 years on the island. This is a remarkable document. The modern residents are only too well aware of the dangers, for one of them once fell to his death trying to harvest fodder for the cow that provided the fresh milk supply to the lighthouse keepers.

I have often wondered in the past whether the anchorites spent the whole year on the island, or only (as seemed more probably to me) only the summer months; but it seems they did, in their devotion to God and solitude. The seas along our west coast are at their most outrageous in the months of February and March. Though recent archaeological work has investigated many aspects of monastic life, it has not yet answered all the queries that may arise.

On a wider point Damien Bracken provides an essay on the Archangel Michael in medieval Ireland. But on this point it is a pity that an essay was not commissioned on the interrelation of Skellig Michael with Mont Saint-Michel in Normandy and, across La Manche, St Michael's Mount in Cornwall. These places are surrounded by masses of mythical and

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.



Skellig Michael, looking from the west towards Seal Cove. Photo: Peter Cox.

legendary lore, far beyond anything that is known about Skellig Michael, lore in which St Michael appears as a protector of the Faithful in danger along these approach seas to the ports of Cork, Southampton, Le Havre and London.

### Dangerous

We often forget just how dangerous a place the Celtic Sea and the Channel have been since prehistory to ships and boats. In a presentation of the Hopkins Summer School I spoke some time ago about the extraordinary numbers of lives lost at sea along the course of the Channel in the same year as the Deutschland. Could one of the tasks of the monks of Skellig would have

been to pray for those in danger at sea?

**“Skellig Michael is one of those places that will go on prompting questions in the minds of the curious and meditative”**

A desert to the monks, to sailors it was often an overcrowded waterway. These three dedications suggest a connected idea, but one which means moving outside Ireland to discuss, not always something Irish local scholars like doing.

The book closes out with a selection of essays on various aspects of the islands in the present day, many of great interest. The most interesting of these (to me at least) are three pieces on Skellig and the sky at night; fascinating stuff. The book actually concludes with a photographic evocation by artist and filmmaker Clare Langan, in which she calls them “the floating world”, which seems very apt indeed.

A densely detailed book which is a pleasure to read, and which provides page upon page of information and data, all expressed with a loving care for a single place. But the more that is known, the more we realise how little we actually know; there is always

more to learn. Skellig Michael is one of those places that will go on prompting questions in the minds of the curious and meditative.

For many lovers of Kerry *The Book of the Skelligs* will go on their shelves beside Tom Barrington's great labour of love.

\*\*\*

Producer David Hare's book about the lighthouses of Ireland is also beautifully illustrated (much of the material deriving from his television documentary series), and has pages on the light house on Skellig Michael. One image shows a helicopter taking off above the island, a reminder that modern technology reaches everywhere today, into even into the remotest crannies of our culture. But it is a remarkable record of human achievement, technology and enterprise, and in the lives and activities of the light house men and their families, lives often of sheer courage.

If the photographs are very fine, some of the paintings from the past are extraordinary. The Irish Lights Service is something we all take far too casually. When the lighthouses failed in the past, tragedy too often followed. This is a well justified tribute to a great corps of people.



A helicopter takes off from Skellig Michael. Photo: Inroduction TV.

# Sidelights on the Skelligs II



The domes of the Anba Beshoy provide a contrast to those of the Skelligs.

**Peter Costello**

“Who founded Skellig monastery?” remains a moot question, as the lawyers say. The relevant contributors to this book have to admit that though the name of St Fionán is associated with the early centuries of Skellig's human history, who truly founded the monastery is an obscure issue. But it may be that light on this problem might be cast from what too many in Ireland may think an unexpected source, the Western Desert of Egypt.

A distinguished light of the Irish Bar, the late Dermot Kinlen (whom I knew well when we were both members of the committee running a society concerned with oriental culture based on the Chester Beatty Library, then still in its original home.)

**“This was the Anba Beshoy Monastery, named for a monk who went into the desert about 300AD”**

Late in 1991 he made a visit to Egypt, during the course of which he travelled out into the Western Desert to see the Wadi el-Natroun. Once an isolated place this can now be reached by a new highway running from Cairo to Alexandria. In the Wadi el-Natroun he visited one of the four famous monasteries. This was the Anba Beshoy Monastery, named for a monk who went into the desert about 300AD. Many followed him. In

1991 there were still 150 monks there.

