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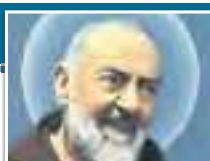
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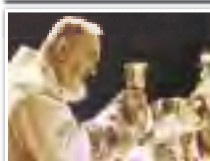
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Pope's trip is moment to set our gaze on a better future

Ask practising Catholics to tell you about their Church and their faith, and on the whole, you get glowing reports. There will be complaints, and stories of inadequacies, and reservations about this or that teaching, and no one knows the faults of the Church – collectively, and in this or that place – better than those who actively belong.

But Catholics will also tell you that the Church is a place of love and welcome, of growth and healing, of support and nurture, of wisdom and of grace, of unconditional acceptance, which plays a key role in bringing forth a more humane, caring world. Here's the great, unreported story of our time: Catholics love the Church.

Hence their frustration with the very different picture of the Church often portrayed in the media, where it appears dogmatic, intolerant, and judgmental, an institution that seeks its own interests, that imposes and excludes. In short: a 'no' instead of a 'yes.' Very often, ordinary decent Catholics won't recognise their Church as it is sometimes portrayed in the media. It's not that they reject the legitimate criticisms of their Church (and God knows there has been much to criticise), but they realise that it is not the full picture.

Preparation

After three years of careful preparation, the World Meeting of Families and the visit of Pope Francis is upon us. A friend at WMOF headquarters in Dublin recently reported on the atmosphere with just days to go. "Walking up and down the corridor here in Clonliffe



Editor's Comment Michael Kelly

today," she wrote, "and it's all mums and dads giving advice and instructions to family members about dinner, shopping, lifts, food and times they will be home at."

"The effort being made here by colleagues to make WMOF2018 a wonderful event for all those attending is immense," she wrote.

It put me to thinking that the story of the Church is really the story of countless hundreds of thousands of people all over the world who seek nothing other than to be of service to their fellow men and women.

“Pope Francis ...will be confirming our Faith and encouraging us to deepen our relationship with Jesus Christ”

It is the stories of mothers and fathers passing on the Faith in difficult circumstances. It is the story of religious sisters and brothers living their lives alongside some of the most vulnerable communities in the world. It is the story of priests trekking vast distances in developing countries to bring people the consolation of Christ's Real Presence in the Eucharist.

That is what Irish Catholics will be celebrating during the World Meeting of Families and the visit of Pope Francis. Obviously, the horrors of the Church's

failings on issues like abuse loom large, and survivors and victims will be in the prayers and thoughts of everyone participating in coming days. Catholics long for their Church to prove that it is a place that takes wrongdoing seriously and that there is no place within it for those who would do harm to children.

Bishop of Limerick Brendan Leahy said recently that in remembering the achievements of the Church, it is also right to remember the darker moments in our history. This is right and proper.

Papal trips aren't magic, but they are momenta of singular grace for the

particular Church that the Chief Shepherd of the Church visits. Pope Francis in exercising his Petrine ministry in Ireland will be confirming our Faith and encouraging us to deepen our relationship with Jesus Christ.

WMOF2018 and the visit of Pope Francis is a moment to lift up our hearts and look towards a brighter future. The history of the ancient Israelites shows us that the way forward is not in the past, or hankering back to fabled glory days that truth be told never really existed.

The Promised Land is always before us. It is this on which we should fix our gaze. Come Holy Spirit.

The question is how to thrive, not just survive.



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Ireland set for historic welcome for Pope Francis



Darragh Confrey, a staff member with Veritas in Dublin, awaiting the arrival of Pope Francis. Photo: John McElroy

Chai Brady

Joyous pilgrims from across Ireland are hopping on planes, trains and automobiles in their hoards this week to celebrate the importance of family and marriage in their lives.

In a moment that will go down in history, Pope Francis will step off his plane at approximately 10.30am on Saturday to be greeted by clergy and politicians.

It's believed 750,000 people in total will be attending all the WMOF events, from the opening ceremonies in each diocese on Tuesday evening, to the Pope's final Mass in the Phoenix Park.

All 45,000 tickets for Knock, which the Pope will visit on Sunday morning, were booked out in just four hours by excited pilgrims.

Biggest event

For the biggest and most anticipated event, the Pope's Mass in the Phoenix Park on Sunday, there were 500,000 tickets booked. Within the first 24 hours 300,000 were secured.

About 37,000 people will descend on the RDS from Wednesday-Friday for the Pastoral Congress. A huge amount of these, 15,000,

are coming from 116 countries, with Archbishop Diarmuid Martin saying it's a moment to "showcase" Ireland and the Church to the world.

In total 6,000 young people under 18 will attend the Pastoral Congress, with all areas of the event being family friendly. A further 2,000 performers will keep all entertained.

Of the 292 announced speakers, 91 are lay women, 65 are lay men and 44 are clergy/religious, with the largest group being couples.

It is an international programme, with speakers from five continents.

With the 7,000 volunteers from all over Ireland, who agreed to give their time to make the event a success, the WMOF has been made possible.

The Festival of Families, held on Saturday in Croke Park, has also been booked out with over 80,000 expected to attend.

With such huge numbers and interest from across the country, there's no doubt all who attend will be making history this week.

Primate looks ahead to Northern visit

Colm Fitzpatrick

The Primate of All Ireland has expressed his hope that Pope Francis will visit the North of Ireland in the distant future, giving it the "dedicated time" it requires.

Speaking to the BBC on Thursday, Archbishop Eamon Martin said that he pushed hard to encourage the Holy See that the Pope would make a visit north of the border, adding that "the time is right now for it".

However, given the packed schedule for the visit, the Archbishop of Armagh said he didn't know "how the poor man is going to be able to do all of the things that we're trying to squeeze in".

History

"In some ways I now realise that a visit to Northern Ireland, particularly with our history and with all that we've been through, is going to require a dedicated time," he explained.

Although the Pope was not crossing the border on this occasion, Archbishop Martin hoped he would acknowledge Northern Ireland during his visit. "He might say something to us in our particular situation here in Northern Ireland about our peace and what we have done, and maybe affirm us in the progress we have made."

Support and encourage families, says bishop

Staff reporter

We all have a "civic responsibility and mission" to support and encourage the family, especially during challenging situations, Down and Connor's bishop has said.

Visiting the 'Families Matter' programme at Maghaberry Prison which is run by the prison and Barnardo's NI to support fathers who are in custody on August 19, Bishop Noel Treanor said: "The importance of this highly innovative Families Matter programme within prison affirms the significance of family life and family relationships for the prisoners."

Challenging

He added that the programme highlights the many challenges faced within the family and society today and it is "precisely within these challenging situations" that the reality of family is lived and

celebrated with Faith, trust, joy and hope.

"Recalling the words of Pope Francis, 'It takes a village to raise a child', family

provides the foundation for the Church and society and that we have a civic responsibility and mission to support and encourage the family."



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Lukewarm reaction to Pope's abuse letter

Greg Daly

Pope Francis' letter to the world's Catholics on clerical sexual abuse has been praised for its strong language but criticised for lacking promises of action against clergy who have committed or concealed abuse.

The 2,000-word letter, coming against the background of last week's Pennsylvania Grand Jury report that revealed over 1,000 children were abused by clergy in the US state over a 70-year period, acknowledges the suffering of minors due to sexual abuse and the abuse of power and conscience by clergy and religious, describing these as "crimes that inflict deep wounds of pain and powerlessness".

Accepting "with shame and repentance" how the Church had "showed no care" for children and "abandoned" them, the Pope criticised a tendency towards clericalism that can help perpetuate abuse.

The Church as a whole needs to "acknowledge and condemn, with sorrow and shame, the atrocities perpe-

Strong words, but promise of action must be fulfilled

Nobody should expect this week's letter from the Pope about child abuse to be Pope Francis' last word on the subject.

Two thousand words long, the letter seems primarily intended to stress that the Pontiff is under no illusions about the horror of abuse, most recently as detailed in the Pennsylvania Grand Jury report. He describes abuse as "crimes" and "atrocities", and even as "part of the culture of death", placing the abuse of children solidly alongside the abortion of unborn children as something the whole Church must fight against.

In some ways it is perplexing, of course. "I am conscious of the effort and work being carried out in various parts of the world to come up with the necessary means to ensure the safety and protection of the integrity of children and of vulnerable adults, as well as implementing zero tolerance and ways of making all those who perpetrate or cover up these crimes accountable," the Pope says, but as survivor and campaigner Marie Collins says, this seems to

make little sense, given claims that only the Pope can hold bishops accountable – and specific references to bishops are conspicuous by their absence from the letter.

Answer

The answer to this, perhaps, is buried and implied in the Pope's subsequent sentence, where he says the Church has delayed "in applying these actions and sanctions that are so necessary". It seems the Pope believes that it is civil society, much more than the institutional Church, that has developed the necessary means to implement zero tolerance and hold to account those who commit or conceal crimes.

This, then, forces us to look more carefully at his praise for those abuse survivors whose outcry proved louder than efforts in the Church to silence them. "The Lord heard that cry and once again showed us on which side he stands," he said, clearly seeing the actions of civic society here as doing God's work.

Not, the letter says, that the Church must continue to lag.

"Looking ahead to the future," the Pope writes, "no effort must be spared to create a culture able to prevent such situations from happening, but also to prevent the possibility of their being covered up and perpetuated".

“The Pope is calling on the Church as a whole to join in solidarity with the wounded”

Fine words, of course, but no parsnips, but this is at least a strong statement of intent, a commitment to catching up, to doing everything necessary to prevent abuse and to prevent the concealing of abuse. Is this, it's worth asking, the first time a Pope has spoken of 'cover up'? The term appears twice in the letter, at any rate, a clear acknowledgement that the tendency to conceal abuse has been rife in the Church.

While the Pope is suitably damning of tendencies to put priests on pedestals, making his own the 2005 words of the then Cardinal

Ratzinger that the Church and indeed the priesthood is full of 'filth', perhaps the most controversial aspect of the letter among Catholics has been its suggestion that the Church should engage in prayer and fasting in response to the abuse crisis.

In doing this the Pope is calling on the Church as a whole to join in solidarity with the wounded and with God himself through the classic spiritual disciplines of prayer and fasting "to see things as the Lord does, to be where the Lord wants us to be, to experience a conversion of heart in his presence". For this to work, he says, the whole people of God must come together in prayerful solidarity to uproot cultures of abuse in our communities.

He's right, surely, but this appeal might have been better received if it were accompanied by decisive action. That can't come quick enough.

– Greg Daly

trated by consecrated persons, clerics, and all those entrusted with the mission of watching over and caring for those most vulnerable", he said, calling for solidarity

against all forms of corruption.

"Looking ahead to the future, no effort must be spared to create a culture able to prevent such situations from happening, but also to prevent the possibility of their being covered up and perpetuated," he said.

Reactions to the letter have, however, been lukewarm.

DUBLINER Marie Collins, formerly a founder member of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, praised the letter's strong words on clericalism, but questioned its lack of promised action.

"The condemnation of clericalism in the letter is good to see as it plays a big part in the ignoring of the laity, survivors and experts," she said. "It gives rise to the ease with which Church leaders can feel comfortable pro-

tecting fellow clerics despite their crimes against children."

Criticising the letter's failure to include a concrete plan of action, she said: "Statements from Vatican or Pope should stop telling us how terrible abuse is and how all must be held accountable. Tell us instead what you are doing to hold them accountable. That is what we want to hear."

Speaking on RTÉ, Raphoe's Bishop Alan McGuckian called on Pope Francis to introduce structures to hold bishops to account, and said he believed action will be taken.

"I too felt when I read the letter that I wanted something more concrete, but by Pope Francis' actions in recent months he has shown that in one specific case where he did become clearly and unambiguously aware of that kind of failure on the part of bishops, he has acted...and I believe he will act."

NEWS
IN BRIEF

Traditional Catholics welcomed for Knock pilgrimage

The National Traditional Pilgrimage, set up under the auspices of the Archbishop of Tuam in 2002, will kick off on September 1 this year.

In establishing this, Archbishop Neary expressed the wish that all traditional Catholics in good standing with an attachment to the older liturgical norms, now termed 'The Extraordinary Form' would be encouraged and welcome to come to Knock on the first Saturday of September each year.

The pilgrimage commences with a *Missa Cantata* at 2pm at the high altar in the parish church.

Papal furniture has Irish touch

An Irish manufacturing company was honoured with responsibility of designing and crafting bespoke sanctuary furniture for the Papal visit to Ireland, including Altar, Ambo and Chair which will be used by Pope Francis during the celebration of Mass in Phoenix Park.

Ciaran O'Hagan of Specialist Joinery Group said the sanctuary furniture has a minimalist and simple design.

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Manuel Steven, Peter James and Chifindo Kagons pose for a photo in their village of Jambawe in Lilongwe, Malawi, which is supported by Concern's Livelihoods programme.

Photo: Jennifer Nolan, Malawi, 2016

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Throwing eggs at the Pope?

A friendly English Catholic I know whizzed by me on her bike, and then drew up. We exchanged greetings and pleasantries, and then she said: "By the way, one of my sisters is going to Dublin to throw eggs at the Pope at the weekend!"

Oh, why?

She shrugged. "It's a bit vague. It's to do with the Pope not meeting with women who were in these abusive homes."

I said I thought the Pope probably would be addressing the issue of the Magdalene Homes. But I ventured to suggest that this historical situation was complex: blaming the Catholic church alone wasn't really the full picture. "Women – usually unwed mothers – were consigned to these homes, sometimes by their own families. The State should also have been responsible for the care and maintenance of welfare homes. It's hardly the fault of an Argentine priest who happens to have become the Holy Father."

"I regretted that a free State felt obliged to have such draconian security"

"I suppose not," she conceded. "It does seem a little, well, mean. But I think she's resolved to do it, probably with pals – off to Dublin and chuck eggs at the Pope."

I guess the security people are prepared for all kinds of protests from all kinds of individuals, including egg-throwers. And while I rather hope people won't hurl ovine missiles – there are more rational ways to make a point – if it does occur, I



Mary Kenny



Queen Elizabeth II during her visit to Dublin.

suspect it might engender sympathy for Francis, personally, rather than hostility.

When the arrangements were being made for the state visit of Queen Elizabeth, in 2011, which I reported, the Department of Foreign Affairs were highly conscious that Ireland's reputation for extending the céad míle fáilte to the stranger should be maintained.

I saw groups of

vociferous and bitter anti-British demonstrators being corralled away by very determined Gardai, evidently on the orders of the State that nothing amiss should happen to the visitor.

I regretted that a free State felt obliged to have such draconian security, but the country's good could have been in jeopardy.

And of course, she, too, had to apologise for past wrongs.

● No one who has seen Wim Wenders' movie *Pope Francis, A Man of His Word* could reasonably suggest that the Pontiff provides a rallying-cry for "right-wing rallies".

What's transparently evident, again and again, is that Francis is a Pope for the poor: it is the poor of so many countries who rally around him, over and over. It is the poor who feel that he is on their side. And prisoners. And refugees.

He speaks as much about environmental degradation as about traditional Christian theology – or, perhaps, he sees the destruction of 'Mother Earth' as being an offence against our bounden stewardship of nature. In this, he is truly a Franciscan. Francis of Assisi – though it is seldom mentioned now – was within an ace of being excommunicated from the Christian Church of his time for tendencies towards "pantheism" (seeing the divine in all of nature).

Pope Francis's lack of "right-wing" credentials is what makes him a focus of criticism among some traditionalists, indeed.

Among his other homilies in Ireland, I'd lay a bet that Francis will mention the need for Ireland to accept more refugees. Right-wing? I don't think so.

We can't be both different and equal

A British woman, Kay Longstaff, was rescued from the Adriatic last weekend, having spent ten hours in the water. She had fallen off a Norwegian cruise vessel.

Experts said that her survival overnight, swimming and floating alone in the sea, was explained by two factors: the Adriatic's temperatures being reasonably warm and because she is a woman. Females nearly always survive longer in water than males because they have different structures of subcutaneous fat.

Scientific fact repeated: men and women are different.

So Josepha Madigan's assertion that women bring a "different perspective" to politics is perfectly logical – an argument she deploys in a plea for more "gender quotas".

But there's the other side of this coin. Men and women are different, and therefore, rigid or over-literal interpretations of "equality" are awkward. It is difficult to be both different and equal. It's like comparing apples and oranges. Both are edible fruit, but different fruit and not always amenable to exactly equal treatment.



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Nuala O'Loan

The View



In just a few days Pope Francis will come to Ireland for the World Meeting of the Families. It will be a brief visit and its primary focus will be the family, not the whole Church in Ireland, nor its future nor its past. So what can we realistically expect will happen and what might be the impact and long term effect of this second visit of a Pope to Ireland, in the history of the Catholic Church?

This is not a state visit, rather Francis comes to participate in the World Meeting of Families, but of course, when the global leader of the world's 1.3bn Catholics visits any country, it is a very significant moment.

His actions, those to whom he speaks in private, those whom he meets in public, his speeches, will all be analysed and conclusions will be drawn about his priorities, his understanding of the situation of the Church here in Ireland and in the world, and whether he is just a well-intentioned elderly man who 'talks the talk but does not walk the walk.'

Burden

A huge burden rests on the Pope as he comes to Ireland, and we should pray that he will have strength and courage, and that his integrity will shine forth for all the people, energising us and focussing us again on why we are Church, what it means to be Church, and what lies at the core of our membership of Church – the love of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for each of us and our belief, our knowledge that Jesus is our Saviour and Redeemer – rarely heard words maybe, in this modern secular world, but nevertheless the foundation of all that we are.

My deepest wish is that somehow he will reinforce our understanding that we are called to love as Jesus loved, giving all and asking nothing back in return, that we will be able to see more clearly in all his children, born and yet to be born, the living face of Christ, and that we will respond to each other as Christ responded to everyone he met on the way to Calvary, caring for and nourishing everyone, understanding more fully that this world is not ours, that our lives are not ours alone, but that we are part of the great work of God in the world He made, terrifying though that may seem on occasion.

“It can be so much easier to walk through our lives living in our own little cocoon, undisturbed by so much of what happens around us”

For the awful reality is that it can be so much easier to walk through our lives, concerned about ourselves and our immediate families, responding with generosity to the occasional calls for famine relief, for help at times of great tragedy, but generally just living in our own little cocoon, undisturbed by so much of what happens around us.

I travel Ireland on a fairly regular basis, I see the ageing congregations, the many older priests, and the endless assaults on our Church by those who would portray the Church as the source of evil, of child abuse and terrible treatment of the ordinary people in years gone by.

Such abusive and criminal behaviour is present everywhere in the world. It should not have

been present in the Church because of our call to love. Yet it was a very real and terrible part of the history of the Church in Ireland.

We cannot deny it and we should not forget it. We must use the right language to describe what happened: so many crimes against little children, the awful treatment, on occasion criminal, of vulnerable women and single mothers, the restrictions on the ability of the laity, male and female, to play a proper role.

Power

In part this was the product of the way in which the world as a whole developed, a world in which authority, power and control were prized and abused. It was not just the Church in Ireland or across the world which lost its way. We must remember, because it is in remembering that we can at least ensure that, within ourselves as Church in Ireland, these things never happen again.

Of course, the reality also includes so much that was good – many of those now in power were educated through the work and self-sacrifice of so many of our Catholic predecessors.

Health and education, and very often a home, were provided largely not by the State, but by those who laboured in orphanages, hospitals, schools, social services, often as religious or priests and often living relatively simple lives, owning nothing and giving their all.

The Catholic Church provided a structure for society through its institutions, a structure which is replicated across the world and which is often the last thing left standing when war and conflict ravage a state. I have seen the United Nations look to surviving Catholic priests



and parishes as a route through which order can be restored, confidence won and trust in the normal structures of society can be re-established.

We must remember that too. The reason why the Catholic Church remains in those war-torn countries, inadequate though it may be, is that Catholics believe that they are called to live loving God and all his people.

“I hope that we will find the strength and the courage to see ourselves as we are, each of us capable of great good”

At this time of ongoing difficulty in Ireland, I hope that we will find the strength and the courage to see ourselves as we are, each of us capable of great good, but capable also of causing great harm. That is how it is in families too. Living as family is not always easy, but it provides the centre which binds us together, no matter how flawed we are.

I am sure that during WMOF2018 there will be acknowledgment

of and repentance for the crimes of the past, for the failures, for the institutional defensiveness, for the arrogance, for the lies, for the cover up. WMOF2018 cannot solve or restore all the harms of the past. It can reinforce our understanding of the complexities and importance of family, of the need to care for one another.

We must be prepared to fight homelessness, enable families to have affordable homes, and live in them in peace, not endlessly worrying about where the rent money or mortgage payment is going to come from.

Ireland is rapidly dividing further, as those who have property extract every possible last euro from it, regardless of the fate of those who do not, not because of any failing on their part, but simply because they don't.

Health service

We must have a proper health service where people don't face death and illness because they have been let down by those paid to care for them.

Our people must acknowledge that they have to work properly in the interests of all, not just

doing the minimum and allowing some people to have a very good lifestyle whilst others suffer every day through poverty and marginalisation.

We must also improve our Church's accountability structures so that we do all we can to ensure integrity, to enable real challenge. Corruption and evil are cyclical.

They will never be fully solved. We must remain alert and do all we can to create structures which are endlessly self-critical.

Difficult work

There must be never again be a system in which evil can go unchallenged. It will be very hard and difficult work. We will have to change radically our systems and our Canon Law. We will have to do it rapidly.

The Church in Ireland can reveal again that part of itself which is true to Christ, that part which lives and loves as we are called to live and love. We can show secular Ireland that the Church lives, that it is not a threat, but rather a contributor to the common good, because at its core lies the beating heart of Jesus, loving and watching over it.

“The Church in Ireland can reveal again that part of itself which is true to Christ, that part which lives and loves as we are called to live and love”



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The easy path's dark legacy



Failures to take hard choices continue to haunt the Church, writes **David Quinn**

The issue of abuse of children by priests has loomed large over the visit of Pope Francis to Ireland this week, and over the World Meeting of Families, the reason for him being here. The scandals have re-erupted in Chile, Australia and in the US with the release of a huge investigation into abuse



by priests in six Catholic dioceses in Pennsylvania.

Responding to that report, Pope Francis this week in Rome said: "The heart-wrenching pain of these victims, which cries out to heaven, was long ignored, kept quiet or silenced." He fell short of detailing how

bishops guilty of covering up abuse should be held accountable.

The Pennsylvania report is as shocking as the official investigations that have taken place into abuse here in Ireland. A roughly similar percentage of priests in Pennsylvania have been

accused of abuse as in dioceses such as Ferns and Dublin. The Pennsylvania investigation looked at the period from 1947 until the present, that is to say, at a seven-decade period. It found that just over 300 of the 5,000 who have served in the State over that timespan have been accused of abuse, which is to say, 6% of the total.

The usual pattern was found; the worst period for abuse was the 1970s and 1980s. 90% of the thousands of cases of abuse predate 1990 and none have been found so far in the years after 2002. This is not to say there are no so such cases because it can take victims a long time to come forward, but it is to say that the robust children protection systems now in place in countries like Ireland and the US seem to be working.

Investigation

The most comprehensive investigation of the abuse problem to date was conducted in the US by John Jay College on behalf of the American bishops. It looked at the period 1950 to 2002, later updated to 2010.

It investigated the files of over 100,000 priests in every US diocese, including members of religious orders. It found that more than 4,200 had claims of abuse made against them. The rate among diocesan priests was almost 5% and among religious order priests it was about two points lower than that.

The absolute epicentre of the crisis occurred between 1976 and 1981. The vast majority of victims (81%) were boys, and most of these were aged between 11 and 14.

Abuse cases broke into public consciousness in the 1990s in the US as here in Ireland because victims began to gather the courage to come forward.

When the John Jay report also found, just like the official investigations here, and the most recent one in Pennsylvania, was a constant pattern of cover-up by bishops until relentless pressure from victims and the media forced them (in the main) to behave differently.

Prior to the 1990s, self-protection was put far above child-protection and even now the self-protective instincts are strong as we see from the reluctance of bishops to resign when it has been discovered they covered up abuse cases in decades past.

The report into the Dublin archdiocese, released in 2009, shows another familiar pattern, namely that in the 1970s and 1980s, bishops adopted a 'therapeutic' approach to the issue of child abuse.

