

The Irish Catholic

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Time to welcome everyone back to parishes – bishops

Chai Brady, Ruadhán Jones and Jason Osborne

Four bishops have called for all the faithful to be welcomed back to parishes as excitement grows after restrictions were lifted north and south of the border.

Bishop of Achonry Paul Dempsey said the lifting of restrictions is a "great opportunity" to welcome people back "to experience what the heart of the Church is".

"That sense of gathering on a Sunday... is so, so important," Bishop Dempsey told *The Irish Catholic*.

Bishop of Meath Tom Deenihan encouraged parishes to explore initiatives like social media campaigns, going door-to-door or handing out flyers, to build on the "hunger for re-engagement, for renewal of the life we had, of social contact and of worshipping together".

He added that already people have "more confidence", while stressing that churches continue to remain vigilant in keeping people safe.

"I think the synodal process as it ramps up in the diocese during Lent will add impetus in terms of encouraging people to get involved again," Dr Deenihan added.

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Catholic schools: Living life to the full



Primary and post-primary students attend Mass in St Eugene's Cathedral, Derry, where Bishop Donal McKeown launched Catholic schools' week, January 20. Photo: Stephen Latimer.

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With election jitters, old enemies prove an easy target

Doug Beattie the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) has launched a scathing attack on Catholic schools in the North, accusing them of educational apartheid.

Mr Beattie leads what is often characterised as the 'moderate' unionist party in the region, in contrast to the traditionally more hard-line Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). It shouldn't be forgotten, however, that the sectarian apparatus constructed in Northern Ireland post-partition to ensure the permanent disadvantage of Catholics was constructed by that same UUP. In fact, from the creation of the northern state in 1921 right up to London imposing direct rule in 1972, the North was always governed by the UUP.

Leader

It was a UUP leader in the person of NI prime minister James Craig who described Stormont as a "Protestant parliament for a Protestant people". It was another UUP prime minister Basil Brooke who blasted a congregation of his co-religionists to stop employing Catholics: "Many in this audience employ Catholics, but I have not one about my place. Catholics are out to destroy Ulster...If we in Ulster allow Roman Catholics to work on our farms we are traitors to Ulster...I would appeal to loyalists, therefore, wherever possible, to employ good Protestant lads and lassies".

But, I digress. In his attack on Catholic schools, Mr Beattie declared the "need to end educational apartheid" in the North insisting that a one-size-fits-all model is the only way forward.

This sort of inflammatory rhetoric should have no place in any sensible discussion about education or how the North deals with the complex legacy of a society that was built on supremacy and sectarianism by Mr Beattie's predecessors in the UUP.

“In his attack on Catholic schools, Mr Beattie declared the ‘need to end educational apartheid’ in the North insisting that a one-size-fits-all model is the only way forward”

Catholic schools are part of a diverse mix in the educational landscape in the North. Crucially, they cater to the needs and desires of parents who want to have their child educated in a Catholic environment. Has Mr Beattie considered parental choice for one second, or is that something he intends to bulldoze as well?

Catholic schools in the North are also consistently at the top of the league tables when it comes to educational achievement. This is all the more impressive when one considers that many of the top-performing Catholic schools are in areas considered by any measure to be in areas experiencing deprivation.

Catholic schools in many communities in the North have cracked the once intractable problem of educational disadvantage and ensured that children once consigned to being a NEET (not in education, employment or training) are making real strides forward thanks to early interventions.

What has been achieved is the envy of the non-Catholic sector in the North. So much so that a previous DUP education minister Peter Weir ordered a review into Protestant underachievement in the region. So, the North has much to learn from the Catholic sector if only there was the sense to listen.

Editor's Comment

Michael Kelly



Catholic schools in the North are not to blame for sectarianism – and yet they become an easy target for a cheap shot when politicians want to paper over their own failures around a shared future. God knows there is much work to be done to help the communities in the North come together, but blaming Catholic schools is as easy as it is meaningless.

Context

The wider context here, of course, is that Mr Beattie's UUP is languishing behind the DUP in the polls – even though the DUP are on course for one of their worst electoral performances this May if the polls are to be believed. Mr

Beattie is understandably worried that when minds concentrate and the election becomes a battle from the DUP to stop Sinn Féin assuming the role of First Minister, his party may well get squeezed. What better way to try to offer some red meat to an electorate fearful of nationalist dominance than vowing to go after Catholic schools? Old enemies prove too hard to resist for some politicians.

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Time to welcome everyone back to parishes – bishops

» Continued from Page 1

The Bishop of Elphin Kevin Doran also saw it as important that parishes reach out because the "gift and prayer" of people who have not returned to Mass "is missed".

"We don't want people to come because they're told," Bishop Doran continued. "We need them to come because they feel the need to be nourished and recognise they have a contribution to make to the faith community."

Bishop Donal McKewen said that he "hopes and prays that the synodal pathway will be an important element in a medium-term strategy to building a solid foundation for parish growth."

"A renewed Church will

seek to do much more than to get people back into church once a week," he added.

Young people have an important role to play in helping parishes, a number of Catholic youth groups told *The Irish Catholic*.

Máire McAteer of Youth 2000 called on the youth to "be brave" and approach priests and parishes to see how they can help.

"They are the influencers, the young people themselves will be the ones to evangelise their peers, to invite them to come back to Mass... When young people see someone their own age being active, that is attractive and they want to get involved."

"Hopefully that will inspire the older generation

as well, to see the younger people involved – it gives them hope," Ms McAteer said.

Tony Foy of Net Ministries said young people are "very excited and there's a lot of stuff that we couldn't do for two years that we're just raring to go".

While young people were able to connect with each other online, now "young people are thirsting for community, and not online, but an active community", said Helen Vysotska of Pure in Heart.

