

**Books of the year:** Looking at some of the great titles from 2019 – Pages 36 & 37

# The Irish Catholic

Thursday, December 19, 2019

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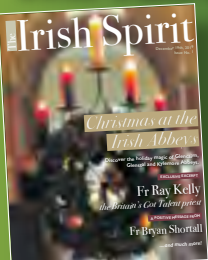
## PAPAL PRIORITIES

Exclusive  
interview with  
the Pope's man  
in Dublin  
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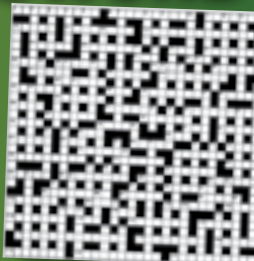
## JOE WILSON

His story has  
the power to  
move hearts  
and minds –  
is he a saint  
for our times?  
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## CHRISTMAS CROSSWORD

Win a trip  
to Lourdes  
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competition  
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## Unto us a child is born



Twenty-month-old Christopher Le O'Sullivan marvels at the nativity scene at Newman's University Church in Dublin.  
Photo: Alexis Sierra

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# Christmas is a time to be nourished

I've always loved how the Christ-child in the nativity scene is usually depicted with his arms outstretched, as if reaching out to the world.

The birth of Jesus – God becoming man – is the decisive Divine intervention in human history.

And yet, there is a paradox of humility and apparent weakness in the Christmas story. For, the all-powerful God did not enter into human affairs with power, and majesty and glory but with the defenceless love of a helpless baby.

Whether one sees the crib in a beautiful gothic cathedral or a country parish church, a busy shopping street or in a hospital corridor, it gives us the same simple – but powerful – message: "God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life" (John 3: 16).

## Longing

The Jewish people – the first to hear the Word of God – longed for the Messiah who would lead them and set them free.

But, in the coming of Christ God has taught us that salvation comes from the freedom of being His sons and daughters.

**“It is a time to know that God is present in the midst of all thoughts...”**

For those who look for signs and wonders, the coming of God as a child in a dusty outpost of the Roman Empire sounds like a disappointment indeed. But, it challenges us to change our notions about power and prestige. In the incarnation, God contrasts what we think of power and transforms the dynamic to show us that true power rests not in ostentatiousness but in humility.

That's why poor people were – and are – always the quickest to understand the

message and invitation that God sets before us in the coming of Christ.

Christmas is a time to rest, to reflect and to recollect. It is a time to be thankful, and it is a time to share with others. It is a time of sadness for loved ones who are no longer present, and a time of longing for what might have been.

It is a time to know that God is present in the midst of all thoughts, all feelings, all cares, all joys, all hopes, all sorrows and all despairs.

It is a time to know anew that God is with us.

It is also a special time to draw near to the Christ-child in the manger and mangier – devour God's love.

*Love bade me welcome; yet  
my soul drew back,  
Guilty of dust and sin.  
But quick-eyed Love,*

*observing me grow slack  
From my first entrance in,  
Drew nearer to me,  
sweetly questioning  
If I lack'd anything.  
'A guest,' I answer'd, 'worthy  
to be here.'  
Love said, 'You shall be he.'  
'I, the unkind, ungrateful?  
Ah, my dear,  
I cannot look on Thee.  
Love took my hand and  
smiling did reply,  
Who made the eyes but I?  
'Truth, Lord; but I have  
marr'd them: let my  
shame  
Go where it doth deserve.'  
'And know you not,' says  
Love, 'Who bore the  
blame?'  
'My dear, then I will serve.'  
'You must sit down,' says  
Love, 'and taste my meat.'  
So I did sit and eat.  
– (George Herbert).*

Allow yourself to be  
nourished by God – happy  
Christmas.

## Pope Francis marks 50 years as a priest by presenting writings of his spiritual director

### Staff reporter

As part of the celebrations for his 50th anniversary of priesthood, Pope Francis chose to personally present a multi-volume collection of writings by his long-time spiritual director, the late Jesuit Fr Miguel Angel Fiorito.

In addition to presenting the Spanish-language collection, *Escritos* (Writings), at a conference at the Jesuit headquarters on December 13, Pope Francis wrote an introduction to it, saying the publication is "a consolation for those of us who, for many years, were nourished by his teachings. These writings will be a great

good for the whole Church."

But he started the celebrations much earlier in the day, inviting cardinals living in Rome to join him in the chapel of his residence for morning Mass. The Vatican did not release the text of a homily or photographs, but the Vatican newspaper printed the greetings of Cardinal Angelo Sodano, dean of the College of Cardinals.

"On this happy occasion of your 50th anniversary of priesthood, in the name of all my brother cardinals, I wish you all the best with the deepest thanks for your generous daily service to the holy Church of God," the cardinal said.

At the evening book presentation,

Pope Francis said he had suggested having one of Fr Fiorito's "disciples" as the main speaker.

The editor of *La Civiltà Cattolica*, which published the books, asked the Pope who he had in mind. "Me," I said. And here we are."

Presenting the book at the Jesuit headquarters, he said, "is a way for me to express my gratitude for all that the Society of Jesus has given me and has done for me," and it is a way to encourage all the men and women around the world who offer spiritual direction to others following the teachings of St Ignatius of Loyola.

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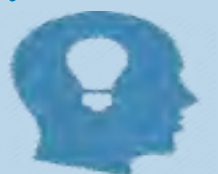


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# Assisting displaced is 'heart of Christmas message' archbishop says

**Chai Brady**

The heart of the Christmas message is reaching out to those who have no home or have been displaced, the Archbishop of Armagh Eamon Martin has said.

Following several recent stories of migrants suffering horrific deaths in containers and arriving on Irish shores the prelate told *The Irish Catholic* "it's bringing home to us that this is an international problem".

This comes after 16 migrants were found on the back of a truck trailer on a ferry sailing to Wexford near the end of November and eight migrants were found two weeks later on a cargo ship heading for Waterford.

## Migrants

Archbishop Eamon said that the 39 Vietnamese migrants found dead in a refrigerated container in Essex on October 23 brought home the seriousness of the situation for Irish people.

"I would notice it here on the ground. A lot of people are quite shocked by the trafficking stories that are emerging, like the recent horrific incident in England in the lorry, and also the increasing number of migrants apparently showing up on our shores," Archbishop Martin said.

"Our hearts go out to Christmas to anyone who is without their home or who is

being displaced, it really does bring us to the heart of the Christmas message."

## Focus

In the bishops' Winter 2019 General Meeting statement, their focus was on the marginalised, including refugees.

After a meeting in which several Catholic prelates discussed the community sponsorship model for welcoming refugees with Minister for Justice Charlie Flanagan and Minister of State with responsibility for Equality, Immigration and Integration, David

Stanton, the bishops called on Catholic parishes and communities to welcome and assist refugees in their local areas "in light of the Gospel message".

"For Catholic communities who are able to be more proactive in terms of practically

assisting with the accommodation and integration of refugees, bishops commended to them the Community Sponsorship Programme, overseen by the Department of Justice and Equality, as a practical expression of Catholic social teaching and a

response to Pope Francis' call for every parish to receive and welcome a refugee family."

Archbishop Eamon Martin added: "I think there are a lot of communities who will do this and we will certainly be encouraging this in our churches and our parishes."

## Childhood 'applauded', family 'strengthened' on Bambinelli Sunday



Fr John Carroll PP blesses the figures of Jesus brought to him for Bambinelli Sunday.

**Chai Brady**

There was "standing room only" at Barntown and Glynn churches in Co. Wexford over the weekend as children from the parish brought the baby Jesus from their homes to Masses for blessing on Bambinelli Sunday, according to the parish priest.

After the weekend celebrations, Fr John Carroll PP said: "The figurines of the baby Jesus from each home were blessed; decorations from Bethlehem were distributed and seasonal community celebrations were held in both the hall in Glynn and the school in Barntown."

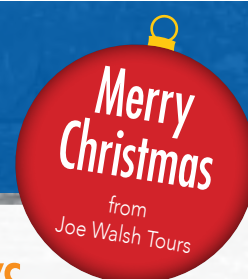
## Tradition

This is the third year of the celebration in the parish. The tradition comes from Italy and occurs on the third Sunday of Advent.

"Bambinelli Sunday affords the parish an opportunity to see the genuine depth of affection that exists in children and their families for the infant Jesus. Parents, grandparents and children come in big numbers to receive a blessing for their home and their families as they prepare for Christmas Day," Fr Carroll said.

He added: "Bambinelli Sunday is a real meeting point for family, school and parish – a genuine inter-generational moment of reflection and warmth at the local level – a celebration of both the beauty of the story of the incarnation and of modern family life where innocence is visible, childhood is applauded and home life is affirmed and thereby strengthened."

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# Vatican in no rush to find new Dublin archbishop

Michael Kelly

The Pope's man in Ireland has given a strong indication that the Vatican will be in no hurry to replace the Archbishop of Dublin, Diarmuid Martin.

Dr Martin is due to submit a letter of resignation on April 8 when he turns 75 in line with Church law.

Speculation has been rife in Church circles about potential candidates. However, in an interview with *The Irish Catholic* Papal Nuncio Archbishop Jude Thaddeus Okolo poured cold water on talk of a quick succession.

"It is delicate and still very premature for discussion. Otherwise, it could raise a flurry of undesired opinions. We wait until the Holy Father gives the go-ahead."

"As a servant, I cannot go ahead of my master. We wait until he blows the whistle,

and the race takes off. I will let you know!" the archbishop said.

On speculation on the succession, he insisted that "there is a season for everything. It will be a fascinating moment, because many people are very interested, including those who have nothing to do with the Church. We shall need the graces and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit".

He said that it will be a while before there is movement in Dublin. "There is no move yet and there is no move foreseen until the archbishop submits a letter to the Holy Father [in April 2020].

"And when he does, the Holy Father will read his letter and then get back to the nunciature and say, 'all right, go ahead.'"

"Until that is done, I don't know anything about it because the step will begin from the archbishop himself.

That is why we wouldn't put the cart ahead of the horse," he insisted.

Asked whether Dr Martin may stay on for a prolonged period like his predecessor Cardinal Desmond Connell who stayed on until he was 78, Archbishop Okolo said: "I don't know. Everything depends on the Holy Father. So, we cannot foresee."

See Pages 9-12.



Mary and Joseph admire their baby Jesus at the annual junior infants nativity play in Guardian Angels' National School, Blackrock, Co. Dublin. Photo: Anne Collins

## Irish nun celebrates 100th birthday in South Africa

Róise McGagh

A nun from Co. Down who took her vows in 1942 recently celebrated her 100th birthday in Port Elizabeth.

Sr Mary Bartholomew was sent to South Africa at the beginning of World War II. Her five nieces flew from Leitrim to join her for the celebration.

Growing up in Leitrim, Sr Mary, born Philomena Cunningham, and her older sister Mary Bernadette attended Sacred Heart Grammar School in Newry. They were some of the first to play camogie in the area before a team was set up by the Fontenoy's GAA club. Both went on to become nuns. Sr Mary entered the Assumption Convent in Bal-

lynahinch. She was on the Warwick Castle as a postulant, "the last passenger ship to sail to the continent (of Africa) for many years", said her niece, Mary McAleen.

She spent her life teaching and on her retirement she helped open a clinic and pre-school for refugees fleeing the Mozambique war.

Sr Mary wrote a book detailing her time in Drumgooland parish. She had not returned to Ireland since her sister Eileen was seriously ill "some years ago", said her nieces.

The day after her centenary, the Missionary Sisters of the Assumption celebrated 170 years since the first sisters arrived in Port Elizabeth in 1849.



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# Reflections on the SDLP revival

**A**s a new party, Aontú did well in the Derry constituency of Foyle for the UK General Election: Anne McCloskey got over 2,000 votes and saw an increase in support for her party.

Yet, in terms of the overall political picture, it's surely also a welcome development that the SDLP, which had been wiped off the political map in Northern Ireland, won back two Westminster seats. Colum Eastwood in Derry and Claire Hanna in South Belfast may not be aligned on all issues that readers of this newspaper would wish; but it had been so regrettable that the party founded by Gerry Fitt and John Hume, and to which Seamus Mallon brought such distinction, had disappeared. At least John Hume's heritage has now been revived as an active political force.

Seamus Mallon's lovely memoir *A Shared Home Place* also prompted some personal regrets for me.

I met Gerry Fitt when he was first elected to the House of Commons for

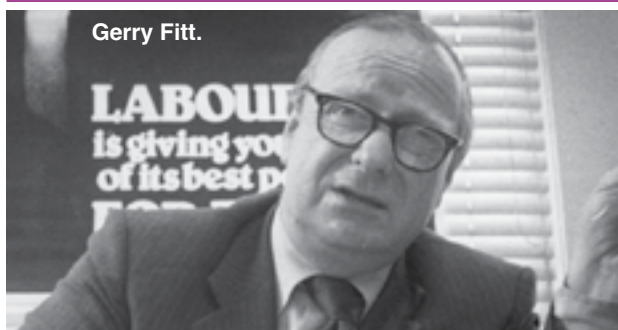


**Mary Kenny**

● I've always been interested in failure, perhaps because I've failed at so many endeavours myself: and I would say that any modest success I've ever achieved has been built on many failures. So I was rather cheered this year by a report which claimed that people who fail at some challenge often learn more than people who succeed.

The researchers even came up with a theory that it is better to have a 15% failure rate, in any undertaking – from exams to jobs – than to have 100% success. Abject failure can indeed dishearten, but some failure is often a spur.

Even as a schoolkid I loved that line in the New Testament about how the stone that the builders rejected subsequently became the cornerstone.



Gerry Fitt.

West Belfast and thought him a very decent man. He told me about his experiences as a merchant seaman on the wartime arctic convoys crossing the

freezing Baltic Sea during World War II. One night he saw a German plane coming towards the ship he was travelling in, and he thought: "There's a pilot

up there trying to kill me, and I'm on a vessel trying to kill his people. But I've nothing against that German personally and he has nothing against me. What's it all about?"

At that moment he felt a strong compulsion to dedicate himself, subsequently, to the cause of peace. It was an epiphany which informed much of his political life. Gerry Fitt survived his wartime experience, but saw many other men lost at sea in terrible conditions.

**“But it had been so regrettable that the party founded by Gerry Fitt and John Hume had disappeared”**

Seamus Mallon writes that, as an older widower, and a member of that ultimate retirement home, the House of Lords, Gerry was often quite lonely in London. I now wish I had made more effort to contact him during his declining years.

It was only recently, too, that I learned that Gerry had been born out of wedlock – literally in a Belfast workhouse, to a single mother, and “father unknown”.

He was fostered and raised by George and Mary Fitt, who had five other children. Later in his adult life, his birth mother approached him, wanting to meet him, but he rebuffed her. He claimed that she had been physically cruel to him as a young child and had caused the disability that marked one of his eyes.

Who knows what her story was?

He adored his own daughters, whom he jokingly called ‘The Miss Fitts’.

So, if only for the historic association with John Hume, Seamus Mallon and Gerry Fitt, I welcome the return of the SDLP to the active political arena of these islands. And surely it's important that there should be a voice in the new Brexit Westminster parliament to represent the moderate Irish Nationalist populace in the north.

## Focus on Scotland, Nicola!

It was remarked that nationalism was a theme running through the British election – Scottish nationalism affirming itself with the success of the SNP, led by the redoubtable Nicola Sturgeon.

Ms Sturgeon is certainly every inch the confident Caledonian, striding forth in her elegant high-heeled shoes: unlike most other modern women, she seldom wears trousers – perhaps proud of a shapely pair of pins!

Fair play to her and her campaign for a Scottish independence referendum. She's entitled to be respected for her national aspirations.

She's not entitled, however, to meddle in referendums held in other sovereign states, and that's just what she did do during the Repeal the Eighth Referendum in Ireland – actively lending her support to the pro-Repeal side.

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Photo caption: Such is their eagerness for education, Elizabeth Ayen teaches students under a tree in a school compound in Rumbek, South Sudan. Construction of more classrooms is under way, but in the meantime some classes have to take place outside. The school is run by Misean Cara member the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Loreto Sisters). Elizabeth is a graduate of the Loreto Secondary School in the same location, and plans to become a nurse. “If you educate a woman you educate a nation. And our new nation needs education,” says Elizabeth. Photo: Paul Jeffrey.



## Breda O'Brien

### The View



# Christianity enriches and ennobles everything we hold dear

I love Christmas. No 'bah, humbug' for me. Of course, it is much easier to love Christmas when you have been greatly blessed by having a family, a roof over your head and enough to live on. So many people do not even have the basics of life.

As a child, there was one Christmas tradition that I loved. Probably to give my over-worked mother a break, on St Stephen's Day my father would pile us into the car and we would visit four different churches in the local area.

We would open a heavy door to a silent, peaceful church smelling of candles and incense and make our way to the crib. We always said a prayer and lit candles.

All the cribs were different, some small, some life-size, but all decorated with loving care. The tour always ended with our

parish church, where we would solemnly agree that our crib was by far the nicest again this year.

I grew up in an Ireland

that was in many ways secular and cynical even then but one that was also still permeated with Christian traditions and

imagery. But for so many young people, there is a blank space where that knowledge and those customs used to be.

I find that very sad. I teach English and RE and a student said to me once that I kept emphasising the religious imagery because I teach religious education. For once, I was silenced.

#### Texts

I then tried to explain that the religious references were woven into the texts, that I had not dreamt up that *Hamlet* is suffused with Catholic iconography. Shakespeare wrote it in that way because his imagination was shaped and formed by Christianity and because in very recent times, England had been a faithful daughter of the Catholic Church.

For many of my students, Christian imagery and symbols are similar to learning about Roman and Greek mythology, vaguely interesting but nothing to do with everyday life.

Sometimes I wish I could explain adequately to them that the values that they take for granted, like human rights, did not spring like Athena fully formed from the head of Zeus. They emerged in direct contradiction to the values of previous ages and they emerged from Christian

values. And because they are not natural phenomena and did not exist for millennia, human rights cannot be taken for granted or expected to survive without sustenance.

**“I regret the fact that their world gives Newman's words so little elevation, so little sense of the transcendent...”**

This point is brilliantly made by Tom Holland in his book, *Dominion*. Famously, it has different sub-titles in the US and Europe. In the US, the sub-title is 'How the Christian Revolution Remade the World' but the European edition the sub-title is 'The Making of the Western Mind'. Christianity is conspicuously absent from the European version, even though Mr Holland's thesis revolves around the idea that our civilisation is utterly saturated by Christian assumptions.

#### Powerless

Among the many ideas that Mr Holland attributes to Christianity is the idea that being weak and powerless does not make you of less value than being strong and

in command. Christianity eventually made practices like the exposure of unwanted infants seem barbaric. It built hospitals and universities. It championed the arts.

And of course, because Christians are deeply flawed humans in constant need of God's redemptive grace, they also often completely betrayed the ideals of the founder, Jesus. But even the idea of forgiveness for sin, free, unconditional forgiveness, is a Christian ideal.

It may seem heretical that I regret the narrowing of my student's imaginative spaces almost as much as I regret the fact that the impact of Christianity on a moral level becomes more removed with every generation.

I regret that they cannot read poetry easily because the allusions are lost on them. I regret that the cadences and flow of traditional prayers do not echo in their hearts.

Most of them will never have heard prayers like Newman's beautiful poetic words: "O Lord, support us all the day long, until the shadows lengthen, and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done."

I regret the fact that their world gives them so little elevation, so little sense of the transcendent. I regret that so many of them are riddled with anxiety and have no notion that even the hairs on their heads are counted.

And yet, they are good people and if their imaginations have not been nourished and they do not know that their moral universe is shaped by Christian grace, it is not their fault.

This Christmas, I will be visiting cribs and lighting candles for them. And after Christmas, I will go back to the seemingly Sisyphean task of trying to explain that Christianity does not take anything away from them but enriches and ennobles all that they hold dear.



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# It's up to us, not the Pope, to revive the Church



It's unlikely that your children or grandchildren will keep going to Mass unless some of their peers are doing so as well, writes **David Quinn**

It is now coming up to seven years since the start of this papacy. What has changed in the Church in the meantime?



