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Fr Ron Rolheiser: Why so many are leaving their Churches – Page 30

The Irish Catholic

MARY KENNY

Modern life is so unforgiving

Page 5



MARTIN MANSERGH

Politics is more than glossy brochures

Page 8



MICHAEL KELLY

Will they ever come back to Mass?

Page 16



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Irish missionaries plead for us to share booster shots with poorer countries

Ruadhán Jones and Chai Brady

Irish missionaries ministering with some of the world's most vulnerable people in Africa have called on Ireland to give vaccine booster doses to developing nations "as a matter of justice". The missionaries warn of a "greater disaster" with just 6% of adults in Africa fully vaccinated as new strains of Covid-19 emerge.

Bishop John A. Ryan SMA, an Irishman based in Mzuzu, Malawi, said Ireland should "definitely" give its booster shots to developing nations once vulnerable and older people here are boosted.

"The current vaccine distribution is not equitable at all," he told *The Irish Catholic*, with many wealthy western countries rolling out plans to offer a third dose to all adults.

"In Malawi, there are ten million people aged over 18 – only 600,000 are fully vaccinated," he said.

Bishop Ryan insisted that "no one is safe until everyone is", adding that people there are facing "worry and uncertainty" over the future in the absence of vaccines. "The fear is that after Christmas there is the potential for greater disaster," he said.

» Continued on Page 2

One down, four to go...



Fr Michael Kelleher lights the first candle on the 2021 Advent wreath during Mass to celebrate the first Sunday in Advent in St Mona's Church, Sherkin, Co. Cork.

Poll predicts post-Covid Mass attendance will drop by 12%

Staff reporter

New research reveals that more than one-in-ten Catholics who regularly attended Mass before the pandemic say they will not return when all restrictions are lifted.

Carried out by Amárach Research in the Republic in mid-November, the survey found that a slim majority (53%) of pre-coronavirus Mass-goers have not returned, with 47% saying they are now back regularly attending Mass.

Parishioners cite a number of reasons including ongoing concerns about Covid-19, a dislike of wearing masks and a weakening of faith for not yet returning to Mass.

In a result that will prove worrying for Church leaders, when those who attended Mass in March 2020 but no longer do were asked if they will return to Mass when all pandemic restrictions are lifted 31% of them said they will. However, 23% (almost one in four) said that they had no intention of returning to Mass while 46% of former regulars said they did not know whether or not they would ever return to Mass.

If the figure for those who are adamant that they will not return were to bear out in reality, it would represent an overall fall in regular Mass attendance of 12% in just two years.

📖 See page 16.



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Inside this week

Jason Osborne

Circus scenes as Ireland appears before UN council

Page 14



Maria Byrne

Amusing to hear talk about saving Christmas

Page 32



David Quinn

The limits of 'my body, my choice'

Page 13



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New IC Deputy Editor appointed

Staff reporter

The Irish Catholic is pleased to announce that Chai Brady has been appointed Deputy Editor of the country's biggest and best-selling Catholic newspaper.

Mr Brady (26) is a native of Dublin and has worked as a multimedia journalist with The Irish Catholic since 2017 where he has contributed across a broad range of subjects to the newspaper's print, online and digital platforms as well as covering papal trips abroad and synods of bishops in Rome. Mr Brady has a particular interest in overseas development and has reported from Kenya and Myanmar.

Mr Brady took up his appointment on December 1. Welcoming the new appointment, Michael Kelly Editor of The Irish Catholic said: "I



look forward to working more closely with Chai as he takes up this new challenge at a time of great change both for the Church in Ireland and in the media landscape.

"Chai has the experience and background to continue to make a great contribution to the paper, something that has only strengthened as The Irish Catholic has worked to overcome the unique challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic," Mr Kelly said.

Doubt is an authentic experience of faith

The Most Reluctant Convert is a film that traces the spiritual journey of the renowned author of *The Chronicles of Narnia* Belfast-born C.S. Lewis.

It explores the impact friends had on the committed atheist and how they forced Lewis to question his own disbelief.

The title of the film is taken from Lewis' own description of the moment he acknowledged that belief was indeed for him. "You must picture me alone in that room in Magdalen, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England.

“Life is doubt, and faith without doubt is nothing but death”

"I did not then see what is now the most shining and obvious thing; the Divine humility which will accept a convert even



Editor's Comment
Michael Kelly



The memorial to C.S. Lewis in London's Westminster Abbey.

on such terms. The Prodigal Son at least walked home on his own feet. But who can duly adore that Love which will open the high gates to a prodigal who is brought in kicking, struggling, resentful, and darting his eyes in every direction for a chance of escape?" he later wrote.

Experience

Doubt is a key experience of the life of a believer. The Spanish philosopher Miguel de Unamuno summarised it thus: "life is doubt, and faith without doubt is nothing but death".

It was something that Pope Francis reflected on recently when he told pilgrims in Rome that "a faith without doubts cannot advance".

Missionaries plead for us to share booster shots with poor countries

Continued from Page 1

"We don't know what will be coming down the road," the Irish missionary said. "There will be more mutations and variations...vaccines could prevent this.

Another Irish missionary, Fr Michael Walsh CSSp, based in Zambia, where the Omicron strain has also been found, insisted that it is a "matter of justice" that developed nations help developing ones to access the vaccine.

"That is vital because the developing nations need help in donations," Fr Walsh continued. "If they don't get EU or US donations, they can't meet the expenses."

It comes as Ireland announced that it has donated 800,000 doses spread between Nigeria and Uganda. However, officials from the World Health Organisation (WHO) have warned that this is a drop in the ocean.

Fr Walsh said the situation is urgent, as new restrictions were introduced in the country on Tuesday, which will be enforced by fines.

"People will be barred from stores and from businesses in so many different ways. It's causing a lot of concern," he concluded.

Fr Alan Neville MSC, based in South Sudan, also spoke

up about the inequitable distribution, describing booster shots as being like "giving someone who has a life jacket another life jacket - and then most people [in developing nations] don't have any life jackets at all".

"We're doubling down on the people in Ireland, which is fine, but you have the vast majority of people who are not vaccinated in Africa, they don't have access to vaccines," Fr Neville said.

Meanwhile, the head of the Irish bishop's bioethics committee Bishop Kevin Doran said the Church's appeal for fair distribution of vaccines has "fallen on deaf ears".

Quoting an earlier statement from the Irish bishops, Dr Doran said that "access to healthcare is a fundamental human right".

"This appeal seems to have fallen on deaf ears, especially the deaf ears of European Governments," Bishop Doran continued.

"We need to show leadership on this and we need to do it now. Even if the demands of love of neighbour do not persuade us, common sense must convince us that none of us is truly safe until all of us are safe."

doubt. As a faith community, it is also something that we too often resist. I often think that where there is huge resistance around doubt it is largely due to a lack of faith formation. It is almost as if people sometimes think that asking questions will expose the Faith to ridicule or that, perhaps, it will cause further doubt. But I have found that what affects faith more than anything else is that when questions arise, they are quickly (and embarrassingly) dismissed and the questioner seen as a problem.

Younger

Especially to younger people, this signals to them that the Church may not have an answer and they walk away.

But doubt is also not a destination and should never be held up as the ideal place to perpetually find oneself. Doubt is like hunger; it invites us to nourishment rather than constant wonder about our hunger.

As the Pope said recently, doubts "reveal the need and desire to enter more fully into the depths of the mystery of God".

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‘Brave’ St Columba to be celebrated in new documentary



Chai Brady

A new documentary celebrating 1,500 years since the birth of the “powerful” and “brave” St Columba will be released next week.

The dramatic reconstruction of the warrior and poet’s life, *Calum Cille: An Naomh Dána/Columba: The Bold Saint*, will be broadcast simultaneously on the BBC, ALBA and TG4 on December 7 at 9.30pm and will be available on the BBC iPlayer within the UK for up to 30 days after broadcast.

Remarking on St Columba’s achievements, Dr Niamh Wycherley of Maynooth University says in the programme: “Arguably Colmcille’s most important and lasting legacy is the great swathe of ecclesiastical foundations that he

established across Ireland and parts of western, now, Scotland.

“Iona of course was his primary foundation, the one he’s most rightly famous for. However he also founded other major ecclesiastical institutions – Kells and Durrow. These primary foundations of Colmcille produced some of our most precious and famous historical artefacts - the Book of Kells, the Book of Durrow, early collections of the Irish Annals. These are incredibly important texts in their own right, but also physical objects,” she said.

Battles

Though known by many as the Dove of Peace, he was at the centre of bloody battles, before founding a monastery on Iona, laying the foundations for the island to become

a beacon of civilisation in the early Middle Ages.

Viewers will journey from Donegal to Iona, uncovering the truths behind the myths surrounding St Columba who came to be one of the most revered individuals in both Scottish and Irish history, as well as gaining international renown over the centuries.

Regarding St Columba’s legacy, in the documentary Dr Duncan Sneddon, from the University of Edinburgh, said: “There’s a difference between Columba the man who lived on Earth and the historical figure who was recreated in the generations after his death - and they all create their own Columba. But they all tell us something important. They all put together a Columba who was powerful, brave and important in different ways.”

Don’t miss special souvenir edition marking 100 years of the Legion

Staff reporter

To mark the centenary of the Legion of Mary, *The Irish Catholic* will next week publish a specially-dedicated souvenir edition looking at the remarkable life of Frank Duff and the tremendous work of the enormous lay organisation he founded.

Charting the humble beginnings of the legion to being the largest movement ever to come out of Ireland, the special edition will look at Frank Duff’s legacy and talk to people who knew him well.



It will concentrate on the work of the legion in Ireland and around the world and look at Frank Duff’s influence on the Second Vatican Council and the lay vocation within the Church.

To celebrate the centenary, *The Irish Catholic* is offering a special bulk discount of 50 copies of the special edition for just €50 represented at 80% discount on the cover price. To order copies of this special edition, call 01.687.4094 (00.353.1.687.4094 from NI).

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'Unwise' to discuss final synod processes, bishop says following laity concerns

Chai Brady

It would be "unwise and unhelpful" to decide how the final listening report will be handled at the early stages of Ireland's national synod, according to Bishop Paul Dempsey of Achonry following concerns about the process.

A number of leading laypeople have called on the Irish bishops to return their final listening report when it is ready to send to Pope Francis back to individual dioceses for ratification by laypeople.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Bishop Dempsey said dioceses are just at the initial stage of the listening process. "We're at the

listening stage at this point in time, I think to be talking about the end stages of this – what's going in to Rome, what's not going in to Rome – it's too early to talk about all of that, all I know is that it will be done synodally, it will be done in a sense of walking together whatever goes in to Rome.

"I think our focus at this stage, which is the most important part, is the listening process and how we can most effectively listen to what people want to say to the Church today," he said.

"What people have said and what goes to Rome, I don't think we've worked out the details of that yet and I think it probably would be unwise and unhealthy to actually stream-

line whatever is going to happen in 12 months' time or whatever it is, I don't think now is the time to be doing that."

Patricia Melvin is one of the lay leaders of the Killala diocesan Placing Hope in Faith's Action Committee which is tasked with implementing the findings of the 2018 Killala diocesan assembly.

Recalling her Killala assembly experience at the Association of Catholic Priests (ACP) conference in November she said clericalism is very much alive and raised a number of concerns about the relationship between laypeople and the clerical church in a synodal process.

She voiced particular concern about the

intention of the bishops to prepare "a synthesis" of the views of Catholics in each diocese, before submitting this to Rome.

"We are concerned about the manner in which diocesan findings will be communicated up the line. It is essential that what is said at local level is what is actually forwarded in any 'synthesising' that is carried out. The best way to ensure this we would suggest is to return finalised documents to the people for ratification."

Peter McLoughlin, a lay leader in Killala diocese and charged with the implementation of its findings, also expressed concern regarding synods in Ireland and worldwide asking, "Will bishops report what people are saying?"

Big changes for Cistercians as abbot of Melleray resigns

Staff reporter

Dom Richard Purcell has resigned as abbot of the largest Cistercian monastery in the country. Dom Richard, who made history in 2009 by becoming the country's youngest abbot at just 33, has led Mount Melleray since moving from Roscrea in 2017. However, he tendered his resignation last week.

Order of Cistercians

A statement from the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance (OCSO) said that "over the last year allegations

were made against Dom Richard Purcell, Abbot of Mount Melleray Abbey (Ireland). Because of this the Abbot General asked for a regular visitation, whose primary object was to establish if there was any substance to the allegations.

"The investigation concluded that the allegations were unfounded. However, for personal reason, Dom Richard offered his resignation. Abbot General, having received the consent of his council, accepted the resignation," the statement added.

Dom Richard served as abbot of

Mount St Joseph Abbey in Roscrea, Co. Tipperary before being elected to lead Mount Melleray eight years later.

Serious health problem

Meanwhile, the Cistercians also announced that the worldwide Abbot General of the order Irishman Dom Eamon Fitzgerald is to step down due to a "serious health problem". He had been due to offer his resignation in 2020, but this was postponed due to the pandemic. His successor is due to be elected at a general chapter of the order in February.

St Angela's bullish over ethos as merger gets green light

Ruadhán Jones

St Angela's College Sligo are confident that its Catholic ethos will be protected, as the Minister for Higher Education has given the go-ahead for its incorporation into Sligo IT.

The Irish Catholic understands that the board of St Angela's is satisfied with the protections being put in place for the new incorporation.

It will have similar legacy

protections to mergers like Mater Dei's and St Patrick's College's with Dublin City University.

A Mericci Institute – named after the founder of the Ursuline order – was also established in June of this year to ensure the continuing legacy of the Ursuline Order – which founded St Angela's – in what will be a new education setting, *The Sligo Champion* reports.

IT Sligo together with St Angela's College and the Ursuline Union signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and a Data Sharing Protocol back in May, and St Angela's will now be one of the nine campuses of the new North West TU.

Special prize for saints



Primary Seven Pupils in Northern Ireland took part in the recent competition researching the life of St Joseph, St Colmcille or Blessed Carlo Acutis. The winners were presented with special prizes, sponsored by the Knights of St Columbanus.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Mass marks 125 years of St Vincent de Paul in Bangor

St Comgall's Conference of St Vincent de Paul (SVP), Bangor in Co. Down, celebrated 125 years of service to the local community in a Mass dedicated to current and past members of SVP at the weekend.

Celebrant Canon Joseph Gunn spoke of the sterling work done throughout the years by the society for those in need during the Mass.

Mary Waide, SVP north regional president, said that she "appreciated that in the last 20 months SVP has been presented with unimaginable challenges" due to the pandemic but in spite of these challenges, "members of St Comgall's have risen to the challenge and continued to provide essential assistance in our local Bangor community to those in need," she said.

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Modern life is so unforgiving...



Mary Kenny

I had a conversation with an old rake the other day about past times and past sins, and their inclination to surface in the present. It occurred after a rather public accusation made by the Tory MP, Caroline Noakes, that she had been “groped” by Stanley Johnson – father of British prime minister Boris – back in 2003/4. And now Stanley’s being investigated for the alleged grope, and for allegedly having told Ms Noakes impertinently “you’ve got a lovely seat”, as he smacked her *derriere*. The old rake – a chap in his seventies – mused:

“How many of my generation are shaking in our shoes at the disclosure of some episode of bad behaviour back in the day?” How fortunate, he went on, that he wasn’t famous or well-known. Hopefully his obscurity would keep his sins a matter between himself and the Almighty.

Forgives

“At least the Almighty forgives,” he pondered. “Modern life, by contrast, is so unforgiving.”

Looking back, he said, there were many times when what started out as a bit of slap-and-tickle with a young lady turned into an episode that would now be considered unacceptable. And, if the young woman seemed to be a party girl, well, as Cole Porter once wrote, “anything goes”.

“Of course, I am mortified to reflect on my bad behaviour and youthful follies,” the old rake went on. “But then,

it was the 1960s and 70s, wasn’t it? We were in the full flush of the ‘permissive society’. Anything did go!” Nowadays, he wondered sometimes if we were moving back into a puritanical age, like the middle Victorians, who covered the legs of pianos out of modesty.

“The Church, particularly in Ireland, is sometimes criticised for having over-emphasised sexual sins in the past”

We can’t blame the spirit of an age on our sins and misdemeanours, but I believe the ‘permissive

society’ does have a lot to answer for, all the same. In breaking the boundaries of previous restrictions, the message was amplified that there were no boundaries.

Liberated

Everyone was to be sexually liberated, and anyone who didn’t agree was guilty of “bourgeois repression”.

A younger generation now, setting new rules and new boundaries, insisting on new forms of respect, may be just trying to undo some of the damage that unrestrained sexual liberation inflicted.

The Church, particularly in Ireland, is sometimes criticised for having over-emphasised sexual sins in the past. Maybe so. But sexual sins are real – as we can see from the narratives

around, for example, the late Jeffrey Epstein, demanding the provision of young girls for his pleasure.

“There were many times when what started out as a bit of slap-and-tickle with a young lady turned into an episode that would now be considered unacceptable”

The old rake of my conversational exchange wasn’t in any such odious arena, but he often reads the headlines about the past catching up on some celebrity and thinks “there but for the grace of God...”

The need to be needed

Stephen Sondheim, who died last week age 91, wrote the lyrics of *West Side Story*, based on Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*.

Sondheim also wrote some great lyrics in many other songs. *Being Alive* is a fascinating example whose words might make the basis of a compelling sermon about love. The words define love in a quite paradoxical way: “somebody need me too much, somebody know me too well”

and “somebody pull me up short/and put me through hell”. The singer yearns for someone to “make me confused...let me be used” and “someone to force you to care” as well as “somebody [to] hurt me too deep”.

Truthful

Being Alive is so truthful about the human need to be needed, or even to be ‘put through hell’, which might sound alarming in other contexts. Here, it depicts

love’s acceptance of emotional suffering.

The musical composition is also terrific. (Neil Patrick Harris does a very fine performance of it on YouTube.)

The new movie of *West Side Story*, directed by Steven Spielberg, looks ravishing and more authentic in its Hispanic cast than the 1961 version (with Natalie Wood). The Catholic devotional side of the Puerto Rican culture is portrayed with warmth and sincerity.

“How many of my generation are shaking in our shoes at the disclosure of some episode of bad behaviour back in the day?”



Panto legends Jimmy O’Dea and Maureen Potter in *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* at the Gaiety in 1963.

● It would be a great pity for children, if they should be disallowed from attending a Christmas pantomime because of Covid-19 restrictions. Some of my jolliest childhood memories are associated with the Christmas pantomime, usually at Dublin’s Gaiety Theatre, with the peerless Maureen Potter and Jimmy O’Dea.

Panto is entertainment with a long history – its roots reach back to the Italian *commedia dell’arte* tradition.

Panto is not only singing, dancing and make-believe; it also contained playful

notions about identity and gender. The dame was a man, the principal boy was a girl, and children perfectly understood that people liked to pretend to be someone differing from reality. *Travestie* – transvestite dressing – goes back centuries, too. Today, these ideas have become serious political statements, but panto showcased them benignly, in an unthreatening way.

Panto also imparted lessons about facing fears (*Jack and the Beanstalk*), overcoming disadvantages (*Cinderella*) and being resilient and persistent (*Dick Whittington*).

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ARAD21-02/008

Forgoing Christmas nativity described as 'bizarre' by TD

Chai Brady

Independent Dáil members have described as "bizarre" Government suggestions that families might forgo Christmas nativity plays this festive season while sports stadiums and night clubs are full.

It comes as the Ombudsman for Children Niall Muldoon warned that the suggestions have a disproportionate impact

on children and young people since no such plans have been formulated for adults.

The cabinet on Tuesday said that proposed restrictions on children attending more than one event per week would be optional. However, this has been widely criticised by parents who see this as leaving them between a rock and a hard place with events not banned, but strongly discouraged.

Independent TD Mattie McGrath told *The Irish Catholic* that "the rules and regulations are bizarre. You could have a nativity play in a nightclub, in a pub, you could do it in a gym, you could do it in a church but you can't do it in a school.

"These are the same people that told us the schools are safe places. Now all of a sudden they are unsafe," he said.

Kerry Independent Deputy

Michael Healy-Rae asked the question as to whether the focus on nativity plays might be part of a wider agenda.

"It doesn't surprise me that this would be a great time to try and do away with the whole idea of nativity plays and all of that, because it would suit a certain agenda by a lot of people".

He said that if this is the agenda, he hopes that people "will not lie down for this

because while we want to do everything that is right and proper and safe, it doesn't make sense that thousands of people can attend other venues, but whatever you do don't dare go to the nativity play in case something bad happens there.

"If they could rub God out of the next couple of weeks now and do away with every reference to God and to the birth of Jesus, they would be delighted," he said.

Impassioned plea from Irish missionary for prayers for Ethiopia

Ruadhán Jones

Fr Paddy Moran CSSp, who served as a missionary in Ethiopia for 11 years, made a passionate plea for prayers for the war torn country

The Spiritan's plea comes as the Irish Government advised its citizens to leave Ethiopia immediately, over concerns for their safety.

Ethiopia, Fr Moran said, is "the birthplace of life", but is also now "a land engulfed in bitter and violent conflict. The news these days is of war, displacement and large-scale food-insecurity".