**“Kinlen knew that monasteries had begun in Egypt with St Anthony the Great, who died in 356AD”**

Dermot Kinlen was assisted by Bro. James who acted as his guide. Dermot Kinlen told Bro. James about the annual visits he had been making to Skellig Michael since 1943. Bro. James was most interested. He knew of that place, “and that a monk from his monastery had founded the monastery on Skellig Rock”. This was quite a claim. Kinlen knew that monasteries had begun in Egypt with St Anthony the Great, who died in 356AD. They talked about the Coptic influences on Celtic art, and on the stylistic comparisons which had been made between the Syrian Coptic chalices the Irish might have been imitating in creating the Derrynaflan Chalices.

When he heard this claim about the Copts founding Skellig, the then Irish Ambassador to Egypt, Eamonn Ó Tuathaill, was careful. He asked for some primary sources for this claim, but the monk was only able to pass on a set of secondary sources, as the actual monastic librarian was at that time away in Cairo.

I have read nothing since setting out in more historical detail what the Coptic claim by Anba Beshoy monastery was. So it seems there is perhaps more to be discovered there too about the Skelligs.

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**10-12 March 2023**  
The Pallottine Fathers  
Sandyford Road  
Dundrum, Dublin 16  
D16 K2X7

"Seek God and you will find God. Seek God in all things and you will find God in all things. Seek God always and you will find God Always" - St Vincent Pallotti

For more information, contact Fr John Regan SAC [johngregan76@gmail.com](mailto:johngregan76@gmail.com) | 0876389658

**Hoping...**  
*to be in a relationship?*

**Seeking...**  
*someone who shares your faith?*

**Finding...**  
*it difficult to meet the right person?*

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Ireland's Foremost Introduction Agency for Catholics  
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**We will  
pass on  
the flame  
of faith.**

For over 130 years, *The Irish Catholic* has been a voice of hope and inspiration for Catholics in Ireland. Help us pass on the flame of faith by remembering us in your Will.

Phone 01 6874028 [info@irishcatholic.ie](mailto:info@irishcatholic.ie)

## The Irish Catholic PREPAID CLASSIFIED AD COUPON

STATE UNDER WHICH HEADING YOUR AD IS TO APPEAR:

Minimum charge of €24.60 (inc. VAT) for 5 lines (25 words). Extra lines €4.92 each.

No. of insertions: _____ weeks
Miracle Prayer €40

Please print your advertisement in the coupon, placing ONE word in each space. Below, please print your name and address. Do you require a Box Number? YES  NO  (Please tick ✓) Box Number €6 extra.

1					€24.60
2					
3					
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5					
6					€29.52
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Name and contact detail form MUST be filled out

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I enclose Cheque/PO: €.....I wish to pay by Visa  Mastercard  Laser

My Visa/Mastercard/Lasercard number is:

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Expiry Date: .....Signature .....

# Leisure time

## The Gift Of A Lifetime

Be there for others after you're gone.

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

Email Anna Sadlier at [anna.sadlier@hospicefoundation.ie](mailto:anna.sadlier@hospicefoundation.ie) or call 01 679 3188



[www.hospicefoundation.ie](http://www.hospicefoundation.ie)



**MQI**

Merchants Quay Ireland  
Homeless & Drugs Services

*You're Invited*

Come for a FREE, behind-the-scenes tour of Merchants Quay Ireland's homeless drop-in centre.

See first-hand how your kind donations and legacy bequests work to bring hope and relief to people who've slept rough overnight.

To find out more please ring Shauna at 01 524 0139.

*We'd love to meet you*

A hot meal. A helping hand. A fresh start.