The main thing is probably tone. The Pope, whoever that is, can set a tone for the rest of the Church and Pope Francis has set a softer tone

than his two immediate predecessors, Popes Benedict and John Paul.

He has made the mercy of God a special theme

of his pontificate. He has reduced the emphasis placed on issues like marriage, the right to life and rising cultural relativism. Francis has also placed a strong emphasis on justice for the poor and saving the natural environment.

But we should be careful not to exaggerate the differences between Francis and his predecessors. John Paul and Benedict did talk about mercy, and social justice and certainly in the case of Benedict, the environment.

## Shaped

Every pontificate will be shaped in part by the times it is in. Pope John Paul II was elected in 1978, when communism still governed Eastern Europe and Moscow *de facto* ruled his native Poland. European communism has now disappeared thanks in part to St John Paul and today issues like immigration and climate change are much more to the fore.

For his part, Francis speaks out much more on topics like abortion, the family and gender ideology than we often think, and certainly far more strongly than the average priest or bishop. In the case of abortion, Francis has compared abortionists with 'mafia hitmen', for instance.

In addition, he often refers to the Devil. I can't remember Benedict or John Paul talking about the Devil as much as Francis does.

Francis often adopts a very strong, almost aggressive tone when denouncing tendencies

in the Church he doesn't like, for example, over-intellectualism, or moral rigorism.

We all have our preferences for different popes. That's only natural. John Paul is the pontiff I grew up with, so I have fond memories of him. I was there with my classmates in 1979 in the Phoenix Park for the papal Mass along with a million other people. You don't forget something like that too easily. It makes an impression. I covered his funeral for the *Irish Independent*.

But consider for a moment whether any recent pope has made much difference on the ground, in your parish. I don't think they do.

Certainly, on any given Sunday the Pope will be prayed for, and he might rate a mention. For the most part though what he says and does makes little enough impression. This isn't a criticism. It's just a fact. An encyclical or apostolic exhortation might come out, but most parishioners couldn't name them.

**“We must lead the revival of the Church in our local communities, which is no easy task”**

Probably the local bishop doesn't make a whole lot of difference to the day-to-day lives of parishes either. A good bishop can encourage his priests, and that will improve morale. He can encourage certain initiatives and put his full weight behind vocations, but these things on their own won't really revive the Church as a whole, or the local church. Your local bishop, much less the bishop in Rome, can only do some much evangelisation for the rest of us.

What I'm saying is that we must lead the revival of the Church in our local communities, which is no easy task. We can't expect someone to come on a white charger and do it for us. As Barack Obama said when he was campaigning for the US presidency first time around, 'We are the ones we've been waiting for'.

Obviously, as Christians we are ultimately waiting for God, but the point still applies; we have to be the

agents of change in our local parishes in the various ways we are called upon to do that, whether that be through something like the local St Vincent de Paul, the parish council, a bible study group, a prayer group, or the Legion of Mary.

There must be more stress on evangelisation. For example, how many of us encourage friends and family to come to Mass? To what extent do parishes reach out to those who have stopped coming to church, or who might never have come (there are more and more of them)?

How many parishes make serious efforts to attract vocations to the priesthood and religious life? We hear a lot about the vocations crisis, but we can't address it if we do little or nothing about it, or make only token efforts. Although it is a crisis, we aren't acting like it.

An awful lot more has to be done on the youth front as well. It is very unlikely that your children or grandchildren will keep going to Mass unless some of their peers are doing so as well. In some parts of the country, there isn't a decent Christian youth group for miles around.

Something else we have to try and address, and here is where the Church's leadership comes in, is to do a better job challenging the ambient secular culture and the all-pervasive individualism of our times.

In a secular, individualistic culture, people will feel less conscious need for God and will be less inclined to join strong communities that might make demands on them.

Or maybe people think they are saved almost no matter what they do because God is all-forgiving in their minds and so there really isn't any need for confession or repentance, a very dangerous delusion.

A Pope or a bishop can certainly try to challenge the underlying assumptions of our times, but at the end of the day it is up to us, locally, to save the Church. It's no use pretending it's up to someone else, like a John Paul II, or a Benedict or a Francis, or whoever comes along next, when it is up to all of us.

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# The face of the 'Francis effect' on Irish Catholicism

Reforms of the Church in Ireland are underway, and they will intensify, Archbishop Jude Thaddeus Okolo tells Michael Kelly



**T**he Christian roots of relations between the Irish and the Holy See go back to 431 when Pope Celestine I sent Palladius as Bishop of Ireland. St Patrick was to steal his thunder, but relations between Rome and Ireland go back a long way.

The latest bearer of that torch is Nigerian-born Archbishop Jude Thaddeus Okolo, as Papal Nuncio the personal representative of Pope Francis in Ireland and effectively the Vatican's ambassador.

While for most people Christmas brings thoughts of going home, the life of a diplomat much like that of a missionary is about being close to the people one has been sent to minister to.

The archbishop will spend Christmas in Dublin, but he will have thoughts of home since his birthday falls just a week before Christmas and the Nigerian priests and religious based in Ireland are planning to organise a celebration.

"I think this is the first time we are meeting actually since I arrived. Well, meeting as a group – but, of course I've met them here and there, but this is the first time I will meet them as a group, officially or formally".

When we meet at his residence-cum-office on the Navan Road – the only diplomatic mission on Dublin's northside – he is conscious of the role of Irish missionaries in his own jour-

ney of faith that has brought him as Papal Nuncio.

"All through my life, from birth until my priestly ordination – at one stage or the other – I have always been associated with Irish missionaries: bishops, priests and religious".

\* \* \* \* \*

The archbishop recalls to *The Irish Catholic* how before he was born his father was praying for a boy and an Irish SMA missionary Fr Greg McGovern encouraged him to make a novena to St Jude Thaddeus.

"At my birth, he was there to give me a blessing. I do not know what he prayed for. He gave me the name Jude Thaddeus. It was he who baptised me and I received my First Communion from his hands," the archbishop recalls with pride.

Irish Sisters of St Louis prepared him for his First Holy Communion and Irish Holy Ghost fathers were also a key part of his faith formation that put the young man on the road to priesthood.

## Ordination

At times, Dr Okolo's mission to Ireland seemed almost inevitable. Upon his ordination as a bishop, he adopted part of the coat of arms of Irishman Bishop Joseph Shanahan, the first bishop in Eastern Nigeria.

Dr Okolo believes that Irish missionaries to Nigeria were so successful in spreading the faith because

they started from the human need. "They began with education, and the health services, and then when the people got settled, then they said, 'Now we'll tell you about God' "And so for the people it was humane...it is a nice missionary pattern, which we see in Christ also. Christ gave the people something to eat. The disciples said, 'send them away'.

"But, Jesus says 'no, give them something to eat' and then when the people were satisfied, they say, 'ah, this man seems to be a Saviour. We should listen to him'."

**“My major reason for becoming a priest is to make a difference in the world. To help people get to know and experience the goodness of God”**

While papal nuncios have many formal responsibilities – particularly in Ireland where he is dean of the diplomatic corps – Archbishop Okolo is clear that he is first and foremost a priest.

"My major reason for becoming a priest is to make a difference in the world. To help people get to know and experience the goodness of God". He says that his "desire was that I would work in a parish setting or as a forma-

tor in the seminary – so far, none of it has been fulfilled!"

A young Fr Okolo first went to Rome in 1984 to work as personal secretary for the well-known Cardinal Francis Arinze and to open a new Vatican section for dialogue with new religious movements.

"While I was there in Rome, one day I was called to the Secretariat of State by the then Archbishop Justin Rigali, the President of the Pontifical Academy for Diplomatic Studies. He told me they had decided that I should enter for the diplomatic service.

"I asked to consult my bishop; he replied that my bishop had already given his consent!" Archbishop Okolo recalls.

The training to be a Vatican diplomat lasts four years and includes Canon Law, international law, languages and – of course – diplomacy.

\* \* \* \* \*

In 1990, his first overseas posting was to Sri Lanka and then on to Haiti and then to Trinidad and Tobago.

The latter appointment proved a fascinating one for the freshly-minted diplomat since the mission covers several countries including French Guyana, Guyana, Suriname, Curacao, Aruba, Saba, St Lucia, St Vincent, Grenada, Grenadines, Barbados, Martinique, Guadalupe, Antigua, Barbuda, Virgin Islands, Bahamas, Kitts

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# 'No one is perfect...the Irish excel in goodness, in many

» Continued from Page 9

and Nevis, Turks & Caicos, Bermuda.

From the Caribbean it was back to Europe and stints in Switzerland, Liechtenstein and the Czech Republic before Australia beckoned.

After the visit of Pope Benedict XVI to Australia, Msgr Okolo received his first appointment as Papal Nuncio to Chad and the Central African Republic. After five years in Africa, it was back to the Caribbean and to Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic.

## Named nuncio

In May 2017 Pope Francis named him nuncio to Ireland replacing Archbishop Charles Brown. After two years in Ireland, what are his impressions?

"Everyone loves the Irish people and myself too. I have known them from birth, and I have always deeply appreciated them sincerely. They can also be challenging. The advice is: love and appreciate them as they are. They are cordial and warm hearted.

"They do not hide; however, they do not seem to appreciate criticism in public. They can laugh and smile and joke over their faults. And they would expect you to do

the same; not to take life too seriously. Tomorrow will be a better day, perhaps without or in spite of the rain," he says.

The archbishop has noticed a directness with Irish people at times. "In a minute, they already go into conversations that relate to profound matters. You are not sure whether you have already reached a deep level of trust, or whether you have to wait, to know them well.

"For a person like me, at that level, I prefer to listen and learn," he says.

He won't be tempted into an indiscretion. "By principle, I like to put emphasis on the positive. So, I will not dwell on negative issues, styles and attitudes. No one is perfect. However, the Irish still excel in goodness, in many ways, in spite of the changing world, the changing epoch," he says.

Archbishop Okolo arrived just months before Pope Francis was due for the World Meeting of Families. He says he did not feel daunted at the prospect of such a visit so soon into his mission because much of the organisation was out of his hands.

"What made it daunting and demanding was the fact that it was very brief. And so,



everything and everyone had to be packed into 36 hours," he recalls.

Dr Okolo said that there

were so many requests for the Pope to participate in various events around the country including a parish that wanted Francis to join them for a full Irish breakfast.

"The time was simply too short for everyone and everything," he said.

I put it to him that the visit was, in some respects, underwhelming. He doesn't share that sentiment. "The Holy Father would have done much more, if he could. People had their expectations. He had his limitations: his age, his health, etc.

**"The Holy Father was always willing to meet the victims... there was never a doubt. I can tell you this"**

"His principal intention was to contribute towards the healing of hearts. In fact, he succeeded in touching. He brought consolation to the afflicted. He reassured many who felt hurt, and he invited them to look to the future with hope," according to Archbishop Okolo.

But, what was it like to have the Pope spend the night in your home, I wonder?

"It was very warm. We know that he [Pope Francis] loves to be with the people, but he also likes to feel at

home when he comes back. So, the reverend sisters here are Spanish-speaking – with one from Argentina...so whenever the Holy Father came back home after everything outside, he felt at home and he turned from Italian or English to Spanish immediately," Archbishop Okolo recalls. Dr Okolo recalls that despite the tightness of the Pope's schedule, Francis wanted to reach out to people.

He recalls the Pope's brief opportunity for lunch after the meeting with the civil authorities in Dublin Castle.

The Pope was due to have lunch at 1pm and the archbishop recalls that everything was timed to perfection so the Pope's meal would be hot. "But you know what happened? The Pope didn't know that more than 400 people were on the grounds waiting for him," he recalls. They were children from the local schools who had asked if they could see the Pope.

Archbishop Okolo said that months before the Pope arrived he was alerted to people at the door of the nunciature asking for him. "It was 20 little boys from the school, they came here with a piece of paper saying: 'Nuncio, the Pope is coming to our grounds, we must be there to meet him.'"

And so it was. "When the Pope came in he saw just a sea of children, he told the driver to stop. And the chil-

dren didn't expect this. And he began to greet them one by one, and shake their hands.

"At this stage I had to come closer to him, I told him, 'Holy Father, the pumpkin soup is getting cold.' He looked at me and said, 'this is better than the food!' So he continued. He didn't even hurry, no," the archbishop recalls with a smile.

**"Francis remained concentrated on the Irish reality, and wasn't thinking of just going home to solve another problem"**

"He remained here mentally and physically,"

A more sombre encounter at the nunciature was that with survivors of abuse.

A meeting of survivors was always going to be part of a Papal visit to Ireland. However, with just two weeks to go it was reported in the media that there was doubt whether the Pope would hold such a meeting or not. That doubt created some confusion among the people.

"The Holy Father was always willing to meet the victims," Archbishop Okolo insists. "There was never a doubt. I can tell you this,

**"He says that his 'desire was that I would work in a parish setting or as a formator in the seminary – so far, none of it has been fulfilled!'"**

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# ways, in spite of a changing world, the changing epoch'



The papal nuncio Archbishop Okolo reflects on the Irish media as he holds a copy of *The Irish Catholic* alongside Managing Editor Michael Kelly.

and also whatever group that he could meet. So, he was ready for that.

"There was no doubt about it – the discussion was more how to do it. I think some misunderstood that, and then thought that the Holy Father was hesitant. He was never hesitant, I can tell you about it. I can vouch for this, because I heard this from him," Dr Okolo said.

One of the other highlights of the visit for the archbishop was the trip to Knock, especially the quiet moments of prayer at the site of the apparition.

"He went to Knock to pray as a pilgrim, and he had time to pray. It was supposed to last for five minutes – the prayer time – but he extended it to ten minutes. Even when Fr Richard [Gibbons] came up to tell him, 'Holy Father, it's time to go' he just looked at him and went on with his prayer!" the nuncio recalls.

The closing Mass of WMOF was to be the highpoint of the Pope's visit, but the day was marked by torrential rain and just a fraction of the 500,000 people who had been expected turned up in Phoenix Park.

I ask if the nuncio was

disappointed by this. "No," he says emphatically. "I was disappointed by the play on words and figures. I'm a journalist and we read between the lines. You see the play on figures and the words. That was what disappointed me".

**“ Archbishop Okolo says that people must be patient when it comes to the appointment of bishops to vacant sees”**

It is clear that Archbishop Okolo was disappointed by some logistical failings in the organisation and preparation – particularly for the Phoenix Park. "The security thing was exaggerated. If you want people to see the Holy Father, why get them to walk for 5km? You know what I mean? It was unfair.

"They could have made more effort to bring people closer to see him," he thinks.

Readers will recall that on the Sunday morning of the Papal visit, a former Vatican

diplomat released a dossier – seemed designed to scupper the trip to Dublin – accusing the Pontiff of being complicit in not taking seriously allegations of abuse against Theodore McCarrick.

What was the nuncio's impression of the Pope's reaction, I wondered.

## Calm

Francis "maintained his calm and concentrated. I need to emphasise this. He remained concentrated on the Irish reality, and wasn't thinking of just going home to solve another problem.

"He remained here mentally and physically," the archbishop recalls of the controversy.

One of the key roles of a Vatican diplomat in a country is to advise the Pope on who should be appointed as bishops. This, historians argue, is one of the reasons why many Irish bishops – in the habit of having huge influence over the appointment of their successor – were not at all pleased when the government of the new Free State convinced Rome to start sending resident nuncios.

Archbishop Okolo says that people must be patient when

it comes to the appointment of bishops to vacant sees.

"The questionnaire [part of the consultation process on the appointment of bishops] is a very long one and is graded in 12 detailed sections – and they reflect the requirements of Pope Francis.

"He gives full attention to the replies and that is why the entire documentation is normally sent to him. Appointments take into consideration the person, the place where he is supposed to work, and his qualities...it is a very slow process; it needs concentration and attention. It needs study and verification and intensive consultation".

\* \* \* \* \*

I put it to Dr Okolo that Dublin – Ireland's largest diocese – will soon need a new shepherd since Archbishop Diarmuid Martin is obliged to submit his resignation in April when he turns 75.

The nuncio cautions people who think there will be a hasty appointment. "It is delicate and still very premature for discussion. Otherwise, it could raise a flurry of undesired opinions. We wait until the Holy Father gives the go-ahead.

"As a servant, I cannot go ahead of my master. We wait until he blows the whistle, and the race takes off. I will let you know!"

I put it to him that as a journalist he must know that speculation is part of the bread and butter of journalists. He laughs. "There is a season for everything. It will be a fascinating moment, because many people are very interested, including those who have nothing to do with the Church. We shall need the graces and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit".

He insists that it will be a while before there is movement in Dublin. "There is no move yet and there is no move foreseen until the archbishop submits a letter to the Holy Father [in April 2020].

"And when he does, the Holy Father will read his letter and then get back to the nunciature and say, 'all right, go ahead.'

"Until that is done, I don't know anything about it because the step will begin from the archbishop himself. That is why we wouldn't put the cart ahead of the horse," he says.

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# 'I'm fortunate to have gone around every corner of Ireland'



» Continued from Page 11

So, might Archbishop Martin – who has often spoken of his imminent departure – stay on longer than his 75th birthday? “I don’t know. Everything depends on the Holy Father. So, we cannot foresee.”

“I have a lot to keep me busy until then, I tell you,” he says. At the time of the Apostolic Visitation of the Church in Ireland ordered by Benedict XVI, the smart money was on an amalgamation of Irish dioceses. Though, conventional wisdom has it that in the meantime Irish bishops killed the idea in Rome.

“All I can say is that the process of amalgamation has already started,” Archbishop Okolo says. “It will be slow and steady – to avoid hurts, shocks, and surprises. Everyone implicated in the matter will be involved. The people will effect the amalgamation, work out the details of the cohesion, and inform the Holy See,” he says.

“I want to be discreet about it, in order not to go ahead. Because if I say it has begun, and the people will say, ‘but we don’t know about it’. Yes, it has begun.”

“The amalgamation begins



Pope Francis greets a local parishioner as he visits the Chapel of the Apparitions at Knock Shrine in August.

## Love Without Limits



Sister Veronika with girls and boys from the Solomon Islands

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from the grassroots. The communities, the meetings. In all the dioceses today, there are consultations going on... some don’t want to hear it,” he says.

\* \* \* \* \*

When we meet, the Bishop of Ossory Dr Dermot Farrell has just poured cold water on the idea of ending mandatory celibacy as a way to alleviate the vocations crisis in an interview with *The Irish Catholic*.

Dr Okolo has seen the interview and thinks Bishop Farrell makes an important point that making celibacy optional is not a silver bullet. “Our brothers in some of the Protestant churches can tell us that married clergy does not solve the question of scarcity of vocations. The same also with our Catholic brothers of the Eastern Rites. It is not a solution for the vocations crisis.”

“The problem is that human beings no longer want to sacrifice their time and their efforts to the unique service of others,” he insists.

### Interest

I am struck by the nuncio’s background as a journalist and his evident interest in the profession.

“We journalists have a duty to humanity to do the best, to create positive images, and also hope and to give hope... we shouldn’t go towards the negative”.

He believes that Catholic newspapers have a vital role to play in challenging negativity that is too often present in secular news outlets. “What the duty of the Catholic media should be is to give people some hope in whatever situ-

ation. People go through difficulties, they have to juggle between work and home. At the end of the month, there are bills to be paid... why not talk about positive things?”

“There are controversies, but, as journalists, we need to look for things that uplift the mind, and create positive thinking in people. – that is journalism,” he insists.

**“When I opened my eyes, and if I was able to see anything, one of the first persons I saw was an Irish priest giving me a blessing”**

The archbishop is clearly busy in his mission in Ireland – both to the local Church and to the Irish State. So, what does he do to try and relax?

“The Church in Ireland appears small, but it has huge demands on our time. There is hardly time for relaxation. But recently, I brought down my television from the attic, to set it up. It will help me to relax at the weekends, when I am not visiting parishes.”

“I play table-tennis; and sometimes I take a walk in a nearby park... I should add that the parish priest of the Navan Road church recently gave me a nice new bicycle, for my regular exercises,” he says.