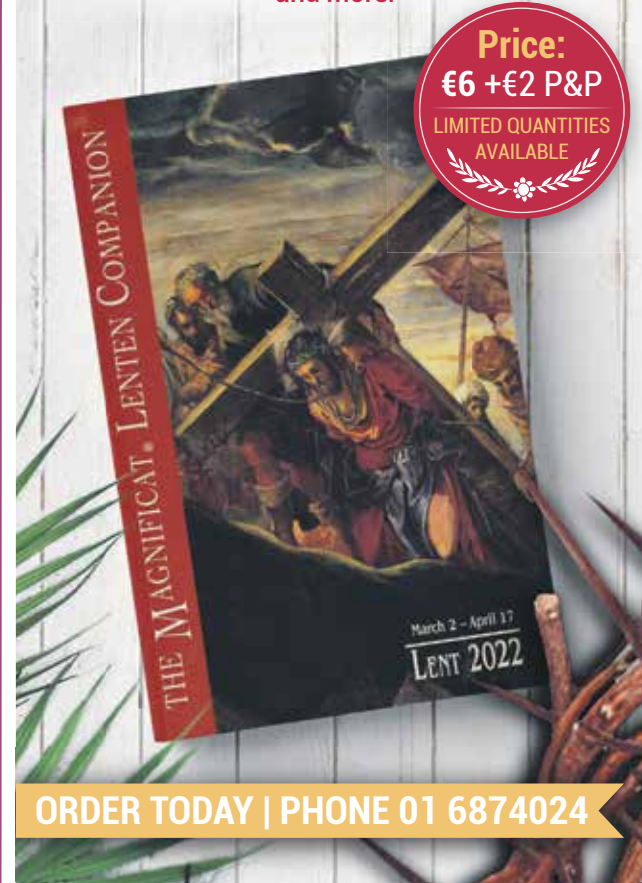
She said that a national campaign or effort is very important as "receiving the sacraments is crucial to any Catholic or Christian, it's just so important to physically receive them".

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Confidence in theology important if synod to be fruitful, says Professor

Ruadhán Jones

The director of the Loyola Institute Dr Michael Kirwan said it's "really important" that people have confidence in their grasp of theology if the Irish synodal process is to be fruitful.

Dr Kirwan, who is a professor in systematic and pastoral theology, told *The Irish Catholic* people are being asked "to have an enormous level of confidence that they have something

to say, that their voices will be heard and that this will be a fruitful process".

For this to work, it's important that people are confident that they understand the Faith, he continued, in areas like the Incarnation, why saints are important and the issue of suffering within Christian life.

"If people feel like they have a confident grasp of their faith, they're more likely to be able to make a positive contribution in a formal setting like the synod process," Dr Kirwan said.

The Trinity College Dublin professor also

pointed out that "it's not just priests and bishops who have something to say about the Faith", adding that there are many lay theologians with important contributions to make.

Dr Kirwan was speaking to the paper ahead of the Loyola Institute's annual 'Faith seeking understanding' lecture series, which will commence Wednesday February 2 and will run for three consecutive Wednesdays from 5.30-8.30 pm.

He hopes that the lecture series, which will take place online for the second year running,

can contribute to the sense of confidence people have in their faith.

"Each course has a male and female voice, I'm on two of them, but I'm the only priest involved," Dr Kirwan said.

"The other four people are all lay people. That's important as well, that people hear that this is a conversation for everybody."

The course costs €20 and you can register on Eventbrite at the following link: <https://www.eventbrite.ie/e/faith-seeking-understanding-2022-lecture-series-tickets-238467561897>

Hollywood star makes pilgrimage with Franciscans for Padre Pio biopic

Staff reporter

American actor and Hollywood star Shia LaBeouf went on pilgrimage to the hometown of Padre Pio as part of his preparations to play the Italian saint in an upcoming biopic.

Mr LaBeouf, who starred in the *Transformers* franchise, visited San Giovanni Rotondo where Padre Pio lived and served from 1916 until his death in 1968, with the Capuchins of the Western American Province of Our Lady of Angels.

According to one of the

Capuchin brothers, "Shia and Bro. Alex report that there have been 'many unexpected blessings' throughout their time filming in Italy".

The group made their way to Assisi and Loreto before ending in Rome. There, Mr LaBeouf was introduced to the Minister General of the Capuchin Order, Fr Roberto Genuin, OFM Cap.

Experience

Mr LaBeouf has previously spoken about his experience staying with the Capuchin friars, saying it is "super attractive to see people giving themselves to something so divine and it is heart-warming to know that there is a brotherhood like this that exists".

"I'm completely immersed in something way bigger than myself," the American actor said.

"I don't know if I've ever met a group of men



Shia LaBeouf pictured with a group of Capuchin friars as they tour Italy for production on a biopic about Italian saint Padre Pio.

as immersed in anything in my life... I've been met with nothing but grace since I've been here. I am very honoured to meet you guys."

As the upcoming biopic is still in the filming phase of production, little is known about what events of Padre Pio's life it will cover.



Mr LaBeouf and one of the brothers pose for a picture beneath a statue of St Padre Pio.

'Star falls from the sky' as Belfast mourns Fionntán


Family and friends of Belfast teenager Fionntán McGarvey heard of how his "big smile, his love and his friendship, with his talent and sportsmanship," lit up the sky in their lives during his funeral on Monday.

Police have launched a murder investigation after the 18-year-old died last Thursday in the Royal Victoria Hospital.

This was as a result of injuries sustained during an incident outside the Devenish Complex on Finaghy Road North in Belfast in the early hours of December 27.

"If we find the renewed sense, that in the end, love and friendship are our most valued possessions, then Fionntán has left us an amazing gift," Fr Eddie O'Donnell told the congregation.

"A falling star is a wonderful sight. For a moment it holds our attention and then it is gone. Such was Fionntán. For too short a while he lit our sky with his big smile, his love and his friendship, with his talent and sportsmanship," the priest said.



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Irish missionary welcomes raised age of consent in the Philippines

Staff reporter

Following the recent raising of the age of sexual consent in the Philippines from 12 to 16, Irish missionary priest Fr Shay Cullen said they've experienced "a big step forward" in fighting child abuse in the Philippines.

