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Easter hope needed for 'fearful and anxious' youth

Chai Brady

The Church must do more to reach young people "suffering from anxiety" and "swamped with social media", according to the Auxiliary Bishop-elect of the Archdiocese of Dublin.

The Easter message of Christ's victory over death is an opportunity to bring his personal message of love to youth despite a "much more secular culture", Bishop-elect Donal Roche told *The Irish Catholic*.

"One thing I hear so often from young people is they are suffering from anxiety. I think it is so sad that joyful message just does not seem to be getting through to a lot of them," he said.

Fr Roche encouraged older people who might feel "afraid" of how the message might be received to "get over that fear".

"It is so hard to get through to young people with all the other messages, they are swamped with social media and an awful lot of negativity. My biggest hope would be the message of the Church will get through," he said.

"People are often blinded by the politics and negativity around the Church, that it's all about rules and regulations and what they can and can't do. They don't hear what Christ is actually saying, that love he has for them, that gets lost.

"My real hope is that in the middle of the noise around young people they would hear that voice proclaiming 'Yes, I love you indi-

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From cross to crown...



Students from Mt St Catherine's School participate in Holy Week ceremonies in St Patrick's Cathedral, Armagh, on March 24.

FG & FF ARE IDEOLOGICALLY HOMELESS

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The Irish Catholic

No peace for 'disappeared' families without truth – Primate

Ruadhán Jones

The ongoing "lack of disclosure about murder" is causing heartache for families of Troubles victims including the disappeared, Archbishop Eamon Martin has said.

The Primate of All-Ireland spoke out during Palm Sun-

day's Mass for the Families of the Disappeared in St Patrick's Cathedral, Armagh.

He called for an investigation and information recovery process which can be fully trusted and keeps open the door to the pursuit of justice, urging the families to keep pursuing the truth.

The archbishop referred to an interim report on Operation Kenova published earlier this month, focussing on the activities of the British agent known as Stakeknife, who infiltrated the IRA's notorious Internal Security Unit that hunted out informers.

The operation of the agent, named as west Belfast man Freddie Scappaticci, was said to have resulted in "more lives being lost than saved", report author Jon Boutcher said.

The report "highlights the failure to properly acknowledge the hurt inflicted on families during the Troubles and the lack of disclosure about murder which wouldn't be tolerated anywhere else", Dr Martin said in his homily.

Dr Martin added: "Meeting like this, every year, highlights and renews the importance of addressing fully and properly the legacy of our troubled past, and making it clear that we cannot accept the simplis-

tic idea of 'drawing the line' under our past.

"We must continue to seek an investigation and information recovery process which can be fully trusted by victims and survivors, and which at least keeps the door open to accountability and the pursuit of justice," he said.

Meanwhile, Archbishop Martin and Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh John McDowell urged Christians to pursue reconcilia-

tion not as an optional extra to the work of peacemaking, but as "an essential duty and service".

"Meaningful reconciliation here is the unfinished work of peace," the archbishops said in their Easter message.

"We all have a part to play in the service of building a reconciled society," they added, including governments, civic society, and individual citizens.

Easter hope needed for 'fearful and anxious' youth

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vidually and I have great hopes for you."

His comments come after Pope Francis' message on Monday to young people on the fifth anniversary of his Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit* (Christ is Alive), which was published after the Synod on Youth in Rome in 2018.

In his letter, the Pope said: "Above all, I would like my words to be a source of renewed hope for you. In today's world, marked by so many conflicts and so much suffering, I suspect that many of you feel disheartened. So together with you, I would like to set out from the proclamation that is the basis of our hope and that of all humanity: 'Christ is alive!'"

Fr Roche said: "Reading that personal message from the Pope, it just reminds me of the same message that I got myself all those years back when I was a teenager discerning what I would do for my life and I just wish that the same message could get to young people today but it just seems to be so difficult, with all that's going on in the world and their lives, all the fear and anxiety about the future and climate change."

Speaking to *The Irish Catho-*

lic, Auxiliary Bishop of Armagh Michael Router said the Pope's message "resonates through every age and every generation".

"I think it is very important that we proclaim that hope to young people in a world that has so many difficulties, and so many things that can cause people to lose hope and to be down and to be depressed."

Bishop Router added that Holy Week "is an opportunity to encourage people to talk about the resurrection, the triumph of life over death. In a world where talk of death, and the despondency around all that is happening in terms of war and famine and climate change and all the rest, is so prevalent, I think focusing on the resurrection helps us to be a Church with a positive message that can help to lift people".

"It is very important to focus on the positive message that we have as a Church, that Christ is alive, that Christ is not a historical figure who was put to death on a cross and that is it. He is still alive, he rose from the dead and his victory over death and sin and all that depresses us is still very much a part of our world today. We really have got to believe in Jesus and turn to him when things are not good."

Dough is risen...



Members of the Ukrainian Catholic chaplaincy work hard behind the scenes to make Easter cakes for celebrations in the chaplaincy in Donnycarney, Dublin.

Expert debunks 'dangerous' myths about Catholic education

Staff reporter

An expert in Catholic education has hit back at "lazy" and "dangerous" myths perpetuated against Catholic education.

Referencing Catholic education as 'segregated' or 'an apartheid schooling system' reinforces division and is

"harmful to both the individual and social cohesion", school chaplain and education expert Dr Aidan Donaldson has said.

These arguments are "lazy and prejudicial", he wrote in *Intercom's* April edition, before debunking six "myths" and "false claims" made about Catholic schooling in Ireland.

Dr Donaldson's comments come as rhetoric from politicians and activists targeting Catholic schools in the North has been ramping up, as Westminster pushes for secular, state-run education models.

The most "hurtful and dangerous of all the myths" concerning Catholic schools is that they perpetuate and reinforce division and social disharmony.

This claim is rejected by a wealth of qualitative data from around the world, said Dr Donaldson, who works as Educational Consultant

to Catholic Schools Support Service in Down and Connor diocese.

"These are challenging times indeed for all who value and cherish Catholic schools," he warned.

While Catholic schools outperform every other educational model throughout the world, the new dominant world vision seeks to "exclude the Catholic voice from public discourse", Dr Donaldson continued.

He urged Catholics "not to be afraid", but to go and spread the Good News with joy.

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Irish diplomat says Ireland has a special place in Pope Francis' heart

Brandon Scott

The Irish Ambassador to the Holy See Frances Collins said that she believes that Pope Francis has a keen appreciation for Ireland, with particular concern for the status of peace on the island while also describing the present relationship Ireland enjoys with the Holy See as "strong".

Commenting on the admiration the current Pope has for the island, Ms Collins said that ties with the Holy See are strong, and may well have been strengthened on account of the Pope's own connections with the country.

"I would describe the relationship as strong," Ms Collins said. "Pope Francis visited Ireland in 2018, when Ireland hosted the World Meetings of Families. Pope Francis also spent four months in Ireland at the Jesuit Institute at Milltown,

so he has personal memories of Ireland and the Irish people."

Ms Collins said she believes the Pope is dedicated to the ongoing efforts to promote peace on the island and offered encouragement to those committed to the ideal during the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement last April.

"I think he holds a special place in his heart for Ireland and in particular, when it comes to supporting peace on the island," she said. "Last year, when we marked the 25th Anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, he encouraged us to continue working to complete the vision, so that all people on the island can enjoy the fruits of peace. He also encourages us to share our experiences of peace-making with other countries that continue to endure conflict."

Reflecting on the strife

the abuse scandals have caused on the island, Ms Collins admitted that society and Church are still processing the enormity of the damage but that survivors must always be to the fore of any discussions and that actions are taken to ensure they secure their justice.

"We are continuing to come to terms with the pain and suffering of abuse in the Church in Ireland," she said. It serves as a reminder of our failure to live up to our ideals and values as church, state and society.

"Having a strong relationship with the Holy See and the Church in Ireland is important, but our shared priority must be to listen to what is being asked of us by the survivors and ultimately to show that we have heard and understood the survivors by together moving forward with the concrete actions they are asking us to take."

Distinguished sculptor whose works adorn many churches dies age 96



Imogen Stuart

Brandon Scott

Acclaimed German-Irish sculptor Imogen Stuart, who produced a sculpture of Pope John Paul II, located in St Patrick's Pontifical University, Maynooth, and the altar and baptismal font of the Honan Chapel on the grounds of University College Cork, died last Monday at age 96.

Born in Berlin, Ms Stuart was the daughter of art critic and author Bruno E Werner and his wife Katha-

rina Klug. In 1948, she met Irishman Ian Stuart, the son of novelist Francis Stuart and Iseult Conne, who was the daughter of Maud Conne.

In 1951, the couple returned to Ireland and married. They later had three daughters together – Aoibheann, Siobhan, and Aisling. Imogen and Ian Stuart later separated in 1972.

Ms Stuart's works can be found in public spaces and in Catholic and Church of Ireland churches through-

out the country.

Other notable works of hers include the main doors of Galway Cathedral, the Angel of Peace on the exterior of St Teresa's Carmelite Church on Dublin's Clarendon Street, a sculptural representation of the WB Yeats poem 'The Fiddler Of Dooney' at the Stillorgan Shopping Centre in Dublin, and 'the Flame Of Human Dignity' in the courtyard of the Centre Culturel Irlandais in Paris.

Piper calls the tune...



Long Tower parishioners process before noon Mass on Palm Sunday, March 24, led by St Colmille's Band piper and drummer.

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Families more likely than patients to express need for assisted suicide says carer

Ruadhán Jones

Family members of patients receiving palliative care are more likely to express a view that it would be better if the patient were no longer alive than patients themselves, according to an experienced palliative carer.

Dr Faith Cranfield can count “on one hand” the number of people she has worked with in 10 years as a palliative carer who genu-

inely desire assisted suicide for themselves, saying it is a “very infrequent” need.

“It’s very uncommon” for patients to see euthanasia as a “solution to their distress” Dr Cranfield told *The Irish Catholic*, adding that St Francis Hospice works with about 30,000 palliative care patients a year, with very few requesting assisted suicide.

“The idea that somebody would be better if they were no longer alive, that things

would be better, that is something that comes much more commonly from family members than from people themselves,” Dr Cranfield explained.

She called for more supports for families, who find the progressive change in someone’s health “very difficult” and experience it as grief.

Dr Cranfield also urged the Government to invest more in palliative care, saying a desire for assisted

suicide is “a distress that should be met with better palliative care, better psychological supports, better social care, better supports for families”.

The comments from the palliative carer at St Francis’ Hospice come after the Oireachtas on Assisted Dying committee recommended the legalisation of assisted suicide in Ireland.

Dr Cranfield warned that introducing the legislation will “inevitably put vulner-

able people within our society at risk”.

She urged people to recognise that while safeguards “might make someone feel better who really wishes for this legislation to be introduced, it’s not actually a long lasting safeguard”.

“The evidence internationally is clear that those safeguards erode over time,” the palliative carer warned. “The decision to introduce legislation has to be seen as a decision beyond the safe-

guards.”

Meanwhiel, an expert on the Irish Constitution has claimed that moves to introduce assisted suicide are “unconstitutional”.

Dr Conor Casey believes the Constitution prohibits the introduction of “intentional killing”, both in its specific text and its underlying ethos, adding that proponents are relying on an “ambiguous” Supreme Court ruling on the Marie Fleming Case in 2013.

Woman nearly dies after abortion in Limerick

Staff reporter

A woman in Limerick nearly died from an ectopic pregnancy three days after having a medical abortion, a paper in the *Irish Medical Journal* shows.

As no ultrasound was conducted, a situation developed in which the 24-year-old woman in question had a medical termination, before being treated in hospital three days later for an ectopic pregnancy.

The “shocking” incident shows the “disastrous impact” of the Government’s

rejection of an amendment that would have mandated an ultrasound before an abortion is carried out, said Pro Life Campaign spokesperson Eilís Mulroy.

“The amendment tabled in 2018 would have meant that issues like the existence of an ectopic pregnancy would’ve been caught before the woman had an abortion, which would’ve avoided such dangerous and life-threatening outcomes,” said Ms Mulroy.

Then Minister for Health – Taoiseach elect – Simon Harris claimed the amendment would “subject” every woman to an ultrasound, saying “this is about choice”.

However, the World Health Organisation warns that a medical abortion can make undiagnosed ectopic pregnancies difficult to identify, since the symptoms of a ruptured ectopic pregnancy and a medical abortion can be so similar, said Ms Mulroy.

The “reckless” decision to reject the amendment leaves women at increased risk of an unidentified ectopic pregnancy, which can rupture, resulting in life-threatening internal haemorrhage, she added.

Barcelona’s Sagrada Familia church to be finally completed by 2026

Brandon Scott

Barcelona’s Sagrada Familia is set to finally be completed by 2026, a whole 144 years since work on the monumental basilica started.

Designed by celebrated Catalan architect Antoni Gaudi, who is buried in the church’s crypt, the world-renowned piece of architecture is famously unfinished.

According to La Sagrada Familia Foundation, the organisation tasked with the construction and pres-

ervation of the church, work on the monument will be finished in two years’ time, coinciding with the centenary of Gaudi’s death.

The church’s first stone was laid in 1882, which means it has been under construction for 142 years. The vast monument and UNESCO World Heritage site draws millions of visitors each year.

Gaudi, who died in 1926, dedicated much of his professional life to Sagrada Familia.

A new Presentation...



Pictured is the new congregational leadership team for the Presentation Sisters: Srs Joy Puerta, Miriam Martin, Anne O’Leary (Assistant Congregational Leader), Sharon Fagan (Congregational Leader) and Sheila De Sa.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Church better at saying sorry, study shows

The Church is better at saying sorry for instances of abuse, a study from Queens University Belfast has found.

The QUB report on Church documents from March 2020 to February 2023 concludes that apologies offered during this time “do not offer excuses or create scapegoats”.

“They are usually very detailed, with acceptance of full culpability on behalf of the church, acknowledging that forgiveness is not expected from victims.”

However, unlike the ‘bad’ apologies of previous years, “these more recent ‘good’ apologies have failed to penetrate public consciousness, remaining buried on the websites of the Irish Catholic bishops’ conference and various dioceses”, according to Prof. Gladys Ganiel and Dr Caoimhe Ni Dhonaill.

Raphoe appoints new Diocesan Administrator

Following the transfer of Bishop Alan McGuckian SJ to the Diocese of Down and Connor, which took effect on March 19, the College of Consultors of the Diocese of Raphoe have elected the Msgr Kevin Gillespie as Diocesan Administrator.

A native of Gaoth Dobhair, Msgr Gillespie was ordained in 1999 and pursued doctoral studies in canon law in Rome. He is currently the Administrator of St Eunan’s Cathedral, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal. Previously Monsignor Gillespie served as curate in Baile na Finne and at St Eunan’s Cathedral before working for a period at the Congregation for Clergy in Rome.

The vicious hounding of the Princess of Wales



Nuala O'Loan

Humanity has always been flawed. We do not need to read the account of creation to know the extent of those flaws. Since time began it seems, the world has been at war. A world which is capable of providing for all its people, if we all but lived as we are called to live, is still torn by terror, conflict, starvation, hunger and fear.

It was to this world, we believe, that God sent his son to show us the way to the Father – the way of love for God, for those who walk the path off life with us, the way of selflessness and sacrifice. Some 2,000 years later we do not seem to have learned very much.

Triduum

The three days of the Easter Triduum are a time when we move out of our daily into the mystery of redemption.

We are reminded yet again of the passion, the suffering of the man who was divine but who surrendered himself to capture, torture, terror, pain and the degradation of crucifixion. I have never been able to understand it. Yet I know that in the savagery of this complete denial of the humanity and divinity of God, in the total stripping away of everything, in the betrayal by one of those whom he loved, the denial by his disciples, the desolation and terror of his final hours there lies an inexplicable and very profound comfort for those who are deep in suffering.

When all else seems lost, when there seems to be no hope, no future, we can look on Jesus in his final hours and know that no matter how difficult life is, there is hope because the crucifixion was not the end – behind the darkness there was great

“Watching the world’s pursuit of the sick Princess of Wales over the past months has not been pleasant”

light and warmth – the light and warmth of love. As he had promised Jesus did rise from the dead and just as he emerged from suffering, so ultimately will all those who follow him and who walk the path of pain on this earth.

Our Easter contributions to Trócaire and other charities are part of our attempt to do what we can to relieve suffering in this world.

For most of us though the greatest impact we will have will be on those closest to us – family, friends, colleagues, those we meet as we go about our daily lives, in shops, as we enjoy ourselves and in our churches. It is here that we can make the greatest difference.

It seems to me looking on our world that it has lost its sense of the divine, its understanding of the importance of just trying not to cause damage as we walk the path of life, but rather to bring that light and warmth to others.

“At a time when she had asked for privacy and space she was permitted neither”

Watching the world’s pursuit of the sick Princess of Wales over the past months has not been pleasant. What must it have been like for this young woman who, despite her privileged position, is after all a very human being? Why do so many people think they have the right to know everything about her. Why, even when told that she had had major surgery and would need time for recovery, was that not enough?

As she withdrew to recover the speculation about her became more and more awful. At a time when she had asked for privacy and space she was permitted neither. Gross speculation about all aspects of her life appeared on social media.

Her reality of course was that she had needed major abdominal surgery, that she needed to be able to reassure her children that all would be well, and then came the

“Behind the public figure is a sentient individual who is not immune to the pain of being subjected to relentless comment”

devastating news that she has cancer. Any of us receiving such a diagnosis would be shocked beyond belief. It would take time to comprehend what was actually happening and what the future might hold for us and for our family. So it obviously was for Catherine as she and her husband came to terms with what lay ahead and cared for their little ones. She did not need to have to cope with media questioning.

Finally she gave in to those who were hounding her and appeared, slightly tense and pale but composed, to tell everyone what had happened. She should not have had to do this.

Public

Those whose lives are lived to any extent in the public eye will be aware of the pressure it can cause, of the sense that their lives are not their own, but that by virtue of whatever position they occupy they are to some extent public property. This has to be accepted. What does not have to be accepted is the viciousness of some public comment, the failure to recognise that behind the public figure is a sentient individual who is not

immune to the pain of being subjected to relentless comment, to the aggression and, on occasion, pure evil of some of the commentary.

Basic human kindness, compassion and respect seem to have been terribly eroded in our world. There has grown a sense anyone can say anything about others. When the media starts hounding someone, cautious always to stay the right side of the line where comment becomes defamation, and where social media trolls feel free to attack others in the most vile way, it is surely time to start reintroducing to our world the concepts which underpin everything we believe.

Perhaps if we could talk again of the virtues of love of God and of each other, of selflessness, of respect, of compassion, if we could visibly live those virtues in our daily lives we might do as the early Christians did and bring others to the knowledge and love of God.

May the love of God and the light and warmth of Easter permeate the hearts of all those who walk today in darkness. May we all know the joy of Easter.



A screenshot of the Princess of Wales who announced she has cancer in a video released last week.

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Success over integrity has become the name of the game in Irish politics

Senator Rónán Mullen The View from the Seanad



The first person I met in the car park last Wednesday was Michael Healy-Rae. As usual, he had the phone to his ear. "Just a minute, Rónán," he said, temporarily putting his caller on hold. "I'm hearing there's a political earthquake about to happen and journalists are being summoned to Government buildings."

"You're joking," I replied - thinking he was referencing the previous day's storm-in-teacup. As Chairman of the Committee on Assisted Dying, with whose recommendations he disagreed, Michael was criticised for announcing that, after launching the main report, he would present a set of minority recommendations with me.

But, "I never joke",

Michael replied. Since he can be very funny, I realised what he meant: When he's serious, he's serious. "See if you have any contacts who might tell you anything," he said.

Soon, everybody knew. The Taoiseach was resigning. Television screens in every office in Leinster House were switched on, waiting for Leo to come to the podium.

Failure?

Do all political careers end in failure? Nobody can dispute Varadkar's achievement. Unlike Enda Kenny, who spent 35 years in the Dáil before becoming Taoiseach, Leo took the express train to the top - a political wunderkind. And now he was leaving high office on what seemed like his own terms. Well, almost.

Even as he enumerated

what he saw as the successes of his tenure, emotion betrayed him. The vulnerability showed. Life had got tough. He was frustrated and disappointed. The referendums had gone wrong. His Government was unpopular. His judgement was in question - to the point where he felt he had to clarify that there was no hidden reason for his departure.

This was not an end-of-term assessment of a Ronald Reagan looking back on his administration: "Not bad at all". Nor was it anything like the calm, casual, almost secret resignation announcement by Pope Benedict in 2013 (delivered in Latin at a routine event) which sent journalists scurrying to their laptops and their phones. Leo's



Pope Francis greets Leo Varadkar, then Taoiseach, during a meeting with authorities, civil society leaders and members of the diplomatic corps in Dublin Castle in Dublin August 25, 2018.

wasn't, in short, a serene departure.

Potentiality

I wish him well. He is basically a decent person who, with the right people around him, could achieve great things. He still may, in a different sphere. But, though some will disagree, he "never fully achieved his potentiality" - which was to be a clever, charismatic leader for a principled, just society.

He introduced himself once at a Fine Gael meeting, to which he invited me as a guest speaker, as a "Christian Democrat". At different points, he articulated the pro-life viewpoint bravely. He was also on the record as opposing adoption by same sex couples on the ground that a child was entitled to be brought up by a father and mother.

This was daring-to-be-different, thinking conservatism. It had the potential

to be refreshing and, given Varadkar's talent, convincing and successful. But politics brings pressures and temptations.

“Do these young talents focus only on political success and are they too dependent on party handlers?”

When Enda Kenny demanded support for his abortion law, something had to give. Leo, Simon Harris and others began the famous 'journey' that so many politicians take, when they change their minds, embrace ideas that they once said were unthinkable, and travel a road that, funnily enough, also leads to high office. It rarely goes in the other direction.

On the positive side, Leo

showed traits of generosity, honesty and humility throughout his tenure. His welcome speech to Pope Francis in Dublin Castle acknowledged the Catholic Church's massive contribution to Irish society in a way that impressed many.

And sometimes when he got it wrong, he was capable of saying so and apologising, for example when he made the atrocious comparison between Micheal Martin and "a priest who says one thing on the altar and does another thing away from it", a trope that stigmatised Catholicism and its priesthood, and offended many people.

Prodigies

No sooner is Leo off the stage than Simon Harris has leapt onto it - another young man in a hurry. What will historians say about these prodigies and their works? Do politicians who start off too young, and reach office too quickly, have enough time to form solid convictions of their own, grounded in life experience and contact with others?

Do these young talents focus only on political success and are they too dependent on party handlers? Do they lack gravitas and substance, and end up as mere glib spokespeople for a temporarily dominant consensus?

But where does such an analysis leave Micheal Martin, Simon Coveney and other more career-diverse politicians who have also performed stunning U-turns on social issues - and on none more life-and-death than abortion? I haven't figured that out yet.

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The politics of dissent

Politicians have a terrible habit of shooting their mouths off before thinking things through. Last week's criticism by the two Fine Gael members of Michael Healy-Rae, took the biscuit though. Michael, Deputy Robert Troy and I disagree with the Committee majority's recommendation that legislation for 'Assisted Dying' (euthanasia or assisted suicide) should be introduced.

Assisted dying legislation is opposed by the vast majority of medical people, mainly because of the way it would burden and endanger people made vulnerable by illness. Given the seriousness of the issue, how could Alan Farrell TD and Senator Mary Seery-Kearney say that, finding himself opposing Assisted Dying, Healy-Rae's position as Committee chairperson was somehow "untenable"? Like everyone else on the Committee, he was entitled to a vote and a voice.