This approach meant the priest was seen as the real 'victim', not the child. The priest was regarded as someone suffering from an illness and therefore he was sent away to be 'cured' by a therapist. He was then reassigned to another parish where he abused more children.

This was absolutely disastrous and enabled abusers because they would know that the worst that could befall them was being sent away for a few weeks or months to a counselling centre rather than being handed over to the law.

The scandals have also undermined the efforts of lay Catholics who had absolutely nothing to do with them"

We cannot overestimate the role of evil in all this. Abuse of children is evil and covering up abuse is evil. The human capacity for self-deception is enormous and evil works through it and takes advantage of it. Thus, bishops will have convinced themselves that sending the accused priest away for 'treatment' was the right thing to do when, in fact, the bishop was protecting both himself and the priest from reputational damage. Deep down, the bishop will have known this.

The example of Jesus is

inextricably linked to the Cross. Sometimes we must take a hard path and there can be redemptive value in doing so. The Church should know this above all, in particular the appointed leaders of the Church, namely the bishops. The hard path when confronted by abuse was to report it to the civil authorities. The easy path was to do what they did; cover it up and send the priest away to be 'cured'. Bishops might also have deluded themselves into thinking this was the 'merciful' thing to do because punishment is not merciful at face value, even though it is just.

The result of not taking the hard path is that the damage done to the Church when the scandals did emerge has been incalculable. Since then, the Church has enormously improved its child protection procedures and the Church has become a vastly safer place for children. Recent media reporting of the scandals de-emphasises or ignores this and gives the public the impression that the problem is still burning out of control.

“Anger at the Church contributed to the victory of the pro-abortion side”

The damage caused by the scandals goes beyond the victims and the Church and ordinary, badly demoralised Catholics to society at large.

The loss of the Church's moral authority made it extremely difficult for it to be an effective voice in the recent abortion referendum. On the contrary, anger at the Church contributed to the victory of the pro-abortion side. The result is that the legalised, publicly-funded, State-authorised destruction of thousands of unborn human lives will now take place in Ireland annually, a true moral disaster.

The scandals have also undermined the efforts of lay Catholics who had absolutely nothing to do with them and are as horrified by them as anyone else.

What should have happened when the scandals first emerged in this country in the mid-1990s is that every bishop at the time should have resigned to show their moral seriousness about the matter. Once again, they failed to take the hard path and therefore we continue to live with the terrible consequences.

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Embracing the grace of the Pope's visit



The long-anticipated moment has arrived. Ever since Pope Francis chose Ireland three years ago to play host to the international World Meeting of Families gathering, he was determined to set foot on Irish soil.

"I will come – if I don't come, my successor will come," he said. Pope Francis has put care for the family at the very heart of his ministry. He has devoted two synod meetings in Rome to looking at the challenges facing families and the opportunities for the Church to reach-out and support families.

His visit to Ireland will be predominately about families and helping people to strengthen the bonds that unite them. In a sense, the family is the domestic Church for it is here in daily acts of kindness, love and sacrifice that children first experience Christianity. The Church is the 'family of families', and this is perfected when we come together as a Christian community to express our love of God. The World Meeting of Families will be a unique and grace-filled time to gather together and express the love that unites believers.

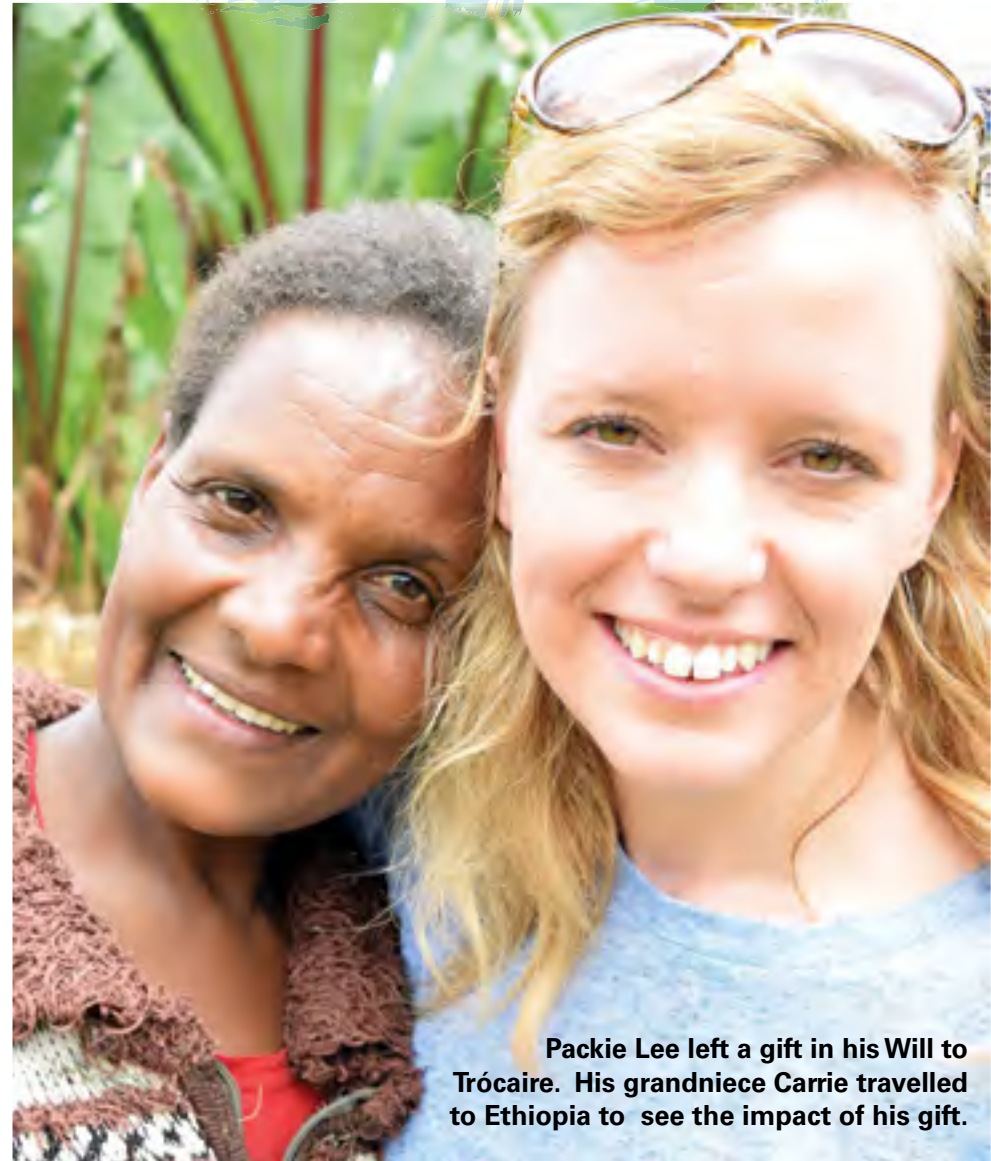
The papal agenda here is a packed one, ranging from civic formalities at Áras an Uachtaráin and Dublin Castle, to meetings with abuse survivors and those experiencing homelessness at Dublin's Capuchin Day Centre, to large events like the Festival of Families in Croke Park and the closing Mass in the Phoenix Park.

Papal trips are privileged occasions. It is almost 40 years since St John Paul II became the first Successor of St Peter to set foot on Irish soil. In 1979, he challenged all of us to be more authentic Christians and to model our lives on Christ above all else. It may well be many decades before Ireland sees another papal trip, so whatever the Pope says and does in the 32 hours here in Ireland will be something for the history books.

But, our faith is not merely about the history books – it is a lived reality. The challenge after the Pope leaves will be to put his message into action in the concrete reform and revitalisation of our Faith.

Holy Father, you are welcome amongst us – Fáilte Pope Francis.

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Colm Fitzpatrick

Pope Francis: The man behind the cloth

Praised globally for reaching out to those on the margins, and for touching the hearts and minds of millions of people, our current Pontiff has made a magnanimous impact in the world today. But what is the story behind the man in the white robes? Who is Pope Francis?

Jorge Mario Bergoglio was born on December 17, 1936, in Buenos Aires, the capital of Argentina to Italian immigrants. They left the country in 1929 to escape the fascist rule of Benito Mussolini. His father was a railway worker and his mother, a homemaker. Bergoglio was the eldest of his four siblings. In his youth, the Pope studied in public schools and in high school, obtaining a technical certification as a chemist.

Despite later working as a bar bouncer, a janitor sweeping floors, and also running

tests in a chemical laboratory, his perennial desire to become a priest only grew stronger as he got older.

As a young boy, Bergoglio mused that he would one day become a priest. Growing up in Barrio de Flores, his neighbourhood crush, Amalia Damonte, has said in interviews that when they were 12, Pope Francis said that, if he could not marry her, he would put on a collar.

Choice

However, his choice of vocation isn't reducible to the outcome of an unrequited infatuation, but also due to his religious upbringing, and the influence of a priest who

he was inspired by, after passing a Church to go to Confession.

Before joining the priesthood, the Pope, aged 21, became gravely ill with severe pneumonia and had his right lung partially removed. Although a life-threatening sickness at the time, the Vatican spokesperson, Jesuit Fr Federico Lombardi, has confirmed that it is "not a handicap" in the Pope's life.

However, the impaired lung was a cause of speculation in 2013 when it was rumoured that the Pope didn't sing or chant in Mass because of this infirmity. In response, Lombardi joked that there was a saying that a Jesuit '*nec*

rubricat, nec cantat', meaning Jesuits are famed for not being enthusiastic about liturgical song or are experts in detailed liturgical rubrics. He suggested instead, that the Pope's lack of singing is due to "a certain hoarseness" or huskiness in his voice.

Following his short illness, in 1958 Pope Francis entered the novitiate of the Society of Jesus. During this period, he had a crush on a girl he met and doubted whether to continue pursuing his vocation. However, two years after entering the novitiate, the Pontiff took the perpetual vows of poverty, chastity and obedience as a Jesuit.

* * * * *

Between 1964 and 1965, he taught literature and psychology at a Jesuit secondary school in Santa Fe, Argentina, and in 1966, he taught at the prestigious Colegio del Salvador secondary school in Buenos Aires.

In 1967, he returned to his theological studies and was ordained a priest on December 13, 1969. After his perpetual profession as a Jesuit in 1973, he became master of novices at San Miguel. Later that same year, he was elected superior of the Jesuit province of Argentina and Uruguay.

He has said that initially, his mother did not support his decision to enter the priesthood, despite the fact that she was a devout Catholic. By the time he was ordained, however, she accepted his calling and asked for his blessing at the end of his ordination ceremony.

“That’s the way he is: totally devoted to the mission of a priest; he is the pastor of the least”

Even though Pope Francis remained very close to his family, he would often skip their barbecues to spend Sundays or holidays in Buenos Aires' slums, the Pope's sister has said. The city had a population of over 2.5 million, and Bergoglio visited these areas where crime was rife and destructive.

“That’s the way he is:

totally devoted to the mission of a priest; he is the pastor of the least,” said Maria Elena Bergoglio in 2013.

“We’ve always had a very close relationship despite the 12-year age difference. I was the youngest and Jorge always pampered and protected me,” she said of her brother. “Every time I had a problem, I’d go running to him, and he was always there.”

“Jorge taught me to always be there for people, to always be welcoming, even if it

meant sacrificing something,” she said. She named her first-born son Jorge, “in honour of my special brother”, who also was moved to be asked to be the child's godfather.

The Pope's nephew, Jorge, 37, also said that his uncle “is someone who is very open, we talk about everything, long talks”. Bergoglio added the the media had only been reporting on her brother's love of tango, opera and soccer, but that very few people know he is an excellent cook. “He makes fantastic stuffed calamari; it's his favourite dish,” she said.

Position

However, the food preferences of the Pontiff were not the main concern for the media following controversy that arose over the position taken by Francis during Argentina's 1976-1983 military dictatorship, which cracked down brutally on political opponents. Estimates of the number of people killed and forcibly disappeared during those years range from about 13,000 to more than 30,000.

Citing a case in which two young Jesuits were detained by the military regime, critics



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Jorge Mario Bergoglio cooking in Buenos Aires, Argentina; right, Francis is pictured left with his brother Oscar, following their First Communion in this 1942 family photo.



among religious, theologians and laypeople, but also secular press. He was, for example, the first Pope ever to make the cover of the famous magazine *Rolling Stone*, and was also named 'Person of the Year' by *Time*.

Alongside his cultural popularity, Francis has made a number of important theological contributions, as even four months after his election, he issued the encyclical *'Lumen Fidei'* (The Light of Faith). Francis worked from

a first draft completed by the then-Pope Benedict, and described it as being written with four hands. It focuses on the theological virtue of Faith, and inspires social action and devotion to God. Not disconnected to this theme, Francis explored the issues of human migration and climate change in his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'* (Praise Be To You), receiving global approbation for tackling the current social ills of our times.

Although some criticised

the environmental document, water only really began to truly boil in 2016 when the Pontiff wrote a long meditation, *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love), on marriage and family life.

The abiding message of the document is usually ignored, following the perceived ambiguity that arose when the Pontiff reflected on the question of inviting divorced people to receive Holy Communion. For some, his clarification on this topic was a step too far, leading to dissent in conservative circles. More recently, his focus on social justice and human dignity led him to change Church teaching on the death penalty, which he declared to be "inadmissible".

Having been Pope for five years now, Francis has and continues to make important impacts throughout the world, and his visit to Ireland will have a lasting mark on the story of the country.

Despite only having one fully-functioning lung, it seems inarguable that this humble Argentinian man has brought a full breath of fresh air to the Church and joy to its people.

cal and Theological Faculty of San Miguel. Before taking up this new appointment, he spent the first three months of 1980 in Ireland to learn English, staying at the Jesuit Centre at the Milltown Institute of Theology and Philosophy, Dublin. In 1986, he spent several months in Germany finalising his dissertation topic, and ultimately settled on exploring the work of the German/Italian theologian Romano Guardini.

In May 1992, Bergoglio was appointed auxiliary bishop of Buenos Aires. He was one of three auxiliaries and he kept a low profile, spending most of his time caring for the Catholic university, counselling priests and preaching and hearing Confessions. On June 3, 1997, he was named coadjutor archbishop and he was installed as the new archbishop of Buenos Aires on February 28, 1998.

As archbishop, he was known simply as "Father Jorge", and he adopted the attitude that the Church belongs in the street. He built chapels and missions in poor areas and sent seminarians to serve them.

“It seems to me that my brother cardinals have chosen one who is from faraway...here I am”

He often spoke out often against injustice, such as the treatment of migrant workers from neighbouring countries and those lured into the sex trade, and against social issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage. Three

years later, in February 2001, he was elevated to cardinal by Pope John Paul II, named the cardinal-priest of Saint Robert Bellarmino. In 2005, he was named president of the Bishops' Conference of Argentina, serving in that position until 2011.

After serving as archbishop and cardinal for over 12 years, Bergoglio was elected to the papacy on March 13, 2013, becoming the 266th Pope of the Catholic Church, and the first Latin American and Jesuit to do so. His election surprised analysts at the time, but press reports have indicated that in the 2005 conclave that elected Pope Benedict XVI, Bergoglio received the second-highest number of votes.

* * * * *

The markings of his humble papacy were evident from its very beginnings, given reports that he snuck out of Vatican City the morning of his election to pray in a Roman Basilica. Indeed, his decision to ditch the papal red shoes popularised by former Popes and to take up residence in a simple two-room apartment conveyed to Catholics across the world his intentions to focus on the poor and issues of social justice.

Addressing a crowd of tens of thousands in St Peter's Square, after his selection by the conclave, Pope Francis stated: "As you know, the duty of the conclave was to appoint a bishop of Rome. It seems to me that my brother cardinals have chosen one who is from faraway...here I am. I would like to thank you for your embrace."

Since then, the Pope has received world-wide acclaim and recognition, not only

say that the Jesuit provincial did not do enough to support Church workers against the military dictatorship. However, in 2013, the Argentine Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Adolfo Perez Esquivel said "the Pope had nothing to do with the dictatorship...he was not an accomplice".

Journalists

Speaking to journalists after his private meeting with Pope Francis at the Vatican in March of that year, Perez said the future Pope, then-Jesuit Father Jorge Mario Bergoglio, "was not among the bishops who were in the front line of the defence of human rights because he preferred a silent diplomacy to ask about the missing, about the oppressed".

In relation to the claims that he played a role in the kidnapping of two priests, Vatican spokesperson Lombardi said it was never a concrete or credible accusation, but rather, Francis did much to protect many people during the military dictatorships.

* * * * *

In 1980, Francis was named the rector of the Philosophi-

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"I'm very pleased with the way things have gone," Fr James Kelly SJ told *The Irish Catholic* in 2015, two years into Pope Francis' papacy. "He has surprised me. He's a changed man."

Fr Kelly, who spent half of each year between 1979 and 1983 at Buenos Aires' Jesuit-run Colegio Máximo, where the then Fr Jorge Bergoglio was rector, said he had been wary in 2013 when he heard the outcome of the papal conclave; while he believed the new Pontiff was "a pastoral man", he feared he might prove rigid and authoritarian, as he had been in his days as seminary rector.

His fears, he was glad to report, had proved groundless, with his former boss – who he still characterised as essentially a conservative who would not shift Church teaching even if he gave it a more tolerant tone – proving more inclined to dialogue than in previous years. "He seems to have changed," he says, adding: "He seems less authoritarian than he was. I feel myself that as Archbishop of Buenos Aires, when he got away from the Jesuits, he more or less found him-

Lessons from the desert



A two-year exile helped make the future Pope the man he is, writes **Greg Daly**

self again – he got what he wanted: he wanted to be out with the people."

Looking at the life of Pope Francis before he became Pope, it seems that while being archbishop surely had changed him, an even more transformative episode may have been his time spent in

a kind of exile in Córdoba between June 1990 and May 1992, a period he described to the Jesuit Fr Antonio Spadaro in 2013 as "a time of great interior crisis".

Appointed to lead Argentina's Jesuit province in 1973, then aged just 36, Pope Francis was by his own admission

an authoritarian leader in his early days, with this contributing to division in the province. His subsequent time as rector of the Colegio Máximo, which he headed from 1980 to 1986, was hardly less polarising, and over the next few years Fr Bergoglio was seen by some in Argentina and among the Jesuit leadership in Rome as a cause of conflict among the Argentine Jesuits.

Residence

In April 1990, he was removed from his teaching post at the Colegio Máximo, where he had lived for most of the previous 25 years, and was sent 650km away to the Jesuit residence in Córdoba in central Argentina, with Jesuits seen as his close followers being sent abroad to study and told not to contact him.

The future Pope spent two years in the pretty mountain city, where he was tasked primarily with hearing Confessions, listening to university students and professors and to people from the poorer outskirts of the town who came to the city centre because their own local priests were

too busy.

"Bergoglio had never before given so much time to being a channel of forgiveness and mercy," writes Austen Ivereigh in *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope*. "It softened him, kept him close to the *pueblo fiel* (faithful people), and put his own troubles in perspective."

Bergoglio had never before given so much time to being a channel of forgiveness and mercy"

Troubles he nonetheless had, and as he would tell Fr Spadaro many years later, his exile in Córdoba was a time of great interior crisis.

In a 2015 article 'The Pope's Dark Night of the Soul', Fr Rafael Velasco told CNN's Daniel Burke how badly the future Pope seemed to be taking his exile in its early months.

"Velasco said he visited

Bergoglio in 1990, not long after the exile began," wrote Burke. "They talked about the Society of Jesus, and Bergoglio tried not to be critical but couldn't help himself. He fumed at being pushed aside like an old piece of furniture and accused Argentina's Jesuit leaders of uprooting the society from its traditional missions. But he saw no way out of exile."

* * * * *

Fr Ángel Rossi, a Jesuit who Pope Francis has described as his "spiritual son", has called Córdoba a "double desert experience" for the Pope, first as a novice and then many years later as "a desert of exile" which the Pope himself describes as "a time of darkness, of shadows" and "a moment of interior purification".

Stressing that deserts are not places in which one stays, Fr Rossi says that by passing through the desert an exile can become an exodus, a kind of pruning that allows us to become more who we are meant to be – indeed, in 2003 the then Archbishop Bergoglio told a politician who feared standing down, "you've got to live your own exile. I did. And afterward you'll be back. And when you do come back, you'll be merciful, kinder, and you're going to want to serve your people more".

Unjust

The exiling of the future Pope to Córdoba was "humanly unjust", Fr Rossi told Daniel Burke, but it nonetheless served him well.

"I would say that many things that he is living through today got their start here in Córdoba," he said, likening the situation to seeds being planted in hard winter soil that bear fruit long afterwards. "They are hidden from



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the outside, but one is pleasantly surprised to see where these great people have gone in these moments of silence.”

The experience, he said, did not so much change the future Pope as help him to become more fully himself. “It is not a different Bergoglio,” he said. “It is a fully blossomed Bergoglio, one who has amplified his reach and found his mission.”

* * * * *

After six months in Córdoba, Fr Bergoglio began working on an essay that would see light as *‘Silencio y palabra’* (Silence and word), written to help religious communities discern what to do in difficult circumstances. It had, perhaps unavoidably, a personal tone, drawing as it could not but do on his own experiences in Argentina’s polarised Jesuit province.

“When we find ourselves in a difficult situation, sometimes silence is not an act of virtue,” he wrote, continuing, “it is simply imposed upon us without any choice.” Self-pity is a natural temptation in that situation, he observed – “It could happen that one falls into a kind of spiritual victimisation, considering that ‘they hurt me without any reason’ – but even imposed silences can be channels for God’s grace, and it is important to stay humble, keep praying, and allow God the time to work.

Sometimes, after all, human solutions aren’t an option, and in another essay published while in Córdoba, *‘El exilio de toda carne’* (the exile of all flesh), he wrote

that “the man or woman who consciously takes charge of his exile suffers a double loneliness”, not merely being strangers in a strange land but suffering “the bitterness of solitude before God”.

The isolation, he wrote, is felt most acutely in prayer, not merely as one may pray separately from one’s fellows but because one can feel a yawning gap between one’s desires and God’s plans. This kind of pain, he wrote, was felt by the Hebrew prophets, with Jeremiah especially having struggled to carry out his great mission and who was remembered only for the infighting and contradictions he left behind.

“When we find ourselves in a difficult situation, sometimes silence is not an act of virtue”

Unsure even how to return home, in the end he was left with no other option but to resort to prayer. “It is the prayer of a man who gave everything, and would like – at least – that God would be on his side,” Fr Bergoglio wrote. “But in life, sometimes

it seems as though God puts himself on the other side.”

Plans

In *‘Silencio y palabra’* Fr Bergoglio noted how Jesuit founder St Ignatius of Loyola had centuries earlier highlighted the dangers of the temptation of trying to force God’s plans through one’s own predetermined plans and towards one’s own predetermined goals. Ambition and greed, he wrote, could in turn lead to mistrust, suspicion, triumphalism and a kind of spiritual worldliness.

The latter, he said, was an especially insidious temptation for religious people who can wish to place themselves at the centre of things: the Pope’s focus today on the margins and peripheries, and on those who can be found there, is surely intended in no small part as an antidote to this.

The article went on to consider how to respond to temptations that present themselves as though they are virtues – bad spirits who present themselves as angels. Only Jesus can reveal this truth, he wrote, and allowing him to do this entails “keeping silence, praying and humbling ourselves”.

This can be a painful experience, of course, and in reflecting on this Fr Bergoglio was drawing on the Third Week of the Jesuit Exercises, the spiritual manual composed by St Ignatius, which considers how in Christ’s Passion the divine nature goes into hiding: “Christ as divine does not destroy his enemies, although he could do so, but allows himself in his sacred human nature to suffer most cruelly.”

“In the end he was left with no other option but to resort to prayer”

The devil, Fr Bergoglio wrote, must eventually reveal himself in the light of the Cross, mistaking as he does gentleness for weakness.

“In moments of darkness and great tribulation, when the ‘tangles’ and the ‘knots’ cannot be untied and nothing is clear, then we must say nothing: the gentleness of the silence will make us look even weaker, and it will be the same devil who, emboldened, will show himself and his true intentions, no longer disguised as an angel of light but boldly and shamelessly.”

When God finally goes into battle against the enemy of humankind, he then wrote, it was important to avoid interfering or engaging in factionalism or to divide into good and bad, but to focus on living the holy tension between the memory of Cross and the hope of the Resurrection. In such situations, he wrote, God “asks us only to protect the wheat, and not to try to weed out the darnel”.

