

The Irish Catholic

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Number of female religious in Ireland halves in 20 years

Ruadhán Jones

The future of religious life in Ireland is at a "turning point" as the number of women religious on the island of Ireland has halved in the last 20 years.

There were 9,031 women religious on the island of Ireland at the turn of the millennium, but in the last 20 years that has declined to just 4,494. This marks a decline of 50.2%.

The diocese of Cork and Ross saw the sharpest decline in the number of women religious at almost 90%, falling from 690 women religious in 2000 to 70 in 2020.

It was followed by Down and Connor in the North (78%), Kerry (68%) and Achonry (63%).

Dublin Diocese saw the largest drop numerically, down 1,180 to 1,739 women religious, a fall of 40%. The north-western diocese of Raphoe saw the lowest numerical decline (37), but this was still down 57% since 2000.

Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilnefora saw the lowest decline of just 17.6%, with 14 dioceses facing a decline of more than half in the last 20 years.

This is according to the most recent figures from the 26 dioceses on the island of Ireland. Half of the

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Love is in the air...



Jack Kelly, Amanda Kelly, Séimhín Ór Ní Dhomhnaigh and Jesse Lezama enjoy the annual Youth 2000 St Valentine's Ball at the Galway Bay Hotel, Co. Galway, on Sunday, January 12.

SR MIRIAM JAMES HEIDLAND

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Number of women religious in Ireland halves in 20 years

» Continued from Page 1
figures relate to 2021 and so include the effects of the first year of covid.

However, the figures from the other dioceses relate to pre-Covid times and so are expected to drop further once updated statistics are released.

Religious orders were hit hard by the virus, particularly for retired members in nursing homes.

The decline highlights the "very uncertain" future for women religious in Ireland, according to an Irish historian.

"It's very uncertain, the future for female religious life in Ireland, in Europe, across the globe, but particularly in Western Europe," Dr

Bronagh Ann McShane told *The Irish Catholic*. "We're at a turning point," she added.

Dr McShane, a historian at the University of Limerick, said that there is a "difficult legacy" to be addressed in the scandal of institutional abuse.

However, she continued, it would be a "shame" if that's the major story told, given the work done by women religious in schools, hospitals, hospices and more.

Many sisters continue to work quietly in these fields, either as volunteers or as employees of the State and Church in Ireland.

In many cases, these sisters are and will soon have to retire with few professed women to take their place.

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Michael Kelly's Editor's Comment will return next week

Baroness Nuala O'Loan calls for cross-border inquiry into Omagh Bombing

Ruadhán Jones

Former Northern Ireland Police Ombudsman Baroness Nuala O'Loan has called for an inquiry into the Omagh Bombing in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Ms O'Loan said that there can be "absolutely no doubt" that a full public inquiry in Ireland "is a necessary complement to the UK inquiry" announced two weeks ago.

The Minister for Justice Simon Harris has said the Irish Government will look at what action is required on its part.

The Omagh bombing was the biggest single atrocity of the Troubles, with 29 people dying after the bombing in the Co. Tyrone town on August 15, 1998. Bereaved families have been campaign-

ing for an inquiry for more than a decade.

Writing in *The Irish Catholic*, Ms O'Loan said that while there "seems to be no legal mechanism for a cross-border inquiry, simultaneous inquiries on both sides of the border should be able to provide answers to some at least of the outstanding questions".

She added that this "would be in the interests of the families who died and those who were injured" as well as being in the public interest.

"Readiness to pursue the search for truth is one of the hallmarks of good government," Ms O'Loan said.

She warned that, when the terms of reference for the UK inquiry are established, it is "vital" that they are "sufficiently wide".

The terms should "allow examination of all information and intelligence which may have related to the Omagh bombing and those who planned and executed it, and how that information was dealt with, so that informed decisions can be made."

"It will be most important that provision is made to assure the public that when 'the protection of national security' is used to prevent information coming into the public domain, the issues are being properly dealt with," Ms O'Loan added.

As Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, Ms O'Loan carried out an investigation into the events prior to the bombing and the RUC's response to them to see if the bombing could have been prevented.

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Bishops praise 'frank' European synodal assembly

Staff reporter

As the European synodal assembly closed on Sunday, the gathered bishops praised the "frank" and respectful dialogue between bishops, priests, consecrated and lay men and women.

Archbishop of Armagh Eamon Martin along with 13 other delegates from the island of Ireland attended the European assembly from February 5-12.

In their final remarks released on February 14, the bishops "rejoiced" at the fruitful dialogue and listening, saying they are an "unmistakable sign of our unique belonging to Christ".

"As a fruit of this synodal experience, we bishops are committed to keep living and promoting the synodal process in our diocesan structures

and life," the bishops said.

"We thank those who have shared their experiences frankly and with respect for different sensitivities."

In the closing remarks of the whole assembly, a number of key themes from the European gathering were identified.

These included: a need to address the question of an all-ministerial Church; to take "concrete and courageous decisions on the role of women within the Church to consider the 'tensions around the liturgy'; and to renew a "lively sense of mission, bridging the gap between faith and culture".

A working document for the continental stage was drafted and will be part of the global Synodal Way, which culminates in two meetings of the bishops in Rome in October 2023 and in 2024.

Finding hope...



Veteran RTE journalist Charlie Bird, who has been at the forefront of raising awareness of and funds for Motor Neurone Disease since his diagnosis, visits Focus Ireland founder Sr Stanislaus Kennedy where she presented him with a copy of her new book *Finding Hope*, published by Columba Books. Sr Stan dedicated the book to Mr Bird "for his inspiration, positivity and courage in facing and living with Motor Neurone Disease". Mr Bird was also a contributor to the book along with the Dalai Lama, Adi Roche, several politicians and members of media and society. Photo: John McElroy

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Accord data reveals strong demand for Catholic marriage this Valentine's

Jason Osborne

Accord has released its latest attendance figures for couples undertaking Sacramental marriage preparation courses throughout Ireland.

The 2022 figure of 4,610 couples hosted through 297 marriage preparation programmes is equal to 2019's pre-pandemic figure of 4610 couples hosted at 285 programmes.

Speaking at St Valentine's shrine in the Carmelite church on Whitefriar Street Monday, Director of Accord CLG, Mr Tony Shanahan said that "it is reassuring to see that attendance figures for Accord marriage preparation courses are back up to their pre-Covid levels".

Report

"When we consider that, for 2021, the Central Statistics Office reported that religious ceremonies accounted for 57% of all marriages in the State; and that the 6,721 Catholic marriages that year amounted to 39% of the total figure, then Accord's data of today paints a positive picture in

terms of the numbers who are planning a Church marriage in the future," he said.

The 2022 figures revealed that over half (59.27%) of those getting married are between the ages of 31-40, while the next biggest age category is those between 21-30 at 28.79%.

“It is reassuring to see that attendance figures for Accord marriage preparation courses are back up to their pre-Covid levels”

This came after Bishop Denis Nulty of Kildare and Leighlin blessed engaged couples Orla Gavin and Patrick Corcoran, and Ilona Catharine Dorrepaal and Patrick Michael Lennon at the shrine of the holy relics of St Valentine in the same church.

Couples

Welcoming the couples to the Shrine of St Valentine, Bishop Nulty said, "celebrating the Sacrament



Engaged couple Ilona Catherine Dorrepaal and Patrick Michael Lennon at the shrine of St Valentine on Monday where they had a blessing from Bishop Denis Nulty. Photo: John Mc Elroy

of marriage is a profound decision in the life of a couple."

"Our two couples represent the many couples across this island who will celebrate the Sacrament and thereby connect their

love for one another to the source of love, who is God. A Sacrament is like the 3-D glasses we watch movies with; love is not just between the couple themselves, but firmly united with God."

Call for Northern Ireland Churches to join fight against exclusion zones

Staff reporter

With the law to create exclusion zones around abortion clinics receiving Royal Assent February 6, pro-lifers have vowed not to take the measure "lying down".

This comes after a priest in England faced criminal charges for praying for free speech outside an abortion clinic after business hours.

At least two others have faced charges for violating a buffer zone at an English abortion clinic since the

law was introduced.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Bernadette Smyth of Precious Life said that "this will affect our freedom to pray, our freedom to impart our religion, so there has to be a real challenge even from the Churches".

"I would be very keen to see the main Churches here in Northern Ireland become more involved because the reality of this is that this is the beginning of an infringement on our freedom of our expression and our fundamental right to impart our religion," Ms Smyth said.

With the exclusion zones set to become law from May 7 in Northern Ireland, Ms Smyth described the cases in England as "test cases" for Northern Ireland.

"It really has to be challenged. What's happening in the UK is we're seeing test cases. These will challenge the courts, and the test cases will give us even more ammunition to use in our battle because we actually are introducing them," she said.

"We're not going to take it lying down. We're really going to fight it the whole way."

Clonfert diocese opens consultation on patronage

Ruadhán Jones

Clonfert diocese has opened a consultation on the future of Catholic secondary level education in Ballinasloe, Co. Galway.

The consultation reflects the "rapidly changing education landscape" and has "no pre-determined

outcome", the diocese said in a statement.

Second level education in Ballinasloe is currently provided by two schools under the patronage of Clonfert and CEIST (Catholic Education, an Irish Schools Trust).

The two patrons have agreed that it is an "opportunity time" to collaborate

with the two schools, St Joseph's College, Garbally, and Árdcoil Mhuire, "to explore together current and future Catholic post-primary educational provision in Ballinasloe and surrounding areas".

The schools are "an integral part of a deeply valued and rich historical tradition", according to the

statement.

The diocese said that it wants "to hear what local education partners and the parents of future post-primary students have to say about the future of Catholic" second level education in the region.

The process will be guided by an independent facilitator, Mr Frank Smith.

JOE WALSH TOURS



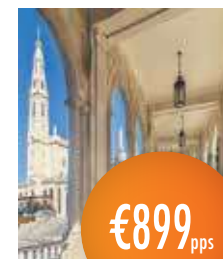
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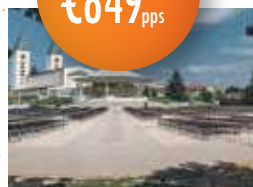
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Former RTÉ presenter praises Bro. Kevin as a 'living saint'

Jason Osborne

Lined up to narrate the Concerts in Aid of the Capuchin Day Centre for the Homeless, former RTÉ presenter Aonghus McAnally has described Brother Kevin Crowley as a "living saint" and the work of the Capuchin Day Centre as more vital than ever.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper about the event and its cause, Mr McAnally said that the work done by the Centre is "critically important" and that homelessness could afflict anyone at the moment but for "the grace of God".

"I've been very impressed with the work they've done over a long number of years," Mr McAnally said, adding that he was "quite taken by his [Bro. Kevin's] humility and his enthusiasm at such a great age and his selflessness," upon meeting him.

With homelessness a bigger problem than ever, Mr McAnally said that what he's "so impressed by" is the "char-



Bro. Kevin Crowley (centre) is pictured with Bro. Declan O'Callaghan, and Bro. John Manley, February 2. Photo: David Creedon

ity and the love and the affection for every human being," that makes use of the Capuchin Day Centre.

"The notion that nobody is ever asked at the door of the Day Centre - you don't need a card to get in - if you arrive there, you're treated with dignity," he said.

With the footage of the humanitarian disaster unfolding in Turkey and Syria being widely broadcast, Mr McAnally said that it highlights the importance of work done by charities like the Capuchin Day Centre and people like Bro. Kevin.

"They are, I mean, Bro. Kevin I would say is a living saint. When you see goodness, the epitome

of goodness in somebody like Bro. Kevin, it just hits you like a blinding flash of light," he said.

Mr McAnally said that his hope for the event is that when people see the tribute to St Padre Pio on the screen at the concert and they hear the Gospel music provided, they feel inspired to remain involved in charitable efforts.

The Concerts in Aid of the Capuchin Day Centre for the Homeless will take place on Saturday March 11 at the National Concert Hall, Sunday, March 12 at the Cork Opera House and Thursday, March 16 at UCH Limerick.

Pioneer Association goes global with website change

Ruadhán Jones

The Pioneer Association is setting its eyes on the international scene, changing their website's address to reflect the growing interest abroad.

The lay Catholic association, founded in Ireland 125 years ago, will change its website address from '.ie' to '.org' as global interest has surged, spiritual director Fr Robert McCabe told *The Irish Catholic*.

Speaking ahead of the RTÉ Mass for Temperance Sunday, January 19, Fr McCabe said

"the future of the pioneers is not necessarily in Ireland."

"We are getting requests from Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and the like for the spiritual response the pioneers offer to people in recovery.

"It's being very much sought for in those countries, as well as in Scotland, the United States, England and some from Australia as well," Fr McCabe continued.

A new setting of the serenity prayer composed by Ephrem Feeley will be sung by Schola St Joseph from Mercy Secondary School dur-

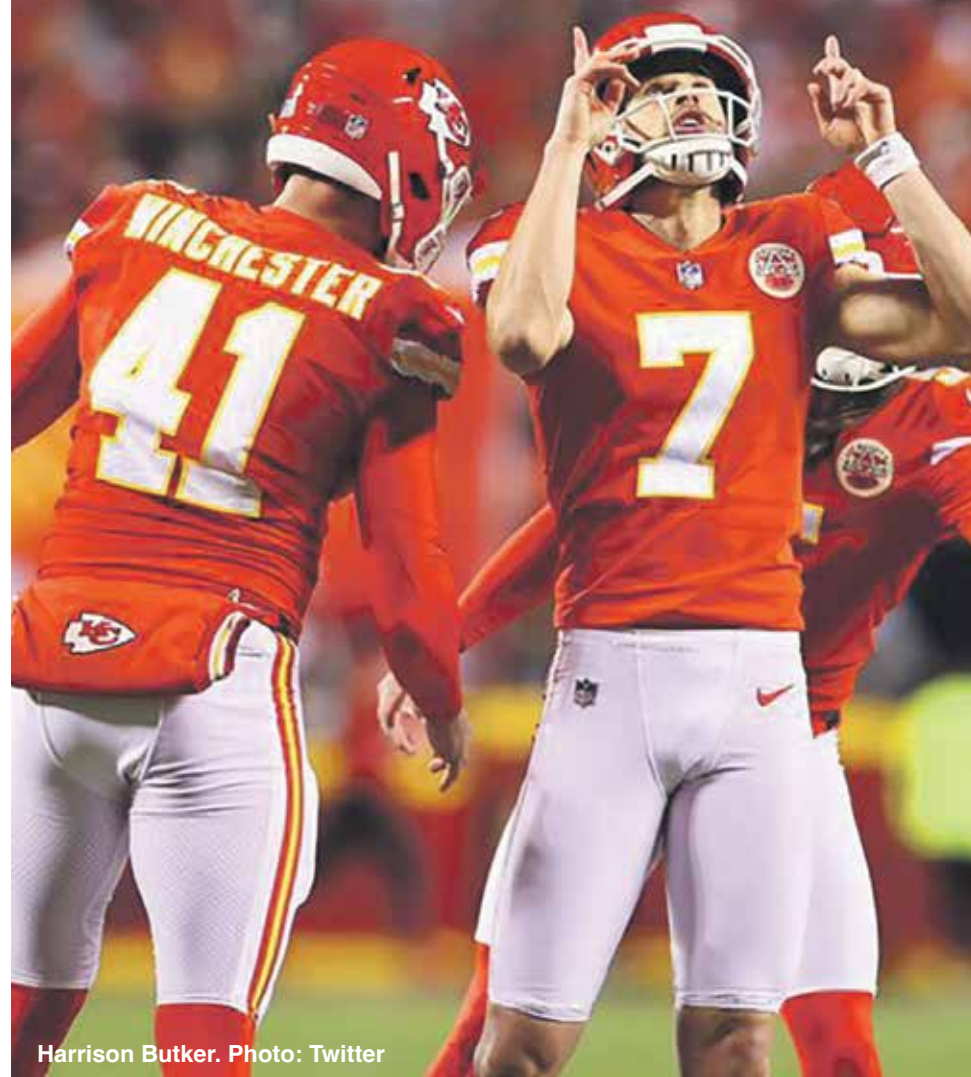
ing the RTÉ Mass.

Fr McCabe also urged the pioneers to show a "synodal spirit" to those suffering from or recovering from an addiction ahead of Temperance Sunday.

"I'm asking pioneers that when they arrange social gatherings, they no longer just arrange them for pioneers," he said.

"I would like people made welcome at the social gatherings who have been through a journey from addiction to sobriety. We need to learn from them."

American footballer sports scapular during Super Bowl win



Harrison Butker. Photo: Twitter

Staff reporter

The game-winning kick in Sunday's Super Bowl was made by devout Catholic Harrison Butker, who used the opportunity to praise God.

Many on social media noticed that during the game he was wearing a brown scapular around his neck.

The score stood at an even 35-35 with just seconds remaining in the game, when Mr Butker kicked the field goal to seal the result for

the Kansas City Chiefs in a victory over the Philadelphia Eagles, 38-35.

The 27-year-old is a well-known Catholic, frequently speaking out about the importance of the Faith.

Speaking to the Catholic News Agency in 2022, Mr Butker spoke of his love for the Catholic Faith: "I think it really entices a lot of young people who are looking for answers. They're looking for happiness. And for me, I found happiness in embracing the Faith offered in the Catholic Church."



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Now there is a diagnosis for us ‘giddy goats’...

I don't mean to sound flippant about a mental disorder, but it does rather seem that everyone who is anyone is claiming to have, or has been associated with, the condition known as ADHD – Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

Celebrities who are listed as having ADHD include Justin Timberlake, Richard Branson, Bill Gates, the socialite Paris Hilton, the swimmer Michael Phelps, the rapper will.i.am, Ant McPartlin, Rory Bremner and Jamie Oliver. I've recently encountered several adults who have decided to get themselves tested for ADHD (the cost of a private test would be in the region of £360/€400).

Manifests
ADHD usually manifests itself before the age of 12, and indeed, I am convinced that I had this undiagnosed condition as a child and young person. The symptoms include: inability to concentrate, impulsive behaviour, restlessness, trouble with organising and tidying, lack of focus



Mary Kenny

or, its contrary, hyperfocus, temper, and sometimes addiction problems.

Conditions
I had nearly all these conditions when young, and some I retained into middle age, and later. Inability to organise my surroundings is certainly one of them: a cousin of mine once said “Mary, you only have to enter a room to make it look untidy.” Fair comment!
I had a boyfriend who used to take me to the opera, but he complained, every time, that I was a “vile fidget”, as I couldn't sit still in the seat (granted, Wagner can be trying even for the most tranquil of personalities).
I've been thrown out of choral singing groups because of this hyper-active behaviour, which upset the concentration of others.
As a youngster, I'd do nearly anything for a dare – run across parapets, swim

through whirlpools, jump into cars with complete strangers.
Back in the day, such conditions weren't clinically diagnosed – and it's still claimed that many adults live with undiagnosed ADHD. The nuns of my convent school had their own word for restless, untidy, impatient and impulsive pupils: “giddy-goats”.
With the passage of time, many of these symptoms have calmed down. I'm still inclined to be fidgety at times, but I've become better at concentrating on a subject that needs focus. I've come to understand that self-discipline is something that serves order, and order, in the end, makes life less panic-stricken.
If I have this condition, I've learned to live with it, and indeed, to learn from it; to be aware of my limitations, and to know how to manage them.

Family face off

Dame Prue Leith may be a familiar TV face to viewers of the cooking programme *The Great British Bake-Off*. Prue, 82, is also a campaigner for legalising assisted dying – while her son, Conservative MP and evangelical Christian Danny Kruger, is an opponent. They've been making a TV programme about the issue being broadcast this past week (with the somewhat facetious title of *Prue and Danny's Death Road Trip*).
Mr Kruger, 48, is a thoughtful parliamentarian, who says that his political career at Westminster has been held back by his being a practising Christian, since it's “not fashionable” in the corridors of power these days. Perhaps it never was. Perhaps the Christian's duty is to stand up against what is

merely fashionable?
Dame Prue – a genial person to meet – holds generally secular views. She is also an active campaigner for global adoption. So many children are languishing in institutions or state care, she points out – and their chances of adoption are being obstructed by time-consuming over-regulation (though correct procedures do need to be followed). But the longer a young child waits for an adoptive family, the less likely that a successful adoption will ensue.
Her own husband, John Playfair, was adopted in the most informal circumstances, back in the 1940s. A local GP, delivered a single mother who couldn't keep her baby; he also knew a childless couple looking to adopt, so he just matched them up. It all worked out, and



Dame Prue Leith of *The Great British Bake-Off* is now also a campaigner for legalising “assisted dying”. years later, John met his birth mother, contentedly resettled in America.
Besides her biological son, Prue also has an adopted daughter, Li-Da, born in Thailand, and Li-Da, too, has an adopted child. An interesting family pattern.

● Steven Spielberg's latest film *The Fabelmans* is a lightly disguised story of his early family life. It's also been seen as a portrayal of the devastating impact that parental divorce can have on children – even where the parental separation is carried out sensitively and with respect.
The movie has several other memory threads – and a rather gorgeous repertoire of American automobiles of the 1950s and 60s: flashy great gas-guzzlers, with enormous back fins, often sprayed in dazzling colours (and driven without seatbelts). They'd never be allowed in our environmentally aware times, but for any auto enthusiast the movie features a wonderful display of American cars in an era when they flaunted their ostentatious design and showy performance.

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Number of nuns in Ireland halved in just 20 years



Many religious sisters continue to do quiet and heroic work. Who will take up the challenge when they're no longer able, asks **Ruadhán Jones**

As we endure yet another winter where our hospitals seem to be in a permanent crisis mode, ask any person of a particular age about the time when religious orders were to the fore. The late broadcaster Marian Finucane, who died two years ago last month, rarely concluded a debate on the health service without observing "the hospi-

tals were well run when we had the nuns".

Undoubtedly, the nostalgia for the past was an over-simplification - but it does speak to a time when the presence of religious sisters was appreciated in healthcare.

Now, as the recent controversy about the National Maternity Hospital (NMH) evidenced, the baby has been well and truly thrown out with the bathwater and the heroic work of women religious almost entirely disregarded.

We are all painfully aware of the hurt felt by many people due to the sisters who betrayed their vocation and abused and neglected those in their care. An often overlooked section of people who share that hurt are the many sisters who never harmed a person and yet see their past work dismissed and ridiculed.

Perhaps nowhere is the changing religious landscape in Ireland more obvious than in the decline in the numbers of religious sisters.

While many congregations were no longer as visible as in the past after they decided to set aside their distinctive religious habits, they were still there working away to better

the lives of the most vulnerable.

They still are, of course - though in much smaller numbers. As our special report reveals this week, the number of women religious in Ireland has halved since the year 2000.

There were 9,031 nuns and sisters across the island of Ireland at the turn of the millennium, but in the last 20 years that has declined to just 4,494. This marks a decline of 50.2%.

“The north-western diocese of Raphoe saw the lowest numerical decline (37), but this was still down 57% since 2000”

The Diocese of Cork and Ross has seen the sharpest decline, falling from 690 women religious in 2000 to just 70 in 2020, down almost 90%.

It is followed by Down and Connor in the North (78%), Kerry (68%) and Achonry (63%).

Dublin Diocese saw the largest drop numerically, down 1,180 to 1,739 women religious.



Photo: CNS

This marked a fall of 40%.

The north-western diocese of Raphoe saw the lowest numerical decline (37), but this was still down 57% since 2000.

Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilnefora saw the lowest decline of just 17.6%, with 14 dioceses facing a decline of more than half in the last 20 years.

This is according to the most recent figures from the 26 dioceses. Half of the figures relate to 2021 and so include the effects of the first year of

Covid-19.

However, the figures from the other dioceses relate to pre-Covid times and so are expected to drop further when updated statistics are released.

Religious orders were hit hard by the virus, particularly for retired members in nursing homes.

Integral role

Women religious in Ireland have played an integral role in the development of social

infrastructure such as schools, hospitals and hospices.

Many continue to work quietly in these fields, either as volunteers or as employees of the State and Church in Ireland. Though these sisters are mostly elderly, and will soon have to retire with few professed women to take their place. The one question that no-one seems to know the answer to is: who will rise to the challenge when these sisters are no longer able?

Women religious in Ireland

Diocese	Total no. (2000)	Total No. (Present)	Difference
Achonry	97	36	-61
Ardagh and Clonmacnoise	235	92	-143
Armagh	365	235	-130
Cashel and Emly	206	80	-126
Clogher	159	104	-55
Clonfert	128	61	-67
Cloyne	272	119	-153
Cork and Ross	690	70	-620
Derry	147	64	-83
Down and Connor	327	71	-256
Dromore	158	83	-75
Dublin	2,919	1,739	-1,180
Elphin	135	54	-81
Ferns	200	110	-90
Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilnefora	221	182	-39
Kerry	306	96	-210
Kildare and Leighlin	337	173	-164
Killala	73	34	-39
Killaloe	245	141	-104
Kilmore	82	47	-35
Limerick	355	243	-112
Meath	287	130	-157
Ossory	242	129	-113
Raphoe	65	28	-37
Tuam	320	181	-139
Waterford and Lismore	460	192	-268
Total	9,031	4,494	-4,537

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Syria facing 'next level of hell' after earthquake



Rescue workers carry Kaan, a 13-year-old Turkish earthquake survivor, to an ambulance after the teen was rescued from the rubble in Hatay February, 13, 2023, after seven days since the quake. The powerful 7.8 magnitude earthquake rocked areas of Turkey and Syria early February 6, toppling hundreds of buildings and killing tens of thousands. Photo: OSV News/Dilara Senkaya, Reuters

Ruadhán Jones

An Irish missionary in Aleppo, Syria, has said the region is facing the "next level of hell" after the recent earthquake destroyed houses and left thousands dead.

Syria was already in a "hellish" way before the 7.8 magnitude earthquake rocked the Northwest of the country and south Türkiye on February 6, Irish Jesuit Fr Tony O'Riordan SJ told *The Irish Catholic*.

"The death toll in Syria is already into the thousands and will keep rising as many people are still trapped under the rubble"

After 11 years of war, the people were facing issues such as "poverty, freezing in the cold, not getting access to medicine", Fr O'Riordan said. "With the earthquake, they're into the next level of hell. It has devastated the area," he continued.

"Buildings have been demolished and are unsafe, people have lost lives in the collapsed buildings, thousands more are without homes."

The death toll in Syria is already into the thousands and will keep rising as many people are still trapped under the rubble. Tens of thousands are now without homes, living in emergency shelters and "struggling to survive".

On top of the destruction of human life is the "terror" that the experience has caused the local people, said Fr O'Riordan, leader of the Jesuit Refugee Service in the region.

"The weapon of mass destruction is the terror that people lived through in the first quake," he said.

"People were screaming for loved ones, hearing debris and buildings collapse and thinking they were going to die. After surviving that moment, they lived through the next 24 hours of aftershocks and another large earthquake."

Unsafe

The experience has left the Syrians feeling "unsafe and insecure and traumatised", even those far distant from the epicentre of the earthquake, the Irish missionary continued.

"We have to help them stand with confidence. Most people will recover from the trauma once they've recovered a sense of direction," he said.

The survivors' needs are material, but also spiritual and psychological, they need a "future of hope".

Many of the first responses and aid came from Syrians who are already "struggling to survive", Fr O'Riordan said.

Now, he added, there is a need for a global response from Western nations, bodies like the UN and NGOs and smaller groups like JRS to provide care to each individual.

"We can reach people who fall between the cracks

and validate if aid really got through," Fr O'Riordan said.

He said JRS' priority is to reopen its health clinic in Aleppo and help protect people against the cold. The Jesuits have also opened their building in Aziziyé to host people without shelter.

Already, the Irish have been "very generous", Fr O'Riordan said, thanking them for their support.

"The Pope also thanked aid workers responding to the crisis"

On Monday, the Irish Government announced an additional €8 million in emergency humanitarian assistance for victims of the earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria.

Last Wednesday, Pope Francis urged all people to be in solidarity with the regions struck by the powerful earthquakes and that are "in part already martyred by a long war."

Pope Francis prayed for the thousands of dead and wounded at his general audience February 8 and expressed his closeness to the victims, their families "and all who suffer from this devastating calamity". The Pope also thanked aid workers responding to the crisis.

If you would like to support the Irish Jesuit's earthquake response, visit www.iji.ie/donate-now/.

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Nuala O'Loan

The View



We must pursue the truth about Omagh bombing

August 15 this year will be the 25th anniversary of the day on which the Omagh bomb exploded killing 29 people and two unborn babies. It was the single biggest incident of the Troubles. It was planted by the Real IRA in the little market town of Omagh as people, including visitors from Ireland and Spain, moved around the town enjoying the sunshine. Those responsible have not been convicted.

Omagh was the eighth attack in Northern Ireland by the Real IRA during 1998 – bombs exploded in Enniskillen in January, in Moira in February, in Lisburn in April, in Beleek in May, in July in Newry, and in Banbridge in August. There was an attempted mortar bomb attack in Newry in July.

As Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, following suggestions that the Omagh Bomb could have been pre-

vented, I carried out an investigation into whether the information which the RUC had before the bomb had been appropriately responded to, and, having learned that there had been an RUC review of the Omagh bomb investigation, whether intelligence held by the RUC was correctly revealed to and exploited by the Omagh Bomb Investigation Team and whether the evidential opportunities contained within the murder review document had been investigated.

My findings were published on 12 December 2001. They were very shocking. We reported on the information available prior to the bomb which we had seen, including a very detailed anonymous telephone call which had been made to police on August 4, 1998, and which stated that an “unspecified attack would be made on police in Omagh on 15 August 1998.”

The police officer who received the telephone call

informed Special Branch as rapidly as possible. The police commander in Omagh should have been told about the threat to the town so that he could decide what response, if any, was necessary. He was not told about it until August 15, 2000.

There had been no linking of the investigations into the previous RIRA bombs that year. There were many failings of investigation.

Some relatives and survivors of the Omagh bomb, led by Michael Gallagher whose son Aidan died in the bomb, have worked tirelessly to try and establish what happened since 1998. There have been numerous enquiries, legal cases and investigations. Theirs has been a terrible journey over almost 25 years. Their courage, integrity, dignity and resilience has been extraordinary.

One response by the UK Government was to establish the Gibson Inquiry to examine intercept intelligence relating to the Omagh bomb. The full



Police stand in rubble after a car bomb ripped through the market town of Omagh in Northern Ireland, killing 29 people on August 15, 1998. Photo: CNS/Reuters.

report was never published.

The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee of Parliament examined the UK Government's response to the Omagh Bomb in 2010, and even its Chair was not allowed to read the full Gibson report. It reported that Gibson had been unable to interview two police witnesses who refused to cooperate with his inquiry. (I had a similar experience and reported that whilst a number of police officers responded magnificently, some police witnesses inexplicably varied their accounts, and others would not cooperate with the inquiry.)

“Omagh was the eighth attack in Northern Ireland by the Real IRA during 1998”

The Committee said that it was unclear to them exactly what Sir Peter Gibson did investigate, and that “his published terms of reference did not stretch as far as appeared when his review was announced”.

Almost 25 years after the Omagh bomb a public inquiry has finally been established in the UK in response to a judge's finding in 2021 that “plausible arguments could be made that the State had failed to comply with its obligation under Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights to take reasonable steps to prevent the bombing”.

Those plausible arguments related to “the handling and sharing of intelligence; the use of cell phone analysis; whether there was advance knowledge or reasonable means of knowledge of the bomb; and whether disruption operations could or should have been mounted, which may have helped prevent the tragedy.”

As the UK government

moves to establish the inquiry it will be vital that the terms of reference are sufficiently wide and that they allow examination of all information and intelligence which may have related to the Omagh bombing and those who planned and executed it, and how that information was dealt with, so that informed decisions can be made.

It will be most important that provision is made to assure the public that when “the protection of national security” is used to prevent information coming into the public domain, the issues are being properly dealt with.

In 2002 I became aware through a variety of sources, including Garda Det. Sgt John White, of information that the Omagh bomb and some at least of the other Real IRA bombs that year had been planned in Ireland. Det. Sgt White's information was accompanied by significant supporting information and gave rise to concerns about what information may have existed prior to the Omagh bomb about the activities of the Real IRA, and how that information had been handled by the Garda.

I reported on what I had been told to the Irish Government in 2002, and the Nally Group was established to enquire into the matters raised. Subsequently the PSNI took a long statement from Det. Sgt White and forwarded it to the Nally Group.

The members of the Nally Group told me that they had no access to actual intelligence from the Garda Security and Intelligence Section. They did not interview the PSNI officers who took the long statement from Sgt White. Their report has never been formally published. They found no truth in the information provided by Det. Sgt White, who maintained the truth of what he had said until his death in 2020.

The judge who recommended the Inquiry which the

UK government announced last week also said that “Furthermore, if possible, it makes sense that a similar inquiry is held in the Republic of Ireland looking at the self-same issues and, in particular, what intelligence was shared between both states. If the full panoply of legal powers available to the authorities had been used to disrupt these terrorists' activities, especially if coordinated on both sides of the border, then arguably there must have been a real prospect of preventing the Omagh bombing.”

“Readiness to pursue the search for truth is one of the hallmarks of good government”

The Minister for Justice Simon Harris has said the Irish Government will look at what action is required on its part. There can be absolutely no doubt that a full public inquiry in Ireland, dealing with the questions raised by the judge and establishing the answers to be found in Ireland, is a necessary complement to the UK inquiry.

Whilst there seems to be no legal mechanism for a cross border inquiry, simultaneous inquiries on both sides of the border should be able to provide answers to some at least of the outstanding questions. This would be in the interests of the families of those who died and those who were injured, and in the public interest. Readiness to pursue the search for truth is one of the hallmarks of good government.

2023 GUIDE TO RETREATS

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Heading on the pilgrim's progress



Fergus Glynn and Michael Murphy of Marian Pilgrimages bid farewell to pilgrim leaders Brandon Scott of *The Synodal Times*, Bishop of Derry Donal McKeown and Michael Kelly, Editor of *The Irish Catholic*. Photos: John McElroy



Anne McDermott and Anna McGlinchey from Buncrana, Co. Donegal.

Ruadhán Jones

Pilgrims on *The Irish Catholic's* Christian solidarity pilgrimage to the Holy Land gathered early in Dublin Airport before taking to the air.

Men and women from across the island of Ireland are undertaking the spiritual journey through Christ's home on earth.

Bishop of Derry Donal McKeown is the spiritual director of the pilgrimage, which is being led by editor of *The Irish Catholic* Michael Kelly and his colleagues Chai Brady and Brandon Scott.



Pilgrims on *The Irish Catholic's* pilgrimage to the Holy Land wait in Dublin airport ahead of their flight. Pictured are Maire Darrach from Randalstown Co. Antrim with Sean and Mary Laird from Draperstown Co. Down on Sunday, February 12.



Editor of *The Irish Catholic* Michael Kelly is pictured with Fergus Glynn of Marian Pilgrimages and Brandon Scott of *The Synodal Times* as they showcase the pamphlet for their upcoming pilgrimage.



Mary Baxter, Carmel Drumm and Patricia Wynne from Ballyconnell, Co. Cavan.



Neil McGeehan from Co. Tyrone, Elaine Noonan from Dublin/Donegal and Brendan Durning from Co. Donegal.



Maura Cronin and Pat Bartley from Fermoy, Co. Cork.

Jesus wanted us to call God 'Father' for a reason



Using gendered language for God goes back to Jesus himself, writes **David Quinn**

It was inevitable that one day a concerted effort would be made to introduce gender-neutral language to describe God. It has already been the case in more radical religious circles that the names given to the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity, 'Father', 'Son' and 'Holy Spirit' have been replaced with words like 'Creator', 'Redeemer' and 'Sustainer'.

But now the Church of England is launching a new commission which will examine whether it should do something similar. This would bring things to an official level.

“It is a big stretch, therefore, to suggest that Jesus was simply passively accepting the culture of his time in referring to God as ‘Father’”

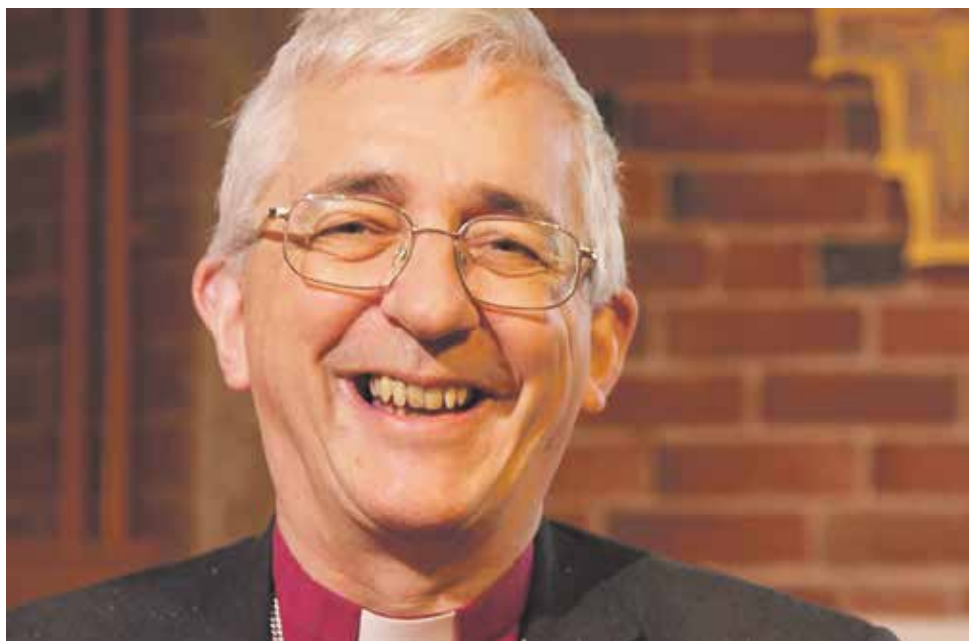
Bishop Michael Ipgrave, vice-chair of the liturgical commission responsible for the issue, said the Church had been “exploring the use of gendered language in relation to God for several years”.

He said a new “project on gendered language will begin this spring”. After that a synod of the Church will be required to approve any changes.

Reporting the matter, *The Guardian* newspaper in Britain said such changes “would mark a departure from traditional teachings dating back millennia”.

But actually, it would mean something far more than that because the use of gendered, and almost always male language for God isn't merely a 'tradition' of the Church, it goes back to Jesus himself.

If the Church of England were to drop the use of words like 'Father', 'Lord', 'He' and 'Him' when praying to God or referring to him, it would be saying that ultimately Jesus was mistaken in using such



Church of England Bishop Michael Ipgrave has announced that the Anglican Church will reconsider using gendered language for God.

language for God.

This would be dressed up differently, of course. They would never be so blunt as to simply say Jesus was wrong. Instead, it would be said that Jesus was reflecting the culture of his time. Judaism almost always used (and uses) masculine imagery for God, and therefore Jesus did the same because he was born a Jew and raised in a Jewish culture. He was reflecting the 'patriarchal' culture of his day.

But this kind of thinking only takes you so far. In many other respects, Jesus was perfectly willing to confront the religious norms of the time. His confrontations with the Pharisees are famous. His claims about himself helped to lead to his crucifixion.

Cultural norms

So Jesus was perfectly willing to challenge cultural norms when he deemed it necessary and his teachings have clearly transcended his own time and place because they have been found in so many times and places in the last 2,000 years.

It is a big stretch, therefore, to suggest that Jesus was simply passively accepting the culture of his time in referring to God as 'Father', knowing that eventually we more 'morally evolved' people would realise it is better to talk about and pray to God in a different way than he did.

Of course, it's correct to say that God has no gender as such. God is neither male nor female for the simple reason that God does not need to reproduce. God creates, he does not procreate.

Notice in the previous sentence I used the pronoun 'he' to refer to God. I did not say 'he/she' or 'they'.

Astute readers will immediately notice the similarities between this debate and the transgender one. Transgender ideology deliberately defies gender norms. Simply because someone is biologi-

cally male doesn't necessarily mean they are male, according to this way of thinking. They might identify as female, or else as 'gender non-binary' meaning as neither male nor female.

Again, it is correct to say God is neither male nor female. Nonetheless, there is no getting around the fact that Jesus always referred to God in male terms. Why would he do that? Was it really all to do with now outdated cultural norms?

Well, consider the alternatives. For example, should the 'Our Father' begin 'Our Mother and Father', or maybe 'Our Parent', or perhaps 'Our Creator'?

When we bless ourselves should we say, 'In the name of the Creator, the Redeemer and the Sustainer'?

“This would, of course, suit a certain kind of religious environmentalism, but it would not be Christianity”

Were we to do this, then we would also start to conceive God differently, which is the intention, of course. If we drop gendered pronouns altogether for God, using 'they' instead of 'he' and 'she', then God becomes an impersonal being, a 'Force' almost. But Jesus obviously wants us to think of God in personal terms and in practice that means thinking of him as 'he' or 'she'.

What about referring to God as a 'mother', not a 'father'? For a start that would replace one form of alleged sexism with another. But secondly, religions which conceive of God as a 'mother' have generally been fertility religions and often confuse the creator with the creation. God becomes some-

thing like 'Mother Earth'.

This would, of course, suit a certain kind of religious environmentalism, but it would not be Christianity. It would be something else. Before Christianity, Judaism fought very hard to distinguish itself from fertility religions. It saw them as pagan and idolatrous. Referring to God as a father avoids all possibility of this confusion.

Referring to God as both

'mother' and father' solves the problem only to a small degree, but it is clearly not what Jesus wanted. He wants us to think of God as a father. There is deep anthropology going on here that we probably need to explore further.

“If we conceive of God as a father, then it makes sense to think of priests as ‘spiritual fathers’, hence the male-only priesthood”

But mothers and fathers are not the same thing. Even though Jesus wants us to see God as a loving father, fathers have always been seen more as authority figures and less as nurturers. Is this first and foremost why Jesus wants us to see God as a father?

Indeed, perhaps we need more than ever to see God in this way because, in Western societies at least, the position and authority of the father has been so badly undermined.

One way or another, Jesus called God 'Father' for a reason. We need to properly under-

stand what that is, and not feel we have the right to change it, or to question his wisdom, or to dismiss his teaching in this regard as a product of its time we can now discard. That would be the height of arrogance and hubris on our part.

Incidentally, the move to make God gender-neutral is linked with the move to allow women priests, something the Church of England has already done. If we conceive of God as a father, then it makes sense to think of priests as 'spiritual fathers', hence the male-only priesthood.

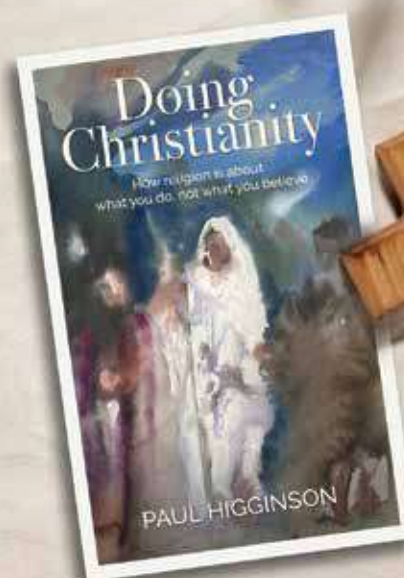
But if women can be priests, and it was sexist not to previously allow it, then it is only a short step to declare thinking of God as a father is also sexist.

Could the Catholic Church go down this path? It cannot if it is what it has always claimed to be, namely the guardian of the deposit of faith and the teachings of Christ.

Any branch of Christianity which decides to depict God in gender-neutral terms will be departing from what Jesus intended and will be morphing ever more quickly and radically into a type of post-Christian Church, related to Christianity, but not really Christian.

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Irish women religious ‘invisible in



Dr Bronagh Ann McShane presents Sr Bonaventure and Sr Colette of the Galway Poor Clare Community with a copy of her book, *Irish Women in Religious Orders, 1530-1700: Suppression, Migration and Reintegration*.



Women religious have often been treated as irrelevant by Irish historians, Dr Bronagh Ann McShane tells **Ruadhán Jones**

Ever since St Brigid founded her monastery in Kildare, women religious have been driving forces in the Church and in society. Through their work in founding hospitals, schools, hospices and through their life of prayer in enclosed orders, they were integral to the founding of the Irish state as it is today.

And yet the tendency among historians has been to see them as “very much peripheral or not relevant to wider historiographical debates or issues”, says Dr Bronagh Ann McShane.

The manner in which women religious lead their lives has “tended to render them somewhat invisible in wider historical studies”, she continues, adding “I think this is slowly starting to change”.

However, “There still isn’t enough recognition of the very real role they played,” Dr

McShane says. “And despite the fact that they were living in many cases behind closed doors and convent walls, they were still very much at the heart of the communities they were living in and were hugely connected to people at the very top ranks of society.”

References

To back up her point, the Irish historian references a story from her recent book, *Irish Women in Religious Orders, 1530-1700: Suppression, Migration and Reintegration*. The book is a study of the effects of the dissolution of the monasteries in Ireland during the Reformation, the brief “golden age” that followed and the turmoil of the Cromwellian repressions.

“You have to remember that in this period, in the early modern era, the women joining the religious orders were predominantly

of a certain social standing,” Dr McShane begins. “They were women of perhaps gentry or aristocratic background.”

By virtue of this standing, they could ensure the security of their convents, approach wealthy contacts for financial support and even go to the king himself! This was just what happened in the 1670s when the abbess of the Poor Clares in Galway travelled to England.

“When they [the Poor Clares] returned to Galway and sought to re-establish their foundation after the devastation of the Cromwellian campaigns, they found the land originally granted to them in the 1640s had been granted to a member of the English aristocracy. The abbess decided to travel to London to petition the King of England [Charles II] and his wife, Catherine of Braganza.

“This Poor Clare travelled to London and petitioned the queen for the return of this land and she’s successful. They are granted the site and the premises and take up residence there again! Although there is a perception that they don’t have any relevance to society because they’re enclosed nuns, their connections reach far beyond the walls of their convent.”

“The abbess decided to travel to London to petition the King of England [Charles II] and his wife, Catherine of Braganza”

Such misperceptions continue to this day, although as Dr McShane says, historians are starting to come to terms with it. Even still, as the numbers of women religious in Ireland has halved in the last 20 years (see page 6), she agrees that it is a case of not realising what we had until its gone.

“It’s a very uncertain time for the future of religious life in Ireland, in Europe, across the globe, but most obviously in Western Europe,” Dr

McShane warns. “We’re at a turning point...”

With her historian’s hat on, she fears that the we are “at risk of losing huge amounts of rich resources and records with the closure of a lot of these foundations. I think that’s a real tragedy, the direction of travel for these foundations and communities today”.