Fr Moran said it is difficult to hear the "distressing" stories from friends "filled with stress, upset and anxiety".

"When I read of stories of battles, and of cities being seized by different sides in the conflict, I think of the individual stories of those whose lives have been so terribly affected," Fr Moran continued.

"I think of the lives that have been lost. I think of the wounded, the grieving, those forced to move for their own protection."

Fr Moran said that he himself is praying for his friends in Ethiopia, and called on Catholics in Ireland to keep Ethiopia in their prayers this Advent season.

"The people of Ethiopia will need all that strength and perseverance as they carry the heavy cross of suffering," he finished.

NI first minister quits Free Presbyterian Church over centenary service

Staff reporter

Paul Givan, a DUP MLA, has resigned from the Free Presbyterian Church due to a dispute regarding October's ecumenical centenary service in Armagh, according to reports.

It is believed Mr Givan resigned rather than face disciplinary action overseen by church elders, *The Irish News* reported.

The number of DUP MLAs who are full members of the Free Presbyterian Church is now in single figures.

Asked about the report of his resignation on BBC Radio Ulster, he said it was a private matter and "something I've

worked through within my own church".

He said it was "appropriate as first minister" for him to attend the centenary church service, which took place in the Church of Ireland St Patrick's Cathedral.

The Free Presbyterian Church issued a statement before the service saying it was "deliberately planned to promote the unbiblical ethos of religious ecumenism".

The statement said the service organised by the leaders of Ireland's main Christian Churches did "not represent the views of thousands of Ulster Protestants who do not accept the Roman Catholic Church as a Christian Church".

NEWS IN BRIEF

Archbishop laments ravages of crack cocaine in capital

Archbishop of Dublin Dermot Farrell has warned that the capital is suffering from an "epidemic" as drug use continues to decimate families across the city. Dr Farrell encouraged a societal response to the deteriorating crack cocaine crisis in the country.

Speaking at a Mass in St Andrew's Church on Westland Row, Archbishop Farrell warned that "the causes of the crack cocaine epidemic we are experiencing in this city are complex and deep seated" but he believed that "based on the good will and the many dedicated efforts of community groups, government and religious leaders, that these causes can be effectively addressed if we all work together.

"It is a societal issue and societal issues require a societal response," he said. "There must be willingness to journey with the families whose members are ensnared by unscrupulous peddlers of drugs, peddlers of death".

Retired lecturer recognised for spirituality contribution

Dr Michael O'Sullivan SJ, has been praised for his "invaluable contribution to scholarship in spirituality across the globe" by Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) as he was appointed as the institute's first emeritus lecturer.

Dr Suzanne Denieffe, head of the school of humanities at WIT said that she believed that this was "a very fitting and appropriate award for" the Jesuit priest.

"We are so grateful for his leadership in the area of spirituality studies in the school," she said.

Fr O'Sullivan acted as programme leader of the MA in applied spirituality in the school of humanities. He was also the founding programme leader of the MA at WIT from 2016 until August 2021.

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Martin Mansergh

The View



Politics is more than re-editing glossy brochures

As stated here before, there is an imbalance in public discourse between civil rights and civic responsibility, with not enough emphasis on the latter. Not just religion but community is about coming together and showing mutual support and consideration. St Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews (10: 24-5) speaks about spurring one another to love and good works, not forsaking, as some do, the assembly of ourselves together, but exhorting one another.

During the current Covid-19 pandemic, despite some lapses, society in the Republic has rallied impressively to try and protect both ourselves and each other. Most restrictions on our liberties have been necessary, especially pre-vaccination, but the preferred emphasis has been on exhortation and persuasion. Irish people do

not respond to coercion. The best approach may vary from country to country, each with its own political culture. South Africa should be praised for alerting the world to a new variant.

“Most restrictions on our liberties have been necessary, especially pre-vaccination, but the preferred emphasis has been on exhortation and persuasion”

While democratic societies recognise the right of conscientious objection, it is hard for a medical profession under prolonged strain and immense pressure to have to treat avoid-

able infection causing hospitalisation and sometimes death, where adults have chosen not to be vaccinated. There are occasions, when uncertain or sceptical, we should humbly subordinate our personal judgment to the overwhelming consensus on what best protects everyone's right to life.

Crisis

There are people in every society who use an existential crisis as an opportunity to propagate conspiracy theories and antagonism towards those who exercise responsible authority. Because Ireland has limited safety margins, fortunately people here are less easily persuaded by them.

The miracle of creation that we enjoy on this planet and the long-term sustainability of human life are threatened by the side-effects of natural resources used up in the accelerated development of recent decades. Both collective and personal responsibility is required. In the past 20 years, Irish society has shown that it is capable of acting together to see that everyone wears seatbelts, to ban smoking in pubs, to ban smoky coal, to reduce drastically the number of plastic bags littering the countryside, to separate household waste, and to rely increasingly on alternative energy, both wind and solar.

Just as the most advanced EU economy Germany is shutting down its last nuclear power station, experts here advocate nuclear power to reduce emissions. Confronted with that advice, a puzzled Taoiseach Bertie Ahern once asked what constituency the experts had in mind. As a young diplomat present at an EEC energy council in the late 1970s, I was approached by a senior English council official, who asked would Ireland like to have “some lovely lolly” in return for storing nuclear waste. I was so disgusted that I reported it to no one. If we care for future generations, we should not bequeath them waste that is toxic for millennia.

Emissions

Emissions could be reduced with appropriate incentives. Heating and light are essen-



Tánaiste Leo Varadkar, Taoiseach Micheál Martin, Transport Minister Eamon Ryan and Minister for public Expenditure Michael McGrath with the latest draft of the National Development Plan.

tial, but they are often used extravagantly in larger homes and organisations.

Ever keener consumer prices encourage attempts to expand agricultural production to compensate. Consent to limit farm output in this country which has one of the best natural environments for food production will require effective accompanying measures to sustain farm incomes.

“Just as the most advanced EU economy Germany is shutting down its last nuclear power station, experts here advocate nuclear power to reduce emissions”

Many things can be done that are rarely talked about. In 1950s America, people drove around in enormous cars, later described as ‘gas-guzzlers’, causing bad air pollution. Their size was scaled down. The car industry persuades people that they need expensive armoured cars, even for mainly driving around urban areas. On motorways, one is regularly passed by cars far exceeding the speed limit. There should be more rigorous enforcement, as happens in America, but for environmental not just road safety reasons.

We are told priority has to be given to public transport. Yet needed investment projects are being long-fingered

rather than fast-tracked, with a 10-20 year time-frame, at least. This country was provided with most of its motorway network, including the port tunnel, to great economic and road safety benefit over a 12 year period ending in 2010, because it was politically driven. Today, transport policy decisions seem to be more in the hands of the National Transportation Authority, who appear more concerned about preventing financial overruns than they are about endless time overruns. Does anyone do cost-benefit analyses on delayed infrastructure? Governing must be about more than re-editing glossy prospectuses, where few projects either proceed or are excluded, but about getting things done within a reasonable time-frame. Focus could be given to smaller projects that would make a difference, like completing the rail line to Navan, or creating a link from Derry to Letterkenny. The perfect but unaffordable engineering solution is often the enemy of the good. A surface rail link to the airport would cost a fraction of the metro, and could later be connected to the Dublin-Belfast railway.

Residents

Dublin Airport, heavily used by residents of the North with its extensive global connections, perfectly illustrates the single island economy promoted by the late Sir George Quigley, which the stillborn Council of Ireland in 1920 and 1974 and

today's North-South bodies intended should complement east-west economic relations between these islands. North-South trade was too long far below the norm for bordering jurisdictions. It is outrageous that increased commerce across a land border that even David Lloyd George accepted was illogical should be denounced as ‘a diversion of trade’ that must be corrected.

“Ever keener consumer prices encourage attempts to expand agricultural production to compensate”

Constitutional status is separate from trade or other political arrangements. I sometimes think that that status, like the smile on the Cheshire cat, will be the last thing to disappear.

It has been a wonderful privilege since 2015 to write for the attentive readership of *The Irish Catholic*, particularly coming from another Christian tradition. Loyalty to one's religion through thick and thin is - or should be - an aid to good citizenship and civic responsibility. In passing on the baton, let me confide that when something puts me in a good mood, I often hum the sublime chorus of Haydn's Creation, “The Heavens are telling the Glory of God”.

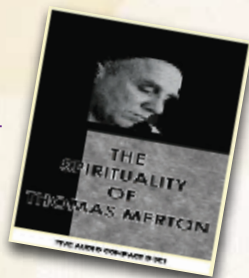
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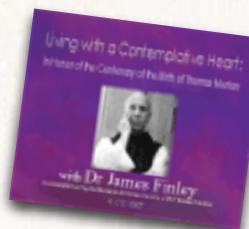
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“Society in the Republic has rallied impressively to try and protect both ourselves and each other”

Soc Dem's education bill an attack on pluralism – Aontú

Ruadhán Jones

The Social Democrat's Sex Education Bill introduced into the Dáil last week is an "attack on pluralism and diversity", said Aontú leader Peadar Tóibín.

The Meath-West TD accused the Social Democrats of trying to "force their ethos on other families who don't want it".

"We believe that all parents should be able to send their children to a school that

reflects their ethos," Mr Tóibín said in the Dáil. "This by definition is the pluralist education model that a republic should have.

"The Social Democrat bill is an attack on pluralism. It is an attack of diversity."

He added that he believes "the Social Democrat members here today should be able to send their children to any school that reflects their ethos. But I oppose strongly the Social Democrat denying parents with a different ethos doing the same".

The Aontú leader was responding to Social

Democrat TD Gary Gannon, who called for a standardised sex education, adding "that health, relationships and sex education should not in the first instance be linked to ethos or characteristic spirit".

Mr Tóibín defended the quality of Catholic education, saying that the Irish people "owe a debt of gratitude to the Catholic Church.

"It stepped in to provide generations of Irish people the highest quality education when the state had either no interest or was unable to do it."

Having said that, Mr Tóibín agreed "that there are too many Catholic schools in Ireland at the moment. We support divestment of Catholic schools so that the education system reflects the diversity of the society that we live in today".

However, he warned that the bill is a "one size fits all approach", which will allow the minister for education to determine ethos – parents and students will have to "like it or lump it".

Pope Francis names new envoy to Medjugorje

Chai Brady

Pope Francis has appointed a long-time Vatican diplomat to be his personal envoy to Medjugorje, following the death of Polish Archbishop Henryk Hoser in August.

Pastoral situation

Dr Hoser had overseen the pastoral situation in the shrine, the site of reported Marian apparitions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, since 2017. He died in Warsaw at age 78 after a long illness.

Pope Francis at the weekend named Archbishop Aldo Cavalli, 75, special apostolic visitor to the parish community of Medjugorje for an indefinite period.

Pope Francis first appointed a papal envoy to Medjugorje in 2017, with the directive to oversee pastoral needs in the town where children first reported experiencing apparitions of the Mother of God in 1981. These apparitions are said to have continued almost daily since their first occurrence, with three of the original six – who are now

adults – continuing to receive apparitions every afternoon.

In 2014, a Vatican commission ended a nearly four-year-long investigation into the doctrinal and disciplinary aspects of Medjugorje and submitted a document to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Medjugorje

The Pope granted Catholics permission to organise pilgrimages to Medjugorje in 2019, though the Church has not yet given a verdict on the apparitions.

Cyprus priest says papal trip encourages Christians on the peripheries

Staff reporter

Ahead of today's visit by Pope Francis to Cyprus, Fr Jerzy Kraj, Vicar General of Holy Cross Franciscan Monastery in Nicosia, said the Pontiff's decision to visit the tiny Catholic community is a concrete applica-

tion of "his message to go to the peripheries, to encounter small communities and to encourage them".

When the visit was first announced, "it was a surprise" for locals, Fr Kraj said, noting that there are other major European countries, like Spain, which still have not had a papal

visit, whereas Cyprus has had two in just 11 years, after Pope Benedict XVI's visit in June 2010.

Pope Francis will arrive in Cyprus today (Thursday), where he will stay for two days before moving on to Greece, where he will be on an official visit from December 4-6.

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– Irish Jesuits International Director, John K. Guiney SJ

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Roots in the past



Fr Mark Mohan, Fr Matthew Mollin, Bishop of Meath Tom Deenihan and Archbishop Dermot Farrell are pictured after the bi-centenary celebrations of Ballivor parish, Co. Meath, held during a triduum in honour of St Columbanus, concluding November 23. The grand-uncle of Archbishop Farrell served as Parish Priest of Ballivor from 1908 - 1950.

Presentation Ballingarry celebrates 150 years



Sr Concepta O'Brien, school secretary of 40 years, Sheila Delaney photographed with her husband Richard and Presentation Provincial, Sr Mary Hanrahan.



Opening procession.



L-R Sr. Patricia Wall, former principal and only remaining sister living in Ballingarry, with Kathleen Ryan Chairperson of the Board of Management.



Former Chair Board of Management Veronica Maher photographed with current chair Kathleen Ryan.

Ruadhán Jones

Staff, students, Presentation Sisters and former staff members of Presentation Ballingarry gathered last week to celebrate their 150th anniversary with an anniversary Mass.

Archbishop of Cashel and Emly Kieran O'Reilly concelebrated Mass for Presentation Ballingarry with parish priest and school chaplain Fr Derry Quirke.

In his homily, Archbishop O'Reilly paid tribute to "the trials and hardships these sisters endured as they established schools in an era without electricity or running water".

Referring to the Gospel, Dr O'Reilly praised the sisters for remaining faith-

ful to the Christ's message and for bearing witness to the Gospel at home and overseas.

He concluded by calling on students to reach out beyond themselves, to be concerned about the world they live in and to remember, school is not just about exam results but also about "fostering each other to place our talents and gifts to service the world".

The liturgy concluded with Presentation Sr Mary Hanrahan congratulating the Sisters and staff who served in Ballingarry and wishing the school continued success.

She thanked principal Ms Angela Cahill for her leadership and felt confident that the flame of Nano's lantern would continue to burn bright.



Porch display arranged by past pupil, Roisin Troy.



Principal of Ballingarry Primary school with Deputy Principal of Presentation Ballingarry, Brian Moran.



Pope John Paul II recipients photographed with Archbishop Kieran O'Reilly and their parents L-R.



Former Principal Sr Anne Nevin, former Home Economics teacher Sr Kathleen Barrett with former student and niece of the late Sr Xavier, Elma O' Mahony.



A selection of retirees and present staff photographed with Archbishop Kieran.



Nancy Dunne who nursed the elderly sisters in the convent, former school parent Josie Fitzgerald with current parent Bernie Fitzgerald and current staff member Teresa Regan.

Irish public urged to help respond to world's largest hunger crisis

- 27 million people caught up in hunger crisis in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)
- 3.4 million children under 5 acutely malnourished
- New Christmas fundraising campaign launched by Concern Worldwide in response to provide life-saving therapeutic food

CONCERN worldwide

Kevin Jenkinson

A grandmother has told how an Irish aid organisation helped save her baby grandson from starving to death in the Democratic Republic of Congo – where 27 million people are caught in a devastating hunger crisis.

“For about a month he refused food and the medicine the doctor gave him, but eventually he started to take them”

Caustasie Kisoke Mukala (61) said Concern Worldwide helped keep her grandson Emmanuel (20 months) alive after she brought him to a health centre they support weighing just 3kg and in an emaciated state.

“He was so weak and underweight that he did not play or move around like other children his age,” said Caustasie, who lives

in a small one room hut made of mud and straw in the Kiambi village in south-east DRC, Central Africa.

“The doctors told me he was malnourished. I was extremely worried.

“For about a month he refused food and the medicine the doctor gave him, but eventually he started to take them.

“His weight is now back to normal and he has healed and I am incredibly grateful.”

The impoverished grandmother, who earns as little as €1 a day ploughing fields, explained that she has been caring for Emmanuel and his four-year-old sister since their mother died weeks after giving birth. Their father is working in a faraway mine to repay family debts.

Family

Things were much better for her family until a few years ago when they were forced to flee their home village where they owned land and sold fish.

“We led a normal life, but then suddenly our village was attacked. We either stayed and died or ran. The fear kept us alive,” said Caustasie, whose husband was killed by arrows during the onslaught.

Concern said an estimated 3.4 million children under five in the DRC are acutely malnourished, which is fatal if not treated, and that they need donations to help save as many of them as they can.

The aid agency launched a fun-



Caustasie and her grandchildren attend an appointment at a Concern-supported health centre. Photo: Hugh Kinsella Cunningham/Concern Worldwide

draising campaign that will continue over the Christmas period when they will continue to provide therapeutic food, like Plumpy Nut, and other supports and training to help children suffering from malnutrition.

“We are currently witnessing one of the biggest hunger crises the world has seen in recent times,” said Concern’s DRC Country Director, Russel Gates.

“The DRC is the second largest country in the African continent with a population of over 90 million people”

“Over 27 million people, one quarter of the DRC’s population, are fighting for survival due to hunger caused by poor harvests, conflict and disease.

“Young children are suffering and need our help to survive, which is why we are urging the public to give what they can to help us save more children like Emmanuel.”

Concern has been working in the DRC since 1994, when it was called Zaire, in response to the refugee crisis that followed the Rwandan genocide.

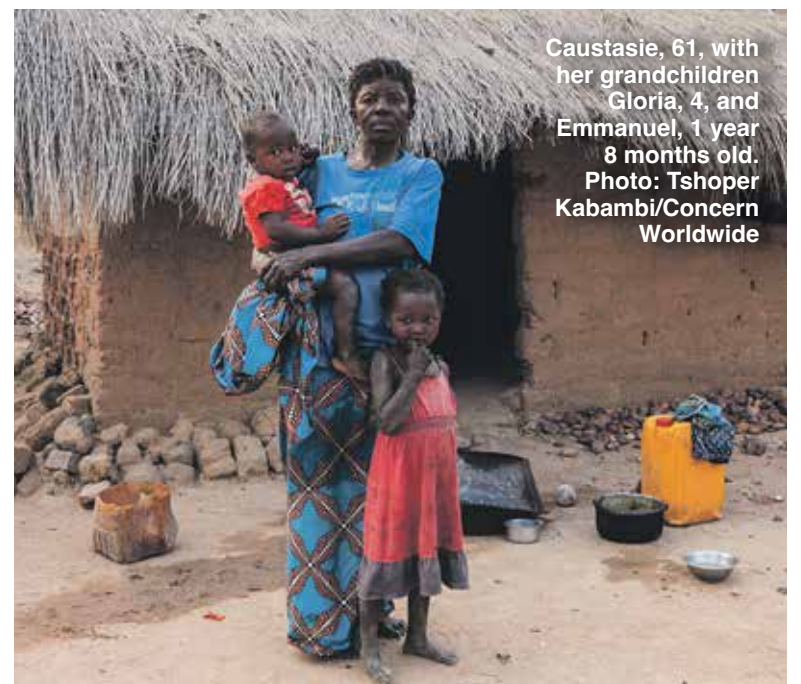
They have been providing both emergency and development aid in response to its many challenges that include the homelessness caused by

ongoing armed conflicts and outbreaks of Ebola and COVID-19.

The DRC is the second largest country in the African continent with a population of over 90 million people and it remains one of the poorest countries in the world despite being rich in natural resources.



Caustasie earns as little as €1 a day ploughing fields. Photo: Hugh Kinsella Cunningham/Concern Worldwide



Caustasie, 61, with her grandchildren Gloria, 4, and Emmanuel, 1 year 8 months old. Photo: Tshoper Kabambi/Concern Worldwide

To find out more about and how to support Concern’s work, call **0818 410 510** or email **info@concern.net**.

Prepare a way for the Lord

“The Word of God came to John son of Zechariah, in the wilderness.”

I really love Advent. Each season of the liturgical year has its own rich spirituality, but I think Advent has the message that is most relevant at the moment, at least in the state of the Church in Western Europe. Advent is the season of hope in the middle of winter. The Church here is experiencing winter in many ways: very few priests under the age of 70 and there are very few seminarians studying for the priesthood. How many young people are coming to Mass? Society has huge problems relating to drugs, breakup of marriage and virtually every night the news tells of another murder. The restrictions, anxieties and financial problems due to the prolongation of the Corona virus have plunged many people into a dark place.

The turn of the tide

Having grown up beside the sea I am aware that the tide has to go out fully before it starts to come back in. How long do we have to wait for the turn of the tide? When will it happen that people will realise that we need something more in life...some sort of belief, some sturdy code of morality, some basis for hope? We are in a right mess, a wilderness. I draw hope from the line in today's Gospel that the Word of God came to John the Baptist in the wilderness. It wasn't in Rome, the political centre, or in Jerusalem, the religious capital, but in the wilderness.

Great saints

Church history shows that the lowest times produced the greatest saints and reformers. Back in the 12th Century people like Saints Dominic and Francis returned to a simple style of living according to the Gospel.

Without planning to be reformers, they hit the right button and thousands followed them. Somebody said that nothing can stop an idea that has reached its time. Similarly, in the mess of a very political Church in the 16th Century, all of a sudden there emerged an extraordinary bevy of saints and reformers like Ignatius of Loyola, Francis de Sales, Philip Neri, Charles Borromeo, Jane Frances de Chantal and many more, too many to mention. The wilderness of the time was quickly transformed into a wonderful garden of humble administrators, enthusiastic mission-

The Sunday Gospel

Fr Silvester O'Flynn OFM Cap.



aries, founders of hospitals, preachers, spiritual writers and so on.