Based in the Philippines, Columban priest and founder of the Preda Foundation, Fr Cullen and his team have worked for many years on tackling child sexual abuse in the Philippines and worldwide.

"We're campaigning on this [raising the age of consent] for God knows how long, because it's a huge contributing factor now in the child sexual abuse. Of course, it's a shocking situation...and the paedophiles were using that," he said.

"So we've beaten that now and this will be law. He [Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte] signed the law against child brides last week, and if he doesn't sign it this week, it'll lapse into law within a few days....It's there, we have it now, it just takes a few weeks for what they call implementing rules and regulations."

Fr Cullen said one of the key issues has been that "groomers" and paedophiles often "brainwash" young children in the Philippines into giving their consent, but that the new legislation will help to address this issue.

Raising the level of awareness among legislators and the general public has been a "big struggle", Fr Cullen said, but this constitutes a "step forward".

"This whole culture, like everywhere, in Ireland, God knows, non-reporting of child sexual abuses is rampant.

"One in three kids worldwide are victims

of sexual abuse, and how many are actually reported? And how many convictions are really ever got?" Fr Cullen asked.

Addressing a recent report from the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF), which found that child abuse imagery had tripled online during lockdowns, Fr Cullen said the onus is on telecommunications and Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to block such content online, making use of new digital DNA software to track and remove abusive imagery and video.

Dominicans to launch new online ministry this autumn

Jason Osborne

The Dominicans in Ireland are set to launch a major new online evangelisation effort this autumn, with Promoter of Online Preaching, Fr Conor McDonough telling *The Irish Catholic* newspaper that it's a way "of reaching out to people who are no longer in the pews".

The website will "have a great deal of video

and audio content, as well as written content," which will be "done in an Irish idiom".

The aim, Fr McDonough said, is "to imitate the good work that's been done, but not simply to replicate it.

"So to make sure that the thing is done in an Irish idiom, which is I think very important for reaching out to people who are maybe distant from the Church, distant from the Lord and, you know, material, content in an American

accent is perhaps unlikely to draw them back."

He described the Polish Dominican website as an inspiration for the project, as well as other online religious evangelisers like US Bishop Robert Barron.

The audience "might be surprised to hear young, Irish Christians speaking confidently about their faith," Fr McDonough said, continuing, "I think there's some unique features to Irish culture that we can connect with.

As an example, he said, "I think in Ireland there's a real love of place and an interest in place and the stories associated with locations and the Irish landscape is just covered with sites of Christian interest.

"And so one of the series that we plan on producing will highlight some of these stories, county by county, in a way that will hopefully engage local communities and open their eyes to just how Christian our past is."

Senator criticises tendering process for abortion chairperson

Brandon Scott

Independent NUI Senator Rónán Mullen last week called on Minister Stephen Donnelly to honour a commitment given to tender openly for an independent chairperson as part of the

three-year review of the 2018 abortion legislation.

Commenting on a Department of Health press release of 8 December last, which said "a request for tender for a chair to carry out research into the views of service providers has also been published on the eTend-

ers website", Senator Mullen criticised the Department of Health saying "the only request for tender published by the department was for a person or organisation to carry out research in the area with no reference to the chair who would be responsible for collating

the relevant information and eventually making a report to the minister."

Senator Mullen stressed that "the Minister needs to explain why he misled people. He must explain the lack of transparency in his approach".

NEWS IN BRIEF

Capuchins announce two closures and a withdrawal

The provincial of the Capuchin Franciscans has officially announced the closures of St Anthony's Friary, Carlow and St Francis Friary, Rochestown and their withdrawal from residency in St Francis Parish, Priorswood, Dublin.

Bro. Seán Kelly said that following a gathering of the Capuchin friars they examined their ability to maintain their

presence in nine communities across the country "with now only 65 friars with an average age of 78".

"I want to assure you that these decisions were not taken lightly, but only after much consultation and prayer," he said.

The closure of St Anthony's Friary was reported in last week's edition of *The Irish Catholic*.

'School holds a place in every community'

Catholic schools contribute to society by encouraging the full development of their young people's character and gifts, which includes "reaching out to those less fortunate in the local community and beyond", according to the Bishop of Waterford and Lismore.

In a statement issued during Catholic Schools Week, which

runs from January 23-30, Bishop Alphonsus Cullinan said that "school holds a key place in every community".

"Our Catholic schools prepare their pupils and students for life. This includes building up their lives in faith, when young people learn of God's personal care for each one and his loving plan for all humanity."

Diocese launches new family Easter initiative

The Diocese of Waterford and Lismore and the Tine Catholic network have introduced an Easter initiative for families entitled 'Arise family Holiday Conference'.

It aims to celebrate Easter and offer teachings geared to the various age groups, as well as the opportunity to combine it with a holiday.

Net Ministries, Holy Family Mission, Ceili Community and Youth 2000 will be run-

ning programmes for children and young adults. There will be a celebration of Mass, an evening social programme of theatre and mime along with sports and other activities. For adults, there will be seminars and workshops.

The event takes place between April 17-22 at Holy Cross National School Tramore, contact Tim Nichols on 0860540009 or book online at www.arisefamilyconference.ie.

Our Lady of Guadalupe visits Dublin



A group of people walk along a street in Dublin praying the rosary with an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe on a tapestry, January 22. Photo: CNS.

Insulted for her 'Muslimness' – everyone is shocked

Shock and horror were expressed in high places. Indignant denials were issued. The establishment came forth to state that such a thing, were it to happen, would be outrageous.

Such was the general reaction at Westminster to the claim by a former minister, Ms Nusrat Ghani, that she had been reprimanded for her "Muslimness".

Allegation

Ms Ghani made a serious allegation that the government Chief Whip, Mark Spencer, had indicated that her faith was a problem, when she was fired as a junior transport minister in 2020. Her Islamic religion allegedly made people "uncomfortable".

Mr Spencer immediately issued a denial, describing the claim as "completely false", and defamatory.