Legacy

But more broadly speaking, there is the question of what is going to be the legacy of these orders. Dr McShane points to an interview with Irish journalist Olivia O’Leary from the start of the year in which she raises just such questions.

“Obviously there is a difficult legacy to deal with in terms of questions of institutional abuse, but it’s a shame if that’s the major story that is told,” says Dr McShane. “That is a minority of the orders, the vast majority were not involved in those kinds of scandals. That seems to be the headline that nuns generate in Irish media.

“She [Ms O’Leary] wasn’t whitewashing the scandals... But she was keen to point out the importance of the role of these nuns as educators and that in the Ireland of the 1960s and 1970s, the State didn’t really have much

concern for the education of Irish girls. If it wasn’t for the role of the likes of female religious orders, her generation of women probably wouldn’t have had the education they did get.”

“An account of this tragedy subsequently made its way to Rome where the Dominican chapter was held in 1656”

In light of some historians’ neglect of Irish women religious, Dr McShane’s book is an attempt to draw attention to their lives and works. Several fascinating stories shine through of the bravery shown by Irish nuns who risked life and limb to pursue vocations during a time of persecution.

For example, the “tumultuous” period between 1630 and 1700 was “punctuated by episodes of warfare, of rebellion, of persecutions and of forced migrations,” Dr McShane explains. One of these was Oliver Cromwell’s violent attempt to suppress the Faith, which wreaked havoc on the infrastructure of the Church and destroyed the foundations of many orders, including female orders.

historical studies’

“There’s also instances of violence against women religious and nuns,” she continues. “One case that I focus on in the book is that of two Dominican tertiary sisters that are associated with the Dominican priory at Burrishoole in Co. Mayo and actually the front cover of the book is a depiction of one of those sisters by the name of Honoria Megaen.

“The dissolution of the monasteries took place in the 1530s and 1540s, after Henry VIII severed ties with Rome and declared himself head of the Church in England”

“The priory was set upon by Cromwellian soldiers in the 1650s and both Honoria Megaen and another lay sister Honoria Burke are basically chased down by the soldiers and physically assaulted and both of the women die as a result of their injuries.”

An account of this tragedy subsequently made its way to Rome where the Dominican chapter was held in 1656. “And then at some point, we don’t know when, a depiction, a fresco, is painted at the Dominican monastery in Carmina, Sicily. This fresco is one of several depicting Dominican women at this monastery – which has since become a five-star hotel.

“So that’s a really significant fresco because it gives us an insight into the ways in which the reputation of these Irish nuns really expanded well

beyond the borders of Ireland. They were being revered as saints for the Catholic Church and as martyrs.”

The dissolution of the monasteries took place in the 1530s and 1540s, after Henry VIII severed ties with Rome and declared himself head of the Church in England. Dr McShane says there is evidence of communities surviving in Gaelic Ireland into the early 1600s, as efforts to “eradicate” monastic life ran into the strength of Catholicism in Ireland.

Religious life

However, for most women who still felt the call to religious life, two options were left open to them: observe religious life in an informal domestic setting; or travel to Europe. Their migration to the continent led to increased respect for “their way of life and the nature of their religious observance”, Dr McShane says.

And so, as a result both of the informal resistance within Ireland and the migration to Europe, Irish religious were finally in a position to return to Ireland in the 1620s. Irish nuns and sisters were integral to the “Catholic revival”, a short burst of renewal lasting about 20 years before the Cromwellian destruction.

“It’s during this period of so-called Catholic revival in Ireland, which starts from the 1620s onwards, that we have the establishment in Ireland of the first official convent for women since the dissolution of the monasteries and that happened in 1629,” Dr McShane explains.

The convent was set up by seven Poor Clare sisters who had entered an English foun-

dation before returning to Ireland. “They establish it in the centre of Dublin city, which is quite remarkable when you think about the status of Catholicism, effectively illegal at this time.

“But this is a period when Catholic revival is very much under way in Ireland and the return of the Irish Poor Clares’ is emblematic of a wider revival of the Catholic Church. We see the establishment of other types of religious orders across Dublin and across the country.

“It proved a setback for the Church, which wasn’t to achieve full emancipation until 1829”

“That sparks a period of rejuvenation of Catholicism in Ireland between roughly the early 1620s right the way down to the onset of the Cromwellian era in Ireland.”

Much of our knowledge of this period we owe to the work of a Poor Clare, Mary Bonaventure Brown. The Irish sister wrote a history of the order’s time in Ireland while she was in exile in Spain, earning great respect for her command of Irish, English and Spanish, as well as her fastidious attention to detail.

Sr Brown “describes that period as a golden age for the Poor Clares but also for the Catholic Church in Ireland”, Dr McShane says. “This is a period when we see a great number of religious houses establishing. The Poor Clares, for example, while they are quickly moved out of Dublin, they establish a convent in Athlone. Subsequently a second community is born in Galway in 1649.

“Then in the 1640s, we have several foundations of women in Galway. We have Dominican nuns, Augustinian nuns, we even have a group of Carmelites... Galway has a very important role in the history of religious orders, particularly female, in the middle of the 17th Century in Ireland.”

Unfortunately, the revival was cut short by the Cromwellian episode in the middle of the 1600s, one in the long series of turbulent events that continued right up to the end of that century. It proved a setback for the Church, which wasn’t to achieve full emancipation until 1829.

Dr Bronagh Ann McShane’s book Irish Women in Religious Orders, 1530-1700: Suppression, Migration and Reintegration published by Boydell & Brewer is available online now.

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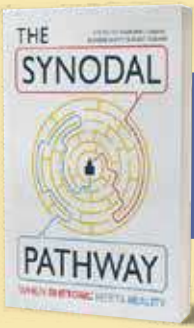
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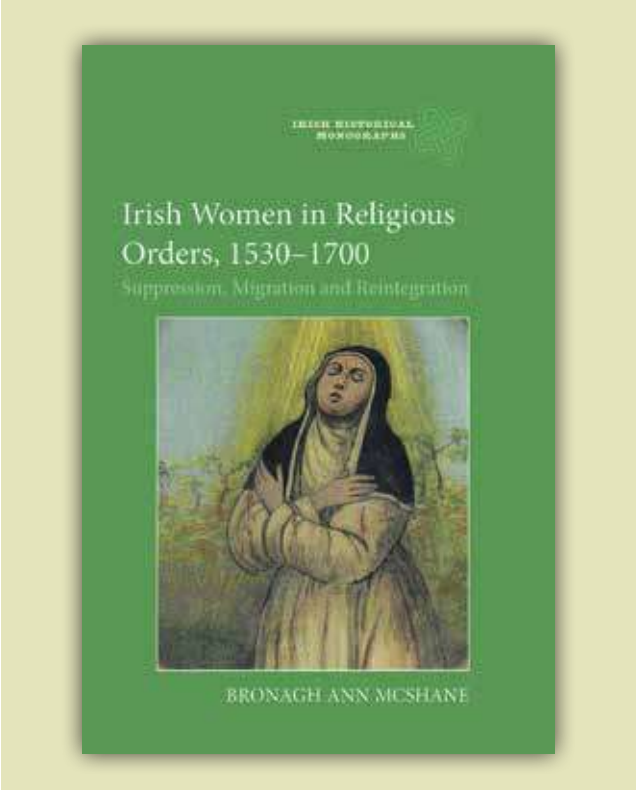
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The front cover of Dr McShane’s book, with a depiction of Irish Dominican Sr Honoria Megaen who was killed during the Cromwellian persecutions in the 1600s.

Ministering to the masses on and off-line



Sr Miriam James Heidland SOLT tells Jason Osborne about her love of sports and reluctant online ministry

Well-known in Ireland for her internet appearances and for her books *Loved as I Am*, *Behold*, and *Restore*, US-based Sr Miriam James Heidland of the Society of Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity tells me with a laugh that she thanks God her main ministry doesn't involve the internet.

"There's a lot of people that I know that have much more of an online presence than I do. I pick and choose very carefully – I'm not on Facebook, I'm not on TikTok, I'm not on Instagram, I just have no desire to do that. I'm on Twitter and I do have a lot of videos that people post from different conferences. But I myself, I have parameters around it, because oth-

erwise it just does become a time-suck," she says.

Ascension

Having presented many videos for *Ascension Presents* – the platform Fr Mike Schmitz calls home – co-hosting a podcast, *Abiding Together*, with her friends Michelle Benzinger and Heather Khym, and regularly speaking before large crowds at retreats and conferences that often draw young Catholics from Ireland, Sr Miriam James is a well-known and appreciated face in faith circles in Ireland. Her own experience speaks to the hearts of many young Faithful today, as it's a story of not recognising what she had in Catholicism and Christ before seeing it afresh and being transformed by it.

“There's a lot of people that I know that have much more of an online presence than I do”

"I think my story is like many stories in many ways of growing up Catholic. We went to the Mass every Sunday, my parents were very faithful...I was baptised, First Communion, first Confession, was confirmed, but I didn't ever fall in love with Christ.

"I didn't have a living encounter with the living Lord Jesus. I knew the truth, I could hear the truths of the Faith, but they had yet to penetrate my heart. For me, it was more like a fear-based

religion," Sr Miriam James says, an experience many today can relate to.

As with so many of us, Sr Miriam began to proceed down her chosen path – which was to work in the media, sports media in particular – without much of a thought for God. She went to college to pursue a degree in communications with a minor in journalism, while developing her long-standing love of volleyball. As so often, though, God had other plans.

"What God did is, about that same time – very early on, actually – God sent a Catholic priest into my life. I had never met anybody who was that holy. He was not perfect, which is lovely. He wasn't perfect, he certainly had his own story, but that man loved Christ. It was palpable and it was beautiful. He had been a priest a long time, he wasn't a new priest. He'd been a priest a long time. God sent that man into my life and he just was such a wonderful mentor to me. He told me the truth whether I wanted to hear it or not. He loved me, he saw goodness in me when I only saw self-hatred and self-rejection," she says.

Witness

"It's one of the reasons why, to my dying day, I will speak about the power of personal witness, because that man loved Jesus, he loved his priesthood and he loved me. That love changed my life. Through the course of a lot of suffering and a lot of hit-



Sr Miriam James Heidland. Photo: OSV News

ting bottom in my own life, I graduated from college and Father invited me down to our mission in New Mexico to just spend some time healing because my life was just a mess."

It was in the silence of that mission in New Mexico that Sr Miriam heard "Jesus call me".

"I heard him call me to be his bride," she says.

That took place nearly 25 years ago, Sr Miriam says, but continues to be the "best decision that I've ever made".

Decision

A decision she keeps saying 'Yes' to every day, she admits that, like with anything, "love is very costly, but it's very beautiful and I wouldn't have it any other way".

Her ministry has touched on a number of points very relevant to people all over the world, but has really struck a chord with the youth of the Church and beyond. One particular area of passion for her is sports, an interest that she's carried through her conversion and that she continues to foster

today. Asking her about it, she breaks into a smile.

"I love sports, to this day I love it. There's a reason why the human person finds it fascinating, why we love that. I think if we could look at why we love it, what does it do for us? Why do we admire it? We admire excellence. We admire people who overcome adversity. We admire people that can push the boundaries of physical possibilities. We admire human triumph stories, we want the underdog to win. It's like, we can't help but love that because it's so primal in us – excellence, the pursuit of goodness, of virtue.

“It was in the silence of that mission in New Mexico that Sr Miriam heard ‘Jesus call me’”

"Really what you're seeing – sport at its best – is a pursuit of virtue and goodness and excellence. Team

sports, you're not always going to be the star. You're going to have to help other people and you're responsible not just for yourself but for others. It's really in a sense a way of communion. We will always love that," she says.

Activities

We also love the human body and what it can do, Sr Miriam muses, adding that there's something about activities like sports that activate body and soul that brings us beyond ourselves.

"I gave a talk on the theology of sports many years ago and I was using a book by a former Olympic athlete and I love this...he defined play, it's so gorgeous as 'the recreation that brings us beyond ourselves into joy'.

"So any form of play, whether it's sport, whether it's art, whether it's gardening, whether it's culinary, it's music, it's nature, it's being by the seashore – it brings us beyond ourselves, where sometimes time even ceases, into a foretaste of heaven. That's why we love it. If we can keep that in heart and



Hosts of the *Abiding Together* podcast, Michelle Benzinger, Sr Miriam James and Heather Khym.

in mind, then we can understand the proper role of it."

There is the danger that, as with other things, "sports becomes a god", which Sr Miriam says that unfortunately for a lot of people it is, and that when we worship at that altar it will "break us, it will disintegrate us, and it will rob us of our identity".

However, when our loves are ordered, she says, "it's a beautiful avenue for virtue and grace".

“There’s something about activities like sports that activate body and soul that brings us beyond ourselves”

I know to ask about her interest in sport by virtue of her internet presence, which I’m also keen to ask her about. Many who use the internet either professionally or semi-professionally see it as a double-edged sword, with incredible uses but also rampant dangers on many levels.

"I think all of us, like anything else in life, we have to continue to examine our relationship with whatever it is. I think the internet has given us a way to preach the Gospel, in ways that have never been known before. You can listen to a talk being given by someone in India, or in Ireland, or you can look at Fr Mike Schmitz [host of *The Bible in a Year* and *The Catechism in a Year* podcasts] – it goes around the world. I can listen to anybody, anytime on podcast or a YouTube video and I can learn things that I would never have known any other way. That’s a very beautiful thing," Sr Miriam says.

Ministry

As she said, she "thanks God" her main ministry doesn't involve internet use, but she acknowledges that much of her spoken content, be it at retreats or conferences, has made its way online, and she's grateful that it's helped people in their faith lives.

One popular initiative that's very close to her heart, and particular popular among young women (although not exclusive to them) is her *Abiding Together* podcast, which she co-hosts with her best friends Michelle Benzinger and Heather Khym. Describing it as a "special blessing" in their lives, Sr Miriam says it was born out of their friendship and that all they desire is that it "continues to be a gift to the world" born out of their friendship.

"That podcast started about five years ago and it just was born out of a friendship, that's all our desire is. I've known Heather and Michelle for many, many years and [it

came about] before podcasting got really, really big.

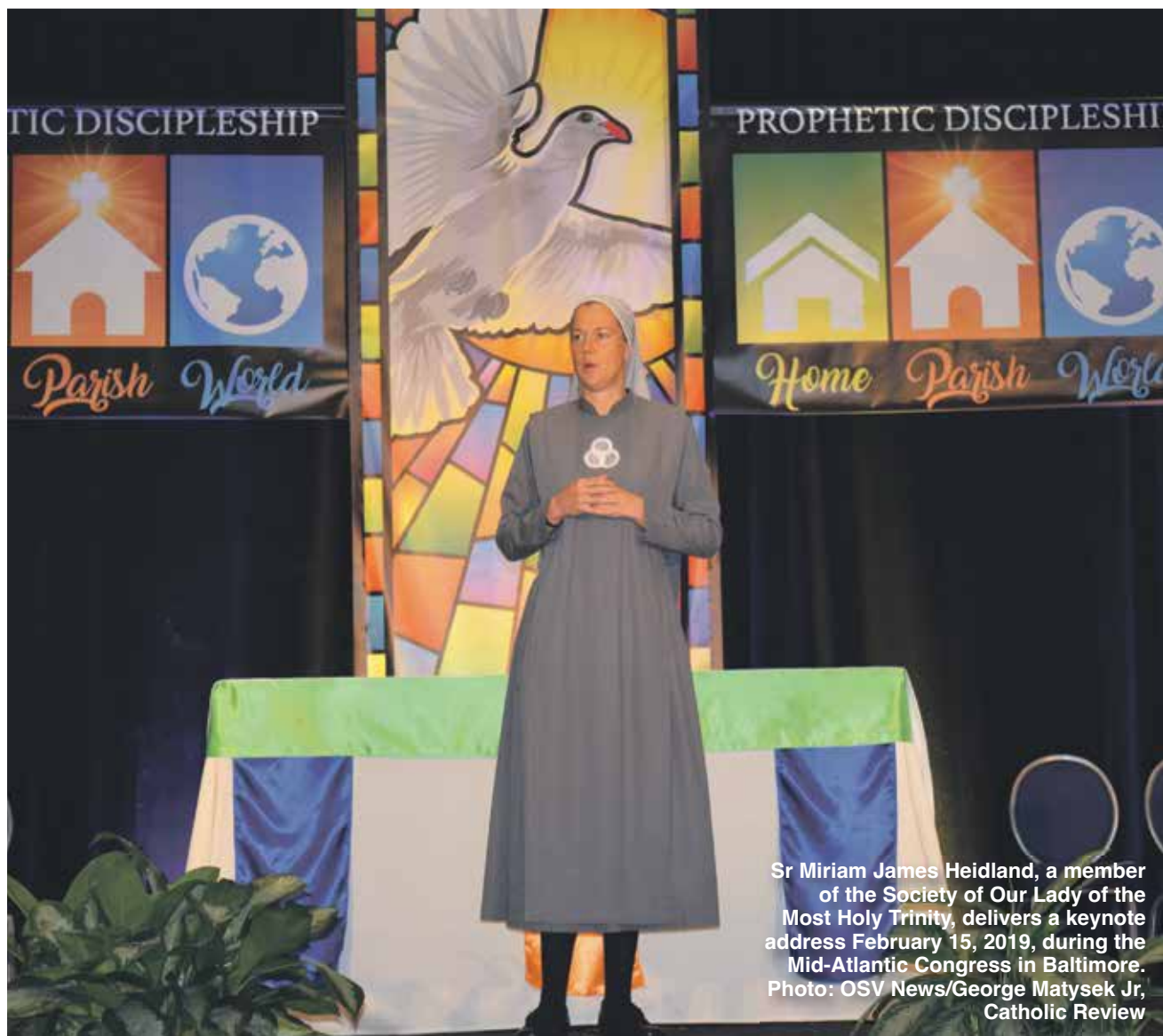
"It's a meeting of our hearts in friendship out of love. We don't pretend we have it all together. We don't pretend like we're perfect, we're just on a journey with you. People often say, 'Wow, I feel like you guys are my friends, I feel like we sit down and have coffee together' or we've had a lot of beautiful stories of people coming back to the Catholic Church. Single moms saying, 'I don't have any friends, and every Monday I listen to you guys and it's like you guys are my friends'. We have an online community, a Facebook community and so it's not driven by market consumption. We took a nine-month break just because we felt like the Holy Spirit was asking us to do that. Our whole desire is that it just blesses men and women, and it's a place where you can find connection, rest and encouragement. When it ceases to be that, or the Holy Spirit says no, that'll be it. It's just for now what the Lord has been doing and it's beautiful," she says.

In response to a question I put to her about the challenges facing Catholics in ministry today, Sr Miriam says that at the heart of all of her ministries, both on and off-line, she wishes nothing other than that Jesus comes and heals her and those she's interacting with every day, as it's a world deeply in need of it.

“That podcast started about five years ago and it just was born out of a friendship, that’s all our desire is”

"We just had SEEK [a Catholic youth conference in the USA] and we had a group from Ireland that came...for all the pitfalls the American Church has, and we have a ton of them, there's a particular light that comes from young people," she says.

"I think there's a convergence of many things happening. I think there's a convergence of a massive destruction of the human person – we can't even decide what it means to be man and woman – where that is now obscured. Where there is massive disfunction in the family, where there's a lot of addiction, and lot of brokenness, and so there's this convergence in the fracturing and the fragmentation of the human person that's happening. That has been happening for a long time, and part of it being with the advent of the internet, but there's just this massive fragmentation of the human person that we've never seen before in the human race.



Sr Miriam James Heidland, a member of the Society of Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity, delivers a keynote address February 15, 2019, during the Mid-Atlantic Congress in Baltimore. Photo: OSV News/George Matysek Jr, Catholic Review

"The technology we have now and what's coming is, we don't know what's going to happen. We don't know, but we see the evidence of a lot of that. At the same time, because of that, you just see the ache ever more deeply of the desire to be loved and the desire to live the authentic life. So there's these two convergent things.

Ask

"People ask all the time, what's one thing I can do for my marriage or for my youth group or for my parish and I really mean it, I mean it as much to myself as I'm saying it to you that the best gift you and I can give to humanity is to let Jesus Christ come and heal us every day," she says.

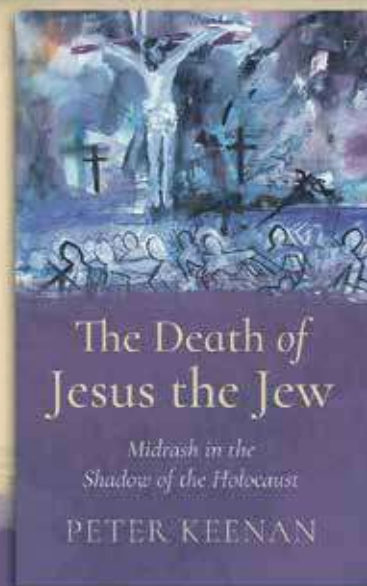
In the places where that truth is being witnessed to, where the truth of the Gospel and the living encounter with Christ is being preached, "I think you see growth," Sr Miriam says.

Referring to Pope Benedict XVI's thought that the Church is going to getting smaller, that it's going to be purified, Sr Miriam said that she's seeing that in action and that it's "on fire".

"In those circles you see a Church that's on fire and people love Christ and that's what they're giving their life for," she says.

Sr Miriam by her many ministries is certainly contributing to the fanning of those holy flames.

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Saving Lebanon's refugees from trauma on the streets



An Irish priest continues to deliver education to vulnerable children amidst economic and political collapse, writes **Chai Brady**

Contending with a dysfunctional government and effectively non-existent banking system is a struggle for the average Lebanese person, particularly the poor, but it's refugee children who are consistently pushed further into marginalisation and poverty.

“Fortunately for Fr Stuart he has access to cash outside Lebanon, many Lebanese who have family abroad also rely on money coming from outside the country”

The Lebanese lira has lost more than 90% of its value due to their banking crisis which began in 2019. They

face electricity and fuel shortages leading to power outages and there are also shortages in medicines and medical equipment.

Irish Rosminian priest Fr William Stuart, originally from Clontarf in Dublin, never expected to be running a school in the south Lebanese city of Tyre for children in such challenging circumstances, admitting it has been a “rollercoaster”. He started in 2018 and had doubts about the work when he arrived but since then “there has been nothing but achievements”.

Fortunately for Fr Stuart he has access to cash outside Lebanon, as many Lebanese who have family abroad also rely on money coming from outside the country.

“Because I’m a foreigner and I have dollars or euro in my wallet, from that point of view, no matter how crazy the Lira goes, I’m still safe. But the local population, I don’t know how they survive,” he said. “Lebanon confuses me at every level, it frequently makes no sense.”

Regarding the multitude of political failures and corruption that led to the country’s economic meltdown, Fr Stuart said: “I think when you have situations like this in any other country you would have mass demonstrations on the streets.”

“The people who were affected, which would be the majority, would target the political class in Lebanon, but nothing happens. You have to ask why? The Lebanese identify themselves, no matter what group they are, to some political group, and they are fanatically and blindly loyal to that group, they say the collapse of Lebanon is due to every other group other than theirs. They’re probably aware that theirs is as involved in the corruption



Fr Stuart is seen speaking to children at a refugee camp.