Advent is a season of waiting. Waiting can be a time of agitation and fear of the worst. But waiting could also be a time of expectancy and hope, like children looking forward to Santa Claus. Advent's waiting is a time to prepare for the celebration of the coming of the Saviour.

Who can celebrate Advent? Only those who know their need of a Saviour. Unless you honestly face the needs of the Church, the mess in society and your personal problems, you will not appreciate the coming of the Saviour.

Prepare a way for the Lord

John the Baptist left the comforts of family life to embrace an ascetical way of life in a wilderness. In those days, the unproductive area of the wilderness, home to untamed beasts, was regarded as a territory controlled by evil spirits. That is why people who felt the call to a life of fasting and prayer went into the wilderness, as it were to confront the evil spirits on their own pitch. And it was there, in the wilderness, that the word of God came to John, inspiring him to return to normal society to prepare people for the coming of the Saviour.

According to the evangelists, this voice from the wilderness recalled the imagery of the prophets of an earlier generation who prepared the exiles in Babylon for their return to beloved Jerusalem. “Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley will be filled in, every mountain and hill be laid low, winding ways will be straightened and rough ways made smooth. And all mankind shall see the salvation of God.”

What can I do?

As we wait in hope and expectancy for the turning of the tide at the reform of the Church and society, we can apply to ourselves the imagery of the road of return.

I may have paths to straighten where I have been devious and deceptive, or less than totally honest.

The valleys to be filled in are the areas where I have neglected prayer. I may have allowed my mind to be taken over by misleading thoughts and allowed the flame of faith to be reduced to dying embers.



St Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus, emerged as a great reformer at a time of crisis in the Church. Photo: Jesuit Curia General

The mountains to be laid low are the obstacles which I imagine to be insurmountable because I have forgotten to trust in God.

The hills to be levelled are those areas of pride and superiority when I looked down on others and judged them in an unfavourable light.

The rough ways to be made smooth are the jag-

ged edges of my personality which irritate others or make me rub them up the wrong way – my insensitivities, my lack of generosity, being unwilling to compromise, my dominance of others in subtle ways.

All God wants of you in Advent is that you would prepare the way for the coming of the Saviour, the bringer of life, light and love.

An Advent prayer

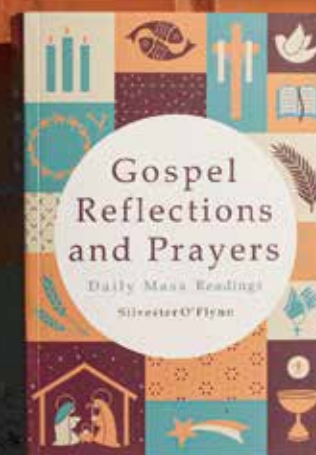
O God of life, come to winter's branches where our lives bear no fruit, where our efforts have failed, where our hope has faltered and the sap of energy has dried up. We are poor and we need a Saviour. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

O God of light, come our dark areas where we have been taken over by fears, anxiety and untamed powers of temptation. We are poor and we need a Saviour. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

O God of love, desiring to dwell in our hearts, come and heal the unredeemed areas where we block your love, areas of jealousy, lust, impatience, pride, anger and bitterness. We are poor and we need a Saviour. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

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The limits of 'my body, my choice'



It is time to breathe new life into the traditional concept of the common good, writes **David Quinn**

During the abortion debate we all became familiar with the slogan, 'my body, my choice'. It is the ultimate expression of personal autonomy.

Pro-lifers have always responded that the slogan is misapplied to the abortion debate because the baby in the womb has a body of its own that must also be protected and respected. The child can never make a choice unless it is born and then reaches maturity.

“We could only leave our homes for essential shopping and exercise but had to stay within five kilometres of our homes”

But since the first lockdown in March of last year we have seen the limits of the 'my body, my choice' philosophy of total personal autonomy because what you do with your body, and the choices you make, can deeply affect and harm other people.

We were locked down whether we liked it or not and huge - and unprecedented - limits were placed on our freedom in the name of public health. We were under semi-house arrest for months. We could only leave our homes for essential shopping and exercise but had to stay within five kilometres of our homes.

Few people then said 'my body, my choice' because they knew their choices could harm and even kill people because they might become



Catholic Relief Service workers carry a portable bed outside Methinkot Hospital in the Kavre district of Nepal. The Covid-19 pandemic has heightened awareness about the need to prioritise the common good. Photo: CNS

infected with Covid-19 and then pass it on to a vulnerable person.

In other words, we received a sharp lesson in the truth that the exercise of your autonomy needs to be limited in some way by considerations of the harm you might do to other people.

But it was also a lesson in the importance of the common good. Throughout the pandemic, public health has been acting as a sort of proxy for the common good.

We have been asked to put aside our own interests, temporarily at least, for the sake of society overall and to save lives.

Motivations

Of course, we were also staying out of harm's way for our own sakes, so our motivations were not purely selfless. There is, of course, nothing wrong itself with protecting yourself even if you're not thinking of the greater good.

The Catholic Church has a very well-developed teaching about the common good. The Church defines it as, "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily."

The common good includes respect for the individual as

well as the social well-being and development of the group. It seeks and promotes peace in society because in conditions of war or strife it becomes almost impossible for people to flourish.

The common good tries to hold various rights and duties in balance. There can't be so much emphasis on the group that the individuals lose out, and there can't be so much stress placed on the individual that the group loses out.

“Critics have responded that this is authoritarian, that you should not limit autonomy in this way, and personal choice must be paramount”

Discussing the common good, the Catechism of the Catholic Church says that "public authorities are bound to respect the fundamental and inalienable rights of the human person", and that majorities must respect personal rights.

In past debates in Ireland about the various social issues including contraception, divorce, abortion, and now assisted suicide, the Church has invoked the concept of the common good as a reason to place limits on personal freedom.

Critics have responded that this is authoritarian, that you should not limit autonomy in this way, and personal choice must be paramount. They have said that the concept of the 'common good', if pushed too far, could ultimately be used to take away almost any freedom. This is true, of course, if we over-emphasise the group at the expense of the individual.

But unless you are an extreme libertarian who thinks almost no limits should be placed on personal freedom, you will invoke the common good at some point to advance values you think are important.

Free speech

We can see this in debates about free speech, for example. Some, mainly on the left these days, want to place curbs on speech they think offends minority groups. They want to expand 'anti-hate' laws to even criminalise such speech in certain circumstances.

They sometimes have the Church in mind. For example, they believe the Christian teaching on marriage is deeply offensive to gay couples, divorced people, cohabiting couples and those in single-parent families. In their vision of society, it would become almost impossible for the Church to promulgate its teaching about marriage. They are getting closer to achieving their goal. The Church, in Ireland at least, heavily self-censors on the topic now for fear of being attacked.

“The pandemic has alerted people to the importance of the common good”

The Church, of course, says the family is an essential part of the common good and the family of mother, father and child is foundational. That should hardly need defending. It should simply be seen as common sense. Every child has a mother and a father, and every child should be raised by their mother and father, where possible and assum-

ing neither is abusive. Marriage gives children the best chance of being raised by both parents. It is remarkable that some people want to all but ban stating this essential truth as a form of 'hate'.

Nonetheless, critics of the Church's teaching on marriage attack it in the name of their version of the common good. They think the common good is harmed if certain minority groups are offended and therefore feel excluded and diminished.

Common good

What we can see is that the common good as an idea is both indispensable but also very hard to precisely define. That means there will always be arguments about it.

It is a debate the Church must start to engage in fully again. The pandemic has alerted people to the importance of the common good.

It has exposed the limits of 'my body, my choice' as a philosophy. Individual freedom is not everything. At the same time, public health cannot be used to crush all autonomy. A balance must be struck, just as the Church has always said. It is a truth that bears repeating.



Circus scenes as Ireland appears before UN Human Rights Council

Ireland's recent appearance before the UN Human Rights Council should prompt questions about how serious a body it is, writes **Jason Osborne**

The relevance of Ireland's recent appearance before the United Nations' Human Rights Council can be summed up by the fact that Iceland asked us to "repeal the Protection of Life during Pregnancy Act". It apparently wasn't noticed by Iceland's representative that Ireland had comprehensively done so in 2018.

Ireland, along with most other countries in the world, is regularly brought before various UN human rights committees to give an account of its progress on the human rights commitments it has made. In a world of shape-shifting norms and values, that is a tricky thing to do, and it's little wonder that every country, no matter how progressive, is told that it can do better.

That said, reading through the list of recommendations offered to Ireland by the various member countries gives what I can only describe as a sense of parody. While Catholics are obliged to debate some of the things the world currently designates 'human rights', such as abortion and the 'right' to choose your own gender, other things remain out of fashion by universal consensus, such as torture, genocide, suppression of certain ethnic or religious groups, and more.

“It's worth looking through the recommendations from a couple of the more questionable countries to offer feedback on Ireland's current state of affairs”

With that in mind, reading China's, North Korea's or Iran's thoughts on how Ireland could improve its behaviour takes on an ironic flavour, indeed. All had their say on how Ireland can better care for its citizens, as did our neighbours with more closely aligned political sentiments to ours. Regardless of where those recommendations came from, Ireland adopted all of the recommendations, which means that they'll be taken into consideration and a response will be produced for the Council before the next session in February-March 2022.



The European headquarters of the United Nations is pictured in Geneva September 2, 2021. Photo: CNS.

It's worth looking through the recommendations from a couple of the more questionable countries to offer feedback on Ireland's current state of affairs. It raises genuine questions about the value of such human rights bodies in the present age, and what, if anything, comes as a result of our membership of them.

Example

To begin with perhaps the most egregious example, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (better known as North Korea), took a hard line on a number of Ireland's failings, past and present.

"Develop new comprehensive strategy and action plan to eliminate all kinds of discrimination on the basis of race, religion and gender identity, and ensure non-discriminatory treatment of all minority communities within its territory," read their first offering, which was bolstered by, "Strengthen its legislation on racist hate speech and crime, intensify efforts to tackle the prevalence of those acts, and ensure that those crimes are thoroughly investigated, perpetrators punished and victims provided with effective remedies".

This is rich coming from a country notorious for the inhumane treatment of vast swathes of its population, living under the boot of Kim Jong-un. What's more, North Korea is routinely identified as the worst perpetrator of anti-Christian persecution in the world, ahead of tough competitors like China, Nigeria, and Afghanistan.

“While surely an abuse, it's one that was identified decades ago, the legacy of which continues to rightly receive intensive treatment”

However, their last input revealed just how firmly North Korea has its finger on Ireland's pulse:

"Cease torture and cruel or inhuman treatment of children in places of reformatory and industrial schools operated by religion institutions, and prosecute and punish perpetrators of such abuse."

“Ireland adopted all of the recommendations, which means that they'll be taken into consideration and a response will be produced for the Council before the next session in February-March 2022”

While surely an abuse, it's one that was identified decades ago, the legacy of which continues to rightly receive intensive treatment. Not particularly relevant feedback from North Korea – a country which itself should be nowhere within 100 miles of a human rights council, unless it is to be reprimanded.

China, meanwhile, asked us to "take legislative and administrative measures to combat racial discrimination and xenophobic violence" – this, as reports emerge over the last number of years regarding China's reportedly genocidal treatment of

Uyghur Muslims in its north-western Xinjiang province.

Intense

With intense accounts of the abuse of Uyghur women contained in the same reports, it's more than a little eyebrow-raising when China goes on to recommend both of the following: "Combat human trafficking targeting women and girls for sexual exploitation and other purposes," and "take measures to eliminate violence against women and girls".

Both are goals all countries should be working tirelessly towards – the question raised here is more so what good it does to have countries of China's and North Korea's human rights records lecture countries which, while far from perfect, haven't traditionally carried out the same, large-scale atrocities?

I would venture to say that to entertain the current pantomimes that occur in the halls of the United Nations' cheapens historical abuses and goes a long way towards eradicating accountability. Some scholars argue that tens of millions died in the Chinese famines of the 20th Century alone, which were largely a result of the government's policies at the time. To allow such a government a seat at any table discussing human rights seems to drain the term of any meaning whatsoever.

That is not to say subtler countries have much higher moral standings. As was expected, many close neigh-

bours pressured Ireland to expand its abortion programme. Austria, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands and Switzerland all encouraged us to remove barriers to abortion, and to use the three-year review to make it even easier to obtain one.

“The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (better known as North Korea), took a hard line on a number of Ireland's failings, past and present”

The Austrian representative told us to ensure "that the three-year review of the Health Act 2018 on the Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy is comprehensive and focused on providing a human rights-compliant framework for abortion, including by identifying and eliminating barriers impacting marginalised groups".

Similarly, the Danish delegate told us to make sure "the three-year review of the Termination of Pregnancy Act focuses on ways to expand access to voluntary termination of pregnancy, both in law and in practice".

There were many, many more recommendations by those sitting in judgement – many of which are right and good things to work towards – so I encourage you to visit the United Nations' Human Rights Council website and see for yourself. However, it is increasingly difficult to entertain such bodies and meetings charitably, when in the same breath they pardon and advocate crimes against humanity in the name of 'rights'.

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Will they ever come back to Mass?



If the data is correct the post-coronavirus Church in Ireland will be a depleted force, but creative thinking can arrest decline, writes **Michael Kelly**

The First Sunday of Advent at the weekend brought more potentially worrying news about the new variant of Covid-19 that has been discovered in South Africa. It's a concern, health officials say, but it will take between two and three weeks to discover just how concerning. Doctors in South Africa say that, so far, those diagnosed with the new variant have experienced mild symptoms.

The latest development is another blow to anyone hoping that this Christmas could be something approaching normal. There is also anecdotal evidence that – at least in some parishes – the congregation was down on Sunday morning. If this is so, it is likely some older parishioners have become anxious about the news of the new variant as well as being concerned about the booster vaccine.

Entails

If Covid-19 is going to be with us for some time, with all that this entails, it begs the obvious question: when – if ever – will our parishes get back to normal?

“In March 2020 when Covid-19 first hit his Irish shores, many parishes moved heaven and earth to ensure that Mass would be available online”

Data from Amárach Research from a survey carried out late last month paints a dim picture overall. It found that of those who were surveyed and identified as Mass-goers pre-coronavirus, fewer than half (47%) have returned as opposed to 53% of former regulars at church who have not returned.

Unsurprisingly, the overwhelming majority of people who have not returned cite fears about the virus. Some 61% said it was fear of contracting Covid-19 in public spaces



Online Masses have proven so popular, some parishioners don't want to go back in person. Photo: CNS.

that was keeping them from Mass. The figure was marginally higher for women with 63% saying this was the reason whereas for men the figure is 60%. Of those in the 35-44 age bracket 55% say fear of Covid-19 is keeping them from Mass. This drops to 48% for the 45-54 age bracket, perhaps indicating this cohort is less risk-averse, but rises again dramatically to 68% (almost seven out of ten) for those aged over 55.

A further 13% said they had underlying health issues that prevent them from going to Mass at this time.

Perhaps more alarmingly for parishes, a not inconsiderable minority of previously Mass-going Catholics say they no longer go because their faith is no longer as strong as it used to be. Now, 21% overall say this is why they no longer go to Mass. This sentiment seems to have affected men more with 26% of men saying this is why they are 'no shows' on a Sunday morning as opposed to 17% of women who said that a weakened faith was keeping them from Mass. Almost a third (32%) of the 35-44 age group said their faith had suffered as a result of the pandemic, 23% of the 45-54 age bracket and 17% of those aged over 55.

Moved

Back in March 2020 when Covid-19 first hit Irish shores, many parishes moved heaven and earth to ensure that Mass would be available online. Some already had sophisti-

cated setups, others moved swiftly with mobile phones and tablets to stream Mass on Facebook and other platforms. Undoubtedly as “three weeks to flatten the curve” turned into months without public Mass, it was a lifeline for all of us.

Victims

Interestingly, the Amárach research indicates that parishes are now, perhaps, victims of their own technological success. Accordingly, 19% of pre-pandemic Mass-goers now say they prefer to join the liturgy online. This was true for 18% of men surveyed and 19% of women. Younger former Mass-goers were less impressed with the online offering the data suggests with just 8% of the 35-44 age cohort saying they don't go to in-person Mass because they prefer to watch from a distance. This rises to 14% in the next cohort (45-54) and 26% in those aged over 55 who were surveyed.

Irritation with ongoing public health restrictions in churches is also a factor with 16% saying they find the requirement to wear a mask at Mass “off-putting”. Men are more irked by this with 23% citing mask-wearing as they reason they no longer go to Mass. On the contrary, just 10% of women said that the requirement to wear a mask was keeping them from Mass.

The survey goes on to ask people what one might describe as the \$64,000 question: when restrictions are lifted completely and life gets back

to normal, will those who attended Mass pre-coronavirus go back?

The results are not encouraging: 31% say they will go back to going to Mass regularly; 23% (almost one in four) say they will not return to Mass and 46% say they don't know whether or not they will return.

If these numbers played out in reality, there would be many more empty seats at Mass on a Sunday morning.

“When restrictions are lifted completely and life gets back to normal, will those who attended Mass pre-coronavirus go back?”

An important caveat not to be forgotten is that these figures refer only to the 53% of Catholics who used to go to Mass at the beginning of March 2020 and don't anymore. As we can see from above, 47% have already returned, so the 23% who say they will not return to Mass is, in fact, about 12% of those who used to attend Mass. At the same time, if realised, that would amount to a dramatic 12% fall in overall Mass attendance in a two-year period.

What is clear is that parishes face a huge challenge in trying to get people back to the regular practice of their faith. The survey indicates that 46% of those who attended before Covid-19 don't know if they

will ever come back. That is a huge chunk of parishioners who – at least on the face of it – are willing to be convinced to come back.

Changed habits

Without doubt habits have changed. A priest told me recently about a parishioner he frequently meets in the small town where he ministers who used to be a daily Mass-goer. She now watches Mass on her iPad before readying herself for trips to the supermarket, hairdressers and butcher shop. She doesn't feel safe at Mass, she tells him.

Yet another priest told me about frequent requests to the parish office for an extraordinary minister of the Eucharist to “drop in” a host to someone who is following Mass from home.

It is perhaps time to look at how some practices are adversely affecting the desire to return to Mass. Is the webcam too simple? In trying to make Mass accessible for people at home, have parishes simply given a widespread seal of approval for people to stay away? If the ritual of bringing Holy Communion to people who could attend Mass preventing them from so doing? There are also questions around poor theology and understanding of things like ‘spiritual Communion’. Gathering together for Mass is crucial to who we are as Catholics, many people evidently enjoy sitting at their kitchen table and watching Mass. But it leaves an essential element of our faith missing. No-one planned for what do to about Mass in the event of a pandemic, we might need some of the ingenuity that parishes showed in responding then now to encourage people back to the regular practice of their faith.

“The overwhelming majority of people who have not returned cite fears about the virus”

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Where and how do you find peace in your daily life?



Sr Stan at The Sanctuary, Dublin.
Photo: Alexis Sierra

Sr Stan asks a wide range of people across Irish society where they find peace

From media personalities like Tommy Tiernan, Miriam O'Callaghan, Ray D'Arcy, to politicians like Taoiseach Micheál Martin and President Michael D. Higgins, all answer the question in their own way, giving us an insight into their minds and their lives. Each contributor has something different to offer, so the content is diverse and wide-ranging. What is clear from all the contributions is that peace, ultimately, is about love.



Words on Peace - President Michael D. Higgins

What I recall as what might be the better moments of peace at a personal level are perhaps those when I was able to be in the company of friends, where it wasn't necessary to explain what friendship was, but merely to enjoy it. I find it difficult to achieve peace in a limited personal sense, particularly if it requires averting one's gaze from where the absence of peace is wreaking havoc in the lives of others. True peace must always be, it seems to me, a troubled peace. I don't think it is morally acceptable to regard a personal peace that distances you from the life and circumstances of others as in any sense sufficient. Yet, when one has put oneself into the agony of others, from such a sharing there is an experience of the greatest peace.

I discern this in *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis' most

recent encyclical letter. Indeed, authentic writing out of sense experiences, and informed scholarship, are an inspiration to me and provide a source of succour. The Pope's latest treatise represents a clarion call to discern the depths of our politics and the destructive populism that has engulfed so much of the world in what is undoubtedly a manifestation of a corrosive and far-reaching democratic crisis. It is not merely words on paper. Envisaging, calling to mind, the human source is an uplifting experience.

Pope Francis identifies fraternity and social friendship as the ways to build a better, more just and peaceful world, with the contribution of all – citizens and institutions – and an emphasis on meaningful, inclusive dialogue taken into account. The encyclical also voices an emphatic confir-

mation of a 'no' to war and to globalised indifference, all of which may assist in the building of a more peaceful, inclusive world.

Pope Francis' observation that peace is connected to truth and justice is a profound one. We in Ireland should also reflect, as we now find ourselves mid-way through the decade of our Centenary Commemorations, on how forgiveness is so often an important prerequisite for peace.