**“We journalists have a duty to humanity to do the best, to create positive images and also hope, and to give hope...”**

One gets the distinct impression that Archbishop Okolo feels very much at home in Ireland. “I’m fortunate to have gone around the dioceses, and many parishes in almost every corner of the country. I have relished Irish cordiality, hospitality and welcome.”

“And especially the Faith, and the harmony in the families... my message is this, my reflection is this: this sense of sharing, cordiality, hospitality, openness, transparency, honesty, goodness and respect is Irish. When I say it is Irish, it’s not just one person. It’s not just one community. It pervades. I encourage Irish people to be what they are.”

“The world knows about it [Ireland] because they have brought these qualities to every part of the world. And we know, myself from infancy to today, I felt it. Because when I opened my eyes, and if I was able to see anything, one of the first persons I saw was an Irish priest giving me a blessing. And I don’t know what he said in his blessing, but I know it continues. And so, we have all seen the goodness of the Irish.”

“The world continues to expect the best from them. Whether it is in Brexit or apart from Brexit,” he says.

I take talk of the dreaded ‘B’ word as time to bring our interview to an end. This is, after all, the season of good will to all!





# Joe Wilson: A saint for our modern times?

**I**ncredible people can be found in the most ordinary and unsuspecting of places – the small Scottish town of Carfin is one of those places.

It lies between Glasgow and Edinburgh, to the north-east of Motherwell, and is probably most famous for its grotto which sees about 70,000 pilgrims travelling to it annually. Carfin is a tight-knit community with just over 1,000 residents and is also where the Wilson family call home.

The story of this inspiring young man has the power to move hearts and minds, writes **Colm Fitzpatrick**



Alan and his wife Veronica invited me to their house to talk about their son Joe who died in 2011. He was only 17. But despite the brief time he spent on earth,

Joe did and continues to make an incredible impact on the lives of people in Carfin and further a-field. Some are even calling him a 21st-Century saint.

I arrive at the train station to be greeted by Alan and after a quick tour of the grotto, we head into the Wilson family home where family and friends of Joe are awaiting our return. After pleasantries, we all sit down in the living room as I prepare to find out who this young man was and why people have started to gather in his name.

\* \* \* \* \*

Joe Wilson was born in 1994 and from a young age, it seems like he

stood out from other children.

Andy MacFarlane, a close childhood-friend, says that during primary school, "I still remember Joe coming up and speaking to me, although even at a young age, he was one of the first people to come up to me and say 'Are you alright, how are you getting on?' and that kind of stuff in the playground."

Another friend – Michael O'Hanlon – chimes in: "He always had a positive outlook on

» **Continued on Page 14**



# ‘What do I do now? Where’s my new normal, what happens?’ And I think I



The Shrine to Our Lady of Lourdes and St Bernadette, Carfin Grotto.

## » Continued from Page 13

everything. Everybody that was having problems just seemed to go to Joe and tell him their problems and he'd always listen, he also seemed to have an answer for everything as well.

"He was very positive in life and I think a lot of people were drawn in by that which was a really lovely aspect about Joe."

Everyone in the room says something uplifting about him and if this were a parent-teacher meeting, he'd received a glowing report. Indeed, he was well-loved in his secondary school, Taylor High, and this affection was to be later demonstrated by the school after his death.

## Composure

It's never easy to relay the final moments of someone's life, especially if it's your own child, and Joe's father, Alan, is no exception to this rule. Yet somehow, he is able to tell me about those imminent few days with candour and composure.

Two days after his 17th birthday in the early hours of December 15, Joe's parents heard a loud thud in the landing and found him on his knees. Alan thought he was choking but upon investigation realised that his throat wasn't blocked. While Alan performed CPR, his mother Veronica had rang the emergency services and was describing Joe's symptoms over the phone while they urgently waited on an ambulance.

"So, the paramedics came along and put the defibrillator on him and kept doing what was protocol; he was out, there was no output. Veronica went in the ambulance and I took our daughter Angela in the car behind the ambulance, and I was honestly following that ambulance thinking, I can't believe it, that's it," Alan explains.

Arriving at the hospital, the family learned that there was a cardiac output from Joe, so he was placed in a critical care ward and put into a medically-induced coma. Despite initial hopes of recovery, Joe's condition didn't improve and he died on December 20, 2011, at Wishaw General Hospital.

He was the victim of Wolf-Parkinson-White syndrome which is a relatively normal cardiac condition that causes the heart to

beat abnormally from time to time. It usually isn't serious but it proved to be fatal for Joe.

While he was in a coma, hundreds of people gathered at Carfin grotto for a candle-lit prayer and procession in the hope that he would recover. The grotto is very close to the family home and is where Joe often frequented.

Veronica, who is a native of the area, says that the grotto has "always been part of my life" and that as soon as Joe was born, she started to take him there.

"When Joe was old enough, he started to ask to go down himself to pray...he just found it a nice, calm place to be."

He viewed it as a special and sacred place where he could pray and reflect. Joe dedicated many prayers to others during the time he spent there and was particularly inspired by St Thérèse of Lisieux after learning about her strong Faith and desire to help others.

Alan recounts that at Joe's requiem Mass, the parish priest Fr Francis McGachey said that when he had just arrived in the parish, Joe was eager to know how he had been settling in. "He said, 'Well Father, how are you? How are you getting on, how are you enjoying the new parish?'," Alan repeats Fr Gachey's words, adding himself, "I just thought that shows how comfortable and at home he was there."

**“Another note says: ‘You were the first student to smile at me and say ‘good morning’... as time went on, I realised you were always smiling...a true quality’”**

Of course, after Joe's death, the grotto took on a deeper meaning for the family especially because of the vigil.

"Honestly, the community just rallied around us, didn't they? It was absolutely brilliant. You're still kind of wondering, 'What do I do now? Where's my new normal, what happens?' And I think I walked up to the grotto every night for several months, just to sit and pray and contemplate," Alan says.



Joe's parents, Alan and Veronica Wilson.

"So, I found it a lovely place of solace for me, and I suppose that's carried on. Every time I'm in need to quiet time, me time, I'll just wander up...it's a lovely place."

The staff and students of Joe's school also played a pastoral role while he was in a coma by creating a special wall in the building's mezzanine replete with inspirational messages and prayers dedicated to him and his hopeful

recovery. One reads: "We're all thinking of you, if anyone doesn't deserve what's happening it's you, honestly the nicest person any of us will meet. We're all praying for you."

Another note says: "You were the first student to smile at me and say 'good morning' when I joined the school on January 5, 2010. You made me feel so welcome, thanks. As time went on, I realised

you were always smiling...a true quality."

The school's resource centre was subsequently renamed after him, and is now called the Joseph Wilson Library Resource Centre.

Support for Joe's recuperation wasn't just local either; while he was in intensive care, the whole world heard his story and people were sending messages of hope through the internet. His



walked up to the grotto every night for several months, just to sit and pray'



(l-r) Chris Lawlor, Andy MacFarlane, Michael O'Hanlon, Alan Wilson, Veronica Wilson, Patrick Lafferty, Anne Lawlor, Paul Lawlor and John Mallon.

classmates started a hashtag on Twitter, urging people to pray for him, which trended globally and was seen by millions.

So incredible was the outreach that an American woman called Vera Pastore travelled from the US to Carfin just to see Joe's school, explore the grotto and find out more about him.

### Prayers

Despite the thousands of prayers for a turn around, Joe still passed away. His mother is a devout Catholic and his father was Episcopalian at the time – he converted to Catholicism two years ago. In times of such at tragedy, many people in their situation would abandon the Faith, angry at a God who created immense suffering by taking their son away unexpectedly. However, it was actually their trust in God that gave them the stability to navigate through these emotionally-wracked times.

"We were just very heartbroken, but I've always had great Faith and so did my parents. I just thought that you've got to trust in God, his will is more important than ours and that's the way I was brought up and that gave me the strength and you've just got to trust that even though you're heartbroken, God helps us through, trust in God's plan," Veronica says.

Likewise, Alan used his Faith to muster up the courage and resilience to overcome this traumatic time, although his journey

was dissimilar to his wife's. He explains that he had a "big epiphany" in the hospital while waiting for a prognosis on Joe. He opened up a Bible in the hospital chapel and was drawn to read different verses which had been highlighted under specific themes like despair or anxiety.

"Every verse I read just said put your trust in God, they said it in different ways but that was the common theme – God knows what he is doing, just put your trust in God, so I did. And all the pressures I was feeling just lifted and I just felt like I can handle this, I can do this," Alan says.

**“Joe's diary entry reads about the joy he felt and that his Faith was growing”**

"At that point, we didn't know what the outcome was or what it was going to be and I just thought that's alright, just go with it and it led me to accept what outcome would come our way. So subsequently, every time you had a chat with a consultant and it's not going the way you want it to there was an acceptance.

"It didn't stop my emotions and my feelings but it helped me to understand and go with what was happening. So that was a big kind of epiphany moment for me, so from that moment that really strengthened my Faith."

\* \* \* \* \*

**“In times of such at tragedy, many people in their situation would abandon the Faith, angry at a God who created immense suffering by taking their son away unexpectedly. However, it was actually their trust in God that gave them the stability to navigate through”**

After his death, Alan discovered diary entries Joe had created over his teenage years in the back pages of some school jotters. In them, he talks honestly about his feelings and connection to his Faith, including times when he desperately wanted to feel closer to God.

At one point, he mentions how proud he was to attend the then-Pope Benedict's visit to Glasgow in 2010. His diary entry this day reads about the joy he felt there and that his Faith was growing. As well as contemplating his RE lessons throughout school in his diary entries, Joe also reflected on the rewarding aspects of following God, putting others first and praying fervently.

Alan and Veronica describe this discovery as a "real source of comfort" and they sat up all night reading them. Upon reflection, Alan decided to read some quotes from the diary at Joe's memorial service creating a surge of people who wanted to hear more about Joe's thoughts and philosophy.

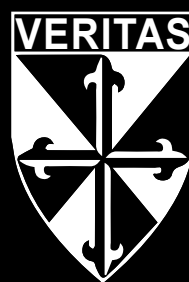
Given that Veronica is a "very private person", she was initially apprehensive about publishing quotes from her son's diary but eventually thought that his words would help people locally. Joe's school began printing a booklet about him called 'Joe's Words' including details about his story and extracts of his writings.

As more and more people heard

» Continued on Page 16



Joe with his mother and sister Angela during a visit to the Glens of Antrim.



# The Dominicans

Truth!

...more precious than Time



"Truth is not something that we invent: if we do it is a lie. Rather it is something we discover, like Love."

- Venerable Fulton J. Sheen

**Vocations Director: Fr Colm Mannion OP**

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# 'You see St Thérèse, she didn't do big things but her words showed a depth of Faith'

» Continued from Page 15

about it, Alan approached the grotto shop about stocking them and they happily obliged. "They just kept getting replenished and replenished and replenished," he says.

Joe's words have had a profound impact probably because of how mature and insightful they are given how young he was. His last entry on December 3, 2011, for example, reads: "I know the world ain't gonna be perfect and that's why I love having Faith. Just think of all the people who were starving, famines, were excluded, were tortured, were not loved in the world. All these people who were unfortunate on Earth are, I am certain, sitting on the highest thrones of Heaven – how reassuring is that?"

One person in the sitting room who tells me about how Joe's words have personally changed his life is Patrick Lafferty – he didn't know him but learned about his story at the Joe Wilson table tennis club run by Alan.

**“Only time will tell if the diocese will open the cause but he's enjoying the journey”**

"I came across Joe's words, I think, potentially three years ago after one of the table tennis nights. I started reading it and I thought I'd read a couple of quotes and then I'll go home but I found myself in the car park of the table tennis club sitting reading through the entire diary because I was so engrossed in what he said," Patrick says, adding that while he's always been religious, Joe's words gave his Faith a boost and that he's had a profound effect on young people.

A clear sign of his mark on people was displayed a year after his death in the summer of 2012 when Joe's family and friends climbed Britain's highest mountain to raise money for the British Heart Foundation.

His best friend Chris Lawlor tells me that he and Joe had climbed Ben Nevis the year prior, and so after his death he decided to arrange the climb in Joe's memory. Over 170 of his relatives and classmates conquered the climb and raised almost £40,000 for the heart charity. This year, Alan and



a few of Joe's friends decided to take on the challenge again.

"We always wanted to do it again but we just decided on this year because everything lined up for us, we just done it for a few different charities," Paul says.

On the back of this recent climb, Alan was interviewed by John Mallon of 'Sancta Familia', the most followed religious Facebook page in Scotland. John had heard about Joe death years prior to ever meeting Alan and had even read the booklet while visiting Carfin grotto.

At the time, John was struggling with anxiety problems and was feeling isolated in university, but felt empowered by Joe's words.

"I was almost grieving for him as well, but to see someone who had written those things and lived a good life and clearly was devoted to their Catholic Faith...he comforted me spiritually in that

sense and gave me a kind of boost to continue on. Some of his quotes about perseverance, some of his quotes about praying, it did help," John says.

\* \* \* \* \*

The interview with Alan received a huge amount of traffic online and John received messages about potentially opening up a cause to Joe for sainthood.

"I said well maybe it's worth looking into because you see a lot of young Catholic saints and you see a lot of stories and things about people who have lived good lives and been good examples and I was doing something on St Thérèse at that point in time and you see her words and her story and she didn't do marvellous things, she didn't do big things but her words showed a depth of Faith and I thought that was parallel with Joe..." John says.

With this in mind, John spoke with Bishop Joseph Toal about opening up a cause and the bishop advised starting a devotional night and writing a specific prayer for Joe's intercession. A Facebook and Twitter page as well as a website was established this year called 'Joe's Faith' to promote his story and garner a following.

On the first ever devotional night in June, over 200 people showed up which is substantial given that Joe died in 2011. The pages continue to grow as Joe's story gains more traction around the world.

"Well, we're still at that kind of stage when we're trying to build a devotion, obviously with these things, I take it very seriously. You've got to be accurate, it's got to be investigated thoroughly and you've got to be realistic. It might not go anywhere, it might

go somewhere. Our aim at the moment is to promote Joe's words as much as possible," John says.

"Schools are using it, people are praying to him, people are claiming favours from him which initially is very good...to have a devotion of that size is already significant, we're still at the stage as a group where we're trying to promote and not be presumptuous as well.

"The diocese is supportive in that they allow us to use the church space, they allow us to promote posters and events and diaries around the churches, priests are talking about it."

He adds that only time will tell if the diocese will open the cause but he's enjoying the journey. There's no doubt that the word is spreading and even Belfast's Clonard Novena this year saw Fr Kieran Brady CSSR preaching on saintliness, humility and courage in Faith, using the example of Joe and describing him as a saint for our modern times.

\* \* \* \* \*

So, what is the future of Joe's story? Well, his sister says it's a testament to his character that he's been able to connect with people across the world without being physically present in the world.

"It's quite weird to think back on, it just goes to show that even that far down the line, people that didn't know him at the time still love to hear about him and how far his words have reached. It's good to hear," Angela says, noting that he always wanted to help people spiritually and now that's "exactly what he's doing".

Joe's mother likewise emphasised his desire to help people spiritually and if he is able to do that, then his mission would be achieved.

"I think he would want people just to believe in Christ, to be nice people, to be forgiving, to help people and just live all the Beatitudes and be humble and just love people – that's what he would want," Veronica says.

**“It's a testament to his character that he's been able to connect with people across the world”**

Joe's father has a much more choked up response. This is probably a question he has spent a considerable time pondering. He directs me to the booklet which reads that towards the end of his life Joe expressed a strong desire to help people spiritually and it is through his death that Joe has been able to achieve this.

"As a parent, what do you want for your kids? You just want your kids to be happy. It doesn't matter what it is they're doing in life whether they're up there or down here, you just want them to be happy. He was devout and I just can't help thinking if I could speak to Joe right now and say to 'are you happy?' he'd say, 'Dad, I'm over the moon.'"

Joe was buried on December 24, 2011, and at his funeral Mass, Bishop Joseph Devine said he knew why Joe had been taken – it was because he is a saint of the 21st-Century. After hearing about Joe's story and reading his words, I think he's probably right.

For more information about Joe Wilson and his words, see: <https://joesfaith.com/index.html>



Joe and his sister Angela.



# The Irish Spirit

December 19th, 2019  
Issue No. 1

## *Christmas at the Irish Abbeys*

Discover the holiday magic of Glencairn,  
Glenstal and Kylemore Abbeys.

EXCLUSIVE EXCERPT

Fr Ray Kelly  
*the Britain's Got Talent priest*

A POSITIVE MESSAGE FROM

Fr Bryan Shortall

....and much more!



# Lighting the last candle

**Christmas is a feast of light and every year at Glencairn Abbey the nuns get ready for this holy season by lighting the wreath.**

**O**n Christmas Eve we are all busy with final preparations. By 4.45 in the afternoon we are all assembled in choir and really getting into the spirit of Christmas. The whole atmosphere is charged with the feeling of the coming of Christ. The two bells ring out that Christmas Eve is here. It is time for the first Vespers of Christmas, which begins with the hymn, 'A noble flower of Judah'. It's a beautiful hymn, sung in four parts. The text for this hymn comes from the fifteenth century *Es ist ein' Ros' entsprungen* and the music is from *Alte Katholische Geistliche Kirchengesang* 1599.

The Advent wreath stands as the centrepiece in the abbey church during this season in preparation for Christmas. Skillfully wrought by Sr Fiachra, its five candles are like beacons lighting the way to Christmas, its circle of evergreen leaves signifying eternal life.

Advent comes from the latin word *Adventus* which means coming. Our longing for Christ is expressed in the liturgical prayer of the Church and in our personal prayer. In the hours of winter darkness of this holy season, the church is filled with the stillness of expectation. Sr Angela lights the fifth candle at first Vespers of Christmas. The symbolism of light goes back to the pre-Christian winter solstice festival, the date on which the sun, at its



**“A noble flower of Judah, from tender roots has sprung, A rose from stem of Jesse, as prophets long had sung, A blossom fair and bright. That in the midst of Winter will change to dawn our night.”**



weakest, begins to revive and grow stronger and brighter. Christmas then is truly a feast of light and the Advent wreath has completed its journey to the Light of lights.

## The Crib

Apart from the figures, the crib is made from the fruits of the earth, including logs and bark from the woods, straw from the barley harvest and palm branches from which a lovely fragrance arises. The sisters in initial formation use their own creativity to assemble the crib. In the afternoon of Christmas Eve the finishing touches to our Christmas crib are made.

It is the tradition in Glencairn, that the last person that has entered the monastery is given the honour of removing the infant Jesus from the centre of the altar and placing Him in the manger. This ceremony takes place before the beginning of Christmas Eve Mass whilst the community and people sing in praise and adoration, 'Come let us adore Him'. Our celebration of this Eucharist and the singing of carols at the end of Mass draws people from the wider community to the monastery. Although it takes place at midnight, the church is always packed and it is a festive and joyful occasion.

## The season of sharing

On Christmas morning we silently descend the stairs for breakfast, rubbing the sleep from our eyes after only a few hours in bed following the midnight Mass. We were slow to get to our beds afterwards as we were soaking in the joyful atmosphere of the night, following our nightcap of tea and mince pies. The refectory is colourfully decorated with brightly lit candles that change colour by a remote control device! Little gifts are on each sisters' place in the refectory. Our housekeeper, Sr Michelle, has tastefully produced an array of breakfast cereals, yoghurts, fruit, etc. from the gift hampers filled with all kinds of food and drink with which our generous neighbours, friends and relatives have provided us.

Following our morning praise and prayer at Lauds we gather in the Abbess's room to wish one another a happy Christmas and celebrate with Christmas cake and other delicacies. The Abbess gives each individual sister a present, wrapped in colourful Christmas paper. We also receive individual





gifts from some kind neighbours. We exchange and share with one another, calling to mind God's gift of a Saviour to humankind. There is great excitement, warmth and camaraderie. Happiness is meant to be shared.