There's an interesting precedent for Healy-Rae's situation. The American bioethi-

cist Edmund Pellegrino, who chaired the US President's Commission on Bioethics in the 2000s, was one of three members who issuing personal statements differing to a greater or lesser extent from that Commission's report on 'brain death'.

"The Chairman's first obligation concerning any Council report is to ensure that it fairly and accurately reflects the opinions of the Council members and that the evidence and research supporting those opinions is complete and reliably presented," Pellegrino said.

"Like any Council member, the Chairman is free to express his personal views on the debated issues. To that end, I offer my own interpretations of some of the evidence and arguments employed in the white paper. I do so in the spirit of 'good faith' urged in the white paper's closing exhortation."

The TD from Kerry chose a more pithy defence in his explanation to journalists last week: "I followed my conscience".

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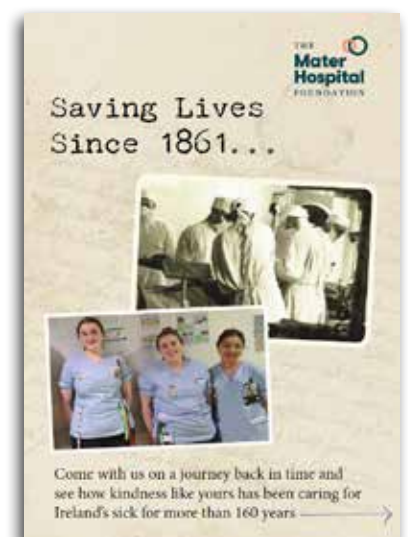
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Free speech is under threat – Catholics should be very scared



Simply expressing what the Church teaches could be a crime, writes **Michael Kelly**

A shocking new report from Britain published on Monday shows that three quarters of respondents, including teachers, councillors and academics, feel cowed into silence because they are frightened of being attacked for their views.

The government report found that there is a climate of harassment and censorship that is threatening free speech.

Dame Sara Khan said in her report that politicians and individuals are being subjected to abuse and even rape and death threats to stop them expressing their views.

In one example, a religious studies teacher was forced into hiding after showing pupils a cartoon of the Prophet Muhammad. He was not even considered a crime victim by police, and no one was arrested for hounding him. Three years on, he is still in hiding and suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.

Threat

Across the western world, free speech is under threat. Freedoms that were once taken for granted are now being eroded, often in the name of protecting minorities.

What is the situation like in Ireland? Well, despite a plethora of NGOs (mostly State-funded) set up to monitor the 'far-right' we have no organisation in Ireland monitoring free speech.

But the anecdotal evidence is not good. Irish academics, teachers, journalists and commentators tell me they now live in a world where they are constantly self-censoring themselves out of fear that a 'snowflake' student or reader will report them for some undefined 'hate crime'.

Even people who say things as innocent as if you have a penis, you're a man, find themselves tracked down and a complaint made to their employer – even though the opinion was expressed on a private social media forum and has absolutely nothing to do with their work or their ability to carry out their job.



Dame Sara Khan, who compiled a shocking report on attacks on free speech in Britain.

In the run-up to the coronation of Simon Harris as the new Fine Gael leader, some backbenchers have been clamouring to say that he should drop Helen McEntee's ill-conceived 'hate speech' legislation. In the proposed law, the hapless Ms McEntee doesn't even define what 'hate' is and has consistently refused to do so during debates in both the Dáil and Seanad.

“The hate legislation could have wide-ranging implications for freedom of speech and freedom of expression”

You'd think the Government would've learned from the thumping it got in the referendums that deliberately vague concepts and

phrases make for bad legislation, and just don't cut it with the people.

If it comes into effect, the hate legislation could have wide-ranging implications for freedom of speech and freedom of expression. This is something that should concern all of us who think that people should be able to say what they honestly believe, so long as, of course, it doesn't incite violence or hatred. Both of which are quite rightly already against the law.

Concern

The Church and people of faith in general should be very concerned when it comes to laws that seek to criminalise hate. As we have seen from Finland and the trial of Päivi Räsänen, the politician charged with 'hate speech' because of her 2019 Bible verse tweet.

Dr Räsänen's tweet, which began a lengthy police investigation bringing forth three charges, challenged her Lutheran Church's leadership as to their justification for sponsoring

a Pride event. She attached a picture of a Bible verse from the New Testament Book of Romans.

“A new offence of possessing inflammatory material could even render material such as the Bible and the Catechism of the Catholic Church...inflammatory”

She was charged for “agitation against a minority group”, a provision that falls under the section of the Finnish Criminal Code titled “War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity.”

Imagine the scenario in the future: an Irish priest delivers a homily presenting the Church's view that marriage is exclusive, for life and open to having children. People should be free to disagree with this, but under hate legislation a divorced person could easily argue that they found what was said inflammatory and therefore constituted a hate crime?

Easter Monday sees Scotland's hate crime law take effect. The Scottish bishops have been rightly anxious about it.

In their submission, the prelates insisted: “whilst acknowledging

that stirring up of hatred is morally wrong and supporting moves to discourage and condemn such behaviour the bishops have expressed concerns about the lack of clarity around definitions and a potentially low threshold for committing an offence, which they fear, could lead to a 'deluge of vexatious claims'. “A new offence of possessing inflammatory material could even render material such as the Bible and the Catechism of the Catholic Church...inflammatory. The Catholic Church's understanding of the human person, including the belief that sex and gender are not fluid and changeable, could fall foul of the new law. Allowing for respectful debate, means avoiding censorship and accepting the divergent views and multitude of arguments inhabiting society,” the bishops said. We'll have to wait and see if Simon Harris drops the controversial plan here. If he does, it may prove to be a short-term win. NGOs have worked long and hard to get this legislation through, and even those their cache is now in tatters after the referendums the relentless push will continue and those of us who believe in free speech must push all the harder.

i For more check out the new *State of the Nation* podcast, available on app podcast platforms.

FF and FG have become ideologically homeless



Breda O'Brien

At John Bruton's funeral in February, the homilist, Fr Bruce Bradley SJ, spoke of how we live now in a rapidly secularising age. He said that is not all bad, pointing to the growth in confidence, prosperity and diversity that the country has experienced.

Nonetheless, something has been lost. Fr Bradley cited Seamus Heaney's comments in 2013. Heaney said: "[The] biggest shift in my lifetime has been the evaporation of the transcendent from all our discourse and our sense of human destiny."

"More bewildering still", he added, elaborating on what "the evaporation of the transcendent" means for a person's inner life, "is exile into a universe with no up or down, no internalised system of moral longitude or latitude, no sense of a metaphysical roof over our heads".

Fr Bradley said of John Bruton that he knew who he was and that's who he was for whoever he met. He also described him as an exceptionally good man.

Can we say this of Simon Harris, selected without a contest as leader of Fine Gael and Taoiseach?

Values

The euphemism politicians use to justify no longer supporting values once held dear is to "have gone on a journey".

Harris has gone on so many journeys he must have frequent flier miles. When he started in politics as a teenager, he canvassed for pro-life Fianna Fail TD, Dick Roche. He then went on a journey that found him working for Fine Gael's Frances Fitzgerald.

As covered elsewhere in this paper, he moved from being one of the most staunchly pro-life deputies in the Dail to being responsible for introducing legal abortion in Ireland. In Dublin Castle on that infamous day when crowds danced to celebrate the freedom to end early human lives, they chanted Simon Harris's name.

Harris has a large online

presence. Everything he does is documented on X (formerly Twitter), TikTok and Instagram. Older people are impressed by his apparent success on these apps while younger people feel that many of his clips have a cringe factor.

We do know that he has a special concern for those who are neurodivergent. He started campaigning while still in school for facilities for his brother, Adam, who has autism. As Minister for Further and Higher Education, he increased access for those who have disabilities. He has also done good work increasing access to apprenticeships and short courses called micro-credentials.

There is no doubt that Harris is hard-working, focused, and determined to turn around the fortunes of a party where a third of the parliamentary party is not running for election next time.

“It is not only politicians who are losing faith in politics. At the moment, many Irish people find themselves politically homeless”

Being a politician is not an easy life. The hours are atrocious, the personal abuse relentless, and the social media where Harris spends so much time promoting himself has made everything more toxic.

But there are lots of professions suffering from a recruitment crisis. People no longer want to be teachers, guards or nurses in the numbers they once did. Healthcare professionals heading abroad in droves seeking better conditions.

It is not only politicians who are losing faith in politics. At the moment, many Irish people find themselves politically homeless. Aontú is a party of integrity and there are also many fantastic Independent TDs but the historic parties that have been around since the foundation of the State are too busy posturing as modern and allegedly progressive. They no longer represent the significant numbers of people in this State who believe in the right to life, support for marriage, and help for parents,

Former Taoiseach John Bruton pictured in 2011.



especially mothers in the early years, to spend significant time with their children.

Eamon O'Cuiv has advocated that Fianna Fail should stop trying to be a catch-all party and represent the kind of people I have described. He is a voice crying in the wilderness. Fianna Fail and Fine Gael have become amorphous blobs, anxiously trying to anticipate public opinion and cater for it instead of standing for anything.

Fickle

The problem with trying to second-guess public opinion is not just that it is a fickle beast. It also means that you will be regularly wrong-footed because you will guess incorrectly, as the recent referendums showed.

On the other hand, when you stand for something, your views may be rejected by the electorate, but it is easier to live with yourself.

Out-of-touch political elites and NGOs focus on things like hate speech while failing to tackle a housing crisis that is destroying people's chances of living decent lives. Similarly, I believe we should be generous to economic migrants and asylum-seekers but it does no one any favours to have newcomers homeless or living in tents.

John Bruton epitomised a fundamental decency. It is heartbreaking to see the party he once helmed heading further and further away from those values.

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A CALL
TO PRAYER
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ALL WELCOME

A tale of two Simons



Eilís Mulroy

Soon after being elected a TD for the first time, Simon Harris wrote the following in the *Sunday Independent*: “Voltaire once commented that ‘the most important thing in life is to speak your mind’. That’s exactly what I did last week. At a private meeting amongst colleagues, I raised concerns about legislating for abortion in Ireland, adding that should such a scenario arise, I would have grave difficulty supporting it”.

Referring in the same article to media criticism of his pro-life stance at the time, he continued: “Why can’t we just have a respectful discussion? Why can’t we recognise as a society that people have strongly held views on this issue and that those views will influence their perspective on whether or not Ireland should legislate for abortion? Why can’t we make the assumption that people who hold views on this issue which oppose our views may be honest, caring human beings, not bigoted caricatures?”

Six short months after penning these words, Harris did a one hundred and eighty degree turn on abortion. The same day that his party leader Enda Kenny announced he was introducing legislation for the X Case, Harris did his about-face and never looked back.

Principles

Gone was the promise he made in the media to stand by his principles and not cave to the “herd mentality”.

Gone was the written commitment the then Councillor Harris gave to the Pro Life Campaign before getting elected in 2011. In answer to a survey put to all election candidates, Simon Harris did not try to obfuscate or leave himself any wiggle room in his answers. Instead he made two direct promises. “Yes, if elected to the Dáil I will oppose any legislation to introduce abortion in Ireland” and “Yes, I will support legislation that protects the human embryo from deliberate destruction and I will oppose any legislation which does not.”

A reply as strong as that would give anyone hope for the next generation of politicians! But just two years



Then-Health Minister Simon Harris speaks January 29, 2018 after the announcement that the government was to hold a referendum on liberalising abortion laws at the end of May of that year. Photo: CNS/Clodagh Kilcoyne, Reuters

later, Mr Harris was passing through the Dáil voting division to proudly vote in favour of the 2013 abortion bill which provided for legal abortion in Ireland for the first time.

“Those who had close dealings with Harris on the abortion issue before his sudden change in stance were aghast at the speed and ease with which he turned”

The person set to become Taoiseach on April 9 didn’t waste any time agonising over his vote for abortion. Instead, Simon Harris embraced the idea fully and became one of

the most visible and ardent backers of abortion in politics.

The man who pleaded in a newspaper column some months earlier for a respectful debate and who railed against unfair caricatures of pro-lifers, suddenly became the foremost exponent in politics of depicting pro-life people in the most negative light possible.

Those who had close dealings with Harris on the abortion issue before his sudden change in stance were aghast at the speed and ease with which he turned.

Shamelessly

As Minister for Health and leading proponent in government for repeal of the Eighth Amendment, he shamelessly attacked the motivations of pro-life campaigners on an almost daily basis, mak-

ing ludicrous comparisons between defending the right to life of unborn babies and the awful history of the Magdalen laundries and Mother and Baby Homes.

“Harris could clearly be heard mumbling words like ‘disgusting’ under his breath in indignation at what was being said”

To atone for everything that happened in the past, Harris’ proposed solution was to delete all constitutional protection for the unborn child and introduce legislation for abortion on demand. In one Seanad exchange before the new abortion law took effect,

Senator Rónán Mullen challenged him over the fact that his new law would permit late-term abortions, where babies that survived the abortion procedure would be left to die without receiving any medical assistance, as routinely happens in countries where abortion is legal.

Truth

As the Senator delivered his remarks, Harris could clearly be heard mumbling words like “disgusting” under his breath in indignation at what was being said. The sad truth is that the dreadful things described that day have already come to pass under the law Harris brought forward, as evidenced by findings published in the *British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology* by a team of UCC researchers.

When taking issue with Harris for saying that repeal of the Eighth Amendment ushered in a “brighter Ireland”, the late Taoiseach John Bruton told the annual pro-life dinner in Dublin (a few months after the abortion referendum passed) that “it will not be a bright Ireland for the little babies who will have their lives ended before being allowed to see the light of a single Irish day”.

“His conduct on abortion and the nonchalant way he changed his stance on such a defining issue is a good guide for what we can expect from him as our new Taoiseach”

The former Taoiseach also criticised Harris for referring to the referendum result as “con-signing a misogynistic legacy to the history books”. Mr Bruton said the Minister’s remarks were “rather judgemental and not particularly tolerant of those who sincerely disagreed with him on the issue of abortion”.

Harris is unquestionably a very skilled communicator and a lot of people hold him in high regard for that. But he should be judged by his actions, not his words. During the abortion debate, he certainly didn’t practice the “civility” that he preached about so fervently last Sunday in Athlone after he was elected leader of Fine Gael.

His conduct on abortion and the nonchalant way he changed his stance on such a defining issue is a good guide for what we can expect from him as our new Taoiseach.

It is important to factor in as well that a lot has changed politically since the 2018 referendum. Voters, for a host of reasons (some easy to identify, some not so easy) are more engaged in politics and what politicians are up to.

The ‘family’ and ‘care’ referendum results from March 8 clearly show this to be the case. As a pro-life movement, we have to hold the new Taoiseach to account for the appalling law he introduced that has resulted in Ireland’s skyrocketing abortion rate.

It would be nice to think as well that when he becomes Taoiseach he reflects on the wise and heartfelt words of his predecessor, John Bruton, and the far-sighted interventions he made on the abortion issue. We can only hope and pray that he does.

• Eilís Mulroy is Chief Officer and spokesperson for the Pro-Life Campaign.



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Fired for speaking the truth about Covid



Theo McDonald

The Covid-19 pandemic left many victims in its wake.

The scale of the pathogens' spread led policy makers to implement some of the most stringent and far-reaching restrictions on everyday life.

Individuals were prevented from travelling beyond a certain radius of their home with several thousand businesses and other public venues shuttered or allowed to remain open with limited access.

The toll on civil liberties and the economy was unparalleled evidenced by countless arrests for minor offences from walking on a beach to visiting a friend's house or the post-lockdown inflation spiral due in large part to halted supply chains.

But the impact on free expression was profound.

Doctors, academics and other public figures who dared stray away from the orthodoxy were demonised and worse for expressing their views.

Heresy

One such covid-heretic was Professor of Science at Harvard Martin Kulldorff.

Prof. Kulldorff, an epidemiologist, defied the Covid religious zealots by placing his name to the modern day 95 Theses – 'The Great Barrington Declaration' in 2020.

The paper, co-signed by Prof. Sunetra Gupta of Oxford University and Stanford's Jay Bhattacharya, argued that measures to combat the disease should be age-specific, mainly targeted at older people and those with comorbidities, that would allow young people – those not at risk – to live their lives.

The publication also

“The Great Barrington Declaration’ gathered almost a million signatures, including tens of thousands from scientists and health-care professionals”

declared that, in the absence of a vaccine, herd immunity, that is letting people get infected with the rapidly spreading virus, would allow for a greater portion of the population to develop antibodies naturally.

At the time, as a young person, such a statement was music to my home ridden ears as I felt part of my youth was being discarded at the altar of mass hysteria.

But Prof. Kulldorff's public health colleagues didn't take too kindly to such a move.

Writing for the *City Journal* in an essay titled 'Harvard Tramples the Truth' Prof. Kulldorff mentions that the attacks against him "intensified - and even grew slanderous."

“Prof. Kulldorff argued that the closures of schools were unnecessary”

Condemned as a 'fringe epidemiologist', a lab scientist who controls one of America's largest medical research funds called on others at Harvard to engage in a "devastating unpublished takedown".

Thus, the centuries old educational institution whose motto *Veritas*, meaning truth, proceeded to run roughshod not only over what turned out to be the truth but free expression.

The insults varied from politically motivated to idolatry with one Harvard epidemiologist accusing Prof. Kulldorff of endorsing "exorcism."

"Though powerful scientists, politicians, and the media vigorously denounced it, 'The Great Barrington Declaration' gathered almost a million signatures, including tens of thousands from scientists and health-care professionals."

More specifically, Prof. Kulldorff argued that the closures of schools were unnecessary and would have major repercussions for child development.

He strongly defended the way his native Sweden



Prof. Martin Kulldorff. Photo: Thérèse Soukar/Wikicommons. Inset: Harvard University

approached the pandemic with minimalist restrictions.

Writing in several Swedish based publications he argued that, "With schools open, Sweden had zero Covid deaths in the one-to-15 age group, while teachers had the same mortality as the average of other professions."

Incredibly, a Harvard-edited publication the *New England Journal of Medicine* looked into whether primary schools should reopen and ignored Sweden: "It was like ignoring the placebo control group when evaluating a new pharmaceutical drug. That's not the path to truth."

Vaccines

Prof. Kulldorff attempted to debate the topic with his detractors at both Harvard and Stanford to no avail proving that higher education these days stymies rather than enhances debate.

While his stance on lockdowns damaged his reputation in 2020, the following year saw his employment come into jeopardy as vaccines began to roll out.

A longtime advocate and researcher of vaccines, Prof. Kulldorff refused to abide by vaccine mandates.

His gripe was based on scientific grounds, arguing that in the absence of longitudinal studies on the impact of mRNA vaccines it was not worth the risk to force young people, especially children, to get inoculated.

“It wasn't his vaccine scepticism that got him in trouble. It was his vaccine enthusiasm”

However, he argued, the risk of Covid was greater for older people than the potential risk of vaccines, meaning they should be prioritised.

But it wasn't his vaccine scepticism that got him in trouble. It was his vaccine enthusiasm.

When the US Centre for Disease Control (CDC) suspended the Johnson and Johnson (J&J) vaccine after instances of women getting blood clots, Prof. Kulldorff spoke out and argued that the shot should remain available for those most at risk of Covid.

After tweeting his view it was censored by Twit-

ter at the behest of the US Government, having already had other posts removed on LinkedIn and other online platforms.

Tempted to keep his head down and give up speaking publicly on what he saw as the government's failures during the pandemic, he had a change of heart after a Harvard colleague whose "family had been active against Communism in Eastern Europe... reminded me that we needed to use whatever openings we could find – while self-censoring, when necessary, to avoid getting suspended or fired."

Expression

His right to free expression came to a crescendo when he publicly objected to a vaccine mandate for himself as he is immunocompromised and he had already contracted the virus meaning he acquired sufficient immunity.

Countless studies showed that immunity from contracting the virus superseding the alleged benefits of the vaccine itself.

But this wasn't enough. Arguing that there are several exemptions to the vaccine mandate, none was

sufficient including a religious objection: "Lacking scientific rationale, vaccine mandates are religious dogma, and I request a religious exemption from Covid vaccination," he argued.

As a result he was dismissed from the Harvard faculty.

Speaking to *Unherd* recently Prof. Kulldorff said he is shocked that people don't see freedom of speech as "obvious" anymore and that he is concerned by moves to curb free expression by the US and the European Union.

“What Prof. Kulldorff's case proves is that nobody has a monopoly on the truth”

While the Covid pandemic has passed, the threat to free expression remains.

What Prof. Kulldorff's case proves is that nobody has a monopoly on the truth and that individuals can get penalised not just for spreading misinformation but spreading accurate information.

Where the next Easter might come from



We must wait patiently for a pro-life and pro-family social revolution, writes David Quinn

Even if you do not have a believing bone in your body, are totally sceptical of all religious claims and absolutely dismiss the possibility of miracles, it is still the case that something incredible happened over the first Easter period 2,000 years ago.

If Jesus simply died and did not rise from the dead, something rose, and that something was Christianity, the biggest and most widespread religion the world has ever seen.

What generally happened when the charismatic founder of a new religious movement died or was killed, is that the movement did not last long after him.

Sometimes a family member of the founder tried to carry on the movement, but they always petered out in the end. None of these movements created a large body of writings based on the teachings of their founder that led to the creation of a new religious community, a new Church, that then grew so big and so widespread as the one inspired by Jesus.

The claim of the early disciples that their Master rose literally from the dead was, on the face of it, incredible, incredible as in, not credible.

Miracles

Even in an age that believed in miracles, very few people would have been inclined to believe such a claim. To begin with, it was open to quick falsification. If the founder was dead and not risen, a body could be produced.

But if, as some claim, the body was simply dumped in a mass grave and could not eas-

ily be recovered, we are still left with the question; why would anyone invent such a claim and then be willing to die for it? Where was the benefit for them in inventing something like that?

Some sceptics will admit that the early disciples genuinely did believe Jesus had risen from the dead (but why would they believe it?), but clearly were in some sense delusional.

Or else they used the story of the resurrection in a purely metaphorical way, that is, they never believed he had risen literally and physically from the dead, but merely that his spirit lived on, that is, the spirit of his teaching survived his death and what rose again was their hope and belief in the Good News of Jesus.

“We Christians believe Jesus really did rise from the dead and it is the chief reason why Christianity persisted when so many other religious movements disappeared”

There is no way to persuade a convinced sceptic that Jesus really did rise from the dead. The Anglican bishop and Bible scholar, NT Wright had written extensively about the resurrection of Jesus.

He wrote an academic thesis about it and his supervisor, a sceptic, said that Wright's arguments were essentially impregnable, but he (the supervisor) still did not believe in the resurrection because he simply did not believe in miracles.

The biggest miracle of all is, of course, the creation of the universe. Once you believe in that (I do not believe that nothing made everything), it is fairly easy to then believe in the possibility of resurrection after death.

You will still have to exercise due scepticism in the face of a claim that someone has risen from the dead, but if miracles can happen, then this can happen, and we Christians believe Jesus really did rise from the dead and it is the chief reason

why Christianity persisted when so many other religious movements disappeared even though they had charismatic founders.

Understood in purely worldly terms, almost everyone, including the early disciples, would have predicted the end of their religious movement once Jesus was executed. Pontius Pilate would have believed it and so would his persecutors among the religious authorities of the day.