“Fr Stuart says he often sees children on the street that would be candidates for his school, but unfortunately not all children can be saved”

but they absolved them and they target the blame on everybody else,” he said. As the country continues to reel from their various disasters, Fr Stuart aims to grow the size of his school and widen the net to help more children who are falling through the cracks. Often, they are working odd jobs on the streets, and are very vulnerable to a myriad of abuses.

Many of the children are undocumented, which Fr Stuart says means they are not allowed to attend state schools. Meaning many only access education through his school, which is not recognised by Lebanon’s authori-

ties. There are children who start working as young as five years old, selling the likes of bottled water, tissue and chewing gum on the streets. In more severe circumstances children have become victims of sexual abuse in order to earn money.

Fr Stuart said: “If we were not there, the 300 kids that we have in the school today would not be receiving an education, why? Because nobody is targeting them for education. How do we know that? Because when we pick up kids off the streets and say, ‘do you want to go to school in the afternoon?’, ‘Where do you live?’, ‘Let’s talk to your parents’ etc., and we set

it up and we put them into the school – The kids that we leave on the streets, because we’re full, are there the next time we go out when we’ve transferred kids into state system. Nobody has been there to rescue them.

“Now all these kids have families, they’re coming from tents, they’re coming from tenements. We have boys as young as 12 who are hustling and you see it, and there’s nothing you can do about it. Girls are a bit more protected because the Islamic culture is a bit more protective of girls and they chaperone them, but the boys are on the streets and they’re very, very vulnerable, it would break

your heart. It’s horrific.”

Fr Stuart says he often sees children on the street that would be candidates for his school, but unfortunately not all children can be saved. “It is terrible because you know what their future is, and you see them deteriorating on the street because life is rough with them, and you see them fighting,” he said.

School boys

Having worked in schools most of his life, Fr Stuart says he has a lot of experience working with school boys. In his first year, which he described as “chaotic”, the students were aged 16 plus.

“They were incredibly



A group of schoolchildren in Tyre, Lebanon.

“Fr Stuart explains there are many big expenses relating to the running of his school, one of which is that the catchment area is enormous so there is a need for buses”

sharp to sexual innuendo, they picked up stuff where it didn't exist,” he explained, saying it was more than what can be expected from teenage boys.

“They are taught English, Maths and Arabic, life care skills, relationships and sexuality, healthcare and more”

“They were sexualised, it was very obvious. Number two, I've worked in schools all my life, when they got into fights I've never seen anything like the aggression – it's beyond horrendous. It still happens, it's awful stuff. They're looking for vengeance all the time, it's terrible. I put it down to that there is so much going on in their lives, there's so much trauma that once they start they can't stop. They're opening doors inside them that they have no control over and they're very, very vicious.”

Expansion

The school will be taking in a further 120 children, 60 of whom will be Lebanese and 60 will be Syrian – the Syrians are kids that have already been transferred into the state system. According to Fr Stuart, families are say-

ing their child hasn't been in school after the transfer since before Christmas, and asking him to take them back – but it has been impossible because the school is full.

The primary school caters for kids aged four to 16. They are taught English, Maths and Arabic, life care skills, relationships and sexuality, healthcare and more.

“In terms of the English, Arabic and maths, the best we can do for them would be 5th or 6th class primary school, they won't go beyond that. Our biggest enemy is work, they're wrecked. We have kids, some of the girls, they work during the day, they're in the second shift in school, so they're coming to school at 4.30pm, and I see them in Tyre where I live at 8.30-9pm in the evening. It's a rough life,” he said.

Fr Stuart said the best-case scenario for some of the pupils would be that their ability read, write, add and multiply at a fundamental level, will open doors for them, and get them off the streets.

Secondly, that their experience of education, however small or inadequate, will give them a taste for the value of education, which Fr Stuart says their parents don't have as they would not be literate. “It won't save them, but it might save the kids they have into the future. That would be my hope,” he said.

He said it costs at least

\$150,000 to run the school, which will probably increase to \$200,000 this year, especially with the additional 120 children starting. There are 16 classrooms.

Fr Stuart explains there are many big expenses relating to the running of his school, one of which is that the catchment area is enormous so there is a need for buses.

“Our bus transport has gone from \$8,000 a year to \$44,000 and it's going up again, due to the war in Ukraine. It's unreal and that has to be fundraised.”

“The school had one Christmas tree last December but will have 10 this year”

A container left from Balbriggan in Dublin January 31 filled with donations from Ireland, headed for Fr Stuart's school in Tyre.

There were school lockers, tables, chairs and much more. Fr Stuart added that “there's enough Christmas decorations to turn the school into Santa's grotto next December”. The school had one Christmas tree last December but will have 10 this year.

“There's a whole load of toys. Manor House School in Raheny did almost 200 shoeboxes. At Eid, the festival after Ramadan, we'll give the toys to the kindergarteners. We have 100 kindergarteners and the other 200 will get the shoeboxes. We have loads of clothes, toiletries, shoes, a plastic pond, bicycles – we've got about 15-18 bicycles,” Fr Stuart said.

His hopes for the future are that “we continue to be supported”.

“I often think to myself when the buses come in and we take the names of the kids and they all run up the stairs and up to their classroom and just at that time I often think, ‘this all happened as an idea in my head’, but it would have stayed as an idea if it wasn't for the people who are supporting us every day. Even down to the people who pick up the phone or send me a message to say ‘you're doing great work and we really admire what you're doing,’” he said.

i Those who are interested in supporting Fr Stuart's work can email him at stresa2@gmail.com



One of Fr Stuart's pupils, Ahmad Aboud, shows his art work.



Fr Stuart helps one of his pupils.

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Recognising faith and service

Staff Reporter

The 16th annual Pope John Paul II Award ceremony was held in St Eugene's Cathedral, Derry on February 6.

The guest speaker, Melany Francisco-Lawless alongside Bishop Donal McKeown, patron of the award, presented the award to 328 young people from all over the Diocese of Derry and beyond. This year three people received the Papal Cross Award. These young people came from 21 second level schools across the diocese and represented 44 parishes within the diocese, and 13 parishes outside the diocese.

The award was founded and created in the Diocese of Derry, and in the last 16 years the award has been introduced in 23 dioceses in Ireland. The Pope John Paul II Award continues to be the largest youth movement in the Church in Ireland.



Carndonagh Community School.



CBS Omagh. Photos: Stephen Latimer



Crana College.



Holy Cross College.



Loreto College Coleraine.



Loreto Grammar School Omagh.



Lumen Christi College.



Sacred Heart College.



Scoil Mhuire Buncrana.



Moville Community College.



Out&About

Lourdes and ladies



CORK: The Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Ballinlough, hosts the South West Region's annual St Brigid's Day Mass. Fr Gearóid Dullea celebrated the Mass and Our Lady of Lourdes Unit organised the day, being joined by Deputy Lord Mayor Councillor Dan Boyle.



OFFALY: The Clear family from Clonaslee are pictured with their daughter Juliet who was confirmed in the Church of the Assumption, Tullamore, by Bishop of Meath Tom Deenihan. Pictured (from left) are Henry and Rena Haverty, Lillian, Brigid, Bishop Tom Deenihan, Juliet Clear, Aoife, Mark, Catherine, Barry Bergin and Mary Clear.



LIMERICK: Pupils from Scoil Iosagain CBS Primary School, Sexton St, stand in St John's Cathedral after receiving the sacrament of First Confession with Canon Gerard Garrett (left) and Fr Leo McDonnell.

IN SHORT

Tuam celebrates inaugural young adult night

The Archdiocese of Tuam held its inaugural young adults night, February 4, gathering young people from around the diocese for Mass and a social.

Archbishop of Tuam Francis Duffy celebrated the opening Mass at 6pm in the Cathedral of the Assumption, Tuam, Co. Galway. He praised the "moving" event, adding that it was very fruitful and he looks forward to more in the future.

Over 100 young adults attended and they were encouraged by the talks, testimonies and beautiful music.

Speaking after the event, Thomas Leddy

from Balla, Co. Mayo (20) said that "everyone has that God shaped hole in their heart. It wasn't until I realised how broken I was, that I realised my need for God. Today you've got people who don't realise their identity and their value, and that value lies in God".

Evelyn Malone (17) from Killawalla, Co. Mayo said to any young person who is looking for their Faith that "you might feel like you're the only one out there but there are actually so many of us, it's great to see at events like this, and community coming together".

The theme of the night was, 'You are the Light of the World', with guest speakers Sr Kathryn Press, Fr Brendan Kilcoyne and Conor McNamee.

Trócaire's work testament to Church-State cooperation

Trócaire's work is a testament to the efficacy of Church-State cooperation, while respecting each other's competencies, Bishop William Crea has said.

In his homily during a Mass to celebrate the charity's 50th anniversary, Bishop Crea praised the "visionary" organisation for its work for the poor and the hungry.

"The establishment of Trócaire came out of a new consciousness of the division across the world between rich and poor, between nations and within nations," the bishop of

Cloyne said.

From its establishment in 1973, Trócaire laboured to meet immediate humanitarian need and "to tackle with the people the cause of their hunger and poverty and together enable and empower them to develop livelihoods that were sustainable."

Dr Crea praised the "sustained generosity" of those "in the pew" who heard the cry of the poor and supported the bishops' charity.

"The Irish and British governments, it should be acknowledged, have been a wonderful support to the work of Trócaire," Bishop Crea continued, February 8.

"It is truly a testament to the co-operative work of Church and State while respecting our respective spheres and competencies."



GALWAY: Sr Assumpta brings the Mountbellew chalice of 1825 to the altar.



GALWAY: The Mountbellew parish choir provided musical accompaniment.



GALWAY: Historian Joe Clarke speaks after Mass in St Mary's Church, Mountbellew, on Sunday, January 29. Mass was celebrated by Archbishop of Tuam Francis Duffy with Fr Karl Burns PP and Fr Sean Cunningham to mark the bicentenary of the first Mass celebrated there on Christmas morning 1822.



BELFAST: St Mary's University College Principal Prof. Peter Finn and Children in Crossfire CEO Richard Moore launch the 'St Mary's Moving for March' to support Children in Crossfire' challenge with St Mary's Students Union President Colin Sheehan and St Mary's students Oisín McClafferty, Lucy Robinson and Shanna Cassidy. Photo: Gerd Curley.



MAYO: Aindrias Ó Caoimh (Dublin) receiving his award of Knight Commander from Archbishop-emeritus of Tuam Michael Neary with Chancellor of the Equestrian Order, Gearóid Williams (Kilrush), in the background.



TIPPERARY: Clare Brennan leads parishioners in a workshop for making St Brigid's crosses in Nenagh, February 2.



KILDARE: Newbridge Parish marked the end of Catholic Schools' Week on Sunday, January 29, presenting each of the local schools with a flag which denotes the radical inclusive nature of Catholic school communities.



CLARE: Bishop of Killaloe Fintan Monahan joins the Neocatechumenal Way community in Ennis to celebrate Mass.



MAYO: Dames and Knights of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem – Lieutenancy of Ireland, participated in the Order's Annual Pilgrimage to the International Eucharistic and Marian Shrine, Knock. Archbishop-emeritus Michael Neary celebrated Mass with Archbishop of Tuam Francis Duffy, Fr Derek Darby, Diocese of Meath and Fr Gerard MacCormack, Diocese of Meath, concelebrating. Pictured are Thomas Kilduff (Cavan), Dr Mary Holohan (Dublin), Prof Richard Conroy (Dublin).



LIMERICK: Billy and Tommy Murphy are pictured with their grandmother Kathleen Ryan Simon.



LIMERICK: Tommy Quillinan is pictured with his grandfather Myles Treacy.



LIMERICK: Lee McSweeney and Leon Wallace are pictured with their grandmother Margaret McSweeney at Doon Convent NS's grandparents' Mass, February 1.



LIMERICK: Sean O'Dwyer and Lilly O'Dwyer join their grandmother Mary O'Dwyer at Doon Convent NS' grandparents' Mass.



LIMERICK: The Bracken Family Zach, Catherine, James pictured with their grandfather Michael Doyle.



LIMERICK: Margaret Crowe stands with her grandchildren Cormac, Amy, Aoife and Sadie.

Edited by Ruadhán Jones
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Events deadline is a week in advance of publication



KILDARE: Monasterevin parishioners embark on a Camino Walk in honour of St Brigid on February 6. The walk was led by Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin Denis Nulty and journeyed via Umeras along the New Canal Blue Way, finishing in Ss Peter and Paul's Church, Monasterevin with a Service of Light. Over 1,000 people walked the Camino and were presented with a Camino Certificate at the end.



GALWAY: Fr Brendan Kilcoyne, Mae Malone, Archbishop of Tuam Francis Duffy and Karen Ludden enjoy refreshments after the inaugural Tuam young adults' night on February 4 in the Cathedral of the Assumption, Tuam.



GALWAY: Patrick, Tommy and Matthew, from Westport, Balla and Carna at the Tuam young adults' night.

ANTRIM

Beloved Disciples Programme for over 60s continues Friday, February 17 at 11am at Living Church 120 Cliftonville Road, Belfast and will conclude Friday, March 3. Each session lasts one hour, a chance for listening and learning over a cup of tea.

ARMAGH

Archbishop of Armagh will deliver the next Life in the Spirit seminar on February 22 on the topic of salvation. The gathering takes place on Wednesday at 8pm in the Synod Hall, St Patrick's Cathedral.

CARLOW

The date for the Sleaty Graveyard Mass, Graiguecullen parish, has been changed due to unforeseen circumstances and will now take place on Friday June 16 at 7.30pm.

CAVAN

Legion of Mary meetings take place on Tuesdays at 8pm in St Clare's Chapel.

CORK

The Poor Clare Sisters are hosting a Zoom meeting for people considering a vocation on Saturday, February 18 at 3pm. Contact vocationspoorclarescork@gmail.com to receive the link for the meeting.

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

First Saturday devotions take place in the Church of the Ascension, Gurrabraher with Fr Marius O'Reilly. Begins at 9.30am. Rosary, Mass, meditation for 15 minutes and Confession.

A Youth 2000 prayer group for young adults aged 18-35 meets Mondays at 7.30pm for prayer followed by refreshments in Ladysbridge parish.

DONEGAL

A Youth 2000 prayer meeting takes place every Wednesday in the Cathedral in Letterkenney from 8-9pm with

tea afterwards in the Pastoral Centre. For ages 16-35. For more information contact Orla 0851681320 or Elaine 0871707440.

A two-part retreat for those who have suffered bereavement takes place in Ards Friary from February 24-26 facilitated by Fr Philip Baxter. The second part of the retreat will be held 17 – 19 March.

DUBLIN

A series of Lenten reflections 'From Penny Catechism to the Catechism of the Catholic Church', take place in St John the Baptist parish centre, Clontarf. They begin Monday, February 27 at 7.30pm with a talk from Fr Terence Crotty OP on 'Jesus the teacher: teaching the four Gospels'.

GALWAY

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

KERRY

Tralee area mission led by the Redemptorists takes place Sunday, February 26, until Friday, March 3. It is a mission for the parishes of St John's, St Brendan's and The Spa. The theme is 'Dream, Hope and Celebrate'.

KILDARE

A Lenten programme begins February 22 in Our Lady's Parish Centre, Leixlip from 7.45-9pm and will continue once a week for the rest of Lent. The theme is 'Living words – keeping Scripture alive today', with different speakers and topics each week.

LOUTH

Mass for the African Community takes place in St Nicholas' Church the third Sunday of each month at 2pm.

Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal novena takes place on Mondays at 10am (except holidays) in Holy Redeemer par-

ish, Dundalk.

MEATH

St Mary's Parish choir, Navan, is working to build up the tenors and basses among their number. Music and training provided every Wednesday evening from 8-9.30pm in St Anne's Resource Centre.

TIPPERARY

Holy Family Mission are hosting a family day on Sunday, February 26, 10am-3pm. Prayer, talk, Mass, music, fun and games for all the family. Bring a packed lunch. Booking is essential contact info@hollyfamilymission.ie.

TYRONE

Omagh Charismatic Prayer Group meet in the pastoral centre on Thursday evenings with Rosary at 7.40pm, followed by prayer meeting at 8pm.

WATERFORD

A 'Theology of the Body' study group takes place Tuesdays 11am-12.30pm in Foyer of Charity, Dunmore East. It begins February 21. Registration is essential, contact Helen 086 167 8027 or hellywilliams@gmail.com.

St Anthony's Novena and blessing with the Relic of St Anthony held on Tuesdays in Waterford Cathedral after 10.30am Mass. The Franciscans have asked that the cathedral continue the Novena. The Mass will conclude with the prayer and hymn to St Anthony followed by blessing with the relic.

WESTMEATH

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

WEXFORD

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

Rosary and devotions at the Rocklands shrine to Our Lady of Wexford take place every Tuesday at 2.30pm.



World Report

IN BRIEF

Priest charged for praying in UK 'buffer zone'

● A Catholic priest who faced criminal charges for praying for free speech outside an abortion clinic after business hours is the latest to run afoul of a strict buffer zone law in the English city of Birmingham.

"I pray wherever I go, inside my head, for the people around me. How can it be a crime for a priest to pray?" Fr Sean Gough, a priest of the Archdiocese of Birmingham, said in a February 9 statement from the ADF UK legal group.

Fr Gough stood near a closed abortion clinic on Station Road in Birmingham with a sign that said "praying for free speech". Police officers approached him and at first told him they did not believe he was breaking Birmingham's public spaces protection order.

Ukrainian Catholics to celebrate Christmas on December 25

● The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) announced February 6 that it is switching its fixed-date religious celebrations to match the Gregorian calendar used by the Church in the West.

Ukrainian Catholics have been among the few remaining sects under the papacy to celebrate holidays according to the Julian calendar, which celebrates Christmas on January 7 and Epiphany on January 19.

The Russian Orthodox Church and other Eastern

Churches under the Patriarchate of Moscow follow the Julian calendar.

Now, Catholics in Ukraine will celebrate feasts on the same dates as Catholics in the US and other Western nations, meaning Christmas will be observed on December 25 and Epiphany on January 6.

The change will take place at the beginning of the Ukrainian Catholic Church's liturgical year, September 1.

Brazilian church provides aid to indigenous people

● The severe health care and hunger crisis affecting the Yanomami indigenous people in Roraima state prompted the Brazilian church to coordinate help and to work side by side with government agencies and indigenous organisations to provide food and medical attention to the sick.

Beyond emergency actions, a number of Catholic voices have been demanding that the authorities who allowed the situation to get to this point must be properly held accountable for their misdeeds.

That includes former President Jair Bolsonaro, who has been in Florida since his last day in office, on December 31.

The National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (CNBB) donated \$70,000 to pay for food and medicine kits, with the support of Adveniat, the German episcopal charity-organisation for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Captors of Haiti priest make ransom demands

● The Claretian Missionaries' Independent Delegation for the Antilles reported that on February 7 one of its priests was kidnapped.

Fr Antoine Macaire Christian Noah was abducted in the morning when he was going to his missionary community in Kazaï, about 20 miles north of Port-au-Prince, the country's capital.

The kidnappers have contacted "the superior of his missionary community asking for money in exchange for his release," according to a statement from the Claretians posted on Facebook.

Fr Macaire is originally from Cameroon and has been the parochial vicar at St Michael the Archangel Parish in Kazaï for one year.

A Camilan priest, Fr Antonio Menegón, told the Vatican news agency *Fides* in December 2022 that currently armed gangs are running the country and also attacking Catholic schools and hospitals.

Nicaraguan bishop sentenced to 26 years in prison by Ortega regime

Bishop Rolando Álvarez of Matagalpa was convicted and sentenced by a Nicaraguan court to 26 years in prison on February 10 – barely a day after the outspoken prelate defied President Daniel Ortega by refusing to go into exile.

The court convicted Bishop Álvarez on charges of conspiracy to undermine national integrity and spreading false information after a secret trial in which he was denied a lawyer of his choosing. He was also stripped of his Nicaraguan citizenship and prohibited from holding elected office or a public position.

Bishop Álvarez was not present as Judge Octavio Rothschuh delivered the decision on February 10 over state-controlled media.

Ortega disparaged Bishop Álvarez the previous day as "deranged" and accused him of being "someone who considers himself leader of the Church in Nicaragua, the Church in Latin America."

Bishop Álvarez refused to board a February 9 flight carrying more than 200 political prisoners to the United States, according to Ortega, who says the prelate wanted to meet first with his fellow bishops. Bishop Álvarez was subsequently moved from house arrest – where he had languished incommunicado for five months – to a prison notorious for deplorable conditions.



Bishop Rolando Álvarez of Matagalpa, Nicaragua, a frequent critic of Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega, prays at a Catholic church in Managua May 20, 2022. A Nicaraguan court sentenced Bishop Álvarez to more than 26 years in prison on February 10 for conspiracy and spreading false information. Photo: OSV News/Maynor Valenzuela, Reuters.

"Irrational and uncontrollable hatred from the Nicaraguan dictatorship toward Bishop Rolando Álvarez. Merciless vengeance against him. They have not withstood his moral stature and his prophetic coherence," tweeted Auxiliary Bishop Silvio José Baez of Managua, who has been exiled in Miami.

"Rolando will be free. God will not abandon him," he tweeted. "They sink further each day in their fear and evil," he wrote about the regime.

Bishop Álvarez's conviction follows the Ortega regime sending 222 political prisoners to the United States, including six clergymen also convicted of conspiracy and

spreading false information.

The sentence given to Bishop Álvarez was the harshest for an Ortega opponent since the Nicaraguan leader unleashed a crackdown on critics of his increasingly tyrannical regime, according to *The Wall Street Journal*.

Ortega has persecuted political opponents – arresting seven potential presidential candidates prior to his winning re-election in 2021, in a race the United States and European countries considered rigged. His regime has also extinguished the registrations of non-governmental groups, forced the closure of Church charities and educational projects, and sup-

pressed independent media outlets.

The Church in Nicaragua has a complicated history with Ortega, who first claimed power in a 1979 revolution with the Sandinistas and returned to office in 2007, presenting himself as a proper Catholic – and supported by some in the Church hierarchy.

Church leaders clashed with Ortega and his wife, Vice President Rosario Murillo, after protests over a proposed social security reform erupted in 2018. Parishes provided shelter for protesters and priests subsequently accompanied the families of political protesters.

Pope's African visit laid down challenge, say Church leaders

While Pope Francis has returned to Rome after his six-day apostolic trip to Congo and South Sudan, the words he left there will resonate across the continent for a long time, Church leaders and experts say.

Catholic bishops in Congo said the words of the Holy Father not only comforted, but shook up, the continent, reviving hope that the nations may overcome the significant challenges they face.

Pope Francis spent four days in Congo, from January 31-February 3, before heading to South Sudan, from where he departed February 5.

"The successor of Peter, Pope Francis, as a good shepherd who knows his sheep, left us with powerful words which have strengthened our faith, revived our hope, ignited our love and challenged our consciences," the bishops said in a February 4 statement sent to OSV News.

In Congo, the Pope spoke out against "economic colonialism" and called out developed nations against the wanton exploitation of Congo's vast mineral resources.

"Hands off the Democratic Republic of the Congo! Hands off Africa!

Stop choking Africa, it is not a mine to be stripped or a terrain to be plundered," Pope Francis said to big applause. The spokesman for the Southern Africa Bishops' Conference, Archbishop Stephen Brislin of Cape Town, told OSV News that the comment was not only relevant to Congo but to the whole continent.

"Africa is rich in resources and yet, by and large, remains poor and underdeveloped," he said, blaming economic colonialism for contributing to inequality.