A festive meal awaits us following midday prayer. We normally eat in silence, but today we have a 'talking meal'. It is one of the rare occasions that we have meat, so our senses of smell and taste are well satisfied. We have stuffed roast turkey and glazed roast ham with all the trimmings. For dessert we have plum pudding, trifles galore, as well as succulent chocolates, cakes and other goodies baked by our regular cook Liz and Sr Michelle. I believe that there is a time for fasting and a time for feasting. The sacred season of Advent is over and this is the time for feasting.

The dinner lasts a long time – we seem to have forgotten the art of eating and speaking at the same time! We pull the Christmas crackers – BANG! There is much laughter and merriment at the silly jokes, it must be the effect of the wine that some of us enjoy! 'What did the piebald cow say during the frost? I'm Friesian.' Sr Lily enjoyed that one!

After supper we have Vespers at 6 p.m. and Compline at 7.45 p.m. in the darkened church illuminated only by the lights of the little red lamps around the walls – reminding us that the light of Christ has come into our lives. After night prayer we go snoozzzzz until Vigils the following morning. Our celebration continues right throughout the Octave. It is a time for relaxation, leisure and gratitude to the Lord for his goodness to us, and to our benefactors who helped to make our dream of rebuilding our monastery come true.



**A Year in the Life, Glencairn Abbey**  
Photographs by Valerie O'Sullivan

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## Kylemore Abbey Christmas Pudding

Surprise your guests this Christmas with a traditional recipe made specially for the nuns at Kylemore Abbey

This quantity will make three 2 lb Christmas puddings. Mix all of the dry ingredients together. Add the grated carrot and apple and mix. Mix together the eggs, lemon and orange rind and juice, treacle, whiskey and stout. Add this to pudding mixture. Leave to stand overnight. The following day fill pudding bowls to within about 3 cm of the rim. Cover the mix with a lid or alternatively with 2 layers of greaseproof paper and tie down the sides. Steam for 6 hours in a saucepan of simmering water, taking care that no water enters the pudding bowl. Serve warm with Kylemore Liqueur Cream Custard.

### Ingredients

- 1.2 kg mixed dried fruit (we use a mix of sultanas, raisins, currants and mixed peel)
- 110 g glacé cherries
- 450 g brown sugar
- 450 g breadcrumbs
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- 1 tsp mixed spice
- ½ tsp nutmeg
- 170 g self-raising flour
- 170 g vegetable suet
- 170 g nibbed almonds
- 1 carrot, peeled and grated
- 1 cooking apple, peeled and grated
- 2 tbsp treacle
- 6 eggs, beaten grated rind and juice of 1 lemon and 1 orange
- 175 ml whiskey
- 280 ml stout (you may need a little more)

### CHEF'S TIP


Pour some brandy over your warm pudding just before serving and set alight for a magical Christmas effect.

**A flavour of Kylemore Abbey**  
Photographs by Valerie O'Sullivan

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**The emphasis on waiting and expectation in the Advent liturgy means that Christmas bursts on the scene in a blaze of colour and light.**

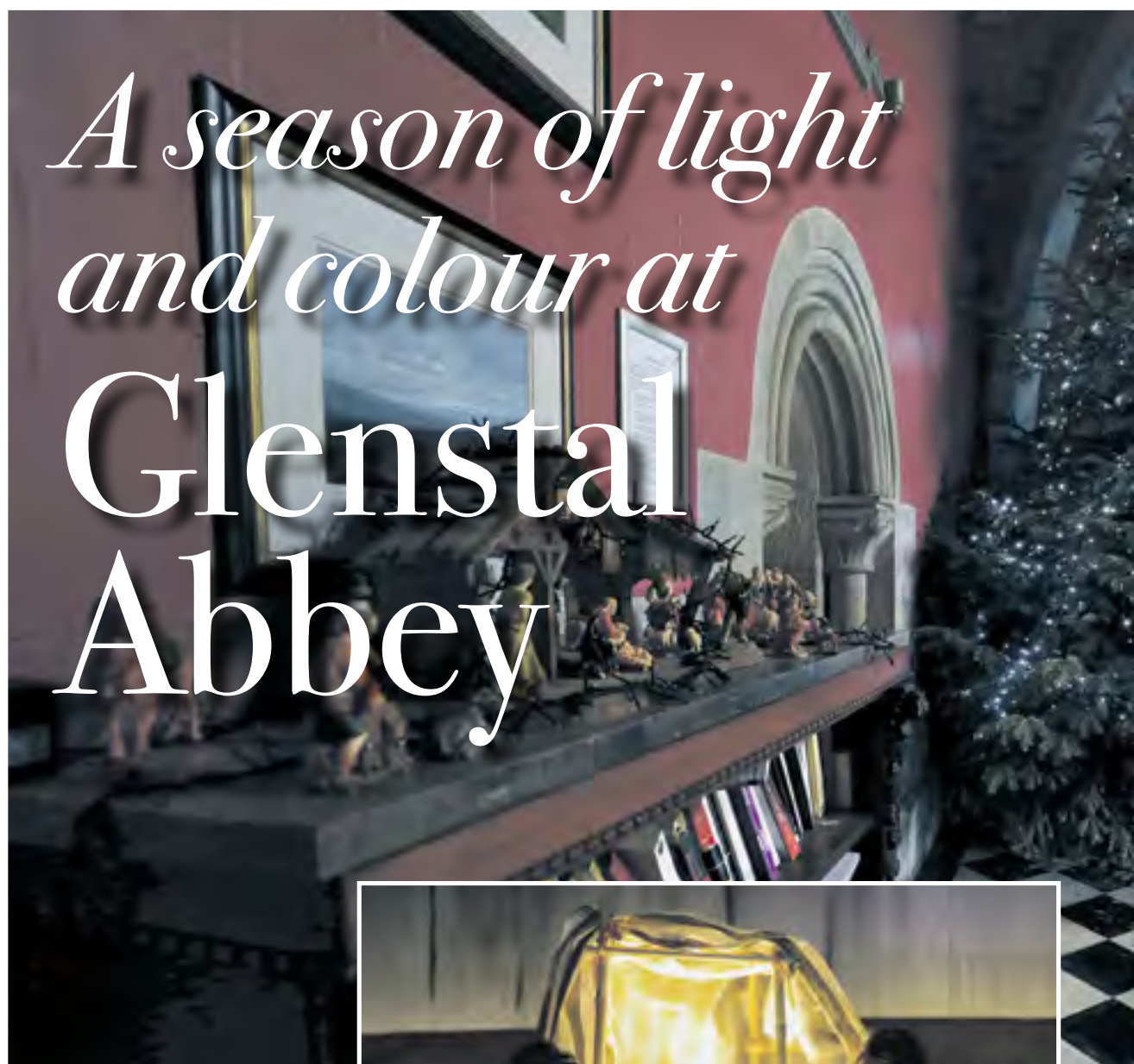
**T**he emphasis on waiting and expectation in the Advent liturgy means that Christmas bursts on the scene in a blaze of colour and light. Everywhere else Christmas decorations have been up since Hallowe'en and look a bit jaded. In the monastery there is a flurry of activity on the afternoon of Christmas Eve to set the house in order for the festivities.

With the exception of the Christmas tree in the school, the decorations around the place are, for the most part, whatever evergreen material is available locally. There is the annual 'berries are for birds' debate when it comes to putting up holly, but some compromise is reached and as we process into church for the first Vespers of Christmas, the place is aglow with candles, colour and greenery.

After Vespers, we move in procession to one of the side chapels for the blessing of the crib. The design each year is entrusted to the novices and junior members of the community and the end results can vary from Zen minimalism to something like a set from Zeffirelli's Jesus of Nazareth. Occasionally, the theme will reflect contemporary or social concerns like homelessness or the political situation in the Middle East.

From 10pm, people begin to gather in the church for the Christmas Vigil and Midnight Mass at which the abbot presides. This is the most popular of the church services celebrated in the monastery, and by 11.20pm the church is packed. The vigil consists of psalms, hymns and readings, and lasts approximately 40 minutes.

After a short pause, with the church bells ringing in celebration, Mass begins at the stroke of Midnight as the community processes into church, singing the opening antiphon of the feast: Dominus dixit ad me – the Lord said to me, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you.' In addition to the Latin chants for the Mass, we also sing some traditional Christmas carols in which everyone joins. Many of the congregation are employees, former students, family members and other friends of the community, and the tea and mince pies that follow provide an opportunity to catch up. Glenstal Abbey School choir sings at the Sunday liturgies during term time. Music, and singing in particular, can make such a difference. St Augustine once said, 'Singing is for one who loves,' and an ancient proverb also affirms 'One who sings well prays twice.'



**TOP:** Christmas Tree and nativity scene decorates the entry hall at the Abbey.

**RIGHT:** Nativity Scene at Glenstal Abbey

**BELOW:** The Students Choir from Glenstal Abbey getting ready to sing at the Annual Advent Carol Service at the Abbey church



## Glenstal Abbey Choir

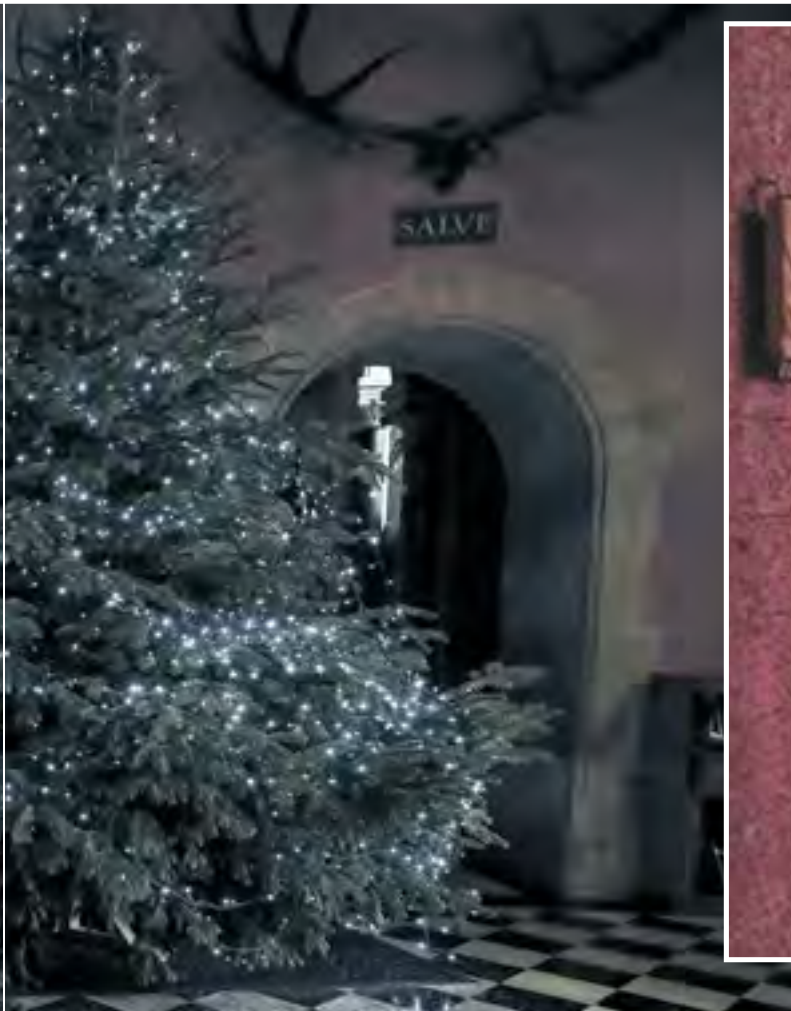
Glenstal Abbey School has many attractions, and music is one of them. Aside from the spiritual benefits, research has shown that, from a less explicitly religious perspective, singing is good for you. It uses the whole brain to an extent which is quite unusual compared to other activities; singing, especially in choirs, has been proven to be good for mental health; the benefits of music in education are well established, and some schools have found that the expansion of music within the life of the school has brought about a whole turnaround in overall results and excellence across the board.

Beautiful music only comes with hard work. Those who are admitted to the choir forgo each week half an hour of the cherished Sunday-morning lie-on in order to arrive early for a warm-up before Mass. They also commit to two evening sessions, one in their own vocal line and one with the whole choir.

The annual Advent carol service is always a major event for the choir, with the emphasis very much on Advent, not Christmas. Newcomers to the choir generally ask 'Why aren't we learning lots of Christmas carols?', to which I generally reply, 'But Christmas doesn't come until December 25th!' There is a beauty to the poetic restraint of Advent that is so easily overlooked.

The choir also has other occasional outings: choral competitions (which they sometimes even win), public concerts, ecumenical services, the annual 'Darkness into Light' walk and occasionally even trips abroad.





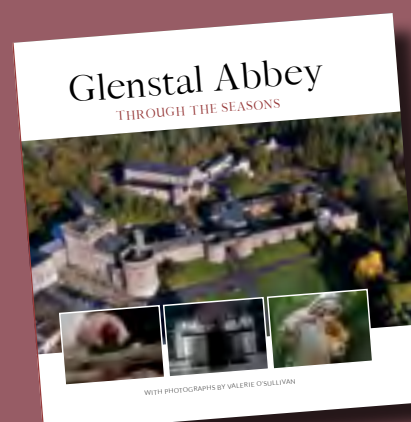
## Christmastide & Candlemas

Because our celebration of Christmas only begins on December 24th, the days that follow have a special resonance. While everyone else is dismantling their decorations, the liturgy explores the significance of the Christ child's incarnation. In the days immediately following Christmas, we find gathered around the manger the martyrs Stephen, Thomas Becket and the Holy Innocents - a reminder of the cost of discipleship even in the midst of celebration.

On January 1st, we place the New Year under the protection of Mary, the Mother of God, and this is followed on January 6th by celebration of the Epiphany, the Lord's revelation of his glory to all the peoples of the earth. This, too, is a solemn celebration, and with it the holiday period draws to a close and, with the return of the school, life settles back into its normal pattern.

The Presentation of the Lord on February 2nd is the last of the Christmas celebrations. Commemorating Christ's parents' decision to do 'what the law required for him', it is a low key, but very beautiful, feast. Before Mass we gather at the back of the church for the blessing of the candles that will be used throughout the year. Once lit, we bear these in procession to the altar, commemorating the one who is 'a light to enlighten the Gentiles and the glory of God's people Israel.'

This is also the day in which the Church celebrates those called to religious life and we remember all our brothers and sisters who share the monastic vocation. It is also a time to remember the elderly, who like the prophets Simeon and Anna, faithfully see in Jesus the hope for which they long.



*Glenstal Abbey, Through the Seasons*  
Photographs by Valerie O'Sullivan

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# A positive message for Christmas from Bryan Shortall

We friars are together a lot because we are a family. We pray together and eat together and sit together in the community room in the evenings at the end of the day. When we are together, like all families we will recall stories, crack jokes, and remember many of the friars who have died who made a big impact on the community. At meals the conversations would be lively, stories would be told, and men who have died would be brought back to life around the table. I've lived in 12 communities since I joined the order in 1987 and I've some amazing memories.

When we were novices, we experienced our first Christmas dinner in a friary. The table was heavy with food and all the friars from 19 to 85 years of age sat down to celebrate Christmas Day after the morning Masses. You name it, it was there: starter, soup, main course, dessert, minerals and wine. One of the friars noticed that 'there's not a banana in sight!' When we were student friars in Dublin, one of the members of the community used to go all out to help celebrate Christmas. The community room and refectory would be decked with lights and tinsel. The tables would be pushed to the centre of the room and we would all sit around with paper hats and Christmas crackers. We even had a train set in the centre of the table with the engine going round and round. The guardian

of the friary, one of the nicest friars I have ever known, used to make sure each member of the community would receive a little gift and we would all take turns opening them.

I remember one of the men I lived with loved his food. He would fill his plate up high with spuds, vegetables and meat. The man who sat across from him used to get amused with the big helpings. One day he wasn't in at dinner time and the man opposite looked at the empty place and quipped; 'There must be good grazing elsewhere today.' Another time I remember each time a dish came to the table one of the friars used to give a running commentary; 'Soup... Soup...' 'Chicken ... Chicken ...', 'Potatoes ... Potatoes ...', 'Carrots ... Carrots ...'. It came to the dessert. 'Queen of Puddings ... Queen of Puddings ...' One friar replied, 'Pray for us!'

During Holy Week, we were praying the Psalms of the Evening Prayer of Monday (Week 2). We were all gathered together in the chapel and one of the older friars, who had been bursar for many years was to recite the first antiphon: 'He had no beauty, no majesty to draw our eyes, no grace to make us delight in him.' When he came to read what came out instead was; 'He had no money ...'. One of the other friars began to laugh out loud and immediately it set us all off and the evening prayer had to be abandoned. Today, all we have to do is say 'he had no money' and we still chuckle.



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## Take Time - to Stop, Observe and Feel

Everyday experiences can be sacred when we take the time to stop, pause, pay attention and encounter a place, person, situation or object, in a fresh way, as though experiencing it for the first time. In the book, *The Sacred Life of Everything*, Sister Stan and Silé Wall invite you to meditate through the image and the poem given.

### Steps

1. Quiet the body
2. Invite the mind into stillness
3. Seek guidance
4. Gaze on the image
5. Become absorbed
6. Read / reflect on the poem or saying
7. Express gratitude



### Scene

This image illustrates the miracle of life going on around us all the time. The hue of colour – blue, indigo, green; the softness of the flower petals; the bee busy, alert and attentive. We need travel no further than where we actually are to experience the energy of each moment as a gift.

### Meditation

Be present to the image before you. Notice how you are in this moment. Are you as attentive as this bee ... alert and alive to what is going on around you? within you? Are you as curious as this bee ... comfortable to be with the whole of your experience, whatever it may bring? Now allow the rhythm of your unique breathing pattern to come into focus as you breathe in and breathe out. Stop. Observe the movement of your breathing.

Feel your breath. With each in-breath feel the bee taking the sweetness of the nectar into itself. With each out-breath connect with a sense of contentment and ease. With each in-breath feel the warmth of the sunshine. With each out-breath allow your gaze to soften. With each in-breath invite the perfume of the flower to become part of you. With each out-breath connect with a sense of wonder. Breathing in. Breathing out.

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# A memorable time

## for FATHER *Ray Kelly*

The star of *Britain's got Talent*, Fr Ray Kelly shares his childhood memories from Christmas in his recently published autobiography, *Hallelujah: memoirs of a singing priest*.



Christmas was always such a happy, memorable time in our home - my favourite time of the year. On the eighth of December every year, Mammy and Daddy would climb into the attic and blow the dust off the box of Christmas decorations. All hands were on deck for the decorating of the Christmas tree with Daddy replacing any of the blown bulbs of the Christmas tree lights. Once our letters were written to Santa Claus, we knew he would deliver. Our names were placed on four kitchen chairs so that Santa Claus left the appropriate gift in the right place.

Christmas Eve was always an early night to bed for us. I was always afraid to get up during that night for the toilet for fear of meeting Santa in the hallway. I remember so well my brother Joseph and I were fighting in our bed and we were warned that Santa would not deliver if we didn't behave. Daddy told us Santa was going around checking on bold children. Within an hour he came into our bedroom; and I remember singing *Jingle Bells* in the fastest, most frightened voice for him while shaking at the same time. Bold or not, the toys always arrived. It was always so exciting to wake up early on Christmas morning and check to see what Santa had brought, whether it was a train set, a pony and cart, a Meccano-set or a Lego-



Family photo 1960. Left to right: Ray, his father, Regina, Joseph, his mother and Rosemarie.

set. However, at six in the morning, once we knew Santa had done his job, and drank his bottle of porter and eaten a bit of Christmas cake, we got ready before breakfast for 7am Mass. I know I kept one eye on the baby Jesus in the crib, eager to return home to the gift Santa had brought me. Meanwhile the choir sang all the old favourites such as "Silent Night" and "O Come All Ye Faithful". If the snow started falling as I left church, it was perfect and indeed it often did.