Let us then together cultivate ethical memory as an instrument for the living and as a foundation for the future in order to realise a collective memory at peace, reconciled; an ethical remembering to replace our past entrenchments that represents a foundation of a shared future at peace.

i Michael D. Higgins is the current President of Ireland.



Pope Francis greets Irish President Michael Higgins during a private audience at the Vatican earlier this year. Photo: CNS

“Stolen moments in a busy life... the best place to find peace is in great big hugs with my lovely family” - Claire Byrne

Finding Peace in Nature – Vicky Phelan

How I find peace in my daily life starts with the same ritual every morning. Before I even get out of bed to start my day, I do a quick assessment of my body for any new aches and pains.

When I realise that I am in good shape, I thank the universe for my good health and start the day as I mean to go on, being grateful to be alive and well and to be given more time with my family and friends. This ritual helps me to face the day with a positive mindset, regardless of what the weather is like outside or what is facing me that day.

For me, being in nature is where I find peace. Every day without fail, unless I am very ill, I make sure that I spend time in nature. I go for a walk and I take the time to really enjoy

nature, free from any interruptions from phones or electronic devices. I look at the sky, I listen to the birds,

I watch the trees sway in the wind and I quieten my mind. Autumn is a particularly favourite time of the year for me with all the beautiful colours of the trees on display.

My absolute favourite sound though, is the sound of the water. I love the sea and when I can't get to it, I have recordings of the sound of the waves at my favourite beach and I play it whenever I need to find a bit of peace.

of peace.

of peace.



Vicky Phelan.

Photo: 'Overcoming' by Hachette Books Ireland

i Vicky Phelan is a women's health advocate and CervicalCheck campaigner.

“There is a part of me that is always at peace but sometimes I need to take time to seek it out. In my preparation for sport, I place a significant emphasis on the importance of meditation” - Johnny Sexton

Peace and the Politics of Love - Pat Hume (In conversation with Aine Hume)

Peace cannot exist alone. It is utterly and completely dependent on the existence of love. For me, peace is defined by those who hold its promise, and live it with love and hope, even when its presence feels very distant. I met many such wonderful people through my life and was sustained by John's own unshakable vision of peace. Peace lives in both public and private spaces. John's work was very public and he was comfortable there, while I have always valued the quiet and private spaces.

Three things have sustained peace for me, even in the most turbulent times I have lived through. The first as I have said, is community, from my own amazing family to the many wonderful human beings I have been privileged to meet. The second is the natural world. I love to walk. I have been blessed to travel a little and I live in Derry, a beautiful city in itself and on the doorstep of Donegal, so beauty is never far away. The third has been quiet moments of prayer. In a busy life, this might have just been a few minutes of quiet in a chapel, or a few moments spoken in my own mind. I have absolutely no doubt that these have sustained my peace, and maybe saved my sanity at times!

When John's parents got married, they had no home. They were given a room by a family who lived in a small terraced house. They had three children in that room, before being given a two-bedroom terrace. They had seven children there and John's uncle and his wife lived in the front room. These experiences helped John develop an unshakable faith in the generosity of others. His appreciation of human interdependence was fundamental to the way he saw the world. He also understood passionately that difference defines humanity and that embracing diversity is the cornerstone of peace.

We live in uncertain times. If John were alive, he would be applying these three tenets of peaceful change to our current situation. Faith in the generosity of others; trust as a foundation, and above all the embracing of diversity. John's notions of kinship transcended boundaries of family, community and nation. If he were alive today, he would be telling us that our interdependence includes our fragile planet and all the species that live upon it. He would be urging us to develop a planetary kinship. One that is inclusive of all life. This will involve a deep shift in our relationship

with the natural world.

Cornell West says that justice is the public face of love. All peace must be underpinned by justice. The approach of non-violence will be central to this. Our experience in Northern Ireland taught me that for those suffering injustice and hardship, violence can offer the seductive illusion of absolute righteousness. Violence blinds both perpetrators and those who fear them, to the messy complexities of human reality. The non-violent path can appear slow and painstaking by comparison. But reality itself is messy and complex and true peace can only be found if it is grounded in reality. It is a lifelong task.

In today's world, violence takes many forms. Wherever there is inequality, injustice and suffering, there is violence. For the millions displaced by conflict and climate change, this is a daily reality. To live peacefully, we need to deepen our understanding of the myriad forms which violence can take. Increasingly, we are learning how exploitation of the natural world is in itself a profoundly violent act, with many consequences.

Our experience of the Covid-19 pandemic taught us that we are part of a single, complex, living system,



John and Pat Hume. Photo: Irish News

in which all are profoundly interconnected. Human health and survival are reliant on the wellbeing of our planet and all the living systems which sustain it. Once again, peaceful flourishing depends on our interrelationship with the living world. Watching my grandchildren's generation and their passionate engagement with this gives me great cause for hope.

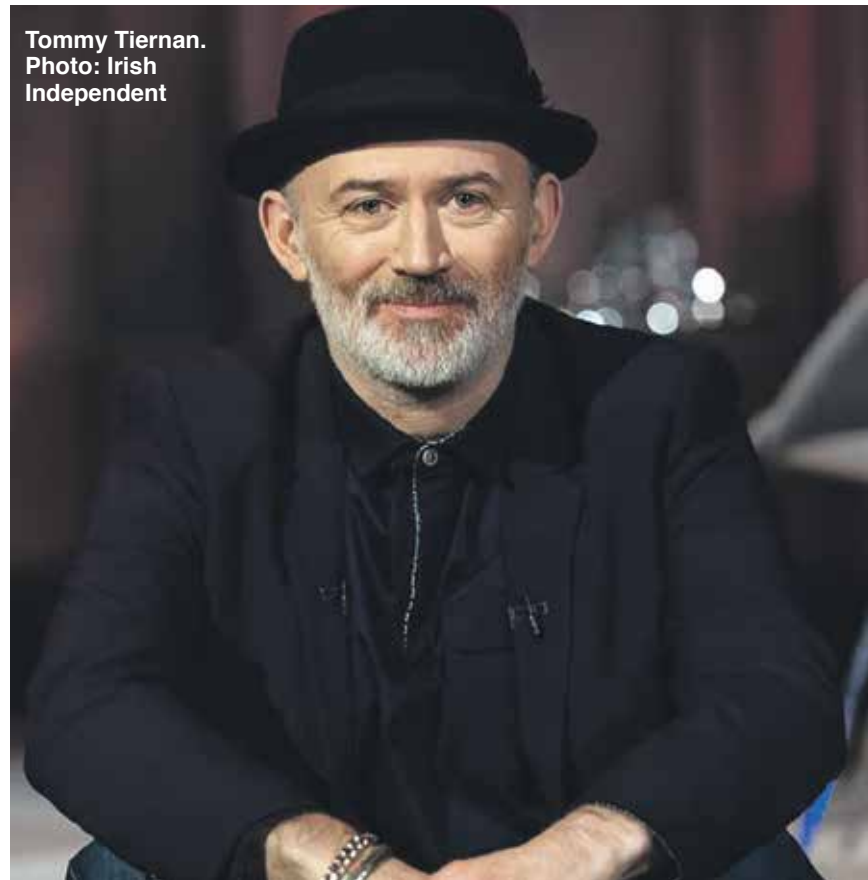
I have seen many changes in my lifetime. Many of my

children and grandchildren's generation reject what they see as the self-protection and power of religious institutions. Having a deep religious faith, and the sustaining rituals and support of being part of a religious community, has carried me through profound challenges. However, I have learned from my own family, friends and community that this is not for everyone and should not be confused with an ethic of love. Peace is all

about relationships and ultimately it is all about love.

i Pat Hume was a former teacher who was married to John Hume for sixty years. She was a member of the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund, the RTÉ Authority and the Spirit of Ireland Awards. She had five children. Pat Hume passed away in Derry following a short illness on 2 September 2021.

Tommy Tiernan.
Photo: Irish Independent



Below Dreaming – Tommy Tiernan

There'll be peace enough when you die. Life maybe is too overwhelming, too immersive and challenging to ever be peaceful.

The Christian adventure is sometimes presented as a journey. From sinner to saint at its most extreme but perhaps more ordinarily from the Garden of Eden to...I don't know, somewhere paradisaic like back to the Garden of Eden. The journey to where you are, I suppose. And journeys involve effort and movement, through 'hollow lands and hilly lands', through countless winters and springs, peoples and places. All the time, moving. And while there may be moments of peace, an afternoon, a week, it's not something that happens too often and we shouldn't think of its absence as a fault. In the same way that acute stress isn't a constant, peace isn't there all the time either.

Any attempt to define life is always frustrating because the experience of being alive is always larger than language.

This is why we love stories so much. A story can hint or point or testify to something without trying to classify it. And a good story will raise more questions than it answers. The one that I have in mind at the moment is Christ at The Last Supper.

That Thursday evening was the beginning of the chaos. They were being hunted, they would never sit like this again. The unity of the group was about to be shattered, their leader, the head of the family about to be murdered, betrayed by one of them. And in the midst of all this he turns to them and says:

'I leave you peace, my peace I give you.'

What did he mean?

We're free from all trouble in dreamless sleep. Like we were before we were conceived. And death may well be the same, although it's hardly what you would call an 'experience'. Every night when we sink below dreaming we get peace. A few

hours of it. We register nothing, we're conscious of nothing. But as soon as we open our eyes we plunge again into the overwhelming, topsy turvy world of the senses. Let us try and fully participate in that while we have the chance.

i Tommy Tiernan is a comedian, actor, writer and presenter.



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“During the pandemic, I became obsessed with jigsaws. The lure is very simple – jigsaws are about making order out of chaos. They have only one mission in life – to be complete! Just like humans” - Joe Duffy

‘It’s good to talk’...so let’s talk and



Framing the synodal process is taking away opportunities to sit and listen first, and let people talk, writes **Garry O’Sullivan**

Speaking at the beginning of the diocesan phase of the worldwide synod, Bishop Brendan Leahy of Limerick said that the synod is taking place at a critical time for the Church and must not be a ‘talk shop’. Bishop Donal McKeown has also spoken about the risk of an Irish synod becoming a “curious talking shop”. Other prelates have used similar language.

“Action is all well and good, but the Church in Ireland is in retreat: it’s not a time for action but reflection and discernment”

The definition of a ‘talk shop’ is a place or group regarded as a centre for unproductive talk rather than action.

Firstly, I fail to see why a Church that has in the main studiously avoided consultation with laity until now is warning people about talking too much - surely this is the point of a synodal process, to talk as well as to listen?. Secondly why are bishops warning of ‘unproductive talk’? After what we’ve been through in the Church in Ireland, surely finding quick fix solutions is the last thing we should be doing. There is listening, but there is also the deeper act of hearing what is said and, sometimes, the message has to be repeated for the penny to drop. Action is all well and good, but the Church in Ireland is in retreat: it’s not a time for action but reflection and discernment.

For those of a certain vintage, who can fail to remember the famous British Telecom (BT) slogan ‘It’s good to talk’ from the 1990’s television campaign



with the advertisements fronted by hardman actor Bob Hoskins. That campaign turned around the fortunes of BT, and could be instructive for the Church here. BT was told that it was not so much in the telephone business as the business of ‘reciprocated confidences’. What this meant was the exchange of ‘confidences’ between human beings leads to better communications, and eventually better relationships. To use the phone, therefore, was a way to build relationships and trust, not just exchange information.

The challenge for BT was to change the attitudes of men: research showed that they paid the bills, but didn’t use the phone to build relationships like women were more naturally disposed to do.

Hardman

This was where macho actor Bob Hoskins was brought in. Suddenly a male ‘hardman’ was saying talking is okay, ‘It’s good to talk’. Four words that helped ‘Britain’s most hated company’ lose that tag. Decades later, we are still encouraging people - especially men - to talk about their mental health etc.

Our Pope (a former bouncer) is our ‘hardman’ from macho South America and he’s saying ‘It’s good to talk’. Talking enables listening and the building of a rapport, and later relationship and finally then trust. This insistence by bishops on framing the synodal process - and what it is not - is taking away opportunities to sit and listen first, and let people talk.

“These are serious Catholics and respected members of the community, and frankly the last hope of that diocese to engage laity”

There is a mountain of hurt, anger and distrust. It is the laity who have been asked to take part in listening processes in the past only to discover that nothing came of them. It is the hierarchy who are out of touch with the synodal process and what is

required of the hierarchy: stop controlling, formulating, processing, work-shopping...gather people and let them have their say.

Take for example two lay leaders from the Killala Diocese who have been tasked with leading the implementation of the diocesan assembly’s recommendations (‘Placing Hope in Faith’ action committee) in partnership with the clergy. These are serious Catholics and respected members of the community, and frankly the last hope of that diocese to engage laity. Here’s what they told the recent meeting of the Association of Catholic Priests (ACP):

Patricia Melvin, a retired schoolteacher, told the gathering of mainly clergy that clericalism is very much alive and she raised a number of concerns about the relationship between laypeople and the clerical Church. She especially singled out concern over how the answers from laypeople for the worldwide bishops’ synod listening process would be ‘synthesised’ by the bishops.

“We are concerned about the manner in which diocesan findings will be communicated up the line. It is essential that

what is said at local level is what is actually forwarded in any ‘synthesising’ that is carried out. The best way to ensure this we would suggest is to return finalised documents to the people for ratification”.

The people of each diocese should ‘ratify’ the bishops’ reports to Rome! Not so much ‘nothing about us without us’ but ‘If we said it, we want to see it’.

Peter McLoughlin, also a senior lay leader in Killala Diocese, expressed concern at the decision that bishops were to prepare ‘a synthesis’ of the views of Catholics in each diocese, before submitting this to Rome. “Will bishops report what people are saying?” he asked.

In other words, they were saying ‘we don’t trust you bishops to accurately report what we laity are saying’. And these are two senior lay leaders chosen to lead the implementation of the Killala assembly together with the bishop and clergy.

Houston, we’ve had a problem!

Jesuit Fr Gerry O’Hanlon writing in his book *The Quiet Revolution of Pope Francis* says that the listening process “should not be disparaged as more ‘talking shops’, as if the process of inclusive talking and listening were somehow a distraction, a poor second to proclamation of the Word. What is a synod, a synodal Church, but

“It is the hierarchy who are out of touch with the synodal process and what is required of the hierarchy: stop controlling, formulating, processing, work-shopping...gather people and let them have their say”

talk and talk

“The devil runs around everywhere, but I’m most afraid of the polite devils – those who ring your door bell and ask permission to come into your home...they are the worst ones and one is very deceived”

‘a talking shop’, one where all together journey, listening, talking and then acting, an acting that will include a richer proclamation of the Word on the basis of the listening and speaking that have gone before? And is this not what Pope Francis has asked the Church to embark on? Is it not the desire of Francis that the Faithful at local level share the inspiring experience of Irish bishops at the universal level?”

Limerick Diocese pastoral implementation manager Rose O’Connor said that there are many issues to be addressed by the synod but for all those issues, the message remains the same. “For a lot of people, they have become disconnected with Church. And I would also have to say the Church has become disconnected with them. And there’s a whole host of reasons for that. People have very busy lives, there is a lot going on, there’s a lot of competing commitments, but also there’s been a lot of hurt. We all know about the crisis in the Church. So, I think there’s a real need for healing.”

“As Catholics, we all have the right to discuss change and reform, because the Church herself is always in need of change and reform - it evolves as humanity evolves”

Healing isn’t mentioned much, but it should be. Reaching out to those who have left is mentioned with no real idea how to achieve that, but healing for all is probably a better way to describe what is needed. The anger, disillusionment and so on have not come from the outside, they are internal. And that’s not to hang blame around the bishops, or the clergy, but it is an institutional problem and we need institutional level healing. And talking is a first step.

Another area for real conversation and listening is among those seeking change and those who are wary of it. One of the concerns expressed by Patricia Melvin was the labelling of those who want change as ‘not Catholic’. This is all too common and as Ms Melvin

has said, if you are baptised, then you are Catholic. It’s so easy for people uncomfortable with change to say to those discussing change ‘well if you don’t like it you can leave’. As Catholics, we all have the right to discuss change and reform, because the Church herself is always in need of change and reform - it evolves as humanity evolves. It is understandable that many are afraid of change or extreme change but fear is not the answer either. Make your voice heard and engage the discussion.

Writing in his blog, Fr O’Hanlon appeals for tolerance of each other: “Pope Francis has opened up a space of discernment and of open and honest debate in the Church. I think we need to keep faith with this synodal process, with courage and constancy. In doing so we cannot shirk the mutual listening and engagement between those who understand the ban on the ordination of women to be based on dubious scriptural foundations and an unpersuasive theological tradition, and those who sincerely object to what they perceive as a betrayal of tradition for the sake of a faddish accommodation to modernity. This ‘not shirking’ can be wearisome: most of us don’t enjoy conflict and this can feel like nagging, especially when the episcopal custodians of the current *status quo* are often palpably decent and kind men. But, as Pope Francis himself noted inimitably in a recent interview on the complex issues involved for all of us in discernment (*La Croix International*, COPE, September 1, 2021), ‘The devil runs around everywhere, but I’m most afraid of the polite devils – those who ring your door bell and ask permission to come into your home...they are the worst ones and one is very deceived’.

Christian gift

“Peace is a Christian gift, but so too is holy lamentation, and the subversive memory of Jesus that constantly disturbs our peace.”

Following Vatican II, Pope Francis has insisted that any “proposal of goals without an adequate communal search for the means of achieving them will inevitably prove illusory”.

So as Bob used to say, it’s good to talk. Let’s talk.

Failing parishioners or fostering togetherness amongst priests?



Ruadhán Jones weighs up the pros and cons of diocesan priest gatherings

For the week of November 15-19, there were no weekday Masses in parishes of Cork and Ross diocese. This was not a Covid-19 measure, it was a self-enforced pause in the celebration of the Eucharist. The priests of the diocese had travelled west to Kerry for a diocesan-wide gathering, over 80 priests meeting together to pray and discuss the future of the diocese.

“A number of the Cork clergy complained to the bishop that ‘shutting down’ Masses failed local parishioners”

Any urgent pastoral needs – such as funerals – were handled by priests in religious orders and retired priests, and the situation is not out on its own. The Archdiocese of Armagh brought its priests together

in just the same manner last month and other dioceses have had similar gatherings. All the same, it is not an approach that pleases all priests.

A number of the Cork clergy complained to the bishop that ‘shutting down’ Masses failed local parishioners. Requests to be allowed to return to parishes were turned down. One priest said that they spent 18 months complaining about Government interference in the sacraments, only to close them down ourselves. Mad, outrageous, frustrating – that is just a snapshot of some of their views, and priests that were upset made their feelings known.

Gatherings

But these gatherings are here to stay, it would seem, and there are pros to go along with the cons. Let’s take the example of the Cork pilgrimage – it had been planned since before the Covid-19 pandemic, as Bishop Fintan Gavin wanted to bring the priests together without external distractions. By heading away, all the priests could concentrate on spending the time together and engage fully with the discussions at hand without breaking the flow due to calls to attend to parish or chaplaincy needs.

According to one of the attendees, each day, priests prayed together, celebrated Mass together, ate meals together, and sat in various configurations to discuss questions and topics put before them. Among the those who attended were priests ordained for the diocese, priests from Poland, from religious orders, from India and from missionary societies.

This, it is hoped, will help foster a truly collegial atmosphere. In an era when loneliness is seen as one the key challenges of a priest’s life, it could be a source of friendship for priests. For the Church itself, it could

be an opportunity to tackle together and in a co-ordinated way the manifold problems facing the Church at a local level. And on the face of it, pooling resources should help. Parishes face similar problems, but not all with have the same resources – perhaps this will open the eyes of the diocese to each other’s needs and also their talents?

“Priests prayed together, celebrated Mass together, ate meals together, and sat in various configurations to discuss questions and topics put before them”

Similarly, as was the case for Cork, it is an opportunity to bring people from the outside to offer expert advice, to draw on the national or even the global picture. On the flipside of this is the con that it could frustrate independent thinking, adding an extra bureaucratic layer to the already busy life of priests. It could centralise decision-making, leading to more talk without the fruit of action.

Lastly, there is likely a pragmatic element, less pleasant, but ever-present, to these gatherings – a collapse in vocations, which will inevitably turn daily Mass into a thing of the past, as is already the case in some rural areas. It’s not that priests will shirk their duties, there simply won’t be enough of them to cover all that is needed. In that light, if these gatherings were to become an annual affair, parishioners will get a foretaste of the future in a piecemeal fashion. Is that a pro or a con? Neither, it’s the reality we’re facing.

Out&About

The gift of priesthood



DUBLIN: The St Joseph's Young Priests Society's Mass of thanksgiving for the gift of priesthood at St Andrews Church, Westland Row, was celebrated by Fr Séamus McEntee, Dublin diocese vocations director. He is pictured here with Fr Frank Drescher, Fr Paul Glennon, Fr Declan Blake, Fr Robert Colclough, Fr Chris Hayden and transitional Deacon Joe Keegan.



CORK: Bishop of Cork and Ross Fintan Gavin is pictured with Managing Director of Cork Airport Niall MacCarthy, after blessing the newly reconstructed runway at Cork airport, November 20. Photo: Brian Loughheed.