Church of England allows blessings of same-sex marriages

The Church of England has banned church weddings for same-sex couples while at the same time allowing priests to bless same-sex marriages and partnerships.

The General Synod of the Church of England decided on February 9 that same-sex couples would be allowed to

come to church after a civil marriage or civil partnership to give thanks, dedicate their relationship to God and receive God's blessing.

Majorities in the houses of Bishops, Clergy and Laity agreed to the move after a landmark debate over two days.

Archbishop Justin Welby of Canterbury, and Archbishop Stephen Cottrell of York, said during the Synod assembly that "for the first time, the Church of England will publicly, unreservedly and joyfully welcome same-sex couples in church," a statement from the Church of

England reads.

"As archbishops, we are committed to respecting the conscience of those for whom this goes too far and to ensure that they have all the reassurances they need in order to maintain the unity of the Church as this conversation continues."



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Lives shattered...



A wife and husband embrace outside of their destroyed home in Kahramanmaras, Turkey, February 10. The powerful 7.8 magnitude earthquake rocked areas of Turkey and Syria early February 6, toppling hundreds of buildings and killing thousands. Photo: OSV/Ronen Zvulun, Reuters.

FBI retracts document orchestrating investigation of Catholics

The FBI says it is retracting a leaked document published on the internet February 8 that appears to reveal that the bureau's Richmond division launched an investigation into "radical traditionalist" Catholics and their possible ties to "the far-right white nationalist movement".

In response to an inquiry from CNA, the FBI said it will remove the document because "it does not meet our exacting standards".

The document, which was published on the website UncoverDC and is titled "Interest of Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremists in Radical-Traditionalist

Catholic Ideology Almost Certainly Presents New Mitigation Opportunities," the document singles out Catholics who are interested in the Traditional Latin Mass as potentially linked to violent extremist groups.

Kyle Seraphin, who is listed by UncoverDC as the author of the document, told CNA that he received the leaked document from an FBI agent. Seraphin himself is a former FBI special agent who was reportedly suspended last year.

According to an NBC News report he went on to join Truth Social, the social media platform started by

former President Donald Trump.

The FBI's national press office confirmed to CNA that the document came from the Richmond office but stated that it will "remove the document from FBI systems" because it does not meet the "exacting standards of the FBI".

"While our standard practice is to not comment on specific intelligence products, this particular field office product — disseminated only within the FBI — regarding racially or ethnically motivated violent extremism does not meet the exacting standards of the FBI," the statement read.

"Upon learning of the

document, FBI Headquarters quickly began taking action to remove the document from FBI systems and conduct a review of the basis for the document. The FBI is committed to sound analytic tradecraft and to investigating and preventing acts of violence and other crimes while upholding the constitutional rights of all Americans and will never conduct investigative activities or open an investigation based solely on First Amendment protected activity," concluded the statement from the FBI National Press Office.

'We can't defend ourselves without arms' – Ukrainian archbishop

The head of the Ukrainian Catholic church has defended President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's requests for long-range weapons, although a Vatican diplomat warned that arms supply is a complex topic.

"I cannot morally endorse this request for arms because I don't know all the details – but we cannot defend ourselves without arms," said Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk of Kyiv-Halych, during a February 8 online seminar organised by the

Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need.

"It may sound strange that religious leaders favour the military support Ukraine is looking for, but to survive, we have to defend ourselves.

"If someone knows how we can stop Russian troops without arms, let them please tell us the secret."

However, Archbishop Visvaldas Kulbokas, the Vatican's nuncio in Kyiv, told the seminar that "when we raise such questions about weapons

and arms, the country which first introduced their military to Ukraine would have this question addressed to them first," suggesting talks with Russia are a necessary step as they started the war.

"When addressing Ukraine's legitimate right to self-defence, the Holy Father and our Secretariat of State have always stressed the proportional use of weapons – you must think how to use them, wisely and attentively addressing all aspects," he said.

Vatican roundup

Pope urges solidarity with Syria, Turkey after earthquakes

● Pope Francis urged all people to be in solidarity with the regions of Turkey and Syria struck by two powerful earthquakes early February 6 and that are "in part already martyred by a long war".

The two earthquakes, which both measured above 7.0 magnitude according to the United States Geological Survey, struck southern Turkey and impacted large swaths of neighbouring Syria.

The death toll has climbed into the tens of thousands and the number of dead is expected to climb further as rescue teams continue to search through the rubble of toppled buildings.

Pope Francis prayed for the thousands of dead and wounded at his general audience February 8 and expressed his closeness to the victims, their families "and all who suffer from this devastating calamity".

The Pope also thanked aid workers responding to the crisis. Hundreds of foreign engineers, medical personnel and rescue workers have been sent to Turkey and Syria to search for people trapped under wreckage and aid the thousands without shelter in freezing winter conditions.

Safeguarding point person appointed for Vatican

● Cardinal Mauro Gambetti, the papal vicar for Vatican City State, has appointed Scalabrini Fr Luigi Sabbarese, a 60-year-old canon lawyer, to coordinate and verify the city state's safeguarding efforts.

Pope Francis established a set of guidelines in 2019 for the protection of children and vulnerable persons for the Vicariate of Vatican City, that is, for Vatican City State and the Roman Curia.

The guidelines said the papal vicar "shall appoint a contact person for the protection of minors who shall coordinate and verify

the implementation of the present guidelines so that, within the vicariate, there is a community respectful and mindful of the rights and the needs of minors, as well as being vigilant in preventing any form of violence or abuse."

The contact person also was to coordinate "the prevention and training activities of pastoral workers" and promote increased care in welcoming and supporting "those who claim to have suffered exploitation, sexual abuse or ill-treatment, as well as their family members," the guidelines said.

The young must fight trafficking with dignity, says Pope

● Young people must be "missionaries of human dignity" to fight human trafficking and all forms of exploitation, Pope Francis said.

The Pope's message for International Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking, observed February 8, was directed to young people.

He encouraged them to build their own sense of dignity and care for the dignity of every person they meet.

"Human trafficking disfigures dignity. Exploitation and subjugation limit freedom and turn people into objects to use and discard," he said in his message.

"Unfortunately, trafficking is growing to a worrying extent, affecting primarily migrants, women and children, young people like you, people full of dreams and the desire to live in dignity."

For the first time since the day of prayer was established by Pope Francis in 2015, young representatives of anti-trafficking organisations around the world gathered in Rome to participate in training sessions on how to better prevent human trafficking.

Talitha Kum, an umbrella network of religious sister-led anti-trafficking organizations, coordinated the training.

The 15 representatives of young people aged from 18 to 35 years old participated in an ecumenical prayer vigil in Rome February 6 as well as an online pilgrimage of prayer and awareness February 8 with participants from 50 countries and all continents.



Letter from Rome



John L. Allen Jr

In the summer of 1971, no question before the US Supreme Court was as contentious as the Pentagon Papers case, in which the Nixon administration sought to prevent *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* from publishing a classified report on the Vietnam War.

“In an independent system of justice, the chief judicial authority has to maintain scrupulous neutrality, observing rigorous hands-off protocols intended to protect the integrity of the process”

In a 6-3 decision, the court eventually upheld the right to publish the material, in a ruling considered a landmark for freedom of the press.

Suppose that during the oral arguments before the court, it emerged that Chief Justice Warren Burger had agreed to meet Katherine Graham, publisher of the *Post* and thus a party to the case, without any of the attorneys present and completely off-the-record. It would have been considered a classic example of prohibited *ex parte* communication during a trial, and likely would have resulted in invalidating the entire process.

In an independent system of justice, the chief judicial authority has to maintain scrupulous neutrality, observing rigorous hands-off protocols intended to protect the integrity of the process. Otherwise, people will assume that legal decisions are simply an extension of politics by other means.

The point comes to mind in light of news that Pope Francis granted a private audience to Italian Cardinal Angelo Becciu in the papal library on the second floor of the Apostolic Palace, the same space where he receives heads of state and other VIP visitors.

Cardinal Becciu is currently on trial before a Vatican tribunal, charged with criminal misappropriation of Vatican funds to support charitable foundations with ties to his own family in Sardinia, as well as complicity in a failed €373 million London property deal while he was still the *sostituto*, or ‘substitute,’ in the Secretariat of State, meaning the Pope’s Chief of Staff.

Under the legal code of the Vatican City State, the Pope is both the supreme executive and judicial

An independent judiciary...everywhere other than inside the Vatican



Cardinal Angelo Becciu, centre, attends Pope Francis' Mass with new cardinals in St Peter's Basilica at the Vatican in August 2022. Also pictured are Cardinals Mario Grech and Konrad Krajewski. Photo: CNS

authority. In any other setting, the *tête-à-tête* would have triggered an immediate appeal from the lawyers involved and might well have produced a mistrial.

In the Vatican, on the other hand, it generated nothing more than raised eyebrows and resigned shrugs. In truth, Francis' almost indecipherable rapport with Cardinal Becciu has been part of the equation in the present trial before it even began.

Vatican tribunal

In September 2020, Francis summoned Cardinal Becciu to his residence at the Domus Santa Marta to inform him that he was being fired as the Prefect of Congregation for the Causes of Saints and stripped of his privileges as a cardinal, including the right to participate in the next conclave. That was ten months before Dr Becciu was indicted by the Vatican tribunal, and to many observers, it seemed the Pope had prejudged the case.

That's certainly the impression of German Cardinal Gerhard Müller, for

instance, the Pope's former top doctrinal official, who said in a recent interview book that Dr Becciu “was humiliated and punished before the world without any possibility of a defence”.

“Now we await the end of the trial before the Vatican tribunal,” Cardinal Müller said. “Everybody should have the presumption of innocence, a right that's been sacrosanct since the time of the ancient Romans.”

Since then, the Pope's had plenty of other contact with Cardinal Becciu.

On April 1, 2021, Francis went to Cardinal Becciu's apartment to celebrate the Holy Thursday Mass, a gesture which was taken at the time either as a rehabilitation of the prelate or as a further condemnation, given that the Pontiff often visits prisoners on Holy Thursday.

The Pope and Cardinal Becciu have also spoken several times on the phone while the trial has been underway, including one conversation that was taped by a member of Dr Becciu's family and ended up being admitted as evidence.

As for yesterday's meeting, Cardinal Becciu seemed ebullient afterwards.

“We had a very cordial and serene conversation,” he told reporters. “The Pope renewed his esteem and trust, as has been the case for some time.”

“The Pope has to be the Pope, which means he needs to be able to meet anybody he wants”

“Every meeting with him is, for me, a reason for great joy,” Cardinal Becciu said.

From the point of view of sound legal procedure, such exchanges between a defendant and the head of the judiciary are simply indefensible. In fact, Catholic social teaching extols the principle of the independence of the judiciary – everywhere, that is, other than inside the Vatican itself.

Of course, Francis isn't just the

chief judicial authority, he's also the chief executive of the Church, and he has to govern. It makes all the sense in the world that for reasons of state, he might need to speak to a figure with a deep knowledge of many of the issues currently on the Pope's desk.

In other words, the fact of being both chief executive and chief judicial authority creates an inevitable conflict of interest – either the Pope is going to look like he's interfering in the legal process, or his hands are going to be tied in running the Church.

The solution, as I've suggested before, is a genuine separation of powers, in which the Vatican would have its own independent judiciary with power over civil and criminal matters (not, of course, questions of faith and morals.)

The Pope has to be the Pope, which means he needs to be able to meet anybody he wants.

He also, however, needs to inspire confidence that when the Vatican hands down legal verdicts, it's doing so with integrity – and that means he may need to voluntarily renounce a small piece of his own power, in exchange for a much larger payout in terms of moral authority.

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

“Everybody should have the presumption of innocence, a right that's been sacrosanct since the time of the ancient Romans”

Names and faces: drawing attention to victims of violence



Cindy Wooden

Pope Francis' visit to Congo and his ecumenical pilgrimage to South Sudan put a face - actually, thousands of faces - on the horror of war.

But he also seemed energised by the enthusiasm of the crowds in Kinshasa, Congo, and buoyed by traveling to Juba, South Sudan with Anglican Archbishop Justin Welby of Canterbury and the Rev. Iain Greenshields, moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

“However, Mr Kiir did announce during the trip that his government would return to the negotiating table with five groups that did not sign a 2018 peace agreement”

Archbishop Welby, joining the Pope and Rev. Greenshields for a news conference on the flight back to Rome, used the word “miracle” to describe the three traditions pulling off a retreat for South Sudan's squabbling leaders at the Vatican in 2019.

But none of the three seemed certain this time that their words and gestures changed anything for South Sudanese President Salva Kiir, a former warrior and still an imposing and commanding figure at age 71, or for the five vice presidents who are supposed to be sharing governance with him.

However, Mr Kiir did announce during the trip that his government would return to the negotiating table with five groups that did not sign a 2018 peace agreement. Mr Kiir had withdrawn from the talks in November.

In the absence of peace and with little possibility of returning to their homes, some 2,000 internally displaced people living in camps that dot South Sudan had their own meeting with the three leaders. They were able to share their stories and their dreams and to do so in the presence of an international press corps.

On the return flight to Rome, Archbishop Welby said with the Covid-19 pandemic there was “a loss of momentum in the peace process,” although the trip showed clearly that the people are desperate for peace after almost 10 years of violent conflicts.

“What we now need is a serious



Rev. Iain Greenshields, moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, Pope Francis and Anglican Archbishop Justin Welby sit together aboard the flight from Juba, South Sudan, to Rome on February 5. Photo: CNS.

change of heart from the leadership. They have to agree to a process that will lead to a peaceful transition of power. They've been told this publicly. We've said it to them,” the archbishop said. “There has to be an end to corruption and gun smuggling and the amassing of huge quantities of weapons.”

Biggest plague

Pope Francis agreed, saying that the weapons trade “is the biggest plague in the world,” provoking violent confrontations among people so that businesses can go in and exploit their land and their resources.

Meeting South Sudan's political leaders at the presidential palace in Juba, Pope Francis got right to the point: “Many things are needed here, but surely not more instruments of death!”

While the moderator and the archbishop did not join Pope Francis for the Congo portion of the trip, they and their denominations know the challenges facing the Congolese, the destruction and corruption that accompany the extraction of its mineral wealth and the grotesque violence that continues in the country's eastern region.

In the most emotional part of his

journey, Pope Francis came face to face with the results of that violence, blessing a young woman and the twins that were conceived when she repeatedly was raped as a hostage of militias and gently cradling the stump of an arm of another woman whose hands had been cut off.

“That evening, at an ecumenical prayer service with the Pope and Rev. Greenshields, Archbishop Welby was even more forceful”

While there were male victims present at that meeting in Kinshasa - a priest whose finger was chopped off and boys who had seen their family members hacked to death - in Congo and in South Sudan it was clear that the violence, the poverty and the lack of education, healthcare and opportunity do not just weigh on the nations' women, but come close to crushing them.

In the presence of the Congolese victims, Pope Francis said, “I pray that women, every woman, may be respected, protected and esteemed. Violence against women and moth-

ers is violence against God himself, who from a woman, from a mother, took on our human condition.”

Three days later, at the meeting with people living in camps for the displaced, Pope Francis said that “mothers, women are the key to transforming the country. If they receive the proper opportunities, through their industriousness and their natural gift of protecting life, they will have the ability to change the face of South Sudan, to give it a peaceful and cohesive development.”

“I ask you, I ask all the people of these lands, to ensure that women are protected, respected, valued and honoured,” he said. “Please, protect, respect, appreciate and honour every woman, every girl, young woman, mother and grandmother. Otherwise, there will be no future.”

That evening, at an ecumenical prayer service with the Pope and Rev. Greenshields, Archbishop Welby was even more forceful. He had a message for young South Sudanese men: “You will value and honour women, never raping, never violent, never cruel, never using them as those there simply to satisfy desire.”

“When we are one, we value and

honour women,” Archbishop Welby said.

The majority of the population in both Congo and South Sudan are under the age of 30 and, with the violence and poverty, getting an education and decent job are out of reach for many of them. But for girls and women, it is even more difficult.

“That would be my plea: The rights of women, and young women in particular, have to be recognised as paramount”

“Bright, good young minds deserve the opportunity to develop.” Rev. Greenshields told reporters on the flight back to Rome. “Now, from my own experience in other parts of the world, bright young female minds deserve the right to the same opportunities exactly as any others in whatever country, but especially in the developing countries.”

“That would be my plea: The rights of women, and young women in particular, have to be recognised as paramount,” he said.

Letters

Letter of the week

Celebrating the true story of St Brigid

Dear Editor, Every year we have the same tired attacks on St Brigid in the media, with claims that she was involved in an abortion and was lesbian. Breda O'Brien's piece was important as it pointed out the offensive co-opting of such a wonderful saint by those who seek to paint her in a way that is more palatable to their own tastes [The Irish Catholic – February 9, 2023]. Aside from this, all Christians should be delighted that St Brigid's Day

has become a bank holiday, it is an opportunity to really celebrate the saint and focus on the truth of her history and miracles. It is also welcome that a woman in the Church is receiving so much spotlight in Ireland, although it has also attracted detractors, this does not take away from this welcome move. Perhaps parishes can organise more events connected with the life and times of St Brigid on subsequent bank holidays. It could be small gath-

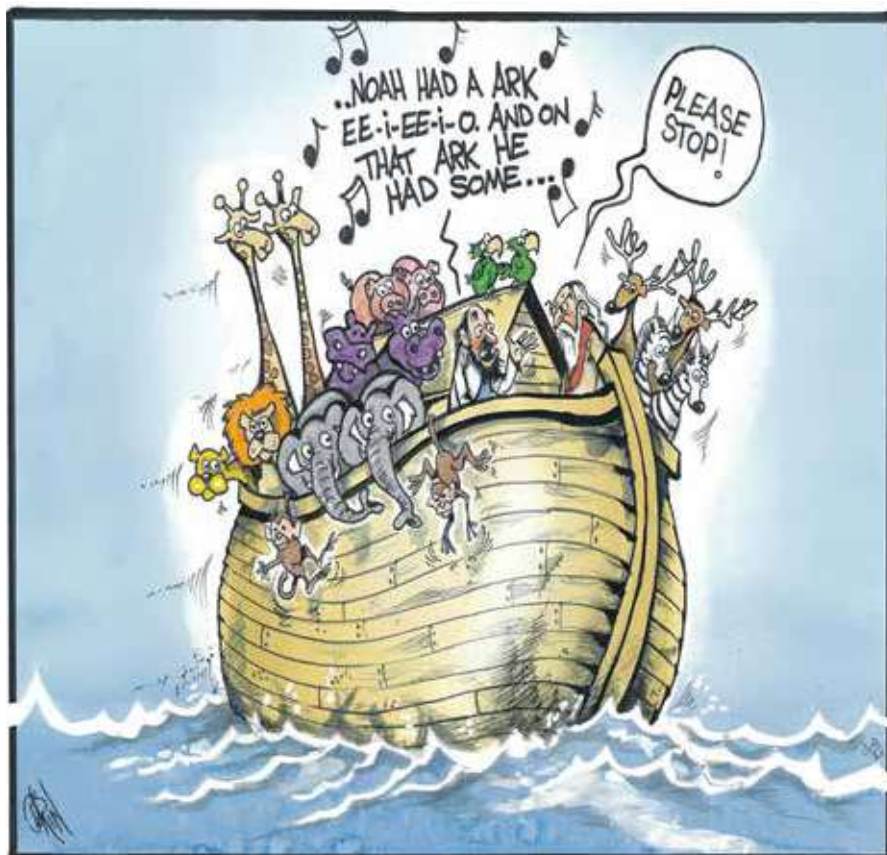
erings or big family events, not only would it attract people to the church, it could also spread the true message of St Brigid and hopefully change the narrative that is being pushed by many of those in the media. There is so much false information out there that we must take the reins and make sure no one is taken down the rabbit hole.

Yours etc.,
Deirdre Murphy
Mullingar, Co. Westmeath

Making St Brigid patron saint of the unborn

Dear Editor, Just a thought – knowing the story about St Brigid and her blessing of an unborn baby in a woman's womb, giving it a safe, sacred space. No doubt going to heaven. Also the fact that she is the patron saint of fertility, why doesn't the Church make her patron saint of the unborn?

Yours etc.,
Brid Fitzpatrick,
Terenure, Dublin 6W



Shortage of priests having greater impact by the day

Dear Editor, While it is understandable that members of religious orders might be upset regarding the initiative by Irish bishops to target vocations for the diocesan priesthood, the reality is the shortage of priests is having a greater impact by the day. The lack of vocations to the priesthood affects parishes in so many ways, but especially upon those older priests who have dedicated

their lives to ministry.

These men even as they age, are being asked to do more to fill the gaps in other parishes. While most men and women approaching their late 60s are preparing for retirement, taking up hobbies and spending more time with friends and families, our amazing priests are struggling to even get time to take their one day off a week or plan a few weeks

holiday without being made to feel guilty. While permanent deacons and parishioners try to share the workload, priests carry the greatest burden and are always in great demand as many want to receive the Eucharist daily and families still request a funeral Mass even if they rarely attend Church at other times. So we do need to promote vocations to the priesthood, but it is challenging

as there is a reluctance to target younger men without significant life experience as it is a big commitment to make, and many more mature men who might consider the priesthood are married and so it is not an option for them.

Yours etc.,
Deacon Frank Browne
Rathfarnham, Dublin 14

Parishes suffering due to lack of priests

Dear Editor, It is unfair for religious congregations to object to the decision to focus the 'Year of Vocations' on diocesan priesthood. Parishes across Ireland are suffering due to a lack of diocesan priests and many now do not have Mass in their local church as a result. It's becoming increasingly

difficult in some parts of Ireland to organise a wedding, funeral and Baptism due to this shortage.

There are very real difficulties facing dioceses, particularly considering the small numbers entering seminary for them. It is of utmost importance to find men who may have a vocation

and foster that calling within them because a Church without priests deprives Catholics of the Eucharist – though some would have us believe this is not important.

Yours etc.,
Mary O'Hagan
Dundrum, Dublin 14

facebook community

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

First blind priest in Kenya: Ordination is a 'dream turned reality'

I'm so delighted for him and I'm very certain that he will be a great priest to his new community and parish. God bless you and congratulations and may you have many happy years as a priest.

Catholic schools concerned about push for gender ideology

Just say no! There is no stopping this, it's a bottomless pit. Until you do what should have been done a long time ago. Say no. – **John Taaffe**
They can keep their radical and extremely dangerous ideology out of Catholic schools. – **Declan O'Reilly**

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

Failing to ask if freedom of conscience is important

Dear Editor, Writing in *The Irish Catholic* – February 2, 2023 – David Quinn discussed Enoch Burke and his employment at Wilson Hospital School. Mr Burke is often portrayed as eccentric, and many on social media treat him as an object of fun. David Quinn explained that the stance of Mr Burke is more than an issue of gender ideology because there is also the issue of conscience. He compared this to Sweden where doctors and nurses have no right of conscience to refuse to participate in abortions. The law of the state is given priority over individual conscience.

In Matthew's Gospel we are told to "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's" (Mt 22:21). Jesus was referring to situations where the Caesars regarded themselves as divine and claimed authority to determine right from wrong. While the state can legislate to criminalise or decriminalise behaviour this is very different from pronouncing on matters of faith and morals.