Something revived the disciples and gave them new hope. The religious authorities who wanted Jesus killed were horrified that his movement did not die with him, but kept growing in strength.

The lessons for the Church today are obvious. In Ireland what we see around us is a decline in Mass attendance, the ageing of practising Catholics, the extremely low level of vocations and so on, and we wonder what things will look like in another 10 or 20 years?

The short answer is that the Church in Ireland will probably look a bit like the Church in the likes of the Netherlands today, where very few Catholics go to Mass, and parish churches are being closed on a regular basis.

Situation

We are, therefore, returning to the situation of the early Church, in the West at least, in that there will be very few practising Christians in many parts of Europe for the foreseeable future and therefore we will have to build again almost from scratch.

But given the seemingly hopeless situation that faced the early disciples on the day of the crucifixion and given the seemingly hopeless situation we have faced before in Ireland (think of the penal times), and the very severe conditions of persecution many Christians live under today in various parts of the world, the very last luxury we can afford is self-pity. Instead, it is imperative we cultivate the Christian virtue of hope.

Where is that to be found? One is in the faith of some of the immigrants who have come to live in Ireland, and specifically



Family members attend the Festival of Families in Croke Park stadium in Dublin August 25, 2018. Could population decline lead to a pro-family, pro-Christian social revolution? Photo: CNS.

the Catholic faith of many Nigerians, or Filipinos or Indians.

Another source of hope is what was on display at events like the Eucharistic Congress or World Meeting of Families that took place here in the fairly recent past.

I am not referring to the numbers who attended the public Masses, but at what was on display in the RDS main hall, namely the numerous Catholic organi-

sations that were present and full of vitality.

Direction

A further one, and this is paradoxical, is the direction of travel of Western society itself. Almost all the indicators show that we are moving the wrong way, from our embrace of the 'culture of death' to our dismal fertility rate. In Ireland in 2022 that had sunk to 1.54, well below the replacement level of 2.1 children on average per couple. This means our popula-

tion is ageing rapidly, even with high levels of immigration.

However, in the face of this, we might eventually have a social revolution, one that will point us once more in a pro-life, pro-family, and very possibly a pro-religion and pro-Christianity direction again.

That could be where the next Easter comes from. Our job is to maintain our faith in the meantime and hope and pray for history, under the guidance of God, to turn the right way again.



“All I kept thinking was... this room is saving me.”

The pandemic might feel like a distant memory to many of us now, but for people like Kara, who lost someone she loves to Covid — its impact is still raw and very real.

“My mother was 75, but she was young at heart,” says Kara with love in her voice as she remembers her mam, Margaret. It's three years ago now since she died. But if you've ever lost someone you adore, you'll know it feels like both an eternity and no time at all.

No visiting allowed

“She had a bad fall and was rushed to hospital at the height of Covid,” says Kara. It was an agonising time because no visitors were allowed. “I got to visit her on Christmas Day for a few minutes wearing full PPE, and then not again until the day before she died,” says Kara. “It was one of the longest and most difficult times in my life.”

It was then that a nurse told Kara they had an end-of-life suite waiting for her and her mother. It was the generosity of our supporters that made this small mercy possible.



“This lovely room was made possible by Irish Hospice Foundation. It has wallpaper with little birds on it, low lighting, less medical equipment... I'd heard of people standing outside of windows or waiting in cars as family members were dying, so I was very grateful to have this beautiful room.” - Kara

Sanctuary & solace

The end-of-life suite available to Kara and her mother that night is one of more than 44 rooms like it across 26 hospitals in Ireland. These rooms are transformed into sacred spaces of sanctuary and solace as part of our Design and Dignity programme run in partnership with HSE Estates. They are places fragile hearts can find care and comfort during the most private moments of their lives.

“This room was made possible by Irish Hospice Foundation,” says Kara. And even though Covid parted Kara and her mam in their final days, this room meant she was as close and comfortable as she could possibly be.

Vital programmes such as Design and Dignity grant people the mercy of a private space to be alone with the person they love in those final moments. With 44% of people dying in hospitals every year, a gift in your will to Irish Hospice Foundation can help support our vision that every hospital across Ireland has a

dignified and comfortable sanctuary to experience the death of a loved one. A place where bad news can be broken sensitively or families can gather together in peace and privacy. A place where people can die wrapped in a circle of their family's love. You can bring comfort, compassion and care to people like Kara when the person they love is slipping away...

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To find out more about including a gift in your will to Irish Hospice Foundation, contact Anna Sadlier in confidence at 01 679 3188 or email anna.sadlier@hospicefoundation.ie

“We might eventually have a social revolution, one that will point us once more in a pro-life, pro-family, and very possibly a pro-religion and pro-Christianity direction again”

Euthanasia for the hard cases?

Here's what its advocates actually said and it goes way beyond hard cases

The Oireachtas Committee on Assisted Dying (to use their own euphemism for assisted suicide) has held many hours of hearings. The committee is trying to decide whether to permit assisted suicide/euthanasia (see Note 1 below for the difference between the two) in Ireland or not. A current proposal is to permit those who are within six months of death to access it.

But the hearings have revealed that Irish euthanasia advocates want to go much further than this. In this briefing note, we carry a selection of quotes from

a selection of witnesses who appeared before the committee. As you will read, some wish to see euthanasia extended to dementia patients, others are open to the possibility of extending it to those with severe mental illness, while one key witness believes a person should not have to be ill at all to avail of it.

In due course, the Oireachtas and society will debate this in earnest. We will be told that there is no slippery slope, despite the evidence from other countries that there is. But we do not have to look to other countries. The quotes below show that Irish eutha-

nasia advocates are already perfectly clear that they want to extend access to assisted suicide/euthanasia far beyond patients who are within six months of death.

i End Notes: Note 1. Assisted suicide (also called 'assisted dying') involves a person self-administering a lethal drug or gas which is provided by another person. Euthanasia is where someone, usually a doctor, administers the lethal substance for them. Note 2. In Switzerland, a person does not have to be physically or mentally ill to die by

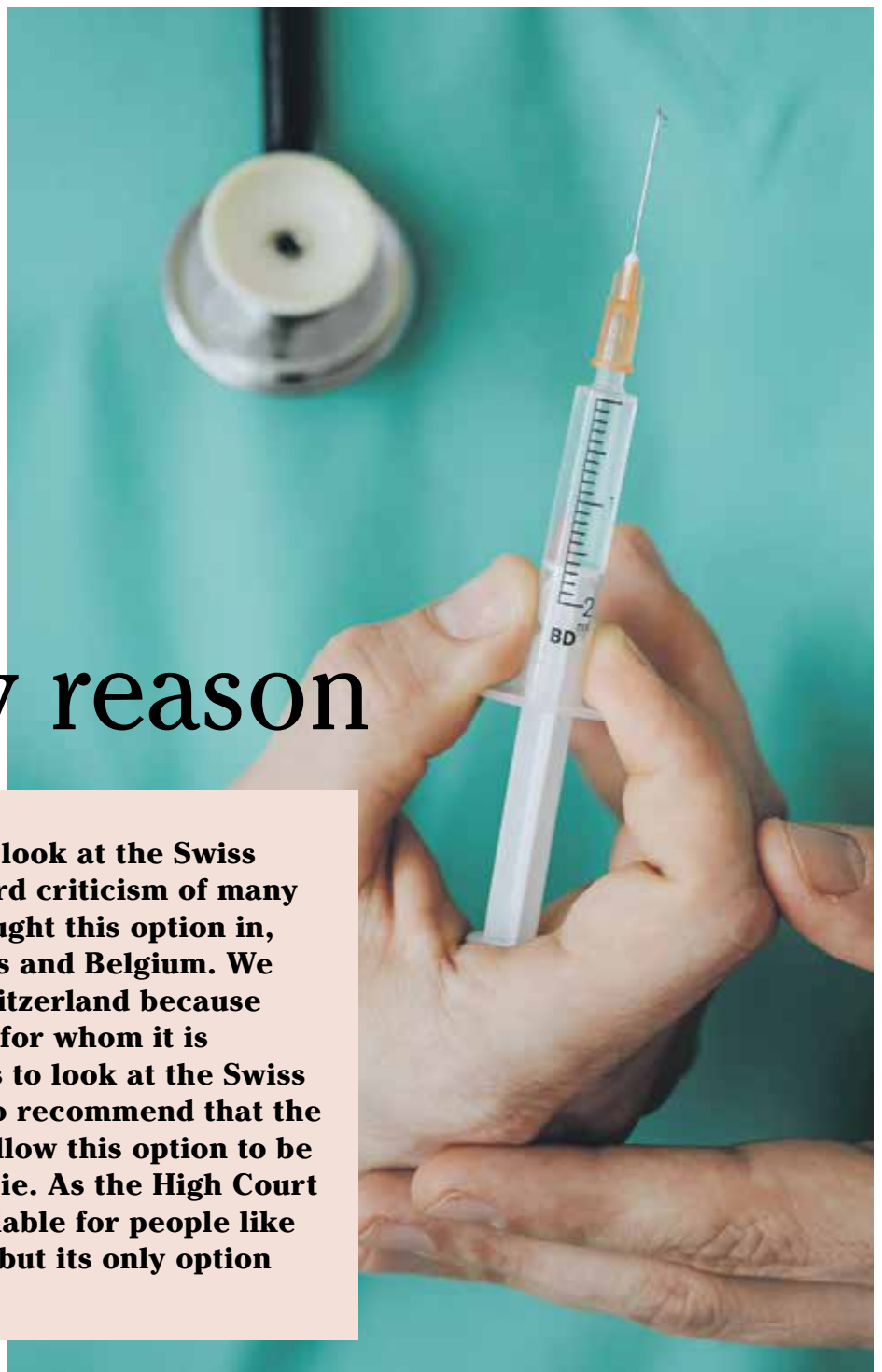
assisted suicide. There are examples of couples dying together by assisted suicide where one is terminally ill and the other suffers from no illness at all. In Switzerland you must ingest the lethal substance yourself. Exit International, the organisation to which Tom Curran belongs, believes that assisted suicide and euthanasia should be made available to anyone who is of 'sound mind'. In his testimony, he is referring to his late partner, Marie Fleming.

i These quotes were first gathered and published by the Iona Institute.

“We’re asking you as legislators, to honour a person who has a terminal or life limiting diagnosis. Because time alone, ‘foreseeable death’ ought not be the sole basis for calculating eligibility criteria; some neurodegenerative conditions can go on for years as we see with Dementia, with MS.”



Janie Lazar,
End of Life Ireland



Euthanasia for any reason



Tom Curran,
Exit International

“I would like the committee to look at the Swiss option (See Note 2). We have heard criticism of many different regimes which have brought this option in, including Canada, the Netherlands and Belgium. We seldom hear anybody criticise Switzerland because Switzerland works for the people for whom it is intended to work. I urge members to look at the Swiss law. I would like this committee to recommend that the Oireachtas enact Marie’s law to allow this option to be made available to people like Marie. As the High Court stated, it would have made it available for people like Marie if it had been able to do so but its only option was to strike out the law.”

Euthanasia for severe mental illness



Senator Lynn Ruane

“I am not sure I fully support the idea of assisted dying being limited only to terminal illness and time limited in the sense of it only being in proximity to death. I also have lots of questions around mental illness. The idea is that we need lots of safeguards in that regard. I feel we also need to weigh mental suffering in the same way as we weigh physical suffering. The thinking is based on terminal rights. ‘Terminal’ means that a person is likely to die or that is the trajectory of the illness over whatever period of time, or that the illness is likely to cause death. The argument could potentially be made that when it comes to decades of suffering with a chronic mental health illness that has not responded to treatment, and in spite of various types of treatment interventions, life has not improved. A person could say that he or she intends to end his or her life in the next six months. When do we say that terminal illness is only related to physical illness? Can the idea of a terminal illness also be associated with a mental illness on the basis that it is going to lead to death, but it might be by one’s own actions rather than the disease? I know I am reaching there in terms of what is causing what, but I feel there should be a space where, after treatment, a person with mental illness should not be excluded from the conversation around assisted dying if he or she so wishes.

When we spoke about disabilities, Dr. Campbell stated that it goes without saying that people with disabilities will also want to engage in this conversation and others will not because they feel they are being pushed in that direction as a result of the lack of services. Would some mental illnesses also fall under the term ‘disability’? I wonder how much we are separating mental illness out from all other illnesses in regard to this decision.”

Euthanasia for dementia patients



Justin McKenna, End of Life Ireland

“In the context of dementia, I see the circumstances of the patient being relevant. The quality of the life of the person will have diminished to a point that is clinically intolerable within the grounds of that person’s determination and where there is no prospect of that quality improving by natural means. The point about the programme I was listening to is about the idea of lifespan and health span. These are not

the same. You can live with dementia for a very long time. We in this room will all know people who are in that condition and who could sustain a life, or perhaps an existence. However, is it healthy? Is it healthy in the way they would like it to be? In a previous time, when they had capacity and when they were able to determine what they regarded as quality, they should be allowed to maintain it and decide when it should end, if that quality no longer exists.”

The Irish Catholic

TELL YOUR STORY







VOCATIONS

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

Vocations Ireland are producing a once-off Vocations supplement to be published in *The Irish Catholic* newspaper on **April 18th** in time for **Vocations Sunday** April 21st. All content and advertising will be reduced by 50% off the normal advertising price as part of the deal so don't delay in getting your vocations stories ads in. As well as extra print copies of the stand-alone supplement available for promotion purposes, digital copies of the supplement will also be available which can be used to post on social media or email to those who may have got a print copy.

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AV ARMAGH: The Irish medium Confirmation for Christian Brothers Schools in Armagh and Portadown took place in St Malachy's Church, with Archbishop Eamon Martin presiding. (all three together)



IN SHORT

Christian Institute announces director's death

The Christian Institute has announced the sudden death of Colin Hart, founder and director of the Evangelical thinktank.

Mr Hart (60) died at home on Wednesday, March 13, of a suspected heart attack, the institute announced.

After leaving his teaching job, Mr Hart worked tirelessly for over 35 years to ensure that the Christian faith had a strong evangelical voice in the public square, they said in a statement.

The Christian Institute was founded in 1991 by Colin and other professionals and

Christian Church leaders. Ciarán Kelly has been appointed Acting Director.

St Patrick's College celebrates 150 years

The Diocese of Kilmore celebrated the 150th anniversary of the opening of the iconic building which served as St Patrick's College in Cavan and is now the base for the Kilmore Diocesan Pastoral Centre.

Bishop Martin Hayes was the principal celebrant of a Mass in the Cathedral of St Patrick and St Felim, Cavan, on Saturday, March 16.

Also in attendance were Cardinal Seán Brady; Archbishop Francis Duffy of Tuam; Bishop-Emeritus Leo O'Reilly of Kilmore; and Auxiliary Bishop of Armagh Michael Router.

All are natives of the diocese and former staff members of the college.

Priests of the diocese concelebrated along with priests who studied in the college, while civic representatives and representatives from other Churches were also present.

Diocese immigrant reps meet for the first time

Diocesan immigrant representatives came together for the first time to discuss current and future challenges on March 8.

The gathering was held following a request from the Bishops of Ireland that each of the 26 dioceses on the island appoint an 'immigrants liaison person' as a point of contact for matters associated with outreach to immigrant

communities, and to promote integration at a local level.

The event was opened by a prayer service led by Sr Julie Doran OLA, a member of the Council for Immigrants of the Irish bishops' conference.

Bishop Michael Duignan of Galway and Clonfert, who is chair of the council, said, "there is potential in the Church in Ireland to build a culture of encounter where we can meet those who seek refuge among us as people – mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, sons and daughters – people just like you or me with our own particular stories.

"Families, just like yours and mine, with their hopes and dreams that tomorrow might be somewhat better than today."

Edited by Ruadhán Jones
Ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie



Events deadline is a week in advance of publication



CORK: Fr Cian O'Sullivan Co PP St Mary's on the Hill, Knocknaheeny, Finbarr Archer and Bishop Emeritus of Cork and Ross John Buckley are pictured at the St Vincent's GAA St Patrick's night fundraiser at the Opera House on March 17. Photo: Mike English.



CLARE: Bishop Fintan Monahan is pictured with students and staff of Rice College Ennis who participated in Mass at the Cathedral of St Peter and Paul, Ennis, on St Patrick's day.



KILKENNY: Fr Willie Purcell National Vocations Director joins the Little Sisters of the Poor Ferrybank for their monthly Vocations Prayer Group Mass.



DUBLIN: Maria Farrell, Paula Donnelly, Ellen Troy, Mary Desmond and Anne O'Connell take part in the 'Paint for Palestine' fundraiser in Castletknock.



DUBLIN: The Ukrainian Catholic chaplaincy in Donnycarney enjoy a performance of Irish traditional music on March 17.



CLARE: A new Neocatechumenal Way family is welcomed to Westbourne, Ennis on March 15.

ANTRIM

Antrim parish rosary and night prayer takes place on Tuesday's at 8pm in St Joseph's Church.

ARMAGH

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults every Tuesday at 7.30pm in St Catherine's Irish Secondary School. For more info 07856 172206

CARLOW

Parish Biblical Studies Group with Dr Amelia Fleming, takes place each Friday 10.30am-12pm in the Cathedral Centre.

CORK

Frankfield/Grange children's rosary group meets on the second Saturday of every month at 6pm in front of Our Lady's Shrine at the Church of the Incarnation, Frankfield.

DERRY

'The Demons and the reality of spiritual combat' a talk by Fr Cajetak Apeh OCD takes place in the Carmelite Retreat Centre, Termonbacca, April 18.

DONEGAL

A guided holy hour of adoration in honour of the Holy Face of Jesus takes place on Sundays, 6-7pm in St Mary's Oratory.

Retreat for Young Adults at Lough Derg, Pettigo County Donegal on Saturday April 27 2024 from 10am to 4pm. Refreshments and lunch provided. This retreat is organised by The Knights of St Columbanus Omagh and is free of charge. To Register, please visit cc/loughderg or email info@knightsfst-columbanusomagh.co.uk

DUBLIN

The feast of Divine Mercy will be celebrated on Sunday, April 7, in St Vincent De Paul church in Marino. Holy hour from 3-4pm followed by Mass at 4pm. Confessions will be available from 3-4pm. Collection to Capuchin Day Centre.

Rosary of reparation and conversion takes place first Saturday every month at 2pm on North Earl Street

GALWAY

Prayer around the cross with Taize music, prayers, reflection and silence in Cathedral of Assumption Tuam at 8pm on Good Friday.

Day of Reflection including first

Saturday Fatima Devotions led by, Eddie Stone and team takes place Saturday, April 6 at 11am in Emmanuel House Clonfert, Ballinasloe, including healing service, adoration, talks, music, Confession and Mass.

Divine Mercy Sunday Celebrations take place April 7 starting at 11am, a day for reconciliation of the soul.

LAOIS

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place each Sunday of Lent from 5-7pm and concludes with the rosary.

LOUTH

Fr Willie Doyle SJ prayer group takes place in Holy Family Church, Drogheda every Thursday at 7pm. Includes Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and a prayer for vocations.

MAYO

The next Latin Mass will take place at 6pm in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel Knock Shrine on Sunday, April 14.

SLIGO

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in St Colmcille's Church every Sunday from 4-5pm.

TIPPERARY

Holy Face hour takes place Tuesdays 7-8pm in Our Lady and St Kevin's Church, Littleton, E41 HD90, including rosary, Holy Face prayers, Divine Mercy chaplet and Eucharistic Adoration.

TYRONE

The men's rosary takes place on the first Saturday of every month in Market Street, Omagh (opposite Primark) at 1pm. Next rosary April 6.

WATERFORD

Youth 2000 Munster Retreat takes place in De La Salle College from April 5-7 for ages 16-35. Donation only, to book visit youth2000.ie

The Focolare Spring Gathering will take place from April 4-7 in Dungarvan, Co. Waterford. For more information contact Gerard at 086 2243631 or focolare.ireland@focolare.org

WESTMEATH

Stations of the Cross at 12 noon on Good Friday starting from St Peter and Paul's Church, Athlone.

What's love got to do with it – religious sisters continuing to make a stand

Dr Toni Pyke

Gerard Gallagher

On Saturday March 2, a coalition of national and local organisations that form 'Le Chéile', organised a 'Stand Together' march in Dublin city centre. This was their second such march, seeking solidarity, unity and acceptance of diversity in an increasingly divided Ireland.

The march that Saturday wasn't about any one issue, it was about the unequal and unjust social and economic experiences of individuals and groups in Irish society and of solidarity from Ireland with others across the world.

The issues that plague our modern society are complex and multifaceted and as such there is no one theory, perspective or group can that encompass the lived realities.

Solidarity

We in AMRI joined this march and walked with the Dominican Sisters Cabra,

“The issues that plague our modern society are complex and multifaceted and as such there is no one theory, perspective or group can that encompass the lived realities”

under the Dominicans for Justice and Peace banner, with a group from the Methodist Church in Ireland ahead of us.

It is not new to experience Catholic religious sisters and other religious groups taking to the streets of Dublin and throughout the island of Ireland to march against a whole host of national and global inequalities.

“Today they continue to lobby for justice, peace and the integrity of creation”

For those of us around long enough to remember President Ronald Reagan's visit to Ireland in 1984, you will recall the 'Sisters for Justice' group carrying a coffin through the streets of Dublin opposing US foreign policy, or sisters demonstrating outside the

American Embassy or Leinster House.

Many religious sisters have marched in unity with women in Northern Ireland for lasting peace. They have marched in solidarity with people all over the world demanding human rights and human dignity for all.

They have stood against apartheid and racism. They were active during the Civil Rights Movement. Today they continue to lobby for justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

In the background, the quieter justice work of religious sisters continues to take place – accompanying, supporting and accommodating refugees and those seeking asylum, visiting people in prison, supporting the homeless, raising awareness about human trafficking and other social and ecological issues.

They can be found outside Leinster House demanding politicians respond to our climate crisis and you may well find some of them marching specifically for peace in solidarity with the people of Gaza or Ukraine – and don't forget Haiti, Afghanistan, Syria, Somalia, Ethiopia and the many other women, children and men living in countries in conflict.

Opposition

Across the globe, religious sisters have been slandered, threatened and opposed for taking part in public

“Religious sisters will continue to join others in stomping the streets in solidarity as they have done so in the past”

marches against injustices and in defence of the common good. This march was no different.

“It is not about a particular group, rather all groups. It was about unity and solidarity”

They understand, however that this is the only path to a sustainable future and is not an easy position to take. But as one Sister recently noted, working for justice comes with a health

warning, “Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice's sake...”.

Seeking social and economic justice, human dignity and global peace is the same vision that underpins Catholic Social Teaching, driven by Gospel values and theological wisdom founded on truth, justice and love.

Religious sisters will continue to join others in stomping the streets in solidarity as they have done so in the past.

We marched alongside the Dominican Sisters, for the dignity for every human being and to show our solidarity with those experiencing injustice.

Along with the sisters,

we took to the streets to amplify the voices of those not being heard – the homeless and those living in sub-standard accommodation; those experiencing racism and those who oppose it; the newcomer feeling unwelcome; for disability rights; worker's rights; for women's equal recognition; for those living on the poverty line; for peace in Israel and Palestine and other conflict zones across the world; for those ostracised by traditional social norms and many others.

There was nothing incoherent about the issues represented at the march, much less those taking part in it. It is not about a particular group, rather all groups. It was about unity and solidarity for the inclusion of human rights and human dignity for all here in Ireland and those elsewhere.

This is the definition of justice.