DOWN: The Catholic Chaplaincy at Queen's University Belfast welcome Year 14s from Blessed Trinity College who joined them for Project Gratitude, November 19.

INSHORT

Bishop Monahan laments tragedy of road traffic deaths

Bishop of Killaloe Fintan Monahan said that the 120 deaths on Irish roads this year are a tragedy in his homily for the RTÉ Television Mass for World Day of Remembrance for road traffic victims.

Bishop Monahan also called for "greater awareness along with prayer and reflection", saying they "can change our driving behaviour, calm our aggression, and remind us to take care of our spiritual, moral and physical dimensions".

The Mass, which was broadcast by RTE on November 21, commemorated the lives of those who died as a result of a traffic collision.

In his homily, Bishop Monahan reflected on the decrease in road fatalities in Ireland, but added that "according to the Road Safety Authority over 120 people have died in traffic collisions already this year. What a tragedy this is!"

He described road safety awareness as "the Good Samaritan in action within our communities today".

"Observation of this day provides an opportunity to draw the public's attention to road traffic crashes, their consequences and costs, and the measures which can be taken to prevent them," Bishop Monahan said. "The day also provides an opportunity to remind those in charge and all of us of our responsibility to make roads safer."

Advent offers 'promise of hope' – Archbishop Martin

The Primate of All-Ireland Archbishop Eamon Martin said Advent offers "a promise of hope for better times", as he launched the 2021 interactive digital Advent Calendar.

The calendar, now in its eighth year, offers resources for parishes, schools and families which can be accessed behind a virtual door each day during the season of Advent.

The content is aimed at assisting people of all ages to pray and reflect on how best to keep Christ at the centre of Christmas preparations during this liturgical season.

In a statement marking the launch, Archbishop Martin said that "the season of

Advent arrives and offers us a new beginning and a promise of hope for better times".

"This year – perhaps more than ever – we need ideas and inspiration to help us delve deeper, to find that glimmer of light, that note of joy, that promise of consolation," Dr Martin continued.

"I am very conscious that in troubled parts of the world the message of Christian 'peace and goodwill to all' needs to be heard above the noise of war, the cries of the poor and the agony of the displaced and oppressed."

The calendar went live on www.catholicbishops.ie on the first Sunday of Advent, November 28.

Edited by Ruadhán Jones
Ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie

Events deadline is a week in
advance of publication



TYRONE: Year 9 pupils, along with staff from throughout Sacred Heart College Omagh, came together in support of their annual Shoe Box Appeal, distributing gifts to those in need, November 23.



DOWN: The CK-19 council of the Knights of Columbanus engage in their first outreach of the academic year, providing stew and hot drinks to those who are homeless or in a vulnerable state.

DUBLIN: Bishop of Killaloe Fintan Monahan (centre) celebrated the RTE Mass to remember victims of road traffic collisions, November 21.



BOSTON: John M Leonard, Corbally, Limerick, and his son Jeremy are pictured with Fr Bryan Massingale (centre), winner of the Isaac Thomas Hecker Award for Social Justice.

Events

● In the current Covid-19 crisis, it is clear that most (and perhaps all) Church events, other than some Masses, are suspended. Consequently, we are withholding the popular Events Listing column until normal activities can resume in our parishes. However, please do email us if you know of any parish event planned and we will publish details.

World Report

IN BRIEF

Church in Italy criticises first legally assisted suicide in country

● The Catholic Church in Italy said that life must be “protected and defended” after local health authorities in Italy approved the country’s first legally obtained assisted suicide.

The ethics committee of the health service of the Italian city of Ancona ruled on November 23 that a 43-year-old Italian man met the requirements of a 2019 law decriminalising assisted suicide in Italy under certain conditions.

It is now up to the Ancona court to decide whether the 43-year-old quadriplegic, identified only as Mario, can proceed with a medically assisted suicide in accord with his personal wishes.

Speaking after the decision, Fr Massimo Angelelli, head of the Italian bishops’ health office, said: “Life is a received good, which must be protected and defended, in all its conditions”.

French youth acknowledged for restoring wayside crucifixes

● The recent endeavours of a group of young Catholics in France are attracting the attention of the media, all while restoring wayside crucifixes across the country.

The group, SOS Calvaires, was founded in 1987 in the Maine-et-Loire department, western France. It sought to bring together people dedicated to preserving the calvaires, oratories, and chapels that dot the French landscape.

The group has become

increasingly popular of late due to their restorations being widely shared on social media. Baptiste Marchais was struck by the beauty and sincerity of the association’s mission. “We understood that there was something to be done, and we decided to embark on a national adventure, with new offices in different parts of the country,” he explained.

The organisation is now restoring 10 calvaires a month across France.

Colombian court lifts ban of video by influencer affirming traditional marriage

● The Constitutional Court of Colombia has overturned a lower court’s decision that forced Colombian influencer Erika “Kika” Nieto to remove a video in which she expressed her Christian belief that marriage is between a man and a woman.

“No one should be censored or fear criminal penalties for expressing their beliefs,” said Santiago Guevara, a lawyer for Nueva Democracia, an NGO that with the support of the Christian legal defense

organisation Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) International, represented Nieto.

“Together with Kika, we are delighted that the court has reversed this censorship decision. Kika stood firm during this ordeal to defend everyone’s freedom to share their beliefs,” Guevara said.

Kika Nieto, who is a Christian, has faced legal proceedings since April 2020, initiated by José Francisco Montufar Rodríguez, a lawyer and LGBTQ+ activist.

Austrian bishops tighten guidelines on Church celebrations amid lockdown

● Austria’s Catholic bishops’ conference has tightened rules for attending Mass and other celebrations as the country went into full national lockdown on Monday.

The country’s bishops have said that they will not exclude anyone from Mass, but they will follow the government’s restrictions, which order those who are unvaccinated against Covid to remain in their

homes except to get food or medicine, or for “basic religious needs”.

The priest celebrant or other liturgical ministers will be required to show proof of vaccination, recovery from Covid, or a negative test result. Choirs will not be permitted, but up to four cantors can sing at the Mass only with proof of vaccination or recovery from the coronavirus.

Treatment of minority Christian women a ‘catastrophe’

A report issued last week declared the treatment of Christian minority women and girls in parts of Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia a “human rights catastrophe”.

The study, “Hear Her Cries”, published by the charity Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) last week, said that “at its most extreme”, forced conversions could amount to “genocide”.

The report, released on Red Wednesday, an annual commemoration raising awareness of anti-Christian persecution, highlighted cases in countries including Egypt and Pakistan.

It also focused on Nigeria, which was controversially removed from this year’s US State Department watchlist of countries with the most egregious violations of religious freedom.

The study found numerous cases of forced kidnapping and exploitation in Egypt, that Christians account for 95% of women and girls seized by Islamists in Nigeria, and that 70% of those forcibly converted and married in Pakistan are Christians.

ACN described the report as “the first of its kind to focus on the phenomenon of young women who are seized, because both their sex and religion makes them vulnerable to abduction and assault”.

The report was compiled by ACN’s UK branch, which has launched a petition calling for action to stop the sexual enslavement of Christian women. The text was



Iraqi Christians stand in front of a memorial plaque at Mar Elia Chaldean Catholic Church in Ankawa. Photo CNS.

presented at an online event chaired by the human rights campaigner Caroline Cox. Speakers included Michele Clark and Fiona Bruce, the British Prime Minister’s Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief.

The report, which includes case studies from Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Mozambique, Nigeria, and Pakistan, said that “evidence suggests that the coronavirus pandemic has provided the perfect breeding ground for acts of sexual violence”.

“Research showed that vulnerable converts in lockdown with their families are at a greater risk of general abuse, especially in the Mid-

dle East and North Africa region,” it noted.

The report argued that “instances of systemic abduction, sexual violence, forced marriage and conversion of Christian women in countries such as Nigeria, Iraq and Syria can be categorised as genocidal by nature”.

In one of the most affected countries, Egypt, around 10% of its estimated 104 million population is Christian, with around 90% belonging to the Coptic Orthodox Church, which is part of the Oriental Orthodox communion and traces its roots to St Mark the Evangelist.

The country’s Christians suffer various forms of dis-

crimination. A report earlier this month said that teachers at a school in Minya Governorate, Upper Egypt, ordered Christian students not to wear crosses, while inflicting violence on the schoolchildren.

The ACN study said the Egyptian authorities were “highly dismissive” of cases of forced abduction and conversion of Christian women.

It quoted a former member of a kidnapping gang that targeted Coptic girls, who described how the abductions were “meticulously orchestrated” and led to the girls being passed to Salafist groups that forced them to convert.

Spanish bishop who recently resigned gets civilly married

Bishop Xavier Novell, who unexpectedly resigned in August as bishop of Solsona, Spain, entered into a civil marriage with Silvia Caballol on November 22.

Catalan media sources reported that the marriage ceremony took place on that Monday at the courthouse in Suria, Barcelona province, and was attended by only two witnesses.

According to this same source, last Friday the couple asked the justice of the peace that the wedding take place on Monday outside normal hours, as the Justice of the Peace and Civil Registry of Suria are only open Tuesday through Friday.

A priest or bishop who has not received a dispensation from the clerical state from the Vatican commits a

canonical crime by contracting a civil marriage, which by virtue of his state as a vowed celibate is invalid from the canonical point of view.

Novell was born in 1969 in Spain’s Lérida province. He was ordained a priest of the Solsona diocese in 1997, and in 2010 he was consecrated a bishop and appointed ordinary of the same diocese.

Brisbane archbishop sets date for priests to become fully vaccinated

The Australian Archdiocese of Brisbane has announced that all archdiocesan employees, including clergy, contractors and some volunteers, must be fully vaccinated by December 15 in accord with the state’s mandate unless they have a

medical exemption.

“As we view the situation in Australia and internationally, it is clear that vaccination is the most effective way to lessen the risk of exposure or the risk of passing the virus on to others within our community,”

Archbishop Mark Coleridge said a recent statement on the archdiocese’s website.

“Therefore,” the statement continued, “the Archdiocese of Brisbane has made the decision that employees, contractors and certain volunteers will need

to have received two doses of a Covid vaccination by 15 December unless they have an official medical exemption.”

Coleridge said that clergy who are not fully vaccinated are putting the faithful at “risk”.



Edited by Brandon Scott
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Unbeknownst blessings



Pope Francis greets a sleeping baby during his general audience in St Peter's Basilica at the Vatican. Photo: CNS.

Christian advocacy group condemns US over removal of Nigeria from religious freedom watch list

An international Christian legal group has denounced the US State Department's decision to remove Nigeria from this year's watchlist of countries with the most egregious violations of religious freedom, in a period where the country is arguably at its most unsafe for Christians.

"Persecution against Christians and other religious minorities around the world must end," wrote Sean Nelson, legal counsel for global religious freedom for Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) International, in a statement. "For too long, governments and non-state

actors have abused people of faith, including in countries like Nigeria, India, Afghanistan, and Vietnam."

"The United States has been a leader on International Religious Freedom for decades, and we are deeply concerned that the State Department found no need to designate these countries as Countries of Particular Concern or to add them to the Special Watch List," he added.

The US State Department released its annual delegations in mid-November. Nigeria was included in a list of "Countries of Particular Concern" (CPC) in 2020, but

the country was not included in the 2021 list.

The US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) had been recommending the designation of Nigeria as a CPC since 2009. ADF International and dozens of other human rights organisations joined USCIRF in calling for the State Department to re-designate Nigeria as a CPC again this year.

It remains unclear why the State Department removed Nigeria from the list.

In its own annual religious freedom report, USCIRF found that Nigerian citizens faced violence by militant

Islamists, as well as discrimination, arbitrary detentions, and capital blasphemy sentences by state-sanctioned Shariah courts.

Kidnappers in Nigeria targeted Christians for abduction and execution, at least 11 churches were attacked in the country's Middle Belt, and the local chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria in Adamawa State was beheaded by Boko Haram fighters in 2020, according to the report.

A recent study by a Nigerian legal group found that at least 17 Christians were killed every day in the first half of 2021 alone.

British cardinal calls for action after 27 migrants drown in English Channel

Cardinal Vincent Nichols, president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, said last week that the death of 27 migrants attempting to cross the English Channel is "a tragic summons to action".

Cardinal Nichols, appealed on November 25 for "focused international cooperation" to prevent further deaths in the

waters between France and the UK.

The BBC reported that 17 men, seven women, and three children died on November 24 when their boat sank near the French port of Calais. It was the deadliest incident in the Channel since the International Organisation for Migration began collecting data in 2014. French police have arrested five people in con-

nection with the deaths.

"The terrible loss of so many lives in the Channel is a tragic summons to action. This event illustrates graphically both the ruthless evil of the traffickers and the desperation of those trying to escape poverty, conflict, or persecution in search of a better life," the archbishop of Westminster said.



Pope Francis prays for Wisconsin parade victims

● Pope Francis is praying for the people injured and killed by an SUV that ploughed into marchers during a Christmas parade in the Milwaukee suburb of Waukesha, the Vatican press office said last Tuesday.

A message sent to Archbishop Jerome E ListECKI of Milwaukee said that the Pope was "asking the Lord to bestow upon everyone the spiritual strength which triumphs over violence and overcomes evil with good".

"The Holy Father asks you kindly to convey the assurance of his spiritual closeness to all affected by the tragic incident that recently took place in Waukesha," said the telegram, released on November 23 and sent on the Pope's behalf by Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin.

"He commends the souls of those who died to almighty God's loving mercy and implores the divine gifts of healing and consolation upon the injured and bereaved."

Five people were killed in the SUV incident and nearly 50 injured, including a Catholic priest, multiple parishioners, and Catholic schoolchildren.

Lebanon is worth fighting to save Pope Francis tells new Lebanese PM

● Pope Francis told Lebanon's new prime minister on Thursday that the crisis-hit country is worth fighting to save.

The Pope met privately with Prime Minister Najib Mikati for a 20-minute discussion at the Vatican on November 25.

"Lebanon is a country, a message, and also a promise to fight for," Pope Francis said after the two exchanged gifts in the Clementine Hall of the Apostolic Palace, according to

the Vatican, Mr Mikati presented the Pope with a brick from the Melkite Catholic Church of the Saviour, which was badly damaged by the Beirut port explosion in August 2020.

Pope Francis assured prime Minister Mikati of his prayers for the efforts to help Lebanon get back on its feet. He recalled the Gospel passage, in which Jesus takes Jairus' daughter by the hand and says to her: "Arise".

Pope welcomes French President Macron to Vatican

● Pope Francis received French President Emmanuel Macron at the Vatican for an hour on November 26 as France prepares to take on the presidency of the Council of the European Union.

The French president met privately with the Pope last Friday before heading into discussions with officials from the Vatican Secretariat of State on "France's commitment in Lebanon, the Middle East and Africa", according to a brief statement from the Vatican.

"In the course of the talks, a number of international issues were discussed, including environmental protection in the light of the outcome of the recent COP26 in Glasgow. There was also an exchange of views on the prospects for the forthcoming French Presidency of the European Union," the Holy See press office said.

While in Rome, Macron also had a meeting with a delegation from the Catholic Community of Sant'Egidio at Italy's Palazzo Farnese on the eve of his papal audience.

Letter from Iraq



Dale Gavlak

Churches help Iraqi Christians displaced by Islamic State

Walking through this mainly Christian town outside of Irbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan, it's easy to see many changes since the victims of Islamic State militants fled here for safety seven years ago.

Gone are the tents and caravans that dotted church yards and open fields to house those escaping forced conversion to Islam or death at the hands of the Islamic State militants in 2014. Colourful laundry once hung from balconies, while some people slept on church pews.

The cavernous concrete skeleton of a shopping mall then sheltered 2,500 displaced people. Support from Catholic and other Churches built and cordoned off rooms on three-stories; each room housed a single family, and all shared basic cooking and bathroom facilities.

The unfinished structure has given way to the Ankawa Mall, where people can food shop at the French Carrefour supermarket, eat in a Turkish restaurant or buy Hello Kitty accessories at a Japanese import shop.

In 2017, the Iraqi military and US-led coalition troops forced out Islamic State fighters. Since then, Catholic churches and organisations have been working hard to address challenges faced by Iraq's historic Christian community and other religious minorities.

“The unfinished structure has given way to the Ankawa Mall, where people can food shop at the French Carrefour supermarket”

“People have faced tremendous difficulties and wounding by the Islamic State. We are still experiencing the practical effects of loss and trauma,” said Fadi, an Armenian Christian worshipping at a local church.

Chaldean Catholic Archbishop Bashar Warda of Irbil stewarded the building of four schools, a university and a hospital, providing local people with badly needed employment, with assistance from Stephen Rasche, who is counsel to the Chaldean Archdiocese of Irbil.

Surrender

“We cannot surrender to the argument that religion is a source of violence. Our Lord is there for all. As his followers we need to make that clear and lead the way with



Father Emanuel Youkhana, centre, meets Iraqi Christians who opened a mobile phone shop on the Nineveh Plain following the removal of the Islamic State from the area. Photo: CNS.

education,” Archbishop Warda told Catholic News Service.

Celebrating its first graduating class in October, the Catholic University in Erbil initially opened its doors in 2015 when Islamic State militants carried out a genocide against Iraq's religious and ethnic minorities. Mr Rasche, who is also the university's vice chancellor, told CNS that the initial course offering develops practical skills needed in Iraq such as business administration, IT, finance and accounting.

Graduation

Speaking at the graduation ceremony, in which Christian and Muslim students participated, Cardinal Louis Sako said “the Catholic Church has distinguished itself since the first centuries of its founding for its cultural and social institutions: schools, universities, charities for the poor, hospitals and charitable clinics.”

Cardinal Sako, who is also Iraq's Chaldean Catholic patriarch, expressed hope that “religious education” is offered to all students, not only Christian or Muslim, but will embrace different

faiths so that students “can know the points in common and avoid extremism”.

Father Emanuel Youkhana, who runs the Christian Aid Program Northern Iraq (CAPNI), a Christian program for displaced Iraqis around the northern city of Dahuk, said his organisation provides instruction on Eastern Christianity.

“People have faced tremendous difficulties and wounding by the Islamic State”

“It's a matter of Eastern Christian identity, which for the past 2,000 years has been rooted in Iraq,” he told CNS of the need to ground people. “We are focusing on two parallel lines. One is capacity building of the Church through catechism, Bible studies, liturgical courses, and summer classes. We work in Dahuk, Ankawa, Kirkuk, and (the) Nineveh Plain with more than 24 parishes involved.”

“We are also working on Syriac promotion, which is the mother language of the Eastern Church. We have 2,000 years of Syriac litera-

ture, theology and archival material,” said Fr Youkhana, a priest, or archimandrite, of the Assyrian Church of the East.

Catastrophe

“Often, we only deal with the outcome and the consequences of the catastrophe such as health, infrastructure, livelihood needs, but we must still address the roots of the problem. And we are focusing more and more on this,” to tackle the ideology behind the Islamic State tragedy, Fr Youkhana explained.

He said CAPNI has worked to revise the curriculum in social science and history books for government schools in grades 1 to 9 throughout the Kurdish region to include Iraq's ethno-religious diversity.

“People will graduate with a positive knowledge about Yazidis, about Christians. It is part of their history. If you don't know the other, how do you respect them or feel solidarity with them?” Fr Youkhana said.

CAPNI is also operating five children's centres, each with 150 children, ages 6-13, from different religious backgrounds. They

are given “informal education, not just maths or languages but arts, sports... environmental awareness, like how to keep the area clean, etc.”

“We are encouraging Yazidi children to celebrate religious holidays with Muslims and vice versa,” he added.

“People will graduate with a positive knowledge about Yazidis, about Christians. It is part of their history”

In Ankawa, the Chaldean Archdiocese of Irbil also opened the Maryamana Hospital, with staff from Christian and Muslim backgrounds. A recent visit to the hospital saw a Shiite cleric enter the facility to pay his respects.

“The hospital is open to all,” Mr Rasche told CNS, adding that the Catholic Church also provided health clinics to aid people during the 2014-2017 conflict against Islamic State.

Cardinal Sako called the social, cultural, education and health initiatives undertaken by the Catholic Church a way to “prepare for a future of coexistence” in Iraq, while offering opportunities for an exchange of experiences and knowledge in anticipation of challenges that lie ahead.

“We cannot surrender to the argument that religion is a source of violence. Our Lord is there for all”

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Letters

Letter of the week

Will Newman's vision of education ever be recognised?

Dear Editor, I couldn't agree more than with Bishop Kevin Doran in his wish for theology to be taught at all Irish universities [*The Irish Catholic* – October 14, 2021]. I am a graduate from University College Dublin and, as a student, wondered why there was no teaching on faith or theology in the college. The only place where I could find the Bible or theology mentioned in the college curriculum was in the linguistics department where they offered some study of the Book of Isaiah in Hebrew. After some late-night research in the UCD library I discovered a tome of great interest – John Henry Newman's *The Idea of a University*. When I looked in the flyleaf I realised that the book

consisted of lectures given at the opening of the 'Catholic University of Ireland' in 1854-8. I knew enough of the college's history to exclaim that the Catholic University was now in fact UCD, my alma mater.