Reflecting further on the Third Week in December 1991, Fr Bergoglio noted the dangers of taking spiritual refuge in what might have been, demanding instant resurrections, or denying that sometimes things really are finished, and corpses really are corpses.

“That is how, throughout history, the Church’s true reforms, those that bring life to parts of it that are dead, and born from within the entrails of the Church itself, and not from outside,” he wrote. “God’s reforms happen right there, where there is no other solution but to hope against all hope.”

The lessons the future Pope seems ultimately to have learned in Córdoba are to never lose hope, and never stop trusting.

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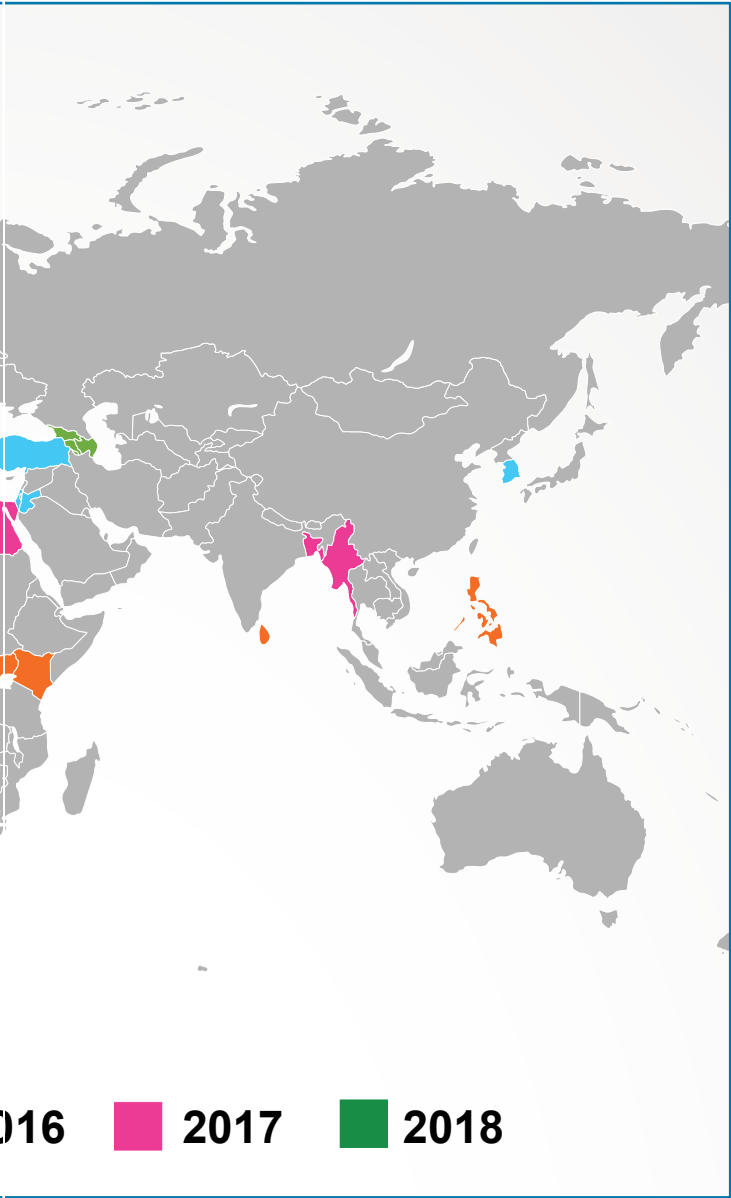


Chai Brady

discusses the Pope's trips abroad and their importance



“The time has come to put an end to this situation, which has become increasingly unacceptable”



2016 2017 2018



2017: Pope Francis greets people as he arrives to visit the Shrine of St Peter Claver in Cartagena, Colombia.

tember, Francis went to Cuba and the US, which was followed by a trip to Africa.

While in Kenya, Uganda and the Central African Republic (CAR) he spoke of the need to protect the environment, address poverty and inequality and called for peace and interreligious dialogue to stop religious conflict.

Francis took the biggest risk of any Pope by being the first to enter an active war-zone in CAR, where he visited a mosque being besieged by Christian militants. He called for peace, saying, "Christians and Muslims are brothers and sisters".

At the beginning of 2016 he stopped in Cuba to sign a declaration with the Russian Orthodox Church to address global issues and solidify their hope to re-establish full unity.

He then went on to Mexico after an invitation from their president.

“2018 began with a visit to both Chile and Peru in January followed by Switzerland in June”

In April he departed to the Greek island of Lesbos in sup-



2016: The Pope thanks World Youth Day volunteers gathered at the Tauron Arena in Krakow, Poland.

port of thousands of migrants, many from Syria, seeking asylum status, and in June went to Armenia.

Francis attended World Youth Day 2016 in Poland, a country with the highest percentage of young people registered as Catholic in Europe. He spent time in prayer at Auschwitz concentration camp and met Holocaust survivors.

In September that year he went to Georgia and spoke of ecumenism with the Georgian Orthodox, and then visited the mainly Muslim Azerbaijan, where he steered clear of criticising the increasingly authoritarian presidency of Ilham Aliyev and spoke of dialogue and tolerance.

This was followed by a one-day visit to Sweden the following month.

Francis went to Egypt in April, a country that has seen a huge amount of violence against Christians, to deliver a message of peace.

He then departed to Fatima in Portugal in May and then on to Colombia for a five-day visit in September. While there he promoted the Colombian peace process between insurgent group FARC [who ceased to be an armed group in 2017] and the current government.

He then visited Myanmar and Bangladesh at a time when the Myanmar government was accused of ethnic cleansing, as a minority Muslim group called the Rohingya people were forced from their land by the Myanmar army. Many fled over the border to Bangladesh to seek asylum in Cox's Bazaar.

2018 began with a visit to

both Chile and Peru in January followed by Switzerland in June.

And in just a few days Fran-

cis will make an historic trip to Ireland, the second time a Pontiff has ever stepped foot in the country since St John

Paul II in 1979 from August 25-26. Expectations are high for the visit, which will most certainly go down in history.



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- 7th September 2018** | 7:00pm Mass
Pallottine Retreat Centre, Kickham Street, Thurles, **Co. Tipperary**
- 8th September 2018** | Start: 5:00pm
5:00 pm Teaching on St Michael
7:30 pm Mass and homily followed by Holy Hour
St Eunan's Cathedral, Sentry Hill, Letterkenny, **Co. Donegal**
- 9th September 2018** | Start: 12:00pm
Holy Hour followed by Talk
St Cloumba's Church, Knocknabollan, Termon, **Co. Donegal**
- 9th September 2018** | 5:00pm Mass
Ards Friary, Ard Mhuire, Ards, Creeslough, **Co. Donegal**
- 11th September 2018** | 7:30pm Mass
St Anne's RC Church, Cranmore Rd, **Co. Sligo**
- 12th September 2018**
6:30pm Adoration | 7:30pm Mass
The Oratory of Mary Mother of God, Newtown Stewart, **Co. Tyrone**
- 13th September 2018** | 7:30pm Mass
St Patrick Chapel, Tullinavall Rd, Cullyhanna, **Co. Armagh**
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Taking Stock



After five years has Francis lived up to Irish expectations?

Fr Alan Hilliard

"No papacy is perfect", says Fr Alan Hilliard, a Dublin-based priest and strong advocate of migrant's rights, but in the five years that Francis has been Pope, he has exceeded expectations.

Referencing the author Austen Ivereigh, Fr Alan says that while St John Paul II said what was wrong with the world, Pope Francis is saying "do something about it".

This message couldn't have been clearer during the July 2013 visit to Lampedusa, when the Pontiff spoke about the trials and trauma immigrants face and to avoid becoming indifferent to their humanity. "For people for whom nobody is speaking, he is the only

voice speaking to them", says Fr Alan, adding that the Pontiff's remarks that immigrants aren't "dangerous" has had a massive positive impact on them.

Fr Alan adds that Francis has importantly showed the direction the curia needs to go, by speaking about the dignity of the human being, "which at the end of the day is very important and what the Church is about".

What's striking for Fr Alan, and what universities and organisations can learn from, is that Francis "has shown that you don't have to lose your humanity and be the head of a big organisation. He hasn't become a clone. He hasn't become a bureaucrat."



Bro. Kevin Crowley

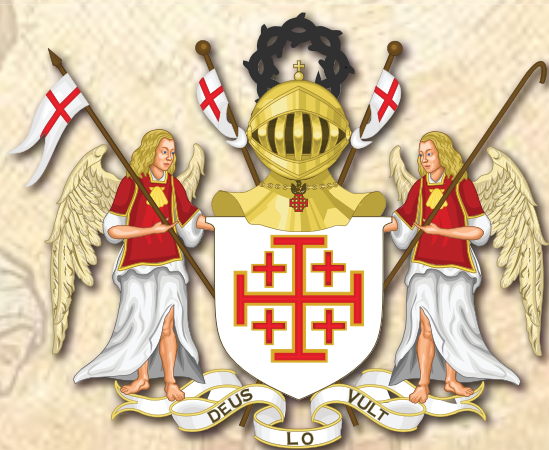
From the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Francis has made great strides in protecting and enabling homeless people, according to Bro. Kevin, and his visit to the Capuchin Day Centre on August 25 is another example of this important mission.

"It's a great privilege and a great honour for the homeless people in the fact that the Holy Father has recognised the great problems and the great difficulties and is coming to meet them, and to show his love and respect for them," Bro. Kevin says.

He adds that the Pontiff's visit is a wonderful occasion, and that meeting homeless people seems to be his "main concern" wherever he goes, noting that after being declared Pope, Francis made sure they were taken care of by providing them with showers, for example.

Those who will meet the Pope in the centre are "excited" and "absolutely thrilled", he says, adding that none of this would have been possible without the "openness" and "generosity" of Irish people who have helped homeless people financially through their donations.

His visit, Bro. Kevin says, will not only impact those in the centre, but will make "a huge difference" to Irish people, and is an occasion of great celebration.



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Fr James Kelly

"Surprise" is the word Fr Kelly uses to describe Pope Francis' papacy – a word with substance given that he spent half of each year between 1979 and 1983 at Buenos Aires' Jesuit-run-Collegio Máximo, where the then Fr Jorge Bergoglio was rector.

"Well I'm very surprised about how successful it has been in the sense that I find his writing very inspiring and very challenging and very spiritual. He notes in particular, that *Gaudete et Exsultate* (the Exhortation on the Call to Holiness) is a "very refreshing" and "stimulating" document and something that we can all learn from. Fr Kelly says that Francis has changed since his time as rector, given that he's actually made "doctrinal changes".



One standout point about Francis for Fr Kelly is his idea of not prejudging anybody or making assumptions, while still preaching "the orthodox stuff". He hopes the Pontiff's visit to Ireland will be "fruitful", and expects Francis will concentrate on the main Christian message which is "that Christ came to save us".



Fr John O'Connor

For this parish priest in St Anne's, Shankill, Pope Francis is doing a "fantastic" job and his pontificate has renewed his faith in the Church. However, Fr O'Connor says he "would've expected a bit more" from the Pontiff.

"I still think he's a lot more to do and a lot more he'd like to be able to do," he says, noting the clerical child abuse scandal, the place of women in the Church, the question of clerical celibacy, and the role of lay people in the Church generally.

There are two major aspects of Francis' papacy that have been inspiring. One, Fr O'Connor says, is his own personal humility which is evident from the fact he doesn't live in the apostolic palace; he doesn't drive around a "huge" car; and he has a very simple lifestyle. "It's Christ-like, and it's awful that we're actually surprised to see the Pope living so humbly," he says.

The second impressive aspect of Francis is his emphasis on the mercy of God, rather than a judgemental God. In visiting Ireland, Fr O'Connor hopes that the Irish will listen to what he has to say. "I hope people will listen to him, and I hope he brings a message of healing to the Church in Ireland. I think we need healing very much."

Paula McKeown

For Paula, the beginning of Francis' papacy was "unnervingly different", and showed Catholics all over the world "something different".

As the Director of Down and Connor's Living Church Office, this is important says Paula as he is communicating "what mission actually looks like". This was demonstrated when he hugged a disfigured man in St Peter's Square. "It wasn't that he was doing PR stunts – he was deeply compelled and moved to act in the way he does."

Alongside reaching out to those on the margins and peripheries, there have been some limitations during his pontificate, Paula says, in particular to bring about the Church reform he mentioned in *Evangelii Gaudium*. "I think I had bigger expectations about seeing more reform at this stage. Maybe that was unrealistic. I was hoping to see more women elevated to more prominent positions. I would love to see a female cardinal and this is the Pope that could make it happen. I'm still holding out for those reforms."



While visiting Ireland, in the fallout of the abortion referendum, Paula hopes that the Pope's message around mercy and dialogue will resonate with Irish people. In this way, we seek to understand the other person and their perspective, rather than only focus on the differences.

Sr Stan Kennedy



One of Ireland's most famous advocates for the poor in Ireland has said she saw Pope Francis as a man who would herald a new era in the Church for people who are poor or on the margins of society when he was elected.

Sr Stan's impression of the current Pope was of a man who would "devote his papacy to his people as a humble servant".

As the founder of Focus Ireland and the Immigrant

Council of Ireland, she said during his papacy Francis has taken a "radical stance and proclaimed the Gospel in a new way".

He has "already taken a radical stance on two of the most crucial issues in our world today – his uncompromising option for the poor and for the earth", she continued.

However Sr Stan added that she would like to see Pope Francis take radical steps on behalf of

women, "which would be a wonderful gift to the Church and would be a major step in dismantling the clericalism that Pope Francis believes to be so damaging to the preaching of the Gospel and would also be a major influence on the wider world".

"I would also like if he called on the Church leaders to take accountability and responsibility for sexual abuse within the Church."



"I'm sure he will help young people. Our young people are the most neglected in this country and they're lead down pathways and roadways that are damaging and destructive."

Julie Kavanagh



At the beginning of his papacy, Pope Francis was an "unknown" for many people, but with that mystery came a "sense of hope, freshness and newness" says Julie, who is the Pastoral Resource Person for the Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin.

There was a sense of humility when he greeted and addressed his audience upon being elected Pope, which were "little tell-tale signs" that

Catholics were in "for a treat". Since then, Julie says Francis has continued to reach out to people on the fringes, creating companionship with prisoners, migrants, and all those people "that maybe have been invisible".

He definitely lived up to her expectations, even though he isn't perfect. "He's a man with great responsibility and at the end of it, he's a human being as well, so he's not

going to be perfect 100% of the time. There are times himself where he says he might have made mistakes in a way that might have been better put.

"But overall, I think the bigger question, is are we living up to the expectations of the Gospel of our care of the earth, of our love of the family and these are all things he's actually brought us to in his papacy."

Sr Consilio

"Humble", "joyful", and "friendly" are just a few of the adjectives Irish nun and founder of the rehabilitation centre 'Cuan Mhuire' Sr Consilio uses to describe Pope Francis.

"He's a man of deep Faith...he's a man for the people, no airs or graces. He is one of us, he's not aloof," she says. Sr Consilio mentions that when she briefly met him in Lourdes, he was just plain and ordinary.

"He is just himself. He lives what he talks about. He does what he believes is the right thing", she says, adding that he's not in the world to impress people or glorify himself.

Alongside his courage and ongoing embrace of "all people", Sr Consilio says that his writings are easily accessible. When he visits Ireland, she hopes the Irish people will welcome him, and that he speaks about the problems and struggles young people face today.

"God calls me today, tomorrow will be too late."

St. Peter Julian Eymard




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Pope Francis is a Pope for a truly global Church, writes Prof. Eamonn Conway



The World Meeting of Families coincides with news of shameful sex crimes by clergy against children and vulnerable adults in the USA in recent past decades. At first glance it might seem that little progress has been made in reforming the Church in the past few years. Fair-minded people will accept, however, that this is not the case.

The first inkling Pope Francis had that he might become Pope, he has said, was when cardinals started asking him leading questions, over lunch, especially in regard to his health. He was elected in the fifth ballot on the second day.

It was his intervention at the meeting of cardinals on March 7 that catapulted him into the see of Peter, much in the same way Joseph Ratzinger's homily, prior to the 2005 conclave, made him the obvious choice to succeed John Paul II. In that homily, Cardinal Ratzinger spoke of the "dictatorship of relativ-

ism" and the indispensability of an adult Faith capable of resisting "the trends of fashion and the latest novelty; a mature adult Faith deeply rooted in friendship with Christ".

To the cardinals entering conclave in 2005 the 'enemy' seemed to lie 'without.' The threat of communism had been replaced by that of secularism, which had taken its toll on Faith practice especially in Europe. The felt need was for a compelling presentation of Church teaching

by an intellect capable of articulating the beauty, truth, goodness, sheer logic and rationality of Christian faith. The job spec was for someone who would counter the ideological currents and bogus 'isms' that diminish authentic human existence and eclipse the reality of God's presence. There was no cardinal considered better equipped to do this than Joseph Ratzinger.

There had already been over a decade of abuse scandals. Apart from those in Ireland, in 1998 the founder of the Legionaries of Christ, Marcial Maciel, had been accused of horrific sexual violence, and in 2002 Cardinal Law of Boston had been forced to resign over cover-ups. Nonetheless there was a sense, now recognised as mistaken, that such matters were being dealt with adequately.

Moreover, John Paul II had gone out of his way to apologise and seek repentance on the part of the Church for its failures, especially during the Year of Jubilee 2000 (for those who doubt this, read *When a Pope asks for Forgiveness: the Mea Culpas of John Paul II* by Luigi Accattoli).

In 2005, after some 28 years of Pope John Paul II's governance, the overall impression the cardinals had, therefore, was the need for 'more of the same'. Continuity, as Cardinal Kasper later confirmed, was considered paramount because outwardly the Church appeared to be in good shape. In reality, however, as Kasper admits, the internal dysfunction that prompted Pope Benedict XVI's surprise resignation eight years later was already festering beneath the surface.

As the cardinals entered conclave in 2013 it was generally accepted that this time the enemy lay 'within'. The previous year, 2012, had been Benedict XVI's *annus horribilis*. It began with leaked documents stolen from the Pope's desk detailing corruption, homosexual cabals and blackmail among Vatican staff as well as major financial irregularities at the Vatican bank (the Vatileaks scandal). In May, the crisis escalated with the publication of a book containing confidential letters and memos between Pope Benedict and his secretary.

The year ended with the presentation of a report of an internal investigation Pope Benedict had commissioned from three cardinals he trusted. Their report con-

Good news for



Pope Francis on the night of his election at the Vatican.

ours because of secularism and countless 'own goals', feel the benefit of renewed energy.

Many young people have been affirmed and challenged by Pope Francis, by his witness, his words and his actions. We will see this reflected at the forthcoming World Synod of Bishops. Many non-Catholics have similarly been moved to action especially by the energy he has brought to bear through *Laudato Si'* on caring for our common home.

Pope Benedict rightly warned of the danger of 'doctrinal relativism'. Pope Francis has taken this further by showing how the view that each individual is the bearer of his or her own truth easily leads to a 'practical relativism'.

It does this by blindsiding us to our responsibilities to the poor and vulnerable who can then be discarded in a 'throwaway culture' because they do not serve our individual and subjective needs (*The Joy of the Gospel*, Nos 61, 80).

Pope Benedict had refocused evangelisation on personal encounter with Christ, an encounter that must precede learning about Christ. Pope Francis has shown us where to look for Christ: in the sacraments, certainly, but also in the 'existential peripheries' that above all the poor, who are 'the prolongation of the incarnation' inhabit (*The Joy of the Gospel*, No. 179).

Renewal of the Church will not come about by navel-gazing about our problems but by becoming the merciful presence of Christ in every situation where human dignity is diminished and violated: "I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security" (*The Joy of the Gospel*, No. 49).

There is more of a buzz about evangelisation now than there was 20 years ago during the decade dedicated to evangelisation or even at the time of the World Synod on the New Evangelisation in 2012.

This is directly attributable to Pope Francis. Significantly, Pope Francis wasn't present at that synod. Also, he replaced the planned post-synodal exhortation with *The Joy of the Gospel*, which draws as much upon a 2007 document charting the renewal of the Latin American Church of which he had been lead

firmed serious dysfunction at the heart of many of the Holy See's offices and administrations.

One hundred and seventeen cardinals entered the conclave, 67 of whom Pope Benedict had appointed. It was quipped that the aforementioned report, with its damning findings, was the 118th and by far the most influential 'cardinal' present in the Sistine Chapel for the election.

In the pre-conclave meetings cardinals were allowed to speak for five minutes. Jorge Bergoglio took only three-and-a-half to deliver what was subsequently described as an electrifying address. Cardinal Schönborn described it as an intervention that was very simple, very spiritual and that got to the heart of the reform and renewal that was urgently required. He is reported to have leaned over to his neighbour and said: "that's exactly what we need".

Reaction

What was it that prompted this reaction? In what was an unintentional self-description, Bergoglio had said, "thinking of the next Pope: a man who, coming from contemplation of Jesus Christ and from worship of Jesus Christ, helps the Church to go out of itself to the existential peripheries...that helps (the Church) to be a fruitful Mother, living 'the sweet and comforting joy of evangelising'".

Significantly, the reference to evangelisation was a throwback to Pope Paul VI whose inspiration Pope Francis has relied upon more than that of any of his other predecessors. By 'existential peripheries', Bergoglio meant "those of the mystery of sin, of pain, of injustice, of ignorance and of religious indifference, of thought, of all misery".

“Jorge Bergoglio took only three-and-a-half minutes to deliver what was...an electrifying address”

In the course of his brief intervention Bergoglio also drew upon conciliar theologians Henri de Lubac and Yves Congar when detailing the stark choice that faced the Church. It could become an evangelising Church that listens reverently to God's word and proclaims it faithfully, or one increasingly absorbed by spiritual worldliness and theological narcissism that considers itself rather than Christ to be the light of the world.

These are the sentiments that stirred the cardinal-electors to put their trust in Jorge Bergoglio. Five years later has Pope Francis been a man of his word, as the recently released film by Wim Wenders claims? Looking back over his pontificate we can say a few things.

Today, local Churches, even those as tired and bruised as

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The most dangerous manifestation of the enemy within the Church is the culture of clericalism and Pope Francis has repeatedly decried it as a profound evil that nullifies the baptismal grace of the lay faithful and stifles prophetic voices in the Church.

As far back as 1983 one report defined clericalism as “the conscious or unconscious concern to promote the particular interests of the clergy and to protect the privileges and power that have traditionally been conceded to those in the clerical state”. Clericalism is at work when holiness is identified with the “clerical state and, thereby, with the cleric himself”.

In recent weeks clericalism was identified once again as having been the key enabler both of sexual crimes against children and their cover-up. This is because it created a climate in which the actions of priests and bishops could not be questioned or contested.

Pope Francis has tackled clericalism not only by his statements but also by appointing lay people to the upper echelons of the Curia and by encouraging their inclusion in decision-making processes (*The Joy of the Gospel*, N. 102). In *Gaudete et Exultate*, he has also reminded us of the universal call to holiness taught by Vatican II, reiterating that there is no ‘fast-track’ or ‘priority lane’ when it comes to life with God.

“The future of humanity passes by way of the family”, St John Paul II said and the renewal of family and marriage has being a key priority for Pope Francis. However, by holding two synods on such a controversial topic and by opening for discussion issues like Communion for people in second and irregular unions, Pope Francis has also restored synodality to what the Council Fathers intended it to be: a key governance and decision-making body, with and under Peter (*sub et cum Petro*) under the guidance of the Holy Spirit at the service of a truly world-Church.

The resulting debates and, at times, division within the Church, though disturbing, nonetheless reflect reality. This can only be healthy.

Pope Francis’ pontificate marks a new phase in the implementation of Vatican II and this could be his most enduring legacy. Pope Benedict XVI was a living link with the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) having participated in it as a theologian. His

immediate predecessors were also at the Council. Pope Francis, however, was not.

We’re now recognising that the Council wasn’t just about the documents it produced. The conciliar texts are of immense importance and give current renewal of the Church its decisive orientation, but they are necessarily limited.

“Francis has chosen to pursue a change of mentality than merely one of personnel”

In its pastoral focus on the circumstances of the present day as well as its method of deliberation and processes, however, the Council also taught us how to go about governing a global Church. In this respect we are only at the beginning of receiving its teaching. Not having been at the Council and therefore less

invested in particular interpretations of the texts than his predecessors, Francis is freer to take this on board.