Dr Toni Pyke AMRI (JPIC) and Gerard Gallagher Secretary General AMRI.



Dominican Sisters Cabra attend the Stand Together Rally in Dublin on Saturday March 2.

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THE SYNODAL TIMES



“Synodality is what the Lord expects from the Church of the third millennium” – Pope Francis

**AFRICAN CARDINAL:
FIDUCIA SUPPLICANS
IS ‘CULTURAL
COLONISATION’**

PAGE 20



**NUNS AND
CARTWHEELS**

PENELOPE MIDDELBOE

PAGE 21



German bishops: Reform dialogue can continue

The German Catholic bishops and the ZDK, a representative body for the laity, want to continue their dialogue on reforms in the Church. After a meeting in Rome, they are encouraged in this by the Vatican.

Following recent talks in the Vatican, the German bishops and the Central Committee of German Catholics are looking forward with confidence to the continuation of the dialogue on reforms in the Church in Germany.

The way is now clear for further work in the Synodal Committee, write the Chairman of the German Bishops' Conference, Georg Bätzing, and ZdK President Irme Stetter-Karp to the members of the committee. The letter is available to the Katholische Nachrichten-Agentur (KNA).

The Synodal Committee has only met once so far. The second meeting is planned for mid-June in Mainz. However, the bishops have yet to approve the committee's statutes. According to the letter, the bishops want to make up for this at the meeting of their Permanent Council on 22 April. The financial resources for the committee's work are to be channelled through an association, the foundation of which is apparently



Bishop Georg Bätzing, president of the German bishops' conference, addresses Pope Francis November 17, 2022, in the Clementine Hall of the Apostolic Palace during the bishops' *ad limina* visits to the Vatican. Photo: CNS/Vatican Media

planned before Easter.

The Synodal Committee is a result of the Synodal Path for the Future of the Catholic Church in Germany, which was launched by bishops and laypeople in 2019. Among other things, it is to prepare the establishment of

a Synodal Council in which bishops and laypeople can jointly discuss and decide on important internal church issues in Germany. The Vatican had repeatedly rejected this because it recognised a possible violation of canon law and the doctrine of the

Church as a hierarchy in which the bishops and the Pope have ultimate responsibility.

During their exchange with high-ranking Vatican representatives last Friday in the Vatican, the delegation from the Bishops' Con-

ference was able to make it clear that the exact organisation of the Synodal Council had not yet been discussed.

"And they have assured the representatives of the Curia that they will ensure that the proposal complies with the Church's guide-

lines," the current letter states. "In addition to further discussions to deepen the dialogue, it has also been agreed that there will be feedback with the Curia during the further process of the Synodal Council's conception."

NEXT WEEK: WELCOMING THE SPIRIT THIS SYNOD

African cardinal: *Fiducia Supplicans* is 'cultural colonisation'



Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo of Kinshasa, Congo, president of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar, speaks to reporters during a news conference at the Vatican October 7, 2023. Photo: CNS Justin McLellan

Jude Atemanke

F*iducia Supplicans* (FS), the declaration by the Vatican Dicastery for the Doctrine of Faith (DDF) permitting the blessing of 'same-sex couples' and couples in other 'irregular situations', was perceived as "cultural colonisation" in Africa, the President of the Symposium of Episcopal Conference of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) has said.

In a March 17 interview with the French-language Catholic Television Channel, KTO, Fridolin Cardinal Ambongo deplored the lack of "synodality" in the release of the DDF Declaration that has evoked mixed reactions and deep division among Catholic Bishops across the world since its publication on December 18.

"In this Declaration, there was a whole cultural problem, because the African continent perceived *Fiducia Supplicans* as cultural colonisation," the Archbishop of Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) said.

Imperialism

What FS proposes is "a kind of Western imperialism, but on a cultural level", he further said, adding that the

Vatican Declaration, "practices that are considered normal in the West were imposed on other peoples".

“We bless everyone, we even bless animals, we bless cars. Sometimes I even bless pens student use”

"I think this explains the virulence of Africa's reaction", Cardinal Ambongo said, alluding to the January 11 decision of the Catholic Bishops in Africa not to implement FS on the continent following a December 20 appeal for opinions from Presidents of Catholic Bishops' Conferences of Africa and its Islands in view of having a "single synodal pronouncement".

"I don't think this text was necessary at the time," he went on to say referring

“They ‘do not consider it appropriate for Africa to bless homosexual unions or same-sex couples because, in our context, this would cause confusion and would be in direct contradiction to the cultural ethos of African communities’”

to FS, and explained, "We had just come out of the first session of the Synod on Synodality, and we're now waiting for the second session. All these questions we raised during the first session of the Synod; we're going to come back to them and we would have gained a lot by waiting for the end of the second session and mature this kind of subject in a spirit of synodality".

"Personally, I think that what surprised and shocked us the most was the way in which the text was published," Cardinal Ambongo, who has previously explained how he spearheaded the rejection of FS in Africa said.

He continued, "When you read the content of the document, there's no revolution because we do bless people. We bless everyone, we even bless animals, we bless cars. Sometimes I even bless pens student use".

"Blessings can be given to anyone. This means that

what caused the problem wasn't the blessing, because we already give blessings. What came as a bit of a shock, and I think we should have prepared public opinion a little better during the Synod, was the blessing of the homosexual couples," he said.

Consultation

The Congolese Cardinal, who has been a member of Pope Francis' Council of Cardinals (C9) since his appointment in October 2020 and reappointment in March 2023 further said, "I believe that if we had consulted beforehand, if we had analysed *Fiducia Supplicans* in the spirit of synodality, perhaps we could have presented it in a different form and with a different tone, taking into account the sensitivities of others".

Following conflicting reactions to FS, the Prefect of the DDF, Víctor Manuel Cardinal Fernández, called upon each Bishop to "make

discernment" on its implementation. In a five-page press release on January 4, DDF provided clarification on FS, writing that its implementation will depend "on local contexts and the discernment of each diocesan bishop with his diocese".

“Since the issuing of the January 11 SECAM statement, there is ‘peace and tranquility’ on the continent”

In Africa, Catholic Bishops issued a "consolidated summary" of their responses against the possibility of blessing couples as suggested in FS. In their five-page response to FS, SECAM members said they "do not consider it appropriate for Africa to bless homosexual unions or same-sex couples because, in our context, this would cause confusion and would be in direct contradiction to the cultural ethos of African communities".

The Catholic Bishops said the "spontaneous" and non-liturgical blessings, which FS proposes, "cannot be carried out in Africa without" causing "scandals".

In the March 17 interview, Cardinal Ambongo said since the issuing of the January 11 SECAM statement, there is "peace and tranquility" on the continent. "Since then, we no longer speak of *Fiducia Supplicans* in terms of virulent opposition to Rome or the Holy Father," the Congolese member of the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin (OFM Cap.) said.

Homosexuality

He went on to recall, "There have been cases of homosexuality, but the cases that exist in Africa are considered a deviation, an abomination". "The cases do exist, and you'll see that on the African continent as a whole, homosexuality is not yet legalised.

The practice of homosexuality even if it does exist, is not considered a normal practice," the President of SECAM since February 2023 said. He added, "The Church on the continent has a very clear stance. We welcome homosexuals as human beings, as sons and daughters of God, we don't reject them, but we don't assume that this sexual orientation is the one we can teach our children".

Originally published by CNA Africa.

Turning cartwheels



Penelope Middelboe

"She's been seen turning cartwheels!"

"What? in her habit!?"

"How do you do that?"

"How do you know?"

"S'Mary Peter saw her."

"She told you?"

"She told S'Mary Paul," Karen said.

We nodded. Everyone knew Karen was a favourite of Sr Mary Paul."

"Sr Mary Peter said she didn't even seem to notice she'd done a cartwheel."

Not *The Sound of Music*, just the start of an Autumn term, at the top of a haybarn on a boarding school farm in England. The bales, being newly stacked, almost reached the top so there was little chance of being spotted should Farmer Giles (I kid you not) be walking by. Unless he smelt our cigarettes.

The person turning cartwheels of spiritual ecstasy was Virginia White (her name has been changed) who'd been at school with us and was just three years older. Since the long summer holidays when she'd taken her first vow to become a nun - or a postulant - none of us had seen her. We'd heard she'd have to stay in the nuns-only part of the school for a year. They had a secret garden but the walls were far too high to climb and peer over.

We'd probably all had a crush on dark, boyish, Virginia, at some time or other. Mine had started two years before, after she became county fencing champion but before she became head girl. I was 13 and she 16. She had been St Joan in George Bernard Shaw's play and I'd been prepared to fight with her to the death. Virginia being literally head-over-heels in love with Jesus scared me. I wanted so much to be like her. And yet I didn't.

That evening, with a friend, I hatched a plan to ensure I could not be 'called'. I dared myself to trample on the school rhubarb patch. In the end I trampled on just a few. It's harder than you imagine to destroy healthy plants. And I diluted my 'sin' yet further when, later, I felt obliged to own up once the crime had been discovered.

Dwindling

The majority of teaching nuns at my school were in their early 30s and 40s. They'd joined post-Vatican Two. Strong, attractive, educated young women, with very distinct personalities.

They wore the full habit, with only their hands and faces showing.



Dominican Sister Mary of the Sacred Heart smiles as she hugs Sister Maria Aquinas following Mass at Corpus Christi Monastery in the Bronx, New York on March 7. Photo: OSV News Gregory A. Shemitz

For most of the year they were our role models. The terrifyingly strict choir mistress had a motto: 'One hour you give to God (meaning her choir) will be given back to you two-fold.'

“In Africa and Asia young women still choose the religious life to minister to the sick and the poor”

I don't know what happened to Virginia White. Some of the most characterful nuns left not long after I finished at the school, in the mid '70s. They 'jumped over the wall' as we used to say. 30 years later, the remainder turned the school over to a trust, left the beautiful palace with its cedar trees and avenue that had been given to Anne Boleyn, and escaped the snobbish parents and girls to live in tiny houses in two nearby towns, where they still work with the poorest communities.

They mind the babies and children they never had, support the exhausted parents struggling with zero-hours contracts, and nurture the elderly. The only habits they have these days are following the monastic Rule of St Augustine.

'My' nuns, like most in both Catholic and Anglican communities in the West, are now aging. I can only find one nun on the list of staff of a Catholic boarding school in the UK today. It was more than 20 years ago, at the first international conference in Dublin for Women's Ordination Worldwide, that my friend Sr Myra Poole of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur bravely defied the Vatican to attend as a keynote speaker.

Today she's house-bound. Sr Joan Chittister, from the Benedictine Sis-

ters of Erie, Pennsylvania, also spoke that day, with the full support of her congregation. Joan, who memorably said, "the prophet is the person who says no to everything that is not of God," remains as vibrant as ever. But she is 88.

There are of course plenty of selfless young women teachers, health care professionals, social workers, NGOs, and charity workers working for the Kingdom of God on earth. But if you're talking of nuns, eighty is now the average age in Ireland as well as in the USA - where only 1% are under 40.

They are what remains of the post-Vatican II peak in novitiates. Do those seeking Christian ecstasy these days, without the agony of self-denial, perhaps turn to evangelicalism?

In Africa and Asia young women still choose the religious life to minister to the sick and the poor. But many, as has been the case worldwide through the centuries, are escaping poverty or early marriages, or taking the only available route to education.

Calling

My heart breaks when I hear Sr Dr Anita Chettiar in India and Sr Dr Nazreen Daniel in Pakistan, both older nuns, tell me how they make a point of warning postulants that they will inevitably be targeted sexually by male clerics. What makes it

worse is that they know that there is no functioning safeguarding for these vulnerable women. All they can tell them is that there's one justice for the woman and another for the man.

Dr Kochurani Abraham in Southern India, in a move that undoubtedly put her reputation on the line, left the convent religious life so that she could be free to campaign for justice for her religious sisters - specifically justice in cases of sexual and spiritual clerical abuse.

When I ask her if she'll marry now, she is surprised. Her devotion to God has not changed. She's simply left the establishment, "happy to live my consecration in the cloister of the world". In Brazil, a Christian eco-warrior friend, Binkale Breton, has researched the contemporary stories of martyred nuns and priests.

In the brutal world of the Amazon they defend workers' rights and fight against the exploitation of the land, and they pay the ultimate price. One of these, an American, Dorothy Stang, was a Sister of Notre Dame de Namur like Myra.

Two youngish nuns I've had the privilege to meet in the UK are part of a small order, started by Margaret Anna Cusack a Poor Clare activist from Ireland in the 19th Century. She achieved notoriety writing under the name 'The Nun of Kenmare'.

“Many, as has been the case worldwide through the centuries, are escaping poverty or early marriages, or taking the only available route to education”

The charism of the Sisters of St Joseph of Peace is peace through justice. Their non-violent direct action might involve for example prayerfully blocking arms dealers from reaching the biennial government-sponsored arms fair in London and being arrested.

Back in 2021 Sr Katrina Alton, originally from the north of Ireland and now in community in England, said it all starts with prayer. 'The first act of resistance is prayer, when you pray "Your Kingdom Come".' Recently she told me that today she would rephrase this to say "prayer is resistance and resistance is prayer."

“It takes a rare woman to become a nun. They seem to have so much to lose and so little to gain”

I can see now that what I thought, at the age of 15, was my 'vocation' was simply hormones. It takes a rare woman to become a nun. They seem to have so much to lose and so little to gain. A seminarian can look forward to independence, status, and power from the moment he becomes a parish priest. There's a career-path too, should he be so inclined.

The nuns I know and admire will never have any status or voting power within the hierarchy. They do however have a very strong voice. And I believe they have gained much more than status.

With their daily, small acts of white martyrdom, they live out Jesus' beatitudinal mission. Perhaps their sacrifices are after all restored to them two-fold. Through them we hear Jesus's voice.

Welcoming the Spirit: a communal discernment approach to pastoral planning – a book review



Pope Francis and his international Council of Cardinals continue their discussion of women's role in the church at the Vatican February 5, 2024. Photo: CNS/Vatican Media



Christina Kheng

God's faithful people are eagerly anticipating the second session of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly to be held from October 2 to October 27, 2024. And for the past year, Catholics worldwide have been excited over the *Synod on Synodality*. They have experienced 'spiritual conversation' in the process, and are anxiously waiting for the final outcome; while there are those who are sceptical of the whole process from the beginning.

The Holy Father, Pope Francis, at the inaugural mass for the Synod in October 2023, encourages us: "Let us walk with the Holy Spirit". In order to walk with the Spirit, we must first welcome and listen to the Spirit. The Holy Father has repeatedly appealed to the universal Church to be in tune with the Spirit by building a more synodal Church fit for her future mission.

Guide

Dr. Christina Kheng's book *Welcoming the Spirit: A Communal Discernment Approach to Pastoral Planning* is most timely and a welcome gift from God. The book was produced in collaboration with the Society of Jesus, and was launched on Decem-

ber 6, 2023, midway through a global conference for apostolic planning and renewal in the Society of Jesus.

Welcoming the Spirit provides a step-by-step guide for pastoral planning in a synodal way as well as providing a theological background. The author integrates pastoral planning with the rich spiritual heritage of St Ignatius of Loyola, and shows us ways of listening to the Spirit.

“Discernment calls for the participation of everyone, and is an opportunity to exercise synodality, mutual listening, and building communion amidst diversity”

'Planning' conjures the notion of corporate board meetings, strategies development and report drafting. In contrast, this book highlights planning as an essentially spiritual, holistic, transformative, and communal journey of discernment. Since the Spirit is a change agent Who frequently surprises us, we should expect change to occur even right in the middle of the process!

In the foreword, Rev. Fr Arturo Sosa SJ, Superior-General of the Society of Jesus, highlights the goal of the book. He says that pastoral planning helps us enter into deep listening, so as to emerge more fruitful, renewed, and committed in our life and mission.

He stresses that a communal discernment approach is indispen-

“He stresses that a communal discernment approach is indispensable because we are in mission not as individuals but as a community, and we need to discern together how God's Spirit is moving”

sable because we are in mission not as individuals but as a community, and we need to discern together how God's Spirit is moving. He adds that such discernment calls for the participation of everyone, and is an opportunity to exercise synodality, mutual listening, and building communion amidst diversity.

And so, he states that *Welcoming the Spirit* has integrated both planning and communal discernment together in a meaningful and practical way.

The Introduction begins with a reflective heading: "We are all wayfarers", and says that individuals, communities and organisations are sometimes at the crossroads. Thus, we need the Spirit to lead us to walk with God, and in pastoral planning.

Planning

In Part I (Theological Foundations), which begins with 'Divine love for all creation', Dr. Kheng outlines the theological foundations for pastoral planning. This enables us to understand why planning is needed, and what kind of process is more consistent with a faith-based perspective.

It aims to foster an appropriate disposition towards planning, and helps participants go through the process in a mindful and meaningful way. There are various quotations

from several sources to encourage us to foster reflection and meditation.

Part II (Pastoral Planning Process) is on the pastoral planning process. It suggests a process for planning, and serves as a general framework which each community could adapt according to its own situation and needs. She provides templates and worksheets that could be used in the process. Some of the exercises are adapted from methodologies that have been developed in the Ignatian tradition of spiritual conversation.

“We, as God's people, need to initiate (or to continue) a journey of deep listening and community discernment since we live in a world of rapid change”

She then takes us through the seven steps of pastoral planning: 1. Realizing Our Current Situation; 2. Recollecting Our Graced History; 3. Rediscovering Our Identity and Mission; 4. Reflecting on the Signs of the Times; 5. Recognising God's Call for the Present Time; 6. Responding in Concrete Action; and 7. Reviewing Our Progress.

The three appendices contain ready-to-use sample schedules for

pastoral planning, a sample hand-out on spiritual conversation, and a template to report on the fruits of the spiritual conversation. Whether we are in the parish council, ministry, youth group, parish agency, or are committed Catholics, we would find this book very helpful in guiding us to listen to the Spirit, and walk with the Spirit in our planning and decision making.

In conclusion, we, as God's people, need to initiate (or to continue) a journey of deep listening and community discernment since we live in a world of rapid change. Amidst these tremendous challenges, God's love is amply evident as the Spirit continues to beckon us to discern the signs of the times, and invites us to collaborate in God's master plan.

Welcoming the Spirit offers communities and organisations a comprehensive guidebook for navigating the challenges of pastoral planning. It presents a proposed procedure, including useful templates and exercises, and provides a theological basis for planning. This 104-page book also serves as a useful tool for a variety of community activities outside of planning, such as orientation programmes, reviews, get-togethers, and formation sessions.

Christina Kheng is a lay person from Singapore. She teaches pastoral theology and leadership at the East Asian Pastoral Institute in Manila and has accompanied a wide variety of church organizations in mission development, leadership, and communal discernment. She is one of the non-voting experts for the October 2023 and 2024 sessions of the Synod assembly.

Irish Ambassador to Holy See remarks on country's 'strong' relationship with Vatican



Elise Ann Allen

Irish Ambassador to the Holy See Frances Collins has praised what she said is a strong relationship between Ireland and the Holy See despite historic tensions with the Catholic Church, saying they share several key foreign policy and humanitarian priorities. In an interview with *Crux*, Ms Collins addressed a number of topical issues including the joint collaboration with the Vatican on issues such as multilateralism and nuclear non-proliferation, the role of churches in the ongoing Northern Ireland peace process while also touching on the country's clerical abuse scandals.

Ireland has just observed its National Day, which is also the feast of Saint Patrick in the Catholic Church. As Ambassador to the Holy See, do you believe that the fact that these celebratory occasions fall on the same day gives Ireland and the Holy See a particular bond?

Ms Collins: Certainly, I think it does. And this was very much symbolised this year when visiting Minister Mary Butler TD presented Pope Francis with a bowl of shamrock at the General Audience on Wednesday. The shamrock, a three-leaf clover, is a national symbol of Ireland. Legend has it that St Patrick used the shamrock to explain the Holy Trinity to the Irish people.

The tradition of wearing Shamrock on Saint Patrick's Day dates back to the early 18th century. Our St. Patrick's Day celebrations are an important time here for the Embassy. It is an invaluable opportunity to jointly reflect on and deepen our bilateral relationship with the Holy See and to exchange with our friends in the Secretariat of State on the many pressing



Pope Francis exchanges gifts with Irish President Michael Higgins during a private audience at the Vatican September 17, 2021. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

foreign policy issues of the day.

“Pope Francis also spent four months in Ireland at the Jesuit Institute at Milltown, so he has personal memories of Ireland and the Irish people”

It is also an opportunity for us to honour the enormous contribution of Irish religious men and women to the Church, and the rich historical and cultural legacy of our religious community here in Rome and the world over. **Ireland and the Catholic Church have had their difficulties over the years. How would you describe relations now, and what are some areas of joint collaboration and interest?**

I would describe the relationship as strong. Pope Francis visited Ireland in 2018, when Ireland hosted the World Meetings of Families. Pope Francis also spent four months in Ireland at the Jesuit Institute at Milltown, so he has personal memories of Ireland and the Irish people.

I think he holds a special place in his heart for Ireland and in particular, when it

comes to supporting peace on the island. Last year, when we marked the 25th Anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, he encouraged us to continue working to complete the vision, so that all people on the island can enjoy the fruits of peace.

He also encourages us to share our experiences of peace-making with other countries that continue to endure conflict. We are continuing to come to terms with the pain and suffering of abuse in the Church in Ireland. It serves as a reminder of our failure to live up to our ideals and values as Church, state and society.

Having a strong relationship with the Holy See and the Church in Ireland is important, but our shared priority must be to listen to what is being asked of us by the survivors and ultimately to show that we have heard and understood the survivors by together moving forward with the concrete actions

There is also an ongoing peace process in Northern Ireland. What role can the various churches in the area play in helping this process move forward?

The Catholic and Protestant Churches played an important role in the mediation and preparing the ground for the successful negotiation of the Good Friday Agreement. Individual

Catholic and Protestant clergy acted as negotiators between paramilitary groups and political representatives, throughout the conflict.

Equally important, though perhaps less well known, is the contribution of Catholic sisters, Presbyterian, Methodist and Church of Ireland women to these processes as well as their important work in facilitating inter community dialogue at the grassroots level.

“The churches remain particularly important voices as we seek to advance and embed reconciliation”

With hindsight, we now see that without the work of these priests, reverends, sisters and religious women many potential avenues for dialogue may have failed or not even opened in the first place. The work of churches continues today, as they support and guide communities across Northern Ireland navigating the very serious challenges of living in a post-conflict society, and this work remains invaluable.

The churches remain particularly important voices as we seek to advance and embed reconciliation. Indeed, last year together with the British Ambassador to the Holy See Chris Trott, I was delighted to welcome the Group of Church Leaders Ireland to Rome.

It was an opportunity to recognise their enormous collective contribution to the peace process but also

to hear from them about the ongoing challenges and how they continue to encourage political leaders to take the necessary steps needed to secure the vision of the Good Friday Agreement.

Pope Francis has also repeatedly called for not just nuclear disarmament, but for an end to the global arms trade. Are these shared priorities for Ireland and the Holy See? How can your states work together in advancing the cause of disarmament?

Yes, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control are one of highest shared foreign policy priorities between Ireland and the Holy See. In fact, we have history of sending Ambassadors to the Holy See who have worked in this area of diplomacy.

Both myself and my predecessor worked in our Disarmament and Non Proliferation Unit in Dublin before coming to the Holy See. Nuclear disarmament is one of Ireland's five signature foreign policy priorities.