“Long experience suggests that many different factors can feature in any accusation”

There is to be an ongoing enquiry into this matter (among the several other enquiries occurring at the heart of Boris Johnson's administration).

Whenever any person makes an allegation, and another person denies the



Mary Kenny

claim, there is often a debate over who is right or wrong, who has misremembered, who interpreted words or expressions differently, who has an axe to grind or a score to settle, who is defending a reputation.

Careful enquiry can usually come up with some conclusion, and long experience suggests that many different factors can feature in any accusation.

But what is interesting is the response. The formal tone of comment was that it was absolutely outrageous that anyone should insult an individual on grounds of their religion. The Muslim politicians immediately came forward and said it was something that could never be tolerated in a modern, democratic society – Sajid Javid, Health Minister, Nadhim Zahawi, Education Minister, Baroness Warsi in the House of Lords, all Muslims.

Solidarity

And – bar those sceptics who don't believe a word any politician utters – everyone seemed in solidarity. It was also pointed out that the current British government is exceptionally multi-faith: Muslims, Hindus like Rishi Sunak, even committed Christians and Catholics,

like Dominic Raab and Jacob Rees-Mogg.

While, naturally I am sorry if Ms Ghani has been distressed, this has turned out to be a significant and useful event. Because it has set a public precedent and a standard that no one should be disadvantaged or bullied because of their faith. A person's religion should always be respected – that was the takeaway message.

“The Muslim politicians immediately came forward and said it was something that could never be tolerated in a modern, democratic society”

Britain has a formal, state religion, of which Queen Elizabeth is the head. France is a secular society which excludes all religion from the public square. Yet the French current presidential election campaign is awash with debates about "Muslimness", and if it is incompatible with French culture. Interesting comparison.



Former minister in Britain, Nusrat Ghani.

“Mr Spencer immediately issued a denial, describing the claim as 'completely false', and defamatory”

A child's view of life

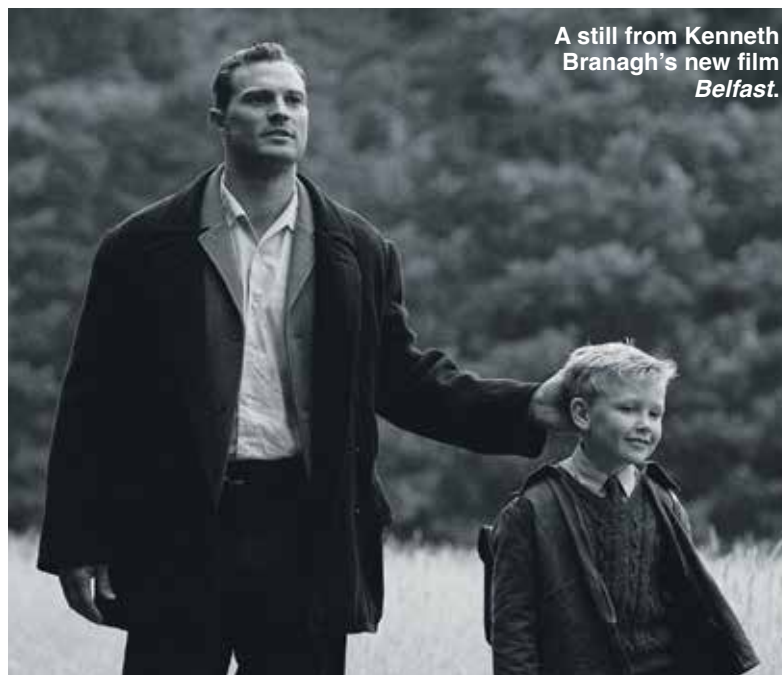
Is Kenneth Branagh's engaging black-and-white movie *Belfast* about sectarianism – or is it essentially about childhood? There's certainly a running theme on sectarianism, with a particularly fierce sermon by a Protestant pastor, blatantly modelled on Dr Ian Paisley, and a loyalist vigilante who runs a violent protection racket. It's also about the beginning of the Troubles, kicking off in August 1969.

Child's eye

And yet, it really is a child's eye view of life which is almost lyrical – an autobiographical recollection by Ken Branagh himself, played by the enchanting Jude Hill, aged 9. Jamie Dornan and Catriona Balfe play his extraordinarily beautiful parents – it's hard

to see Dornan, who does a dazzling professional rendering of the song 'Everlasting Love' – as a simple East Belfast carpenter-joiner in need of employment, or the stunning Catriona, with a super-model's figure, as a forlorn housewife. But that, I think, is part of the point Branagh is making – that we often do see our parents, when young, as beautiful and special. (By the way, there's a clip of Jamie singing his number on YouTube – Google 'Belfast Movie Clip'.)

Belfast is also about leaving behind community life, and whatever the rewards of better economic circumstances elsewhere, a family-based community feels safe to a child – even with Saracen tanks moving down those little back streets.



A still from Kenneth Branagh's new film *Belfast*.

An unorthodox appearance

A young man came to the house recently, sent by the local authority to put up safety rails for my son, who is learning to walk again after a broken femur. Rick had a ponytail hairstyle and rather noticeably fancy earrings. I caught myself thinking, oh yeah, we've got a hippy workman here.

But Rick turned out to be efficient, helpful and cheerful and when he had finished, I thanked him. "You know what?" he said, smiling. "I have the best job in the world! People are pleased to see me. They always thank me. And I go on my way feeling I've helped someone. And I get paid too!"

There goes a man happy and fulfilled in his work, I thought. And I inwardly kicked myself for having judged someone just for his unorthodox appearance, without seeing the sunny soul underneath.

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Charity warns of rental pressures due to pandemic debt

Chai Brady

Housing charity Threshold has warned that debt accrued during the pandemic as well as job losses will put further pressure on renters during the housing crisis as society reopens.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, CEO of Threshold John-Mark McCafferty said that those most affected by the pandemic, including staff in the hospitality indus-

try, are more likely to be in rental accommodation and had to rely on the PUP (pandemic unemployment payment).

He explained that some tenants made agreements to pause rent payments with landlords when they were out of work but now have to pay them back.