The Synod of Bishops was conceived to be a council in miniature. For the first time since Vatican II the debates, discussions and position papers produced between the two synods on the family were reminiscent of the energy and vibrancy that was manifest between sessions of the Council over 50 years ago. We can expect more of these debates into the future.

Besides all this, of course, is the fact that Pope Francis is a Jesuit. This informs his governance of the Church more than anything else. St Ignatius had a profound understanding of human nature: its strengths, rooted in the prevalence of grace, and its weaknesses, rooted in the reality of sin.

Since his election Pope Francis has been training us in the dynamics of personal conversion: encouraging us

to recognise God in the ordinariness of our daily lives, reminding us of the need to imbed habits of prayerful discernment, inviting us to commit to personal growth and accept that such growth, if it is to endure, only happens incrementally and requires patience.

What of the conversion of the Church as an institution? Pope Francis seems to be applying the same principles. He has chosen to pursue a change of mentality than merely one of personnel. To those of us on the outside it all seems slow. To those wounded by the Church it must seem painfully so.

Even Pope Francis himself is frustrated. Last year he said “reforming Rome is like cleaning the Sphinx of Egypt with a toothbrush”, a reference to a remark made by a Belgian cleric over a century ago.

It is a courageous approach for a man now in his eighties but then he sees Church reform ultimately as God’s responsibility and not his or his alone. As we welcome him to our shores we could do worse than let him know we are behind him and that he has our prayerful and practical support.

author (Aparecida) as it did upon the Synod’s proceedings.

The Latin American influence on *The Joy of the Gospel* is just one example of how the Catholic Church is finally shaking off its European mantle and becoming truly globalised. Another is Pope Francis’ appointment of 75 cardinals from 50 different countries, 15 of which have never had a cardinal before.

* * * * *

Vatican II, the first Council of the Church with indigenous bishops from all over the world, recognised the global nature of the Church in principle. Now, for the first time, a world-church is being realised in practice.

Less than a quarter of the world’s 1.2 billion Catholics are European and we Europeans must be realistic about our relative unimportance. We need to get used to humbly receiving inspiration, energy, impulses and resources from other cultural contexts and continents.

We also need to get used to how non-European popes choose to go about their business. This includes in terms of leadership, communication and decision-making processes, though Francis’ style in relation to these also owes much to his Jesuit roots, a point to which we will return.

Implementation of *The Joy of the Gospel*, the programmatic document for Pope Francis’ pontificate, is still a work in progress. In part, this

is because many of us have yet to shake off our complacency, and perhaps also an unhelpful passivity in which we were previously schooled, so that we can embrace more fully our responsibilities as baptised faithful.

The Joy of the Gospel is, after all, an exhortation. Its purpose is to exhort us to engagement and action, to ‘get with the programme’ of evangelisation, to transform everything we do into “a missionary key” (*The Joy of the Gospel*, Nos. 33, 34).

“Pope Francis’ pontificate marks a new phase in the implementation of Vatican II”

Work still needs to be done in bringing about a “sound decentralisation” (No.16) whereby, the faithful, bishops, priests and laity together, are enabled to take shared responsibility for the renewal of their local Church. In a global Church, superficial uniformity must give way to a unity that accommodates the richness of how God speaks in diverse cultural contexts.

Practically speaking we are in the early stages of working this out, as evidenced, for instance, by recent failed attempts to agree between Germany and Rome on regulations in regard to Holy Communion for spouses in mixed marriages.



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Sharing the Faith in a



The Pope's most controversial document is an attempt to face reality, writes **Greg Daly**



the wounds," he continued. "And you have to start from the ground up."

The image of the Church as a battlefield hospital is one the Argentine Pope has returned to on several occasions through his papacy. Drawn almost certainly from the classic Italian novel *The Betrothed*, it has underpinned his sense that ours is a ravaged world, one in which, as the Pontiff put it in *Evangelii Gaudium*, his first exhortation, "the family is experiencing a profound cultural crisis, as are all communities and social bonds".

"In the case of the family," he continued, "the weakening of these bonds is particularly serious because the family is the fundamental cell of society, where we learn to live with others despite our differences and to belong to one another; it is also the place where parents pass on the Faith to their children."

Coming just weeks after the Pope had announced an extraordinary synod of bishops on the pastoral challenges to the family in the context of evangelisation, this pointed to one of the key issues the 2014 and 2015 synods of bishops would ponder: how can families pass on the Faith when the family has as an institution been under siege for decades?

These would not be the Church's first synods on the family, of course. In 1981, for instance, St John Paul II had written *Familiaris Consortio* after a synod on the Christian family, mapping out a heroic vision as a bulwark against the rising tide of attacks on the Christian notions of mar-

riage and family. Inspiring though that vision was, however, the line did not hold, and by 2013 it was very obvious to the new Pope that the Church needed to revisit this issue.

Violence

How, after all, could the Faith be passed on in families headed by single parents, families sundered by divorce, families where domestic violence is rife, families struggling with financial hardship and poverty, families in societies where religious faith is ridiculed or persecuted, families suffering and wandering because of wars and famines? And how can children and young adults raised in such situations become themselves prepared for Christian marriage and the formation of Christian families?

2014's extraordinary synod of bishops was preceded by a consistory of cardinals that reflected on the questions the synod would consider, and by a questionnaire shared among dioceses and parishes by bishops' conferences throughout the world in an attempt to gather input from Catholics at grassroots level globally.

The report of the 2014 synod and a subsequent questionnaire of laity were drawn on in preparations for 2015's larger synod of bishops on the vocation and mission of the family in the Church and the modern world, which closed with Pope Francis stressing that the two-year synodal process "was not about finding exhaustive solutions for all the difficulties and uncertainties which challenge and threaten the family" but was about confronting them head on, "without burying our heads in the sand".

Highlighting the "importance of the institution of the family and of marriage between a man and a woman, based on unity and indissolubility", he took issue too with Catholics who he described as having closed hearts "which frequently hide even behind the Church's teachings or good intentions" to "judge, sometimes with superiority and superficiality, difficult cases and wounded families".

The fruit of this extensive process was revealed in April 2016 with the publication of *Amoris Laetitia*, or *The Joy of Love*, the Pope's post-synodal apostolic exhortation on love in the family. Although written in simple language, *Amoris* is a long document and can be intimidating, so people approaching it for the first time might do well to



start with the skeleton key to unlocking it proposed by Vienna's Cardinal Christoph Schönborn at a July 2017 conference in Limerick's Mary Immaculate College.

Describing the document as a whole – and adding that Pope Emeritus Benedict shares this view – as so complementary to St John Paul's 1981 post-synodal exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* that the two form a 'diptych' he began by pointing to section 325 of the text as a "great summary" of the document.

“The biblical foundations of marriage and the family...do not shy away from reality”

The Pope's tendency in *Amoris* to think of marriage as a journey is, he said, similar to that of St Thomas Aquinas: "There's no family in a static way; each family is *in via*, as each of us is *in via* his whole life."

With families being works in progress, looking towards their ultimate fulfilment in the Kingdom to come, he advised against demanding of marriage an unreasonable perfection, and said, "very often Pope Francis remembers that one of the main causes of failure is not asking too little of marriage, but too much".

Acknowledging that imperfection is part of who we are, the cardinal then turned to section 320, which says a couple's love reaches a healthy autonomy when each spouse realises only God can satisfy their deepest needs.

The World War II Lutheran

pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, he quoted the document as saying, said couples' spiritual journeys need to help them reach a point where they stop expecting from each other "something which is proper to the love of God alone".

Witnesses

It's worth continuing into Section 321, then, he said, noting how it presents the family as a 'hospital' in which Christian couples act as co-operators of God's grace and witnesses of the Faith.

Turning from the document's closing sections to its opening section 1, he said that if he were to share the central message of *Amoris* in, for example, a single phrase, he said it would be that "marriage and family are possible", describing the exhortation as a great encouragement for marriage and the family.

The biblical foundations of marriage and the family, he said, as outlined in sections 19-21, do not shy away from reality. "For good reason," he quoted, "Christ's teaching on marriage is inserted in a dispute about divorce." Citing biblical examples, he explained that this realism warns us against idealising the family, and calls us to view reality with mercy.

Sections 35-37, he said, outline the Pope's approach, encouraging us to stand up for the values we can and must offer the world. It is not enough, he said, to reel off the world's problems or just impose rules; instead we should responsibly and generously show why people should marry so as, in Pope Francis' words, "to help men and women better to respond to the grace that God offers

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“Heal the wounds...and start from the ground up”

world of wounded families



them”.

Urging those gathered to underline this, and to trust in God's grace, he recalled too the Pope's warning against burdening marriage with excessive idealisation, and highlighted how section 37

of *Amoris* observes “we have been called to form consciences not replace them”.

It is worth considering, he said, whether we really trust in the consciences of people who respond as best they can in difficult circumstances,

noting how Pope Francis has observed that “a little step towards the good done under difficult circumstances can be more valuable than a moral solid life under confident circumstances”.

Section 49, he said, shows

where Pope Francis comes from on this, outlining as it does the difficulties faced by poor households, single mothers, and others in need to whom the Church must offer understanding, comfort and acceptance, rather than turning God's loving and healing message into stones to hurl at those in difficulty.

The fingerprints of St Thomas Aquinas can be found in section 123 of the document, he continued, in a passage defining love as a kind of friendship marked by concern for the good of the other and with marriage destined to last as it is rooted in the deepest inclinations of human nature, adding that Pope Francis' realism is clear in sections 220 and 221, which details how with patience a maturing love learns to negotiate over time in a way that everyone wins.

Chapter eight of the document has been controversial since its publication, so it's helpful to read the chapter – and especially sections 298 and 300 – in light of how in 1981's *Familiaris Consortio* St

John Paul II said that in dealing with situations where Catholics had civilly divorced and remarried, pastors must “for the sake of truth” exercise careful discernment of situations.

“He recalled the Pope's warning against burdening marriage with excessive idealisation”

In other words, priests should not prejudge situations, but must put time into accompanying people and helping bring them into the life of the Church, especially through a deep and guided examination of conscience, entailing reflection around five questions about how their original marriage had broken down, and how they had acted since.

In some cases, *Amoris* says, reintegrating people in Church life may entail the help of the sacraments, but

the document avoids saying what these cases might be. Instead the key sentence in section 300, the cardinal notes that “if we consider the immense variety of concrete situations such as those I have mentioned, it is understandable that neither the Synod nor this Exhortation could be expected to provide a new set of general rules, canonical in nature and applicable to all cases”.

When it comes to the fraught issue of whether some divorced-and-remarried people might be allowed to receive Communion, then, *Amoris*, doesn't set out new rules – it teaches the classical understanding of marriage and it certainly doesn't question the indissolubility of marriage – but instead builds on and attempts to give force to St John Paul II's call for case-by-case discernment in this area.

The challenge is to live out the Church's moral teaching on the ground, and for the Church to help couples and individuals do so.



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Recruiting Ireland for a family revolution



Pope Francis harbours no illusions about modern Ireland, Cardinal Kevin Farrell told **Greg Daly**

When it was announced at the closing ceremony of the 2015 World Meeting of Families that the Church's next global celebration of the family would be held in Dublin, eyebrows inevitably were raised. The September 27 announcement, after all, came just months after Ireland's marriage referendum, which had seen two thirds of Irish



Bishop Kevin Farrell.

voters voting to redefine how the State would understand marriage and the family.

Two years later, almost to the day, the Dublin-born Cardinal Kevin Farrell, head of the Vatican's Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life,

explained to a packed hall at Down and Connor's Faith and Life Convention that Pope Francis' decision that Dublin should host WMOF2018 was no accident.

"I would hope that you would all support and gather

together so that the Church as a whole can do something about the greatest crisis affecting humanity today – it is the crisis of marriage and it is the crisis of families," he urged the assembled crowd.

"Let's not talk any more about it, let's not discuss it anymore," he continued. "The reality exists – let's do something about it."

Pope Francis had told him that June that his decision to have Ireland host the gathering had its roots in his knowledge and experience of Irish missionaries, the cardinal said.

"I even had missionaries from Ireland – Irish priests – in Buenos Aires in Argentina," he quoted the Pontiff as saying. "They sent missionaries all over the world. They Christianised many parts of Africa, some parts of Latin America, certainly North America – and I can attest to that – and how many other parts of the world?"

Books

How many books have been written, he added with a nod to Thomas Cahill's famous tome on the heroic role of Irish monks in the early Middle Ages, on how the Irish saved civilisation?

"Of course, we're always good about talking about what we do, but there is a basis to that," he continued. "We need, Pope Francis said, we need to ensure that they be part of the revolution of promoting once again marriage and family life in our world today."

The situation in Northern Europe, he said, is "drastic", and simply reading the statistics shows how important it is that action is taken.

Concluding his address,

he said: "That's why he chose Ireland to be the centre of the next gathering of the families. I hope that you will all support it and that you not ever be afraid to voice your support for marriage and for family life in our world today."

The obvious questions, given this, are what exactly Pope Francis envisages Irish people doing to help realise his revolution in marriage and family life, and how aware the Pope is of the various social changes that have taken place in Ireland in recent times?

"He understands that – he doesn't think that Ireland is some miracle," Cardinal Farrell told *The Irish Catholic* after his address. "Nobody thinks that, but he thinks there's a great spirit in the Irish people of giving of themselves to others, and of taking leadership roles, and I think that he would hope that Ireland will solve Ireland's problems first."

For the cardinal, that seemed a common-sense approach: "I think that's the way that you project a positive message – you resolve your own issues."

The Pope had no illusions about modern Ireland, as a typical northern European society, Cardinal Farrell stressed. "I believe that he realises, like everyone realises, the problems that the whole world is faced with. He realises the problems that you are faced with," he said.

Since the 2015 decision the Pope would have been more fully briefed on the realities of modern Ireland, he continued, pointing to the Irish bishops' January 2017 *ad limina* visit to Rome.

“We need to focus on our concept of family, what we believe as Christians, as Catholics”

"He met with all the bishops privately where he had a free-for-all," he said. "Pope Francis is great for having discussions. It's not like it's a lecture series. He wants 'okay, we're all here, we're all in the same boat together, we're sitting around the table – now what's the problem? Let's discuss it.'"

The priority in this 'revolution', the cardinal said, is to hone in on what it is the Church understands by 'family'. "We need to focus on our concept of family, what we believe as Christians, as Catholics – this is about our Faith in the family," he said. "Sometimes that's forgotten, you know. We're not addressing a multitude of different definitions of family. I think that's important for us to understand. I think that's what Pope Francis would hope that we would do, and I think that

that's what he would hope would come out of this."

Taking a fresh look at the notion of family values and how values are passed on through families should be key to this too, the cardinal said, pointing to the classic ideas of the family as a domestic church and of parents as the first teachers of the Faith.

"Families have transmitted the Faith, but families have also transmitted values, and when there isn't that strong family life, values are not transmitted from one person to another," he explained. "Then we find a kind of lost generation, of people who have no values to the extent that they don't know why they live anymore."

Not, he added, that he thinks the Pope envisages Ireland sending our missionaries to teach this revived idea of family. Rather, he said, Pope Francis' hope is that "Ireland will solve Ireland's issues and then become a beacon of light for the rest of the world".

In doing this, the cardinal added, it will not be enough to look to older models of value-transmission, such as in the working-class Dublin of his youth where mothers were domestic evangelisers and formators.

"We need to adjust to the moment and the culture in which we live," he said, noting that "the way the Faith was practiced in apostolic times is not the way the Faith is practiced today".

Faith transmission

Financial necessity is largely responsible for family realities being different nowadays, he explained, and the transmission of Faith and values being difficult.

"Today I know many families where both father and mother work, who are in and out of the home, some of them work two jobs every day," he said. "They don't have the time – kids are with grandparents, kids are with people in the neighbourhood."

This, he said, is one reason why the Pontiff returns repeatedly – and sometimes in jest – to the topic of grandparents as sharers of Christian truth in a world where both parents must work, and work lots.

"That's why Francis makes a joke about grandparents, because in the economic situation of the world today, that's one of the greatest challenges to families and to marriage: the economic situation and the cost of living, and parents have to work two and three jobs just to make ends meet," he said.

"And that's the reality – but the reality doesn't preclude the transmitting of values, the family unit, the family tradition and family values, and every family is different," he said.

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Church of the Immaculate Conception, Qaraqosh on Iraq's Nineveh Plains shortly after its liberation from Daesh (ISIS).

Christians: The World's Most Persecuted and Forgotten

There is no room for complacency when presented with the reality of the scale and severity of Christian persecution worldwide – it faces the very real threat of extinction in several countries.

There is much work to be done by the international community to ensure that the right of Christians to live, to work, to raise families, to participate and to worship in their homelands is recognised and safeguarded.

At Aid to the Church in Need (ACN), we recognise that in speaking for the rights of persecuted Christians we are also in fact speaking up for all peoples who are oppressed for their peacefully-held beliefs – indeed freedom of conscience and freedom of worship are among the most fundamental tenets of Christian teaching. When freedom of worship is restricted or outlawed, the common good also greatly suffers, as political hegemony inevitably invites tyranny.

The infliction of Christian persecution in a country is a barometer of its societal and political freedoms. Christian Persecution always runs the threat of being politically ignored: more so it seems than any other class of oppression. The reasons for this are often related to political capital but the effects of ignoring this reality have demonstrable effects on the policies of extremist regimes where a 'soft persecution' enters into the fabric of daily life – manifesting itself in such injustices as social ostracisation, institutional bullying, police harassment, difficulties in getting or retaining employment, alongside educational exclusion – and often become so encultured as to be normalised.

Invariably, acting with such un-checked impunity can be a precursor to the infliction of 'hard persecution' such as kidnappings, tortures, forced migrations and mass murder. Against such a backdrop ACN's exhibition at the WMOF2018 (details below) can be seen as an educational tool for anyone who claims

to have human rights and dignity at the forefront of their concerns efforts to make this world a better place.

We must not only politically recognise Christian persecution and genocide, but have it culturally recognized also. The reality of the vast, brutal scale of a global effort worldwide to extinguish the light of Christ and the life of Christians must be morally reflected in our humanitarian, diplomatic and corporate relationships to ensure that those who inflict or enable Christian persecution are held to account.

Assisting charities like ACN – be it through prayer, through education, through donation or through volunteering – is a vital component of pastoral work but also counts as a Spiritual and a Corporal work of Mercy: in helping our brothers and sisters on Earth, we are helping each other get to Heaven. If ever a true likeness of peace is to be sincerely attained by the international community, then it will require – at least in part – that the humane and equal treatment of Christian religious minorities be a conditional factor in diplomatic and trade relations of Western governments, including in Ireland where there is a growing anti-clericalism being fostered and subsidized by an amoral political class.

In lands tilled by violence, oppression and genocide, we must plant seeds of hope: that those who weep now will have cause for joy, that those are persecuted will not be forgotten.

God bless you and keep you all.

Dr. Michael Kinsella

National Director,
Aid to the Church in Need (Ireland)



Fr. Martin Banni
in his church in
Karemla, Nineveh
Plains, Iraq.

Come and visit the Aid to the Church in Need (Ireland) Exhibition at World Meeting of Families 2018 located at Hall 8D RDS Simonscourt Pavilion between 9am and 2pm each day from Wednesday 22nd - Friday 24th of August.



ACN Witness to Hope in Syria: Sr. Annie Demerjian

By the Grace of God,
I was born into a Christian
family and found my religious
vocation in the Order of Jesus
and Mary. These have given
me the strength necessary
to carry on in the face of the
most harrowing suffering
I believe any human
could witness.

Our Lady of Fatima said to the three seers that war is always a result of sin – and in Syria I have witnessed something of the ultimate end of all sin... Hell.

Images of the war in Syria appear on our television screens every night, yet they fail to convey the full extent of the carnage and mayhem. I work with a team of lay volunteers who go from house-to-house, providing basic help and support, especially for the sick and elderly, trapped in the bombed-out city of Aleppo... it is a broken city where life hardly exists, it has in many places become a giant graveyard...where not even the dead can rest in peace.

Aleppo's ancient Christian community has fallen from 200,000 to less than 35,000 since the war began in 2011. Churches have been destroyed. Hospitals, schools and homes obliterated. Those people who have remained in the city, often because they are too sick or elderly to move, are living in desperate conditions without food, water and electricity for weeks on end. In the summer, they endure intense heat.

This year there were temperatures of over 50 degrees centigrade. In the winter, it is bitterly cold. People must queue for hours for water, sold at exorbitant prices they can't afford. One elderly couple I know well, sold their bed to buy fuel last winter. They rationed themselves, heating just one room for one hour a day.

This winter they have nothing left to sell. But with help from Aid to the Church in Need, we have been able to purchase much-needed items for distribution to the housebound. Our team brings water, food and medicines. They also meet living costs such as rent, fuel for heating and electricity, which is often powered by portable makeshift generators. Yet we know this can only be a temporary solution to a long-term problem... we ultimately rely on your prayers before God. Families are living in fear most of the time, but also living in the hope that one day there will be peace.

In an effort to keep some sense of normality, and when it is possible, parents try to send their children to school. Although when they say goodbye, they know they may not see each other again because they know that at any time rockets or shells might fall on top of us. The psychological damage is resulting in a pain far greater than that of the physical pain. Children are growing up with limited education and no sense of security. When peace does come it will be a huge task to re-integrate people back into society. There is a lost generation of young people in Syria for whom violent death is an everyday experience.

Yet: in the name of hundreds of families and children, we say thank you because you have entered the houses and the hearts of many; because you have fed hundreds of hungry families, because you provide warmth to those who feel cold, because hundreds of pairs of shoes protect hundreds of children from the harsh winter, because, through you, we can heal many wounded people. Our world is a gift from God, part of it is bleeding. Be peacemakers for us and our children. Be a witness to hope and to joy in this suffering world.

The World Meeting of Families in 2018 is a wonderful opportunity to thank God for the gift of family and faith...and what a wonderful blessing it would be to know that while Christians in Syria are attempting to reunite families to rebuild their country, their fellow Christians in Ireland will be uniting families to rebuild their faith. As I have been a witness to the horrors of war in Syria, let me also invite you to become a witness to hope in Almighty God who knows full well the full extent of religious persecution and violence from the sacrifice of His Son, our Redeemer.

God bless you.

Sister Annie Demerjian

ACN Witness to Hope



Sister Annie Demerjian

Born 1967 in Damascus to a devout Armenian Christian family, is a religious sister from the Order of Jesus and Mary. Throughout the war in Aleppo as a key ACN project partner she has led a team of lay volunteers who, at great risk to their own safety, went from house-to-house, providing basic help and support, especially for the sick and elderly, trapped in the bombed-out city. Her vital life-affirming work to heal the wounds of war, to recover lost dignity and build peace based upon truth, justice and love of neighbour continues and continues to be in need of all our unstinting support



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Colm Fitzpatrick explores why the Pope chose the name 'Francis'

Nowadays, the names that we are given or ascribe usually have no abiding meaning or significance, but merely act as markers for identifying one another. However, in the Jewish tradition, names carried spiritual significance – they held a certain symbolic meaning and it was this meaning that was a key component of parents' decision to choose them. Moses, for example, may mean 'drew out', while Joseph means 'he will add'.

Names, then, symbolically pointed beyond a person, to something more meaningful and profound. This ancient practice was also carried into the Christian tradition, leading laypeople and religious alike to pick names of signifi-

FRANCIS

...what's in a name?



St Francis.

cance. So, when our current Pope chose the name Francis, he did so, not because it sounded good, but because attached to it was a history of meaning which he wanted to convey in the world today.

The story of choosing the name Francis dates back to 2013, when the now-Pope said that "as things got dangerous" in the conclave voting, he was sitting next to his "great friend", Brazilian Cardinal Claudio Hummes who "comforted" him. When the

former Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio went over the 77 votes needed to become Pope, he said, Cardinal Hummes "hugged me, kissed me and said, 'Don't forget the poor'".

Encounter

After this encounter, Bergoglio told thousands of journalists that he took to heart the words of his friend and chose to be called after St Francis of Assisi, "the man of poverty, the man of peace, the man who loves and protects

creation", the same created world "with which we don't have such a good relationship". He added "How I would like a Church that is poor and that is for the poor."