This goes back to the early years of our UN Membership when our then Foreign Minister Frank Aiken put forward a series of resolutions which became known as the 'Irish Resolutions' which led ultimately to the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty, the NPT. The NPT has played an essential part in the maintenance of international peace and security for over 50 years.

Throughout his pontificate Pope Francis has sought to advance the cause of nuclear disarmament; Pope Francis became the first Pope to condemn explicitly not only the use of nuclear weapons but also "the threat of their use, as well as their very possession".

The NPT remains the cornerstone of the disarmament and non-proliferation framework. It is worth recalling that this Treaty was negotiated at a time of severe international tension, when the widespread proliferation of nuclear weapons seemed inevitable.

However, the international community came together and recognised the importance, and necessity, of achieving a world free from these terrible weapons. This can serve as a reminder that substantial progress can, and has, been made in difficult geopolitical circumstances, for the benefit of all.

The Catholic Church is a leading provider of humanitarian aid globally through its various charitable organisations, especially in natural disasters and conflicts. How can Ireland and the Holy See collaborate in ensuring that needy populations, such as the people of Ukraine and Gaza, get the assistance they need?

One of the central areas in our collaboration with the Church is in the implementation of development and humanitarian assistance programmes. Through our Irish Aid programme, we directly support the work of Trócaire, the development agency of the Irish Catholic Church and a member of the Caritas Internationalis family, and Mísean Cara, the umbrella organisation of Irish Missionaries.

“The Church and missionaries who serve in these areas are embedded in local communities, and so we can respond to the most urgent humanitarian needs”

These organisations received the second and third highest levels of funding of our Irish Aid NGO partners respectively. These partnerships are invaluable, as they enable us to reach those most affected by conflict and crisis through the Church's extensive network.

The Church and missionaries who serve in these areas are embedded in local communities, and so we can respond to the most urgent humanitarian needs of these communities and to empower and build the resilience of these communities in the longer term.

In terms of the situation in Ukraine and Gaza we continue to call for full, safe and unhindered humanitarian access in both cases and indeed in all situations of humanitarian need across the world.

Ireland was one of the first countries to respond with significant humanitarian assistance in the first days of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and continues to support people most impacted by the war including women, children, the elderly and those in front line regions.

Elise Ann Allen currently works as a Senior Correspondent for *Crux* in Rome, covering the Vatican and the global Church.

“Through our Irish Aid programme, we directly support the work of Trócaire, the development agency of the Irish Catholic Church and a member of the Caritas Internationalis family, and Mísean Cara, the umbrella organisation of Irish Missionaries”

World Report

IN BRIEF

World's oldest nun is 115-year-old Brazilian

● “My secret, my great secret, is to pray,” said Sr Inah Canabarro Lucas, the oldest nun in the world at 115 years of age. “I pray the rosary every day for all the people around the world.”

The Teresian nun is also the oldest person in Brazil and Latin America and the third oldest living person in the world, according to the Gerontological Research Group.

Sr Canabarro expressed her good humour and joy in the few words she managed to say in an interview with *ACI Digital*, CNA's Portuguese-language news partner. She repeated a prayer several times to the Virgin Mary, praying to her “for all the people of the entire world”.

European bishops call for inclusion of Christian principles in Europe

● European bishops this week called on the institutions of the European Union to embrace greater state-Church dialogue and on parliamentary candidates to include Christian principles in their political programs ahead of the bloc's elections in June.

Stressing the importance of participatory democracy and the involvement of citizens in the decision-making process of European affairs, the statement bemoaned what it saw as the political and institutional marginalisation of Christian

voices.

“We distinctly noticed that a large proportion of citizens, who confidently look at the European future through the prism of Christian values, now feel marginalised, as they do not have the opportunity to express their positions and opinions in an autonomous and distinct way,” the bishops said in their statement.

“We also notice the exclusion of any appropriate reference to Christian values in relevant EU texts,” the bishops said.

Haiti's bishops issue urgent appeal for end to violence

● Amid the violence racking the country, the Haitian Bishops' Conference has issued a letter to the faithful that recalls Isaiah's prophecy: “No longer will violence be heard in your land, nor ruin or destruction within your borders, but you will call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise” (Is 60:18).

Based on this hope for a country without violence, the prelates this week issued an urgent call for the end of the widespread violence and for the active search for peace and national reconciliation.

In the letter, the prelates expressed their profound concern over the murders, the settling of scores, witch hunts, looting, and other acts of violence going on that have plunged the country into a major humanitarian crisis.

“This dream of a country without violence makes us raise our voices to call for an end to the acts that aim to reduce Haiti to ruins and ashes,” the 10 bishops of Haiti stated.

French bishops oppose ‘end of life’ bill in latest row with government

● After French President Emmanuel Macron's recent announcement of new legislation that would allow adults facing terminal illnesses to access assisted suicide, the country's bishops have hit back against the measure, stressing the need for further investment in palliative care.

In a March 21 statement, the French bishops, who are currently meeting in Lourdes for their spring plenary assembly, voiced “our great concern and our deep reservations with regard to the bill announced on the end of life”.

Noting that the Marian shrine in Lourdes is traditionally a place where those who are sick come to experience healing, the bishops voiced their solidarity with “the most fragile people” and insisted that all human life must be “unconditionally respected and accompanied with authentic fraternity”.

Earlier this month, Mr Macron announced that he would put forward a new bill legalising “aid in dying” for terminally ill individuals, and that he planned to present a draft of the legislation to parliament in May.

‘We are not alone, abandoned or afraid,’ patriarch of Jerusalem says

When Christians gathered in Jerusalem to remember Jesus' entry into the city, it was one of a few joyful moments in the Holy Land, “crushed by so much hatred” in the months following the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel.

“Despite the war and everything going on around us this year, we have once again chosen to celebrate Jesus' triumphal entry into the Holy City,” said Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin patriarch of Jerusalem, as the traditional Palm Sunday procession moved through the streets of the city.

“We have joined voices with those who sang in Jerusalem two thousand years ago: *Hosanna Filio David*, Hosanna to the Son of David,” he said. Especially now, it is “even more important and necessary to shout strongly that Jesus is our Messiah, he is our Lord,” the patriarch said March 24.

Over the past months, Cardinal Pizzaballa said, many felt “lost or alone and without reference points,” and “crushed by so much hatred”.

“This war, which is so terrible and seems never-ending, sometimes leads us to fear for the future of our families,” he added.

Walking through the usually empty streets of Jerusalem, given the Holy Week and Easter time, the patriarch emphasised that the celebration in this time, when many of the dioceses “could



Christians wave palm and olive branches as they walk the traditional path that Jesus took on his last entry into Jerusalem during the Palm Sunday procession on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem March 24. Photo: OSV News.

not join us”, makes it all the more important to “shout with strength and faith that we have a point of reference, Jesus Christ.”

“We are not alone, we are not abandoned, and above all we are not afraid!” the Church leader emphasised in his message for Palm Sunday.

“Following Jesus also means accepting the way of the cross,” something Christians in the Holy Land “unfortunately know well,”

he continued, because their “ordinary life is often a *Via crucis*, a painful road, marked by many obstacles, misunderstandings, rejections and hostilities of all kinds.”

“Yet this does not discourage us,” the patriarch said.

Fr Waldemar Cislo, director of the Polish section of pontifical charity Aid to the Church in Need, said that when he saw the patriarch as they entered Holy Week, “he told me it's the saddest

experience that he has ever had in the Holy Land – to see empty streets of Jerusalem for Easter” and experience the suffering of so many Christians in the region.

“There are no pilgrims, and that means no income for local Christians, who also are barred from working in Jerusalem,” if their permanent residency is in the Palestinian West Bank, Father Cislo told *OSV News*.

Archbishop speaks of ‘horror and pain’ of terrorist attack in Moscow

Archbishop Pavel Pezzi of Moscow on Saturday offered his “deepest condolences” to the victims and relatives of a “brutal terrorist attack” in Russia's capital on Friday evening. At least 133 people were killed at a concert hall

in Krasnogorsk, a suburb of Moscow.

The Islamic State group's Afghanistan branch claimed responsibility for the attack on social media. “Following the brutal terrorist attack in Moscow, which left many

people dead and injured, I would like to express my deepest condolences to the relatives of the victims and support to everyone who suffered in this terrible tragedy,” Archbishop Pezzi said in a statement. “Today,

our hearts are filled with horror and pain, but we will not allow them to make us forget that our lives and the lives of all people are in the hands of God,” the archbishop said.

Threat to life not only physical, but ‘moral and spiritual’, says British archbishop

Archbishop John Wilson of Southwark in England says society is called to care for the suffering, “not to bring about their death”. The archbishop issued a pastoral message on assisted suicide as the British Parliament is fac-

ing pressure to legislate on the procedure.

In England and Wales, the 1961 Suicide Act makes it illegal to encourage or assist someone to take their own life, while laws in Scotland and

Northern Ireland prevent dying people asking for medical help to die. Campaigners have made numerous attempts to legalise euthanasia or assisted suicide in the United Kingdom in recent years.



Edited by Brandon Scott
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Rebuilding together step-by-step



Lo'ay Ayyad, Wissam Jarayseh and Tamer Salameh work in the garden of the Rosary Sisters' convent in Bethlehem, West Bank, March 16. Photo: OSV News/Debbie Hill

Belgian ex-bishop and abuser Roger Vangheluwe defrocked

Pope Francis has laicised Bishop Emeritus of Bruges, Belgium, Roger Vangheluwe, years after the former prelate admitted to repeatedly sexually abusing his nephew when the latter was a minor.

The apostolic nunciature to Belgium said in a statement last week that "serious new elements" had come to

light regarding ex-bishop Vangheluwe, who resigned in 2010 after having admitted to the sexual abuse of his nephew from when the youth was five years old.

The "new elements" included the recent testimony of a victim that led to a re-examination of the case. On March 8 the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith recommended

Pope Francis dismiss ex-bishop Vangheluwe from the clergy.

Pope Francis "granted the request, ordering that the proposed sentence be imposed", the nunciature said.

Ex-bishop Vangheluwe reportedly "asked to be allowed to reside in a place of retreat, without any further contact with the

outside world, in order to dedicate himself to prayer and penance".

The Pope's hesitation in the matter had threatened to overshadow his planned trip to Belgium: Francis is due to visit the country later this year for the 600th anniversary celebrations of the University of Louvain.

Nicaraguan dictatorship trying to totally eradicate the faith, lawyer charges

With Holy Week upon us, Catholics in Nicaragua are preparing for religious celebrations in the midst of ongoing persecution of the faith by the dictatorship of President Daniel Ortega and his wife, Vice President Rosario Murillo.

For Martha Patricia Molina, a

Nicaraguan lawyer and author of the Spanish-language report *Nicaragua: A Persecuted Church?*, the regime "wants to completely eradicate the faith of the Catholic people in order to eliminate the Church".

In a March 18 Facebook post, Ms Molina reported that for Holy Week

2024, approximately 4,800 outdoor processions have been prohibited throughout the country (this figure includes processions on the four Fridays of Lent). Outdoor processions are a prominent and integral part of Hispanic Catholic piety.



Vatican roundup

Pope Francis changes statutes of papal basilica, emphasising work of canons

● Pope Francis last Wednesday issued new regulations for the administration of the papal Basilica of St Mary Major, placing new emphasis on spiritual work and pastoral care and appointing a coadjutor archpriest of the West's oldest Marian shrine.

In the March 20 chirograph, or papal decree, the Holy Father explained that he sought to "free" the "canons", (members of the group or "chapter" of clergy he designates to serve the basilica) "from all economic and administrative duties, so that they may dedicate themselves, fully and with renewed vigour, to the spiritual and pastoral accompaniment" of pilgrims.

In December 2021 Pope Francis appointed Lithuanian-born Archbishop Rolandas Makrickas as the extraordinary commissioner to undertake the commissioning process "for the reorganisation of the life of the chapter and the basilica, for the greater good of the people of God".

US police professional and Colombian bishop appointed to minor protection commission

● Pope Francis last week appointed an American former law enforcement professional as adjunct secretary to the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors and a Colombian bishop as secretary of the independent body tasked since 2014 with advising the Pope on how the Church can best protect minors and vulnerable adults.

The Vatican announced that Teresa Morris Kettelkamp, a Chicago

native and Illinois law enforcement professional, was named as the commission's adjunct secretary. Auxiliary Bishop Luis Manuel Alí Herrera of Bogotá, Colombia, was named secretary of the commission, replacing Fr Andrew Small, who had served as temporary secretary since 2021. Both appointees were already members of the currently 19-member commission.

Pope stresses fraternity and hope on World Day of Prayer for Vocations

● Pope Francis on last week released his message for the 61st World Day of Prayer for Vocations, reflecting on the Christian pilgrimage as a synodal journey that is rooted in hope and aimed toward discovering God's love.

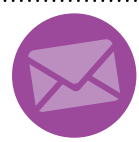
The theme for the this year's World Day of Prayer for Vocations, 'Called to Sow Seeds of Hope and to Build Peace', reflects the universal Christian call to "base our lives on the rock of Christ's resurrection, knowing that every effort made in the vocation that we have embraced and seek to live out will never be in vain", the Pope said.

This year the Church celebrates the World Day of Prayer for Vocations on April 21.

Vatican Observatory attempting to better understand Big Bang theory

● Two priests and cosmologists from the Vatican Observatory have made further progress in developing a new mathematical method to understand the Big Bang theory, which describes the first moments of the universe.

In a 2022 article published in the prestigious journal *Physical Review D*, Frs Gabriele Gionti, SJ, and Matteo Galaverni introduced the new and promising mathematical tool. They have recently published a new article in the *European Physical Journal C*, a publication that presents novel research results in theoretical physics and experimental physics.



Letter from Rome

Vatican reins in German bishops amid dispute over 'synod' reforms



Elise Ann Allen

Late last Friday March 22 evening, the Vatican announced that after holding an all-day working session with members of the German bishops, the latter have assured their national reform process will be in keeping with Canon Law and will not move forward without the Holy See's approval.

In a statement published at 8pm local time, the Vatican announced that earlier that day, representatives of the Roman Curia and the German Bishops Conference (DBK) met at the Vatican to continue a process of dialogue that began in 2022 over controversial reforms in the local German Church.

"Today's meeting, which lasted the entire day, took place in a positive and constructive climate," the statement said, saying discussion touched on "some open theological questions raised in the documents of the Synodal Path of the Church in Germany".

In the course of the conversation, it said, "differences and convergences" of opinion and perspective were identified, "according to the method adopted in the Final Synod Report" of the October 2023 Synod of Bishops on Synodality, which heavily emphasised dialogue and "conversation in the spirit" as a means of communally discerning a path forward on various issues.

Synodal

The Vatican said that representatives of both the DBK and the Holy See agreed to hold regular exchanges on the work of the German Church's controversial Synodal Path, as well as the creation of its contested Synodal Committee.

In this regard, the Vatican said the German bishops clarified that their work "will seek to identify concrete ways of exercising synodality in the Church in Germany, in conformity with the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council, the provisions of Canon Law, and the fruits of the Synod of the universal Church, then submitting them to approval of the Holy See".

Representing the Roman Curia at Friday's meeting were Cardinals Victor Fernández, prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith; Kurt Koch, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity; Pietro Parolin, the Vatican's Secretary of State; Robert Prevost, prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops; and Arthur Roche, prefect of the Dicastery for Divine Worship.

Archbishop Filippo Iannone, pre-



Pope Francis and the bishops of Germany pose for a photo after a meeting in the Clementine Hall of the Apostolic Palace November 17, 2022, as part of the bishops' 'ad limina' visits to the Vatican. Photo: CNS/Vatican Media

fect of the Dicastery for Legislative Texts, was also present. German prelates attending the meeting included Georg Bätzing of Limburg, Stephan Ackermann of Trier; Michael Gerber of Fulda; Peter Kohlgraf of Mainz; Bertram Meier of Augsburg; Franz-Josef Overbeck of Essen, who respectively hold the positions of president of CET, and presidents of the Episcopal Commissions for Liturgy, Vocations and Ecclesial Services, for Pastoral Care, for the Universal Church, and for the Faith.

The secretary general of the DBK, Ms Beate Gilles, and its spokesman, Matthias Kopp, were also present. Friday's statement came after the Vatican earlier this year ordered the German bishops to halt a vote on the statutes of the Synodal Committee, and threatened canonical action if they did not comply.

As part of their current February 19-22 general assembly in Augsburg, the roughly 60 members of the German Bishops' Conference (DBK) attending were scheduled to address the results of their recently concluded "Synodal Path" reform process and vote on the statutes of a "Synodal Committee" that has the task of establishing a new national "Synodal Council".

However, the bishops refrained from holding the vote after receiving a letter from the Vatican threatening punitive measures if they moved for-

ward. The idea for the Synodal Council, a governing body composed of both bishops and laypeople that would permanently oversee the Church in Germany, was approved during the fourth plenary assembly of Germany's "Synodal Path" in September 2022, with the purpose of making "fundamental decisions of supra-diocesan importance".

“Pope Francis wrote a letter to the German bishops warning that their reform process risked fracturing church unity”

That assembly also approved of a "Synodal Committee", to be co-chaired by Bishop Georg Bätzing of Limburg, president of the German Bishops' Conference, and a layperson, which had the specific task of establishing the Synodal Council so as to be active by 2026.

In January of last year, the heads of several Vatican major departments wrote a letter to the German bishops vetoing the Synodal Council on grounds that it constituted a new form of ecclesial authority not canonically recognised, and which would

essentially usurp the authority of the national bishops' conference.

At the time, the German bishops ignored the Vatican's warnings, announcing during their March 2023 spring assembly that plans for establishing the Synodal Committee were still moving forward. Pope Francis and several dicastery heads within the Roman Curia have repeatedly directly intervened in the German bishops' synodal process since it was launched in 2019, with the aim of reforming Church structures to better respond to the national clerical abuse scandals.

The process quickly became controversial over proposals to end priestly celibacy, allow women's priestly ordination, broadly approve blessings for same-sex couples, and to give women the authority to administer baptisms.

In 2019, Pope Francis wrote a letter to the German bishops warning that their reform process risked fracturing church unity, and he later criticised proposals for both the Synodal Committee and the Synodal Council in a November 2023 letter to German theologians critical of the national reform process, saying these bodies "cannot be reconciled with the sacramental structure of the Church".

Concerns

Among the primary concerns with the Synodal Council is that it would constitute a new governing Church body not recognised by canon law and would essentially usurp the power of the national bishops' conference. Part of the Synodal Committee's powers enable it to pass resolutions with a simple two-thirds majority.

With just 23 bishop-members on the committee, after four refused to participate, over half of the body's 70 members are laypeople, meaning resolutions could theoretically be

passed without the approval of any of the country's bishops.

When the German bishops visited the Vatican for their regular ad limina visit in November 2022, members of the Roman Curia proposed a moratorium on the process, however it was instead agreed that an ongoing dialogue be established with regular meetings.

An initial meeting took place at the Vatican on July 26, 2023, and further discussion of major reform topics took place during the October 2023 first session of the Synod of Bishops on Synodality, with the second and final session set to take place this year.

“Friday's statement from the Vatican implies that they drew a hard line in the sand after this year's kerfuffle over the Synodal Committee”

Friday's statement from the Vatican implies that they drew a hard line in the sand after this year's kerfuffle over the Synodal Committee, assuring that German Church reforms would not breach canon law and that no measures would be adopted without prior approval from the Holy See.

The statement was published simultaneously on the German bishops' website. Another meeting between representatives of the Roman Curia and the DBK is expected to take place before summer, though no specific dates were provided.

Elise Ann Allen works as a Senior Correspondent for *Crux* in Rome.

Letters

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

Letter of the week

May Easter's light illuminate their way to the Church

Dear Editors, As we approach Easter, our hearts are filled with anticipation for the profound significance of this holiest of days. Easter is a testament to the enduring power of faith, hope, and redemption.

In the midst of our joyful celebrations, let us also pause to reflect on those

who have strayed from the fold of the Church. Our Faith teaches us the importance of unity and inclusion, and it pains us to see non-practicing Catholics becoming more distant.

Therefore, let us seize this opportunity of Easter to fervently pray for the return of those who have

left the Church. Let us pray that they may once again find solace and guidance in the teachings of Christ, and that their hearts may be open to the transformative grace of God's love.

As we gather with family and friends to commemorate the resurrection of our Lord, let us also extend

a hand of compassion and understanding to those who may be searching for spiritual renewal. May the light of Easter illuminate their path and lead them back to the warm embrace of our Catholic family.

*Yours etc.,
Helen Ryan
Greystones, Co. Wicklow*

Concerns about ruling marriage out

Dear Editor, Cardinal Lazzaro You Heung-sik, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Clergy [*The Irish Catholic* – March 21, 2024] stated during his visit to Knock, that there are “those who call for an end to the ban on priests marrying but do nothing to promote priesthood in their own families”. Of course he is right, but the reason many committed Catholics might not encourage their sons to consider the priesthood, may have to do with concerns, that at young age they would be ruling out the possibility of marriage and having a family. We do not know how many married men might be willing to train for the priesthood, but if the permanent diaconate is any comparison, we can be sure that there would be candidates.

*Yours etc.,
Deacon Frank Browne,
Rathfarnham, Dublin 16.*



Sexual abstinence in consecrated life

Dear Editor, The necessity to abstain from sexual activity is a real challenge but the best way according to Jesus in the Gospel of Mathew: “There are eunuchs born so from their mother's womb, there are eunuchs made so by human agency and there are eunuchs who have made themselves so for the sake of the kingdom of Heaven. Let anyone accept this who can” Mathew 19.12.

The apostle Paul elaborates that only men who are free from marital commitments can be fully available to God. Of course this teaching applies both to men and women of God.

“The unmarried man gives his mind to the Lord's affairs and to how he can please

the Lord; but the man who is married gives his mind to the affairs of this world and to how he can please his wife, and he is divided in mind. So, too, the unmarried woman, and the virgin, gives her mind to the Lord's affairs and to being holy in body and spirit; but the married woman gives her mind to the affairs of this world and to how she can please her husband” 1 Corinthians 32-34.

This abstinence from sexual activity in the service of God is highlighted in the Tanakh (Old Testament). When Moses was sent by God to liberate Israel from slavery in Egypt, he ceased to have marital relations with his wife Zipporah and she went

back with their two sons and lived with her father Jethro. This was not divorce, but separation, to allow Moses to be dedicated to God.

David and his followers were only permitted to eat the consecrated bread at the sanctuary at Nob outside Jerusalem when David had assured the high priest Abimelech that he and his men were clean because they had not had sexual relations at that time 1 Samuel 21.

This event is referred to by Jesus in the Gospels.

*Yours etc.,
Andrew Kieran
Bristol, England*

A nudge towards reconsidering married priests

Dear Editor, With the number of priests declining some juggling takes place to ensure Sunday Masses are available. Discussions take place about having married priests. The Eucharist is of predivine origin and so cannot be overruled by human law but sometimes it is

restricted, as it is by the rule of celibacy. No celibacy, no Mass.

Up to the 5th Century celibacy was an option taken by some priests until in France it became a precondition for ordination. Gradually this became general in the Western though

not in the Eastern (Orthodox) Church.

Today the Vatican accepts some married priests, those married Anglican clergymen who became Catholics in recent years.

Times and attitudes have changed and what was judged advisable in other centuries is

not seen as helpful today.

With the Christian view of family now under strong attack, the Lord may be nudging us to reconsider married priests as witnesses to family life as well as ministering to the community of Faith.