The Lego set was to be my last official Santa Claus present. About two months before that Christmas, mammy gave me money along with a bill from Glynn's Garage to go up the village and pay the bill. I went in and met Olive Glynn in the office and duly paid the bill for her. As I was leaving Olive quietly said to me

"Will you tell your mammy I got all of the toys she ordered except the guitar, but I may be able to order that from another catalogue?" I must have looked confused and bewildered because Olive asked, "Do you know what I'm talking about?" I said "No." And then I could see Olive's face turning red as she mumbled to herself almost under her breath but loud enough for me to hear, "Oh my God what have I done!" I returned home, and met Mammy in the kitchen, still confused about the message I was to pass on; I gave her the marked paid invoice, which she duly put through a wire string with all of the other invoices. "Oh Mammy," I said, "Olive told me to tell you she got all of the toys you ordered except the guitar, but she may be able to get that from another catalogue."

**"I was always afraid to get up during that night for the toilet for fear of meeting Santa in the hallway."**

Mammy looked at me for what seemed like an eternity but was probably a matter of seconds. "Where is Regina?" she asked. "She's across the road in Gaye's playing with Dettie," I said. Mammy closed the back door and sat me down beside her and told me, "Ye know you are old enough now to know that your daddy and I buy all of the toys that come from Santa every Christmas. Regina is not old enough to know that yet, and you are not to tell her, but you are old enough. I order them from Olive Glynn from the toy catalogue every year." I was ten years old.

\*\*\*

When I told Auntie Kitty that I knew where Santa Claus' presents came

from she burst into a fit of laughter. I can still see and hear her laugh. I asked her why was she laughing and she said, "And do you know your mammy always hides all of your Christmas toys here upstairs in the spare room?" I was shocked! All the times I had been in this house over the years not knowing our gifts were hiding upstairs. Aunt Kitty then went on to say, "And all the times you have been in that spare room and you would never find them. When you were all in bed on Christmas Eve Ger and I would bring them all down to your house." The penny dropped. That explained why while in bed on Christmas Eve, I would always hear their voices in the kitchen before I would go to sleep.



***Hallelujah: memoirs of a singing priest*  
by Fr Ray Kelly**

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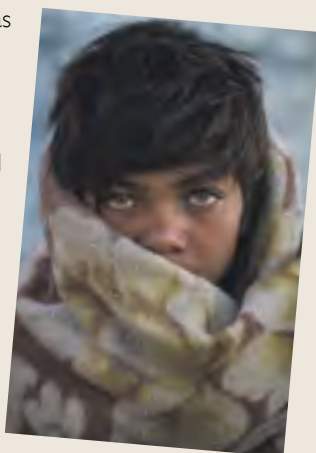
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# And So This is Christmas

From the book *Beautiful Thoughts for Beautiful Minds*  
by John Scally

As a boy Christmas was always the high point of the year for me – particularly 'Big Saturday', when we all went into town 'to bring home the Christmas' and my sisters and I went to Santa Claus. One year in particular stands out. Armed with a shining two-shilling piece, a gift from my grandfather, the requisite fee for the honour of receiving Santa, I took my place in the queue in a state of high excitement. I was very surprised to see a nun with three small children of the local Travelling family who lived in a big tent by the side of the road. Every time I passed that excuse for a dwelling on my bike I was chilled by the constant chorus of children coughing.



A few months earlier, a family of Travellers had come to live a mile and a half away and been shunned by some of the local community. They were refused entry to some local pubs and shops. At Sunday Mass they sat together on the back seat of the church. None of the 'upright' pillars of the community would sit on the same seat as them. A few of the more superior parishioners decided to go to Mass in the neighbouring parish.

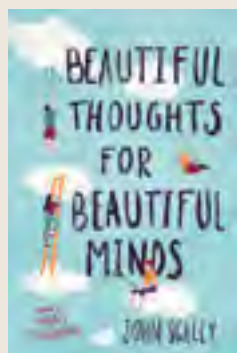
I was going to ask Santa for a pair of boots and a football. However, my plans were modified when I got my first lesson in social awareness, hearing Santa's conversation with the youngest of the Travelling children who was just ahead of me in the queue.

"Now little boy, what will I bring you for Christmas?"

"Please sir, would ya bring me a nice dry blanket to keep me warm on the cauld nights?"

How could I possibly ask for two presents after that? I just asked for a football and did not complain when I discovered that I had got poor value for my two shillings when Santa handed me a cheap-looking colouring book. I think about that incident every time I hear Christy Moore's song Go Move Shift, which parallels the original nativity story with the treatment of Travellers.

Christmas is the most wonderful time of the year. It's a thrilling time for giving and for getting, a time for forgiving and for forgetting.



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by John Scally

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# The Call to the Mountains

The incredible history of the bravery of the volunteers at Kerry Mountain Rescue Service in Carrauntoohil during St Stephen's Day 2017.

Hiking on the MacGillycuddy's Reeks, County Kerry.  
Photo: Valerie O'Sullivan



From the book  
**Wild Stories from the Irish Uplands**  
by John G. O'Dwyer

Around 8 a.m. on St Stephen's day, 26 December 2017, Alan Wallace set off to climb Carrauntoohil, accompanied by his brother-in-law Ger and 18-year-old son, David. His group was well prepared for winter climbing. As a long-serving member of the Kerry Mountain Rescue Team (KMRT), Alan was an experienced mountaineer with an intimate knowledge of the terrain.

Ascending by a route known as O'Shea's Gully, the threesome summited around noon and immediately encountered rapidly worsening weather. An icy gale whipped across the snowfields, while a whiteout had descended on the mountain. Disorientating and dangerous, this is where it becomes impossible to distinguish earth from sky.

Soon enveloped by a full-on blizzard and with no visible landmarks, they were forced to navigate by map and compass only. Wallace recalls, "These were some of the most challenging conditions I have encountered on the [MacGillycuddy's] Reeks. The snow was waist deep in places, visibility was virtually zero, a storm was raging, and the cold was intense."

Well-equipped and experienced, Wallace's group descended safely off the mountain. They were making their way toward the car park and the promise of food and an evening with family, when

out of the gloom loomed the KMRT rescue vehicles. Clearly, someone was in trouble.

When Alan Wallace and his two companions finally reached the rescue team, the news was that a climber had become lost on Carrauntoohil. Wallace immediately grasped the gravity of this; in the prevailing weather it would be almost impossible to survive a long winter night on open mountainside. It was imperative the climber be located quickly. Famished and cold after a long day, Wallace, nevertheless, joined his fellow volunteers in the rescue effort.

Having identified his location as somewhere on the southeast of the mountain, the climber was advised to stay put and await rescue. Several teams then headed out into the storm and began a laborious sweep search. Eventually, the casualty was located in deep snow near Carrauntoohil summit. Now enveloped by darkness, the team had to painstakingly assist him down for immediate transfer to the hospital.

In the meantime, two other climbers reported they had also become disorientated while descending Carrauntoohil. A team was dispatched to their location, which was on steep ground approximately 400m above the Devil's Ladder. Now followed the physically demanding task of helping the climbers — who were showing the early symptoms of hypothermia — to descend the snow-choked and slippery Devil's Ladder.

As the team was about to stand down, a third emergency call was received. A high-altitude camper reported his tent had been destroyed by the storm. The exact location of the casualty was

unclear, with communication difficult on a poor phone connection; then the signal died.

Working on scant information, the most likely position appeared to be the Black Valley side of the Reeks. As much of the nation celebrated St. Stephen's night with family and friends, the team transferred to this isolated area and commenced a sweep search by torchlight that continued into the early hours of December 27th, but to no avail. According to Wallace, "searching for a casualty on a dark, stormy night without location coordinates is like looking for a needle in a haystack". That night Wallace reached his home in Killarney at 2:30 a.m. His sleep would be short, however; the search resumed at 8 a.m.

With its renowned fickleness, the Kerry weather now bestowed a crystal-clear morning. A rescue helicopter could be safely deployed, and soon the camper was located. Winched from a ridge — known as The Bone — he was transferred to the hospital, while the team members recovered his belongings before returning to their families in the late afternoon.

Christmas 2017 was a tough and physically demanding time for KMRT, but nobody in the team complained. The important fact was that eight people had been rescued with nobody seriously injured. This is what counts as a happy Christmas for the members of the hardworking rescue team, who very often find themselves heading up the mountains on a call-out in conditions that would have all sensible people coming off. In a self-absorbed age, they still remain a bastion of selfless volunteerism and community service.

Read more inspiring stories like this one by buying the book *Wild Stories from the Irish Uplands* by John G. O'Dwyer from Currach Books by phoning 01 6874096 or visiting [www.currachbooks.com](http://www.currachbooks.com). Price: €14.99 + €2.50 P&P



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# Three weddings and a pilgrimage



**Chai Brady** speaks to couples who met in Lourdes in 2010 and married one month apart

**L**ourdes is a well-known place of pilgrimage closely connected to faith, prayer and helps people gain a closer connection with God, but if three married couples are anything to go by, it can also be a place to meet a potential soul-mate.

This year was a special summer for six people who met their wives and husbands at the holy site when they were young volunteers assisting elderly pilgrims and developing their own Faith.

During the Diocese of Down and Connor's annual pilgrimage to Lourdes, six youth volunteers met the love of their lives, although for some it was only years later that sparks began to fly.

All from Northern Ireland, Niamh and Patrick Gallagher married in June, Patrick and Cloína Muldoon in July and Gerard Casey and Aoife Magee in August this year.

## Experience

For Gerry Casey, going to Lourdes was quite the tradition for young people in the diocese, and there was a gang of young people attending each year from his school: Rathmore Grammar School in Belfast, which both Patrick and he attended. Their wives are from all over Down and Connor diocese, with Niamh being from Randalstown, Cloína from the southernmost point of the diocese in Kilkeel, and Aoife from Downpatrick.

"There was a whole load of people going from our school. It was basically a bit of a group thing, there was a decent



The three couples at Patrick and Niamh's wedding in June, 2019.

chunk of people. There was a big history of people going. There was a strong awareness of what it was, so quite a lot of us started at exactly the same time," he said.

**“The pilgrims are there for all sorts of reasons as well and there are people who are very seriously ill and people who are just there for a bit of a break”**

Mr Casey's experience of Lourdes was positive as there was a host of people from different backgrounds who all had their own reasons for going.

"It's pretty diverse to be fair, lots of people there for different reasons. Everybody from the most pious diligent Catholic, to the person that's there because their friends were going to have some fun – quite an eclectic mix of people. Down and Connor is a decent size of area, so there was people from all the way up the north Antrim coast and then a load of us from the Belfast area," he said.

Although Mr Casey says it's

a "light-hearted place a lot of the time", they still had to "work hard".

He says: "There is plenty of pretty profound sadness in reality for a lot of people, it's a mixed bag for everybody every year because you never know who you're going to be looking after. You could be looking after someone in their 60s who's not quite fit to walk every single day, but needs the odd hand from you in the afternoon for the walk down, all the way to some-

body who's in a pretty critical condition who's not really in good shape at all and is on their last legs.

"It's a pretty interesting experience, it was very fulfilling. A pilgrim, one year, died very shortly after, you do have some quite strong memories.

"The pilgrims are there for all sorts of reasons as well and there are people who are very seriously ill and people who are just there for a bit of a break, a bit of a time for reflection."



Patrick and Niamh Gallagher's wedding in June, 2019.



Gerard and Aoife's wedding.





Patrick and Cloína Muldoon, Aoife Magee and Gerard Casey and Niamh and Patrick Gallagher at Gerard and Aoife's wedding in August.

It was in 2009 that he first met his now wife, Aoife, although they did not immediately start going out, a year and half later and some more Lourdes pilgrimages and it wasn't long before their relationship became romantic.

"I had no agenda. I never would have had any expectations, I never thought that far ahead. Truthfully it's just kind of happened in a very organic unintended way," said Mr Casey.

Although he admits he didn't think too much of the coincidence of his two friends meeting their wives in Lourdes and then having weddings in the same summer one month apart, despite all of them having very different styles of relationships, he says it is "remarkable".

"We don't think about it too much but I suppose now especially when we all got married. It's a joke, Aoife and I were going out for by far the longest, about nine years.

We've travelled a lot, we've lived in Brussels, I was in the States for a while, we've never been properly settled so that in part explains why we got married in August, so we were a long burn.

**"I had no agenda. I never would have had any expectations, I never thought that far ahead..."**

"Paddy Muldoon, he's only really back in Belfast a couple of years, so he was going out with Cloína a decent chunk of time but not as long as us, he was engaged for quite a while, for well over a year anyway, and on the opposite side of the coin, Paddy Gallagher and Niamh were – relatively speaking – pretty short and quick.

"So it's kind of funny

they're all very different in their own ways, it's all happened at the same but there was certainly – even a year and a half before – there was no signal that that was going to happen, it was kind of completely organically by chance that we all came to the same sort of crossroads at similar times. It's quite remarkable."

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Patrick Gallagher said he went to Lourdes three years in a row, 2009, 2010 and 2011, and met Niamh there in 2010.

"I only met Niamh in Lourdes in 2010 and we didn't start going out until 2017. We'd bump into each other at different points and then we met each other again at a prayer group and that's when we started going out," he said.

The prayer group was born out of a conference held in Croke Park in 2017 which Niamh hadn't attended, but was invited to the prayer



The three couples at Patrick Muldoon and Cloína's wedding in July.

group by a friend, and the two ended up meeting once again.

He went to Lourdes with a group of five friends, with Mr Gallagher saying himself and the two other married men are "very good friends", so "three out of the five of us got married in the same sum-

mer".

Speaking about pilgrimages to Lourdes, he added: "It's a good balance, you've got the pilgrimage side of things, the deepening of your faith, and then also the practical side of helping elderly people, it's definitely a good

environment to meet like-minded people and it's good fun as well."

There may have been something in the water in Lourdes, but for this summer's happily married former youth volunteers, they certainly couldn't complain.

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# World Report

## IN BRIEF

### Arsonist arrested after burning down US church

● After a fire destroyed Most Blessed Sacrament Church in Franklin Lakes in the early hours of December 11 the suspected arsonist was arrested. He was receiving burn treatment at a local hospital prior to his court hearing.

"We are thankful for the efforts of the police, firefighters and public safety workers who immediately responded to calls and battled the blaze during frigid conditions to try and save Most Blessed Sacrament Church," said a statement from the Newark Archdiocese.

James Mayers, a 26-year-old local resident, was arrested at the scene of the fire that had been set with a cigarette lighter and gasoline. He was charged with first-degree aggravated arson and third-degree burglary, it is reported.

### Questions raised over Indian priest accused of fraud

● A Catholic priest accused of fraud in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh has been remanded in judicial custody for 15 days.

Ucanews.org has reported that Fr Anand Muttungal, a priest of the Archdiocese of Bhopal, was arrested at his residence by officials of the Economic Offense Wing, a special branch of the Madhya Pradesh police department that investigates financial cases. After his arrest, he appeared before a court and was remanded into custody until December 26.

Richard James, a spokesman for Fr Muttungal, described the priest's arrest as illegal and arbitrary and said the priest was a victim of a large conspiracy.

"He will come out clean from the charges against him, and the real culprits will be exposed," he said.

### Costa Rican bishop voices concerns of new abortion decree

● Costa Rica's president has issued a technical decree that defines the conditions under which a doctor may perform an abortion when doctors consider it necessary to preserve the life of the mother.

President Carlos Alvarado last Thursday signed the decree that, while not changing any laws, lays out how a woman may legally choose abortion in some circumstances.

Bishop José Manuel

Garita Herrera of Ciudad Quesada spoke out against the decree and urged respect for both lives – that of the mother and of the child in her womb.

"To doctors, my call is also that, faithful to the principle and vocation to which they have consecrated themselves, allow them to place their gifts at the service of the mother and her son," Bishop Herrera said.

### US prelates condemn 'violent' anti-semitic shooting

● The US bishops' conference has condemned the anti-semitic shooting at a kosher market in Jersey City earlier this week, reiterating the Church's absolute condemnation of anti-semitism.

"The recent attack on a kosher market in Jersey City, alongside many other recent hateful and at times violent actions, have highlighted the importance of, once again, publicly condemning any and all forms of anti-semitism whether in thought, word or action," said Bishop Joseph Bambera of Scranton, chair of the US bishops' ecumenical and interreligious affairs committee.

### Iraqi cardinal mutes Christmas celebrations due to violence

● Christmas celebrations among Iraqi Christians will be subdued this year in a show of solidarity with anti-government protesters. "Morally and spiritually we cannot celebrate in such an atmosphere of tension," Cardinal Louis Raphael Sako of the Chaldean Church in Iraq, told the *Associated Press*. About 400 people have been killed by the country's security forces since protests broke out on October 1.

"It's not normal to celebrate our joy and happiness while others are dying. That doesn't work," said Sako. "We cannot make a big feast when our country is in a critical situation."

## Pope says people yearn for God, not possessions

The Christmas season is a time to reflect on what life is all about, Pope Francis has told an international group of performers.

"The time before Christmas calls us to ask ourselves, 'What is it that I am waiting for in my life? What is the great desire of my heart?' You too, with your songs, help awaken or reawaken this healthy human 'yearning' in the hearts of many people," he said.

The Pope met with the group of singers, songwriters, musicians and conductors the day before they were to perform in the Vatican's Paul VI hall for a benefit concert to help protect the Amazon and support indigenous communities there.

### Performers

The line-up included: Lionel Richie, the US Grammy Award-winning singer and songwriter; Susan Boyle, who was a 2009 finalist on Britain's *Got Talent*; and Bonnie Tyler, whose songs 'It's a Heartache' and 'Total Eclipse of the Heart' are among the best-selling singles of all time.

The Charleston Gospel Choir and several Italian performers were also part of the



Pope Francis accepts a gift during an audience with a group of international performers at the Vatican. The performers, including US singer Lionel Richie, were scheduled to perform at the Vatican's Christmas concert. Photo: CNS

line-up for the 2019 Christmas Concert in the Vatican, sponsored by the Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education.

The Pope told the performers and concert organisers that God is the author of the "yearning" people feel in their heart, "and he comes to meet us by this route."

God cannot be found along the path of "vain compulsion to acquire possessions or to

keep up appearances. It is not there that God comes; no one will meet on that route. But surely he comes wherever there is hunger and thirst for peace, justice, freedom and love," the Pope said.

"Dear artists, I thank you for all that you do. I wish you the best for your activities and your spiritual growth," the Pope said, asking that their hearts be touched by the "mystery of Christmas, so

that you can convey some of that same tenderness to those who listen to you."

Donations and proceeds from ticket sales were to go toward a Salesian project helping indigenous communities in northwestern Brazil and to a campaign of Scholas Occurrentes to raise awareness in 450,000 schools around the world promoting reforestation.

## Faith groups praise new Aussie discrimination legislation

The Australian government has released its second "exposure draft" of its religious discrimination legislation, winning widespread praise from faith groups, including the Catholic bishops, following changes to the original legislation released in October.

The bishops' main criticism was the proposed laws did not extend to cover health and eldercare workers; the Catholic Church runs about 10% of Australia's hospitals and eldercare institutions.

Their concerns were addressed in the new draft, which includes

provisions to cover workers in those sectors and extends those institutions rights to discriminate against staff on the basis of religion to preserve the "religious ethos" of that institution. The same extensions cover religious camps and conference centres as long as they publish their policies.

### Discrimination

Medical practitioners cannot discriminate against individuals but can refuse to perform procedures such as abortion if their faith dictates against it. As well, pharmacists can

refuse to dispense prescriptions such as contraception and the morning-after pill if they disagree with their use.

Human rights, LGBT groups and some legal experts continued to criticise the proposed laws.

"Surely we have learned from the recent royal commissions that giving religious organisations special treatment and allowing them to make up their own rules can have an intensely harmful impact on the most vulnerable," said Alex Greenwich, a member of Parliament from New South Wales.

## Be apostles for the poor at Christmas – archbishop

Christians and Ghanaians are called to be apostles of the poor and abandoned by caring for those most in need, especially during the Christmas season, said Archbishop John Bonaventure Kwofie of Accra.

"Let's celebrate by thinking of what can be done to ease

the situation of the abandoned, the marginalised, the forgotten, the sick, the aged, the needy," he said last week at an event with diplomats, clergy and lay faithful. "Let us celebrate Christmas taking a positive stand in support of the human person, in order to bring to an end whatever

diminishes the dignity of the human person."