Pope Francis also said some had suggested jokingly that he, a Jesuit, should have taken the name Clement XV "to get even with Clement XIV, who suppressed the Society of Jesus" in the 1700s. Others were uncertain if his name referred to St Francis Xavier or St Francis de Sales, but the Pontiff confirmed that the 12th-Century ecological saint was the primary influence for him choosing the name.

Born in 1181, St Francis was a Catholic friar, deacon and preacher. Notably, he was the founder of the Franciscan Orders, which continues to play an important influence in communities throughout the world. Today, he is usually praised for his theology

on the environment, affirming that all of creation is good, and that humans are called to be stewards of the Earth.

One convivial story that highlights the nature of the saint recalls that while Francis was travelling with some friends, they happened upon a place where the trees were filled with birds.

“The Pontiff has repeatedly spoken about how we should all ‘become a bit poorer’”

Francis told his companions to "wait for me while I go to preach to my sisters the birds". The birds then surrounded him, captivated by the power of his voice, and not one flew away.

Although Pope Francis hasn't performed any miracles of such grandiose stature,

it's clear that he hasn't shied away from the saint's environmental passions. His 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si'* (Praise Be To You) pays homage to the religious song 'Canticle of the Sun' composed by the saint, which praises God and gives thanks for all creation.

Living up to the theme of poverty, the Pontiff has repeatedly spoken about how we should all "become a bit poorer" and has carried this message across the globe. In 2016, in St Peter's Square, he said the poor are at the centre of the Gospel and that Jesus privileges those "who are furthest away, the suffering, the sick, those discarded by society".

Although this is the first time any Pope has chosen the title Francis, given the praiseworthy work our Pontiff has done in his name, the saint and his message will be undoubtedly remembered long into the future.

World Missions Ireland welcomes their patron Pope Francis to Ireland, and thanks him for inspiring us all to share God's love!

World Missions Ireland welcomes their patron Pope Francis to Ireland, and thanks him for inspiring us all to share God's love!

For centuries Irish missionaries have travelled the world proclaiming the joy of the Gospel. These selfless brothers and sisters remain dear in the hearts of many because they've given their lives to something that truly matters - helping those who are most vulnerable and in need. It's thanks to World Missions Ireland and their generous supporters that much of Irish missionary work remains as vital and relevant today as it did back in the 1950s, which was regarded as the peak era in the Irish missionary movement.

In the first half of the 20th century Ireland was faced with poverty, shortages and rationing as it struggled through the Economic War, post-World War II. However, the Irish people's generosity towards missionaries knew no bounds.

It was because of their kindness, in a time when



Director of WMI Fr Martin Kelly and Pope Francis share a warm handshake.

there was so little, that missionaries could be clothed, fed, educated and sent overseas to where there was even greater need. It's also because of this kindness that these missionaries could (and still can) build Churches, clinics, hospitals and schools, and run feeding and sanitation programmes in some of our world's most disadvantaged and remote communities.

Beyond financial terms, it's impossible to fully grasp Ire-

land's contribution to the missionary movement. The moral support and prayers offered show missionaries just how much they're appreciated and loved – an intangible gift that provides much comfort and courage in times of danger, fear and isolation.

Worldwide network

As we eagerly wait to welcome Pope Francis for the World Meeting of Families, there is an added reason for World Mis-

sions Ireland's excitement. He is the patron of their charity. In fact, World Missions Ireland is the Church's official charity for overseas mission. They're part of a worldwide network of over 120 charities, originally known as the Pontifical Mission Societies. Many of their international offices go by the name 'Missio'. World Missions Ireland (and their fellow international charities) support missionaries at the grass-root level, in communities that are struggling and often war-torn, which cannot happen without the belief and continued support of Irish people.

Something World Missions Ireland values highly from the Holy Father, is he how he inspires us all to have missionary hearts and to act upon them. During his first Chrism Mass, Francis said we need to 'go out to the outskirts and give ourselves and the Gospel to others, giving what little ointment we have to those who have nothing, nothing at all.' It doesn't matter who, or where you are – you can be a missionary. Be it through offering your prayers

to those in need, or by giving what you can, no matter how little, to help continue the life-transforming work of our missionaries further afield.

Pastoral Congress


During the Pastoral Congress in the RDS, World Missions Ireland invites you to visit their stand, number 24. There they will celebrate the work of missionaries – those who have indeed gone out to the outskirts! The charity will be showing an inspirational and moving mission documentary, from RTE journalist Charlie Bird. It depicts incredible life-changing stories from overseas brothers and sisters.

Also on display will be a replica of a unique souvenir the charity will give to Pope Francis. To commemorate his time, they invited schoolchildren from over 3,000 schools to enter a competition to design the Holy Father vestments. The winning piece of art work, by Jane Boland, Carrig National School Tipperary, has been created into two life-sized garments – one on display at the Congress, the other for our Holy Father. It's a fun and joyful sight, not to be missed!

World Missions Ireland looks forward to meeting old and new friends in missionary spirit!



Smiling children from the Badjao community in the Philippines who feature in the WMI mission documentary.



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Francis and Mary: A lifetime of love

Colm Fitzpatrick

In the papal apartments the next morning after Joseph Ratzinger was declared Pope in 2005, Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio paused longer than almost any other cardinal to converse with the new German Pontiff and express his deferential respect and loyalty – a tradition that has been carried out by cardinals since the Middle Ages.

A few months later, Bergoglio presented a chalice inscribed with an image of *Mary Untier of Knots*, to Benedict. The gesture wasn't a formality but a personal reminder to Benedict about the power of prayer and devotion needed for what would be a challenging pontificate.

The 17th-Century image alludes to the 2nd-Century Church Father St Irenaeus who has written of how "the knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary".

Study

While studying in Germany in the 1980's, Francis discovered this special devotion to Our Lady at the Church of St Peter am Perlach in Augsburg. The painting depicts Mary in heaven surrounded by angels, and standing on a crescent moon crushing the head of the serpent, Satan. She also holds a long ribbon and is untying a large knot, one of several on the ribbon.

In presenting this image to Benedict, Bergoglio was expressing the message that good will always and eventually overcome evil. And it is this same Marian message that Francis has been devoted to during his own papacy.

“The Pontiff established a new feast day for the Catholic Church devoted to Mary as the ‘Mother of the Church’”

Indeed, after being declared Pope in 2013, Francis went straight to Rome's Basilica St Mary Major to pray and when he stops there on his way to the Vatican after returning from an international journey, he usually leaves a bouquet of flowers that had been presented to him during the trip.

Most people in Argentina were already aware of



Mary Untier of Knots.

his devotion to Mary years before his election, given that as archbishop of Buenos Aires, he'd participate in a massive pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady of Lujan; an event so popular it was once referred to as "a religious craze".

But his love of Mary was immediately conveyed to Catholics throughout the world shortly after he became Pope when he changed the itinerary of the already planned trip to Brazil for World Youth Day in Rio Janerio, to include a day trip to the home of the shrine of Our Lady of Aparecida. And his devotion to Mary is a precedent he's certainly kept up with.

On a papal flight in 2013, he said that "Our Lady is more important than the Apostles" and that we can't "imagine a Church without women". In 2016, he travelled to Mexico to defend the dignity and rights of immigrants, but before and during the trip he repeatedly said he would visit Our Lady of Guadalupe. "How could I not come?" Francis asked the Mexican bishops when he met with them. "Could the Successor of Peter, called from the far south of Latin America, deprive himself of seeing la Virgen Morenita?"

In March of this year, the

Pontiff established a new feast day for the Catholic Church devoted to Mary as the "Mother of the Church" to be celebrated on the Monday after Pentecost. He thought it might "encourage the growth of the maternal sense of the Church in the pastors, religious and faithful, as well as a growth of genuine Marian piety." Francis believes that through devotion to Mary, we can learn about ourselves, God, and his love for all people.

“Above all, the Pope hopes that, as he mentioned in 2013, that the faithful don't reduce Mary to a postmistress, 'who sends messages everyday'”

Above all, the Pope hopes that, as he mentioned in 2013, the faithful don't reduce Mary to a postmistress, "who sends messages everyday", but rather realise that she is a mother who is always with and nurturing us. Whatever knots we are experiencing in life, she isn't far away.



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Waiting for decisive action on abuse

The Pope's window for showing that child protection is a key priority for him is narrowing, writes **Michael Kelly**



A woman holds this sign as members of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP) hold a news conference in front of the Diocese of Pittsburgh. Photos: CNS

It was with a mixture of sadness and dismay that many Catholics looked on in January 2018 when Pope Francis jumped to the defence of a controversial Chilean bishop accused of knowing about the actions of a notorious sexual abuser.

Responding to a journalist who asked about the issue, Pope Francis said “the day they bring me proof against Bishop [Juan] Barros, I’ll speak. There is not one shred of proof against him. It’s all calumny. Is that clear?”

The 2015 appointment of Bishop Barros had been sharply criticised by activists and abuse survivors who accused him of covering up the crimes of his long-time friend, Fr Fernando Karadima.

It was a low-point in Francis’ papacy on the issue of safeguarding and wasted huge capital that the Church had built up on demonstrating that it was decisively committed to rooting out the scourge of abuse and cover-up from the Church.

Leadership

Most fair-minded observers acknowledge that Benedict XVI showed tremendous leadership of addressing what he himself described as the “filth” within the Church. In 2001, he took personal charge of the issue and ensured that all complaints of abuse were handled in a uniform fashion rather than the hapless way various departments had struggled to cope before that point.

He warned bishops’ conferences that they had to act decisively to implement robust child safeguarding practices. Of course, the unfinished work of his Pontificate was the absence of a Vatican office specifically charged with child safeguarding.

In March 2014, Francis established the Pontifical

Commission for the Protection of Minors headed by Boston’s Cardinal Seán O’Malley. Cardinal O’Malley had served as something of a troubleshooter on the issue of abuse and had been charged by Benedict XVI as one of the Apostolic Visitors to assess the crisis in Ireland. Other members named to the commission were Irishwoman Marie Collins and British-based abuse survivor Peter Saunders.

The office was staffed by Msgr Bob Oliver, the former Vatican prosecutor for sex crimes and the charismatic Irishwoman Emer McCarthy. The body soon began an ambitious programme of work. Progress was painstakingly slow and the only two abuse survivors on the commission Mr Saunders and Ms Collins resigned in frustration. Both cited a resistance in the upper echelons of the Vatican to take safeguarding seriously as a priority for the global Church.

“Archbishop Diarmuid Martin criticised the commission at the weekend saying it is too small and not robust enough”

Neither doubted the sincerity of Pope Francis, but his apparent failure to back up his own body or give it the teeth it needed left many wondering whether Francis truly understood the depth of the crisis that had to be addressed.

His words in Chile – for which he later apologised and launched a thorough investigation which led all of the country’s

bishops to offer their resignations – had damaged the Pope. Many were now wondering whether an apparent lack of urgency on the issue would be a black mark against his leadership. This was compounded when he allowed the body to lapse for two months when the mandate of members ran out in December 2017.

Now, many are asking whether the Pontifical Commission is up to the job. Almost two years ago, at the instigation of the commission the Pope ordered the establishment of a special Vatican tribunal to deal with bishops who are shown to have misgoverned the Church and put children in harm’s way or covered up for an abuser priest. It never happened. Despite the fact that the Pope’s authority in the Church is absolute, senior members of the Roman Curia resisted the move and the commission was powerless to act.

Archbishop of Dublin Diarmuid Martin criticised the commission at the weekend saying it is too small and not robust enough.

He said the body is “not getting its teeth into where it should be” and this “puts all the pressure back on the Pope”.

Pope Francis “really needs a better, stronger and more robust team around him. I’m very fortunate that my predecessor left me a child protection

office which was in its early days, but it was robust from the beginning,” Dr Martin said.

Just a day later Francis wrote an unprecedented letter to the world’s 1.2 billion Catholics. In the letter, he acknowledged a culture of cover-up of the crimes of abuser priests and said he wanted to beg forgiveness of those who had been hurt.

The Pope also acknowledged that the Church had been slow to implement guidelines or adopt best practise across the globe.

It is striking that he described abuse as part of the “culture of death” – a phrase usually reserved for issues like abortion and euthanasia. The Pope promised that the Church was learning the lessons and that more concrete action was on the way.

According to campaigners, if the document is to be effective the Pope will have to quickly follow it with practical measures.

Unfinished business

On the face of it, there are two key pieces of unfinished business. Firstly, child safeguarding measures are patchy across the Church. In countries like Ireland, Great Britain and the United States the policies and procedures followed are acknowledged to be top notch. All allegations of abuse are routinely shared with the civil authorities and there is a good working relationship between Church safeguarding offices and law enforcement and child protection services.

In Ireland, there is a veritable army of safeguarding volunteers working in every parish and religious institution on the island to ensure a safe environment for

children and vulnerable adults. According to Marie Collins, this is a template that should be shared with the rest of the Church – particularly in developing countries where there is not the heightened awareness of abuse that there is in Ireland.

The other key reform is the tribunal or other mechanism to judge bishops who have failed in regard to safeguarding. Theologians have pointed out that only the Pope can judge bishops. But, the entire *raison d’être* of the Roman Curia is to assist the Pope in the exercise of his supreme authority within the Church.

“If the document is to be effective the Pope will have to quickly follow it with practical measures”

Just as the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith punishes dogmatic crimes on behalf of the Pope, a similar body can be empowered to prosecute bishops under the Pope’s authority. It is true that the canonical mechanisms do not currently exist for such a body, but the Pope as legislator-in-chief for the Church can establish such norms by the stroke of a pen.

The Pope’s latest letter has been welcomed by some, dismissed as more of the same by others. What’s clear now is that the expectation is that he will take decisive action of the issue. If he doesn’t, it runs the risk of damaging his own reputation and marring his Papacy.



Msgr Bob Oliver.

Building a synodal Church

It's one of the many ironies of Pope Francis' pontificate that the 2014 and 2015 synods of bishops have been criticised by some as rigged exercises, when by all accounts they were the most open and transparent synods the Church has ever seen.

Held every two or three years since 1967, when Blessed Paul VI established the synod with the intention that it be a council of bishops intended to ensure the Church would continue to reap the benefits of the consultative process experienced in the Second Vatican Council, the synods until recently tended to be carefully-managed talking shops rather than instruments of governance, with their agendas and conclusions under tight curial control.

2008 and 2012's synods on the Word of God and the New Evangelisation were steps in a more open direction, but it was clear by the end of 2013 that the forthcoming two-phase synod was going to be a very different phenomenon.

"It is a new approach that responds to the Pope's new way of doing things and responds in some ways to the dynamics of the Second Vatican Council," Archbishop – now Cardinal – Lorenzo Baldisseri told

Pope Francis wants a living relationship between Rome and the local Churches, writes Greg Daly



Vaticanista Andrea Tornielli in December 2013. "Francis wants a dynamic and permanent synod, not as a structured entity but as an action, as osmosis between the centre and the periphery. And he wants it to be applied to all issues, in order to get suggestions from local Churches."

Language

This is very much the language of the late Dominican theologian Yves Congar, who has had an immense influence on the thought of Pope Francis. Fr Congar believed every Church renewal consists of an increase in fidelity to her

own calling and a return to the roots of the Church. True reform, to Congar's mind, often comes from outsiders and those far from the centre of the Church, and can require new structures.

Reforms from on high have little chance of success without the participation of those below, he believed, holding that all true reform is pastoral, and about helping people to be holy, attacking the kind of spiritual worldliness that stops the Church from looking like and acting like Christ.

For those who might worry that the synods on the family have exposed and even exacerbated

divisions in the Church, and fear that the upcoming synod on young people may worsen things, it is worth looking to the writings of another inspiration for Pope Francis, the late Fr Romano Guardini.

“Francis has concluded that ecclesiastical unity should not be something imposed from above”

An Italian-born German priest who died in 1968, Fr Guardini has the distinction of having been a huge influence on both Pope Francis and Pope Benedict XVI, with Francis once having worked on a PhD thesis on the theme of 'polar opposition' in Guardini's writings.

Considering this as something beneficial, Francis told Fr Antonio Spadaro in 2016: "Opposition opens a path, a way forward. Speaking generally, I have to say that I love oppositions. Romano Guardini helped me with his book *Der Gegensatz*, which was important to me."

He continued: "He spoke of a polar opposition in which the two opposites are not annulled. One

pole does not destroy the other. There is no contradiction and no identity. For him, opposition is resolved at a higher level. In such a solution, however, the polar tension remains. The tension remains; it is not cancelled out. The limits are overcome, not negated. Oppositions are helpful. Human life is structured in an oppositional form. And we see this happening now in the Church as well. The tensions are not necessarily resolved and ironed out; they are not like contradictions."

Guardini, in short, believed contrasting views could work together to generate dynamic growth, and following him, Francis has concluded that ecclesiastical unity should not be something imposed from above and that given time and patience conflict can lead to a deep agreement in unity, even if not in uniformity.

For Pope Francis, such unity is the work of the Holy Spirit, in whom we are called to trust.

In the meantime, though, there's no harm in open disagreement, he thinks, famously remarking of the Synod Fathers: "I prefer that they yell a few strong words against each other and then embrace, rather than speak against each other in hiding."



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A man who dreams of a Church transformed

According to a leaked diary – which no-one has disputed – Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio came runner-up in the conclave that elected Benedict XVI in 2015. Despite that, few people considered him a candidate for the papacy in 2013, the conventional wisdom being that his moment had passed.

The members of the College of Cardinals had a different idea. The Argentine Jesuit had quietly impressed many of his colleagues as various synods and meetings in Rome.

It was a dramatic eve-of-conclave speech that convinced many cardinals that the Archbishop of Buenos Aires was the man best suited to the Petrine ministry at this juncture and so he was elected with a strong mandate for reform.

When the cardinals met in March 2013, it was against the backdrop of Benedict XVI becoming the first Pope to resign in some 600 years. The Vatican was mired in controversy and the Pope's butler was in prison having admitted to stealing and leaking documents from Benedict's private office.

The scandal-ridden Vatican Bank was causing huge embarrassment and the Holy See's banking system was temporarily knocked off the international grid due to fears

Pope Francis has not fully realised his ambitious reform agenda, writes **Michael Kelly**



that it was a conduit for laundering money. At the same time, the Italian press was abuzz with rumours about a so-called 'gay lobby' within the Vatican influencing decisions.

Bowed by age and the weight of office, Benedict was isolated and chose to take the humble step of standing aside.

Masterful

As the cardinals met in Rome for their pre-conclave meetings about the state of the Church, it soon became apparent that there was a piercing desire for reform. According to Cardinal Jaime Ortega, "Cardinal Bergoglio made a speech that seemed masterful, insightful, engaging and certain".

On the first point on evangelisation, Cardinal Bergoglio said "the Church must take leave of itself and go to the peripheries" but not just in the geographical sense "but also the existential sense,

manifested in the mystery of sin, pain, injustice and ignorance, among others".

The second section characterised the institution as a "self-referential" Church and self-centred in a kind of "theological narcissism".

In point three, Bergoglio criticised "the worldly Church living in itself, of itself, for itself." According to Cardinal Ortega, the idea of the Pope is that the institution must find a balance in "the changes and reforms that have to be undertaken".

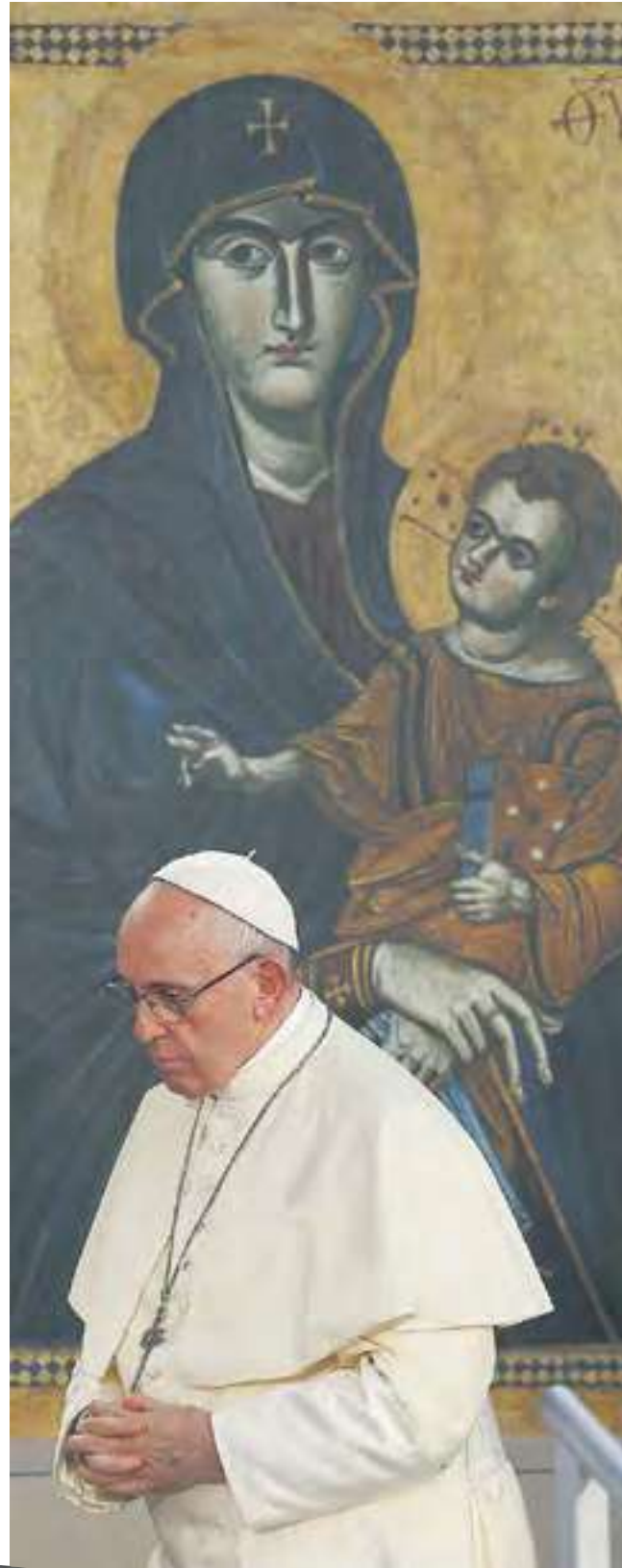
The fourth point reported by Cardinal Ortega indicates that the Pope, not knowing that he would be elected, said he expected a top pastor of the Church of Rome "a man who, from the contemplation of Jesus Christ...helps the Church to emerge from itself to arrive at the existential limits".

Francis very quickly set about an ambitious reform agenda. He immediately appointed teams of international consultants to advise on the reform of the Holy See's finances.

There were major personnel changes both at the Vatican Bank (the Institute for Works of Religion) and the Administration of the Patrimony of the Holy See (APSA). The reforms very quickly returned confidence from international regulatory bodies and lots of suspected bogus accounts were cancelled.

On the wider reform of the Roman Curia, the Pope convened a committee of senior cardinals later dubbed by commentators as the C9. The body has met regularly since to advise the Pontiff and is reportedly nearing a final draft of an apostolic constitution to reform the Curia.

Going back to the papacy of John Paul II, it was long felt that issues like the laity and family were relegated at the Vatican since they were



Pope Francis walks in front of a copy of the Marian icon *Salus Populi Romani*; left, Msgr. Dario Viganò. Photos: CNS

managed by less powerful Pontifical Councils rather than the congregations which oversaw things like

the Doctrine of the Faith, Clergy and Bishops.

In a bid to remedy this, the Pope created what to many is a new super dicastery that for laity, family and life headed by Dubliner Cardinal Kevin Farrell. At the same time, Francis breathed life into his social teaching by creating another dicastery to deal specifically with these issues.

The Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Develop-

ment brought together the work of the Pontifical Councils for Justice and Peace, Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, Pastoral Assistance to Health Care Workers, and the charitable body 'Cor Unum'.

A move met with less enthusiasm was the decision to bring all the Vatican's communications arms under one umbrella headed by Msgr Dario Viganò. Msgr Viganò resigned earlier this year after he had ordered a letter from Benedict XVI about the writings of Pope Francis to be partially blurred thus taking the visible lines out of context.

“There have been frequent stories in the Italian press of staff feeling under pressure to resign”

Staff at the new communications outfit – which brought together amongst other things the Vatican Television Centre, Vatican Radio, the internet office and the daily newspaper – have complained of difficult working conditions under the new dispensation.