*Your etc.,
Fr Dermot Carthy*

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.

Easter only comes after Golgatha

For those looking in from the outside, Easter and the ceremonies might seem liturgically interesting at best, with the paschal fire, the incense, the Exultated sung as the lights come on in the church, but pointless, or meaningless to a modern world. The truth is the opposite, the meaning and depth to Holy Week and Easter is buried deep in our genetics, our souls, our very sense of what it is to be human. We're not about mindlessly worshipping God only as some might think but more about understanding our human condition liturgically, theologically and philosophically, because that's essentially what the Gospel is about, understanding and loving ourselves and our neighbours as God loves us all. Christianity is about incarnation, God and human journeying together, sometimes in mystery.

As Sr Joan Chittister writes: “Everyone who has ever lived, who will ever live, will someday undergo a Holy Saturday of their own. Someday we will all know the power of overwhelming loss when life as we know it changes, when all hope dies in mid-flight. Then, and only then, can we begin to understand the purpose of Holy Saturday. The importance of Holy Saturday lies in its power to bring us to the kind of faith the spiritual masters call mature.

“Holy Saturday faith is not about counting our blessings; it is about dealing with darkness and growing in hope. Without the Holy Saturdays of life, none of us may ever really grow up spiritually.” No doubt about it: this is the day of the going down into the tomb—our own as well as Jesus'. It is now the time for us to die to false hope. But it is also time for us to die to faithless despair.”

Tomáš Halik, the priest and philosopher writes that Easter during Covid with empty and often-locked churches reminded him “strikingly of those 11 years when I served ‘clandestinely’ as a secretly ordained priest at the time of the communist persecution. In those days I also celebrated Easter in private homes in a circle of my closest associates, at an ordinary table with no chasuble or golden chalice, no organ or incense.

“I experienced it as a sort of prophetic vision of warning: unless the church (and not only our ‘Roman Church’) does not undergo the profound reform called for by Pope Francis – not only a structural reform but above all a turning to the depths, to the very heart of the gospel – then empty and locked churches will not be the exception but the rule.”

He adds: “During this strange Easter, I once more opened a slim pamphlet by the Czech 17-century thinker Jan Amos Komenský (Co-menius), entitled *The Legacy of a Dying Mother, the Unity of the Brethren*.

“As the last bishop of this small, persecuted Protestant church, he wrote in exile this remarkable ‘theology of the death of the church’. I was alerted to the work many years ago by one of my teachers of faith, Oto Mádr, for many years a prisoner of communism, in his essay *Modus moriendi ecclesiae* (How a church dies). ‘The death of the church’ is once more a topical issue. Yes, I do believe that one form of the church, one form of Christianity, is truly dying. But isn't the core of Christianity the message of the death that must precede resurrection?”

And yet Easter Sunday is the cause of our hope, as Sr Chittister explains: “Hope, you see is a slippery thing, often confused with certainty, seldom understood as the spiritual discipline that makes us certain of only one thing: in the end, whatever happens will be resolved only by the doing of the will of God, however much we attempt to wrench it to our own ends. “There is the hope that we can begin, finally, to see the world as God sees it and so trust that God is indeed everywhere and in everything at all times—in abstruse as well as the luminous, whether we ourselves can see the hand of God in this moment or not.”

Happy Easter to all our readers and your families.



The Liberties in Pictures

Maurice Curtis

If you have ever wondered what stories lie in the stone walls of Dublin's oldest storefronts and cathedrals, this is the book for you.



The Opal & the Pearl

Mark Patrick Hederman

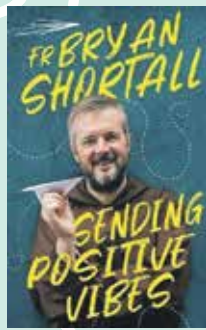
Benedictine monk and author Mark Patrick Hederman delivers a stimulating critique of the Catholic Church's monosexual stance in this best-selling book.



Tomorrow's Parish

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This book is for anyone who has an interest in the future of the Church, particularly those involved in parish ministry and parish pastoral councils.



Sending Positive Vibes

Fr Bryan Shortall

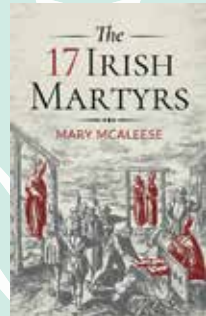
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Early Irish Saints

John J. Ó. Riordain

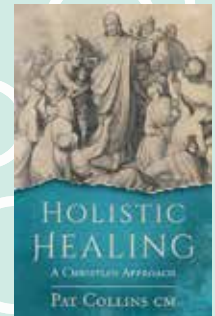
This collection of short essays on fourteen well-loved early Irish saints presents a very readable combination of historical fact, folklore and legend.



The 17 Irish Martyrs

Mary McAleese

An historical account detailing the inspiring stories of the 17 Irish martyrs beatified by Pope John Paul II and what made their causes for martyrdom stand apart from others.



Holistic Healing

Pat Collins CM

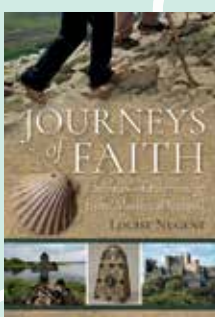
This timely book describes how the gift of healing has been rediscovered in recent years and stresses the therapeutic power of the Eucharist, while addressing questions like, 'why isn't everyone healed?'



The Elephant in the Church

Mary T. Malone

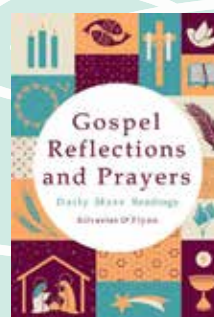
Women have long been the 'Elephant in the Church'. Christian feminist Mary T. Malone explores 'Woman Christianity' from a historical perspective in this revised edition.



Journeys of Faith

Louise Nugent

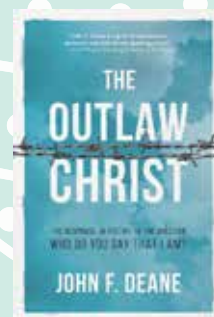
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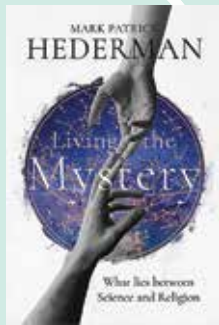
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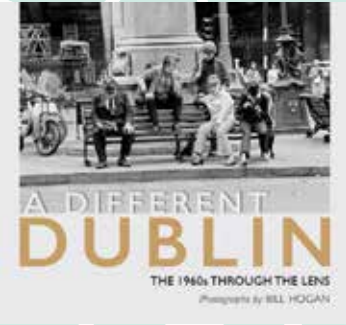
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Bill Hogan

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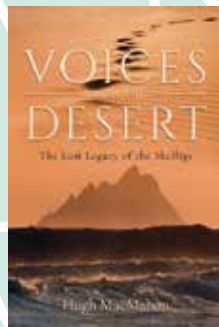
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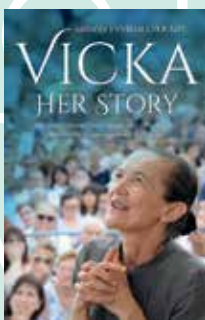
Rainbows & Windmills
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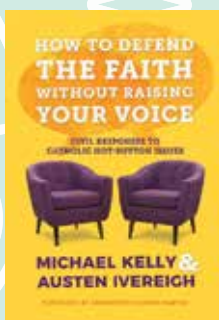
Voices from the Desert
Hugh MacMahon

Individuals looking for a fresh view of what it means to be a Christian, or to understand the Skelligs' legacy, will appreciate its authenticity, clarity and relevance.



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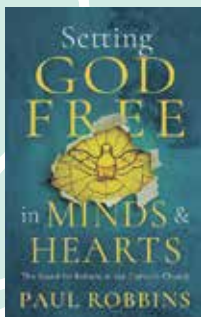
How to Defend the Faith Without Raising your Voice
Michael Kelly & Austen Ivereigh

Answering some of the most common criticisms of the Church, this book aims to help people defend their beliefs in a calm and rational manner.



Dancing to my Death
Daniel O'Leary

piece, it is an account of cancer diagnosis and the rollercoaster of facing his own illness, Daniel found that his Faith meant to him.



Setting God Free in Minds and Hearts
Paul Robbins

In this book, laicized former priest Paul Robbins expresses the need for reform that should include changes to those aspects of the church's teachings and practices that currently restrict the freedom of the Holy Spirit to give life to the Church.



Hallelujah
Fr Ray Kelly

In 2018, Fr Kelly reached the semi-finals of Britain's Got Talent, demonstrating his ability to connect with people through singing. His memoir describes his fascinating journey from parish priest to fame.

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The Irish Catholic, March 28, 2024



Francis' Year of Prayer will be immersive

Photo: OSV News



After the Year of Mercy, it's time to pray, writes Elizabeth Scalia

St Philip Neri once had a penitent confess to indulging in gossip. He advised the contrite soul to bring him a chicken, and to pluck its feathers as he walked the streets of Rome.

When the man showed up with the chicken, his penance fulfilled, the great saint told him, "Now, brother, gather up all the feathers you've strewn about the city." The man's face fell. "It's impossible," he protested, "they're everywhere..." "Yes," Philip nodded, "as is gossip, once it is strewn about..."

During the 'Year of Mercy', concluded in November 2016,

I benefited from weekly meditations on what mercy looked like, what it did not look like and how the actual practice of mercy in our lives – be it the simple act of holding one's tongue or something more – was both easier and harder than we believed.

The mercy of showing forgiveness to another, for instance – certainly difficult, when the hurt is huge – can truly set us free, especially when our forgiveness is unconditional.

Mercy

I learned that on a very deep and personal level, back then, when someone who had spread a terrible lie about me

came to admit it and sought my forgiveness.

Part of me wanted more – wanted this person to endure further humiliations by telephoning everyone to whom she'd lied about me, admitting what she'd done.

But I quickly saw that such a requirement would be more vindictive than merciful and that a sincere expression of remorse – while making imperfect amends to the truth, or to the reality of my larger world – was still evidence of a heartfelt regret deserving my respectful response.

Recalling Philip Neri's lesson to the gossipy penitent, I suddenly understood that there was nothing this woman could ever do to fully repair my reputation among those who now believed a lie, because in the depths of our

hearts we all believe what we really want to believe about others, whether for evil or for good.

So those people who had always rejected her story believed better of me. Those who accepted the lie believed worse and that, I suddenly knew, was on me. Something existed within my character that made some people willing to believe an untrue thing about me.

Realising that among some the shards of my broken reputation could never be gathered up, and that the situation could never be wholly repaired, I felt something like peace well up inside of me.

That a small number of people would continue thinking ill of me might not be 'fair', but I'd already learned that in life 'fairness' is an illusion –

“‘Fairness’ is an illusion – something complex and subjective on too many levels to count”

something complex and subjective on too many levels to count.

I had no doubt that over the course of my life I'd done plenty to deserve a measure of justified enmity, and decided it didn't matter whether the contempt stemmed from a lie or not.

Therefore, I was able to say the words 'I forgive you' – and really mean them.

Awareness

That whole episode has been a valuable gift to me. The woman, by her lie and then her contrition, had administered to me a dose of much-needed self-awareness – given me interior food to chew on for the rest of my life as I contemplate all the ways I hurt others, then help others, and then fail again.

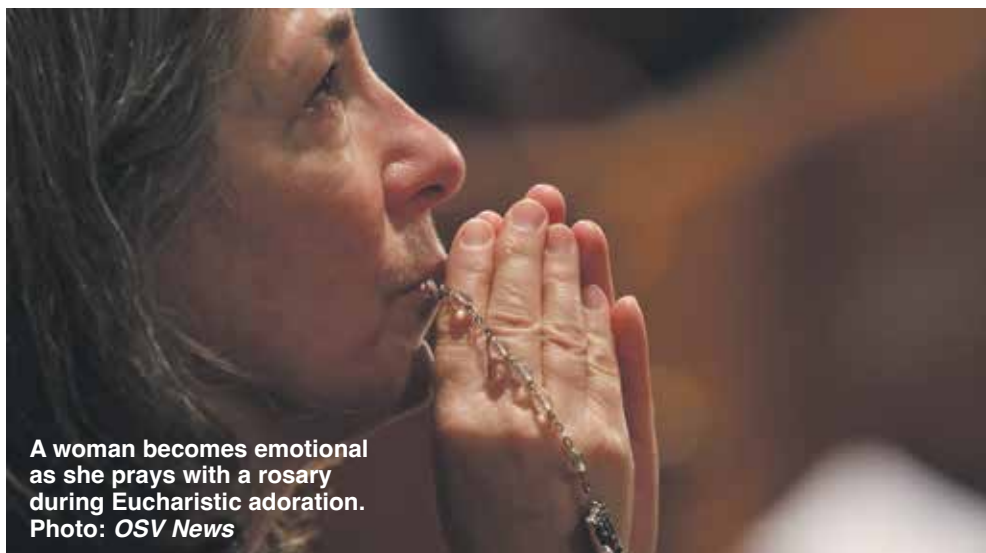
There were plenty of lessons to be learned in that 'Year of Mercy', but now we are in a 'Year of Prayer' – so designated by Pope Francis in anticipation

of the 2025 Jubilee Year.

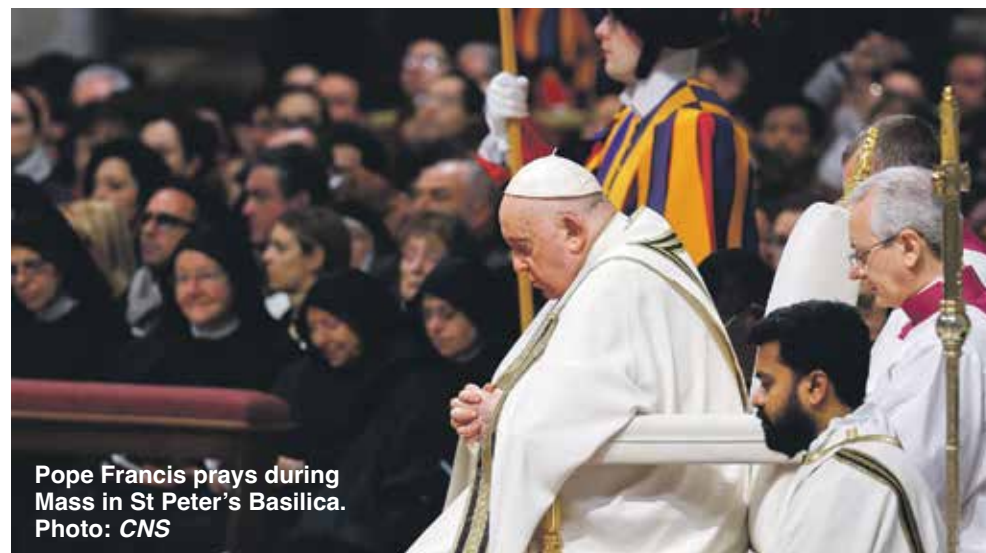
I'd been castigating myself for getting off to a slow start, but a recent, serious bout of pneumonia gave me opportunities to make offerings of my illness and discomforts – to practice a form of prayer that we don't much talk about in the church, but which takes a direct line through the apostle Paul's example: "I am rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, the Church" (Col 1:24).

It is a good and intimate prayer to whisper one's agonies into the ear of the suffering, unjustly crucified rabbi-God and ask to be admitted, in the smallest way, into his unfathomable salvific act. It is a strange privilege to look out from the cross with him and view the terrible beauty, and nearness, of paradise.

i Elizabeth Scalia is editor at large for OSV.



A woman becomes emotional as she prays with a rosary during Eucharistic adoration. Photo: OSV News



Pope Francis prays during Mass in St Peter's Basilica. Photo: CNS

Joseph's perfect wife and her perfect son



Photo: OSV News



Hosffman Ospino

While ago, writing about St Joseph, I was intent on lifting up his human experience while calling out quick attempts to idealise this important person in Jesus's life. Joseph was a husband, a father, an immigrant, a worker, a neighbour, a friend, a companion.

In response, I received a note from Joe Benevento in July 2021. A professor of English at Truman State University for 40 years who retired in 2023, Prof. Benevento is a novelist, poet, musician, family man and committed

Catholic. We've continued to correspond ever since.

He shared a similar interest in Joseph the human being, the flesh-and-bones husband and father who has been a source of curiosity and inspiration throughout Christian history, and told me about a novel he had just completed and was accepted for publication.

Love

My Perfect Wife, Her Perfect Son (Addison and Highsmith) was released in 2023. As soon as I received a copy, I paused all other reading and delved into the novel. The work did not disappoint. It is a novel, and thus, readers must expect to encounter the literary freedoms that this genre affords.

The novel is written in the first person. Joseph, Mary's husband, tells a story familiar to Christians, yet he does it from the perspective of a man whose life is not as extraordinary as his wife's or her son's. Joseph speaks as

a man who loves Mary and Jesus sincerely, yet struggles to comprehend the demands of that love.

“It invites the reader to ponder with Joseph what does it mean to live with Mary, a woman chosen by God”

Perhaps this is the novel's greatest achievement. It invites the reader to ponder with Joseph what does it mean to live with Mary, a woman chosen by God from eternity to be the mother of the Saviour of the world, and Jesus, God's Word made flesh.

“The Scriptures don't tell us whether Joseph ever came to terms with the experience of living with a perfect wife and her perfect son”

Prof. Benevento introduces us to a Joseph who must contend with the fact that he is an everyday human being, married to a woman adorned with many perfections to fulfil God's salvation plan, raising a son who is unlike any other child – starting with the way he was conceived.

Marriage

Mary and Jesus throughout the novel seem to have a good sense of God's will for them and about their roles in history. Joseph doesn't! He was not preserved from original sin. He does not enjoy any special knowledge of reality, except for what he hears in dreams.

In Prof. Benevento's novel, Joseph is attracted to Mary in the human ways that a regular husband is attracted to his wife. He loves her company, provides for her, seeks her affection and desires intimacy. He also quarrels with Mary and sometimes feels distant from her. Joseph is not devoid of humanhood.

“Although not a perfect father, Joseph does not appear as an absentee or disengaged one”

I have read a good number of books and short stories about Joseph that portray him in almost angelic ways. Many of these have been written by unmarried authors.

Prof. Benevento, who is married and a father of four children, has the audacity to tackle some topics that may

seem taboo when reflecting about the relationship between Joseph and Mary. He does it with care, creativity and faithfulness to the tradition.

In his relationship with Jesus, Prof. Benevento's Joseph teaches and mentors him as a father; he gets upset and distressed at certain behaviours. He corrects Jesus when necessary. As Jesus grows into adulthood, Joseph must learn to let go. Although not a perfect father, Joseph does not appear as an absentee or disengaged one.

The Scriptures don't tell us whether Joseph ever came to terms with the experience of living with a perfect wife and her perfect son. Prof. Benevento, however, imagines Joseph on his deathbed holding their hands with much gratitude and feeling “blessed ... perfectly blessed” because of them.

📌 Hosffman Ospino is professor of theology and religious education at Boston College.

Our ego is a great obstacle to holiness



Sr Anne Marie Walsh

It is hard to fathom that today's world does not want God. It mirrors the fundamental struggle of our individual souls, the battle between being self-centred and being centred in God and his presence in our lives and the life of the world.

Scott Barry Hoffman reported in the *Scientific American* that one study of a group of 10–12-year-olds found that being famous was their most popular future goal, above financial success, achievement, and community-centered goals. No mention was even made of spiritual goals.

But we don't have to look far to see what happens when we seek ourselves and our own glory over and above God. Hollywood and the world of sports abound with examples of lives that have been shipwrecked on the shoals of fame and notoriety.

In any case, the glory that we seek, whether in significant ways or smaller ones, can easily rob God of the honor and glory that are rightfully his. We did not give ourselves our gifts, talents, appearance, or physical abilities.

We are responsible for developing them in order to put them to the service God intended. But we're not the origin of the good that exists in us. God is.

Liddle

A beautiful way to think of our gifts and keep them rooted in the proper perspective is found in the life of Eric

Liddle. Mr Liddle was born in China to a Scottish missionary family and subsequently attended schools in London and Edinburgh.

He entered the 1924 Paris Olympics as a runner, but being a devout Christian, he refused to run on Sundays. This affected the events he was eligible for and effectively eliminated him from the 100-meter race in which he was favoured after having already set a British record that stood for the next 23 years.

“I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast. And when I run, I feel his pleasure”

He trained for and ran instead in the 400-meter race, which he won in a time (47.6 seconds) that remained unbeaten for the next 12 years. Right before the race, a team masseur handed him a message which read: “In the old book, it says: ‘He that honors me I will honor.’ Wishing you the best of success always.” It was a reference to 1 Samuel 2:30, which Liddell recognised immediately.

The film, *Chariots of Fire*, puts these words on the lips of Eric Liddle:

“I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast. And when I run, I feel his pleasure.”

As for his purpose, he said: “God made me for China”. He did not find his gift for running incompat-

“If you knew how quickly people in your life would forget about you after your death, you would not seek in your life to please anyone but God”

ible with the mission God gave him, but he did put the gift in its rightful place.

He returned to China as a missionary and ended his days in a Japanese internment camp near the end of WWII, expressing in his last words his complete ‘surrender’ to the Lord.

Without question, one of the greatest obstacles we have to holiness and becoming like Jesus is our own ego. Our spirit has to become like Our Lady's who magnifies the Lord and not herself. Or like John the Baptist, who understood how necessary it was that he decrease and the Lord increase.

Service

John Newton, Anglican minister and composer of the hymn ‘Amazing Grace’ illustrated the struggle and the remedy by looking to the angels.

“If two angels were to receive at the same moment a commission from God, one to go down and rule earth's grandest empire, the other to go and sweep the streets of its meanest village, it would be a matter of entire indifference to each which service fell to his lot, the post of ruler or the post of scavenger; for the joy of the angels lies only in obedience to God's will, and with equal joy, they would lift a Lazarus in his rags to Abraham's bosom, or be a chariot of fire to carry an Elijah home.”

Finally, it is worth remembering that human fame is fleeting. St. John Chrysostom reminds us:

“If you knew how quickly people in your life would forget about you after your death, you would not seek in your life to please anyone but God.”



Eric Liddle portrayed in *Chariots of Fire*.



Q: If, indeed, abortion is the Church's preeminent issue, then why don't we hear a pro-life petition as part of the Prayer of the Faithful at every Mass?

A: Many parishes do include a pro-life intention as part of the Prayer of the Faithful at Mass every week. However, it is true that including a pro-life intention is not a stated requirement. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (ie, the master universal ‘instruction book’ for how Mass is to be celebrated) tells us that: “The intentions announced (during the Prayer of the Faithful) should be sober, be composed with a wise liberty and in few words, and they should be expressive of the prayer of the entire community” (See GIRM 71). In a roundabout way, this paragraph of the General Instruction is letting us know that, unlike other prayers of the Mass such as the offertory or the consecration, the Prayer of the Faithful is meant to be somewhat more ‘free form’.