Please pray for the beatification of

## Little Nellie of Holy God

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

— Pope St Pius X, June 4, 1912

## Will the MSC Missions

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

Please help us with a gift in your Will

Contact:

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

[www.mscmissions.ie](http://www.mscmissions.ie)

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

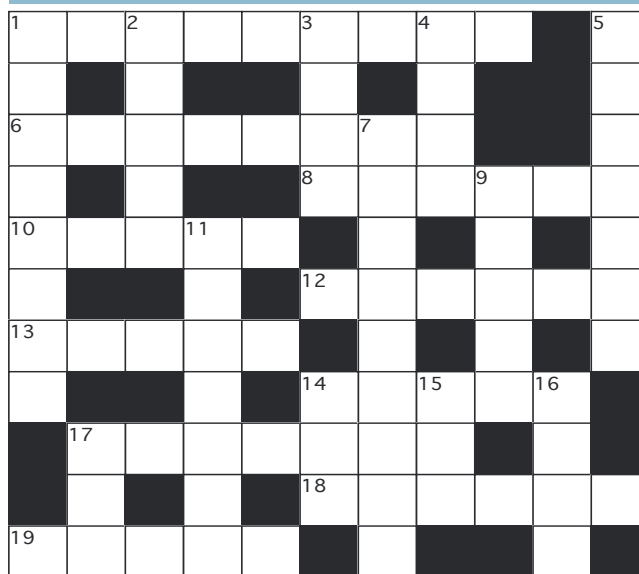
**Trócaire**

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

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

### Crossword Junior

Gordius 472



#### Across

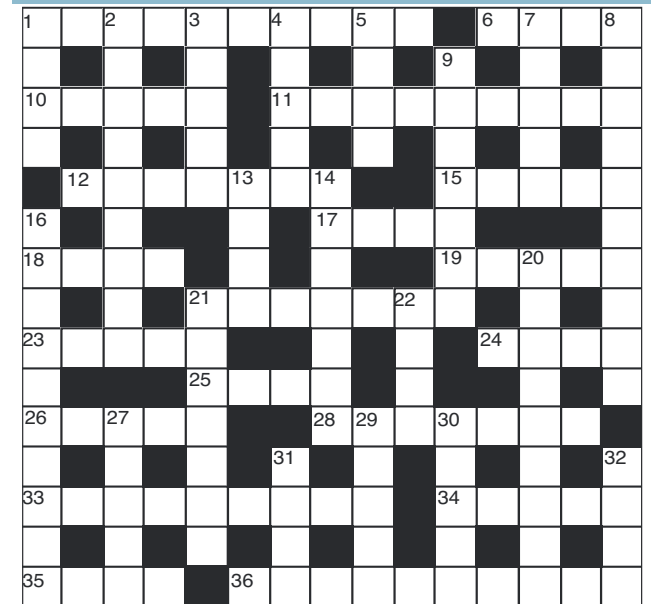
- 1 The main lights at the front of a car (9)
- 6 Popular fizzy drink (8)
- 8 You can buy things at the stalls here (6)
- 10 During this very twenty-four hours (5)
- 12 Newspaper boss (6)
- 13 Small creature hunted by a cat (5)
- 14 You carry a hot drink in it to keep the drink hot (5)
- 17 Post which is delivered using a plane (7)
- 18 Travelled like a ball or a wheel (6)

#### Down

- 19 Book of maps (5)
- 1 It's midway through a match (4-4)
- 2 Pointed a gun at something (5)
- 3 The first man in the Bible (4)
- 4 Jetty (4)
- 5 In this school subject, we learn about the past (7)
- 7 Yellow weed (9)
- 9 Flying toys controlled by string (5)
- 11 Vienna is its capital city (7)
- 14 Distant (3)
- 15 Everyone or everything (3)
- 16 Hold onto, don't lose (4)
- 17 Take part in a play (3)

### Crossword

Gordius 600



#### Across

- 1 Scandinavian award established by the inventor of dynamite (5,5)
- 6 Crust formed over a sore (4)
- 10 Wood projection which is inserted into a mortise (5)
- 11 Blessed with rude good health (2,3,4)
- 12 Shade of red (7)
- 15 Emburdened (5)
- 17 Warmth (4)
- 18 The holm oak tree (4)
- 19 Aspirations (5)
- 21 Thy narc is wandering in a chapel within a church (7)
- 23 Countryside walker (5)
- 24 Informal potato (4)
- 25 Confidential assistant (4)
- 26 Character from children's fiction, created by Enid Blyton (5)
- 28 Strips of bacon (7)
- 33 From the French, an entertaining teller of stories (9)
- 34 Location (5)
- 35 School bench or office equipment (4)