I also noted that in an article in the *Guardian* (February 1, 2023) under the heading 'Welby would rather see C of E disestablished than split over same-sex marriage', Harriet Sherwood wrote, "A number of MPs have threatened parliamentary intervention unless the C of E aligns itself with the law". If we fail to take the separation of Church and State seriously we could end up reducing the Catholic Church to an established Church where its teaching has to be aligned with state law.

When we dismiss the actions of Enoch Burke as eccentric or a matter of jest we may inadvertently be failing to ask if freedom of conscience is important, and if we have the right to exercise it.

Yours etc.,
Brendan Kennedy
Belfast, Co. Antrim

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.



Leaving our self-centredness behind this Lent



Lent begins Wednesday, February 22, this year, and so in preparation it's worth turning our mind to it in advance. At least in my case, it often comes upon me like a thief in the night, and once I find myself on the back foot, it's a struggle to work up the motivation to get back on track and make the most of this important season in the Church's calendar.

Last week in our *Questions of Faith* column we looked at the idea behind Lent, which is that by "the solemn 40 days of Lent, the Church unites herself each year to the mystery of Jesus in the desert" (so the Catechism tells us in paragraph 540). Lent is a 40-day period, modelled after our Lord's 40 days in the desert. Like him, we commit ourselves



The goal of Lent is nothing other than freeing ourselves up to follow God more faithfully, writes Jason Osborne

to a time of prayer and fasting, as well as almsgiving, that begins on Ash Wednesday and ends at sundown on Holy Thursday, leading us into Good Friday and the agony of the Passion.

Preparation

Lent is a time of preparation, in two different senses. In the first sense, it's preparation for celebrating the Lord's Resurrection on Easter Sunday. In the

second sense, it's preparation for heaven in that we seek to relinquish many of the excessive attachments we have to earthly things that aren't truly necessary. As mentioned above, we do this that we might be motivated more purely by our love of God, and that we might be freer to serve him.

During Lent, the Church advises us to double down on the following things that most of us

are already familiar with (even if we're not too good at practicing them): prayer, fasting and almsgiving. We engage in more personal prayer during this time, and it's not a bad idea to engage in more communal prayer either. Availing of the sacraments, meeting with brothers and sisters striving in Christ and adopting a more reflective mindset than usual are also good – necessary, even – measures. We fast by giving up on excessive attachment, by foregoing whatever we find ourselves attached to, whether that be food, alcohol, Netflix, social media or something else.

We serve by giving alms, which draws our minds to the service Christ first offered us. If you're in a position to donate or offer your time or services in

some way, now isn't a bad time to put your best foot forward and do just that, as Lent can be a good time for kick-starting a habit.

Minor sacrifices

As mentioned in last week's *Questions of Faith* column, on some level, many of us still hold to the idea of Lent that we picked up in school, which is one of very minor sacrifices. Foregoing a chocolate bar here, a bag of crisps there, or maybe doing away with ice-cream altogether. Stumbles along the way were likely, and myself fully included, we've done little to rectify this approach to Lent since then. Adults need a different regimen from children, and nowhere is that more the case than Lent.

This childish understand-



ing of Lent must be left behind if we're to enter into the true spirit of the season, which is one of true, internal conversion of heart as we seek to follow God more faithfully. By far the most important thing about Lent is this continual transformation of heart – the end destination of our transformation being Christ himself. Without that inner transformation – if we pray, fast and serve with dour faces and bitter hearts – our practices are in vain. The end goal is to become more like Christ, and as mentioned last week, Lent is another one of the tools at the Church's disposal to make that happen.

“Do you have the space for an extra devotional for the duration of Lent such as the rosary or the divine mercy chaplet?”

How is one to make the most of this time, though? With just under a week still to go until Lent kicks off, now would be a good time to consider how best to prepare to engage with those three pillars: prayer, fasting and almsgiving. We make the best use of spiritual occasions when we prepare for them beforehand. If we form a plan and stick to it, we're likely to see greater benefits as we walk forward into the future with God. Even if we formulate a plan and fail, we'll

be more inclined to get back on a well-structured track, game-plan in hand, than if we were without.

Just as rolling out of bed late and mouthing a few bleary prayers is less useful and sanctifying than an orderly morning, so too is a pre-planned Lent entered with clear disciplines in mind bound to be more fruitful than otherwise. So let's have a look at a few things we could do to get our minds moving and start strong this year.

Ideas

Here are some things to consider before we get underway next Wednesday:

Have you got a daily prayer plan? Have you got the time to make a commitment to daily Mass? Or would 15 committed minutes of meditative or contemplative prayer each day be more realistic? Would it be a good idea to engage with Scripture more by reading the daily readings each day, or by following a reliable reading plan? Do you have the space for an extra devotional for the duration of Lent such as the rosary or the divine mercy chaplet? Would spiritual reading and a daily examen before bed each night be spiritually beneficial for you?

When it comes to fasting, are you being generous in your sacrifice, for God's sake? Is your current commitment likely to enhance your spiritual life, or is it a light burden? Besides following the basic laws of abstinence and fasting, with perhaps added personal restrictions on luxuries such as entertainment, have you considered applying fast-

ing to different behaviours you've noticed impacting on your life? Is social media use a problem for you? Are you watching one too many episodes of your favourite series at night? Maybe fasting from these things too is necessary.

“With God's help though, we can be forgiven, forgive ourselves, and keep moving forward in the spiritual life to the joy of the resurrection”

In terms of almsgiving, are you truly serving others this Lent? How much of your time are you devoting to others compared to yourself? Could it realistically, and healthily, be more? Could you afford to donate to a verified, charitable cause or organisation? Could you overcome yourself more often to serve those who most easily overlooked – your close family and friends?

These are just a few considerations to stimulate your Lenten preparation that I keep coming back to myself. Despite the best preparation and plan in the world, I know ahead of time that I'm likely to fail on multiple fronts. With God's help though, we can be forgiven, forgive ourselves, and keep moving forward in the spiritual life to the joy of the resurrection.



Tracing the ‘twitch upon a thread’ that draws us home

Faith in film



Ruadhán Jones

In a 2000s poll, the British Film Institute canvassed film and TV professionals to find the 100 best English TV series. At number 10, the highest ranked TV Mini-series, was a famous adaptation of *Brideshead Revisited*.

The classic book by Catholic author Evelyn Waugh became a classic series, beloved by audiences, critics – and even the hard-won professional. Some 30 years on from its release, it's a show well worth revisiting and so we will turn away from the “big screen” to the small.

“Once more drawn back into the circle of this family, Charles is challenged to confront his atheism and the Faith of the Flytes”

The series is very faithful to the book – unlike a more recent Hollywood effort – and traces the life and romances of the protagonist Charles Ryder from the 1920s to the early 1940s. Most especially, it focuses on his friendship with the Flytes, a family of wealthy English Catholics who live in a palatial mansion called Brideshead Castle.

Charles, an avowed atheist, befriends the quixotic Catholic Sebastian Flyte and while Charles' progresses on a life of apparent success, Sebastian descends into alcoholism. They drift apart and by a quirk of fate Charles falls in love with Julia, Sebastian's sister. Once



Jeremy Irons (right) stars in the TV adaptation of *Brideshead Revisited* as Charles Ryder and Anthony Andrews as his friend Sebastian Flyte. Photo: ITV.

more drawn back into the circle of this family, Charles is challenged to confront his atheism and the Faith of the Flytes.

That's the plot, but the meaning is best described in Waugh's own words: “The novel deals with what is theologically termed, ‘the operation of Grace’, that is to say, the unmerited and unilateral act of love by which God continually calls souls to himself... God has a separate plan for each individual by which he or she may find salvation. The story of *Brideshead Revisited* seeks to show the working of several such plans in the lives of a single family.”

Adaptation

The 1980s adaptation captures the full force of Waugh's novel in all aspects, including and perhaps most especially this central theme. Without wanting to give too much away, the most striking example of grace at work is a famous death-

bed reversion brought to life by veteran star Laurence Olivier. But all through the series, great effort is taken to illuminate the thread, as Waugh calls us, that attaches all men and women to the Church and through it, to God.

Two of the episodes allude to a quote Waugh takes from GK Chesterton, in which he describes the relationship of the soul to God as being like a fish to the fisherman. “GK Chesterton has compared this to the fisherman's line, which allows the fish the illusion of free play in the water, and yet has him by the hook; in his own time the fisherman by a ‘twitch upon the thread’ draws the fish to land.”

This is the thread on which the series, as with the book, hangs. And it is masterfully achieved through out. All the character's story arcs should be understood in the context of God's desire to call them to himself.

They're a motley crew, but that's

deliberate: “Grace is not confined to the happy, prosperous and conventionally virtuous. There is no stereotyped religious habit of life, as may be seen from the vastly dissimilar characters of the canonised saints.”

That's another quote from Waugh himself. He imbues the characters with that human element of rational irrationality. By that I mean they are able to explain their actions, but often their explanation makes their reasoning more obscure not less. Why does Sebastian become an alcoholic? Why is it that his mother so upsets him? Sebastian and Waugh always allude to an answer without giving one.

In not over-explaining, Waugh leaves space for interpretation and for God's action. Sebastian's alcoholism is accepted, and he ends his life in God's arms, though not as anyone could have intended it. It's the working of grace in a broken life.

And so the action of grace is the main takeaway. The book and TV show are both very simple in reality – the characters love each other imperfectly, even as they strive to love perfectly. That love only finds perfection in unexpected ways, ways not wholly rational because they supersede rationality.

It's worth reflecting on how narratives can be a better way of expressing principles like the action of grace or God's love than theory can. Cardinal Newman writes about how conversion is a holistic experience, one which requires life itself to change.

“We have to learn to love properly by acting out our loves and hatreds until we are ready for God, drawn along mysteriously, as though on the fisherman's line”

The point at which we realise we must change, that God has been calling us, is not going to be a point reached by rational analysis alone. It is best understood as a story that includes the confluence of thought, experience and fate, the drama of salvation.

Our own ‘character’, our self, has to change too, so that we are ready to enter into a personal relationship with God. And this is the basic dramatic progression for many characters. We have to learn to love properly by acting out our loves and hatreds until we are ready for God, drawn along mysteriously, as though on the fisherman's line.

Finally, as a word of warning, this show and the book itself dwell on adult themes, issues of sexuality and drug addiction. As such it's only suitable for adults or mature teenagers.

Saint — of the — week

By Jason Osborne



Saints Cyril and Methodius

Ss Cyril and Methodius: Brothers in arms for Christ

Despite the singular name of this column, this week we're focusing on two saints: February 14 the Church esteems Ss Cyril (originally Constantine) and Methodius, who were declared co-patron saints of Europe by St Pope John Paul II. These brothers were born in the Greek city of Thessalonica in the early ninth Century, but it's uncertain whether their family was of Slavic or Greek origins.

The brothers both took to religious life, with Cyril being ordained not long after he finished his education, while Methodius was abbot of a Greek Monastery. Around the 860's, the Byzantine Emperor Michael III sent Cyril on a missionary expedition to the Khazars (who inhabited what is modern-day Crimea by the Black Sea) who had asked for a scholar be sent to them who could debate and engage with both Jews and Saracens.

It has been claimed that Methodius accompanied Cyril on this particular mission, but some argue that this may be a later invention. Regardless, the brothers soon undertook a

storm of missionary journeys; two years later, they were asked to travel to Greater Moravia (the Czech Republic today).

The prince there, Rostislav, had asked Constantinople for missionaries who could counter the Germanic influence by speaking Slavic, and Cyril and Methodius were sent in response. They started their work among the Slavs in 863, using Slavonic in the liturgy. They translated the Bible into the language later known as Old Church Slavonic and invented the Glagolitic alphabet – an alphabet based on Greek characters. Its descendent, the Cyrillic alphabet, is still used in many Central and Eastern European countries today such as in Russia and Ukraine.

Their work saw them invited to Rome by Pope Nicholas I. They were there to explain their conflict with the German archbishop of Salzburg and bishop of Passau, who claimed control of the same territory and who wanted to enforce the exclusive use of the Latin liturgy. The brothers arrived in Rome in 868, where the new pope, Adrian II, took their side and formally authorised the use of the Slavic liturgy,

vindicating the brothers' efforts.

When Cyril died following an illness in 869, Pope Adrian II sent Methodius back to Moravia as his legate and archbishop of Sirmium. His province included all of Moravia. In 880, Methodius was again summoned to Rome about the Slavic liturgy, obtaining once more papal approval of his use of the vernacular. He continued their mission until he died in 885 and was buried in the cathedral of Velehrad (also in today's Czech Republic).

Over the ensuing decades and centuries, the influence of Cyril and Methodius reached Kiev in then-Russia and also resounded among the Slavs of Croatia, Bohemia, and Poland. They were recognised as saints much earlier by the Eastern Orthodox Churches and were finally celebrated by the Roman Catholic Church in 1880. On December 31, 1980, in the apostolic letter *Egregiae virtutis*, the first Slavic pope, John Paul II fittingly proclaimed the brothers patrons of Europe.

Unleashing the power of Lent



The Wisdom of Pope Francis

Ash Wednesday, marks the beginning of the Lenten journey of 40 days, which will lead us to the Easter Triduum, the memorial of the Lord's passion, death and resurrection and the heart of the mystery of our salvation. Lent prepares us for this most important moment; therefore, it is a 'powerful' season, a turning point that can foster change and conversion in each of us. We all need to improve, to change for the better. Lent helps us and thus we leave behind old habits and the lazy addiction to the evil that deceives and ensnares us. During the season of Lent, the Church issues two important invitations: to have a greater awareness of the redemptive work of Christ; and to live out one's Baptism with deeper commitment.

Thanksgiving to God

Awareness of the marvels that the Lord has wrought for our salvation disposes our minds and hearts to an attitude of thanksgiving to God for all that he has given us, for all that he has accomplished for the good of his People and for the whole of humanity. This marks the beginning of our conversion: it is the grateful response to the stupendous mystery of God's love. When we see the love that God has for us, we feel the desire to draw close to him: this is conversion.

Living our Baptism to the full – the second invitation – also

means not accustoming ourselves to the situations of degradation and misery that we encounter as we walk along the streets of our cities and towns. There is a risk of passively accepting certain forms of behaviour and of not being shocked by the sad reality surrounding us. We become accustomed to violence, as though it were a predictable part of the daily news. We become accustomed to brothers and sisters sleeping on the streets, who have no roof to shelter them. We become accustomed to refugees seeking freedom and dignity, who are not received as they ought to be.

“Lent is to be lived as a time of conversion, as a time of renewal for individuals and communities, by drawing close to God and by trustfully adhering to the Gospel”

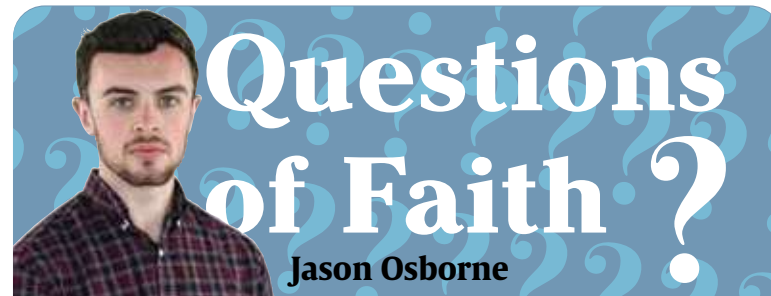
We become accustomed to living in a society which thinks it can do without God, in which parents no longer teach their children to pray or to make the sign of the Cross. I ask you: do

your children, do your little ones know how to make the sign of the Cross? Think about it. Do your grandchildren know how to make the sign of the Cross? Have you taught them? Think about it and respond in your heart. Do they know how to pray the 'Our Father'? Do they know how to pray to Our Lady with the 'Hail Mary'? Think about it and respond within yourselves. Growing accustomed to un-Christian and convenient behaviour narcotises the heart!

Lent comes to us as a providential time to change course, to recover the ability to react to the reality of evil which always challenges us. Lent is to be lived as a time of conversion, as a time of renewal for individuals and communities, by drawing close to God and by trustfully adhering to the Gospel. In this way, it also allows us to look with new eyes at our brothers and sisters and their needs. That is why Lent is a favourable time to convert to the love of God and neighbour; a love that knows how to make its own the Lord's attitude of gratuitousness and mercy – who “became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (cf. 2 Cor 8:9). In meditating on the central mysteries of the Faith, the Passion, Cross and Resurrection of Christ, we shall realise that the immeasurable gift of the Redemption has been granted to us through God's free initiative.

Mystery

Let us give thanks to God for the mystery of his crucified love; authentic faith, conversion and openness of heart to the brethren: these are the essential elements for living the season of Lent. On this journey, we want to invoke with special trust the protection and help of the Virgin Mary: may she, who was the first to believe in Christ, accompany us in our days of intense prayer and penance, so that we might come to celebrate, purified and renewed in spirit, the great Paschal mystery of her Son.



Questions of Faith?

Jason Osborne

Do Catholics worship Mary?



Anear age-old accusation levelled at the Catholic Church is that it encourages and actively worships Jesus's mother, Mary. The same accusation is applied when it comes to saints – Catholics are accused of being polytheistic, essentially: of worshipping saints as gods, rather than God alone.

The short answer to this is no, Catholics do not worship Mary or the saints. While it is understandable that other denominations and faiths make this mistake, what with Mary and the saints being highly esteemed by Catholics throughout the ages, it is born of a fundamental misunderstanding. While the Church points to God as the only “object” of our worship, at the same time, it says that exceedingly virtuous lives ought to be recognised and celebrated.

The practice of praying “to” the Mother of God and saints, and including them in our spiritual lives is something that comes under fire too. Understanding the world as it does, the Church recognises that the ‘communion of saints’ extends beyond the horizons of this present life, and so encourages us to ask the saints for their prayers and intercession. The basic logic goes that if we Christians on earth can request prayers from one another and “intercede” with God on one another's behalf, why would the saints in heaven – who are more spiritually alive than we are now – be excluded from this?

This inclusion of the saints in our spiritual lives and our devotion to their examples, coupled with the wealth of art and attention dedicated to them, is the origin of the confusion around Catholic attitudes. To clarify Mary's position in all of this, it's often thought that she stands atop the pyramid of Catholic idolatry – a super-saint of some sort who's the mistaken recipient of the love and worship due to God alone.

The Church has some helpful terms that help us to understand how we're to approach the saints, Mary and God, occupying different ‘levels’ as they are.

- *Dulia*: ‘Dulia’ refers to the honour we accord to the saints.

We recognise that they lived very holy lives, in many different ways. Some lived near-legendary lives replete with big feats – like miracles – whereas others lived simple, “little” lives, like St Therese of Lisieux. The Church upholds them as examples to all of us, though, of the varied ways in which we can follow God faithfully. In learning from them, asking for their help and honouring them in our prayers and artwork we're dealing with them with the respect that they're due.

- *Hyperdulia*: ‘Hyperdulia’, as you might guess, is the exceeding reverence and honour that we afford to God's own mother, Mary. She's afforded a special place in the life of the Church by virtue of the unmatched blessing God gave her, which she freely consented to. The titles granted to her, ‘Queen of saints’ and ‘Queen of heaven’ are given in recognition of her supreme holiness.

- *Latria*: ‘Latria’ refers to worship, and this alone is directed to God. St Thomas Aquinas writing in his *Summa Theologiae*, explained: “In more technical terms used by the Tradition to draw this important distinction, devotion to Mary belongs to the veneration of *dulia*, or the homage and honour owed to the saints, both angelic and human in heaven, and not to *latria*, or the adoration and worship that can be given only to the Triune God and the Son incarnate. Because of her unique relationship to Christ in salvation history, however, the special degree of devotion due to Mary has traditionally been called *hyperdulia*. While *latria* is owed to her Son by reason of unity of his divine and human natures in the Person of the Word made flesh, *hyperdulia* is due to Mary as truly his Mother.”

If these seem like technicalities, look to the fact that even with regards to devotion to Mary and the saints, all we ask of them is to lead us closer to God, to point us the way to Christ. Their human example can be encouraging in a way that can sometimes be difficult to feel in relation to the God-man himself.



Lent is a penitential season.

A lesson about living from 'the Misfit'

Catholic author Flannery O'Connor, whose character "the Misfit" has a lot to teach about grace and life. Photo: CNS.

More than a half century ago, Flannery O'Connor wrote a short story, *A Good Man is Hard to Find*. One of the main characters in the story is an elderly woman who is a difficult, stubborn, and not a particularly happy person. Traveling to Florida with her family, she is constantly whining and complaining.

Then, thanks to some carelessness on her part, they get in a traffic accident and while their car is stalled, an escaped convict ("the Misfit") chances on them and executes the whole family. Just before she is shot, the unhappy elderly woman, fearing for her life, reaches out and touches the Misfit and has a gentle moment with him. After killing her, he says, "she would have been a good woman, if there had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life."

I suspect we would all be better persons if there were someone there to shoot us every minute of our lives. At least I know that I would because I once had someone there to shoot me and it made me a better person at least during the time when the threat was there. Here's my story.

Diagnosed

Some 12 years ago I was diagnosed with cancer. The initial prognosis was good (surgery and chemotherapy and the cancer should be stopped). For a while it



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

was. However, three years later it again made an unwelcome reappearance.

"For some months I prayed that creed intensely every day, trying to live out its every tenet"

This time the prognosis was not good. My oncologist, whom I trust, shared that situation was grave. Chemotherapy would be tried again; but, he assured me, that barring the exceptional, this treatment would not be effective for long and would be more for palliative purposes than for any real hope of remission or cure. He felt it his duty to deliver that message clearly. I was facing the shooter. You have about 30 months to live!

As you can guess, this wasn't easy to accept and process. I

struggled mightily to make peace with it. Eventually, through prayer, I wrote a creed for myself as to how I would try to live out those two years. Here's the creed:

I am going to strive to be as healthy as I can for as long as I can.

I am going to strive to be as productive for as long as I can.

I am going to make every day and every activity as precious and enjoyable as possible.

I am going to strive to be as gracious, warm, and charitable as possible.

I am going to strive to accept others' love in a deeper way than I have up to now.

I am going to strive to live a more-fully "reconciled life". No room for past hurts... anymore.

I am going to strive to keep my sense of humor intact.

I am going to strive to be as courageous and brave as I can.

I am going to strive, always, to

never look on what I am losing, but rather to look at... how wonderful and full my life has been and is.

And, I am going to, daily, lay all of this at God's feet through prayer.

"The 'shooter' reappeared two years ago with another reoccurrence of the cancer"

For some months I prayed that creed intensely every day, trying to live out its every tenet. However, the chemotherapy treatments were, surprisingly, very effective. After five months of treatment, all the indications of cancer were gone, I was healthy again, and my oncologist was optimistic that, perhaps, his diagnosis had been too dire and that with some maintenance chemo, I might enjoy many more years of life. And, indeed I did for the next seven years.

Remission

However, during those seven years of remission, feeling healthy and optimistic, with no one there

to shoot me every day, I now prayed my creed less frequently and with less intensity. And even though its challenges were now more ingrained in me, my old habits of taking life for granted, of praying St Augustine's prayer (Make me a better Christian, Lord, but not yet!), of losing perspective, of impatience, of self-pity, of nursing grievances, and of not appreciating fully the richness of life, began to seep back into my life.

Reappeared

The "shooter" reappeared two years ago with another reoccurrence of the cancer. Initially the prognosis was dire (30 months and chemotherapy for the rest of my life) and the creed again took a central place in my life. However, a new treatment unexpectedly offered a much longer future and, with no one there to shoot me every day, the creed again began to lose its power and my old habits of impatience, ingratitude, and self-pity began again to mark my days.