Although practically speaking there are Catholic publications that can provide parishes with suggestions for the various intercessions of the Prayer of the Faithful, the Church's law envisions each parish composing their own intercessions, so as to best express the actual intentions on the minds and hearts of the faithful in a given parish or diocesan community. Still, the General Instruction of the Roman Missal does give us some guidelines on what these intercessions should encompass. GIRM 70 indicates that:

“The series of intentions is usually to be: a) for the needs of the Church; b) for public authorities and the salvation of the whole world; c) for those burdened by any kind of difficulty; d) for the local community. Nevertheless, in any particular celebration, such as a Confirmation, a marriage, or at a funeral, the series of intentions may be concerned more closely with the particular occasion.” In light of these statements from the GIRM, my thought is that, if you are not hearing a specifically pro-life intention during the Prayer of the Faithful, this might be due to one of several reasons. First, it could be that other kinds

of intentions were seen as more pertinent to a given community or in a particular circumstance. For instance, it may be eminently appropriate to include a pro-life intention during the Sunday Masses at a Catholic chapel or Newman centre serving a secular university.

But it might not be as much of a pastoral priority to specifically pray for pro-life causes at the funeral Mass for the grandmother of a large and devout Catholic family, as this might be perceived as merely ‘preaching to the choir’ rather than offering a sincere prayer most relevant to the occasion. In more typical parish settings, perhaps the pro-life intention might be ‘hidden’ and implicit rather than explicit and obvious in a given intercession.

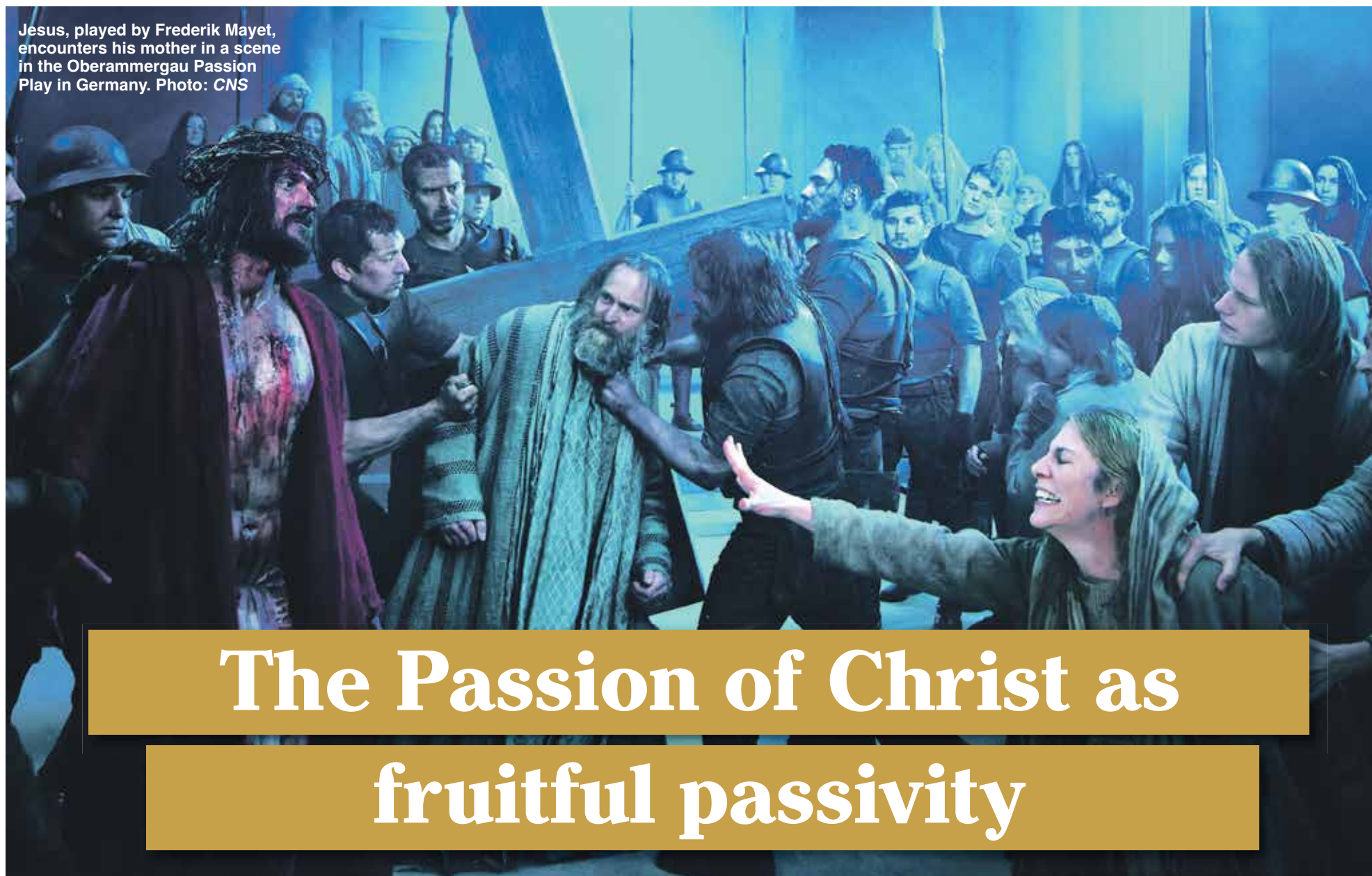
For example, an intercession ‘for public authorities’ to carry out their duties with a well-formed conscience might strongly imply that public leaders should do all they can to protect the sacredness of human life.

Or a prayer ‘for those burdened by any kind of difficulty’ might include women facing difficult pregnancy situations. Even without using the word ‘abortion’, such intercessions would still be supporting the Church's pro-life teachings. On a similar note, it's good to keep in mind that while being pro-life does certainly mean opposing the act of abortion, it goes well beyond that. A true pro-life stance means supporting vulnerable women, creating spaces where children and families are welcomed, appropriately catechising young people on the nature of sexuality and teaching them to form healthy relationships, and fostering a sense of the immeasurable worth and value of every human person.

It could be the needs of a community – and thus the specific wording of their intercessory prayers – are more focused on one of these more foundational pro-life concerns.

! Jenna Marie Cooper is a consecrated virgin and a canonist whose column appears weekly at *OSV News*. Send your questions to CatholicQA@osv.com.

Jesus, played by Frederik Mayet, encounters his mother in a scene in the Oberammergau Passion Play in Germany. Photo: CNS



The Passion of Christ as fruitful passivity

We speak of that section in the Gospels which narrates Jesus' life from the Last Supper until his death and burial, as chronicling his 'Passion'. On Good Friday, the lector begins the Gospel with the words: "The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ According to John".

Why do we call Jesus' suffering just before his death his passion?

Generally this is not properly understood. We tend to think that 'passion' here refers to intense sufferings, as in 'passionate suffering'. This isn't wrong but misses a key point.

Passion

Passion comes from the Latin, *Passio*, meaning passiveness, non-activity, absorbing something more than doing something. Hence, the 'Passion' of Jesus refers to that time in his life when his meaning for us is not defined by what he was doing but rather by what was being done to him. What's being said here?

The life and ministry of Jesus can be divided into two distinct parts: scholars estimate that Jesus spent about three years preaching and teaching before being put to death.

For most of that time, in fact for all of it except the last day, he was very much the doer, in command, the active one, teaching, healing, performing miracles, giving counsel, eating with sinners, debating with church authorities, and generally, by activity of every



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

sort, inviting his contemporaries into the life of God.

And he was busy, so pressured that at times he didn't have time to eat. For almost all of his public life Jesus was actively doing something.

However, from the time he walked out of the last supper room that activity stopped. He is no longer the one who is doing things for others, but the one who is having things done to him.

In the garden, they arrest him, bind his hands, lead him to the high priest, then to Pilate. He is beaten, humiliated, stripped of his clothes, and eventually nailed to a cross where he dies.

This constitutes his 'passion', that time in his life and ministry when he ceases to be the doer and becomes the one who has things done to him.

What is so remarkable about this is that our faith teaches us that we are saved more through his passion (his death and suffering) than through all his activity of preaching and doing miracles. How does this work?

Illustration

Allow me an illustration: some years ago, my sister Helen, an Ursuline nun, died of cancer. A nun for more than 30 years, she much loved her vocation and was loved within it.

For most of those 30 years, she served as a den-mother to hundreds of young women who attended an academy run by her order. She loved those young women and was for them a mother, an older sister, and a mentor.

As well, for the last 20 years of

her life, after our own mother died, she served in that same capacity for our family, organising us and keeping us together.

Through all those years she was the active one, the consummate doer, the one whom others expected to take charge. And she relished the role, was born for it. She loved doing things for others.

“That was her passion. She, who had spent so many years doing things for others, now had to submit to having things done to and for her”

Then, nine months before she died, cancer struck her brutally and she spent the last months of her life bedridden. Now things needed to be done for her.

Doctors, nurses, the sisters in her community, and others, took turns taking care of her. And, like Jesus from the time of his arrest until

the moment of his death, her body too was humiliated, led around by others, stripped, prodded, and stared at by curious passers-by.

Indeed, like Jesus, she died thirsty, with a sponge held to her lips by someone else.

That was her passion. She, who had spent so many years doing things for others, now had to submit to having things done to and for her.

But, and this is the point, like Jesus, she was able in that period of her life when she was helpless and no longer in charge, to give life and meaning to others in a deeper way than she could during all those years when she was active and doing so many things for others.

Mystery

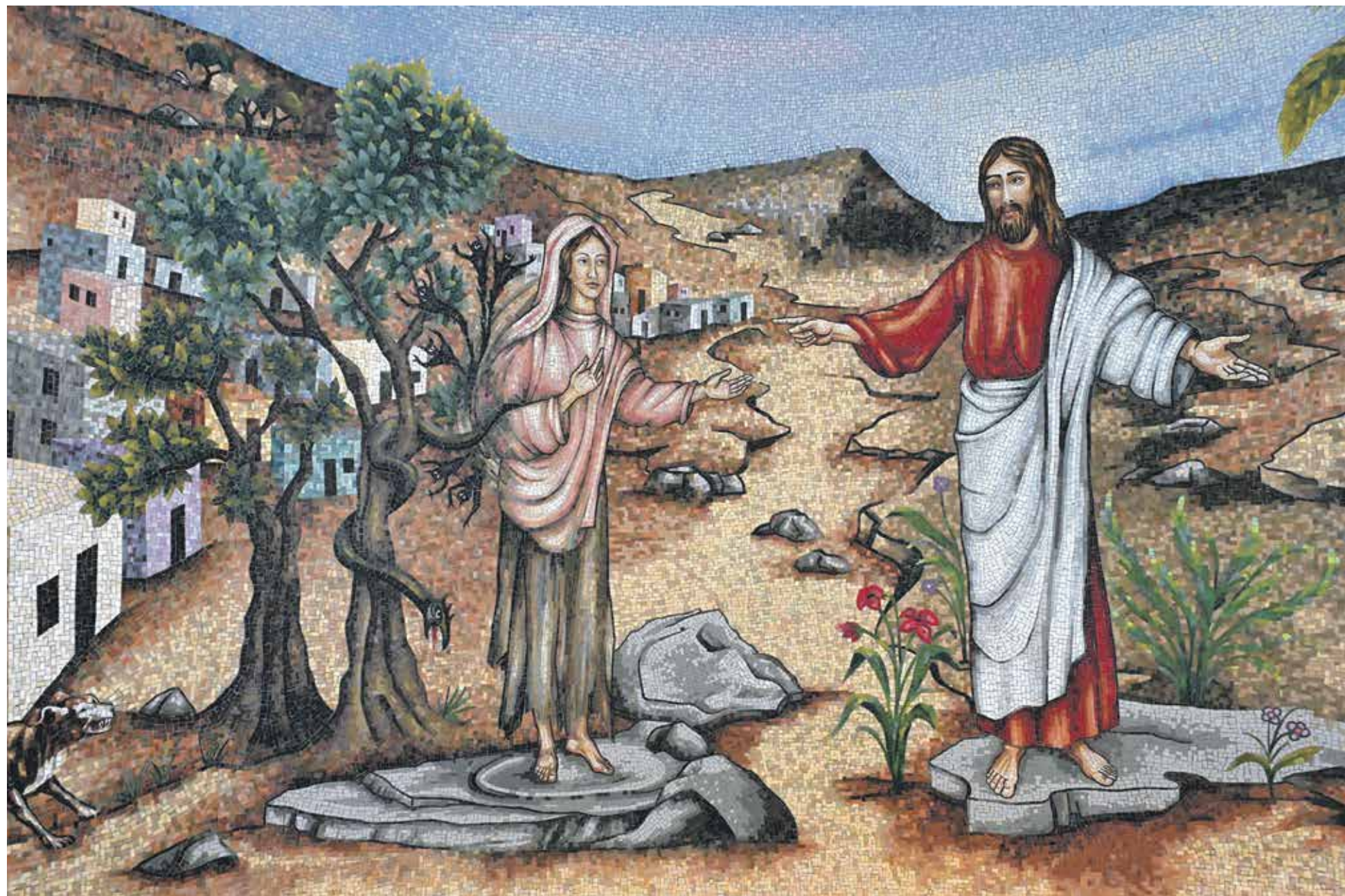
That is the mystery of the fruitfulness of passivity, of helplessness. And there's an important lesson here, not the least of which is the potential fruitfulness of the terminally ill, the severely handicapped, and the sick.

There's a lesson too on how we might understand what we have to give to others when we are ill, helpless, and in need of care from others.

The passion of Jesus teaches us that, like Jesus, we give as much to others in our passivity as in our activities. When we are no longer in charge, beaten down, humiliated, suffering, and unable even to make ourselves understood by our loved ones, we are undergoing our passion and, like Jesus in his passion, have in that the opportunity to give over our love in a very deep way.

“The passion of Jesus teaches us that, like Jesus, we give as much to others in our passivity as in our activities”

The greatest news in human history



Mary Magdalene and Jesus mosaic mural in a chapel in the Duc In Altum at Magdala, March 31, 2023. Photo: OSV News

Easter Sunday
Acts 10:34a, 37-43
Ps 118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23
Col 3:1-4
Jn 20:1-9

The Sunday Gospel

Deacon
Greg Kandra



‘Did you hear...?’ In our modern information-saturated age, those three little words say a lot. They sum up so much of how we live.

Face it: We are bombarded incessantly by news. Our phones buzz, cable news squawks, social media chirps and pings. There’s a lot going on out there. What are we missing? Almost nothing. It can be impossible to shield ourselves from the onslaught of stuff.

All of which should make us hear the Good News of Easter – really, the greatest news in human history – in a different way. What we realise, as we hear the proclamation of Christ’s Resurrection, is that we are hearing a phenomenal

story being told, news being spread, truth being shared, person to person.

And the message couldn’t be more clear.

Keep it going. Tell the story.

The reading from Acts sets the stage, with Peter standing before the world with an urgent announcement. He wastes no time and cuts to the chase: “You know what has happened all over Judea...”

From that moment, he proceeds to tell the story of the Christ in broad, bold outline – from John the Baptist all the way to Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Beginnings

Then the Gospel account of the Resurrection that we hear, likewise, gives us one solitary figure, Mary of Magdala, spreading the news: “She ran

and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, ‘They have taken the Lord from the tomb...’”

And so it starts. We see the very beginning of a story that will be told countless times, across every century, in every language imaginable – a story that began with an empty tomb in Judea and has spread now to every corner of the globe, in sprawling cities and humble villages, in grand cathedrals and huts that have dirt for a floor. We are only the latest to hear the story that is continuing to change the world.

This weekend, we hear how it began.

Intriguingly, the Gospel we hear at the Easter Vigil, from Mark, notes that the

“We do it by bearing witness to what Jesus taught and how he lived and how he died, and by standing in affirmation of that glorious Good News”

first news of the Resurrection came from an anonymous angel – serving, in a way, as a beautiful bookend to the Annunciation. What does the angel say? His directive is simple and clear: “Go and tell his disciples”.

“Maybe the great question we need to ask ourselves is: how well are we doing that?”

Don’t stay where you are. Don’t keep this to yourself. Go. Keep this going. Tell the story.

Now, over 2,000 years

later, we need to continue what others began. We need to go and tell the story – a story of miracles and suffering, of sacrifice and love, of redemption and hope. Easter morning, as we stagger out of church with ‘Alleluias’ ringing in our ears, maybe the great question we need to ask ourselves is: how well are we doing that?

If we are to tell the story, what are we doing to tell it?

Loving

The long, dry weeks of Lent served as a reminder to us of what the Christian story is about; fundamentally, it is about loving, and that loving is expressed by giving, to both God and to our neighbour.

That, I believe, is how we tell the story – how we pass it on to others and encourage them to pass it on, as well.

We do it with words and with gestures, but also with our lives. We do it by bearing witness to what Jesus taught and how he lived and how he died, and by standing in affirmation of that glorious Good News not just on Easter

Sunday, but every day of our lives.

One of the breathtaking messages of Easter, conveyed in the Scripture we hear, is this: the greatest story ever told is one we are charged with telling and retelling every day.

“The Gospel needs witness to keep it going”

The angel said it. Mary of Magdala listened and did what he said. It’s up to us to celebrate that and rejoice in what it all means – and continue what they began. The Gospel needs witness to keep it going.

We can’t keep it to ourselves.

So, go. Tell the story.

Deacon Greg Kandra is an award-winning author and journalist, and creator of the blog ‘The Deacon’s Bench’.

TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



Religious dramas range from razor sharp to theologically vapid

I've been catching up on a few TV drama series that have religious themes.

The best of the lot is **Kim's Convenience** (Netflix), a comedy about a Korean family running a convenience store in Toronto. The characters are believable and likeable, even the minor characters are very funny, particular the random customers, even if they only put in the briefest of appearances.

The script is razor-sharp and there are laugh-out-loud as well as emotional moments, but it never gets overly sentimental, never takes itself too seriously. The pace is sprightly – no scene gets prolonged.

It helps that the same duo, Ins Choi and Kevin White, write every show – it has a marvellous consistency across its five seasons, though as Season 5 progresses it gets more serious and less funny.

Mr and Mrs Kim attend the local Presbyterian church, and in the show religion is respected – seen as a natural part of the characters' lives though they sometimes fall short of the Christian ideals (like us all!).

Pastor Nina is a hilarious character, impossible to dislike though she transgresses – prompting a panic-stricken confession to God when, trapped in a lift, she fears a fatality. Predictably, the adult children aren't so enthusiastic about their parents' religious faith.

They engage in the loose



Kim's Convenience – a Netflix production

sexual behaviour typical of our age, and this is often treated rather lightly. In its scattershot way the show both sends up the excesses of wokery, with a kindness towards individuals. It is rarely if ever preachy, though there is some preachiness about the value of medicinal cannabis in one Season 5 episode.

It's hard to know what to make of **God's Favourite Idiot** (Netflix). It's a poor man's **Bruce Almighty** where God chooses an unlikely character to spread his message (what that is exactly actually is left unclear apart from vague platitudes).

The lead character Clark, played by the writer of the show Ben Falcone, is interest-

ing enough – a generous soul, but his sidekick Amely, played by Melissa McCarthy doing her usual bubbly schtick, is irritating. The minor characters are pretty bland, chosen, it looks like, more for racial and gender diversity rather than any inherent interest.

It could have been a genial if unremarkable show if it hadn't been for the gratuitous foul language. The theology, such as it is, is all over the place. The main characters, tasked with spreading the Good News, are 'sleeping together' though unmarried. You might have thought God would have an issue with that.

God appears in the show, as a kindly middle-aged woman, a bit like a divine Mrs

Doubtfire, though God makes the point that God can appear in many forms. Satan also appears a woman – young, nasty and quite violent. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse put in an appearance (sorry, 'horsepersons', as one is a woman) but seem confused about their role.

I'd suspect the show won't appeal to believers because of the factors mentioned and won't appeal to non-believers because there's so much belief in God in it.

Good Omens (Amazon Prime) visits similar territory. Based on the novel by Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman, Season 1 featured a struggle between an angel and a demon on earth until they both got fed of the battle

PICK OF THE WEEK

ON THE WATERFRONT

BBC Two Holy Saturday March 30, 2.30pm and BBC 4 Thursday April 4, 8pm

Oscar-winning drama. A one-time boxing hopeful learns about responsibility through his love for the sister of a murdered docker. Karl Malden plays a priest committed to social justice. Music by Leonard Bernstein.

URBI ET ORBI

BBC One and EWTN Sunday March 31, 11am, RTÉ One 11.45 am

Pope Francis' Easter Message 'to the city and the world' from St Peter's Basilica, Vatican City, with commentary and translation by Michael Kelly.

GARETH MALONE'S EASTER PASSION

BBC One Easter Sunday March 31, 11.30am

Gareth races to prepare his eight amateur singers for the biggest performance of their lives, taking on Bach's St John Passion alongside world-class professional singers and musicians.

between good and evil and opted for a quiet life in earth-bound obscurity.

That first season had some novelty value and featured two fine actors Michael Sheen and David Tennant, but the whole premise was silly and it ran out of steam. I wasn't too enthusiastic about seeing Season 2 but I endured two episodes in the line of duty!

The theologically incoherent plot this time features the Angel Gabriel turning up on earth with memory loss – John Hamm really hams it up in that role. Fearing some cataclysmic events the angel and the demon get together to protect him.

Beelzebub, breathing flies, is out to get him, while

in Heaven (an antiseptic whiter-than-white office building), the angel hierarchy is disturbed. The archangel Michael (a woman) looks suspicious. Sheen's angel tries to organise a lesbian relationship without batting a wing. Even in the line of duty life is too short to endure six hours of this.

Meanwhile, on Irish earth, it's more of a struggle between uninspiring and uninspiring as Leo Varadkar's T-shock announcement had Fine Gael seeking a new leader and the opposition parties seeking an election and new Government. I'm feeling 'harrised'.

Film

Pat O'Kelly



St Matthew's Passion brought to life

Over the past number of years the National Symphony Orchestra and Chorus have focussed their Holy Week concert on religious themes. This event normally takes place on Good Friday afternoon not, in my view, the ideal time as it clashes with the sacred liturgy in many churches and there are those who would like to attend both events.

This year's NSO/NSC programme brings Bach's substantial St Matthew Passion. The piece requires a double choir and orchestra as well as a boys' choir, several solo voices with instrumental accompaniment and an additional tenor acting as narrator

and a bass who takes the part of the Christ.

Bach's text comes from chapters 26 and 27 of St Matthew's Gospel in the Lutheran Bible with additional reflective verses written by one Picander, the pen name of Bach's Leipzig friend and librettist poet Christian Friedrich Henrici (1700-1764).

Henrici's wife, Elizabeth, was a godparent to Bach's 19th child, daughter Johanna Carolina (1737-1781). Besides Picander, Bach also used some verses by authors Salomo Franck (1659-1725) and Barthold Heinrich Brockes (1680-1747).

There is some doubt about the date of the first St Matthew performance but most

likely this took place on Good Friday, April 11, 1727 in Leipzig's St Thomas' Church. Given in two parts, separated by a lengthy homily, it made a long session of words and music.

The St Matthew is the second of Bach's two Passion settings that have survived – the other being that of St John, somewhat shorter than St Matthew but equally impressive. Bach is also known to have written a Passion, now lost, according to St Mark.

Several of the chorales that Bach used would have been familiar to the St Thomas' congregations as they had been in use there from the 1500s. Bach made a number of revisions to his St Matthew setting, the last of these dat-

ing from 1746.

From 1723 to the end of his life in 1750 Bach lived in Leipzig where he had been appointed Kantor at the Thomasschule following the death of the previous incumbent Johann Kuhnau (1660-1722). Bach's duties included providing music for the city's two major churches – St Thomas and St Nicholas – as well as for two of the smaller ones, St Peter and the New Church, or Neukirche, formerly a Franciscan friary.