There have been frequent stories in the Italian press of staff feeling under pressure to resign.

In ordering the communications overhaul, Pope Francis insisted that no-one should lose their job, instead making savings as people retire. However, several former staffers have spoken of an atmosphere which makes it impossible to stay.

Five years on, Francis has certainly changed the mood music in Rome. His stinging critiques of the Roman Curia, usually delivered around Christmas, have become legendary.

Critics will point to the fact that there is little substantial change. It's also concerning to people keen on reform that five years on the apostolic constitution – the document meant to paint the blueprint for curial reform – has still not emerged.

Francis has transformed the standing of the Church internationally and his approval ratings remain strong both amongst Catholics and in general views towards world leaders. On the issue of reforms, however, it's probably a case of a lot done, more to do.

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Chai Brady explores why Francis is known as the 'Pope of the poor'

When darkness falls on the city of Rome and the its homeless search for shelter and food, there's one disguised shepherd on the streets practicing what he preaches and assisting the impoverished.

Not many people would expect a Pope to sneak out at night to assist the poor, with the many security risks this would incur, but throughout his papacy Pope Francis has always been full of surprises.

He has always shown humility. First and foremost he ditched the red shoes popularised by other Pontiffs for plain black ones, took up residence in a simple two-room apartment and the day after his election chose to be driven to the Sistine Chapel on a minibus with other clergy rather than take a chauffeur driven Vatican car.

These actions reflected to the world his deep concern for issues of social justice and his cognisance of the impoverished around the world.

Dignity

In January, while addressing Chilean priests, consecrated people and seminarians during a papal visit, he said: "The problem is not feeding the poor, clothing the naked and visiting the sick, but rather recognising that the poor, the naked, the sick, prisoners and the homeless have the dignity to sit at our table, to feel 'at home' among us, to feel part of a family."

"This is the sign that the Kingdom of Heaven is in our midst. This is the sign of a Church wounded by sin, shown mercy by the Lord, and made prophetic by his call."

“To do no wrong is not enough. God is not an inspector looking for one who has not paid the ticket”

Less than a week before this address, Francis offered tickets to 2,000 of Rome's poor or homeless people, several refugees and prisoners for Medrano Circus. Food and medical personnel were also provided at the event.

On his birthday this year 3,000 gelati were given to needy and homeless people in his name, and they were distributed through soup kitchens and shelters mostly run by Catholic charities, in Rome.

Since Francis was elected in March 2013, he has lead by

Reaching out to those with nothing

profound truths of the Gospel are made manifest and tangible. Everything is revealed in mercy; everything is resolved in the merciful love of the Father."

Specifically mentioning poverty he called the Church to be vigilant, saying: "Our world continues to promote new forms of spiritual and material poverty that assault human dignity. For this reason, the Church must always be vigilant and ready to identify new works of mercy and to practice them with generosity and enthusiasm."

During his ministry he has always been very hands on, embracing homeless people and having conversations with them. Before the beginning of Lent last year he said in an interview – with a magazine serving homeless and marginalised people – that when encountering those who live on the street, he greets them and sometimes asks them about their lives.

He always chatted with a homeless family and couple that lived next to the archbishop's residence in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and never considered making them move.

“One can look at a homeless person and see him as a person or else as if he were a dog”

It's important to be sincere, because people who live on the streets understand right away when the other person is really interested in them as a person or when they just feel pity, he said.

"One can look at a homeless person and see him as a person or else as if he were a dog, and they notice this different way of looking," he said.

It is well documented that Pope Francis will privately visit the Capuchin Day Centre on August 25 at 4.30pm. Visiting sanctuaries for the homeless and poor has been a recurrent practice for him wherever he goes.

Founder of the Capuchin Day Centre, Bro. Kevin Crowley OFM Cap. – who has been working with those experiencing homelessness for decades – said after it was confirmed: "I feel it shows great respect and great concern for them [service users]."

He added that "it shows that he has a great love for the homeless and unprivileged people". Eighty homeless people are expected to be present for the Pontiff's visit. During the encounter Francis is expected to share a meal as well as listen to the experiences of homelessness of those present.

With Ireland experiencing a homeless crisis on epic proportions, and a recent report by property website Daft for the second quarter of 2018 revealing the average rent in Ireland is now €1,300 – up by €274 from the last peak in 2008 – it is now more than ever that a visit by Pope Francis may serve to highlight the importance of caring and humanising the poor in order to fight a growing epidemic.



A crowd is seen on the roadway as Pope Francis blesses the cornerstone of Talitha Qum homeless shelter in Cartagena, Colombia.

example, and called people not to be content and believe themselves to "be good" by not doing bad things.

Speaking at the World Day of the Poor in November 2017 in front of 4,000 people suffering poverty – who he later brought out for lunch – he said: "But to do no wrong is not enough. God is not an inspector looking for one who has not paid the ticket."

"He is a Father looking for children to whom he can entrust his assets and his projects. It is sad when the Father of love does not receive a generous response of love from his children, who limit themselves to respecting the rules and following the commandments, like hired servants in the house of the Father."

It was Francis who established the first World Day of the Poor

when he issued his Apostolic Letter, *Misericordia et Misera* (Mercy with Misery), in which he implored people to be merciful. The title refers to the mercy with misery Jesus grants the woman caught in adultery.

Mercy

In it he said: "Mercy cannot become a mere parenthesis in the life of the Church; it constitutes her very existence, through which the



The Pope meets people involved with St Maria's Meals Programme of Catholic Charities in Washington.



Pope Francis greets migrants during his general audience in St Peter's Square at the Vatican.

A voice for



Pope Francis: a champion for the cause of migrants, writes Chai Brady

Continuously being a strong advocate for the rights of migrants and refugees, it seems wholly appropriate that Pope Francis' first pastoral visit outside Rome was Lampedusa – where migrants have arrived in huge numbers over the years.

In the past two decades 400,000 migrants have arrived on the small Italian island in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, which has been called the 'door of Europe', with many asylum seekers from Syria, Libya, Eritrea, Gambia, Maghreb, Sudan and Tunisia travelling there to seek sanctuary.

Many who risk the journey have lost their lives. Pope Francis laid a wreath in the sea to commemorate the almost 20,000 people who had died.

Although this visit, which took place five years ago in July, was quickly overshadowed by his trip to Brazil for World Youth Day a few days later, it set the theme for his papacy – particularly when he spoke about what he calls a "globalisation of indifference" to migrants, styling them as primary victims of a "throw-away culture".

It's not just in his pastoral visits Francis has turned the spotlight toward migrants and refugees, but in many of his homilies in the Vatican.

Sacrifice

Recently, in June of this year, he likened people whose hearts are closed to welcoming them to those of the Pharisees – who often preach sacrifice and following God's law without exercising mercy to those in need.

In a homily commemorating the fifth anniversary of his visit to Lampedusa he said Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisees' "insidious murmuring" is "a finger pointed at the sterile hypocrisy of those who do



“Recently, in June of this year, he likened people whose hearts are closed to welcoming them to those of the Pharisees...”

not want to 'dirty their hands', like the priest or the Levite in the parable of the good Samaritan”.

“This is a temptation powerfully present in our own day. It takes the form of closing our hearts to those who have the right – just as we do – to security and dignified living conditions. It builds walls, real or virtual, rather than bridges.”

Francis recalled his visit to Lampedusa and repeated “that timeless appeal to human responsibility, ‘Where is your brother? His blood cries out to me’”.

Sadly, he said, “the response to this appeal, even if at times generous, has not been enough, and we con-



tinue to grieve thousands of deaths”.

* * * * *

Overcoming the fear of the unknown is paramount to humanising migrants, Francis has said many times, and politicians have a role in creating spaces where citizens and migrants can meet.

Pope Francis told 1,000 people in Bologna last year. “Many people don't know you and they're afraid.”

“From far away, we can say and think anything, like easily happens when they write terrible phrases and insults on the internet,” the Pope said.

The fear “makes them feel they have the right to judge and to do so harshly

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the voiceless

A young boy eats fruit with other children as they wait in line for a meal at the Juventud 2000 migrant shelter in Tijuana, Mexico. Photos: CNS



and coldly, thinking they see clearly," the Pope said. "But it's not true. One sees well only up close, which gives mercy."

He said this just four days after he kicked off Caritas Internationalis' 'Share the Journey' campaign to encourage Catholics to meet a migrant or refugee and listen to his or her story.

'Share the Journey' is an awareness campaign that promotes opportunities and spaces for migrants and communities to come together and share stories and experiences with the aim of strengthening the bonds between them.

Francis launched the campaign last year on September 27.

Caritas says the reason they are running the campaign is because: "Pope Francis urges us to promote the culture of encounter in an effort to combat the culture of indifference in the world today. It means seeing through the eyes of others rather than turning a blind eye."

“Making walls is not the solution. We saw it in the last century, the fall of one”

The campaign will continue until near the end of 2019 and resources for individuals who want to get



Pope Francis greets Syrian refugees he brought to Rome from the Greek island of Lesbos, at Ciampino airport in Rome.

involved can be found at <http://journey.caritas.org/>

* * * * *

In 2016 Francis visited the Greek island of Lesbos, which was at the heart of one of Europe's greatest refugee crisis since World War II, with some 5,000 people arriving on its shores – mainly from war-torn Syria – on a daily basis.

Since 2015, thousands of people died while crossing the Eastern Mediterranean, many in boats completely unsuitable for travelling long sea journeys.

On his return journey Francis brought three Syrian refugee families, 12 people, back to Rome after visiting one of the frontline camps in Greece despite borders being largely shut due to the huge influx of refugees.

He said he saw "much suffering" at the sprawling fenced complex on the Aegean island, with many adults and children breaking down in tears in front of him.

When asked on the papal flight back to Rome from Greece about several European countries that are reinforcing their borders to keep migrants out Pope Francis said "we must take a real responsibility for welcoming".

"How do we integrate these people with us? I've said this, but making walls is not the solution. We saw it in the last century, the fall of one. It doesn't resolve anything," he said.

"We must make bridges and bridges are made with intelligence, dialogue, integration. I understand the

fear, but to close the borders doesn't resolve anything. Because in the long run, that closure will hurt the people

themselves.

"Europe must make a policy of welcoming, integration, growth, work, the

reform of the economy. All of these are the bridges that lead us to not making walls. After what I've seen in that refugee camp, and what you saw, was to cry about."

Speaking about his time in Greece this year, Francis said that while he was "enchanted" by the scenery, "I was struck by the thought that such a beautiful sea had become a tomb for men, women and children who had for the most part sought only to escape inhumane conditions in their own homelands".

He said this in a letter to Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, who was also in Lesbos with him.

Pope Francis' parents were themselves migrants, who emigrated from Italy to Buenos Aires in Argentina to escape the fascist rule of Benito Mussolini.

It can't be understated that Francis has never shied away from being a voice for the most marginalised, or the 'alien', throughout his papacy, and has pushed the Faithful to strive for a greater understanding and tolerance of those with different beliefs and ideals.

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Delighted couples 'over the moon' about Pope meeting

Chai Brady

Pope Francis has often spoken about the importance of love and marriage before and during his papacy, which makes it very apt he will meet couples from every diocese in Ireland in the pro-cathedral during his visit.

On August 25 Francis will join with married and engaged couples in St Mary's Pro Cathedral in the archdiocese of Dublin at 3.30pm, after meeting with authorities, civil society, and the diplomatic corps in Dublin Castle.

Several of the lucky couples told *The Irish Catholic* that they are very excited to be sent to represent each of their dioceses. WMOF organisers allocated a certain number of couples that could be put forward by a

diocese depending on their size, according to sources. While the Archdiocese of Armagh will be sending 16 couples, the Diocese of Achonry has been allocated two couples.

Those participating at the event will receive a specially packaged copy of the *Family Prayer Book* produced by the Council for Marriage and the Family of the Irish Episcopal.

Speaking about the gift, Fr Peter Murphy, Secretary of the Council for Marriage and the Family, said: "The *Family Prayer Book* invites readers to bring their hopes and concerns and the needs of families to God. It offers prayers for daily use or it can be dipped into from time to time, using the section and prayer titles

as a guide towards choices."

The selection process varied throughout the different diocese, with many using a raffle system to choose people who expressed interest in attending.

There are certain rules regarding attendance as a couple.

They must have celebrated their marriage after August 1, 2017, or will celebrate their wedding before December 31, 2018.

There is a preference that couples chosen from a diocese are currently resident in that diocese and they must be available to attend the meeting with Pope Francis.

Francis will be there for 45 minutes before being transferred to the Capuchin Day Centre, a charity that provides services for homeless people, for a private visit at 4.30pm.



Cloyne: Lisa and Ciarán McDonald

Lisa McDonald and her husband Ciarán's diocese helped the couple's wedding anniversary celebrations by giving them a chance to see Pope Francis.

Lisa and Ciarán met while they were both in medical school. After dating for around eight years, they were married on June 30, 2017, in the church where she went to Mass during holiday as a little girl. They have been chosen to represent the Cloyne Diocese for the WMOF meeting with the Pope. "We are beginning our own family so meeting the Pope would be a huge honour," Lisa said.

She added that the Pope's interest in young people and families is something inspiring and admirable. With Lisa and Ciarán both being doctors, life gets extremely busy with their schedules, yet they find a way to make it to Mass every week, even if it doesn't happen to be on a Sunday.



Cork and Ross: Audrey Lettice and Peter Spillett

Audrey Lettice and Peter Spillett said it was wonderful to receive the news that they have the opportunity see the Pope in the Pro Cathedral.

Having met in secondary school, they have been an item for 12 years before getting married in July. Both hail from Co. Cork, Audrey from Blackpool in Cork City and Peter from Blarney. Audrey is from the dioceses of Cork and Ross, while Peter is from the Dioceses of Cloyne. Audrey spoke of her and her husband's excitement about meeting the Pope: "It is especially significant to us as we prepare for the Sacrament of Marriage next year...in 1979 my father was part of the team that built the popemobile here in Cork. He received a Papal Medal which he still has today. He is very proud that he was involved in that visit and now I am involved in this visit in a different way."

Of their Faith, Audrey says: "We really enjoy being a part of parish life and it is a big part of our lives together."

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Killaloe: Audrey and Gavin Kissane



Hailing from Shannon in Co. Clare, Audrey Kissane said she thinks Pope Francis is "a great humanitarian".

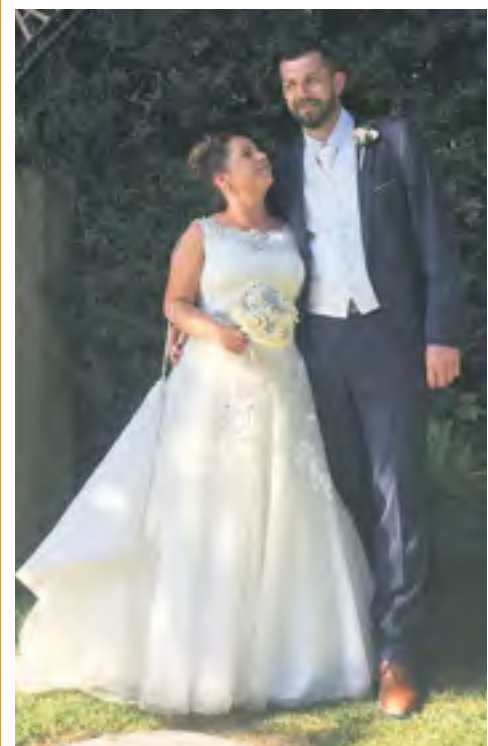
"I saw a video of him consoling a distressed young boy, who was worried about his atheist father, who had recently died, getting into heaven.

"The Pope's response made me cry. It was so, so lovely," said

Audrey.

Especially since having children, Audrey and her husband Gavin are curious about God. She said: "I feel connected to God in a way that feels right to me."

The couple met in Shannon over the May bank holiday weekend in 2009 at a birthday party.



Ferns: Keith and Elaine Wallace

Married this year on June 8, Keith and Elaine were "delighted" that they had been chosen to see Pope Francis.

Keith said they are "very excited", and that their friends and family are in disbelief. Both originally from South Dublin and now living in Riverchapel, Keith believes that Pope Francis' visit can "only be a good thing".

"I think only good can come from it, because people are going to see and experience something in their lifetime and I think it will inspire a generation to start thinking about religion again, because I think we've lost a generation or two."

With their two children aged three and five, the couple intend to teach their children more thoroughly about the Faith. "We'd be more casual churchgoers, but with the kids now we'd be trying to lead them a little bit more, just to get them thinking. They can make their own decisions later on, but it's just to get them thinking."

Dublin: Cathal Barry and Christina Foley

Turning to Faith shouldn't just be done in times of hardship, but at positive times such as marriage, according to one soon to be married Dublin man.

Cathal Barry, former journalist at *The Irish Catholic*, will get married exactly one week after himself and his fiancée Christina see the Pope in the Pro Cathedral.

After seeing Francis in the Vatican several years ago, Cathal said he is "delighted" to see him a second time, saying "there's more of a sense of occasion to it because it's in my home country".

Speaking about the importance of Faith for the couple, Cathal said: "Faith has played a big roles in our lives and in our families growing up, so that stayed with us and I

think having a Catholic ceremony, getting married in a church was something really important – not just for our families – but also for us personally.

"We were very positively impacted by the Church. Sometimes you can take Faith for granted in a way, and I think a lot of people turn to Faith maybe in times of need. I think it's really important to turn to Faith in positive times and at times of celebration – such as getting married."

The couple lived on the same street growing up, but only met later in life when Christina was working in a pharmacy. Cathal arrived with a sore throat, she sold him a box of Strepisils and the rest is history.



Limerick: Michael and Jane Guinane



Young couple Michael and Jane are "beyond excited" to have been chosen to represent the Limerick Diocese. Michael recalls receiving the email confirming that they were chosen, describing himself

as "over the moon".

"I don't really know what to expect, but I'm very excited for it," said Michael. Jane and Michael met during a night out and were married on September 2, 2017.

According to Michael, his Faith has long been important to him and that meeting the Pope in Ireland is the opportunity of a lifetime.

"My family is very excited for us," he added.



Waterford and Lismore: Aisling and Pádraig Larkin

Excitement is building in the Diocese of Waterford and Lismore following news that Aisling and Pádraig Larkin will see Pope Francis on August 25. The couple, who were married on June 22, 2018, said they were really looking forward to it, and that Faith is an important part of their life. "I'm a sixth-class teacher in the school, so I teach Confirmation, and Pádraig has been a second-class teacher for the last couple of years, so he teaches about Communion. The Sacraments play a big role in our lives. We're both Massgoers and our families have a really deep Faith as well," Aisling says.

If she gets to meet the Pope face-to-face, Aisling says she would ask him to pray for her family and world peace. "I think it's brilliant, it's great for our country," she says, adding that it will hopefully be a change from all the negativity that has been in the media and the press in the last months and years.

Our brothers' keeper

Pope Francis has been unyielding in his pursuit of peace, writes **Greg Daly**



Once it was announced that Dublin would host the 2018 World Meeting of Families, there was little delay before speculation began over whether Pope Francis would come to Ireland and whether, if so, he would visit the North.

St John Paul II had famously wanted to visit the region in 1979 during the first papal trip to Ireland, but was prevented from doing so by the especially fraught security situation at the time. It seemed obvious, however, that 30 years after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement and with the agreement itself at risk from the strains of Brexit, Pope Francis would seek to finish his Polish predecessor's work by visiting a part of Europe where until recently Catholics were at risk of being murdered simply for being Catholic.

In any case, the North would have seemed a natural place for Francis to visit, given his clear passion for places on the peripheries, for building bridges, and for trusting in time to break cycles of violence, hatred and suspicion, and so it was that all manner of religious and civic leaders pleaded with the Pope to come North. A trip to the North could have helped provide the symbolic boost to the area's stagnant peace and political processes, they said.

Historical visit

It was not to be, however, seemingly due to concerns that a historical visit to the North would overshadow the Dublin gathering, leaving the North as a curious oversight, not just on this papal trip but on Pope Francis' general peace agenda.

The Pope's Latin title – *Pontifex* – basically means 'bridge-builder', and building bridges across wartorn societies has been central to this papacy from the beginning, with perhaps the most dramatic early call for peace coming in September 2013, when the Pope appealed for prayer and fasting for

Syria.

Just weeks after the Pontiff's rallying cry at Lampedusa against what he called "the globalisation of indifference", late August 2013 saw a series of images broadcast around the world of corpses neatly laid out in body-bags. Seemingly they showed clear evidence of having been killed with chemical weapons – by some reports over 1,400 people had been killed by chemical weapons deployed by the Syrian government against rebels in the country's civil war.

The Pope expressed his horror at this when he spoke at his Sunday Angelus on September 1. "Those terrible images from recent days are burned into my mind and heart," he said. "There is the judgment of God, and also the judgment of history, upon our actions from which there is no escaping."

Addressing those Western countries planning on launching missiles against Syria as a reaction to the chemical attacks, he cried: "War brings on war! Violence brings on violence!"

“There is the judgment of God, and also the judgment of history, upon our actions”

Calling on all involved to pursue negotiations and urging the international to take practical steps to end conflicts, he announced a five-hour prayer vigil in St Peter's Square for the following Saturday, calling for a day of fasting and prayer for peace.

"On September 7, here [in St Peter's Square], from 7pm until midnight, we will gather together in prayer, in a spirit of penitence, to ask from God this great gift [of peace] for the

beloved Syrian nation and for all the situations of conflict and violence in the world," he said, calling on non-Catholic Christians and non-Christian believers to participate in suitable ways. "We want a peaceful world," he said, "we want to be men and women of peace."

Speaking during the vigil, the Pope addressed the question of where violence comes from, pointing to the story of Cain and Abel and to a failure to understand that we are indeed our brothers' keepers. Maintaining that every act of violence brings about Cain's rebirth, he said the answer to this lies in the Cross.

"My Christian faith urges me to look to the Cross," he said.

"There, we can see God's reply: violence is not answered with violence, death is not answered with the language of death. In the silence of the Cross, the uproar of weapons ceases and the language of reconciliation, forgiveness, dialogue and peace is spoken."

* * * * *

A few days later plans for American airstrikes on



Pope Francis tosses a wreath of flowers into the Mediterranean Sea off the Italian island of Lampedusa.
Photo: CNS

said that Pope Francis had helped spur the change and personally thanked him for doing so. The Vatican then released a statement explaining how two months earlier it had hosted delegations from the US and Cuba to negotiate the deal after Pope Francis had written to both leaders.

According to *Time* reporters, senior US officials described the papal appeal as unprecedented, and said his letter sparked momentum in the rapprochement between the two administrations.

The following September the Pope visited Cuba on the way to the US for 2015's World Meeting of Families, and within minutes of his arrival at Havana airport he spoke effusively about the Cuban thaw as a something that could give hope to the world.

“We do not have the right to allow ourselves yet another failure”

"It is a sign of the victory of the culture of encounter and dialogue, the system of universal growth over the forever-dead system of groups and dynasties," he said. "I urge political leaders to persevere on this path and to develop all its potentialities as a proof of the high service which they are called to carry out on behalf of the peace and well-being of their peoples, of all America, and as an example of reconciliation for the entire world."

The following day during his Sunday Angelus address, he addressed Colombia's warring factions, begging the country's government and leftist rebels to end Latin America's longest-running war, warning that failure is not an option in ongoing negotiations to stop the country's bloodshed.

"We do not have the right to allow ourselves yet another failure," he said, praying that "the long night of pain and violence" might "with the support of all Colombians, become an unending day of concord, justice, fraternity and love".

Three days later, peace talks, which had gone on in Cuba for over two years but which had stalled, resumed, and when the Pope visited the Latin American nation in September 2017 he praised the progress made in the previous November's peace agreement, and urged the Colombian people not to be content with "taking the first step".

"Instead, let us continue our journey anew each day, going forth to encounter others and to encourage concord and fraternity," he said. "We cannot just stand still. Colombia, your brothers and sisters need you."



Former US President Barack Obama.

Syria were put aside, as Russia and the US agreed on a plan to request the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons arsenal, and Syria's state broadcaster accepted this as a starting point.

Whether this was related to the Pope's appeal is unknown, but it ensured Francis had a reputation as a peacemaker, a reputation that would be furthered over coming years by, for instance, his silent May 2014 prayers at the wall separating Israel from the Palestinian territories, when he prayed for the wall's disappearance. He subsequently hosted Israeli president Shimon Peres and Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas at a joint prayer service for peace in the Middle East.