By night I read this book and was so refreshed by its wisdom and breath of educational vision. It made sense to me of what a university should be like. Further research into college history taught me about the Irish Universities Act of 1908 which forbade the teaching of theology in the now recognised Royal and then University College Dublin and NUI. The British authorities of the time decided that Ireland's third level education – unlike Newman's Oxford

– had to be completely secular.

Amazingly little has changed since. There needs to be in my opinion a movement to challenge this imbalance in education. So many issues faced in Ireland such as our north-south divisions and the role of Islam in the world have religious roots. As your article stated both in the US and Europe, theology is a normal part of university curriculum.

Will Newman's vision for education never be realised in the place where he first gave birth to this vision?

*Yours etc.,
Dr Cormac O'Duffy,
Moncks Corner, South Carolina*

The Labour party and Catholic schools

Dear Editor, Out! Out! Out! – words not said by the conservative Mrs Thatcher, but rather a member of the Irish Labour Party. Should he have said out, out, out to Jews, homosexuals or any ethnic minority he would be labelled racist, xenophobic, anti-Semitic and bigoted.

He selected Catholic schools because Catholics are an easy target. It will be interesting to see what schools of other religions he will want to have secularised.

I have voted Labour in the past, need I say any more.

Yours etc.,

Mary Clarken

Portlaoise, Co. Laois



Ireland is a hostile place for young families

Dear Editor, Thank you for highlighting on your front page the scandalous cost of living in Ireland and its effect on young families [*The Irish Catholic* – November 25]. It's particularly important as we come up to Christmas: a time of year when we celebrate the birth of Christ, come together as family and friends and, very importantly, make greater efforts to help those less

fortunate than ourselves.

Ireland is not a country for young people and particularly young families. I can't imagine what it would be like to be in your 20s nowadays trying to find a house with your spouse. Unless you earn a humungous salary, you are locked out of the housing market, regardless of whether you're buying or renting.

Those who are lucky

enough, and have saved up enough, are then confronted with exorbitant and increasing energy bills. No wonder we have seen Ireland's birth rate plummet – it has now gone below replacement level. Ireland is a hostile place for anyone hoping to have children. How can anyone afford to raise a child in this environment?

The various Government schemes over the past dec-

ade have done nothing to alleviate the housing crisis and as a result young people are choosing to move out of this badly managed country to start a family. It will be young people and families starting out and trying to get a footing that will be in my prayers this Christmas.

*Yours etc.,
Deirdre Brady
Dundrum, Dublin*

Process of dioceses working closer together is welcome

Dear Editor, It was good to hear that the Diocese of Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora and the Diocese of Clonfert will be put under the leadership of one bishop. While it would be a mistake to put too much focus on Church structures when planning for the Church's future, there are certainly things that can be done to streamline how dioceses function.

As your paper reports [*The Irish*

Catholic – November 25, 2021] a 'source' said this won't be the last structural change for Irish dioceses. Amalgamation certainly causes concern for many who want to maintain their diocese's unique identity, so having two dioceses under one bishop is a welcome compromise.

Hopefully this will lead to an improved use of resources which have been greatly diminished due to the

pandemic. Covid-19 can be blamed for the recent crash in finances but resources have been on the decline for many years – the pandemic has just sped up the process.

Ireland has too many dioceses anyway, so hopefully we see more of this rational approach in the future.

*Yours etc.,
Gerard Byrne
Tallaght, Dublin 24*

Knock pilgrimage on behalf of babies

Dear Editor, As you know the Catholic bishops have undertaken a timely pilgrimage to the Marian shrine at Knock to remember those affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The first Irish death by Coronavirus was on March 11, 2020, and since then 5,652 people have died in the Republic of Ireland.

Covid victims have been the beneficiaries of numerous prayers.

According to the Minister for Health a total of 6,666 abortions were carried out here in 2019 and 6,577 in 2020.

These innocent babies died a shameful death and received no funeral service.

Hopefully the bishops who have been remarkably silent on their murder will organise a pilgrimage to Knock on behalf of these babies, their unfortunate parents and their grandparents who have been deprived of their grandchildren.

*Yours etc.,
Liam de Paor
Carrickane, Co. Cavan*

Halloween has become sinister and occult

Dear Editor, I wish to compliment you and congratulate you on recent articles in *The Irish Catholic* on Christianising the practices at Halloween [*The Irish Catholic* – October 28, 2021], which have become very sinister and occult here, with no reference at all to the holy evening which the festival is.

How wholesome to see children dressed as saints and not as witches, skeletons, ghouls and goblins!

It is such a shame that the schools are encouraged by the commercial world to promote this falsity. Much is invested in decorations, masks and costumes... to what avail? Our good teachers, who promote the Faith so well in teaching it to the children and upholding the Catholic ethos are prevailed upon, by the commercial world, to preside over this trashy, sinister world of the occult, at a key moment and at a peak time when as a Church we are so intent on the prayer practice and liturgical celebration of the month of saints and souls.

We should also learn from the countries of southern Europe how to celebrate this festival of the saints, with proper spiritual symbols and not allow ourselves to succumb to a world that is going nowhere.

*Yours etc.,
Fr Patrick Moore PP
Castlepollard, Co. Westmeath*

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



▲ **USA:** Youths kneel in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament during adoration at the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis. Photos: CNS.

◀ **VATICAN:** Pope Francis gestures as he meets nuns during his general audience in the Paul VI hall.



GREECE: Refugees and migrants stand next to a tent in the Mavrovouni camp on the island of Lesbos.



▲ **CANADA:** Fr Dennis Flores, pastor of St Anthony of Padua Church in Agassiz, British Columbia, and volunteers are pictured with one of the truckloads of donations the parish took to stranded travellers during recent flooding.



▲ **FRANCE:** Migrants sit near wood fire at a makeshift migrant camp at Loon Beach in Dunkirk, November 25, 2021.



▲ **COLOMBIA:** Sr Gloria Cecilia Narváez Argot is escorted by police after arriving at El Dorado Airport in Bogota. Sr Narváez was kidnapped and held by insurgents in Mali for nearly five years, until her release on October 9.

People leaving their Churches



Why are so many people leaving their Churches? There is no one answer to that question. People are complex. Faith is complex. The issues are complex.

Looking at the question, it can be helpful to distinguish among a number of groups. The 'Nones', the 'Dones', the 'Spiritual-but-not-Religious', the 'Indifferent', the 'Angry', and the 'Marginalised'. While there is some overlap among these groups, each has its own set of issues with the Church.

“David Gushee asks this question about those leaving their Churches. Are they clear on what they are actually leaving?”

The Nones are those who refuse to identify with any religion or faith. Asked on a census form, what is your faith or religion? they answer “none”. Theirs is an agnostic stance. They are not necessarily atheistic or hostile to faith, religion, and the Churches. Rather, it's that at this time in their lives they refuse to identify themselves with any explicit faith or Church. Some are humble about it, others arrogant; in the end, the stance is the same, an agnosticism about religion and faith.

The Dones are those who, in their own words, are done with religion and often with explicit faith as well. Done with it! They



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

can consider themselves done for any number of reasons, from having had a bad experience with religion growing up, to anger at the Church, to the intoxicating power of a culture that can seemingly offer itself as a sufficient substitute for religion. They have been there, considered religion, and moved on.

Believe

The Spiritual-but-not-Religious are those who believe in the value of spirituality but not of any Church. They have chosen to pursue a spiritual path outside of any ecclesial community, believing that (at least for them) the spiritual journey is best done outside of organised religion. There can be many reasons for this kind of attitude, not least the overpowering ethos of individuality and personal freedom pervading our culture. In one's faith journey today, people prefer to trust only their own search and experience.

The Indifferent are just that, indifferent to religion (while per-

haps still nursing some faith). There can be a myriad of reasons why these folks feel indifferent to religion and perhaps also to faith. Our culture, for all its goodness, is also a powerful narcotic that can, for most of the years of our lives, swallow us whole in terms of anesthesising our religious instincts and having us believe in what Charles Taylor calls a self-sufficient humanism. For long periods of our lives, our world can seem enough for us and while this is the case, indifference to religion can be a real option.

Reasons

The Angry are those who for reasons they can name, no longer go to church. Any number of causes can be at play here – clerical sexual abuse, the Church's treatment of women, racism, the Church's failure to live out the gospels credibly, their own Church's involvement or non-involvement in politics, a bad history with their Church, a bad

pastor, or personal mistreatment in a pastoral situation. Persons inside this group sometimes end up seeking a new ecclesial home inside another denomination, but many just stay at home on a Sunday morning.

The Marginalised are those who feel themselves outside the understanding, empathy, and spiritual scope of the Churches. This includes everyone from many inside the LGBTQ community, to the homeless on our streets, to countless thousands who feel (consciously or unconsciously) that the messiness of their lives somehow excludes them from ecclesial community. They feel like outcasts to religion and our Churches.

“The Dones are those who, in their own words, are done with religion and often with explicit faith as well”

People are leaving their Churches for a multitude of reasons and this begs some further questions. When people are leaving their Churches, what actually are they leaving? And, where are they going, if anywhere?

In a recent book, *After Evangelicalism, The Path to a New Christianity*, David Gushee asks this question about those leaving their Churches. Are they clear on what they are actually leaving? Do they know whether they are leaving church, leaving their denominations, leaving the faith, leaving Jesus, or just leaving?

Endgame

More importantly, he asks, what will be their endgame? Will they end up in another denomination, or as Spiritual-but-not-Religious, or as agnostic, or just as disillusioned?

Perhaps that question is not so important for the Nones, the Dones, the Spiritual-but-not-Religious, the Indifferent, and for many of the Marginalised – but it is for the Angry, for those who feel alienated from their Churches. Where do you go when anger keeps you away from your family table? Do you search for a more like-minded family? Do you give up on finding a family table? Do you just stay home on a Sunday morning? Are you okay to go to your deathbed still angry? Are you content to remain disillusioned?

Leaving Church: two questions stare us in the face. Why are more and more people leaving their Churches or simply not going to them? And, what's the religious future of those who no longer go to church? The former is a question for the Churches themselves, the latter a question to ponder for those no longer going to church.

“For long periods of our lives, our world can seem enough for us and while this is the case, indifference to religion can be a real option”

Family & Lifestyle

The Irish Catholic, December 2, 2021

Personal Profile

Overflowing with love for the Lord

Page 34



Preparing for Our Lord's arrival



Photos: CNS

Advent is upon us, like a thief in the night. Beginning last Sunday, November 28, it will run right through to Christmas Eve. Pointing out the beginning and end of Advent may seem like a moot point to some of our older readers, but the reality is that it's a season that has been overtaken entirely by Christmas in recent times. Many people of my generation know Advent exists, but the subtle, and supernatural, nature of the occasion flies over our heads much of the time.

Hailing the beginning of the new liturgical year, Advent is the perfect time to reengage with the riches of liturgical living. Catholic writer, Jennifer Gregory Miller, identifies four key elements to keep in mind when considering living out the liturgical life of the Church. These will come in very useful if we take the invita-



Advent often goes overlooked these days, but it's a spiritual treasure to be plundered, writes Jason Osborne

tion into the heart of the Church's life that Advent offers us:

- Keep in mind that living liturgically is all about developing our relationship with Jesus.
- Respect the individual: Knowing how far we can propel our families down the liturgical path with their different needs and limits is essential.
- Get to the heart of the feast or season – the essential.
- Our relationship with Christ calls for celebration, so do it! There's a reason feast days are called 'feast' days.

These are the four linchpins to base our, and those of our families', liturgical lives on, according to Ms Miller, and there's no better time to implement them than Advent. So, what are we celebrating and how do we celebrate it? The word itself might give us a hint.

What does the word 'Advent' mean?

Advent comes from the Latin 'ad' and 'venire', which means, essentially "To come to", or "to

come toward". 'Ad' and 'venire' is the root of the Latin "Adventus" which means "arrival."

So, Advent is the season of arrival. The arrival of who or what, though? It's not too difficult to guess.

Advent

Our Faith is characterised by waiting, and it has a long history of that. The people of Israel waited for the Messiah for generation after generation, and the best proof of this is the Old Testament. Their scriptures, poems, songs and worship were all ordered towards the saviour God had promised them, the one who would set them free from their captivity. And God sent him – Our Lord Jesus Christ. Long awaited, and heralded immediately before his birth by John the Baptist.

Advent is ultimately the season in the Church's life intended to renew that experience of waiting. However, it's not just waiting, but waiting and preparation. Christ has already come into the world, but the Church invites us to deepen our desire for him during this period of meditation and retreat, while also preparing for his second coming into the world.

So it is a double-edged celebration: one that reminds us of God's first coming into the world, while propelling us to work and prepare for his second. The Advent liturgy includes Messianic prophecies and the "O" Antiphons, which refer to both Jesus' arrival at Bethlehem, and the end of time, "when God will be all in all" as St Paul puts it (1 Cor 15:28).

» Continued on Page 33



AND EVENTS

NASA LAUNCHES SPACECRAFT TO KICK ASTEROID OFF COURSE

A NASA mission to deliberately smash a spacecraft into an asteroid – a test run should humanity ever need to stop a giant space rock from wiping out life on Earth – blasted off last week from California.

It may sound like science fiction, but the DART (Double Asteroid Redirection Test) is a real proof-of-concept experiment, which lifted off at 10.21pm Pacific Time (6.21am Irish time) on board a SpaceX rocket from Vandenberg Space Force Base.

“Asteroid Dimorphos: we’re coming for you!” NASA tweeted after the launch.

The goal is to slightly alter the trajectory of Dimorphos, a “moonlet” around 160 metres (or two Statues of Liberty) wide that circles a much larger asteroid called Didymos (762 metres in diameter). The pair orbit the Sun together.

Impact should take place in the autumn of 2022, when the binary asteroid system is 11 million kilometres from Earth, almost the nearest point they ever get.

RARE EINSTEIN PAPERS SET RECORD AT PARIS AUCTION

Albert Einstein’s handwritten notes for the theory of relativity fetched a record €13 million at an auction in Paris.

The manuscript had been valued at around a quarter of the final sum, which is by far the highest ever paid for anything written by the genius scientist.

It contains preparatory work for the physicist’s signature achievement, the theory of general relativity, which he published in 1915.

Calling the notes “without a doubt the most valuable Einstein manuscript ever to come to auction”, Christie’s – which handled the sale on behalf of the Aguttes auction house – had estimated prior to the auction that it would go for between €2 million and €3 million.

Previous records for Einstein’s works were €2.49 million for the so-called “God letter” in 2018, and €1.39 million in 2017 for a letter about the secret to happiness.

NEARLY HALF OF WORLD’S POPULATION SUFFERS POOR NUTRITION – REPORT

Nearly half the world’s population suffers from poor nutrition linked to too much or not enough food, a global assessment said, with wide-ranging impacts on health and the planet.

The Global Nutrition Report (GNR), a yearly survey and analysis of the latest data on nutrition and related health issues, found that 48% of people currently eat either too little or too much – resulting in them being overweight, obese or underweight.

At current rates, the report finds, the world will fail to meet eight out of nine nutrition targets set by the World Health Organisation for 2025.

These include reducing child wasting (when children are too thin for their height) and child stunting (when they are too short for their age), and also adult obesity.

Amusing to hear talk about ‘saving Christmas’

My 11-year-old son has been asking me for ages “When are we getting the chocolate calendar?”

For a small child the promise of a treat every day right up to Christmas seems very appealing. Even adults can see Advent as a time to stock up early on sweets and goodies, anticipate all the gifts under the Christmas tree and hit the shops to get started on the biggest spending spree of the year. This year things seem a bit different and there’s a sense of wanting to get back to basics to focus on what’s really important. As Catholics, we can find it a little amusing to hear discussion about “saving Christmas” when we know that, no matter what else is happening, the truth about God sending his son into the world to save humanity is always a cause for celebration. Advent is the great season of hope and anticipation. Pope Francis spoke about it as a time that Christians are invited to reflect, on the one hand, on the drama of history in which “men and women, wounded by sin, ceaselessly search for truth, mercy, redemption and, on the other hand, on the goodness of God, who has come toward us to communicate to us the truth that saves us and to make us sharers in his friendship and his life”.

Advent is that time when we celebrate an historical event (the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem), a present reality (God-with-us) and a future mystery (Christ’s coming again). In a podcast by Fr Mike Schmitz of Ascension Press Media, he poses a stark question: How would we prepare for Christmas if we knew that we were going to die on Christmas day?

For those without faith that may sound morbid and gloomy but, as Christians, we always have our sights set on the eternal.



A parent’s perspective Maria Byrne

Imagine the care and preparation we’d put into this Advent if we knew that it really was going to be our last one. I don’t think we’d be fussing about the Christmas table decor or the exact right present. We’d probably give the crass consumerism and the manufactured cheer a miss and try to get to the heart of what really matters, the fact that, without Christ, there is no Christmas. Each of us will tailor our individual Advent preparations to the unique needs of our families. While the secular aspects of Christmas preparations can prompt competition and comparisons especially on social media, the Catholic preparation involves no competition. We should all be assisting each other to be the best possible versions of ourselves. A quick online search will result in numerous lists of how to have the perfect Advent but the best idea is to keep it simple and focus on the key theme of spiritual preparation. The sacraments are central. I asked my 15-year-old daughter and 11-year-old son to make lists of Advent goals and both mentioned getting to Mass more often, going to Confession and trying to go to adoration. A neighbouring parish has a beautiful adoration chapel which is a joy to visit in the pre-Christmas period. Just to silently pray in the presence of Jesus is such a contrast to the noise and bustle of supermarkets and shopping centres.

Prayer featured prominently in both my children’s Advent lists: my daughter suggested saying the family rosary. This is a lovely way to get all the family to pray together. Even the busiest teenager can commit to 10-15 minutes a day. Allowing children an input into planning for prayer



times results in a much more enthusiastic response. This prayer can include one of the online Catholic Advent calendar resources. I’ve been using the catholicsbishops.ie one for several years now and it’s become a bit of a tradition. Smaller children love the virtual doors that can be opened each day during the season of Advent revealing various aids to prayer and reflection. The theme of this year’s calendar is hope amid all the difficulties and hardships we’ve endured during this very challenging year. For little ones there are lots of Catholic websites with Christian craft ideas. Catholic Sprouts is one I came across that has some great crafting creations that children

will enjoy- this includes a children’s paper Advent wreath. Older children will enjoy making a proper Advent wreath with its four candles representing the four weeks of Advent, or taking a creative role in the construction of an imaginative background for the crib.

“If you do all these things, I’m sure you’re on the road to sainthood”

Advent is also a time to think of others. My daughter suggested making care packages for homeless people, helping on a soup run and a novel idea which involves filling a jar with suggestions for good deeds that can be done during Advent for other family members. When planning Christmas presents, don’t forget the spiritual gifts like including a prayer for the recipient in each Christmas card you send; getting a Mass said for a friend’s intentions or including a prayer book, Bible or lives of the saints among your other gifts. The best gift of all is the gift of your time, love and service. Whatever is worrying you or threatening to overwhelm you at this time, remember that Jesus said: “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” As my 15-year-old daughter said, “If you do all these things, I’m sure you’re on the road to sainthood.” Wouldn’t that be the best Advent outcome of all?

» Continued from Page 31



With all of this in mind, it's no surprise why Advent leads up to Christmas. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church says, the goal of Advent is to make present to ourselves and our families the "ancient expectancy of the Messiah...by sharing in the long preparation for the Saviour's first coming".

“Anchoring the overwhelming nature of God's arrival in a tangible activity or object is very well suited to communicating essential truths to your children”

So it's clear that Advent is intended to make us more spiritually prepared to meet with Our Lord, but how does this work out in practice? How do we celebrate Advent?

Celebration

Ms Miller writes that St Thomas Aquinas said nothing can enter into the mind unless it comes first through the senses. As such, if we want something to enter our minds during a particular liturgical season, it makes sense to involve all of our senses – sight, taste, touch, smell and hearing. This works for us, but it works particularly well for children. Anchoring the overwhelming nature of God's arrival in a tangible activity or object is very well suited to communicating essential truths to your children.

Advent wreaths

A perennial feature of churches at this time of year, the Catholic Church has been using Advent wreaths since the Middle Ages. Originally a German custom, the fact that Christian

truth can be expressed so clearly through it is another example of the beautiful universality of our Faith. A circular bough which houses four candles, symbolism drips from them.

Lighting candles throughout Advent satisfies all of the senses (except taste) – sight, smell, hearing and touch. It's a simple way to remind ourselves as we prepare for Christmas that Christ is the light of the world, and that he's coming. The evergreen wreath is intended to remind us of Christ's 'evergreen', eternal nature, and the eternal life we find in him, while the progressive burning of the four candles is a reminder of our mortality, which is now rooted in Christ.

As for those candles, three of them are purple, and they are first lit on the first, second, and fourth Sundays of Advent. The pink candle is lit on the third Sunday of Advent, which is known as Gaudete Sunday. On that Sunday, in addition to the pink candle, the priest wears a pink vestment. Gaudete means "rejoice" and we rejoice on Gaudete Sunday because we're halfway through Advent.

Making your own is very simple, and an activity the whole family can do together. Premade wreaths can be availed of, or if you're feeling adventurous, you can make your own from a variety of evergreens.