A rule in the larger churches required a new motet or sacred cantata be sung every Sunday and this stipulation resulted in Bach's church music output being very considerable indeed. It

was also in Leipzig that he composed his masterpiece Passions of St John and St Matthew as well his Easter and Christmas Oratorios and Mass in B minor.

Before Leipzig, Bach had held several other posts as organist and choirmaster including prolific periods in Arnstadt, Mühlhausen, Weimar and Cöthen. In Weimar he served under Lutheran Duke Wilhelm Ernst (1662-1728) whose penchant for religious devotions aimed at maintaining the Church's ancient musical tradition. This was to Bach's advantage, as it gave him a very solid foundation for his own ecclesial compositions. Easter joy.



Johann Sebastian Bach

BookReviews

Peter Costello



Art and the creation of Christian memory

Peter Costello

Easter being the most important feast day in the Christian calendar has always attracted artists. Each incident of Holy Week from the Last Supper, the arrest in the garden, the trial before Pontius Pilate, the denials by Peter, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, the women at the empty tomb: each of these has been the subject of paintings by innumerable artists.

They have helped us all to realise what St Ignatius at the start of the Spiritual Exercises, called *viendo el lugar* – seeing the place, or more formally, what his expositors call ‘composition of place’.

Keeping in mind an image of say the Crucifixion, helps the meditation to deepen their sense of understanding.

For myself, I have a preference for the vast catalogue of paintings by the French-born painter Jacques Joseph Tissot (d. 1902), also known as James Tissot in England, covering the life and passion of Jesus in extraordinary detail.

On very many occasions I have chosen his images as providing the most appropriate illustrations for articles on these book pages.

Theology

But in art history this was not always the case. Tissot, working in the decades at the end of the 19th Century was originally a society painter; but a tragedy in his private life led him into a greater realisation of religion, and what became the mammoth task of his last years.

In his paintings he tried to recreate from what he thought to be the hardly changed daily life of Palestine the sights and scenes of the life of Jesus. He worked, so to speak, as an archaeologist or historian might.

But this was not always the

approach taken by painters in the Renaissance. For instance I have long been fascinated by Pietro Perugino's vast fresco, *The Delivery of the Keys* (1482), in the Sistine Chapel, showing Jesus bestowing on St Peter the symbolic keys of the kingdom of heaven, a key element in the Petrine claims of the Vatican.

Jesus and the apostles on this important occasion are presented as living in a stylised Renaissance city (perhaps inspired by Florence) with the piazza spread out behind filled with scenes of everyday life. (Perugino, by the way, was reputedly a man of little religion.)

“As a Christian, his was a medieval vision married to a totally modern style of art”

This makes quite a contrast to Tissot. But it also makes a different theological point about not about the Jesus of history as Tissot does, but the Christ of theology, showing that the events related in the New Testament were not just ‘in the past’ that they have a life and continuation in the life of today.

A similar idea possessed the British artist Stanley Spencer (died 1959). His large painting, done in the late 1920s, showing the Final Resurrection taking place in the cemetery of Cookham, the rural village he lived in.

He managed to also include, to generalise the humanity of the image, a group of African persons. (Spencer's religious views are explored in the two biographies about him, by Kenneth Pople (Collins) and Duncan Robinson (Phaidon), both still available.)

The theme, however modern the style, echoes much



The Delivery of the Keys, fresco by Pietro Perugino, Sistine Chapel, Rome.

“Keeping in mind an image of say the Crucifixion, helps the meditation to deepen their sense of understanding”

medieval art, both in carving and art work, showing the resurrection of the great and powerful in all their naked human fragility, including also senior Churchmen.

As a Christian, his was a medieval vision married to a totally modern style of art.

This, too, expounds a different theological point, that though we seem to live always in a temporal period we are, always, *sub specie aeternitatis*.

Significance

Of course, art historians these days do not always expound or explain the theology involved in these very different works of art. That kind of thing has nothing to do with art appreciation – or as carried out by tour guides, appreciation at all – but to a realm of private judgment. But this surely is to leave the visitor unenlightened about aspects of his work that were of central importance to the artist.

The importance of art to faith is perhaps not surprising given the long standing legend of the Church that the Apostle Luke was a painter. Indeed it is held by some that the imagery of many icons comes down to us from the style of the apostle.

But I have long suspected that if indeed he was a painter that he would have worked more in the style of the supremely human images of the Egyptian coffin art of the first centuries of the Christian era, which provide a calm settled idea of the people in the that time who were among the first Christians.

Given the part played by art in the creation of the memories and insights of their faith for Christians, this Easter holiday, a valuable adjunct to the attendance at Church ceremonies, might be a visit to an art gallery in search of the transcendental.



The Resurrection by J. J. Tissot

“The importance of art to faith is perhaps not surprising given the long standing legend of the Church that the Apostle Luke was a painter”

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.

A truly Catholic poet, with a uniquely modern voice

Pure Filth,
by Aidan Mathews
(Lilliput Press, €15.00 /
£13.00)

Thomas McCarthy

Few poets have written with the intensity and seriousness of Aidan Mathews; and fewer still have sustained that intensity over a career of five collections, six books of prose and six plays.

This heroic, wide ranging and always engaged achievement belies the poet's character which has seemed at all times evasive, ironic and otherworldly.

His books come to us like trails left by a nocturnal visitor who vanishes in the daylight, a Southside poetic badger, one of 'the Republic of Letters' oldest pretenders.' This badger-like creature thinks in this manner:

"In this, the ultimate asylum, all houses safe,
His emptiness escorts him through wide streets.

Now it is his turn, it is his hard-earned right

To wave to the women and children at the locked windows."

Crosshead

Covid-19 set him wandering empty streets and the core of this book is a series of pandemic poems, thoughtful and marvellous. The pandemic intensifies his isolation as it intensified everything in all of us, but it also drives him into the 'cloud'; that is the iCloud, the ether of our new technical universe.

Spotify, Google, Wikipedia, Snapchat, all bring both connection and anxiety, accompanying the poet in his family life as "I lay in a lithium pool of the Dead Sea", only to leave him "open-mouthed at last, to leave me breathless,/ My worry-beads, my rosary, my jailer's clutch of house-

keys...".

Death, funerals, weddings, love-making, childbirth, celebration and Communion, all come together in poem after poem in this dynamic, linguistically energetic book.

Like that great poet Paul Durcan, Mathews has always performed leaps and cartwheels of Thomistic thought, his mind racing before us, his genius both magnetic and compressed:

"Then the soft weather lifts,
tears like a Chekhov coquette:
All corsage and no corsetry.

This is it, then. The groundswell,
Lá Fhéile Bríde, greenery
Stealing her march on Britain..."

There is such power in those six lines, the quick associations and flawless line-breaks, the Irish bit, the soft weather as a national ally, and the compression of thought.

“Uncanny details elaborately juxtaposed, it’s all part of the Mathews method”

Here is our evasive poet both vigilant and watchful, a poet who recalls, remembers, analyses and simultaneously lays flowers at many graves. Thus, the dead are remembered always beautifully, whether it's a housekeeper clutching a pocket insurance book that will pay for her funeral, or the wise John Moriarty where "a sparrow sits on your shoe-lace,

a bright by-passer;" or a great-uncle, a priest whose brass cross was made from beaten bullet cases from the Great War. Uncanny details elaborately juxtaposed, it's all part of the Mathews method.

"The last time I stripped in front of a woman,/ She was a skin specialist", he writes in the poem 'In Praise of Older Men' – an ironic and hilarious poem on remembered locations of love where it always seemed to be "the 23 psalm and the 23 chromosome".

That juxtaposition of 'psalm' and 'chromosome' is pure Aidan Mathews. In the title poem 'Pure Filth' he reminds us that "Metaphysics took my mind off things/ Now I'm coming to my senses."

The irony of those two words together, 'pure' and 'filth,' words that might be bawled by a censoring monsignor, create a drama that is very much an Irish Catholic drama.

Crosshead

Complex and urbane, Mathews is one of the best living poets of Catholic atmospheres, a rare enough beast within Anglophone poetry. A fine private education and very sophisticated upper-class Catholic formation in early childhood have enriched his imagination and his work immeasurably.

This atmosphere is a dramatic joy for him, it enriches everything he writes and it gives that shock of recognition to any educated Catholic reader.

Yet, it's for the sheer joy of well written poetry, its drama and pleasure, that one should read *Pure Filth*. I am certain that this book will become one of the poetry collections of the decade.

How Christians have disputed the date of their salvation

Peter Costello

One of the curious facts of 2,000 years of Christian history is the readiness with which Christians will dispute their traditions and the dates appropriate to them, especially in relation to the nature, date and place of Easter, the most important date in the whole Christian calendar that is celebrated this weekend.

Historically, the most recent of such disputes centred on the introduction of the Gregorian Calendar.

The Gregorian calendar is the established method for fixing the date of Easter that was introduced by Pope Gregory XIII in the year 1582AD. It is based on the movement of the earth around the sun (which means it's a solar calendar) and includes leap years.

But it has to be kept in mind that dates of events in the New Testament have been uncertain from the time that the Asian scholar Dionysius Exiguus, writing in the 6th Century, was up to five years out (according to modern scholars) in placing the date of the birth of Jesus.

Initially this reformed calendar was used in Catholic states of Europe and their oversea colonies. The Orthodox tradition maintains the older Julian calendar. Indeed the Gregorian calendar was only introduced for civil matters in Greece itself in 1923.

When it was introduced into Britain in 1752 it caused great controversy – people demanding the return of their "lost 11 days". However, the Papal reform carried the day, and is now in global use, though for many purposes Orthodox cultures and Muslim states still retain their traditional systems.

Overall the calendar caused great controversy, and still does. But the essential reform the Pope introduced retains its central position, though over the centuries the controversy was intense. Hence in Ireland the Greek Easter will this year be celebrated 11 days later than the Catholic one.

But further back in time, the matter discussed in the North of England at the Synod of Whitby in 664 was of essentially of far greater import for Ireland.

This synod which directly affected the early Christian Church in Ireland, nowadays styled by many the 'Celtic Church'. At this date Ireland was still an independent entity, and not part of Britain or Scotland, its ecclesiastical authority resting in Armagh.

So strictly the decision made by a minor British king for a foreign Church had no relevance here. But things in these islands are never that simple.

A dispute to be decided by the king of Northumbria concerned the date of Easter, whether it should follow Rome or Alexan-

dria; and also the style of monastic tonsure, whether that too should follow an Eastern style, as in Ireland, or the habit of Rome. Irish missionaries in Britain had introduced the customs of Ireland to parts of that island.

The synod decided in favour of Rome though the matter was a little more complex. But it was a decision that affected England only; it did not, as is often said, mean the rejection of the Celtic church by Rome, the suppression of an independent Irish church.

Certainly Ireland saw itself as an adherent of Rome, though one where the influence of the East was plain to see.

This debate over Easter and the mode of tonsure was also taking place in Ireland, and in other places too, in recognition of the need to maintain nearly their received tradition from Apostolic times.

But over the coming centuries the increasing disputes of Rome and Byzantium lead to the Great Schism in July 1054.

It was an unhappy matter which might well have been better handled more diplomatically. But human nature being human nature, conflict all too easily arises over different opinions which move to differences of creed. Yet given the importance attached to Easter Christians might have tried to follow more closely the imperatives of the Gospel to love one another.



Poet Aidan Mathews

“It’s for the sheer joy of well written poetry, its drama and pleasure, that one should read *Pure Filth*”

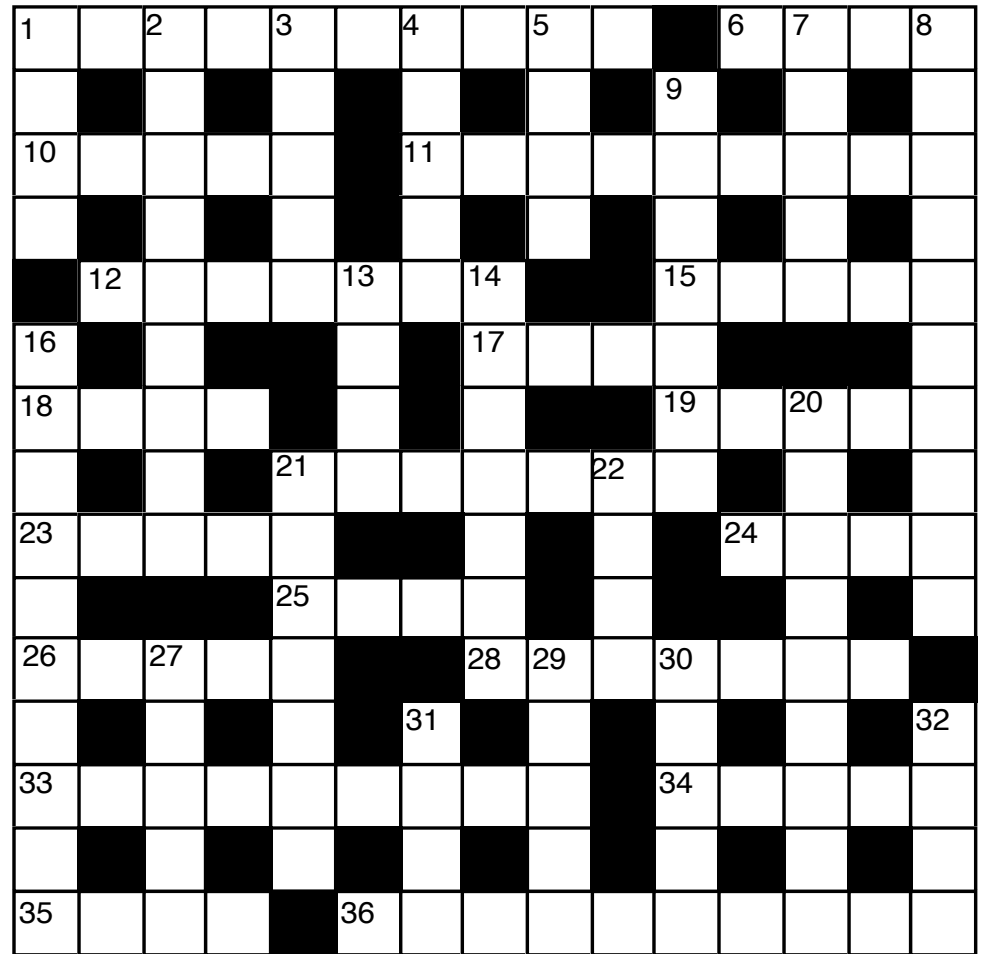
Leisure time

Crossword

Gordius 656

Across

- 1 Your own selection of sweets (4,3,3)
- 6 Talon (4)
- 10 Concerning the kidneys (5)
- 11 A change to the constitution (9)
- 12 What a conceited person may be said to have (3,4)
- 15 Perfect (5)
- 17 Prince in an opera by Borodin (4)
- 18 Hatchets (4)
- 19 Chemical element - one of the noble gases (5)
- 21 It's used to make porridge (7)
- 23 Retains (5)
- 24 Bazaar (4)
- 25 Spin a coin (4)
- 26 Sacrificial table (5)
- 28 Unhealthily thin (7)
- 33 Early Christian Irish monument (4,5)
- 34 Watchful (5)
- 35 Uncommon (4)
- 36 In a negligent way (10)



Down

- 1 Pig meat (4)
- 2 Insect with many legs (9)
- 3 The God of Islam (5)
- 4 A play (5)
- 5 Wild goat (4)
- 7 City in Belgium (5)
- 8 One who brings down the mood of a party (3,7)
- 9 High-ranking naval officer (7)
- 13 Volcano in Sicily (4)
- 14 Remove from employment (7)
- 16 Slice of bacon (4,6)
- 20 What golfers may be charged to play (5,4)
- 21 The world's largest bird (7)
- 22 Attest (4)
- 27 Big cat (5)
- 29 Indian social group (5)
- 30 Heedful (5)
- 31 Meditative exercise (4)
- 32 Remain (4)

SOLUTIONS, MARCH 21

GORDIUS No. 655

Across

- 1 Compliment 6 Utah 10 Bonus 11 Soap opera 12 Baptism 15 Curve 17 Axle 18 Oats 19 Rates 21 Bracken 23 Pence 24 Anon 25 Ride 26 Tiber 28 Dormice 33 Boomerang 34 Drove 35 Eddy 36 Stonemason

Down

- 1 Cube 2 Manhattan 3 Liszt 4 Moses 5 Neat 7 Their 8 Heaven-sent 9 Concern 13 Ivor 14 Marched 16 Hospitable 20 Tenacious 21 Berries 22 Ewer 27 Broad 29 Organ 30 Madam 31 Past 32 Vein

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VACANCIES

MARY ADELAIDE MACNAMARA HOME TRUST APARTMENTS AT BERYSTEDE LEESON PARK DUBLIN 6.

The Trust provides accommodation in one-bedroom apartments for ladies over 50 years of age of the Roman Catholic Faith of limited means living in Dublin. The present contribution to services is €350 per month. Application Forms can be obtained from O'Keeffe & Moore Solicitors 6 Merrion Square Dublin 2 or Phoning **087-2482533**.

Sudoku Corner

526

Easy

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

Hard

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

Last week's Easy 525

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

Last week's Hard 525

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

Notebook

Fr Martin Delaney



Irish missionary who was shot twice at close range

In the week leading up to St Patrick's Day two men died. One you have heard a lot about, the other you probably heard nothing about. Neither man knew each other but both had something of a link with our parish in Rathdowney and more importantly both men had been inspired by the legacy of St Patrick in Ireland.



The late journalist Charlie Bird pictured on Crough Patrick.

The first man is Charlie Bird. Back in 2016, Charlie accepted an invitation to launch a book on the lives of all the priests and religious, native to our parish, who have worked in every corner of the world. On the face of it Charlie was an unlikely candidate to launch such a book because by his own admission he was not a particularly religious man in the formal sense. However, the reason we invited Charlie and the reason he readily agreed was because for many years he had spoken about his admiration for the work of Irish missionaries around the world. The only precondition Charlie placed on accepting the invitation to launch the book was that he was not paid a single penny for doing it.

Philippines

Charlie's interest in the work of Irish missionaries dates back almost 40 years when, for his first international story as an RTÉ

reporter, he went to the Philippines to cover the story of Fr Niall O'Brien, the Irish Columban missionary who was facing a trumped-up murder charge. Some years ago, Charlie produced and presented a short video on the work of Irish missionaries in various countries. At the launch of that video Charlie commented: "The one thing that struck me forcefully when I covered the story of Fr Niall O'Brien all those years ago was the commitment of the Irish missionaries to the cause of 'social justice' and to be seen to be standing side by side with the oppressed... In the 30 years since, as a reporter in RTÉ, in many places where I went, I met remarkable Irish missionary priests and nuns doing remarkable things, and they did it away from the glare of

publicity, away from their families and their homes."

Fr William Banda

The second man who died was Fr William Banda. He was a 37-year-old Zambian missionary working in Tzaneen in South Africa. William was a member of the St Patrick Missionary Society in Kiltegan. The parish where Fr William worked was where our parish sister in Rathdowney, Anita O'Leary ministered for nine years before coming to live here with us. When Anita worked there William was a student studying for the priesthood. On Wednesday morning March 13, Fr William was preparing to celebrate Mass when a man, who had sat beside him for the morning prayer earlier, drew a gun and shot the priest twice at close range in his neck and his head killing him instantly. Fr William is the latest in a line of over a hundred priests and religious attached to Irish missionary congregations who have been killed in the course of their work.

Through the work of both Charlie Bird and Fr William Banda we have been made more aware of the incredible lives and ministry of missionaries whose faith and inspiration has its roots here in Ireland. We acknowledge the vital

role Patrick played in planting those initial seeds of faith in our land. Fr William chose to join the missionary congregation named for Patrick. When Charlie Bird wanted to raise awareness and funds to help those like himself with motor neurone disease, he chose to climb Crough Patrick.

As we enter these Easter days we think again of Patrick and how he defiantly lit that Paschal fire on the hill of Slane to celebrate Christ's resurrection. It is a flame of faith which has continued to burn in the hearts of generations of Irish women and men. Long may it continue to do so.

An Easter Prayer

Thanks be to you, God known in a body
Who blessed as he lived,
Who raised up our lives
To be gathered as one,
Reaching out for the kingdom.
Born of Mary, he shares our life.
Eating with sinners, he welcomes us.
Guiding his children, he leads us.
Visiting the sick, he heals us.
Dying on the cross, he saves us.
Risen from the dead, he gives us new life.

The work must go on...

"Two Irish lads were working for the local county council. One lad would dig a hole and the other lad would follow him and fill the hole in. They worked up along one street and then down the other. They then moved to the next street and did the same, working flat out all day without stopping. One lad digging the holes, the other lad filling them in. A passerby saw what they were doing and was amazed at the hard work but couldn't understand what they were at. So, he shouted over to the lad digging the holes, 'I don't get it - why do you dig a hole, only for the other lad to fill it in?' The lad wiped his brow and sighed deeply, 'Well, I suppose it probably does look a bit odd. You see, we're normally a three-man team. But today the lad who plants the trees phoned in sick.'"



YOUR EASTER GIFT TO OUR RISEN SAVIOUR

HELP TRAIN A YOUNG MAN FOR THE LITTLE WAY MISSIONARY PRIESTHOOD IN MYANMAR

The Little Way Missionary Priests of St Therese were founded in Myanmar by Archbishop Mang Thang with the assistance of the late Miss Mary Doohan, founder of The Little Way Association. There are now 27 LWM priests, six major seminarians and 77 minor seminarians in various dioceses in Myanmar. Two LWM priests are now serving in Cambodia and four in Papua New Guinea, in tribal areas. Our Association has funded the Little Way Priests since their inception, especially with the costs involved in training and maintaining them as seminarians, paying for food, medical aid, clothing, housing and other needs.

It costs approximately €84 a month (€1,000 per year) to feed and educate a student for the priesthood.



We wish all our friends and benefactors a very happy and blessed Easter.

A NOVENA OF MASSES FOR YOUR INTENTIONS

We are arranging for a Novena of Masses to be offered for your intentions during Eastertide as a mark of gratitude for your kindness and support.

May Our Risen Saviour bring you His richest blessings, peace and joy.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO VOLUNTEER AT OUR THERESIAN HOUSE IN KNOCK?

The work involves general house-keeping duties, providing guests with a light breakfast, prayer and welcoming pilgrims. If this work appeals to you, and you could offer one month of your time, please write to Maria Gracar at the address in the coupon, giving details, experience and a contact telephone number.

Email: contact@littlewayassociation.com

The great majority of young men who come forward to offer their lives to God, and His people, come from poor families. Their parents do not have the means to support them financially.

These young men are Myanmar's future priests, carrying the Gospel and message of Christ's love to people who would otherwise have little or no opportunity of hearing it. His Grace asks you urgently, our faithful supporters, for any donation you can send this Easter to help with the heavy costs involved in training and supporting a seminarian for the priesthood.

Archbishop Nicholas and our Little Way Missionary Priests of St Therese remember all Little Way friends and benefactors every day in their prayers and Masses. On their behalf, we appeal to you wholeheartedly this Easter for ANY gift, large or small, you can send us. They will be forever grateful to you. Please pray for them, for Myanmar and for all its people, in the ongoing conflict.

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

THE LITTLEWAY ASSOCIATION
Sacred Heart House, 119 Cedars Rd, Clapham Common, London SW4 0PR
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€..... **MASSES** (please state no.)

We ask for a minimum of €6.50 or more for each Mass

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