"They are now having to make right those debts, those historical arrears. That's a real challenge for many people we assist," Mr

McCafferty warned.

"Renters are disproportionately in those sectors like retail, like hospitality, and they are the very ones that have been impacted by reduced hours, reduced salary, and that's still washing out as we move through this whole Covid process."

Threshold was founded by Fr Donal O'Mahony OFM Cap in 1978. It assists, advises, advocates and mediates with landlords and other statutory agencies, to keep tenants in

their homes and "save them from the spectre of homelessness".

The national charity mostly work with private renters, with Mr McCafferty saying many of the issues they come across regard the cost of rent "in the context of increasing energy bills and wider inflation".

"So we know rents have become increasingly unaffordable for many people on middle to low incomes for many years."

Mr McCafferty said that the debt

many renters have accrued during the pandemic "is eventually going to manifest itself in terms of perhaps historic non-payment of rents or other debts that aren't rent related but which people's limited and maybe reduced household budgets can't stretch. So they may be trying to pay off debt in other areas of their life and that puts further pressure on their ability to pay the rent. That's an ongoing issue."

See pages 18-19.

Still 'anxiety and fear' in Drogheda two years after Mulready-Woods murder, says local priest

Ruadhán Jones

There is still a sense of "anxiety and fear" in Drogheda two years on from the murder of Keane Mulready-Woods, Fr Colm O'Mahony OSA told *The Irish Catholic*.

The killing of the 17-year-old on January 12, 2020, was the result of a gangland feud and left the community of the Co. Louth town feeling "isolated and intimidated and very much alone", Fr O'Mahony said.

"The situation has improved but there is still a sense of anxiety and fear in Drogheda and that will take a long time to go," he continued.

Fr O'Mahony – prior of the Augustinian community in Drogheda – warned that "just as this situation did not occur overnight, neither will it heal or disappear overnight".

"Great work had been achieved but there is so much more that needs addressing such as the level of homelessness and addiction in the town," he

continued.

"A dedicated outreach service is needed to pinpoint stress situations before it becomes too serious."

The Augustinian priest added that Drogheda needs resources and supports for individuals, families and communities "now more than ever".

A number of arrests have been made and two men are to come before the Special Criminal Court on April 25 concerning the murder.

St Brigid honoured with public holiday



Staff reporter

The Government has decided to add a new public holiday to the national calendar to honour the country's female patron, St Brigid of Kildare.

The fifth Century abbess, who is one of the country's three patron saints along with St Patrick and St Columba, founded several monasteries of nuns and her feast-day takes place on February 1, marked by many people as the traditional first day of spring.

Bishop Denis Nulty of Kildare and Leighlin, where St Brigid founded her largest monastic settlement,

had backed calls for the female saint to be honoured on the civil calendar. Several Kildare-based Oireachtas members also voiced support for the proposal.

The new holiday will be in addition to the national commemoration of St Patrick's Day which falls on March 17 and is also a public holiday. However, as a one-off in 2022, St Patrick's Day will have an extra holiday on March 18 making it a two-day celebration as a special 'thank you' to frontline healthcare workers for their work during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Martyrs for the poor



Irish Franciscan missionaries Fr Emmet Murphy and Bishop Michael Lenihan OFM visit the site in El Salvador where recently beatified Fr Rutilio Grande and his companions were martyred.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Date for NI abuse apology announced

The northern Executive has set March 11 as the date for a public apology to former residents in institutions in the region who suffered abuse.

This was announced on the fifth anniversary of the publication of the Hart Report, January 20, which made a number of recommendations, including a public apology.

The chair, the late Sir Anthony Hart also recommended a permanent memorial.

The inquiry examined the period 1922-1995, and

found there had been widespread and systemic abuse at institutions.

First Minister Paul Givan said: "Victims and survivors of historical institutional abuse have our full support, and we are determined they will receive the acknowledgement, support, and redress they deserve."

"Our priority remains approaching an apology with care and sensitivity, and basing it upon the experience of victims and survivors," he said.

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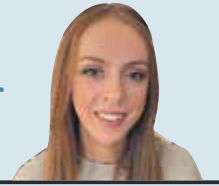
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Shannon Campbell

The View



Students must be educated beyond their echo chambers

Pope Francis captured headlines recently when, in his annual address to the diplomatic corps, he tackled head-on the growing phenomenon of 'cancel culture.'

He was uncompromising in condemning it as a form of "ideological colonisation" which leads to "one track thinking", ill-suited to addressing the challenges of our times.

Cancel culture and 'de-platforming' have become all too common on college and university campuses. My own alma mater, Trinity College Dublin, had a well-documented case not long ago.

The Hist, one of the oldest university debating societies in the English-speaking world, 'cancelled' Richard Dawkins. Not because of his anti-Christian beliefs – presumably they were the reason for inviting him in the first place – but rather comments he had made some time ago about women, and Islam.

The auditor was concerned not to 'discomfort' students. I make no judgment on the merits or demerits of that particular decision. Unacceptable attitudes and behaviours towards women, Muslims and any group in society, should be called-out.

“The student must engage in a conversation with the self in which they come to discern grace at the roots of the world”

There is, however, a bigger point we shouldn't lose sight of. My understanding of the university, one I think shared by the Church, is that it should aspire to be an intellectual community where, in academic freedom, various lines of tradition and thought intersect and invite contemporary culture to move toward a reflective unity. Otherwise, a university offers neither challenge nor much direction.

Students ought to be able to grapple with questions of ultimacy, even when the pro-



cess is discomforting.

It is arguable that contemporary educational culture has been colonised by notions of negative freedom and individuality. Questions of the good are often avoided, and institutions and traditional voices of authority are viewed with distrust. They are perceived as manipulative forms of oppression by the powerful.

What is emerging is a form of 'hyperbolic doubt'. "And why should we accept that?" is the all too familiar refrain of the sceptic or malcontent. They could be likened to the spoilt child who has learnt the power of the question "Why?" to illicit a response from its distracted parents.