There are tutorials aplenty on the internet, YouTube being a source of inspiration once again.

Advent calendars

Another humble tradition, Advent calendars are still widely popular due to the fact that they've largely been stripped of their religious significance in favour of a simple countdown to Christmas.

It need not be so, though. Advent calendars are easily imbued with a Catholic spirit. Designing your own, you can easily create one using cardboard, coloured paper, scissors, glue and a marker. Fill it with images from salvation history that call to mind the wait for the Messiah and his coming, as well as scriptural passages.

“These are but a few suggestions, which can be implemented alongside your prayer, Mass and your regular spiritual practices”

While not essential, an odd piece of chocolate or trinket will go a long way to winning a child's loyalty, too. Having a positive association with their Faith in childhood never hurts, either.

These are but a few suggestions, which can be implemented alongside your prayer, Mass and your regular spiritual practices. However, it's a good idea to try as best you can to enter into a retreat mindset during Advent. This is possible to varying degrees depending on our circumstances, but it's an effort we'll never regret making. After all, we know neither the day nor the hour. Maranatha!

Dad's Diary

Rory Fitzgerald



Choosing a secondary school for a child is a heart-rending task. During the teenage years, a child's peer group plays an important role in shaping who they will become. The ethos of a school is important, but the values of those who actually attend it is arguably more important. The coronavirus pandemic has made choosing all the more like guesswork, as most schools were not having open days.

We have an embarrassment of riches, in terms of good secondary schools in our area. There is really the full selection: a Church of Ireland school, a Catholic boys' school, a girls' convent school and a well-regarded non-denominational secondary. There are also busses to other great schools in nearby towns. We applied both widely and fearfully, since some boys in the area got no school offer whatsoever in recent years, due to lack of capacity.

In the end, the offers came slowly in, to great anticipation each time. We were fortunate to be offered each of the schools we applied to. This good fortune came with a downside, however. Now we had to decide. Parents of kids attending each school were consulted. This made matters even more difficult, since each school came with good reports.

I soon learned that a school's Facebook page tells you more about a school than their brochures or videos. It gives a sense of the wider school community. It also lets you see the kind of things that are important to the schools, their student's achievements, the sports played, and the general sense of a place.

It also gives you an idea of the political ideology of a school. One school used Facebook to recommend a book called, *George*, for kids aged 9 and up. It said: "George knows that she's a girl even if everyone else thinks that she's a boy." The school's next recommendation, again for kids 9 and over, was a laudatory story about an eleven-year-old girl who, with the help of a librarian, discovers "stories of girls loving girls" and tells her mother that she is a lesbian. This all seemed

a little unusual.

Now something which a parent had shyly mentioned made sense. They had been about to send their child to this very school, but they saw "some things on Facebook" that unsettled them, and then decided to change their decision.



I naively thought that sex education – with all the delicate and contentious moral issues it entails – should be confined to the appropriate classes, where a carefully

judged curriculum would be sensitively taught. Yet here was a quite striking and controversial brand of sex ed being delivered publicly via social media – with no parental opt out.

I found myself searching my memory of those classes in constitutional law I did in university. Wasn't there a bit about the family being the "the primary and natural educator of the child?" Didn't the State guarantee that it would respect that inalienable right? Perhaps it is just a case of good intentions paving the road to hell, since these literary recommendations were apparently aimed at stopping bullying.

Yet preventing bullying does not actually require the imposition of any worldview, it merely requires acceptable outward behaviour. In a pluralist society, people hold sharply contradictory ideas and values. Yet to be kind to a Muslim person, you need not accept Islamic teachings. To be kind to a transgender person, there's no need to accept transgender ideology. Nor can any such ideologies be lawfully imposed in a free society. True pluralism is about recognising differences, and then disagreeing well.

Sadly, education is becoming less about learning how to think, and more about what to think. My son's history book has a chapter celebrating women from history, which includes that well-known historical figure, Greta Thunberg. Needless to say, in this age of equality, there is no equivalent chapter for male historical figures. There is instead, in between the lines, politics and ideology masquerading as objectivity and truth.

Overflowing with love for the Lord

Personal Profile



Ruadhán Jones

Deacon John Taaffe was among the first men ordained to the diaconate in the diocese of Armagh. It was a long and winding road to that point, as he moved from a love of materialism, money and success, to a love of the Lord and his people.

Deacon John explains that he grew up in a house “where there would have been no prayer”, and it was largely through the good works of his mother that he saw God.

“Deacon John went and prayed quietly in a Church for a time and while he was in there, he read a book on prayer by St Mother Teresa”

“My God would have been materialism and money and success,” Deacon John says. “That would have been my life. I started off as a young bar man collecting glasses, then at 17 I was a bar manager in Dublin. I went onto sales and was the director of my own company – I was caught up in that world. I was baptised and the Holy Spirit was in me, but it was stagnant because I hadn’t connected at all with my Faith and God.”

His life took a new turn in 1997, when a friend witnessed to him, asking if he believed in God and saying that he had nothing to lose if God was real.

“And then she started talking about Confession and that if you go to Confession then everything is gone,” Deacon John remembers. “I did go to Confession that day, I didn’t



Deacon John Taaffe (centre)

make a good one. But the priest was outside and he was saying a prayer with people. I felt this beautiful feeling I’d never felt in my life.

“Some people say that there was an emptiness, something missing in their life – but I would have thought I was successful. When that feeling came through me, it was something I had never felt before. I cried for hours and the next day I dropped up to the parochial house – I wanted to hold onto this beautiful feeling.”

Deacon John went and prayed quietly in a Church for a time and while he was in there, he read a book on prayer by St Mother Teresa.

“The first part I read was, ‘the fruit of silence brings prayer, the fruit of prayer brings faith, the fruit of faith brings love, the fruit of love brings service and the fruit of service brings peace. I looked at that as my roadmap.”

Having found, as he says, his roadmap, Deacon John quit his job and started working in drug outreach, with people who were vulnerable or homeless. During this time, he also started leading pilgrimages to Medjugorje, for which he developed a great personal devotion.

Unforgiveness

“Someone gave me a free ticket to go and I went,” he explains. “I had a lot of hurt, I hadn’t spoken to my father for years. I was carrying a huge amount of unforgiveness. I went and had Confession, and just loved the feeling of love out there.

“After that, I prayed for my father a couple of times a day for a few years. Out of the blue one day, he rang me asking could he go Medjugorje, not for Confession or Mass – just for the sun. I say that now, I didn’t realise the son he was really going over for.

“The first day we were up on apparition hill and I was praying for him. I actually got very upset, because I could really sense my mother’s presence, she had died five years previous. I walked down the hill and left him there. I went back to the apartment and thought there’d be big trouble because I’d left him on the hill.

“He came in four hours later, glowing and he said he followed the steeple and wanted to ask someone for directions but there was no one around. He went into one of the Confession boxes because there was a priest in it and he said he sat down with him and was there for a few hours and the priest told him that my mother and Jesus forgave him. After my father converted, all my family have gone and our relations because they couldn’t get over his conversion.”

In 2012, Dublin diocese ordained the first permanent deacons for the region, which caught John’s eye. He knew straight away that that was for him. A year later, an opportunity opened up in Armagh and he struggled through the preparations in order to become one of the first permanent deacons for the diocese. Immediately he moved into mission and outreach, working with those separated or divorced, setting up a grandparent’s association and starting a prayer group.

“The initiate group is called Apostles of Love Ireland and the centre is called the Oasis of Peace, a centre for prayer teaching and healing”

“And then I set up a new missionary group,” Deacon John continues. “I’d been bringing people to Medjugorje since 1999, so that was a big part of my life. I would have brought people four or five times a year. And then I’d see that there was nothing to come back to, so I set up Our Lady’s pastoral centre. I did that as a place where people should come together and grow, and offer pastoral support.”

More recently, he fulfilled a dream 10 years in the making to set up a missionary group: “I set up a new centre in Mellifont Abbey. The initiate group is called Apostles of Love Ireland and the centre is called the Oasis of Peace, a centre for prayer, teaching and healing.

“That has been wonderful. The archbishop did the official opening during the summer. The number of people coming back to the Faith is incredible, even over the Covid period I’ve seen over 280 people for pastoral counselling, people with fears and anxieties and doing prayer ministry and listening services.

“It’s incredible to see God’s providence... everyone says it’s like a mini Medjugorje,” Deacon John finishes.



Children’s Corner

Chai Brady

Go with the flow and make water glow

Not many people have come across black lights, or even have them in their house although they are easy enough to come by particularly at a time when people are buying things online – something that has increased due to the pandemic.

Black lights allow materials and substances invisible to the human eye under normal lighting to be seen. What does it look like? How does it work? How can it be useful? These questions can be answered with a simple experiment.

Tonic water doesn’t look very strange under normal light but what happens when you look at it under a black light? Does the dye from a highlighter pen do the same thing? Find out what happens and why it happens with an easy experiment which can be done at home.

Apparatus:

A black light (which can be found in some large shops and online)

Tonic water or a highlighter pen.

A dark room to do the experiment.

Method:

If you are using a highlighter pen carefully break it open, remove the felt and soak it in a small amount of water for a few minutes.

Find a dark room.

Turn on the black light near your water, how does it look?

What’s happening?

The ultra violet (UV) light coming from your black light lamp excites things called phosphors. Tonic water and the dye from highlighter pens contain phosphors that turn UV light (light we can’t see) into visible light (light we can see). That’s why your water glows in the dark when you shine a black light on it.



Black lights are used in forensic science, artistic performances, photography, authentication of banknotes and antiques, and in many other areas. That’s the simple explanation!

More detail

If you really want to get into depth, you must know that black light (also known as UV or ultra violet light) is a part of the electromagnetic spectrum. The electromagnetic spectrum also includes infrared, X-rays, visible light (what the human eye can see) and other types of electromagnetic radiation.

A black light lamp such as the one used emits a UV light that can illuminate objects and materials that contain phosphors. Phosphors are special substances that emit light (luminescence) when excited by radiation. Your water glowed under the black light because it contained phosphors. If you used a highlighter pen then the UV light reacted with phosphors in the dye. If you used tonic water then the UV light reacted with phosphors in a chemical used in tonic water called quinine.



TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



Not exactly filled with hope by the synod discussion

I'm always on the lookout for inspiration, hope, something radical, out of the ordinary, especially when it comes to Church matters. Current affairs' debates about matters touching on religion are not always a good source.

It was good to see the return of **The Leap of Faith** (RTÉ Radio One, Friday), with Michael Comyn, albeit for a short run of four episodes for now. The first show focused on the current synodal process and at the end of it I wasn't exactly filled with hope. I thought one of the most important points was made by Derek Scally author of *The Best Catholics in the World* – there needed to be a management of expectations. He was conscious of his experience of that process in Germany and warned also against the illusion of listening. If there was listening and no hearing (or more to the point no consequent action) there would be frustration. People had to be clear what could be changed locally and what was beyond the competence of a national synod.

Ursula Halligan of the liberal 'We Are Church' group had earlier said her desire for change meant "changing the whole structure of the Catholic Church"! She seemed particularly concerned with women not being able to fulfil their vocations in the Church (which begs a few questions) and the Church's attitude to



Michael Comyn has returned for another run of *The Leap of Faith*.

homosexuality. On that issue she objected to the language of the Church – "calling people objectively disordered and their love intrinsically evil" – but does she not want more than the language to be changed? And if so, is not this a recipe for frustration and disillusion from the start? Further, her own description of that language was not accurate – *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* does not say that *people* are objectively disordered or their love intrinsically evil. The words of 'objective' or 'intrinsic disorder' refer only to inclinations and actions so why the disordered interpretation?

Bishop Brendan Leahy took a more patient view,

outlining the 'synodal pathway', currently in its early stages and accepted some of Ms Halligan's criticisms. He agreed there was an issue around decision-making in the Church, but said he had also found many women had an experience of the Church as meaningful for them and involving them. She felt that "women are totally excluded" – surely an exaggeration and a casual dismissal of the massive role women religious have playing in the Church, in education and healthcare.

Michael Comyn was a good listener and asked some searching and pertinent questions – e.g. was there a problem with apathy and exhaustion? Was there

a critical mass of people that needed to contribute to the synod?

Ms Halligan referred to Vicky Phelan, whose support for 'assisted dying' came up on the **Brendan O'Connor Show** (RTÉ Radio One, Sunday). The approach seemed supportive until Gabrielle Colleran, a paediatric radiologist, made a very strong statement against – warning about how the grounds for it can get wider and wider – she cited the Canadian experience. She really feared the pressure that would come on vulnerable older people who can't advocate for themselves. It was a strong and timely intervention, all the more impactful as earlier in the show she had

PICK OF THE WEEK

MASS

RTÉ One Sunday December 4, 11am

The annual St Vincent de Paul Mass will be celebrated by Fr Paschal Scallon, CM.

COLMCILLE - AN NAOMH DÁNA

TG4 Tuesday December 7, 9.30pm

This feature documentary explores the truths, myths and legacy surrounding one of Ireland's most revered saints – Colmcille.

SAGAI RT NA SÍOCHÁNA

TG 4 Wednesday December 8, 9.30pm

This new documentary reveals the remarkable roles played by Irish Redemptorist priests in brokering the most important peace deals between republicans and British governments in the 20th Century.

become very emotional when discussing the ravages of Covid-19 and in particular the lack of global vaccine equity. She had just come off a long hospital shift and was obviously tired and frustrated. I thought Brendan O'Connor was suitably sympathetic and handled it very well.

However, I thought his introduction to the assisted dying item fell short of the requirement for impartiality – "I think that there are ways... am I right...of implementing this where you have a lot of safeguards...in other countries haven't been huge issues around it?". He suggested that the permission of two doctors could allay fears, but Dr Colleran was not impressed. She had "huge safeguarding concerns", was anxious about coercive control and that

vulnerable people would not be offered the necessary and appropriate medical care in the context of our inadequate health service.

On another controversial matter, **Three Families** (RTÉ One, Tuesday) is a two-part drama about people dealing with restrictive abortion laws in the North. I'd hesitate to make final judgement until I've seen part two, but so far it's unabashedly one-sided, effectively a dramatisation of pro-choice rhetoric, and all the more concerning as it is well made.

boregan@hotmail.com,
[@boreganmedia](https://www.facebook.com/boreganmedia)



Film

Aubrey Malone



Ernest Hemingway's complicated Catholicism

Ernest Hemingway died 60 years ago this year. I recently watched the film of his famous novel *A Farewell to Arms* which was based on his wounding on an Italian battlefield during World War I. "I felt my soul leaving my body," was how he described the incident.

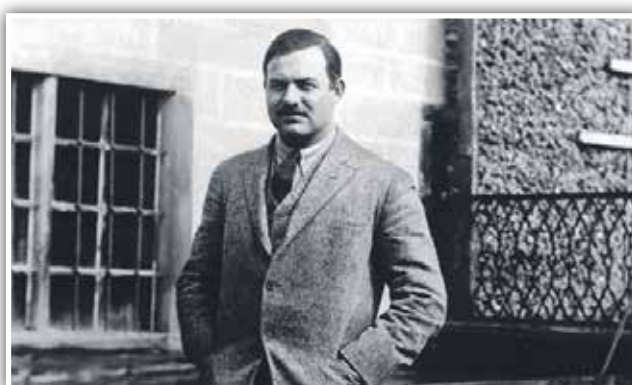
Hemingway was in love with Pauline Pfeiffer, a Catholic, while he was writing the book. He converted from Methodism to Catholicism to marry her. Afterwards he became prayerful and an avid Mass-goer.

His actions were more expedient than spiritual. To be allowed marry in a Catholic church he had to claim his marriage to his first wife, Hadley Richardson – who wasn't Catholic – was void. She was very hurt by this.

He claimed to have been baptised by a priest on the battlefield after he was wounded. This is unlikely. He was given the Last Rites all right but a baptismal certificate never surfaced.

"Catholicism is great for anyone soldiering," he maintained. He saw it as the religion of artists and poets. Pfeiffer had a blunter attitude to his 'conversion'. "The outlet of confession will be good for him," she sniffed.

They divorced in 1940. Two subsequent marriages resulted in his excommunication. He blamed Church policy on birth control for his break-up with Pfeiffer. He had two sons by her, both by Caesarean section. She was warned that if she had any more children she



Ernest Hemingway

could die.

Catherine Barkley, the heroine of *A Farewell to Arms*, dies in childbirth at the end of the book and film. This was a dramatisation of Pfeiffer's situation.

Barkley's character was

a composite of Pfeiffer, Richardson, and a nurse he became infatuated with after his 1918 wounding, Agnes von Kurowsky. The film *In Love and War* deals with this relationship more factually than *A Farewell to*

Arms.

There are many other films based on Hemingway's books: *The Sun Also Rises*, *To Have and Have Not*, *The Breaking Point*, *Hemingway's Adventures of a Young Man*. They're all on Amazon.

The Killers was the only film adapted from his work that he liked. It came from a story of a mere few pages. *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* and *The Macomber Affair* emanated from longer ones.

Films of his posthumously published books include *Islands in the Stream* and *Garden of Eden*. If you're interested in his life, check out *Genius*, *Papa Hemingway in Cuba*, *Midnight in Paris*, *Hemingway and Gellhorn*. There's also the excel-

lent Ken Burns documentary recently shown on BBC 4, *Hemingway*.

Other documentaries are *Wrestling with Life* and *The True Gen*. The latter explores his friendship with Gary Cooper.

Cooper appeared in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* in 1943. It failed to reprise the book's magic. Likewise *The Old Man and the Sea*. Hemingway thought Spencer Tracy looked more like a fat tourist in it rather than a Cuban fisherman. I agree.

When Cooper converted to Catholicism on his deathbed, Hemingway joked "Now he can have all that money and God!"

BookReviews

Peter Costello



Recent books in brief

My Words will not Pass Away

by Fr Martin Hogan
(Messenger Publications,
€19.95/£18.95)

Fr Martin Hogan formerly lectured in New Testament studies at Mater Dei in Dublin, and had written some five previous books on reflections for the liturgical years. These commentaries allow readers to enjoy a period of reflection in their own time, recollections which are not always possible to have for an extended period at Mass.

The inspirational theme of this volume comes from that passage in Luke where we are told "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away".

There was a time when these words might have seemed hyperbolic. But nowadays what with Covid-19 and climate change the possibility of the earth as we know it ceasing to exist is very real. Peoples' minds are more concentrated. The message is that though all else changes around the words of Scripture do not stop shining light when all is darkening, like a lighthouse or a morning star.

The Deep End A Journey with the Sunday Gospels in the year of Luke

by Triona Doherty and Jane Mellett
(Messenger Publications,
€14.95/€12.95)

By contrast to the book above this volume of reflections on the same liturgical year, takes a different approach. The authors say their aim is to highlight "the role of women in the story of Jesus" as well as to engage at the same time with the "ecological climate that confronts us in the twenty-first century".

So this is in its way a challenging book that asks its readers to confront the world as it is, and to achieve a spiritual approach that is appropriate to encompass things as they really are.

But the book is designed for easy reading, and to inspire reflection through additional insights from persons running from Pope Francis to Martin Luther King Jr. Many will find this an approachable and effective book.

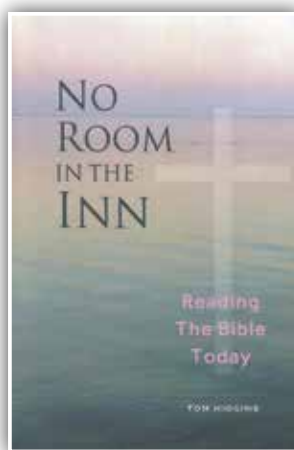
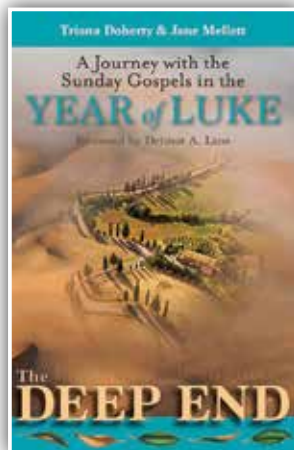
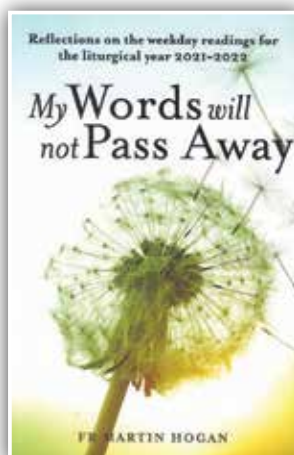
No Room in the Inn: Reading the Bible Today

by Tom Higgins
(published by the author,
available through
Amazon and other sites,
€24.95/£21.99)

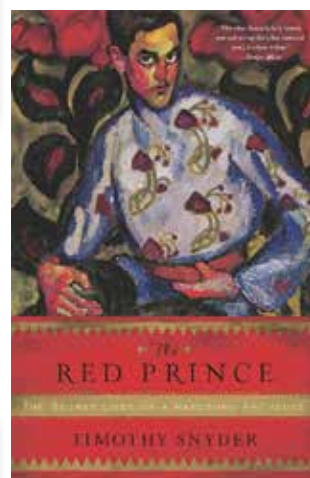
The author intends this book "as a commentary on the Bible.