The ecumenical event, titled 'Conversations in the Cathedral' was held at Holy Spirit Cathedral with the theme, 'Being a Christian in Ghana Today: In preparation for Christmas 2019'.

The Ghanaian arch-

bishop, however, expressed concern about how the rich amass wealth at the expense of the poor. Describing it as an injustice, Kwofie discouraged Christians from chasing after personal wealth and instead use it to "be a blessing to the poor; don't accumulate wealth to make others poor".





Edited by Colm Fitzpatrick  
colm@irishcatholic.ie

## In honour of Mary



A young girl is dressed as Our Lady of Guadalupe outside Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church in Houston. Thousands visited the parish to mark the feast of Mary appearing to St Juan Diego on a hilltop in what is today Mexico city. Photo: CNS

## Calls to boycott Netflix following release of gay Jesus satire

The latest episode of Brazil's comedy group Porta dos Fundos on Netflix has angered thousands of Brazilians from different religions. The group's Christmas special, *A Primeira Tentacao de Cristo* ('The First Temptation of Christ') is a satire about a gay Jesus bringing his boyfriend home to meet Mary and Joseph.

Reaction to the 40-minute show was quick. Brazilians took to social media and the internet, calling for a boycott of Netflix and the cancellation of the parody. The episode, say many, ridicules the Christian faith.

The Brazilian bishops' conference criticised the short film and said there is a limit to freedom of expression.

The conference "repudiates recent facts that, in the name of freedom of expression and artistic creativity, profoundly assault the Christian

faith. Ridiculing the belief of a group, whatever it may be, in addition to constituting an offence under criminal law, means disrespecting all people, hurting the search for an effectively democratic society that values all its citizens", said the statement.

### Mockery

Julio Cesar Ribeiro, a federal representative, announced he was cancelling his Netflix subscription because of the episode.

He said it showed Jesus as a gay man and "shows the disciples all drunk. Inadmissible! It is a mockery of the Faith of evangelicals, the faith of Catholics. We need to stop it; I will even be filing a representation because this is vile and is provided for in Article 208 of the Penal Code," said Ribeiro, who is part of the evangelical base in the

Brazilian Congress.

Other Brazilians, including Catholic religious, said they would be cancelling their subscription to the streaming service.

Brazil's National Association of Islamic Jurists expressed solidarity, saying, "we are against any disrespect and solidarity with our Christian brothers".

Petitions have been set up on [change.org](http://change.org), both for and against the satire. As of Sunday, more than 1.5 million people had signed the petition asking that the film be withdrawn from the streaming service.

Last year's Porta dos Fundos special, *The Last Hangover*, depicting Jesus Christ as a drunk, won an International Emmy for best comedy this year.

## Bishop thankful for British election results

A British bishop said he was relieved by the election defeat of political parties committed to liberalising Britain's abortion laws, but he was "not particularly enthused" by the Conservative Party agenda.

In the December 12 general election, the Conservatives of Prime Minister Boris Johnson gained 47 seats, the largest increase for his party since Margaret Thatcher won a third term in 1987, giving

him a Commons majority of 80 members of Parliament.

The opposition Labour Party suffered its worst defeat since 1935, and the Liberal Democrats, the third-largest party, gained only 11 seats.

Bishop Philip Egan of Portsmouth said he was relieved by the result because he had been "horrified" by manifesto promises made by the losing parties to strip criminal sanctions from the abortion law so

that the procedure was available on demand.

### Agenda

The two parties had "an anti-life agenda, particularly on abortion, so I am delighted that that direction has been stopped," he said.

However, Bishop Egan said he had concerns about social care of the most needy and noted that the "false anthropologies" underpinning the

radical social policies of the other parties also were operative within the Conservative Party.

"You have got to be vigilant, because things are coming through the education authorities, the health service and the social services," Bishop Egan said. "What was difficult was that the other parties had tuned into those ideologies and wanted to further them more."

## Vatican roundup

### Advent is a time to purify Faith – Pope Francis

● As Pope Francis blessed children's nativity scene figurines Sunday, the Pontiff said that the Advent season is a time of conversion to make space in one's heart for Christ to come and fill it with joy.

"Advent, a time of grace, tells us that it is not enough to believe in God: it is necessary to purify our faith every day," Pope Francis said in his Angelus address on December 15.

"It is a matter of preparing to welcome – not a fairy-tale character – but the God who calls us, involves us, and before whom a choice is imposed," he said in St Peter's Square.

Italian children gathered in St Peter's Square before the Angelus prayer, shouted and cheered as they awaited the papal blessing of their Nativity scene figurines of the infant Jesus, called 'Bambinelli' in Italian.

This 50 year-old Vatican tradition of the blessing the infant Jesus figurines on *Gaudete* Sunday began in 1969 with St Pope Paul VI at the initiative of the Roman Oratori Centre. The tradition has since spread throughout the world each year on the third Sunday of Advent.

### Vatican releases Pope's Christmas season schedule

● Pope Francis' 2019-20 Christmas season celebrations will include the usual liturgies and traditions. Releasing the Pope's schedule last week, the Vatican said he would:

- Celebrate Christmas Mass in St Peter's Basilica at 9.30pm on December 24.
- Address the crowds gathered in St Peter's Square and give his blessing *urbi et orbi* (to the city and the world) at noon on Christmas Day.
- Celebrate evening

prayer on December 31 in St Peter's Basilica at 5pm and lead the singing of the 'Te Deum' to thank God for the year that is ending.

— Celebrate Mass at 10am on January 1, the feast of Mary, Mother of God, and the World Day of Prayer for Peace, in St Peter's Basilica.

— Celebrate the feast of the Epiphany on January 6 with a Mass at 10am in St Peter's Basilica.

### CDF official says no link between clerical celibacy and abuse

● A senior official at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has defended clerical celibacy in the wake of the abuse crisis.

In an essay published in a Spanish magazine, Fr Jordi Bertomeu Farnós [pictured] said that there is "no evidence" celibacy has any relation to instances of sexual abuse, and warned that priests have been unfairly branded a suspect class.

In the essay, published in *Palabra*, Fr Farnós laid out the context of sexual abuse by Catholic priests, noting that the high-profile nature of the scandals has resulted in a number of mistaken presumptions about the causes of abuse.

"Although unfortunately, in all social classes, professions, ethnic groups and, of course, religions, there is the phenomenon of child abuse, Catholic priests are seen or even increasingly treated as 'suspects' of having committed this horrible crime."

He added: "There is no evidence that priestly celibacy directly causes any deviant sexual addiction, as evidenced by those cases of men or women who, due to life's circumstances, must live as celibate."





# The Incarnation is the central doctrine of our Faith



Fr Bill Dailey CSC

Love came down at Christmas,  
Love all lovely, love divine;  
Love was born at Christmas,  
Star and angels gave the sign.

Worship we the Godhead,  
Love incarnate, love divine;  
Worship we our Jesus:  
But wherewith for sacred sign?

Love shall be our token,  
Love shall be yours and love be mine,  
Love to God and to all men,  
Love for plea and gift and sign.  
– Christina Rossetti, 1885

“Love came down at Christmas”, begins Christina Rossetti’s beautiful little poem meditating on the celebration that is fast upon us. Five short words that explain it with a clarity anyone can understand that most exalted of theological terms: the Incarnation. We bow when we recite *et incarnatus est* – and he became incarnate – in the creed, signalling the centrality of this marvellous fact. God took flesh and was born to us – God “who is love” as we state at every baptismal liturgy.

St John Henry Newman, among the most learned and revered of Christian theologians, called the incarnation the ‘central’ doctrine of the Christian faith – the single doctrine one might name to explain all the rest of what we believe. How marvellous then if it could be understood not just by a person of his learning, but by anyone who could understand Rosetti’s little line that “love came down at Christmas!” We should expect it is so, for Our Lord himself blessed his Father “for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children.”

## Beautiful

What it is to say that love came down at Christmas, and to say that God became flesh, may be understood if you stop for a moment as you read this and look at your hand. What do you see there? Isn’t it beautiful? What is it for? Who made it? Why? We human beings spin ourselves into all sorts of perplexity when we get lost in these questions. What am I for? Who made me? What was I made for?

Our first sin was losing sight of who made us, and wishing to be gods ourselves. In forgetting

who made us, we were doomed to forget what we were made for. We descend from beauty into ugliness quickly enough that way.

Into human history God sent us a reminder. Not just any reminder, but a teacher. And not just any teacher, but his Son. “And the word became flesh, and dwelt among us.”

How are we to know what we are made for, and who made us, and how to use these bodies of ours? “Come, follow me.” By attending to Christ the teacher. Note he did not teach calculus, or physics, or biology, or Latin or Greek – not even Irish! No, he taught in the following ways. He made the lost feel at home – the tax collector, the prostitute. He made the proud – the Pharisee, the Roman Centurion, even Pontius Pilate – feel humbled. He sat with the Samaritan woman at the well, despite knowing everything about her – because he remained with her knowing the worst, she knew

he was the long-awaited one. He healed and forgave to the point of exhaustion.

**“How marvellous that God all powerful, God so remote, the God of the Plagues and the Flood, the Creator of all that is who dwells beyond time and place, came down at Christmas”**

Where he encountered hunger he fed. He even provided that great vintage to a couple in Cana on their wedding day, for that was a celebration of love. He also gave that body for us on the Cross.

When Jesus told us he was the Way, the Truth, and the Life, he was not pointing us to some hidden path of knowing. He was saying, emphatically: “Look at me. See how I love. This is

what you were made for!”

How incredible that God, all powerful, all remote, the God of the Plagues and the Flood, the God of creation who dwells beyond time and space, in the fullness of his wisdom sent us a humble, indeed a vulnerable child to an obscure and dusty village and a conquered people.

St John Henry put it this way: “And with a wonderful condescension He came, not as before in power, but in weakness, in the form of a servant, in the likeness of that fallen creature whom he purposed to restore. So he humbled Himself; suffering all the infirmities of our nature in the likeness of sinful flesh, all but a sinner – pure from all sin, yet subjected to all temptation – and at length becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross.”

People say that what they want in preaching is something practical, something concrete,

something that connects to their own lives. God says, “Okay, do you have a body? A voice to speak? A community? I’ll show you what to do with all that. This is my beloved son...”

## Preaching

What could be more concrete than to ask what have I been doing in this body? Have I sought out the lonely and the discouraged? Have I visited those who may need it? Have I forgiven those who have wronged me? Have I fed the hungry? How have I been speaking to people?

Love came down at Christmas. How marvellous that God all powerful, God so remote, the God of the Plagues and the Flood, the Creator of all that is who dwells beyond time and place, came down at Christmas. To a particular mother, our Mother, in a particular, obscure town, Bethlehem, to a particular conquered people, he came. Poor shepherds heralded his coming, “peace on earth, good will toward all!”

It’s a story even a child can understand.

❶ Fr Bill Dailey CSC is the Director of the Notre Dame-Newman Centre for Faith and Reason.





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# Letters

## Letter of the week

### Capital punishment no replacement for justice

**Dear Editor,** I read that according to a recent poll, most Americans support life in jail over the death penalty (IC 05/12/19). At its root, this perspective is based on the idea that every single person has intrinsic human dignity independent of their behaviour. It doesn't matter if you're a thief or a murderer; you still have the right to live until your natural death.

By being given this chance to carry out their last years in prison,

convicts have a chance to reflect on their actions and seek forgiveness not only from those affected by their crimes, but also God. It's important to remember that key figures like St Paul – once Saul – killed Christians before his conversion. Likewise, we read the story of the penitent thief in the Gospel of Luke, where Jesus assures him that they will be together in heaven. Jesus wasn't interested in focusing on his wrongdoings, but how

he responded to God's call to believe. Whereas the world might shun the outcasts, the lowly and the imprisoned, the God we believe in does no such thing. Capital punishment attempts to replace what no human institution can ever fully do: judge someone for their sins.

*Yours etc.,  
Peter O'Reilly,  
Navan,  
Co. Kildare.*

## Good to see people at Mass for Christmas

**Dear Editor,** I often think about the psychology of the people who only attend Mass on occasions like Christmas and Easter. Why do they only go at this time of year? It might be because they're with their family and there's an expectation to attend as they did in childhood.

Others might simply

want to please their parents. Perhaps some go to Mass only when they're home because they've never bothered to integrate into a parish after leaving for university or for a new job. These are all potential explanations. I like to believe, however, that people go to these special liturgical

events because there's a niggling calling within them that they should. It's not created by a sense of guilt, but more of an internal feeling that there is truth to be found in the Church and in Christ's story.

While it's upsetting to see Mass numbers decline, we should rejoice in the fact that

these 'part-time Catholics' still attend these important services.

There's something working within them. Give it time.

*Yours etc.,  
Martha Kearney,  
Newry,  
Co. Down.*

## Remember the vulnerable at Christmas

**Dear Editor,** While Christmas is a joyous time in our liturgical calendar, we mustn't forget those people who have no family and friends to keep them company during the holidays. The elderly are the majority demographic prone to loneliness during Christmas.

If you have an elderly neighbour, reach out to them, ask them how they are, and if possible, invite them over for Christmas dinner. It might seem like a small action, but it will make a world of difference to them.

*Yours etc.,  
Terry Henegan,  
Dungarvan, Co. Waterford.*



## President Trump cannot be regarded as pro-life

**Dear Editor,** Your letters page (IC 05/12/19) carried two lengthy letters in defence of Donald Trump. Both letters praised the pro-life credentials of Mr Trump ("... the most pro-life president since Ronald Reagan.") Really? Most of us who are pro-life are pro-life at all stages of life; opposed to abortion, opposed to euthanasia and assisted suicide and opposed to the death penalty.

Whatever else he may be, Mr Trump

is definitely not pro-life.

Regrettably, when I see the word "hate" in reference to Mr Trump, I think of his hate speech, his utter disrespect of women, his boasts about his cruel immigration policies on the US southern border that separate children from their mothers, and incarcerates them in cages and warehouses (where some have died). And, of course, I think about his hatred for Muslims and his incitement

of hatred towards them. I could go on.

Being religious suggests a belief in God, but I don't know of a single God that would support and encourage such hate. Adulation is one thing; facts another.

*Yours etc.,  
T. Gerard Bennett,  
Kilpatrick,  
Bunbrosna.*

## Theft of religious items show how tough we face it

**Dear Editor,** It's sad to see that no one has come forward to supply information about the decapitation and theft of the statue head of Archbishop Patrick Leahy in Thurles. In the last few years, we've seen a soaring increase

in the number of churches and religious iconography being vandalised, damaged or stolen. The deplorable thing about this attack is that it was clearly planned out and took some exertion. It's fast and easy to graffiti a wall

but this incident probably required the efforts of more than one person as well as the use of a saw or cutting equipment.

I suspect crimes like these will become even more frequent in the coming years

as Christianity continues to be systematically pushed out of Ireland. There are tough times ahead.

*Yours etc.,  
Philip Fitzpatrick,  
Armagh City,  
Co. Armagh.*

## facebook community

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

### Archbishop renews appeal for stolen statue head in Thurles

The vandals damn themselves by their actions and by their actions convert no one to their side. – **Gary Murphy**

Unbelievable...just more of the mindless thuggery of this country that has lost all respect. – **Ger Kelleghan**

It may be more practical to remove the statue rather than wait for the thugs to return the head. – **Brendan Kennedy**

I'm from Thurles town and I can tell you that nothing like this as ever happened before but now attacks are happening all over Ireland and into other Christian countries...Christians are under attack and the Church seems okay with it. – **Seoirse Dargan**

### Anchoring ourselves with God's goodness – Fr Rolheiser

When asking 'What would Jesus do?', remember that overturning some tables and whipping stuff around the place is a possibility. Not sure what he's getting at when he talks about "blocking access to God's mercy". It's not really clear what he means. – **Adam Conroy**

I feel sorry for Fr Rolheiser. He is ashamed of the very words of Christ and His Apostles. The early Church believed Christ was so fundamental to salvation that they claimed that "there is no name under heaven" but His that would bring salvation. This was so radical because it was originally applied to Caesar! They were willing to challenge the emperor's worldly power with Christ's divinity. Fundamentalism indeed. Difficult but true. – **William Lynch**

### Move sacramental preparation from school to parish

I think this is the beginning of separation of the Church-State relations. Our faith can't be privatised to conform secularisation in our society. – **Niall McCormack**

Looking more into this I think they should remove from schools because the parents might make more of an effort to take their children to Church. Schools with a Catholic ethos should have a level of the faith taught. – **Frances Donaghy**

I think it is an excellent idea. This gives parents an opportunity to relearn the Sacraments of Communion/Confirmation when their children are being prepared for it. It will hopefully put an end to the secularisation of these sacred sacraments. It's hypocritical of those who want it and yet at the same time no longer follow nor respect Church doctrine. – **Valerie Kavanagh**

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

## Letters to the Editor

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

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

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



# Around the world



▲ **VATICAN:** Pope Francis greets an attendee during a meeting with doctors, patients and members of the Italian Association of Medical Oncology at the Vatican.  
 ▲ **HOLY LAND:** Palestinian Melkite Catholics Eli and Peter Hosh prepare meat in the kitchen of their restaurant, Abu Eli, in Bethlehem. Photos: CNS



▲ **GUATAMALA:** A woman attends the the beatification Mass of Blessed James Miller in Huehuetenango.



▲ **UKRAINE:** People take part in a rally in Kyiv ahead of the so-called 'Normandy Summit' in Paris, where leaders of Ukraine, Russia, Germany and France met to discuss steps to resolve the conflict in eastern Ukraine. Pope Francis offered prayers for the summit.

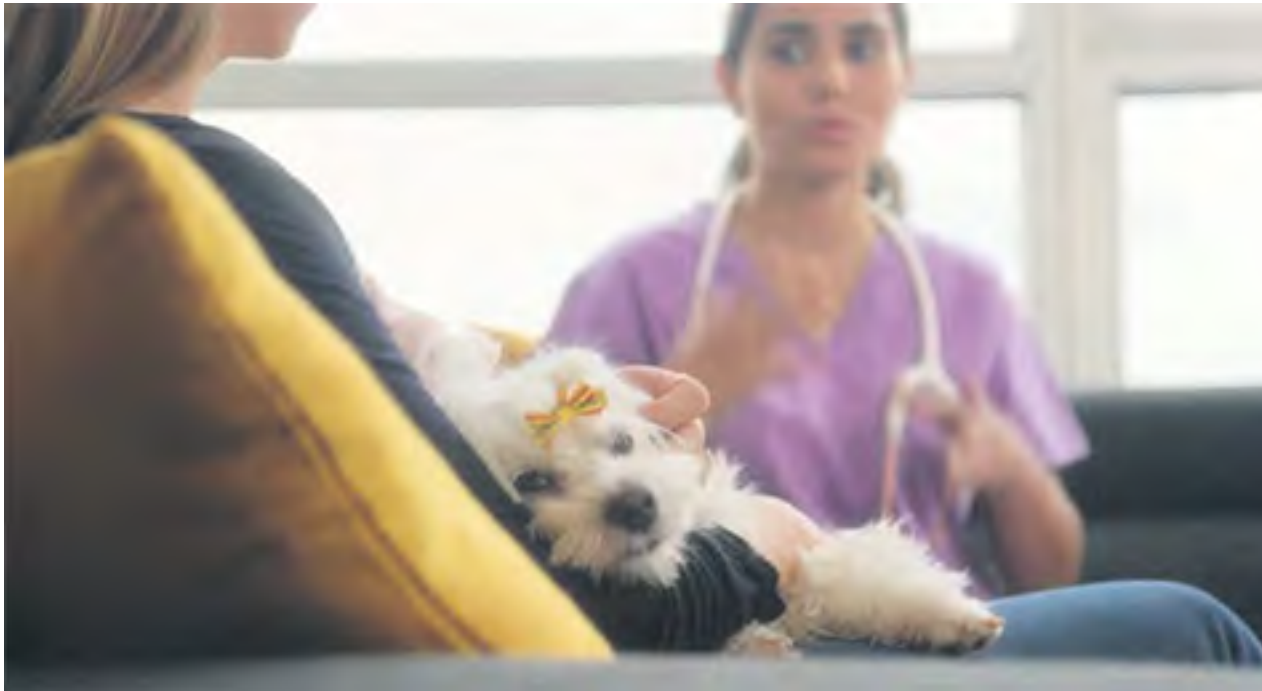


▲ **HONG KONG:** A protester is detained by a riot police officer during an anti-government rally.