Less aggressive

In its less aggressive guise, this manifests culturally as a passive or superficial way of living, marked by apathy, floating lifestyles and provisional commitments.

More positively, there seems to be emerging a mode

of thought and way of being which people of faith can engage with constructively. This is especially characteristic of a younger demographic. Their searching is humbler, they have a desire to heal old wounds, and they are seeking after liberating zones of life.

Also discernible is a shift in sensibility towards the spiritual, ecological and feminine.

Knowledge and reasoning are understood increasingly as deeply personal and intuitively sound processes which value common sense and practical judgement. On this view, the university project is best understood as the pursuit of new connectedness and the re-evaluation of holistic thinking.

Intellectual endeavour should aim at growth in personal authenticity. The fake and the photocopy do little to inspire. The one who is committed to being 'the real deal' must be open to conversion. Only in this way do they free themselves from

being merely a child of one's time, to embrace a horizon of meaning which transcends both time and space.

This kind of conversion happens in conversation – the etymological link is obvious. We exist conversationally, a truth rooted in the theological principle of logos, Christ the Word of God.

“There seems to be emerging a mode of thought and way of being which people of faith can engage with constructively”

The student must engage in a conversation with the self in which they come to discern grace at the roots of the world. This interior dialogue requires a commitment to ascetic practice. Not that of self-punishment, but rather the gradual stripping away of the ego so that one can see what is really there.

Moreover, they must engage in a conversation with the communion of saints so that they can come to know and value the richness of a tradition's received wisdom. And they must seek out and engage as conversation partners, people of virtue who lead by example. The way to find virtue is to live with virtuous people and imitate what they do.

Risky

All of this is a risky business. You cannot truly converse without risk of conversion. We must be prepared to take other persons seriously enough to engage them in dialogue and debate about what makes life worth living.

It calls us to go way beyond contemporary notions of tolerance which are often nothing other than strategies of non-interference with beliefs and ways of life of those who are different.

We must be committed to intellectual solidarity and accept that authentic conversation poses the very real

potential for conversion.

Whether we start out as fundamentalists, convinced of our certitude, or agnostics convinced of our doubts, the element of risk at the heart of authentic conversation speaks to the vulnerability and fragility at the heart of Christianity; we are forever under the shadow of the cross.

This calls for a humanism of compassion, capable of withstanding the tragedies of history and the excesses of our contemporary age. This compassion should move the student to engage not just the head, but the hands and the heart; to directly engage in social justice and service to others.

From my unique perspective of university chaplaincy, I think it essential that we form students not only to be intellectuals, but intellectuals who are courageous, and go out in search of the flesh of Christ. They should not rest content with being highly educated and starch-pressed, prepared only to discuss matters of intellectual import over tea.

“We form students not only to be intellectuals, but intellectuals who are courageous, and go out in search of the flesh of Christ”

They should be motivated to move beyond their comfort zones, their thought silos, their echo chambers, lest they labour under the misguided notion that just being part of a conversation is reward enough.

Those like me, engaged in campus ministry, should be creating time and space for authentic conversion to happen. We should be encouraging our intellectual communities to strive not to be like Harvard or Oxford, but rather Bethlehem, Nazareth, Cana, Calvary, and the Upper Room at Pentecost with Mary, as the 'Word becomes flesh' in the one who called Himself 'the Way, the Truth and the Life.'

“It is arguable that contemporary educational culture has been colonised by notions of negative freedom and individuality”

'Tell your friends you'll meet them at Mass'



The energy we have as restrictions end is a chance to call people back to Mass, Ruadhán Jones hears

Some grim figures emerged during the pandemic, not least the fact that a good number of regular Mass-goers had not returned after the various lockdowns. However, the Government's announcement Friday January 21 that the majority of restrictions were to lift from Saturday was met with no little amount of joy and hope. As restrictions effectively end north and south of the border, the energy and hopefulness we feel is a chance for parishes to invite people back to Mass again, according to bishops, youth groups, priests and deacons.

Bishop of Elphin Kevin Doran encouraged parishes to reach out, as the people who are not at Mass, "their gift and prayer is missed... anyone not there is missed and we'd like to have them". He added that we need to respect the different paces at which people adapt to change, and be generous in our interaction.

"We don't want people to come

because they're told," Bishop Doran continued. "We need them to come because they feel the need to be nourished and recognise they have a contribution to make to the faith community."

Encourage

Bishop Doran encouraged people, especially young people, to suggest to friends that "you'll meet them at Mass", as a way to encourage them to return.

The Bishop of Meath Tom Deenihan also called for parishes to "encourage people to make that first step" in returning to Mass.

"There is a hunger for re-engagement, for renewal of the life we had, of social contact and of worshipping together," Dr Deenihan said. Even on the weekend the restrictions lifted, the bishop of Meath said he noticed numbers were up at Mass and that people had "more confidence".

"I think the synodal process as it ramps up in the diocese during Lent will add impetus in terms of encouraging people to get involved again," Bishop Deenihan finished.

Meanwhile, Bishop of Achonry Paul Dempsey described the lifting of restrictions as "a great opportunity now, being cautious... to welcome people back and to experience what the heart of Church is about – that sense of gathering together on a Sunday, which is so, so important".

He called on the Church to "reflect upon the experience and see how we can extend a warm welcome to people to come back and be a part of the community", adding that "that's always been the challenge of the Church".

The majority of parishes moved online in order to serve their local parishioners, resulting in a leap

forward in the Church's communication. However, Fr Paddy Byrne, PP Abbeyleix parish, Co. Laois, said "the challenge now is to move from the online to the offline reality of the flesh".

"It is a momentous challenge but I do believe we are living through a cathartic moment of real change," Fr Byrne said. He stressed the importance of creative thinking in approaching the challenge. He believes March 18, the date of this year's new bank holiday, is "a big moment that we can claim our place in the ritualising of moments like that day for prayer in our parish churches as we remember what we have gone through".