His clearest achievement in the cause of peace, although very much his own, came after years of careful, patient work by Vatican diplomats, when in December 2014 the then US President Barack Obama and Cuban President Raúl Castro declared the beginning of a process of normalising relations between the two countries, signalling the end of 54 years of tensions.

In a 15-minute speech announcing this, President Obama

If the future has a name, perhaps it's Francis



Pope Francis with film director Wim Wenders.



Pope Francis: A Man of his Word (PG)

St Francis of Assisi travelled to the Holy Land 800 years ago to try and end a war. Today his successor is continuing that journey.

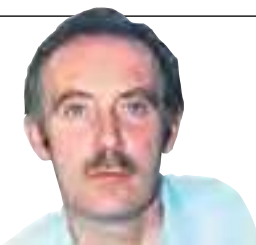
Pope Francis – ‘Papa Francesco!’ to the crowds who swarm around him in his native Argentina – has made it his mission to continue the work of his namesake, a man of equal gentleness and dignity. His reverence for the saint has made Assisi, this engrossing documentary informs us, into a spiritual centre for all religions today. “St Francis knew how to listen,” he assures us.

A little longer than 800 years ago, two millennia in fact, another evangelist trod the earth. Francis has embraced his message too. “God doesn’t listen with his ears,” he observes, “he listens with his heart.”

If Francis’ papacy has shown us anything it’s his ability to listen. It’s given him the ability to empathise with those ravaged by war, famine, uprooting, poverty, death. The man behind *Laudato Si’* has made it his

Film

Aubrey Malone



business to lend his voice to all the major problems afflicting the world ever since he donned ‘the shoes of the fisherman’ to try and give the Church the leadership it seems to have lacked since Pope John Paul II died.

The more powerful one is, he reflects, the greater the need for humility. Great power comes with great responsibility. Sometimes – as with the abuse of nuclear power in places like Hiroshima – it has horrific ones.

The film’s subtitle might just as easily be ‘A man of his words’ as ‘A man of his word’. That’s what it really is – a chronicle of his addresses to the public. There’s no fancy editing here, no grand directorial flourishes from Wim Wenders behind the camera. He just turns it on and lets the Pontiff do the rest. The film is like one elongated homily, but without any judgmental sense. “Never take a proselytising attitude,” he advises.

If his message could be summed up in one of those words, it would be ‘inclusiveness’. God doesn’t love Mahatma Gandhi or Martin Luther King any less than the rest of us, he remarks; we’re all brothers whether we like it or not. He wants to unite East and West, Catholic and Hindu, the rich and the poor, those who have too much and those who have too little.

“He devotes special attention to the refugee problem plaguing the world at the moment”

But he drops some harrowing statistics on us: 150 species die each day. Of the eight billion people on earth, a billion of them are hungry. 80% of the world’s wealth resides in the hands of 20% of its population. Do we care about these things? Not enough.

There’s a ‘globalisation of indifference’ in the world.

It’s as a result of this that he’s chosen to live in an apartment rather than a luxurious mansion. It’s why he travels in a bishop’s bus whenever he can rather than in a stretch limo. It’s why he visits the sick and deprived... like the Nazarene of 2,000 years ago.

He lectures the *Curia* on spiritual diseases like vainglory and rivalry. He speaks of the “existential void” causing a *lacuna* in the collective psyche. He says the curse of modern life is its frenetic pace, the fact that so many of us live with “the accelerator down” thereby endangering our spiritual health, our mental health, our physical health. “On the seventh day,” he reminds us, “God rested.”

As one might have expected, he devotes special attention to the refugee problem plaguing the world at the moment. He says we haven’t seen a crisis of such magnitude since World War II. The devastation caused by contemporary wars is another one of his passions. Deadly weapons are being sold to people with destruction on their minds for one reason and one reason only: money.

Such money is, as he puts it, “drenched in blood”.

He also talks about the fact that man is destroying the planet, that he’s looking at it upside down, imagining himself to be its master rather than its caretaker. “We’ve plundered Mother Earth,” he says. Later on he talks about another kind of pollution: the intellectual kind. Even truth (with fake news?) has become an “endangered species”.

“This isn’t an unduly lengthy film but there are very few topics that aren’t mentioned”

But this isn’t a morbid film. Each morning, he tells us, he prays for the gift of humour in his life. A smile, he says, is “the flower of the heart”. He shows his wit in an address he delivers on the subject of marital disharmony. Plates sometimes fly in domestic squabbles, he remarks – to generous laughter. Children can be a headache too. “I won’t say anything about mothers-in-law,” he adds puckishly.

He calls on all parents to play with their children, to try not to forget the day they became engaged to be married. More generally, he asks families not to let the sun go down on an argument.

Diversity

Wenders’ film has a timely release here, coinciding with his visit to our shores. I’m sure he’ll be repeating some of the sentiments he does here, epithets like some he

trots out here: “Tenderness isn’t weakness.” “Our diversity makes us stronger.” “The first saint was a prisoner.” And, my favourite: “You can always add more water to the beans.”

At 96 minutes this isn’t an unduly lengthy film but there are very few topics that aren’t mentioned, like the importance of women in the Church, the indignity of unemployment (“the tragedy of our times”), the importance of not marginalising gay people, the necessity to have ‘zero tolerance’ for paedophilia.

Towards the end he tells a moving story about a woman who wrote to him once to tell him that her eight-year-old nephew, who had terminal cancer, expressed a wish to talk to him.

Francis rang him but he was sleeping so he only got his answering machine. When the boy heard about the call he thought Francis was offended by him not answering. But he rang again the next day, and the next. After the third call the boy died. “He was reconciled,” Francis says, overcome that one so young could have that kind of acceptance.

Moving to the general question of why children suffer – a question asked by the “great” Dostoevsky, as he calls him, he offers this possible answer: God allowed his own

‘child’ to die. It’s not an answer to a question that has puzzled every theologian since the dawn of time but it’s an interesting reflection.

The final message of the documentary is suitably upbeat: “The future has a name and it’s the name of hope.”

Excellent
★★★★★

Letters

Post to: Letters to the Editor, The Irish Catholic,
23 Merrion Square North, Dublin 2,
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Letter of the week

This is no time to leave our Mother

Dear Editor, I'm sure most people by now have heard about the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report which details the widespread sexual abuse in the Catholic Church. The content of the document is horrific and shows just how deep the Church is entrenched in this crisis. This wasn't the action of fringe or isolated clerics, but rather groups of priests, in what best can be described as a "paedophile ring".

Three-hundred priests were found culpable, but I like most others suspect there are many clerics who have not been called out. How can an institution which teaches love, compassion and joy, be responsible for

such heinous crimes and abuse?

Alongside this sickening behaviour, many of these priests were reported to higher authorities within the Church and yet nothing was done about it. There was a litany of lies, there was perennial cowardice, and there was a disgusting desire to self-preserve the institution despite the suffering it caused.

The Church had a duty to protect and care for those most vulnerable in society, and it failed. Time and time again. In response to these failures, many Catholics are rightly calling for structural reform, more accountability, and lay input.

But many other Catholics are also "giving up their Faith", no longer attending Mass, and moving away from the Church. While I have sincere sympathy for this move given what we have heard about the abuse crisis, I would invite all Catholics to stay united with the Church. A quote, often attributed to St Augustine, is "the Church is a harlet, but she is our Mother". There are difficult times ahead, but don't leave your Mother – she is deeply sick and needs help to recover.

*Yours etc.,
Jennifer Harkin,
Clondalkin, Dublin 22.*

Positive talking wouldn't go amiss!

Dear Editor, There's been a lot of focus about the horrors of the Church in Ireland in the lead up to Pope Francis' visit, ranging from the clerical sex abuse scandal, to its treatment of LGBT people, and the role of women. These topics undoubtedly need to be discussed and interrogated but alongside this, I really wish the media would talk about the positivity of the visit. Myself, and a group of friends, are immensely excited to see Francis, and it will undoubtedly bring back memories of when I saw Pope John Paul II in 1979. We are all going down on a parish bus, and there will be a buzz and joy in the air. This visit means so much to people across Ireland and it would great if that idea was communicated more.

*Yours etc.,
Caroline Fitzgerald,
Ballyronan, Derry.*

Teens suffered religious/clerical abuse too

Dear Editor, From the reporting of clerical sex abuse we've become accustomed to the terms 'child abuse' and 'paedophile priests'. What's not emphasised is the level of abuse relating to youths (teenagers), seminarians and young priests and the fact that the core problem is active homosexuality within the clergy.

The clergy and in particular seminarians were not immune from the sexual revolution which started

in the 1960s and it appears that there is a legacy issue of sexual abuse mainly relating to the period from the 1960s to the 1980s inclusive, which is difficult to deal with. One likely reason for this is that those who were in the seminaries at that time are now in positions of authority and are compromised.

Earlier this year all the Chilean bishops offered their resignations to Pope Francis to enable their records of avoidance of responsibility

or collaboration to be investigated. Having regard to recent revelations in America it now looks that, at a minimum, all those who are cardinals may need to do likewise.

Pope Francis has indicated that he is not in favour of men who are homosexual becoming priests and it seems that steps have been taken in this regard. But how can the legacy issue be satisfactorily dealt with? We read that a sizeable

proportion of clergy are homosexual and that many of those are active or support active homosexuality. Could it take the resignation of all clergy who are homosexual to come to grips with this matter which is so unjust and deeply damaging to the vulnerable and to Christ's Church?

*Yours etc.,
Eileen Gaughan,
Strandhill,
Sligo.*

Western society was formed by the Bible

Dear Editor, I was amused by Colm Fitzpatrick's news piece about biblical baby names (16/08/18 IC). It said that over half of new-born boys in Ireland have a bible-themed name such as Daniel or James. It's a convivial story that probably doesn't have much functional merit, but it did remind me of the fact that our society has been formed by the Bible. Whether Western society likes it or not, our morals and beliefs are a direct product of Christianity. Human rights, for example, didn't really exist before the dawning of Christianity. Before then, the adage 'Might is Right' was the dominant outlook. The theologian, David Bentley Hart, gets it right when he says the modern human being is a Christian invention.

*Yours etc.,
James McNally,
Inchicore, Dublin 8.*

Wilson's sentence is too light

Dear Editor, I read with anger and sadness that Archbishop Philip Wilson will serve a maximum 12-month sentence in home detention for concealing child sex abuse (16/08/18). How is it that crimes such as these go basically unpunished? We have to be stronger and harsher on crimes such as these or the perpetrators won't be fazed about the punishment. This isn't good enough – too many guilty clerics are walking around freely.

*Yours etc.,
Mark Dorin,
Newry, Co Down.*



Surely we are all sinners?

Dear Editor, I've read on numerous websites commentators criticising the WMOF congress for inviting Fr James Martin SJ to speak about the Church inclusion of LGBT people. These ultra-conservative websites have said that Fr Martin, and concomitantly, the Church are promoting a 'gay agenda'. What utter tripe! As Catholics, we are called to love all of our brothers and sisters,

regardless of their sexual orientation or preference. The LGBT community has suffered enough discrimination and abuse and deserve to be recognised as who they are: human and created in the image of God. There is no place for homophobia in the Church, and those who promote such ideas should be ashamed of themselves. Those who are homophobic in the name of the Church

don't quite get what it teaches. While carrying out certain sexual activities, such as fornication, adultery and same-sex intercourse, are impermissible, we should never condemn the person. Everyone sins, and everyone deserves to be embraced and nurtured by God's love.

*Yours etc.,
John McCaughley,
Galway City,
Galway.*

Pope's legacy is...

Dear Editor, I wonder how Ireland is going to feel when the Pope leaves Ireland after his visit here. Will there be animosity that perhaps he didn't do enough or said the wrong thing? Or will the visit be remembered in history for revivifying the spirit of Ireland? Will he reinvigorate the faithful to fight for their beliefs? Only time will tell, but it could go either way.

*Yours etc.,
Sean O'Donovan,
Tallaght,
Dublin 24.*

The Church here did not cause homelessness

Dear Editor, I am sick of our biased Irish media reporting that people are being forced from their temporary homes because of Pope Francis' visit, framing it in a way that the Church is responsible for this problem. The problem is in fact our Government who think it's fine not to give families permanent homes. Any time there is a major event on in Ireland, like a musical concert, hotels throw out the homeless families who are temporarily residing there. Instead of criticising the Church who are constantly supporting the poor in Ireland every day, how about the media focus their attention our failing Government?

*Yours etc.,
Mary McCaul,
Wexford Town, Wexford.*

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



INDIA: A man is rescued from drowning after the opening of a dam following heavy rains on the outskirts of Cochin. The Church has joined relief efforts as unprecedented floods and landslides continue to wreak havoc in Kerala state, killing at least 75 people within a week. Photos: CNS



USA: Dominican Srs Maristella and Judith Maldonado pose with their dog, Brindel, at their convent in Gaithersburg in Maryland. After about five years of serving together in family ministry at St Martin of Tours Parish in Gaithersburg, the identical twins are beginning new assignments in Puerto Rico.



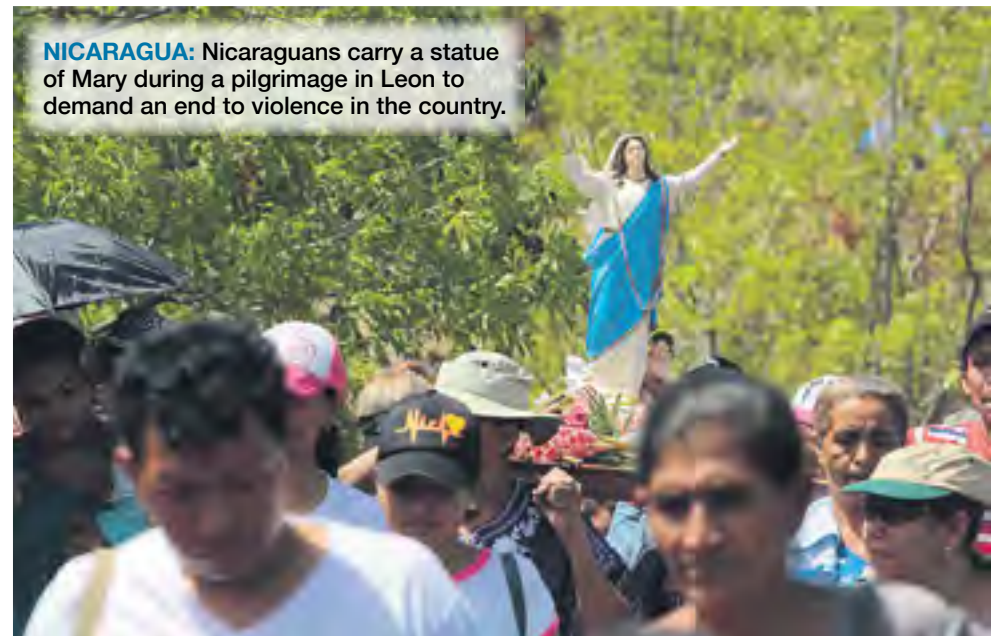
LONDON: Sr Clara of CAFOD, the British bishops' international relief and development agency, is seen surrounded by shoes – part of campaign calling world leaders to assist refugees – outside the Westminster Cathedral.



USA: A border patrol agent apprehends two men from Brazil after they illegally crossed the border into the US from Mexico in Los Ebanos, Texas.

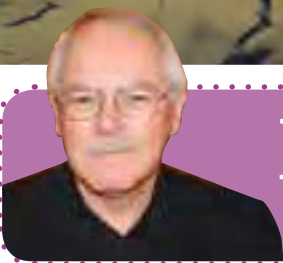


AFGHANISTAN: An Afghan cleric prays over the grave of one of the victims of a suicide attack in Kabul. As Afghanistan's Shiites mourned their dead and held funeral services, the Islamic State group claimed responsibility for an August 15 suicide bombing at a Shiite educational centre that killed at least 34 students.



NICARAGUA: Nicaraguans carry a statue of Mary during a pilgrimage in Leon to demand an end to violence in the country.

Beautiful stoics



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

Memoir of Living and Dying.

What these authors all have in common is this: they look at life's deepest questions and face those questions with courage and sensitivity, but only from an agnostic and stoic perspective. How do you make sense of things, if there's no God? How do you face the finality of death, if there's no afterlife? How do you ground love as an absolute, if there's no 'absolute' upon which to ground it? How can the precious events of our lives have lasting meaning, if there's no personal immortality? How do we face the shortcomings of our lives and own mortality, if this life is all there is?

They face these questions honestly and courageously without an explicit belief in God and come to peace with them, find meaning for themselves, and garner the insight and courage they need

to live with answers that don't include faith in God and belief in an afterlife.

There's a courageous stoicism in that for sure, but in many of their writings there's also a certain beauty.

You get the sense that this is an honest, beautiful soul wrestling with life's deepest questions and coming to an acceptable peace that itself encapsulates the kind of compassion that all the great religions place at their center. Inside of religious literature you can meet some beautiful saints.



Nina Riggs.

Inside of secular literature you can meet some beautiful stoics. But there's one thing upon which I want to challenge these beautiful stoics. They try to answer a deep question: how do we make sense of life if there's no God and no afterlife and how do we make sense of life if the tenets of faith are not true, but mere projection? That's a

fair question, worth asking.

But this is my protest: while these authors face with courage and honesty the question of what it means if God doesn't exist and there's no afterlife, they never face with the same courage and honesty the question: what if there really is a God and an afterlife and the essential tenets of faith are true? How does one live then?

“How do we shape our lives if there's no God and no afterlife – and how do we shape our lives if there is a God and an afterlife?”

What if our probing minds and noble sentiments are in fact grounded in a loving, personal God? That would be an even more honest and more courageous agnosticism, and an even more beautiful stoicism.

True agnosticism speaks of an open mind, one so open that it's reticent to shut down any real possibility.

And the existence of God is a real possibility.

At any given time in history, our age included, the vast majority of human beings believe in the existence of God and the existence

of an afterlife. Atheists have never been the cognitive majority. If this is true, and it is, then why are good, courageous, honest, and sensitive men and women reluctant to take their agnosticism down both alleyways, that is: how do we shape our lives if there's no God and no afterlife – and how do we shape our lives if there is a God and an afterlife?

If one wants to look at the meaning of life as courageously and honestly as possible, shouldn't the question of God and the afterlife, and not just its antithesis, be one of the horizons against which that discernment occurs?

I suspect the reluctance of many of these authors to give equal consideration to the possibility of the truth of religion comes from the fact that, up to modern times, the bulk of all literature perennially considered life's deep questions more or less exclusively from a religious rather than an agnostic perspective.

What our agnostic authors are contributing is an alternative, a different voice from the dominant voice in history (though not the dominant voice within secular society today).

Still, it makes for some valuable insights from some beautiful stoics.

“How do we make sense of life if there's no God and no afterlife and how do we make sense of life if the tenets of faith are not true, but mere projection? That's a fair question, worth asking”

Perspective

You see this too is in a good number of contemporary novelists who write from fairly deliberate agnostic perspectives. And you see this in wonderful biographical books, like Nina Riggs' *The Bright Hour* – A

Challenge to see the positives



TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



While advance coverage of this week's papal visit was largely negative, there was one programme at least that struck a positive note.

True North: The Pope and I (BBC1, Wednesday) was an affectionate, sometimes whimsical look at the reaction of various people from Northern Ireland to the recent popes and especially to the 1979 visit of Pope John Paul II. Mary, from 'The Holy Shop' in Belfast, told us that pictures of St John Paul were still very popular, as were those of Pope Francis. Benedict didn't fare so well, and unfortunately some contributors were negative towards him, but with an effort to understand – he was an intellectual, he did his best, he was afraid of saying the wrong thing, he was following the first 'celebrity Pope'.

However many Northerners had very fond memories of the '79 visit, especially their journeys to see the Pope in Drogheda – we were told of huge traffic jams heading south on the M1 motorway from 7 am that morning. Clips were shown from the Phoenix Park Mass as well, and of his visit to England and Glasgow.

Tearful

One enthusiastic English woman showed the dress she wore when she was chosen to present flowers to Pope John Paul II when she was a very young girl. Many reminisced about being upset and tearful when he died – one woman said it was "like losing a friend".

Many of these cheerful contributors were looking forward to the visit of Francis as well, and there was no Church bashing or cynical or iconoclasm. Of course there are darker issues to discuss, but it was good to watch a programme that engendered

some welcome enthusiasm for this week's papal visit.

On the negative front the comments of ex-President Mary McAleese about Pope Francis were well flagged, and on a loop on **RTE News Now** for most of last Saturday. When I caught up with her soft interview with Brendan O'Connor on Saturday's **Marian Finucane** (RTÉ Radio 1), it wasn't quite as negative as I expected – the folks at RTE News had chosen to highlight the most negative bit of what she'd said – the web headline captured the spin: "Pope putting defence of Church ahead of abuse victims."

"I thought she went off the Catholic rail completely when she reviewed recent changes in Ireland"

Yet in the interview she was talking about the attitude his formation as a bishop would have imbued him with. She also said he was a man of "phenomenal strengths" and that she believed his heart was on the side of the victims but that he needed a plan.

She made lots of thought-provoking points about the need for the Church hierarchy to involve more lay people as advisors, to involve outside expertise – she thought the leadership was poorly qualified on its own to deal effectively with the crises.

However, I thought she went off the Catholic rail completely when she reviewed recent changes in Ireland. She mentioned legalising of divorce, same sex marriage and abortion and said "in all these things we have retrieved the Christ I grew up wanting to believe in". Seriously?

I heard it reported that she



Some of the people who featured in BBC TV's *Faith Behind Bars* and, above left, Pope John Paul II waves to the crowd gathered in the Phoenix Park during his visit in 1979.

PICK OF THE WEEK

POPE FRANCIS IN IRELAND

RTÉ1, Saturday, August 25, 10am

Live coverage of Pope Francis' arrival at Dublin Airport and his visits to Áras an Uachtaráin and Dublin Castle. Presented by Bryan Dobson, Sharon Ni Bheolain and Aine Lawlor (also EWTN).

THE LEAP OF FAITH – POPE VISIT SPECIAL

RTÉ Radio 1, Saturday, August 25, 10am

Setting the scene as Pope Francis visits Ireland this weekend, join Michael Comyn for an hour-long *Leap of Faith* special.

POPE FRANCIS IN IRELAND

RTÉ1, Saturday, August 25, 2.55 pm

Live coverage from Dublin city centre of Pope Francis' visit to St Mary's Pro-Cathedral and to the Capuchin Centre. Presented by Miriam O'Callaghan and Bryan Dobson.

POPE FRANCIS IN IRELAND – FESTIVAL OF FAMILIES

RTÉ2, Saturday, August 25, 5.45 pm

Mary Kennedy is joined at Croke Park by guests including Francis Brennan, Oliver Callan, Norah Casey and Sister Stanislaus Kennedy, to set the scene for tonight's Festival of Families – a spectacular Catholic celebration of all things family, in the presence of Pope Francis – with commentary by Marty Whelan. Performances include Andrea Bocelli, Daniel O'Donnell and Nathan Carter (live also on EWTN, with repeat Sunday 2.30am and 5am).

FESTIVAL OF FAMILIES

RTÉ Radio 1, Saturday, August 25, 6pm

Brenda Donohue and Marty Morrissey are live from Croke Park as the Pope attends the Festival of Families and will be speaking to people who have secured a place at the festival and bringing us the colour and atmosphere from the day.

POPE FRANCIS IN IRELAND RTÉ1, Sunday, August 26, 9am

Live coverage of Pope Francis' visit to Knock. Presented by Eileen Dunne and Caitriona Perry (live also on EWTN, with repeat Monday 2.30am and 5am).

POPE FRANCIS IN IRELAND

RTÉ1, Sunday, August 26, 2pm

Live coverage of the Papal Mass in the Phoenix Park in Dublin. Presented by Bryan Dobson, Aine Lawlor and Fr Dermot McCarthy (live also on EWTN, with repeat at 11pm).

SONGS OF PRAISE

BBC1, Sunday, August 26, 3.30pm

Claire McCollum joins the celebrations for the visit of Pope Francis. Meeting up with the 100-strong group travelling from the Archdiocese of Birmingham One of the places Pope Francis will visit is Knock Shrine and Sean Fletcher finds out what draws 1.5 million pilgrims there every year.