"It aims to show that the Bible is as relevant today as when it was written with an ancient audience in mind. Rather than being strictly academic, the aim of the book is devotional and inspirational. It is mainly intended for lay readers."

However no book should be an end in itself. The author would have made his commentary more accessible if he had included some kind of notes or bibliography, so that his readers would be able to go further into particular aspects of the Old and New Testament. Only in this way could he have brought to full fruition his aim to open up the text to readers. However, his approach is careful and conservative so he is unlikely to lead them astray, and as such will please and help many readers who seek in the Bible inspiration to inform their actions and help in their daily lives.



The wreck that a great empire left behind



The Red Prince: The Fall of a Dynasty and the Rise of Modern Europe

by Timothy Snyder
(The Bodley Head, £20)

Joe Carroll

World War I (1914-1918) swept away the Hapsburg dynasty which for hundreds of years had ruled much of Europe from Vienna as the Holy Roman Empire.

Napoleon put an end to the Holy Roman title and the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 reduced the Austro-Hungarian Empire to a series of republics in central Europe.

What was left of the Hapsburg royal family - in the eyes of many one of

the great Catholic families of Europe - a set piece of the Almanach de Gotha, also scattered. The last emperor, Karl, who had succeeded the famous Franz Josef who had ruled for 68 years, went into exile in Madeira and died in 1922.

His son Otto ended up as a member of the European Parliament sitting with Fine Gael MEPs in the European People's Party (EPP) group.

“After the war he resumed plotting with Ukrainian exiles to free that country from the Soviets”

But Hapsburg Archduke Wilhelm, who became known as the 'Red Prince', had spent much of the First World War fighting to free Ukraine from Russia and planning to become King of a Ukraine that would be part of the Hapsburg lands. The rulers in Vienna supported this venture, but it failed when the new Soviet Union drove out the imperialist invaders sending Wilhelm into exile, first with his cousin, King Adolfo of Spain and later to France where he became a noted playboy. His brother Archduke Albrecht, meanwhile, had been trying to

make himself King of Poland but had to satisfy himself owning vast estates there and a money-spinning brewery.

To escape a scandal in Paris, Wilhelm returned to the Austria of the 1930s which was teetering between democracy and fascism. He started a campaign to restore the Hapsburg throne in Vienna as a stabilising influence but this collapsed when Adolf Hitler's troops marched in. Wilhelm joined the German army when war broke out in 1939, but later, disillusioned with the Nazis, he began to supply valuable intelligence to London.

Plotting

After the war he resumed plotting with Ukrainian exiles to free that country from the Soviets, a dangerous exercise in a Vienna occupied by the Russians as well as Americans and British.

In August 1947, his luck ran out and he was seized by Russian soldiers and flown to Kiev, in Ukraine, where he had once hoped to be crowned king. After a year of tough interrogation he was sentenced to 25 years in prison. He died some months later of tuberculosis.

His amazing story and that of a part of Europe remote from us here in the west is brilliantly told and documented by Prof. Snyder of Yale.

Blessed Karl, the saintly last Emperor of Austria

Karl I, destined to be the last Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary (where he ruled as Karoly IV), succeeded on the death of his great-uncle Franz Joseph who had blundered into war with Serbia and so opened the way to the ruin of Europe.

When the Emperor Karl gave up the government of Austria in 1918 in the face of post-war social collapse and political turmoil, he did not abdicate as emperor. He kept his sacred title. He remained (at least in his own mind) God's anointed ruler.

Deprived of his throne, he went into exile, first in Switzerland. Later attempts to regain his throne, led to further exile in Madeira, where he died in 1922.

Moves to seek his beatification (and

eventual canonisation) began after World War II. The cause of his beatification was achieved in 2004. At this ceremony John Paul II said in his praise: "The decisive task of Christians consists in seeking, recognising and following God's will in all things. The Christian statesman, Charles of Austria, confronted this challenge every day. To his eyes, war appeared as 'something appalling'. Amid the tumult of the First World War, he strove to promote the peace initiative of my predecessor, Benedict XV."

So it is as an apostle of peace that he should really be honoured. And at Christmas time the cause of universal peace is one that should be on everyone's mind. P.C.

Blessed Karl of Austria.



Readers should note that *The Irish Catholic* circulates throughout the island of Ireland and the book prices listed are the retail price recommended by the Irish or British publishers, in either euros or sterling, as a general indication of what purchasers may expect to pay.



The World of Books

By the books editor

The oddly unending nature of place names

The other day I was reading a book by the American palaeontologist George Gaylord Simpson about his expedition through part of Patagonia in 1930 in search of fossils. His finds helped recreate an idea of past life; but it was not his comments on geology that caught my attention, but his observations on the nature of something completely man-made: place names.

Now here in Ireland we have long been fascinated by place names, but not just through the enduring pages of Patrick Weston Joyce's *Irish Names of Places*, a book of ever absorbing interest that has never really been replaced.

Here is what Dr Simpson had to say (in part): "The passion for naming things is an odd human trait. It is strange that men always feel so much more at ease when they have put appellations on the things around them and that a wild, new region almost seems familiar and subdued once enough names have been used on it, even though in fact it is not changed in the slightest.

“They are the names of one particular wave of colonists, who were not literate”

"Or, on second thought, it is perhaps not really strange. The urge to name must be as old as the human race, as old as speech which is one of the really fundamental characteristics by which we rise above the brutes and thus a basic and essential part of the human spirit or soul. The naming fal-

lacy is common enough even in science. Many a scientist claims to have explained some phenomenon, when in truth all he has done is to give it a name."

In these words the echo of the two different accounts of creation given in Genesis is deliberate as Simpson was raised a strict fundamentalist Presbyterian.

Possession

Naming things is a means of taking possession of things and places...and people. Hence its importance in colonialism from ancient times onwards: names bestowed by the Greeks around the Mediterranean have persisted into our own time.

Simpson notes that the 'natives' in a place often do the official naming of their place: we have experience of this in Ireland. Hence the controversy over place names especially in the west in Ireland. Often though, the officials are confused themselves. In a little thoroughfare in Donnybrook, little more than a lane, some three council name plates give three different version of the way's name in Gaelic!

The Gaelic forms of names are given (unthinkingly) dominance. But consider the Irish Celts, who seem to have come from Spain and not across from the next door island, only came here about 300 years before Christ. As human beings have been in the counties for many millennia, the Gaelic names cannot at all be the first names of any place in these islands.

They are the names of one particular wave of colonists, who were not literate. They retain their knowledge of the island through memory as

other non-literate cultures do. But with the coming of literacy (bookmaking so to speak) the Gaelic names were given prominence, though other cultures, Norse, Norman, English, have also changed and added to our names.

We ourselves are always changing the names of features to commemorate recent figure of renown. Just as the Celts renamed the mountain they called Knocknarae after Maeve (or so it is supposed), thought the original queen was some figure of the Mesolithic in all likelihood.

“Naming things is a means of taking possession of things and places...and people”

What we have come to think of as enduring monuments in place names are nothing of the kind, in the full perspective of human history. In the Book of Genesis, God is said to have made the world and its features, but Adam to have named them.

One has only to consider the name of the present territory that many call the Holy Land to realise that names have no fixity. Each belongs to a particular time, but time and nations pass, and people pass away. Nothing human persists, but humanity, and even that may now be in doubt. All things flow.

We cannot, as the ancient Greeks wisely observed, "Bathe in the same river twice". If even names of mountains change, we need to be cautious about any claims political, social or historical based on them.



Tumulus on Knocknarea.

Leisure time

Operation Smile

Charity Regulatory Authority No. 20054588 Revenue Number: CHY 15661

By remembering Operation Smile in your Will, you are leaving the gift of a lasting smile for a child born with a cleft condition.

Operation Smile envisions a future where health and dignity are championed through safe surgery. Get in touch with Kristen Bell, Legacy & Fundraising Manager, on

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Be there for others after you're gone.

A gift of just 1% of your estate to Irish Hospice Foundation can help us ensure no-one faces death or bereavement without the care and support they need.

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Your heart for the homeless

Merchants Quay Ireland reaches out with kindness to people living on our streets, sleeping in doorways, suffering and alone.

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Missionaries of the Sacred Heart bring hope to the poorest people living in over 48 countries worldwide.

Please help us with a gift in your Will

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When you remember Trócaire in your Will, you bring hope to people living in the world's poorest places

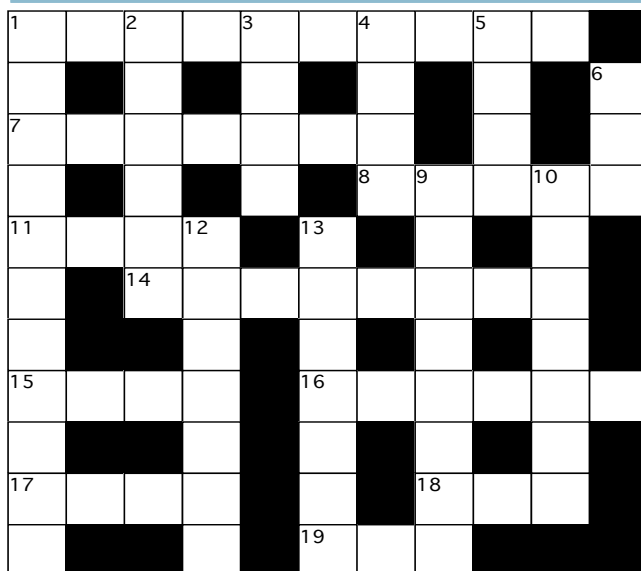


It's easy to get started, and we'll help you every step of the way. Call **Grace Kelly** on 01 629 3333, email grace.kelly@trocaire.org or write to me at Trócaire, Maynooth, Co Kildare.

One day, parents and their children will tell the story of how your legacy of love changed their lives. Thank you for considering a gift to Trócaire in your Will.

Crossword Junior

Gordius 411



Across

- 1 Programme that shows the best bits of matches (10)
- 7 Butt in (7)
- 8 '_____ right of way' (5)
- 11 Proper amounts of the right food; people sometimes change this to lose weight (4)
- 14 Going back over work for an exam (8)
- 15 Sharp-tasting (4)
- 16 You inhale when you breathe in, you _____ when you breathe out (6)
- 17 This word appears on Irish stamps (4)
- 18 "Baa, baa, black sheep, have you ___ wool?" (3)
- 19 Sprinted (3)

Down

- 1 You might get a wash and blow-dry from this person (11)
- 2 Collect (6)
- 3 Noisy (4)
- 4 Mix black and white to get this colour (4)
- 5 You may get a puncture in this (4)
- 6 The top of a bin or saucepan (3)
- 9 He comes from the Emerald Isle (8)
- 10 Lawfully (7)
- 12 Small dog - a Jack Russell, perhaps (7)
- 13 You might sprinkle it on your chips (7)

SOLUTIONS, NOVEMBER 25

GORDIUS NO. 535

Across - 1 Ancient Greek 7 Imp 9 Beef 10 Runner bean 11 They 14 Geese 15 Cameo 18 Mimic 21 Cairn 22 Lying 23 Drawl 24 Rued 25 Spare ribs 26 Trike 29 Andy 33 Goalie 36 The Little Flower

Down - 1 Ape 2 Cuff 3 Ezra Pound 4 Tinge 5 Reels 6 Kish 8 Paying guests 9 Blackcurrant 12 Umpire 14 Gamma 17 Elijah 19 Melee 20 Close 27 Roost 28 Kylie 30 Duel 31 Tell 32 Grew 35 Bar

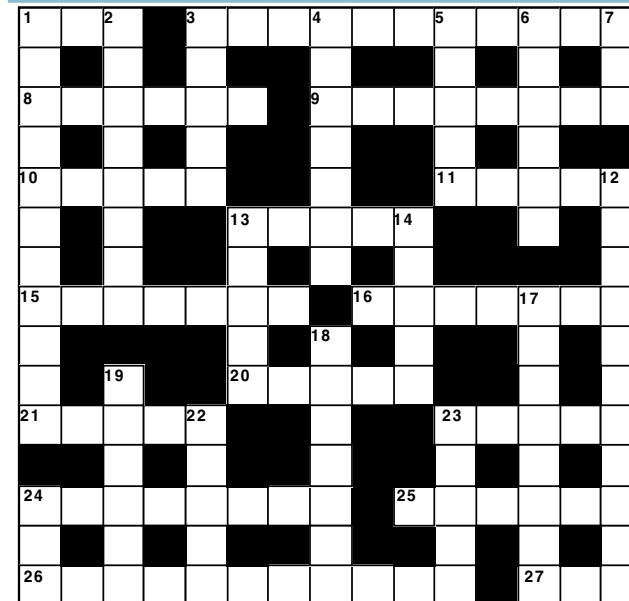
CHILDREN'S No. 410

Across - 1 Daisy chain 7 Nasty 9 Chin 11 Hero 13 Injection 15 Near 16 Rug 18 Shy 20 Sky 21 Snake 22 Invite

Down - 1 Daughter 2 Ignoring 3 Yes 4 Hay 5 Itch 6 Fin 8 Tiger 9 Catching 10 Iron 12 One 14 Jacket 17 Upon 19 Drew

Crossword

Gordius 536



Across

- 1 Piece (3)
- 3 Ingratiate oneself (5,6)
- 8 & 13a You can count on these for Marian prayer! (6,5)
- 9 & 10 Jesus did this when he found the Sea of Galilee to be beneath Him! (6,2,5)
- 11 Artist's stand (5)
- 13 See 8 across
- 15 Get into better spirits (5,2)
- 16 In which an infant can safely find amusement (7)
- 20 Dog bred to pull sleds (5)
- 21 Kingdom (5)
- 23 Of less importance (5)
- 24 Historic way to send an urgent message (8)
- 25 Anticipate with confidence (6)
- 26 I'm carried up in confusion to find the sac around the heart (11)

27 Female pronoun (3)

Down

- 1 Ornithologist; 'twitcher' (4-7)
- 2 Piece of laboratory equipment (4-4)
- 3 Minder (5)
- 4 Oars are needed to propel this craft (7)
- 5 Joint just above the foot (5)
- 6 The most ancient lots Ed moved (6)
- 7 Sprint (3)
- 12 You pay to wash your clothes here (11)
- 13 The limb of a tree (5)
- 14 Saline, briny (5)
- 17 The monarch's daughter will pin cress up (8)
- 18 Took for granted (7)
- 19 Mariner (6)
- 22 Conjury (5)
- 23 Motto (5)
- 24 Faucet (3)

Sudoku Corner

411

Easy

8	5							6	
	9	1		6	5			3	4
		2			3	8	5		
	8	9		7					
	7		5		4			1	
				9		6	8		
	2	4	9			7			
1	3		2	5		4	9		
9							2	3	

Hard

		9		5	8			3	6
1			3			4			
					4			7	
9	7		1			6			
		6				7			
		5			7		1	9	
5			7						
		4			1				3
2	6		5	4		9			

Last week's Easy 410

9	6	1	5	3	8	4	2	7
2	3	4	1	7	9	6	5	8
7	5	8	4	2	6	9	1	3
8	4	5	3	9	7	1	6	2
1	2	7	6	4	5	3	8	9
3	9	6	8	1	2	5	7	4
4	8	9	7	6	1	2	3	5
5	1	2	9	8	3	7	4	6
6	7	3	2	5	4	8	9	1

Last week's Hard 410

8	7	3	9	1	2	4	6	5
6	2	9	5	4	7	3	1	8
4	5	1	3	8	6	2	7	9
3	1	8	7	2	4	9	5	6
2	6	4	1	9	5	7	8	3
5	9	7	6	3	8	1	4	2
1	8	2	4	6	9	5	3	7
9	3	5	8	7	1	6	2	4
7	4	6	2	5	3	8	9	1

Notebook

Fr Martin Delaney



Preparing for Christmas with acts of love

I'M A BIT OF A GREETING card junkie. Wherever I go, I buy cards for all kinds of occasions. I seek out the ones with the most interesting messages, be that inspirational, meaningful, quirky or sometimes risky depending on who I have in mind to send them to. Sometime in late October I found myself in a pretty large card shop in Limerick and those addictive tendencies began to kick in. One entire wall of the shop was already dedicated to Christmas cards. Having more than a slight resistance to all things Christmas before December begins I was about to skip this seasonal section when I became aware of another male customer browsing through the section of cards dedicated to 'My Wife at Christmas'. This man very carefully read the message on each card before moving on to the next. The whole scene intrigued me as this man, more than eight weeks before Christmas, was preparing to acknowledge and articulate his love for the most important person in his life. Despite my initial scepticism about Christmas shopping in October, here was a rather unique expression of Advent unfolding before me.



that the love of husband and wife reflects in a very visible way the love of Christ for us his Church. The greatest expression of God for all of us was when he sent his son to us on that first Christmas night in Bethlehem. Every Advent and every Christmas allows us to celebrate that love anew. The challenge is to find ways and create the space to express our love and appreciation in these weeks of December. Pope John Paul II once famously warned that we should not become so caught up in the work of the

Lord that we neglect the Lord of the work. If I could rephrase that to suggest that in Advent we might not get so caught up in the material gifts for those we love that we forget about the loved ones themselves.

Celebrate love

I'm going to stick my neck out here and suggest that for each day of what is left of Advent, we set aside a little time each day to do some little act which prepares to celebrate love at Christmas. It might be a text, a phone call or unexpected email to someone you have not communicated with in a while. It might be taking a few minutes to pray in gratitude for those we love. Now of course if you wanted to go for the deluxe version of this proposal you might actually sum up the courage to reach out to someone from whom you have become estranged for whatever reason. However you do it, let this collection of random acts of kindness be your very own spiritual Advent calendar. I guarantee you that by December 24 you will be ready to celebrate the love of Christmas like never before. Happy Advent.

Appreciation

Bob attended a seminar on interpersonal relationships and became convinced that he needed to do a better job of showing appreciation to his wife. So, on his way home from work he picked up a dozen red roses and a box of chocolates. He was eager to see how excited his wife would be at this example of appreciation. As Bob walked through the door with a big grin, he met his wife in the hallway – and she burst into tears. 'What's wrong darling?' Bob asked. 'it's been a terrible day!' she exclaimed. 'First, Tommy tried to flush a nappy down the toilet. Then the dishwasher stopped working. Sally came home from school with her legs all scratched and now you come home drunk!'

Christian marriage

One of the aspects of our understanding of Christian marriage is

Celtic inspiration

I'm currently reading a very beautiful book, *Journey to the Well* written by Mary Kennedy and her sister Deirdre Ni Chinneide. In the book, Mary quotes an ancient Celtic prayer which has been helpful to her in her life: "Help me to find my happiness in my acceptance of what is my purpose. In friendly eyes, in work well done. In quietness born of trust and most of all in the awareness of spirit in my being."



YOUR ADVENT GIFT TO SUPPORT OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN DISTRESS

Will you enable a missionary priest or sister to carry the love, care and compassion of Christ to those of our brothers and sisters in dire distress and in urgent need of help?

Your gift will mean a chance of health and happiness, perhaps even the difference between life and death. Please help The Little Way Association to respond to the hundreds of earnest requests received each week from bishops, priests and sisters all around the world appealing for help on behalf of their suffering people. Be assured that every euro you send will be forwarded intact to a missionary who will be happy to put it speedily to use to help a needy person/child in distress.

Thank you and may the God bless and reward your generosity.



"Jesus wills that we give alms to Him as to one poor and needy. He puts Himself as it were at our mercy; He will take nothing but what we give Him from our heart, and the very least trifle is precious in His sight."

- St Therese

YOU CAN HELP REPAIR A MISSION CHAPEL

The Little Way Association has a long history of providing humble places of worship for far-flung parishes in mission countries. Nature can take its toll on these simple buildings, and we receive requests from priests for help with repairs.

We humbly ask that you allocate some of your kind giving to our chapels fund. By ensuring that these small but dignified churches are in good repair, you help to make possible the offering of Holy Mass in needy Catholic communities.

The clergy and people overseas who benefit from your generosity invariably promise to pray for their benefactors' intentions.

Please can you spare a donation, large or small, to help a needy person or child

Every euro you send to The Little Way Association's fund for hungry, sick, deprived refugees and needy children will be used, without deduction, for the relief of suffering.

Crossed POs and cheques should be sent and made payable to:

THE LITTLE WAY ASSOCIATION
 Sacred Heart House, 119 Cedars Rd, Clapham Common, London SW4 0PR
 (Registered Charity No. 235703) Tel 0044 20 76 22 0466
www.littlewayassociation.com

I enclose €..... to be allocated to:

€..... **HUNGRY, SICK, DEPRIVED & REFUGEES**

€..... **NEEDY CHILDREN**

€..... **MISSIONS CHAPELS**

€..... **MASS OFFERINGS**
 (Please state no. of Masses _____)

€..... **LITTLE WAY ADMIN EXPENSES**

Please tick if you would like an acknowledgement

To donate online go to
tinyurl.com/lwadonations

DONATIONS FOR THE MISSIONS ARE SENT WITHOUT DEDUCTION FOR ANY EXPENSES.

Name (Rev. Mr. Mrs. Miss)

(Block letters please)

Address