I am deeply grateful for all the post-cancer years that God and modern medicine have given me. Cancer has been a gift that has taught me a lot. Having my life parceled out in six-month chunks has me appreciating life, others, health, nature, the simple joys of life, and my work like never before a better person when there is someone there to shoot me every day!

"I suspect we would all be better persons if there were someone there to shoot us every minute of our lives"

The unconditional love of God

This Sunday's Gospel (Matt 5:38-48) is the fourth excerpt from the Sermon on the Mount, the charter of the Kingdom of God, the description of a Christian life.

Last Sunday Jesus gave us a new understanding of three commandments, moving from what "You have learnt from what is said" to "But I say to you".

This Sunday, the same formula of advancing from the past to the new ideals of Jesus is repeated. He gives three examples of where the accepted standard of the past needs to be replaced by a new sort of love which refuses to be contaminated by the wrongdoing of another. Offer the wicked person no resistance. "If someone hits you on the right cheek, offer him the other as well." Determination to remain positive is greater than temper.

“The ideal of Christ is to show that his sort of love refuses to be contaminated by the wrongdoing of another”

If someone takes you to court to claim your outer tunic, let him have your inner tunic also to show that your detachment is greater than his greed. This is exactly what Francis of Assisi did in his decision to leave his father's drapery business when he discerned his calling to live the Gospel.

A Roman soldier had the right to commandeer someone (like Simon of Cyrene) to carry his bag for a thousand steps, but offering to go the extra mile with a smile is a way of stating that helpfulness is more important than weapons.

Do we let the brutish bullyboys, the greedy moneymakers or advocates of military superiority continue to rule society with their small minds? An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth will leave the world blind and hungry. The ideal of Christ is to show that his sort of love refuses to be contaminated by the wrongdoing of another. His love is greater than all the wrongs of the world. It's a lofty ideal that will only be reached by the grace of God. Indeed, the ideal is so lofty that Jesus said, "You must therefore be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." Perfect here means a love that is universal and complete.

The Sunday Gospel

Fr Silvester O'Flynn
OFM Cap.



The Holy Spirit offers supernatural assistance

The most severe testing of genuine Christianity is the willingness to forgive.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church admits that human nature on its own will be unable to find forgiveness, but with the aid of the Holy Spirit a new way of seeing the past opens up. One begins to remember the past with the heart and eyes of Christ.

"It is not in our power not to feel or to forget an offence; but the heart that offers itself to the Holy Spirit turns injury into compassion and purifies the memory into transforming the hurt into intercession" (Catechism 2834).

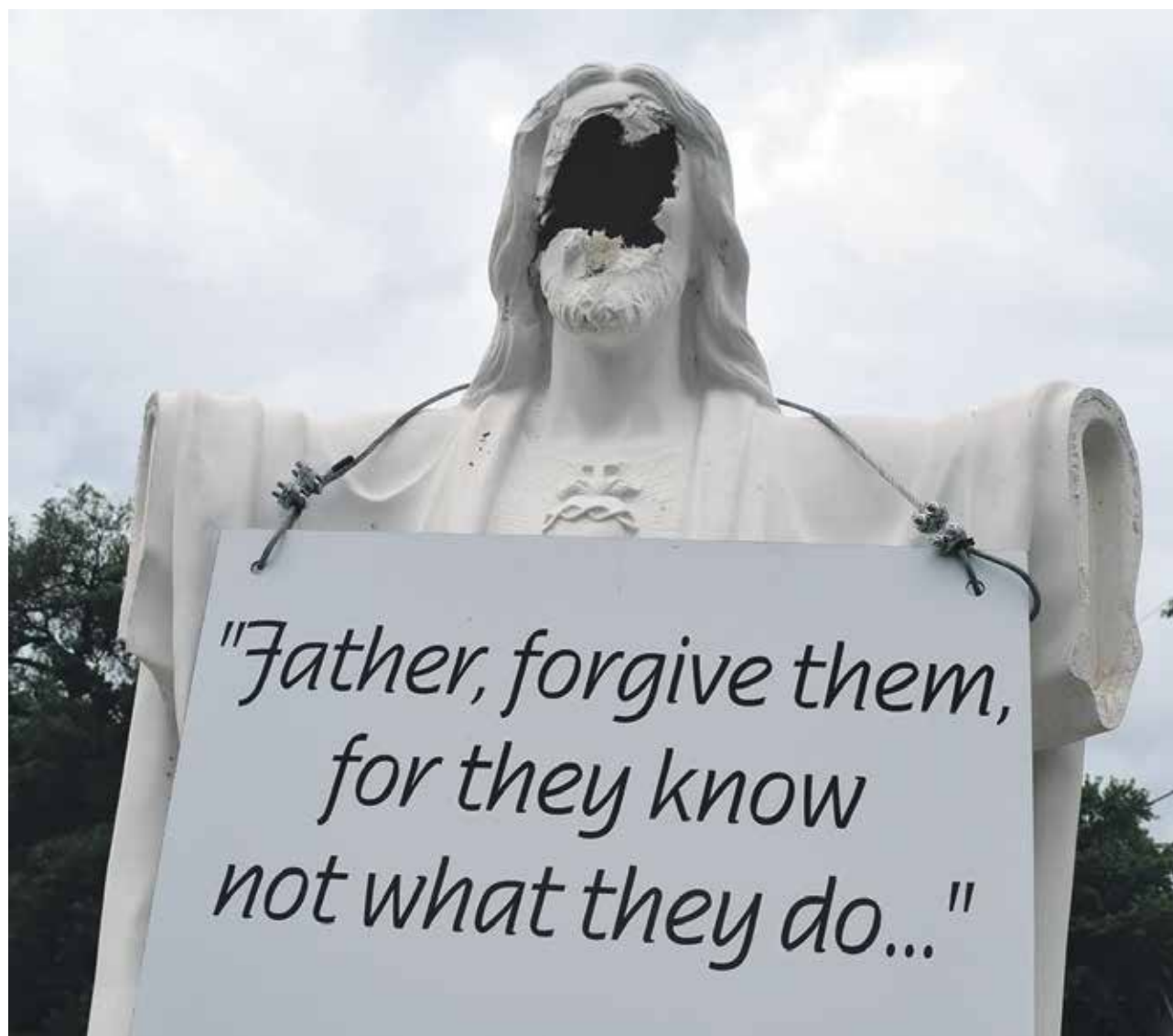
Think of the Holy Spirit like a helicopter lifting us up to a height where we have a wider vista of the road of life. Now we can see where the wrongdoer has come from. Now we view our enemy as a person very sick in mind and spirit, and we begin to have pity on that sick, unhappy person. That is how the Holy Spirit turns injury into compassion.

The Spirit also opens up the road ahead and we see what a dreadfully unhappy future lies in store for the person who hurts others. So, we pray for his/her healing and conversion. Thus "the Holy Spirit purifies the memory into transforming the hurt into intercession".

Spirit-filled forgiveness is the mark of genuine children of our Father in heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on bad people as well as good, and his rain to fall on honest and dishonest people alike. God's love is not selective. It is universal. God's unconditional love is not based on what a person has merited. It is always 100%.

Love is a decision to be always positive

Love is a word much used today but Christ's concept of love is little understood. It goes far beyond infatuation which is temporary. It goes beyond the friendship between people who share interests or complement each other's character. Christian love resides in the will. It is a decision that determines how a person wants



A sign with a Scripture verse on forgiveness draped on an outdoor statue of Jesus that was vandalised in the US in 2019. Photo: CNS

to live. According to St Paul, love is always patient and kind; never jealous, boastful or conceited; never rude and never seeks its own advantage. It does not take offence or store up grievances. Love does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but finds its joy in the truth. It is always ready to make allowances, to trust, to hope and endure whatever comes (1 Cor: 13:4-7). Lent, beginning next Wednesday, will be an opportunity to take Christlike love more seriously.

St Josephine Bakhita

I began writing this reflection on the feast of St Josephine Bakhita (February 8). It struck me that she was a great model of the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Who was she? Born in Sudan in 1869, at the age of nine she was kidnapped, forcibly marched under the tropical sun for eight days and then sold as a slave. She was mistreated by five violent masters, one of whom repeatedly whipped her. Her life changed when she was acquired by an Italian family who treated her

well. They brought her to Venice where she worked around the house and minded the baby. She was taken into a convent school for education. She was so impressed by the sisters that she asked to be baptised. She joined the convent and impressed everybody with her humble service, prayerfulness and calmness.

“As Pope Francis wrote, what Jesus brought to the world is a revolution of tenderness”

There was not an ounce of bitterness against those who had brutally treated her. She regarded those dreadful years as the passage to her Calvary where she came to know Jesus Christ. She resolved to be like him. It was said that her mind was always on Christ while her heart was in Sudan. She was a model of how Christian love is greater than bitterness. As Pope Francis wrote, what Jesus brought to the world is a revolution of tenderness.

Responsorial prayer

The Lord is compassion and love, slow to anger and rich in mercy.

He does not treat us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our faults.

As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our sins.

As a father has compassion on his sons, the Lord has pity on those who fear him.

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TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



'Indescribably awful' earthquake dominates Irish news

One of the reasons I'd rage against war is that it is entirely man made. Natural disasters produce a different response, but human inadequacy or irresponsibility can make the outcome worse.

The media coverage of the Turkey/Syria earthquake included suggestions that after the 1999 earthquake in the area, buildings were not subsequently erected to be more robust. Whether this was due to building regulations not being improved, or improved but not implemented, wasn't clear.

On **Morning Ireland** (RTÉ Radio 1, Tuesday) we heard a survivor's report that really captured the panic as the earthquakes struck. One observer found the scene "indescribably awful". Later there were reports of a man in a refugee camp never so glad to be living in a tent!

Disasters

When these disasters strike it's always a source of pride to find Irish aid agencies in the front line. And so it was when a spokesperson for Concern, Ali Fuat Sutlu, spoke on **Drivetime** (RTÉ Radio 1 Tuesday). I was also impressed by the UNICEF representative James Elder – he described the core relief efforts of that UN body – practical and child centred.

A few days later it was sad



An earthquake survivor holding a child sits by a collapsed building in Hatay, Turkey, on February 10. Photo: OSV News/Umit Bektas, Reuters.

to hear the news on **Drivetime** (RTÉ Radio 1, Friday) about 27 workers for Goal, another Irish charity, being killed in the earthquake. Alec Milutinovic, Country Director for GOAL Turkey, spoke of his heart being broken.

On **Morning Ireland** (RTÉ Radio 1, Thursday) Salah Aboulgasema, spokesperson for Islamic Relief Worldwide (he referenced a Dublin office) was understandably animated about the dire

situation as the death toll rose rapidly. He was fearful of a secondary disaster, as the survivors were homeless and living in freezing outdoor conditions.

Coverage

I tuned into the comprehensive coverage on **Sky News**. Happy rescue stories blended with sad stories of remains being found. On Saturday we saw the delight of rescue workers as a young girl, Sham, was pulled alive

from the rubble after so many days, but it didn't last long as the scrolling news text told us that she later died in hospital. On **Sky News** on Sunday there were happier rescue stories.

Another issue that bothered me during the week was the recent report into Jean Vanier. I had admired him for his work with adults having intellectual disabilities in the L'Arche communities – it was a model of Christian service worth emulating but it seems that Vanier himself was involved in inappropriate relationships with adults he came into contact with.

Following the recent report, **Liveline** (RTÉ Radio 1, Tuesday and Wednesday) took up the issue. Presenter Joe Duffy asked so many questions about how to reconcile Vanier's public persona and his secretive activities. Hypocrisy was mentioned a lot, though maybe it could have been self-delusion or rationalising, though perhaps all those categories are not mutually exclusive. Either way, I was upset once again for those idealistic young women that were exploited.

Many of the callers on the show had met Vanier or worked with him or in the L'Arche communities, had found him inspiring and had not suspected anything. When reports surfaced a few

PICK OF THE WEEK

SUNDAY SEQUENCE

BBC Radio Ulster Sunday February 12, 8.30pm

Topical religious issues with a Northern Ireland flavour.

SONGS OF PRAISE

BBC One Sunday February 12, 1.15pm

Preparing for Lent. Sean Fletcher joins a group of children from a local Catholic primary school on a visit to Lincoln Cathedral to learn more about the Stations of the Cross.

IN CONCERT

EWTN Monday February 13, 6am

Ruben Dubrovsky conducts the Vienna Bach Consort in a performance of sacred music by Italian Baroque composer, Antonio Vivaldi.

years ago, and more so now, they were, as one L'Arche worker described it, "devastated".

Callers

Lessons were drawn by many callers – the dangers of putting gurus on pedestals, how charismatic people have a power they can use to manipulate people, the awareness that people can have good and bad co-existing within them. Most callers stressed the value of the good work and the ongoing value of the L'Arche communities.

One caller raised the issue of references to Vanier in primary school RE textbooks. I thought too much was made of this. RE texts often reference people noteworthy for their holiness or good works, and sometimes the idols fall and teachers or publishers

make adjustments.

There was a bit of niggles when Joe took issue with social worker Kieran McGrath, who specialises in this area, who used the description "exploitation" instead of "abuse" – possibly because the victims were adult and there seemed to be a consensual element. The host insisted that the report used the term "abuse".

He asked if there was any area of the Catholic Church that was unaffected by an abuse scandal. Yes, I'm sure there is but he might as well have asked if there was any corner of society unaffected.

Thinking of the "mystical explanations" unearthed for the offensive behaviour, last Sunday's reading seemed apt: "No one has been given permission to sin."



Pat O'Kelly

Music

A bold musical step for a fledgling State

This month celebrates the 75th anniversary of the establishment in 1948 of the Radio Éireann Symphony Orchestra (RÉSO), renamed the National Symphony Orchestra (NSO) from January 1, 1990.

1948 also brought the foundation of the Radio Éireann Light Orchestra (RÉLO) – a body of 22 musicians with its own agenda but would supplement the larger gathering of 65 in the RÉSO when the repertoire required.

Ensemble

Not that Radio Éireann was without a music ensemble prior to 1948 as, when the station opened in January 1926 with its call sign 2RN, it employed a piano trio com-



Members of the National Symphony Orchestra.

prising Terry O'Connor, violin, her sister, Viola, as cellist and Kitty O'Doherty (later O'Callaghan), piano.

Within a few months viola player Rosalind Dowse joined them and quite soon the radio

instrumentalists numbered seven. Broadcasts were live from RÉ premises on Dublin's Henry Street. By November 1927 director of music, Vincent O'Brien, decided the time was ripe for a public concert and, with suitably augmented forces, this took place at the Metropolitan Hall on Dublin's Lower Abbey Street on November 26 that year.

The extra musicians came from Dublin's then numerous cinema and theatre orchestras with wind and brass players joining from the army bands and Army School of Music.

The programme consisted of Weber's *Euryanthe* Overture; Beethoven's First Symphony; Saint-Saëns' *Danse Macabre* and the Rossini/Res-

pighi ballet music *La Boutique Fantasque*.

Bass Glyn Eastmann sang arias by Bellini and Mozart; violinist Arthur Darley played Carolan's Concerto; Séamus Clandillon, 2RN's first director of broadcasting, sang several songs in Irish and there were a number of traditional Irish airs. The Civil Service Choir was involved and audience participation came through *Adeste Fideles* and *Let Erin Remember*. A marathon if ever there was one.

By 1933 the station orchestra had grown to 19, two years later to 24 and, known as the Radio Éireann Orchestra (RÉO), numbered 28. On Vincent O'Brien's resignation in 1941, Michael Bowles (ex Irish Army, born Riverstown, Co. Sligo in

1909 and died Dublin in 1998), replaced him although not officially until 1944. Bowles was noted for the catholicity of his programming.

Displaced

With the end of World War II in 1945 many displaced continental European musicians were seeking employment and Bowles, then also director of music, embarked on a recruitment drive. Beforehand he sought to engage the famous French conductor Charles Münch for a concert in Dublin. Unavailable, Münch suggested his protégé Jean Martinon. Bowles agreed and set out for Europe.

On his final return to Dublin, following successful

auditions, director of music Bowles found Martinon temporarily replacing him as the RÉO's conductor. Taking serious umbrage, Bowles resigned from RÉ and relatively soon became principal conductor of the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. Later moving to the USA, Bowles was music professor at the University of Indiana and conductor of the Indianapolis Philharmonic Society.

As a guest conductor, his last concert with the RTÉSO was in January 1977 when it included Rakhmaninov's *Paganini* Rhapsody with John O'Connor. Interestingly, the Rhapsody was also part of Bowles' first concert with the RÉO in October 1941 when Charles Lynch played it.

BookReviews

Peter Costello



Recovering the curious life and the European legend of 'the white Martyr of Munster'

Searching for Thaddeus: Images of a Forgotten Irishman in Ireland and Italy

by Patricia Curtin-Kelly
(Liberties Press, €20/£18)

Peter Costello

This is an interesting and unusual book, which will perhaps lead readers into new places to explore, not only in the remoter parishes of western Munster, but also in northern Italy. It focuses on the city of Ivrea, a place of Celtic origin. It lies in Piedmont on the famous ancient road along which those living in France (and beyond) travelled down to Rome.

Today it is a UNESCO Heritage City and a prosperous industrial town. The ancient cathedral houses shrines to St Bessus and from medieval times, another to St Pierre of Luxembourg.

And also one to Blessed Thaddeus MacCarthy, a man of Celtic origin too, being from western Munster, whose feast day is on October 25. Though he had, so to speak, a previous Irish life, it was only after his death that a devotion to him began to emerge.

He was a bishop twice over in the course of a few years, who never ruled his sees. His appointments to Ross 1482 and later to Cork and Cloyne were mired in controversy, largely down to tribal feuds. Amazingly unable to secure his seat in either place, he went to Rome to receive further authorisation from the pope, setting out in the garb of a pilgrim, wearing the rough robes of penance and the shell emblem of a pilgrimage, to return to Ireland.

Dying in the hostel in Ivrea, he would have been buried in a pauper's grave but the Bishop Nicholas Garigliatti was summoned. The bishop is said to have had an extraordinary dream during the night in which he had witnessed a man dressed in bishop's robes ascending in glory to heaven. He immediately recognised the dead man as the person he had seen in the dream.

The man's belongings were examined – a wallet, a water flask and a staff were his sole possessions. However, the wallet contained some papal documents and a bishop's ring. Bishop Garigliatti ordered that the body be clothed in bishop's robes and to be brought to Ivrea Cathedral to lie in state



Blessed Thaddeus MacCarthy depicted in a window in St Ita's church (1907), Gortroe, Co. Cork, installed 1921. Window in the church of the Holy Family (1903), Caheragh, Co. Cork, installed 1963.

before burial within the cathedral. When news of the death of Bishop MacCarthy traveling in disguise spread, the population flocked to the cathedral of Ivrea for his funeral. After his burial many miracles have been attributed to his intercession.

His tomb became a popular local shrine. In 1742, when it was opened, the body was found to be uncorrupted, in those days taken to be a sign of divine favour.

During Great Famine people in the town sent money for the relief of the hungry people to Ireland. They also began to seek information about this mysterious bishop. A movement began in Piedmont and Munster for his beatification. In 1896 Pope Leo XIII confirmed "the immemorial cult" of the Blessed Thaddeus, so no fresh miracle was needed. Relics were sent from what was then the Kingdom of Italy to Cork.

This is a very strange story. But Patricia Curtin-Kelly is by vocation an art historian. She has already written a volume about the Harry Clarke windows in St Joseph's Church Terenure. The real heart lies not in the rapidly summarised account of MacCarthy's saintly life, but in highly illustrated itinerary through her visits to small parish churches in which



there are stained glass windows dedicated to him, created by a variety of artists.

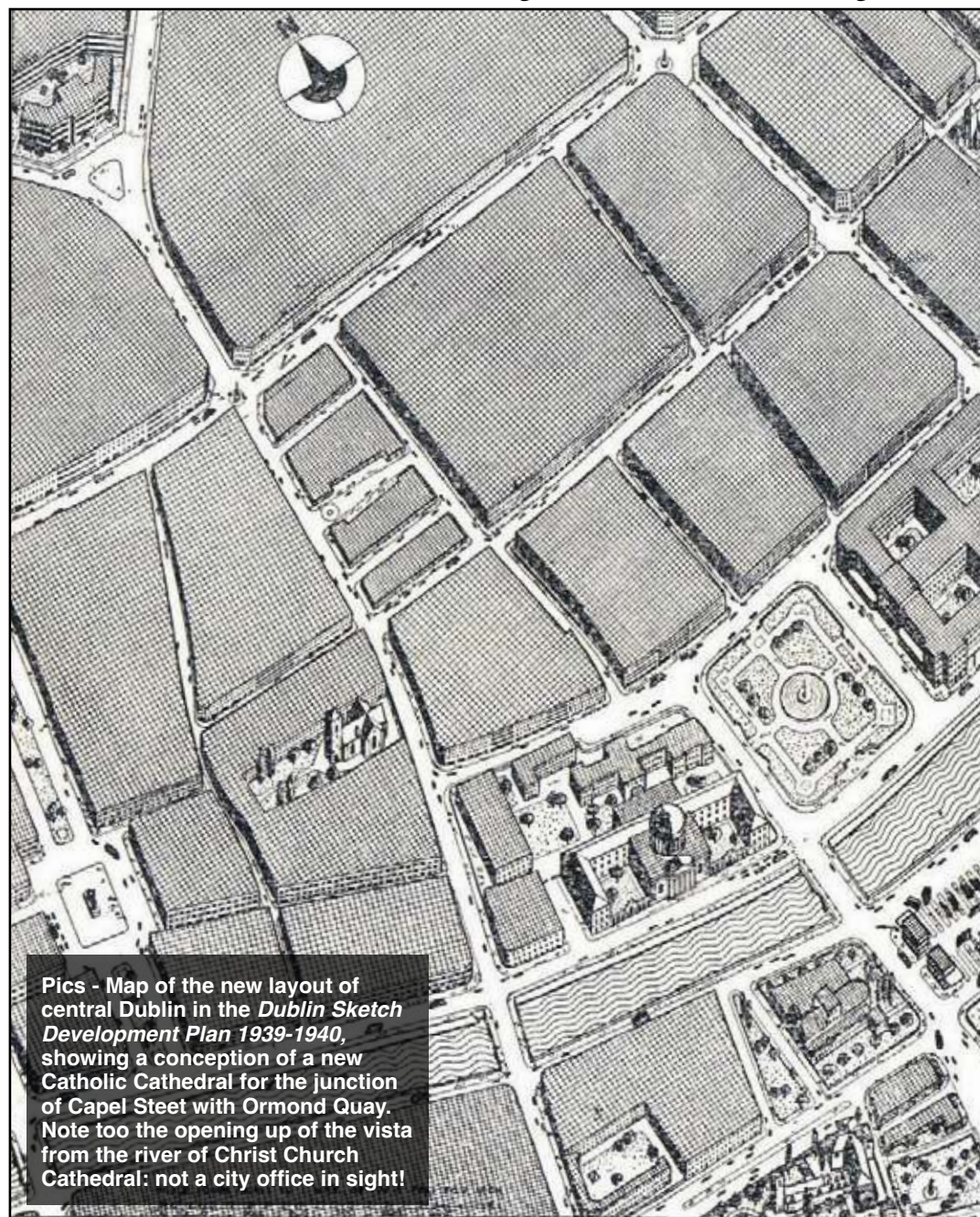
This in itself is a very unusual procedure. Most books dealing with stained glass deal with single artists and are published at high prices and in very elaborate formats. This book, however, is within reach of everyone interested in the Blessed Thaddeus.