POPE FRANCIS IN IRELAND

RTÉ1, Monday, August 27, 8.30 pm

Highlights of the Papal visit.

had called the World Meeting of Families a "right-wing rally" which I thought was overly dismissive, but it was Brendan O'Connor, though fair at some points, that initially suggested the phrase (he also threw in "fundamentalist") and McAleese did agree with him. Interestingly this was converted into "orthodox rally" by Brendan Butler of 'We Are Church' in an interview with Jonathan Healy on **The Pat Kenny Show** (Newstalk) last Monday morning.

On last Sunday's **This Week** (RTÉ Radio 1), Arch-

bishop Diarmuid Martin's pro-cathedral address last Sunday morning got plenty of coverage, as did an interview with him after the event.

He thought some structures worked well and that some were too loose. He wanted to see the elimination of excusing and cover up where such existed – structures that permitted or facilitated abuse must be broken down for ever.

John Allen from the American *Crux Now* website is one of the most highly regarded commentators on Church matters and his interview on

Morning Ireland (RTE Radio 1) last Monday is worth listening back to. Like Mary McAleese, he thought Pope Francis was upset by the scandals and had made efforts to improve the mechanism to deal with them, though one initiative didn't work out.

He thought that Pope Francis was still hugely popular as a world leader, but there was an urgency to put in place mechanisms to deal with accountability for those involved in cover-up.

Like Archbishop Martin, he thought it was high time to go beyond just apologising

to victims.

On another important strand of Church life, **Faith Behind Bars** (BBC One, Tuesday) was a sober but positive exploration of the work of prison chaplains, including a Catholic priest, in Edinburgh.

Spiritual and practical help was offered but not forced, and while there was no denying the seriousness of crimes committed, there was a strong sense of the importance of rehabilitation and a second chance, a sense of the unique value of each person.

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BookReviews

Peter Costello



Dublin's heritage of churches



The magnificent St Andrew's Church on Westland Row in Dublin.

A Walking Tour of Dublin Churches
by Liam C. Martin
(Veritas, €7.99)

Peter Costello

Artist Liam C. Martin was a very popular delineator of Dublin and other places, who died in 1998. It is nice to see his little book back in print, for such a thing is much needed.

Also available is a new *Sightseeing Map of Dublin's Historic Churches* (Veritas, gratis) which is available over the counter in Veritas outlets or on purchase of Liam C. Martin's booklet.

However, the Diocese of Dublin through its parish structures does almost nothing to use the open churches of the city as a means of prodding information not about the church itself so much but about Catholicism in general. Suburban hushes seem to think they never get visitors.

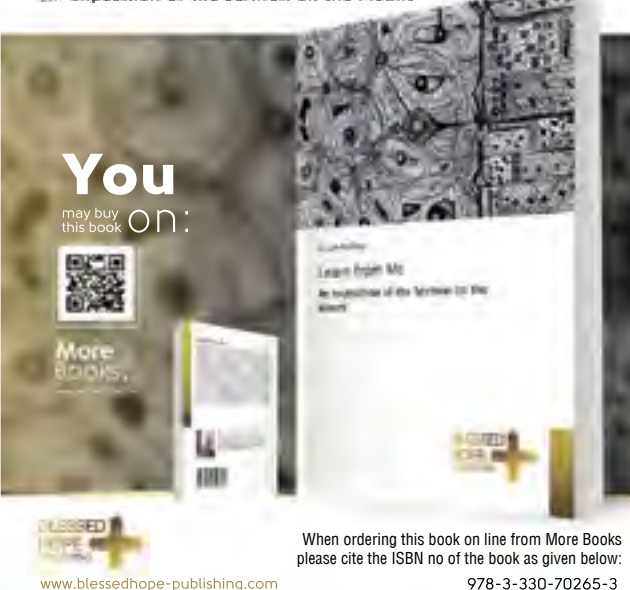
What a contrast this is to so many churches in France, where a priest is always present, often in a glassed-in private area, where he can see and be seen. He is there to provide not only information but counselling and guidance.

Perhaps in future the Catholic Church should think of the few parish priests it has as pastors, and have the administration of the parish and the care of the property done entirely by others.

Fr. Con Buckley

Learn from Me

An exposition of the Sermon on the Mount



When ordering this book on line from More Books please cite the ISBN no of the book as given below:
978-3-330-70265-3



Pope Francis on God's deep love for all creation

An Astonishing Secret: The Love Story of Creation and the Wonder of You
by Daniel O'Leary
(Columba Press, €14.99)

Anthony Redmond

Fr Daniel O'Leary is a well-known Irish priest, author and speaker living in England. I have read a number of his books. He is a superb writer, deeply moving, inspirational and lyrical.

In his latest book, *An Astonishing Secret*, he reflects on Pope Francis's *Laudato Si'* and *Evangelii Gaudium*. So this is a book very much in steps with the Pope's pastoral visit this week.

As he explains: "*An Astonishing Secret* offers 49 reflections on selected extracts from Pope Francis' creative writings, which invite an exciting unpacking and a creative exploring. Of the many urgent spiritual, ecological and theological themes they carry, this book focuses on one in particular – Creation and Incarnation: a deeper understanding of the closeness of a God who carefully fashioned us, who loves us unconditionally, who delights in us at every moment, and who is now flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone.

"The Pope," Fr O'Leary continues, "is deeply concerned that we understand something of the true mean-

ing of the Incarnation story; it is central to our Faith and, unbelievably, we have mostly ignored that most beautiful mystery. He also knows that the more we grow to love our gracious Earth the more anxious we will be to reverence and protect our natural environment."

Pope Francis is very concerned about valuing and respecting the earth and seeing it as a special beautiful gift from God.

Many of the poets, such as Wordsworth, Patrick Kavanagh and Gerard Manley Hopkins, spoke about God's presence in nature.

“‘Happy Christmas’, you could say, was uttered in the ‘flaring forth’ of the Big Bang”

Daniel O'Leary reminds us that "the Incarnation of God did not only happen in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago. The Incarnation actually began 14 billion years ago with a moment we now call 'The Big Bang'. The human Incarnation of God in Jesus is comparatively recent but, before that, in the original incarnation of the amazing story of evolution, God had already begun the mysterious process of becoming flesh by

first becoming Creation itself. 'Happy Christmas', you could say, was uttered in the 'flaring forth' of the Big Bang."

Once we were given a rather negative, indeed stern impression of God. Fear played a big part in our relationship with Him.

To counter this Daniel O'Leary observes: "Herbert McCabe OP writes that God is helplessly and hopelessly in love with us. Whether we are sinners or not makes no difference to him. He is just waiting to welcome us with joy and love.

"Infected as many of us were, and still are, by a heretical image of an angry, punishing God, is it possible for us to believe Fr McCabe's healing statement? Rohr insists that God never changes his mind about us. He is simply always in love with us. What God does again and again is to change our minds about him. We are not forgiven because we confess our sins; we confess our sins because we are already forgiven."

Fr O'Leary goes on to say that "there was never any lessening of that extravagant love and tenderness, never any expulsion from a mythical garden. In fact, Richard Rohr assures us there is nothing we can do or say to decrease God's excessive love for us... Neither McCabe nor Rohr takes sin lightly; but for them God's love is always at the heart of our weakness, our

powerlessness, our constant vulnerability."

There is a delightful, compassionate and poetical quality to Daniel O'Leary's writing. I find it refreshing and thought-provoking.

Here, for instance, he is enlarging on the themes of creation, which is very much key to what the gathering in Dublin this week is all about.

“Once we were given a rather negative, stern impression of God.”

"An orthodox theology of Creation," he writes, "the truly original, traditional, but utterly neglected teaching of the Church, holds that God, right from the beginning, desired to become human simply because, as St Thomas Aquinas put it, infinite love needed to express itself outside itself – something like, as we have mentioned, the mutual love of a couple being enfleshed, incarnated in their baby. This divine becoming, this expression of a great love (*bonum est sui diffusivum*) first happened in creation, and this sublime and cosmic moment of the Big Bang was fully and definitively revealed much later in the Incarnation of God in Jesus."

This eminently attractive book will enlarge the thought of all those who read it.

Irish art as 'the work of angels'

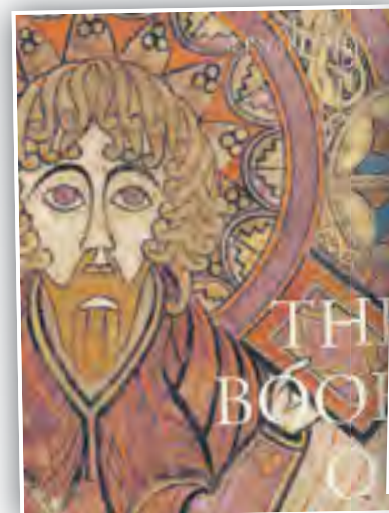
The Book of Kells: Official Guide
by Bernard Meehan
(Thames & Hudson, £12.95)

Peter Costello

Quite aside from all the changes that have overtaken Christianity in Ireland in recent decades, everyone still has to admit that the art of Early Christian Ireland – exemplified by the Ardagh Chalice, the Cross of Cong, the Derrynaflan hoard, and above all the *Book of Kells* – represent an epoch in the art history of the world.

This book by Bernard Meehan, recently retired Head of Research Collections and Keeper of Manuscripts in the Library of Trinity College Dublin, provides an exact and up-to-date summary of what is known and what remains uncertain about that majestic book on which he is a leading expert. This is a complete revised edition of what the publishers call their 'all time best seller'.

He provides an account of the early history of the book and its later misadven-



Part of the *Book of Kells* Display at Trinity College Dublin.

tures, and describes how it is arranged. He describes the structure of the book, which contains the Gospels for ritual use, noting some of the major landmarks in the treatment and decoration. The sources of the text and the inspiration of the illuminations has long been a complex topic. It is one which modern non-intrusive methods of ink and pigment analysis have cast a flood of light.

He also deals with the

physical making of the book and exactly how the scribes and the artist worked. Visitors to the exhibition, which provides an excellent introduction with a brief glimpse of a single page, will be lead on to explore the book and its history more deeply. To this end Dr Meehan's earlier scholarly treatment of *The Books of Kells* (Thames & Hudson, €75.00) published in 2012 is still available.

Gerald de Barri soon after

the Norman invasion alluded to another illuminated Irish book he had seen as the 'work of angels'.

“The library also houses and cares for more than 20,000 manuscripts and archives”

The *Book of Kells* is the most famous work of its kind

in Ireland, bringing in a million visitors to Dublin it is said.

But the general public is less aware that the library also houses and cares for more than 20,000 manuscripts and archives from many cultures dating from the 13th Century BC up to literary archives and artists' books of the present day.

Among these treasures is a significant collection of Medi-

eval Latin manuscripts.

There is a charge to see the Book of Kells, but not many people are aware that they can visit *gratis* the Royal Irish Academy in Dawson Street and see some of their treasures, such as the *Cathach of Columcille*.

Those other archaeological treasures mentioned above are in the National Museum in Kildare Street.

The lives and wonders of our early saints

Four Offaly Saints: The Lives of Ciarán of Clonmacnoise, Ciarán of Seir, Colmán of Lynamilly and Fionán of Kinnitty

by Pádraig Ó Riain
(Four Courts Press, €14.95)

J. Anthony Gaughan

Homilists and those interested in the early history of Ireland are indebted to Ó Riain for his splendid Dictionary of Irish Saints. For much of his professional life he has researched and written about St Finbar, patron of his native Cork. Here he surveys the lives of saints associated with the midlands, one well-known, St Ciarán of Clonmacnoise, the others not so well-known.

St Ciarán was born about 516 in an area in present-day Co. Roscommon. His father was a carpenter. He is said to have spent some time in captivity in Wales before escaping back to Ireland. In those earliest years he was a shepherd. Subsequently he



was a student at St Finnian's monastery at Clonard. About 534 he left Clonard and went to Inishmore on the Aran Islands, where he studied and was under the tutelage of St Enda.

Ordained

He was ordained and St Enda urged him to build a church and monastery in the middle of Ireland. About 544, after travelling to meet St Senan on Scatterry Island, he settled in Clonmacnoise where, with ten other monks, he founded

the famous monastery. As abbot he worked on the first buildings but soon died of a plague in his early 30s.

Not much information survives about the other three saints associated with Co. Offaly. St Ciarán of Seir was bishop of Seirkieran and is patron saint of the diocese of Ossory, whose major and minor seminaries were dedicated to him. He is sometimes identified with St Piran who is venerated in Cornwall, Wales and Brittany.

St Colmán of Lynamilly was

an early abbot – about the 7th Century – the founder of a monastery at Lann and the patron saint of Lynn in Co. Westmeath. St Fionán is more properly associated with Kerry, where he is credited with establishing the monastic settlement on Sceilig Mhichíl, near Ballinskelligs, and Innisfallen Abbey on an island in Lochléin, near Killybegs.

“The book will be of interest to people living in areas associated with these saints”

In the narratives of the lives of all these saints there are accounts of incidents calculated to establish their credentials as wonder workers. The saints are frequently involved in healing a wide variety of illnesses and disabilities.

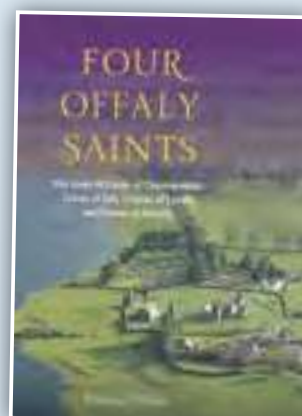
They exercise power over inanimate things and even

raise people from the dead. Their miraculous powers mirror those exercised by Jesus in the New Testament narrative.

In this study the author first surveys the manuscripts and other sources which provide traditions on the four saints. For instance, the life of St Ciarán of Clonmacnoise survives in three Latin and two vernacular versions. He then opts for one of the versions and provides an English translation of it.

Essentially this is a manual for scholars. The author explains the background to the early lives of saints and he discusses the Martyrologies and Calendars, the dating of manuscripts, saints' genealogies and territorial divisions. The book will be of interest to people living in areas associated with these saints.

However, for the most part the general reader is not aware of the literary devices intrinsic to hagiography, for instance, that miracle-working was a way of demonstrating a person's authority and



sanctity. Thus, many will probably struggle to understand these lives of the early saint in a human way, and may well be tempted to regard the over-blown narratives about them as somewhat absurd.

Editorial note

Due to an oversight, the author's name was omitted from the head of review (August 16) of Gerard Murphy's new book, *The Great Cover-Up: The Truth About the Death of Michael Collins* (Collins Press, Cork), for which we apologise.

Classifieds

The deadline for advertising in the classifieds is 10.30am, the Friday before publication. Contact the Classified Team on 01 687 4094 or email advertising@irishcatholic.ie

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Leisure time

Crossword Junior

Gordius 246



ACROSS

- 1 'Ladies and _____' (9)
 6 We get our oxygen from it. (3)
 7 Snakes and _____ is a popular game (7)
 9 Halt (4)
 10 Sport played on a rink with a puck (3-6)
 13 Above (4)
 14 Goes in (6)
 15 Creature that followed the Pied Piper (3)
 16 Not as many (5)
 17 In the story, the Ugly Duckling became this when he grew up (4)
 18 Most fantastic (8)

DOWN

- 1 In the story, she met the Three Bears (10)
 2 Push gently with your elbow (5)
 3 Fib (3)
 4 Definitely not nice (5)
 5 One of a bunch which may be used to make wine. (5)
 8 You might see it blast off into space (6)
 9 You should always fasten it when being brought for a drive (4,4)
 11 Sea fish (7)
 12 Commands (6)

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTIONS

GORDIUS No.364

Across – 1 Bug 3 Bell, book and candle 9 Poseidon 10 Coupe
 11 Tonic water 15 Crystal 16 Manx cat 20 Fairy 21 Perch
 23 Stain 24 Commuter 25 Figaro 26 Benedictine 27 Ink

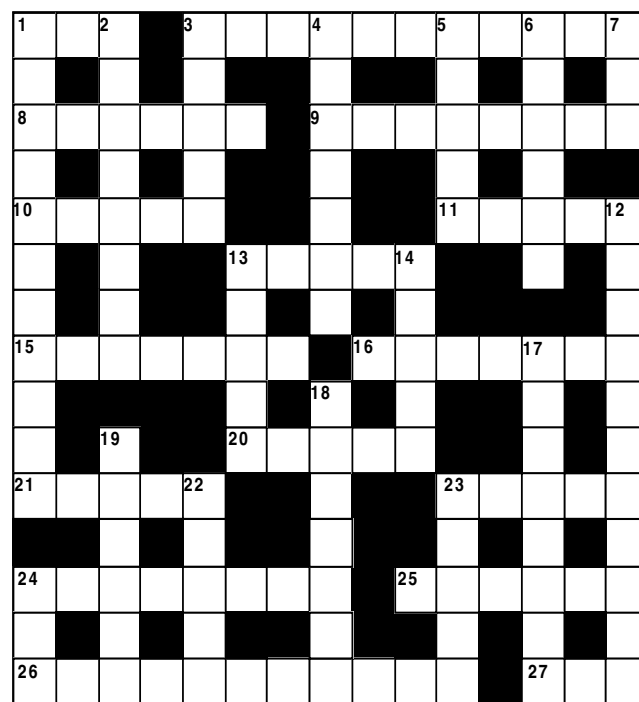
Down – 1 Bicycle clip 2 Gin rummy 3 Bilge 4 Lepanto 5 Overt
 6 Ardent 7 Don 12 Captain Cook 13 Wharf 14 Ready
 17 Calamari 18 Pierrot 19 Bremen 22 Hound 23 Smile 24 Cub

CHILDREN'S No.245

Across – 1 Spanner 7 Irish 8 Driving 9 Heard 10 Egypt
 13 Edge 15 Secret 17 Second 18 Pull 19 Peep 20 Apple
Down – 1 Saddles 2 Alice 3 Noisy 4 Right 5 Wizard 6 Shed
 11 Gorilla 12 Pet shop 13 Escape 14 Gander 16 Equal

Crossword

Gordius 365



ACROSS

- 1 Strange or uneven (3)
 3 Is your spouse's parent some Hitler woman? (6-2-3)
 8 Latent kind of aptitude (6)
 9 Is this member of a religious order involved in bargain opportunities, Mr Hislop? (8)
 10 Type of willow (5)
 11 Fabric with a tiny centre (5)
 13 Rugby formation (5)
 15 There is a mistake in the new rum rate (7)
 16 Difficulty, bother (7)
 20 Large deciduous tree (5)
 21 Con has left the hard stuff in a Greek island (5)
 23 Kingdom in ancient Palestine (5)
 24 It's the curved shape of a boar, pal (8)
 25 Aw, bias could affect what might go with Japanese food (6)
 26 Small edible marine gastropods (11)
 27 Hot article from a Chinese dynasty (3)

DOWN

- 1 Relating to diseases and deformities of the bones and

joints (11)

- 2 An old instrument could provide a mild cure (8)
 3 & 18d With T.E.'s Ron, I'm describing a blip (5,3-4)
 4 Oh, is rye needed literally for stockings? (7)
 5 Inactive (5)
 6 Hang around, possibly with criminal intent (6)
 7 Pale (3)
 12 A profane act that is somewhat considerate? (11)
 13 Small, noisy firework (5)
 14 Frivolity, glee (5)
 17 Robin could clean up here, even if it's too small for Batman (4-4)
 18 See 3 down
 19 Great fear (6)
 22 Joint in the arm (5)
 23 Denims (5)
 24 An explosive sound from Dad (3)

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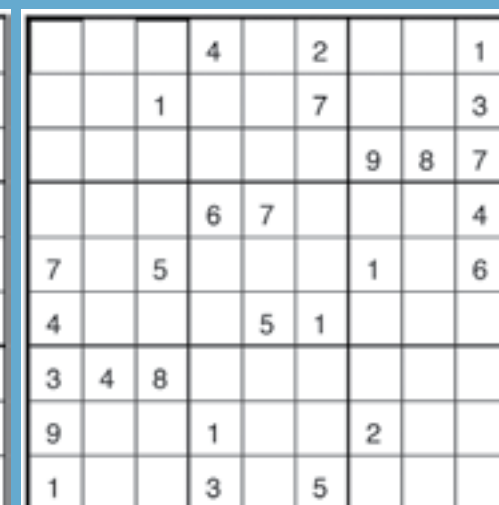
Sudoku Corner

246

Easy



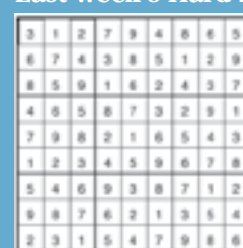
Hard



Last week's Easy 245



Last week's Hard 245



God’s plan depends on fidelity of more than religious

THIS WEEKEND’S visit by Pope Francis will inevitably rekindle many memories of the only previous papal visit to our shores. In September 1979 when Pope John Paul arrived I had been a seminarian for just one month. As you can imagine I was already full of idealism and religious zeal and to cap it all the boss was coming to see us! To make me and my fellow students even more special, in a packed schedule over two days the Pope was making time to meet us on our own.

And so in the very early hours on Monday October 1, 1979, almost 1,000 Irish seminarians from all over the country made our way to the famous Pugin College Chapel in Maynooth. The atmosphere was electric as we waited through those night hours for the Pope to arrive at 8am. I’m sure we prayed, we definitely sang and talked and told stories. We were entertained by, among others, James Galway on his beautiful golden flute. Years later I heard James reflect on that memorable night and the irony of him, a Belfast Protestant, singing with 1,000 trainee Catholic priests waiting for the Pope to arrive!

The Pope eventually arrived, delayed by fog. Having been



Pope John Paul II in 1979.

instructed how we were to join our hands and respectfully welcome the Pope, the door opened and we duly ignored the instruction, welcoming him like the Limerick fans cheering their captain as he

raised Liam McCarthy aloft.

John Paul made a short speech and while I have forgotten most of it I do remember one little passage where he said: “The Catholic Faith of Ireland today was linked, in God’s plan, to the fidelity of St Patrick. And tomorrow? Yes, tomorrow some part of God’s plan will be linked to your fidelity – to the fervour with which you say yes to God’s word in your lives”

Thirty nine years later, seven years a seminarian and 32 as a priest, I sometimes go back to those words in trepidation...a part of God’s plan for the church and faith in Ireland is linked to the fervour and fidelity with which I continue to say ‘Yes’.

The context of my vocation and those who along with me shouted and clapped for John

Paul in Maynooth all those years ago has changed dramatically – one small bus could bring all the Irish seminarians to welcome Pope Francis this weekend. But those words of John Paul are still relevant today.

“Thirty nine years later...I sometimes go back to those words in trepidation”

God’s plan for the Church in Ireland is now also explicitly linked to the fervour and fidelity of so many other people beyond seminarians and priests. It is linked to the faith, fervour and fidelity of countless catechists, pastoral workers, music ministers, pastoral council members, liturgical

planners, parish secretaries and countless other people who are emerging in a new era of co-responsibility and partnership.

God’s plan for the Church in Ireland must surely also be linked to the commitment we all bring to creating new structures, new wine skins where the gospel of love and compassion can be preached and lived.

And that brings me to one final, perhaps somewhat worrying note.

The cost of the Papal visit this weekend and the World Meeting of Families is somewhere in the region of €21m, whether from sponsorship or donations from the faithful we will find the money to pay the bill. I just wonder what €21m could do if it was invested in the Irish Church, resourcing new ministries and new structures. I can but hope!

It could happen to the Pope!

Paddy was returning home from the pub, smelling like a distillery. He flopped on a bus seat next to a priest. His tie was stained; his face was plastered with red lipstick, and a half empty bottle of whiskey was sticking out of his torn coat pocket. He opened his newspaper and began reading. He turned towards the priest and asked: “Father, what causes arthritis?”

“Well my son,” looking down his nose at the inebriated Paddy, “it’s the result of loose living, being

with cheap, wicked women, too much whisky and contempt for your fellow man.”

“Well I’ll be damned!” Paddy muttered, returning to his paper.

The priest, feeling a little guilty, said, “I’m very sorry. I didn’t mean to upset you. How long have you had arthritis?”

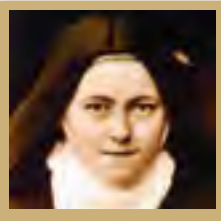
“I don’t, Father. But I was just reading here that the Pope does.”



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