“Máire McAteer of Youth 2000 called on young people to ‘be brave’ and approach priests and parishes to see how they can help”

Deacon Brendan Dowd of the Holy Family Parish, Belfast, also called for creative thinking through a new evangelisation strategy to "reconnect with them [people who have not returned to Mass] in a way that makes it worthwhile for them coming back".

"We know the beauty of the Eucharist, for the believer there is nothing better... perhaps now is a really good time now to restate that in a way that is meaningful to people, maybe we've been a bit casual.

"A lot of people won't come back to Mass if they don't understand what's going on. It's all right say-

ing 'come on back', come back to what? How are we engaging with people? What's the music going to be like? How many young people are we going to be involving?

"We have an opportunity to really do something very new," Deacon Dowd finished.

A number of youth groups told *The Irish Catholic* about the sense of youthful excitement there is at the possibility of re-engaging fully with local communities. Máire McAteer of Youth 2000 called on young people to "be brave" and approach priests and parishes to see how they can help.

"They are the influencers, the young people themselves will be the ones to evangelise their peers, to invite them to come back to Mass... When young people see a young person being active, that is attractive and they want to get involved.

"Joy breeds joy, and holiness attracts – when they see a young person involved, then they want to get involved. Hopefully that will inspire the older generation, to see the younger people involved – it gives them hope," Ms McAteer said.

Young people

Tony Foy of Net Ministries spoke of the excitement that young people are feeling. His own group of missionaries are "very excited and there's a lot of stuff that we couldn't do for two years that we're just raring to go".

He was candid about the challenges the Church faces in getting people back, saying "we need to take into account people's withdrawal symptoms. We've been told what to do basically for two years. Now we can decide for ourselves".

The pandemic, though a global phenomenon, affected different

groups in different ways. While young people were able to connect with each other online, now "young people are thirsting for community, and not online, but an active community", said Helen Vysotska of Pure in Heart.

She said that a national campaign or effort is very important as "receiving the sacraments is crucial to any Catholic or Christian, it's just so important to physically receive them," "Our Church is so tactile, we're all about the sacraments – receiving them and being present... I think the importance has been lost," Ms Vysotska said.

“I think what's more important or what the youth can bring is re-catechising and re-teaching people what the Faith is”

Two young people at the Holy Family Mission in Waterford also told this paper about the need to "inform people on why the Faith is how it is".

"It's getting down to the basics again," Rebecca Peer said. "The lack of knowledge of the basics is partially the reason why a lot of people are leaving in the first place.

"I think what's more important or what the youth can bring is re-catechising and re-teaching people what the Faith is."

Michael Tierney agreed, adding that "if people are going to come back to the Church, it will come through word of mouth and bearing witness to the Faith".

Nine NI schools awarded for outstanding work and outreach



Fr Eddie McGee, Director of the Catholic Schools' Support Service, organisers of the event, addresses the awardees.

Chai Brady

The Diocese of Down and Connor presented nine schools across the diocese with the annual 'Spirit of Catholic Education Award' to pay tribute to the "inspiring work" they have done.

The ceremony was held in St Mary's University College on Monday, January 24, during Catholic Schools Week, which runs from January 23-30. It was organised by the Catholic Schools' Support Service (CSSS).

The schools received the award in recognition of their "outstanding work and commitment to partnership and outreach" to support pupils, families, parishes and the wider community and for the priority that they give to promoting and delivering the ethos and values of Catholic education.

A statement from the CSSS read: "Each year, Catholic Schools Week provides a focus on the role and significance of the school family as experienced within the lives of children and young people today. It also provides an oppor-

tunity to affirm and pay tribute to the ongoing work of teachers as they seek to form young people in their intellectual, moral, spiritual and social development.

"The Catholic Schools' Support Service (Down and Connor) congratulates each award-winning school. These schools are representative of and showcase how teachers across the diocese embed an ongoing commitment to living out the spirit of Catholic education".

There was one nursery school recipient: St Theresa's Nursery, Belfast.

St Colmcille's Primary School, Downpatrick, St Comgall's Primary School, Bangor and

Holy Cross Primary School, Belfast were the three primary school recipients.

The post-primary winners were: Our Lady and St Patrick's College, Knock, St Mary's High School, Downpatrick, Rathmore Grammar School, Finaghy, Belfast, Blessed Trinity College, Belfast, and St Louis' Grammar School, Ballymena.



Head of RE Shauna-Rose Pickering of St Louis Grammar School Ballymena with Joan McCombe of the CSSS.



Anne Doran from the CSSS (left) presents the award to the principal and RE coordinator of St Columcille's Primary School in Downpatrick.



Cathy Hunter, principal of St Comgall's Primary School, Bangor, with teacher Sharon Parker (centre) and Joan McCombe of the CSSS.



Rosemary McLaughlin, principal of St Mary's High School, Downpatrick with Joan McCombe of the CSSS.



RE teacher Maeve Wright (centre) and Vice Principal Patrick O'Callaghan of Rathmore Grammar School in Belfast with Joan McCombe of the CSSS (left).



Principal Deborah McLaughlin and Head of Religion Pauline Rainey from Our Lady and St Patrick's College, Knock, (Centre) Joan McCombe of the CSSS.



Coole parish is plumbing the depths of its past to find solutions to take it into the future, writes **Jason Osborne**

The parish of Coole (Mayne) is located in north Westmeath and borders the parishes of Abbeylara, Rathowen, Multyfarnham, Taghmon, Castlepollard and Collinstown. A quick scan of its geography is completed when you take the surrounding Lake Derravagh into account, which lends more than a mythical backdrop to the setting.

According to legend, Aobh, the jealous stepmother of Finola, Aedh, Fiachra and Conn, the Children of Lir, told them to bathe in the aforementioned lake, turning them into swans, consigning them to spend the next three hundred years there.

With this background present to him at all times, parish priest of Coole, Fr Oliver Skelly, is scanning the parish's past and present to ensure that it isn't consigned to the mists of history like so much of our island has been.