I can imagine that it may well inspire many happy explorations among Catholic "church-crawlers", as those with a penchant for church visiting for culture or piety are often called in friendly mockery by those who lack the energy for such a hobby.

Perhaps too it will inspire a more regular popular biography of Thaddeus, dealing in greater detail with what went on in Ivrea. Why, we might wonder today, did the usual movement towards canonisation not take hold?

Could it be that the Irish hierarchy of later Victorian Ireland felt this was an ecclesiastical life that exposed elements of Church history that they preferred were not recounted or over emphasised, as they might challenge the picture being built up of centuries of Irish devotion expressed through Irish bishops.

The unlikely history



Pics - Map of the new layout of central Dublin in the *Dublin Sketch Development Plan 1939-1940*, showing a conception of a new Catholic Cathedral for the junction of Capel Street with Ormond Quay. Note too the opening up of the vista from the river of Christ Church Cathedral: not a city office in sight!

Peter Costello

In a recent issue some remarks made by the authors of a book on the future of the concept of the parish suggest some confusion about the strange history of Dublin's cathedrals. I know that many foreign visitors are certainly confused as to why the city has "three cathedrals".

Of course the older cathedrals, St Patrick's, which once stood outside the city limit and was of Irish foundation, and of Christ Church Cathedral, founded by the Viking colonists of Dublin, became at the time of the Reformation the property of the Church of Ireland.

Patriotic

This fact over the next centuries rankled with the more pious and patriotic, as can be seen in the forceful, even over forceful remarks of Fr Thomas Corcoran in the *Gill's Guide to Catholic Dublin*, issued for the Eucharistic Congress in 1932.

In late Georgian times a movement had got under way to provide the city with a proper Catholic Cathedral to be built hopefully on an open site in the middle of Sackville Street (today's O'Connell Street), which changing society movements had by

then made the heart of the city.

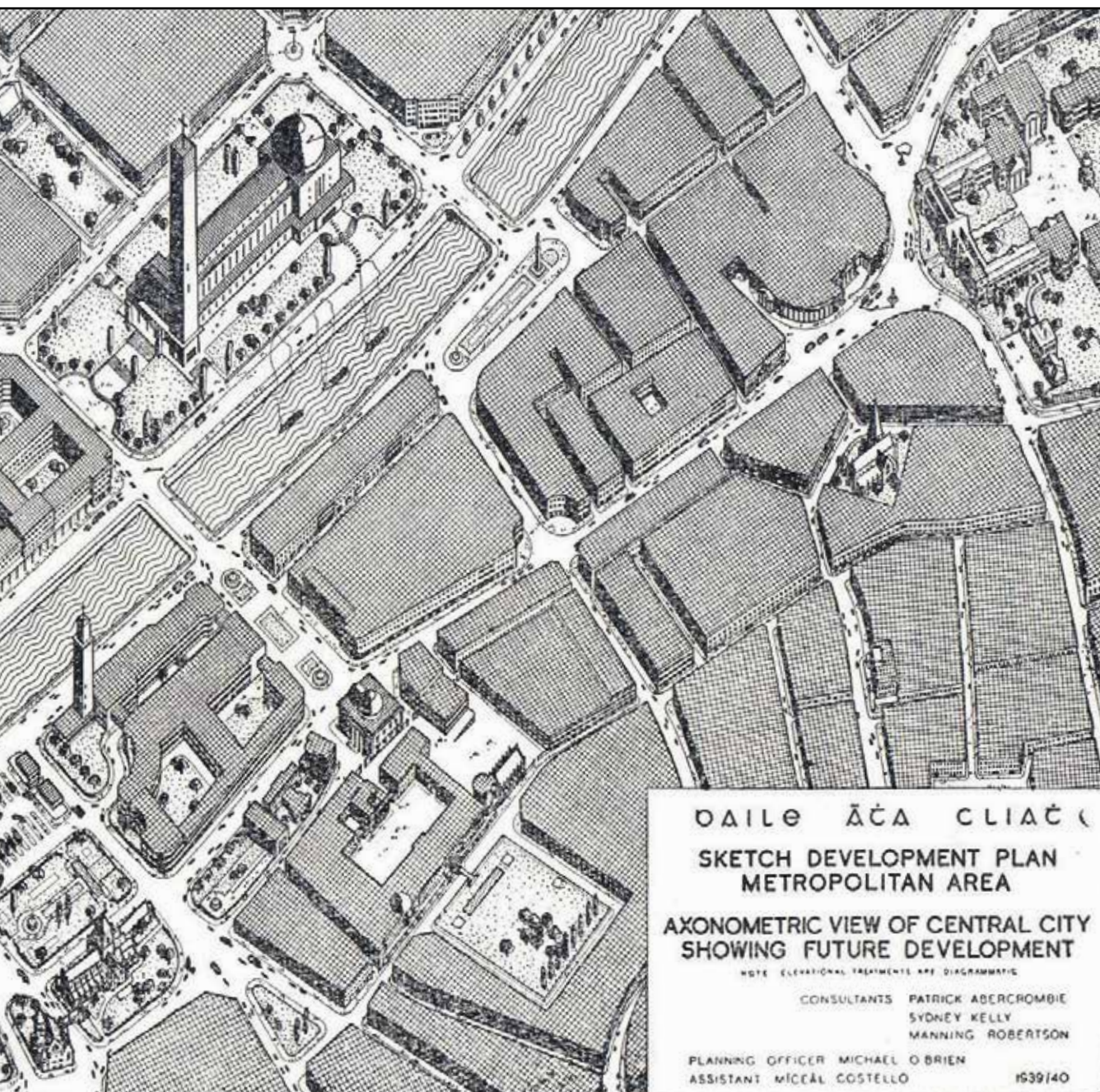
However the penal laws prevented the erection of Catholic churches on any main street, nor could a church be called a cathedral. So instead a "pro-cathedral" was erected in nearby Marlborough Street, and this still remains in use today. But unlike St Patrick's and Christ Church, the edifice very good though it is, it is rarely visited by tourists. Which is a great pity, for so much of the city's social, religious and political history is bound up in its classical fabric.

“Eventually in the 1930s a site was acquired by the purchase of the private title to Merrion Square park”

Towards the end of the Victorian era there were many Catholics who urged that the Church of Ireland should surrender either or both of the old Cathedrals to Catholic custody. This, of course, never happened. They carped at the active restoration work done by the Church of Ireland to preserve the fabric of both buildings; but as medieval churches are costly things to maintain, and getting costlier every year that comes, so it is perhaps as well that this

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.

of Dublin's cathedrals



handover never happened. But all three churches are a significant part of the city's heritage, and one way or another will always need public support and public money.

Real Cathedral

But Catholic feeling for a "real Cathedral" continued to grow. Various schemes were proposed, of which more in a moment. Eventually in the 1930s a site was acquired by the purchase of the private title to Merrion Square park. Here it was proposed to erect a cathedral in full gothic glory facing across the square to Government buildings and the Dáil, placing the Catholic Church at the centre of the public life not just of the city, but the country.

On a technical point: building on land that had once been flowed over by the sea would have presented exactly the same problems that beset the erection of Busárus in the 1950s.

Just before the Great War a plan for Dublin was put forward by Prof. Patrick Abercrombie. This included a scheme for a new Catholic Cathedral.

Then followed the destruction of the Revolutionary era, now being celebrated. The urgent task it seemed to both state and city authorities was to get things moving again, to get to work to build up the economy and business again and not to indulge in planners' pipe-dreams. Nothing was done.

“In the 1950s Dr McQuaid was faced with a real problem, to which all the resources of the diocese had to be reserved”

Then again after WWII, when the novelties of city planning were sweeping "Socialist" Britain, ripples of these ideas flowed in here too. Abercrombie and his associates issued a new report, with a new scheme for Dublin. This too included a vision of a new Cathedral (pictured). It is well worth pondering for it also never came to pass.

But the dreams of the diocese were never to pass either. In the

1950s Dr McQuaid was faced with a real problem, to which all the resources of the diocese had to be reserved. This was the provision of new suburban parish churches for an ever-expanding city, which was filling up rapidly with people from the provinces.

Perhaps today this problem has been solved by the fall in the Catholic population allowing the erection, when really needed, of much smaller edifices rather than the great "Romanesque basilicas" that Dr McQuaid imagined would be necessary.

Spiritual heart of Dublin

I doubt that the Catholic archbishops will ever desert St Mary's in Marlborough Street. But if there was an urge to move perhaps an older church like St Audeons might better be utilised. Now that would really draw the tourists in when they had done with nearby St Patrick's and Christ Church, which Google oddly claim's to be the "spiritual heart of Dublin", which the Dean down in Kevin Street might gently dispute.

St Brigid not quite as presented by some today

Peter Costello

The new national holiday on the first day of February has been judged a great success on its first celebration. Doubtless in the decades to come ways of celebration will become fixed and standardised, and we will all know what we can expect in the way of local events to celebrate the role of women in Irish history.

But over recent weeks some comments I have heard, especially from leading figures in Irish society, have been curious. I heard a speech the other day in which it was claimed that St Brigid had been ignored over the centuries in favour of men. Now that, it seems to me, does not conform to the historical record.

The modern study of ancient Irish saints can be said to have begun with the creation of John Colgan's *Acta Triadis Thaumaturgae* published at Louvain 1647, just before the Cromwellian persecutions in Ireland. This was an adjunct to his *Lives of the Irish Saints*.

In these books he laboured to arrange, confirm and make coherent the fragments of tradition that had survived both by word of mouth or in manuscript. Most of the later, more scientific investigations all begin with Colgan, the investigations let us say by the Bollandists, John O'Hanlon, or more recently Pádraig Ó Riain.

The three "wonder workers" of the title were St Patrick, St Brigid and St Columba. Colgan was able to write this immense book, albeit in exile, because these three, including St Brigid had not been forgotten, had not been suppressed, because indeed they were simply the three most honoured saints in Ireland. Not much neglect there.

Without going back to Early Christian Ireland, we need only go as far as the badly resisted Norman intrusion into Ireland in 1169, a century after their incursion into England. The Norman historian of these events was Gerald de Barri (often known as Giraldus Cambrensis, "Gerald the Welshman").

Gerald has never been popular with Irish patriotic historians, who claim he often misrepresents many aspects of the old Gaelic order. But it is striking that

he gives in his account of Ireland a warm and respectful account of St Brigid's shrine in Kildare, its continuing flame of purity and hope. This shows there was no neglect of the saint by the new masters of the land.

His passage on the shrine is linked with passages describing a large, illuminated manuscript he saw in Kildare, in which he uses the descriptive term "the work of angels". This phrase from St Brigid's territory has come to be applied to the *Book of Kells* and other Irish manuscripts of a similar kind (thought what he saw has never really been identified).

Gerald de Bari was forced to stand in awe of some people and works of art related to Brigid, from which we can deduce that the saint was celebrated, even renowned, among the Normans.

But the real evidence of the celebration of St Brigid is to be found, as some historians would have expected, not among high churchmen, but the common people of Ireland.

Not only was her feast day well kept, it was marked by the making and posting up the woven crosses now called "St Brigid's Crosses", these have persisted in the folk life of Ireland over the centuries down to today.

And again confirming the popularity of the saint among the people was the use of her name. All over Ireland, even in the North, schools, churches and shrines are dedicated to her.

The use of St Brigid as a girls' name never died out. Indeed it is notorious that in the cities of the north-eastern sea-board of the United States the house maids were Irish, and as often not referred to as Brigid (even though that may not have been their name). The maids were Irish, the cooks (semi-professional persons of authority after all) were Swedish.

No: the memory and hope of Brigid flourished over the centuries. To even hint that she was neglected or suppressed is quite simply not true. I have a certain amount of scepticism about many of the things now said by devotees and critics of the saint these days, but then I am sceptical about many things. But even if you are an important public figure, one can't deny the facts of her wide celebrity.

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Leisure time

Crossword Junior

Gordius 470



- Across**

1. Late this evening, before tomorrow morning. (7)

7. A message sent on the internet. (1-4)

8. Be careful it doesn't burst when you blow it up! (7)

9. Birds lay their eggs in them. (5)

10. Groups of schoolchildren. (7)

13. There are many battles in this. (3)

15. Goes around a planet. (6)

17. It's completely surrounded by water. (6)

18. In this place. (4)

19. Hibernating creature at the Mad Hatter's tea party. (8)
- Down**

1. You might spread this out before placing out the plates, knives and forks. (10)

2. The world's longest river. (4)

3. Wear them to keep your hands warm. (6)

4. Sport played with a racquet. (6)

5. We have feet, dogs have _____. (4)

6. Nearer. (6)

11. Travelled by ship. (6)

12. Not as difficult. (6)

14. House made of snow and ice. (5)

16. Insects that live in colonies. (4)

SOLUTIONS, FEBRUARY 09

GORDIUS NO. 597

Across – 1 Experimental 7 Air 9 Meet 10 Father-in-law 11 Pews 14 Joeys 15 Audit 16 Area 18 Incur 21 Usury 22 Unwed 23 Satyr 24 Oath 25 Berth 26 Giant 29 Sell 33 Plaice 34 Hale 36 Yew 37 Norway spruce

Down – 1 Eye 2 Pith 3 Rift 4 Metro 5 Needy 6 Lane 8 Rise and shine 9 Miraculously 12 Adjust 13 Stays 14 Joist 17 Reward 19 Carat 20 Rugby 28 Noisy 30 Lawn 31 Help 32 Thou 35 Lie

CHILDREN'S No. 469

Across – 1. High jump 6. Ask 7. Ice-skates 8. Sip 9. Spear 11. Missed 13. Opera 14. Learn 15. Errors 18. Little 19. Sentry

Down – 1. Marmalade 2. Twins 3. Rocks 4. Kitten 5. Chapel 9. Italian 10. Tangled 12. Ulster 15. Push

Crossword

Gordius 598



- Across**

1 It entitles one to attend all the matches at a ground during a sporting year (6,6)

7 Tear roughly (3)

9 Quaint (4)

10 Was the reason for (6)

11 Ale (4)

14 Crockery (5)

15 Rubbish in America (5)

16 Pelvic joints (4)

18 Boorish (5)

21 Exactly the same (5)

22 Municipal (5)

23 Inuit canoe (5)

24 At low temperature (4)

25 French goodbye (5)

26 I step around with malice (5)

29 Glimpse (4)

33 Humorous drama (6)

34 Hasty, ill-judged (4)

36 Waterproof coat (3)

37 Quick to shoot (7-5)
- Down**

1 Historic French coin (3)

2 Topmost point (4)

3 On a single occasion (4)

4 Cease-fire agreement (5)

5 Inexpensive (5)

6 Verifiable (4)

8 Make the rich chap rush around to where the congregation gathers (6,6)

9 Rich dairy product to put on a scone (7,5)

12 Informal (6)

13 White rock (5)

14 Something used to lure one into a trap or to divert one's attention (5)

17 To no avail (2,4)

19 Joint just above the foot (5)

20 Clear off, 'get lost' (5)

27 One of the spikes of a fork (5)

28 Subject, connecting topic (5)

30 Agreement (4)

31 Legend (4)

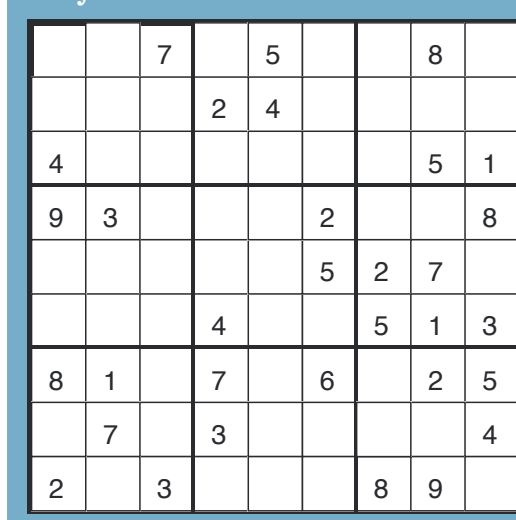
32 Journey, excursion (4)

35 State, mention (3)

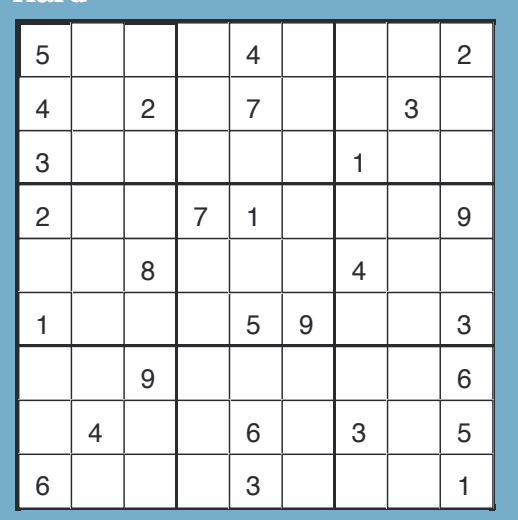
Sudoku Corner

470

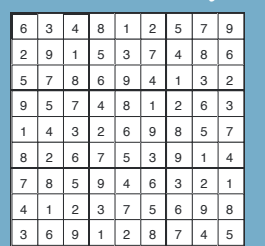
Easy




Hard



Last week's Easy 469



Last week's Hard 469



Notebook

Fr John Harris OP



Learning from Our Lady this Lent

IT WAS THE THURSDAY (February 18) after Ash Wednesday 1858 that the Lady first spoke to Bernadette. On the two previous occasions (February 11 and 14) the Lady had appeared to Bernadette she had said nothing. On this first Thursday of Lent the Lady asked Bernadette to come to the Grotto for the next fifteen days and once she had agreed to the Lady's request the Lady told her "I do not promise to make you happy in this world, but in the next". The dialogue of relationship had begun. The fact that Mary's apparitions to Bernadette at Lourdes were during Lent helps us as we prepare to celebrate this sacred season.



St Bernadette, the Marian visionary of Lourdes. Photo: OSV News

Apparitions

Firstly, the apparitions were completely at the initiative of the heavenly visitor. God's love for us, his desire to be with us is completely his free gift to us in the same way as the apparitions at the Grotto were a free gift to Bernadette. It is God's free choice to invite you and me to communion with him, remembering always that the fullness of this divine invitation is not for this life but for the glory of heaven. Lent is God's gift to us to reconnect with his love.

The requests of the Lady to Bernadette are the same as all of us hear during Lent. Mary asks Bernadette to pray and specifically to pray for sinners (February 19-23), she invites her to acts of penance (February 24) and to perform actual penitential exercises (February 25 – March 1). This concern for sinners to return to Christ is given its focus in the apparitions of March 2-4 when the Lady asks that a church be built on the site

and that people come in procession. The Church, through her life and sacraments, is the instrument by which God's grace most directly enters into our lives.

Dates

There are two dates during the two weeks of the apparitions which bear a particular importance if we are to deepen our relationship with God. On Monday, March 1 the day after the Lady had asked Bernadette to pray for sinners, the Blessed Mother inflicts on Bernadette the penance of absence, by not appearing. Again, on the Friday of the same week, a day essentially penitential, again no show. These two days of no appearance caused Bernadette great sorrow and suffering.

The days of no appearance are essential on our growth in the

Christian life. First and foremost, when God is not in our lives, we encounter deep pain and suffering. Without God our lives have no true meaning and joyful fulfilment. A world without God is a world without joyful hope, forgiveness and ultimately true humanity. Just look around!

Secondly, the penance of continuing to believe and to hope in God when he seems to be absent carries us into a deeper, more trusting relationship with God. He is not simply our play-thing who jumps each time we call, but he is the one who invites us into a real relationship which goes beyond our ideas of God to see things from his perspective.

May we all, like Bernadette at Lourdes, have Mary to guide us through Lent.

Meet me under Clerys' Clock.

A friend of mine recently arrived at an appointment 15 minutes late. He excused himself for being late. He explained he had forgotten his mobile phone so he had returned home to get his mobile in case I was late and was trying to phone him. What ever happened to good manners and people keeping appointments. Has the mobile phone so changed good manners? I was taught in civics class at school that being early is good manners, being on time is a courtesy, being late is an insult. Now that Clerys' clock has reappeared we may return to some good, old-fashioned manners.

Buying on line

A grandmother told me that her grandson visiting from America couldn't understand why she hung clothes out to dry on the clothes line. This was all a new experience for him, as in his apartment in the USA the clothes are dried in a dryer. After attempting to explain how we have dried clothes for centuries the granny eventually gave up and said "I bought them on line". It worked. He stopped asking questions.



LITTLE WAY TURKEY-SYRIA EARTHQUAKE APPEAL

We have all seen the terrible destruction and suffering caused by the recent earthquakes which have hit large parts of Turkey and Syria. We know you are as heart-broken as are we by some of the events taking place, including the death of whole families and of little children. These brothers and sisters of ours need our prayers and support. The Little Way will send as much, by way of funds, as you our supporters make possible. This will be utilised by one or more of the Catholic and international aid organisations capable of bringing vital food, water, medical aid and shelter, as well as loving care to the thousands of traumatised victims in Turkey and Syria.

THE NEEDS NOW ARE IMMENSE

Please send us any monetary gift that you can. Every euro will help.

Crossed POs and cheques should be sent and made payable to:

THE LITTLE WAY ASSOCIATION
Sacred Heart House, 119 Cedars Rd, Clapham Common, London SW4 0PR
(Registered Charity No. 235703) Tel 0044 20 76 22 0466
www.littlewayassociation.com

I enclose €..... to be allocated to:

€..... **TURKEY-SYRIA EARTHQUAKE APPEAL**

€..... **NEEDS OF MISSIONARIES**

€..... **WELLS AND WATER**

€..... **MASSSES** (please state no.)

We ask for a minimum of €6 or more for each Mass

€..... **LITTLE WAY ADMIN EXPENSES**

☐ Please tick if you would like an acknowledgement

Name (Rev. Mr. Mrs. Miss)

(Block letters please)

Address

To donate online go to
tinyurl.com/lwadonations

DONATIONS FOR THE MISSIONS ARE SENT WITHOUT DEDUCTION FOR ANY EXPENSES.



An earthquake survivor reacts while sitting amidst rubble Hatay, Turkey, Feb. 9, 2023.
Photo: OSV News photo/Emilie Madi, Reuters

Please consider making a gift to The Little Way Association's earthquake appeal for the relief of suffering victims.

Every euro you send will be gratefully received and forwarded without deduction.

Thank you, and May God reward your generosity.

Our benefactors will be glad to know that a Mass is offered each day for their intentions.



"We can never have too much confidence in our God Who is so mighty and so merciful."

- St Therese

PLEASE HELP CATECHISTS TO TEACH THE FAITH

Catechists, working in unison with their local priests, play an extremely important role in proclaiming and teaching the Catholic Faith. Many missionaries ask the Little Way for help to support and maintain their catechists who very often witness to Christ in the face of extreme poverty or persecution.

Please can you spare a donation to support a catechist?

WELLS NEEDED

Missionaries repeatedly appeal to The Little Way for funds to sink wells in order to provide clean, safe water, the lack of which causes much illness and many medical needs. On average, women in Africa and Asia walk around three hours every day to fetch water, often in scorching heat.

Can you help provide a well?