▲ **USA:** Police stand at the scene of a gun battle that took place the day before involving two men around a kosher market in Jersey City. Six people, including a police officer and three bystanders, were killed in a furious battle that filled the streets of Jersey City with the sound of heavy gunfire for hours.





**S**ome years ago at a religious conference a man approached the microphone and after apologising for what he felt would be an inappropriate question, asked this: "I love my dog. When he dies will he go to Heaven? Do animals have eternal life?"

The answer to that might come as a surprise to many of us, but, looked at through the eyes of Christian faith, yes, his dog can go to Heaven. It's one of the meanings of Christmas. God came into the world to save the world, not just the people living in it. The incarnation has meaning for humanity, but also for the cosmos itself. We don't know exactly what that means and our imaginations aren't up to the task of picturing it, but because of the incarnation, dogs too can go to Heaven. Is this fanciful? No, it's scriptural teaching.

At Christmas we celebrate the birth of Jesus and see in his birth the beginning of the mystery of the incarnation unfolding in history, the mystery of God becoming human in physical flesh in order to save the world.

What we tend to struggle with though is how we understand what's meant by Christ saving the world. Most of us take that to mean that Christ came into the world to save the people, those of us with self-awareness and eternal souls.

### Soil

That's true, but our faith also asks us to believe that God's saving activity in the Christ extends to more than only human beings and more than even animals and other living things.

God's saving activity in Christ reaches so deep that it saves creation itself – the oceans, the mountains, the soil that grows our food, the desert sands and the Earth

## There is a place in Heaven for dogs



**Fr Rolheiser**

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

itself. Christ came to save all of those things too, not just us, the people.

Where, you might ask, does scripture teach this? It teaches it most everywhere in implicit ways though it teaches it quite explicitly in a number of different places.

For example, in the Epistle to the Romans (8, 19-22) St Paul writes: "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God."

"We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time."

This may come as a surprise to us since, until quite recently, our preaching and catechesis has not often made this explicit. However

what St Paul is saying here is that physical creation itself, the cosmic world, will, at the end of time, be transformed in some glorious way and enter into Heaven, just as human beings do.

**“What we tend to struggle with though is how we understand what’s meant by Christ saving the world”**

He's also saying that, like us, it too somehow senses its mortality and groans to be set free from its present limits.

We need to ask ourselves this question: what do we believe will happen to physical creation at the end of time? Will it be destroyed, burnt-up, annihilated? Or, will it simply be abandoned and left empty and deserted like a stage after a play has ended, while we go on to life elsewhere? Scripture informs us otherwise, that is, it tells us that physical creation itself, our

planet Earth, will also be transformed ("liberated from its bondage to decay") and enter into Heaven with us. How will this happen?

We can't imagine it, just as we can't imagine our own transformed state. But scripture assures us that it will happen because, like ourselves, our world, physical creation, is also destined to die, and, like us, it intuitively senses its mortality and groans under that sentence, aching to be set free from its limitations and become immortal.

Science agrees. It tells us that physical creation is mortal, that the sun is burning out, that energy is ever-so-slowly decreasing and that the Earth as we know it will someday die.

### Mortal

The Earth is as mortal as we are and so if it's to have a future it needs to be saved by something or someone from outside itself. That something and someone are revealed in the mystery of the Incarnation within which God takes on physical flesh in Christ in order to save the world – and what he came to save was not just us, the people living on this Earth, but rather, "the world", the planet itself, and everything on it.

Jesus assured us that nothing is ever ultimately lost. No hair falls from someone's head and no sparrow falls from the sky and simply disappears forever, as if it had never been.

God created, loves, cares for and ultimately resurrects every bit of creation for all eternity – including a beloved dog.

## QUESTIONS of faith

Each week Colm Fitzpatrick looks at interesting and sometimes controversial questions people have about Catholicism...



## Is Santa Claus a saint?

The first image that probably pops into your head when you think of Santa Claus is a jolly, old, bearded man who delivers presents to children once a year. However, the origins of this story date back to a real life person in the 4th Century.

St Nicholas of Myra was a bishop in Turkey and is famous for his generosity and kindness. We know very little about his life as most biographical accounts about him were written centuries after his death. This material is also embellished with legendary and fantastical stories, so it's hard to separate the fact from the fiction.

It's reported that he was the son of a wealthy family and after his parents' death, he used his inheritance to help others.

He's celebrated for his orthodoxy and is believed to have been present at the Council of Nicaea in 325AD where he excoriated Arius for his heretical ideas. Likewise, his commitment to the Faith also shines through when sources record that he faced imprisonment and torture during a time of Christian persecution around 300AD.

### Stories

One of the most famous stories associated with the saint is that he saved three poor sisters from being sold into prostitution. They could not provide the necessary dowries for their marriage, so their father would have to sell them.

Hearing about their plight, St Nicholas went to their home and gave the three daughters a bag of gold each and so rescued them from a dire fate.

About 200 years after his death, the St Nicholas Church was built under the tutelage of Theodosius II over the site where he had served as bishop. His remains were placed there, but were later stolen and

placed in the Basilica di San Nicola in Italy, with other fragments apparently residing in San Nicolò al Lido in Venice.

His feast day is celebrated on December 6 and he is the patron saint for Russia and Greece, as well as sailors, merchants and children.

**“The Dutch brought the legend of St Nicholas – otherwise known as Sinterklass – to America in the 1700s where he went through many transformations”**

While his popularity began to wane in the 1500's due to the impact of the Reformation and its position on venerating saints, the Dutch continued to celebrate his feast day on December 6. It was a common tradition for children to put their shoes out the night before and in the morning they would discover the gifts he had left for them. The Dutch brought the legend of St Nicholas – otherwise known as Sinterklaas – to America in the 1700s where he went through many transformations.

The image of Santa Claus as a magical man who delivers toys to children became concretised in the early 18th Century through the poem 'An Account of a Visit from Saint Nicholas' by Clement Moore. Later cartoonist Thomas Nast drew him wearing a red suit with a white fur lining.

His annual visitation to deliver gifts was moved to December 25 to converge with Christmas and to this day children all over the world are thankful for his generous work.

**Got a question or comment?**  
Email [colm@irishcatholic.ie](mailto:colm@irishcatholic.ie)



# The pick of the Christmas season

## CHRISTMAS CAROLS

Virgin Media One Sat 21 December 5.55am, VM3 Monday, 23 December, 9.30am

Singing superstar Alfie Boe leads the congregation of St Elisabeth's Church in Greater Manchester in a traditional Christmas Eve carol service, with Nadine Coyle, and Alexander O'Neal.

## RENOVATION NATION

Virgin Media One Sat 21 December, 11.30am

An old orchard within the grounds of The Daughters of Charity Disability Services in Limerick is the target for the first renovation.

## IN CONCERT: CHRISTMAS IN VIENNA 2017

EWTN Saturday, 21 December, 9.30pm

A beautiful and inspiring Christmas concert from Vienna concert features a vast assembly of international vocalists.

## THE EWTN FAMILY CHRISTMAS SPECIAL

EWTN Saturday, December 21 (night), 2am

Fr Joseph Mary Wolfe and the EWTN Chapel Choir gift EWTN viewers with a special Christmas Concert.

## MASS ON THE 4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

RTÉ One TV & RTÉ Radio 1 Extra / LW252, Sunday, December 22, 11am

A live simulcast Mass, with a celebration of the Society of St Vincent de Paul.

## SONGS OF PRAISE

BBC1, Sunday, December 22, 1.15pm

This year's 'Big Sing' comes from the Assembly Hall in Belfast.

## THE DONKEY WHO WASN'T THERE

RTÉ Radio 1 Sunday, December 22, 7.30pm

In this festive programme, Jane Little goes in search of the Christmas donkey and its real-life descendants today.

## IN CONCERT: BACH'S CHRISTMAS ORATORIO (COLLEGIUM VOCALE GENT)

EWTN Sunday, December 22, 8pm

Recorded live at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels,



**Brendan O'Regan**

the Collegium Vocale Gent presents Bach's famous cantatas, originally written by the composer for performance from Christmas to the Epiphany.

## A CHRISTMAS CAROL

BBC1, Sunday, December 22, 9pm, continuing Monday, Tuesday, 9pm

Episode 1 of three-part drama from Dickens' classic story.

## THE GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD

BBC2, Monday, December 23, 9.35am

(1965) From his lowly but venerated birth through his adult years as a teacher roving the Holy Land, Jesus attracts admirers and enemies unlike any man before. With Max Von Sydow as Jesus.

## IN CONCERT: SING NOEL! A CHRISTMAS CONCERT

EWTN, Monday, December 23, 10am

From Ottawa, Canada, the Thirteen Strings Candlelight Orchestra and the Seventeen Voyces choir perform Fantasia on Christmas Carols and the Christmas Oratorio; French Noels sung by the Children's Choir from the Ecole Secondaire De la Salle.

## THE CHRISTMAS LETTER

RTÉ1, Monday, December 23, 6.30 pm (also Christmas Day 12.30pm)

This heart-warming and touching tale tells how eight-year-old Henry's efforts to spread Christmas cheer bring much-needed joy into the life of a lonely old lady.

## NEW! LIFE ON THE ROCK - MFVA CHRISTMAS SHOW

EWTN, Monday, December 23, 8.30pm

Join the Franciscan Friars of the Eternal Word for a special Christmas celebration!

## IN CONCERT-JOHN SEBASTIAN BACH: CHRISTMAS CANTATAS

EWTN, Monday, December 23, 9.30pm

Recorded at the Church of St Roch in Paris, France, experience the classical majesty of famed composer Johann Sebastian Bach's Christmas Cantatas as performed by the Collegium Vocale Gent.

## PILGRIMAGE: THE ROAD TO ROME

BBC2, Christmas Eve, 7am

Eight celebrities of differing faiths and beliefs strap on backpacks and have 15 days to tackle 1,000km of the ancient Via Francigena pilgrimage, from the Italian Alps to Rome. The three episodes together. Repeat.

## CAROLS FROM KINGS

BBC2, Christmas Eve, 5.50pm and Christmas Day, 8.40am

Traditional Christmas celebrations from the candlelit Chapel of King's College, Cambridge. The world famous choir is directed for the first time by former King's College organ scholar Daniel Hyde.

## ANGELA'S CHRISTMAS

RTÉ1, Christmas Eve, 6.20pm

Set in Ireland in the early 1900s, Angela's Christmas is a funny, heart-warming and poignant story about the power of family and the innocent desire of a child to ensure everyone is safe, warm and loved at Christmas time.

## CAROLS FROM KILKENNY CASTLE

RTÉ1, Christmas Eve, 9.20pm (also Christmas Day 7.35am)

Mary Kennedy presents a star-studded, festive celebration from Kilkenny Castle, with Colm Wilkinson, Ronan Tynan, Claudia Boyle, Róisín O and her new band Thanks Brother, Jack L and Hudson Taylo.

## MIDNIGHT MASS

RTÉ1 and RTÉ Radio 1, Christmas Eve 11pm

Midnight Mass live from the Cathedral of Our Lady Assumed into Heaven & St Nicholas, Galway, will be broadcast via Eurovision The Principal Celebrant for Christmas Eve is the Most Reverend Brendan

Singer Tommy Fleming stars in *A Voice of Hope* 2 on Virgin Media One on St Stephen's Day.

Kelly, Bishop of Galway & Kilmacduagh.

## MIDNIGHT MASS

BBC1, Christmas Eve, 11.40pm

Rev. Dr Andrew Bishop leads Midnight Mass from Croydon Minster. The choir sings Mozart's *Great Credo Mass* in C and leads the congregation in well-loved carols.

## THE CHRISTMAS LEAP OF FAITH

RTÉ Radio 1, Christmas Day, 8am

*The Leap of Faith* presents 'Spirits of Christmas: Past, Present and Future'. From Dickensian nostalgia to tales of our times and hopes for the years ahead. A festive gathering of guests join Michael Comyn for conversation, music and



Elena Tice features on RTÉ1 on December 29.

## MASS ON CHRISTMAS DAY

RTÉ1 & RTÉ Radio 1 Extra/Longwave 252, Christmas Day, 10am

Live Eurovision Mass from the Church of the Sacred Heart, in Lugano, in the Italian-speaking canton of Switzerland, with commentary and translation by Fr Thomas McCarthy OP.

## CHRISTMAS MORNING FROM ST JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC CHURCH, BRADFORD

BBC1, Christmas Day, 10am

A joyful celebration of Christmas live from St Joseph's Catholic Church in Bradford, led by the Rev.



proclaimed the news of Jesus's birth to shepherds. Acclaimed boys' choir Libera perform the Basque carol *Sing Lullaby*.

## TOM JONES AND BEVERLY KNIGHT'S GOSPEL CHRISTMAS

BBC4, Christmas Day (night), 1.40am

Sir Tom Jones and Beverly Knight present a special evening of music and spiritual cheer, featuring performances from choirs and a house band from the British gospel scene.

## KEEP CHRIST IN CHRISTMAS, A CATHOLICS COME HOME SPECIAL PRESENTATION

EWTN, St Stephen's Day, 11.30am

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

## TOMMY FLEMING: A VOICE OF HOPE 2

Virgin Media One, St Stephen's Day, 11pm

Tommy Fleming treats viewers to a concert from the holy pilgrimage site Knock Basilica in the West of Ireland.

## CARLOW CHOIR PRESENTS, THE: JOY TO THE WORLD

EWTN Friday, December 27, 7pm

Enjoy the sounds of the season in this delightful Christmas program from The Carlow Choir.

## LIFE & SOUL CHRISTMAS SPECIAL

RTÉ1, RTÉ Radio 1 Extra and LW 252, Sunday, December 29, 11am

Francis Brennan, Katie Taylor and Ireland hockey star Elena Tice are among Aine O'Neill and Colm Flynn's guests for this seasonal episode that celebrates Christianity as a living and lived faith. Also, the legacy of the late Jean Vanier of L'Arche in Cork

## IN CONCERT: THE GREAT ORGAN OF NOTRE DAME CATHEDRAL

EWTN Monday, December 30, 6am

The majesty of the great organ at Notre Dame Cathedral is showcased by organist Olivier Latry in this historic concert recorded prior to the catastrophic fire.

*\*Schedules may be subject to change and regional variations*





# BookReviews

Peter Costello



## Books of the Year

Some of our regular reviewers select the book or books they most enjoyed or were impressed by over the course of the last year...

Mary Kenny

Although it's a serious and scholarly book, *Religion, Landscape & Settlement in Ireland – From Patrick to Present*, by Kevin Whelan (Four Courts Press, €45.00), is clear, accessible and full of riveting stories and information. It explains and illuminates how Irish landscape, culture, history and faith are interwoven.

"Erasing the Irish religious past proved notoriously difficult," he writes of the Tudor period. His judgement on modern times is more exacting, but always rooted in the authority of knowledge. It's expensive, but truly worth it.

*Knockfane*, by Homan Potterton (Merrion Press, €16.95) is an old-fashioned 'big house' saga set in Ireland from the 1950s to the present time, based on a Protestant family in the Co Meath area, written in a gentle and beguiling way.

I really wanted to know the fate of the Esdaille family members through the decades, whose essential values weren't all that different from their Catholic neighbours.

John Bruton

The book I most enjoyed reading this year was Fergal Keane's *Wounds: A Memoir of War and Love* (William Collins, £18.99), not exactly new (it appeared first in 2017) a passionate, but disturbing read by a brilliant reporter.

It is a story of the Troubles of 100 years ago in North Kerry, and is built around the killing of RIC inspector, Tobias O'Sullivan, on Church Street in Listowel on January 30, 1921.

O'Sullivan was from Connemara and his wife was from near Westport. He was a Catholic, as were the men who killed him, when, unarmed, he was walking home for his midday dinner.

His wife died of tuberculosis shortly afterwards. Some of his orphaned children stayed in Ireland, and one of his grandsons was in the FCA guard of honour outside the GPO on Easter Sunday in 1966.

This well written book shows that the War of Independence of 1919-1921 was almost as much an Irish Civil War, as was the subsequent fighting between pro and anti Treaty forces in the 1922-23 period.



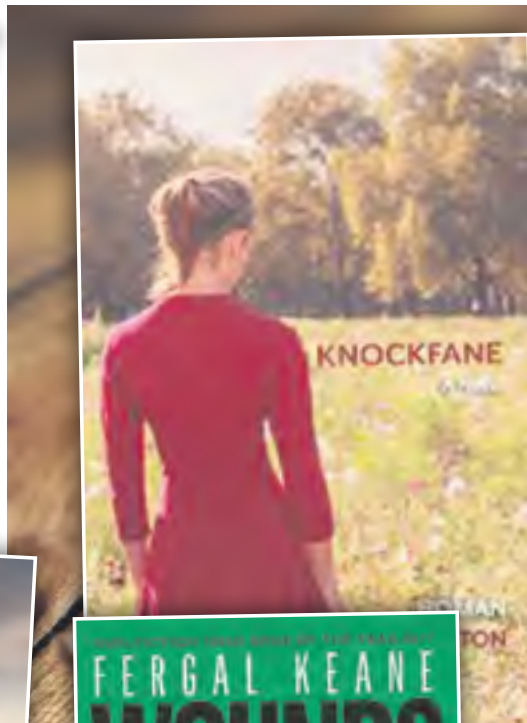
Joe Carroll

Fr Sean Fagan, Marist priest and moral theologian, died in 2016, a broken man after years of being silenced by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and being threatened with laicisation. It even ordered any unsold books to be withdrawn. During this difficult time he could only confide his feelings to a few friends he could trust.

One was Angela Hanly, a lay theologian and catechist, who has now published *What Happened to Sean Fagan?* (Columba Books, €14.99). As he said to her in his last illness, she ought "to spill the beans in public on what really went on, to shame our sinful Church in the hope it would prevent further repetitions".

She has faithfully carried out his wishes. Her book describes, for the most part dispassionately, what happens to theologians who fall foul of the CDF, successor of the Inquisition and later the Holy Office.

It is a depressing story, but deserves to be heard and compared to the kid gloves with which the Church used to handle the clerics accused of child sexual abuse.



My choice is Rupert Sheldrake's *Ways to go Beyond and why They Work* (Coronet, £20.00)

Since the 1980s Rupert Sheldrake, a successful scientist, has been publishing scholarly and readable books which support the general ideals of people of faith.

This, his ninth book, continues on from previous works in which he advances three important observations. The first is the degree to which even the most painstaking of scientists are influenced by sentiment as well as by their results. The second is the scientifically demonstrable prevalence of phenomena which do not conform to any known laws of physics.

The third is the probability of the existence of the spirit world, forces which influence human beings and the entire material universe but are not physically part of them. He very rightly notes that atheism and materialism are merely alternative belief systems as incapable of proof as any spiritual concept.

John Wyse-Jackson

*The Second Sleep*, by Robert Harris (Hutchinson, £20.00) – it's refreshing when good writers don't stick to a formula, and Harris is one who doesn't.

What his books have in common is that they're all well researched and entertainingly written – and that in the case of this one and its predecessor, *Conclave*, the action is seen through the eyes of a priest.

Though I won't spoil surprises here by giving away the plot – or



even by telling you in which era it is set – his latest novel touches on themes that include the effects of technology on mankind and the tensions that may arise between religion and science.

The only downside is that it's so compulsively readable that it won't detain you long...

Frank Litton

John Barton's *A History of the Bible: The Book and its Faiths* (Allen Lane, £30.00) says one of the most damaging results of the Reformation was the doctrine of *sola scriptura* which has seriously distorted our understanding of revelation, with its presumption of an unmediated access to the word of God.