#### Down

- 36 Ensnarled in the ultimate in traffic congestion (10)
- 1 Item of paper money (4)
- 2 Teller (4,5)
- 3 Relating to the moon (5)
- 4 Major European river (5)
- 5 Catherine \_\_\_\_-Jones won her only oscar to date for 'Chicago' (4)
- 7 Youngster (5)
- 8 It gives lift and flavour to bread, for example (6,4)
- 9 Rich (7)
- 13 Christian name of Mr Walesa, president of Poland from 1990 to 1995 (4)
- 14 Stormy sound (7)
- 16 Number written as DC in Roman numerals (3,7)
- 20 Book with a soft cover (9)
- 21 Waxy colouring sticks (7)
- 22 Bones that form a cage in the body (4)
- 27 Mallards, for example (5)
- 29 Mooted (5)
- 30 Nickname of the animal whose name means "River Horse" (5)
- 31 Stag or doe (4)
- 32 Repair (4)

### SOLUTIONS, FEBRUARY 23

GORDIUS NO. 599

**Across** – 1 Divine Word 6 Bend 10 Solid 11 Last Rites 12 Endless 15 Salve 17 Luck 18 OPEC 19 Lucid 21 Crunchy 23 Furze 24 Blur 25 Nape 26 Owlet 28 Rat trap 33 Red mullet 34 Ibsen 35 Epee 36 Befriended

**Down** – 1 Dusk 2 Volunteer 3 Nadal 4 Wells 5 Ruse 7 Extol 8 Dusseldorf 9 Briskly 13 Ever 14 Slander 16 Golf course 20 Collapsed 21 Centaur 22 Hint 27 Ledge 29 Aster 30 Tripe 31 Sloe 32 Enid

CHILDREN'S No. 471

**Across** – 1. Bridesmaid 6. Tick tock 8. Underwear 11. Nod 13. Pencil-case 15. Bed 16. Complain 17. Ashes 18. Twigs

**Down** – 1. Batman 2. Included 3. Eat 4. Ask 5. Dollars 7. Car 9. Doctors 10. Wicklow 12. Operas 14. Ennis

### Sudoku Corner

472

#### Easy

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

#### Hard

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

#### Last week's Easy 471

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

#### Last week's Hard 471

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

Notebook

Fr Bernard Cotter



# Spare a prayer for a madcap parish mission

**THIS LENT**, I have taken on a project that is either incredibly brave or incredibly foolhardy. This undertaking of mine is also way above my pay grade, one of those proposals which seemed a good idea when it was a long way off, but now seems a lot less so. I have agreed to preach a parish mission this Lent, and not just in Ireland, but in southwest Chicago, USA – God help us all.

A little background may help explain why I agreed. Over 20 years ago, I spent a year at St Bernadette parish in Evergreen Park, while I studied liturgy nearby. As well as saying Masses there and writing in the parish newsletter, I took part in general pastoral work also. Many parishioners were kind and hospitable to me, feeding and encouraging me, making me feel at home. They were just as nice to my parents when they visited me in Chicago. Kindnesses like that cannot be forgotten. You could say I owe them something in return.

**Shortage**

Like parishes in Ireland, St Bernadette has suffered because of the shortage of priests in Chicagoland, but it also suffers a shortage of people. The demographic make-



up of St Bernadette's has changed in the last half-century, from the time when it mainly consisted of Irish immigrants (and was characterised, tongue-in-cheek, as 'EverWHITE Park'), to today, when many of its inhabitants are African American, most of whom are not Catholic. Like here, priesthood isn't attracting vocations, and priests are growing older and fewer.

A scheme had to be devised to make priestly resources stretch further and to bring people together. After a consultation, St Bernadette was merged with its neighbouring parish, Queen

of Martyrs, with St Bernadette's school closed and the site sold off, and its church in line for closure. A unification committee is devising ways of drawing these two communities together, with their common Irish heritage being one point of convergence. It is thought by the ever-enthusiastic young Polish pastor that having a native Irish priest preach a Lenten mission for the two communities will help the process. Time will tell how wise this is.