John Barton's *A History of the Bible: The Book and its Faiths* is the product of many years scholarship as professor of the interpretation of holy scripture in Oxford and ministry as a priest in the Church of England.

Barton's account of how the Bible was constructed and understood from its remote beginnings to the present, makes clear that the Bible

**“Barton’s account of how the Bible was constructed and understood from its remote beginnings to the present, makes clear that the Bible is a compilation of the conversations between God and believers”**



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.



is a compilation of the conversations between God and believers.

Every conversation is a 'merging of horizons'. God's words make sense because they fit into the world of the listener. That world is invariably time-bound. Our mind-set is far from that of Abraham.

Burton shows the compilation and interpretation of the conversations is no easy business. We see through a glass darkly and what we see, we see as a community of believers, guided by tradition, as we seek to make the scriptures speak to our time. Burton makes a considerable and welcome contribution to that task.

#### Thomas J. Morrissey

The present of a de Valera biography was not received with enthusiasm. The story had been told too often. But I had not long started on David McCullagh's *De Valera, Rise, 1882-1932* (Gill Books, €25.00), than I was caught by the author's detailed research, in America as well as in Ireland, his objective presentation, and a style which carried the reader smoothly through the vicissitudes of the young de Valera from arduous childhood through political eminence to splitting his country in civil war, and from there to political redemption and the assumption of

government.

McCullough's second volume, *De Valera: Rule, 1932-1975* (Gill Books €25.00), brings us through the 1930s and the challenge of neutrality and economic survival during World War II, all dealt with clearly, if succinctly, before considering de Valera's post-war election defeat, his subsequent mixed political fortunes and his eventual retirement from the Dáil.

The account of the final years as the elected president of the Irish Republic brings de Valera's career to a fitting conclusion.

#### Ian d'Alton

My read of the year was Caleb Wood Richardson's *Smyllie's Ireland: Protestants, Independence, and the Man who ran the Irish Times* (Indiana University Press, £27.99).

A lively and insightful discussion of Irish identity after independence is hung on the very substantial frame of R.M. Smyllie, editor of the *Irish Times* from 1934 to 1954. Smyllie was of Sligo Protestant stock. He spent the Great War

in an internment camp in Germany, having found himself on the wrong side of the line – much like southern Irish Protestants after independence, then. Richardson's original 'take' is to interpret Smyllie and his ilk in terms of success rather than failure, and he does this with great panache.

The book is enhanced by the effervescent writing and apposite phraseology, such as '...most of the snobbery of Dublin's Protestants was self-inflicted: directed not at Catholics but at fellow members of the minority'. A short book, but a most refreshing read.

**“One of the major events of the year for Catholics, the canonisation of John Henry Newman, saw the appearance of many books around the world”**

#### Rev. Robert Marshall

John Barton, *A History of the Bible: The Book and its Faiths* (Allen Lane, €30.00): Has the bible a theme? With deep scholarship Barton examines, from the perspectives of all People of the Book, the gap between the Bible and faith. Barton excites and challenges, as he moves from ancient Israel and the canon of what Christians call the Old Testament, through Christian beginnings in the New Testament, to the Middle Ages, the Reformation and meaning, concluding with controversial issues of translation.

He points out that many of the texts from which the current translations are drawn, are themselves also translations from earlier languages. Food for thought.

Barton concludes with an interrogation of the Bible which feeds the faith of Jews and Christians, each of whom have many traditions.

Easily read, engaging, questioning and, for all traditions, often provocative it is a worthy stocking filler.

#### Felix M. Larkin

Rolf Loeber (1942-2017) was a pro-



fessor of psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh, specialising in juvenile delinquency – but he had another career as a scholar of Irish literature, art and architecture.

He pursued his Irish interests with vigour and peerless scholarship during innumerable visits here in the company of his wife and collaborator, Magda Stouthamer-Loeber. The result was a body of published work which will endure – most notably, their magisterial *2006 Guide to Irish Fiction, 1650-1900* (Four Courts Press, €90.00).

*Irish Houses and Castles, 1400-1740* is a posthumous collection of six major articles by Rolf, edited by Kevin Whelan and Matthew Stout as a tribute to him (Four Courts Press, €55.00)

It is richly illustrated, and includes a listing of Rolf's publications in the field of Irish studies which extends over five pages. The book was launched in Dublin in November with an evening of words and music in memory of Rolf. It is, by far and away, my 'book of the year'.

#### J. Anthony Gaughan

One of the major events of the year for Catholics, the canonisation of John Henry Newman,

saw the appearance of many books around the world. Those published here in Ireland, such as the excellent one for those unfamiliar with the details of the new saint's life, *A Perfect Peace: Newman Saint For Our Time* by Bishop Fintan Monahan (€7.99), dealt in part with Newman's time in Ireland as the first Rector of the Catholic University.

Newman had a stellar career as an apologist and a divine. A prolific author, he published some 40 books on serious topics. Newman was first rector of Catholic University of Ireland in Dublin in 1854 and published a universally-acclaimed study on university education. That Catholic University evolved into University College, Dublin, now regarded as the leading university in Ireland.

And yet, showing a woeful lack of the broadness and openness of mind which university education is intended to develop, the UCD authorities initially indicated they would not be represented at Newman's canonisation.

In the event, owing to protests by the university's graduates and the prospect of becoming a laughing-stock in the academic world, eventually representatives of UCD did travel to Rome to honour their university's founder.

#### Peter Costello

Having been writing over the course of the year about art as well as books, my book of the year is devoted to religious art. *Dark Beauty: Hidden Details in Harry Clarke's Stained Glass*, by Lucy Costigan & Michael Cullen (Merrion Press, €35.00), is a further investigation of the stained glass window of that often enigmatic artist.

The authors admit they are very much following in the footsteps of Nicky Gordon-Bowe, but they are also probing into examples and details she never got to explore. Clarke was an artist not only of the beatific, but also of the macabre. His was a mind that needs further exploration by many hands.

Fr. Con Buckley

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Fr. Con Buckley

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# Win a trip to Lourdes

ACROSS

1

Relics came around for a tasty treat (5,5)

6

This may have hinged on securing the place of nativity! (6,4)

11

Gloves that do not have individual finger covers (7)

14

Banquet (5)

15

See 3 down

17

A handful of sounds from Midas' phone is what I got on the fifth day of Christmas, it seems (4,4,5)

19

Attests that one raves strangely (5)

20

Culpable, responsible for a problem (2,5)

23

Misfortune; grief (3)

24

Call around informally - with playground apparatus close at hand? (5,2)

25

Shade, colour (3)

26

Make the cardinal object to what's small and lousy (3)

28

Finished with love (getting the priest back) (4)

30

German Ring maker (6)

33

The holy sacrifice (4)

36

Material wealth is provided by some of the hammam money (6)

37

Eats out - with Denis, perhaps (5)

38

Wintry precipitation (5)

39

One took as true that the Bee Devil has changed (8)

40

Streak around with one on the rink (6)

43

Confectionary associated with Montelimar in France (6)

45

Tot up (3)

46

Oh my! What virtue! (8)

48

Thumb a lift (5)

49

Bewail that Mr Kingsley has taken in an extinct bird (6)

50 & 60d

You burn it during the Christmas season (4,3)

51

Where King Arthur was buried (in Java, long ago) (6)

54

Heavenly being from a Russian Arctic port? (9)

56

Sufficient (6)

57

Time of year to get tangled twine, right? (6)

58

See 5 down

59

Herb? Mr Fawty to you! (5)

61

Frozen water (3)

62 & 71

A hymn (African soloist) about the original Santa Claus (5,8,2,4)

65, 21d, 23d & 36d

These travellers relied on The Star for information (3,5,4,3)

66

One is adored by many, given one's divine origins (3)

67

Actor with only a walk on part (5)

68

Sign of the Zodiac - The Lion (3)

70

Did it help that Aladdin bottled it? (5)

74

Russian ruler who made rats reform, literally (4)

75

Put down, or get rid of, a burden (6)

77

Soft luminescence could leave one in a predicament (6)

78

Dot's aware, possibly, of what's fizzy and refreshing (4,5)

79

Bequest (6)

80

One of the seven deadly sins (4)

83

Blockbuster movie from James Cameron (6)

84

Narnia's lion has a nasal problem (5)

86

There's not much going on the pan for little swimmers (5,3)

88

Carton (3)

89

Information from an informant as to why your cue won't work? (3-3)

93

Brandy (6)

95

Flower that can disrupt drainage (8)

97

Rock with a hot part of the Bible (5)

98

Unadulterated Ecstasy? That's pulp! (5)

100

Spider's creation (6)

101

It's played over eighteen holes (4)

103

Pill (6)

105

Speed competition (4)

106

Soccer's version of TMO was created by Virginia, right? (1,1,1)

108

Be prone to falsehood (3)

110

Musical piece about a cholera outbreak (7)

111

For Santa, this should be sometime after the children go to sleep! (1,1,1)

112

Uncouth type (7)

113

As grows in a witch's garden? (5)

116

This may be spruce even before it is decorated! (9,4)

117

Looks at feathers as bingo instruction is given (4,4)

118

As yet not catered for; awaiting a meal (5)

119

Where to plant toddlers? (7)

120

Tasty cut of meat from an Eton basket (1-4,5)

121 & 115d

To judge by its title, this Jack Nicholson movie was of maximum achievable quality! (2,4,2,2,4)

DOWN

2

How some neat mead emerged (8)

3 & 15a

This nun will rip our theorems asunder (6,8)

4

Santa's checking his one of these (twice) about now! (5)

5 & 58a

Verne's submariner may have rewritten a mean caption (7,4)

7

Was this gift a pair of amphibious birds? (3,11)

8

Elevator (4)

9

Take the plunge? Daily - in various enterprises to begin with (4)

10

Resume business after a closure (6)

11

Demure fashion is on the street (6)

12

I'd dart in to make it to this Caribbean island (8)

13 & 29d

Promising piece of jewellery! (10,4)

14

Friend, a strong, woolly composition depicts what the Magi were doing, according to Carol (9,6,4)

16

Either way, give it a mention (5)

18

Religious song (4)

21

See 65 across

22

Is it Ruby that's part of the management? (3)

23

See 65 across

27

Such notions may be put aside (5)

29

See 13 down

30

Can't eastern wealth be saved in this region of the middle-east? (4,4)

31

Enquire (3)

32

A cardinal in front of two trees? Rubbish! (7)

34

What's Bob at, confusing the prior? (5)

35

Did David have this weapon because of a broken arm? (5)

36

See 65 across

41

Protective metalwork (6)

42

Upset part of the 33 across, thou worthy, feted girl? (3,7,2,3,4)

44

Boundless (9)

46

Shine, radiate (4)

47

It contains medicine for the pain at the heart of a saint (6)

48

Nag about an article that leaves one almost speechless (6)

52

A sharp bite (3)

53

Wild West transport beloved of actors (5)

54

Dry help is about right (4)

55

Do islands go around with this musical instruction? (9)

59

Campanologists are interested in these (5)

60

See 50 across

63

Father has a right to be victorious here in Australia (6)

64

Can you play them as you pour champagne into them? (6)

65

Excursion (4)

69

Friend (3)

71

See 62 across

72

Try to catch the sound of moving tinsel (6)

73

A quicker route to being close-cropped? (5,3)

76

The editor is upended over New York? Say it isn't so! (4)

77

Dessert named for a Russian legend of ballet (7)

81

Crosby surrounds the novice with glittering objects (5)

82

Animal innards (5)

85

One is not ordained to live a monastic life! (3,6)

87

Radio, TV, newspapers, etc (5)

90

The jetty is quiet? That is right (4)

91

Injection (3)

92

Card game (5)

94

Mimic a primate (3)

95

Might this ingredient upset a gentile? (7)

96

Ms Bruce loses the head in St Colmcille's island (4)

99

Wear them to keep hearing organs warm (8)

100

Male bird (4)

102

Move like a reindeer! (3)

103

One understands these are small branches (5)

104

Sweets (7)

106

Church storage room (6)

107

About history - make a meal of it! (6)

109

Do turn in a portly way (6)

113

Five-stringed instrument (5)

114

Bird traditionally hunted on St Stephen's Day (4)


115

See 121 across

Christmas Crossword No. 1

Marian Pilgrimages, who have been organising pilgrimages to Marian Shrines around the world for over 25 years, are delighted to offer readers of *The Irish Catholic* the opportunity to win an inclusive pilgrimage for two to Lourdes during 2020.

Along with pilgrimages to Lourdes, now with direct flights to Lourdes, Marian Pilgrimages also offers custom made itineraries to Medjugorje, the Holy Land, Italy, Fatima and Camino de Santiago. For more information, please call them on 01 878 8159 or email [info@marian.ie](mailto:info@marian.ie).



MARIAN PILGRIMAGES  
BRIDGING CHRISTIANITY, BY LOVE, FOR OVER 25 YEARS

How to enter the competition

The competition consists of TWO crosswords. Crossword No.1 which is published this week and Crossword No.2 which will be published in next week's edition. All you have to do is answer all the crossword questions correctly on BOTH crosswords and your name will be entered in a draw for the pilgrimage. Remember, even if you don't manage to complete the crosswords correctly you will be entered in the draw to win one of the three runner-up prizes of the **World Meeting of Families Commemorative Bundle – Fáilte Pope Francis and Pope Francis in Ireland**. When you have completed the crosswords send CROSSWORD No.1 and CROSSWORD No.2 before **Friday, January 10, 2020** to:  
**LOURDES COMPETITION**  
**Marian Pilgrimages, 19 Eden Quay, Dublin 1.**



NAME

ADDRESS

PHONE

SOLUTIONS, DECEMBER 12

GORDIUS No. 433

Across – 1 Saw 3 Solway Firth 8 French fries 9 Losing My Religion 10 Rates 11 Sheet 13 Adam's rib 15 Garland 16 Medical 20 Stork 21 Depot 23 Lotto 25 Carrot 26 Bookshelves 27 Duo

Down – 1 So far, so good 2 Wrestler 3 Socks 4 Wolfram 6 Regret 7 Hay 12 Table for two 13 Aunts 14 Steak 17 Cantered 18 Colonel 19 Apollo 22 Tagus 23 Leaps

CHILDREN'S No. 312

Across – 1. Soother 7. Ocean 8. Ovens 9. Keeps 11. Alone 12. Hat 13. Total 15. Ivy 16. Two 18. Bag 20. Natural 22. Ass 23. Hospital

Down – 1. Snow White 2. Operations 3. History 4. Rockets 5. Here 6. Ends 10. Pea 14. Tablet 17. Cubs 19. Girl 21. Ash

Solutions to Sudoku No. 312 will be published in the edition of January 2.



## Notebook

Fr Bernard Cotter



# Our reminder that God understands all that ails us

**MY AUNTIE MARY** was the most famous person in our family, but she attained fame in an unusual way. She was my grandmother's aunt and had died long before I was born. I knew only two salient facts about her: she lived on North Street, Skibbereen. And she died on Christmas Day. What happens on Christmas Day lasts long in the memory, as has been the case in our clan.

Take the case of Bishop William Delaney of Cork, now long dead. It was unusual enough that he was born in Kilbrogan Church in Bandon in 1804. But what made his entry to the world particularly memorable was that it took place on the floor of the sacristy – on Christmas Day.

## Experience

Some people claim December 25 is just another date on the calendar, which can be easily ignored. People who act like this have one of two motives; either a disdain for all the day means or a recent experience which clouds any happy memories that might in the past have been associated with Christmas.

The former group are undoubtedly growing: Ireland has



more and more unbelievers, who are annoyed at the intrusion of anything that smacks of religion (or superstition, as they would have it) into the public life of the nation. Such people can cope with a mid-winter break and some brightness to cheer the bleak

days of winter, but the birth of a Saviour leaves them cold. Those of us who believe can only wish them well and say a silent prayer that the Good News may at some time enter their heart.

**“While Easter might be the more significant feast, Christmas marks a profound mystery too: incarnation, the Word becoming flesh”**

The latter group contains each of us, at least in some years. For anyone bereaved in the year before any Christmas, celebrating the feast can be unbearable.

A person whose parent dies, or a spouse or sibling, finds Christmas extremely tough. And to those people, add those suffering other traumas – sickness, loss

● A small group gathered at my kitchen table for a parish meeting. I was about to light a candle when one of the group jumped in: “Don’t light that, I’m choked with a cough and it’ll only start me off!” Fortunately there was a plastic battery-powered candle on the window nearby, which I placed in the centre of the table as a reminder of the divine presence.

Because once you have Faith, anything, real or artificial, can remind you of the True Light which enlightens all. There is a place for everything, used creatively – even if liturgists balk!

of a friendship or relationship, breakdown of marriage, isolation. Memories of happier times flood back and threaten to overwhelm.

The keeping of December 25 as just one more day on the calendar is an understandable survival mechanism.

But Christmas cannot be ignored. Whether December 25 can be proven as the date on which Jesus of Nazareth was born or not, it is the date on which the Church invites all her children to mark his birthday. This intrusion of the divine into our world is no small matter.

While Easter might be the more significant feast (for what good would anything be to us if it were for this life only?), Christmas marks a profound mystery too: incarnation, the Word becoming flesh.

For those for whom Christmas is an unbearable endurance, the feast offers some solace: God became one of us and understands all that ails us. Jesus who wept at the grave of Lazarus weeps with us, even when sorrow afflicts us at his birth.

And, in the spirit of Advent hope, we cannot forget: on other Christmasses, we may smile again.

## Cribs are getting upwardly mobile

● I notice that Christmas cribs in churches are making quite a journey round the church. Fifty years ago, nativity scenes were found at the back, often near the door, accessible to anyone who might call in, just like the baptismal font.

With Vatican II, everything moved to the sanctuary, more visible to the people but strangely also, further away from the people.

The crib has in places even taken its place in front of the altar, almost blocking it out. But the pendulum swings on, and now the crib reappears in more discreet corners, close to the people once more...



## Could you help to save a poor helpless child?

The Little Way Association receives numerous requests from missionaries throughout the world asking for help to feed, support and educate needy, deprived children. They tell us of orphaned children left alone with no one to love or care for them, of families so poor that they cannot afford to send their children to school, and of street children, totally abandoned, hungry and homeless, experiencing much anguish and hardship during their most tender years. The whole future of these children often depends upon whether a missionary can find sufficient funds to care for them.

## Your Christmas gift will mean a chance of health and happiness for a deprived child

As we prepare to welcome the Christ child at Christmas, please consider making a gift to The Little Way Association's fund for children.

**Every euro you send will be gratefully received and sent without deduction, to enable a missionary priest or sister to carry the love, care and compassion of Christ to a deprived, abandoned or orphaned child. Thank you, and may God reward your generosity.**

In your prayers at the Crib, please ask the Holy Child to bless and protect all missionaries as they labour to bring the knowledge of His love and saving power to the world.



**The Little Way Association wishes all its supporters – past, present and future - a blessed Christmas and a peaceful New Year**

Thanks to your donations during 2019, many Roman Catholic Missionaries around the world have been assisted in their devoted and selfless service to the poor, the needy and the marginalised, and have brought the light of the Gospel to shine in the darkest places.

We pray for God's blessing on our generous friends and on our continuing efforts to make the spirituality of St Therese of Lisieux, patroness of missionaries, better known and loved. May we always follow in her footsteps, witnessing to God's love for all humanity.

In gratitude for your kindness a **CHRISTMAS NOVENA OF MASSES** is being offered for your intentions

Crossed POs and cheques should be sent and made payable to:

**THE LITTLE WAY ASSOCIATION**  
Sacred Heart House, 119 Cedars Rd, Clapham Common, London SW4 0PR  
(Registered Charity No. 235703) Tel 0044 20 76 22 0466  
[www.littlewayassociation.com](http://www.littlewayassociation.com)

I enclose €..... to be allocated to:

€..... **NEEDY CHILDREN**

€..... **NEEDS OF MISSIONARIES**

€..... **MASS OFFERINGS**  
(Please state number \_\_\_\_\_)

€..... **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](http://tinyurl.com/lwadonations)

**DONATIONS FOR THE MISSIONS ARE SENT WITHOUT DEDUCTION FOR ANY EXPENSES.**