**Result**

The result sees me off to Chicago mid-March, like a politician, preaching at six Masses in two campuses over the weekend of 18-19 March, and leading a

three-day mission in the days that follow. I will preach briefly at three morning Masses, and in the evening celebrate a reconciliation service on day one (the Irish rite 2.5), a healing service on day two and a closing Mass on the Wednesday, with hospitality for all to follow.

Then I fly home next day and arrive to my family of parishes, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, to celebrate the three Masses there the following weekend. God help us all indeed.

My request is simple – now that you see how outlandish my undertaking is, please, if you have a spare prayer, include the success of this mission... as I have been doing since I agreed to this madcap idea.

**The 'Better Than Nothing' priest**

A colleague had a sabbatical outside his home diocese. While studying in a theological college, he stayed in a parish where there had previously been a fulltime priest. My friend's role was to help out when he was available, on the understanding that he could not equal the fulltime priest he was replacing.

What would his title be, this would be the question? His suffix would not be CC (Catholic Curate), AP (Assistant Priest), not even PIR (Priest-In-Residence). Instead, the title BTN was coined by clerical wags ('Better Than Nothing') – a title that may become more common in coming years.

**A great need for homiletics in Maynooth**

I recently came across Maynooth's 'Kalendarium', its academic directory. Our national seminary is well served with teaching staff, but with one major lack: homiletics is vacant. This discipline, which involves teaching the art of preaching, was led by Fr Ronan Drury, now sadly deceased (and irreplaceable, apparently). The broader context is a concern about homilies, echoed by Pope Francis recently. Never was there a greater need for good training in homiletics at Maynooth.

Perhaps I should throw my hat in the ring? Anyone daft enough for a three-day parish mission in the USA should be sufficiently unhinged to try anything...



## LITTLE WAY TURKEY-SYRIA EARTHQUAKE APPEAL

We have all seen the terrible destruction and suffering caused by the recent earthquakes which have hit large parts of Turkey and Syria. We know you are as heart-broken as are we by some of the events taking place, including the death of whole families and of little children. These brothers and sisters of ours need our prayers and support. The Little Way will send as much, by way of funds, as you our supporters make possible. This will be utilised by one or more of the Catholic and international aid organisations capable of bringing vital food, water, medical aid and shelter, as well as loving care to the thousands of traumatised victims in Turkey and Syria.

**THE NEEDS NOW ARE IMMENSE**

Please send us any monetary gift that you can. Every euro will help.

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

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

- I enclose €..... to be allocated to:
- €..... **TURKEY-SYRIA EARTHQUAKE APPEAL**
- €..... **NEEDS OF MISSIONARIES**
- €..... **WELLS AND WATER**
- €..... **MASSES** (please state no. )  
We ask for a minimum of €6 or more for each Mass
- €..... **LITTLE WAY ADMIN EXPENSES**

To donate online go to [tinyurl.com/lwadonations](http://tinyurl.com/lwadonations)

**DONATIONS FOR THE MISSIONS ARE SENT WITHOUT DEDUCTION FOR ANY EXPENSES.**

Please tick if you would like an acknowledgement

Name (Rev. Mr. Mrs. Miss) (Block letters please)

Address

IC/03/02



An earthquake survivor reacts while sitting amidst rubble Hatay, Turkey, Feb. 9, 2023. Photo: OSV News photo/Emilie Madi, Reuters

**Please consider making a gift to The Little Way Association's earthquake appeal for the relief of suffering victims.**

Every euro you send will be gratefully received and forwarded without deduction.

Thank you, and May God reward your generosity.

**Our benefactors will be glad to know that a Mass is offered each day for their intentions.**



"We can never have too much confidence in our God Who is so mighty and so merciful."

- St Therese

**PLEASE HELP CATECHISTS TO TEACH THE FAITH**

Catechists, working in unison with their local priests, play an extremely important role in proclaiming and teaching the Catholic Faith. Many missionaries ask the Little Way for help to support and maintain their catechists who very often witness to Christ in the face of extreme poverty or persecution.

**Please can you spare a donation to support a catechist?**

**WELLS NEEDED**

Missionaries repeatedly appeal to The Little Way for funds to sink wells in order to provide clean, safe water, the lack of which causes much illness and many medical needs. On average, women in Africa and Asia walk around three hours every day to fetch water, often in scorching heat.

**Can you help provide a well?**