Fortunately, the parish has plenty to work with, both past and present. With a population of just less than one thousand living in 300 households, Coole parish boasts two churches – The Church of the Immaculate Conception in Coole, and the Church of St John the Baptist in Milltown/Whitehall – two primary schools with over one hundred pupils between them, a parish hall and three cemeteries.

There's also the now-redundant Church of St Nicholas at Mayne, which is owned by the Pakenham family. Strong relations with the Church of Ireland in the area ensures that each year there is a Christmas carol service and an event to mark the week of prayer for Christian unity.

A united, Christian parish it is too, like Johnstown/Walterstown of last week, with parishioners hailing from near and far. Dublin, England, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland are well-represented, with families of many nationalities happily settled into the rhythm and structure of Coole life.

Challenges

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper, Fr Skelly isn't shy about the challenges the parish, like so many around Ireland, faces. Ranging from the obvious damage Covid has inflicted on local church life to the wider trend of the population's disengagement with the Church, Fr Skelly is keenly aware of the difficulties Coole is facing going forward.

A parish of deep and mythic backdrop



A gathering to mark the centenary of the arrival of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul in July 1916.

However, he's implemented solutions that have proven successful in parishes around the world in an effort to reach people normally beyond his reach, and they've borne fruit.

"We have had outreach in the sense that the Masses on Sundays and Holy Days are online," Fr Skelly tells this paper.

"In fact, you have people watching from England, America and all over the world, really," he says, continuing, "people in Australia have been watching as well, so that's certainly one sense of outreach."

“Fr Skelly isn't shy about the challenges the parish, like so many around Ireland, faces”

With regards to how to proceed into the future, Fr Skelly has been thinking about past events the parish hosted, and the wealth they brought to the area.

"We did have before for the Eucharistic Congress in the year 2012, a first Communion day, we had a Corpus Christi procession from the parish church down to Coole hall.

"We had benediction at Coole hall, but that was, I presume, years and years and years ago, when the

convent was in operation, they would have had Corpus Christi processions and Queen of the May processions and so on, and children of Mary processions. That has gone into abeyance in recent times. The Eucharistic procession in 2012 was one and only, really."

Success

A major success at the time, though, it perhaps sheds light on how to proceed into the future, with other Church events hosted by the parish in recent years providing equally valuable grace and insight. Coole parish has hosted over the years mission teams from the Redemptorists, Pure in Heart, and NET Ministries, all of which greatly profited the parish, and all of which are continuing to bear fruit around the country to this day.

On top of this, for the parish's 175th anniversary of the church in Coole, they hosted "a Sacrament a night", which saw the Church in Ireland descend upon Coole for the space of a blessed week.

"What we did, we had for the 175th anniversary of the Church in Coole, we started off with a Sacrament a night, so on the Sunday, we had a child baptised at Mass on the Sunday. Then on the Monday, Cardinal Sean Brady was the chief celebrant if you like – we had

exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, and the Sacrament of Confession. He spoke on the Sacrament of Penance. Then on the Tuesday, we had Confession first, and then I think we had Fr Nigel Charles...He spoke on the Holy Communion, the Eucharist. On the Thursday was my ordination date, and I was 25 years ordained, so we had that.

"Then on the Friday, we had a marriage, before the Sacrament of the Sick on Saturday. Fr James Gavigan, he was the main celebrant for the Sacrament of the Sick on the Saturday."

Confirmations followed hot on the heels of this, rounding out the perfect celebration of the seven sacraments with which Christ blesses his Church. Speaking about the celebrations, the grace Fr Skelly

encountered is evident, and he's hopeful that the heady days of Church celebration will return.

Minister

For now, however, he continues to minister to a Church labouring under the recent weight of the worst of the pandemic. With restrictions until very recently necessitating the postponement of many of the parish's social occasions, Fr Skelly is eager to see them take off again as soon as possible, with the framework in place for events to cater to every age and every social demographic. Bingo, amateur drama festivals, dances and socials have all echoed through the parish in not-too-distant memory, and he's hopeful it will all make a return.



Lourdes Grotto, Coole, erected to mark the Holy Year 2000.



Fr Oliver Skelly with Arthur Edmund Dease, nephew of Lieutenant Maurice James Dease, VC, beside the Dease memorial in the grounds of Coole church.

The Sunday Gospel

Fr Silvester
O'Flynn
OFM Cap.



In today's Gospel Reading (Luke 4: 21-30) we continue last Sunday's story of Jesus returning to his home town, Nazareth, where he preached in the local synagogue. After reading from Isaiah about the power of the Holy Spirit inaugurating a time of liberation and a new way of seeing life, he handed back the scroll and announced, "This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen." Sacred Scripture is God's word on paper. But like seeds in a paper envelope, the words are lifeless until they are planted in the compost of everyday living.

The initial reaction to the words of Jesus was very positive. The listeners were astonished at his gracious words. Gracious words are full of grace, conveying God's presence and power. They inspire our potential for goodness and love.

From approval to rejection

But see how quickly the mood is soured. Luke takes us on a journey of emotions from approval, through growing doubt, into anger and eventually into violence. It is left to the reader's imagination to put flesh on the story. Imagine the nudges and winks, the grunts of disapproval and the cynical guffaws. Local begrudgery begins to plant the seeds of doubt. First to speak is the voice of caution: "This is Joseph's son, isn't it?"

In other words, who does he think he is? Don't be swept off your feet by his outrageous claims.

The begrudger can usually mask his cynicism under the guise of humour which serves to rally fellow-travellers. The voice of parochial jealousy is heard, masked in a tone of pious admiration. "We heard all that happened at Capernaum." The voice hardens a little, "Do the same here in your own countryside."

No prophet is accepted in his own country

Sensing the negative mood, Jesus makes the immortal statement. "No prophet is ever accepted in his own country." It is not a new story. It happened years previously to the great holy men, Elijah and Elisha. Both got a poor reception at home but they were agents of miraculous healing to people outside the nation.

The locals think it is audacious of Jesus to couple

himself with these hero prophets of history. And sorer still is the implication that he is on a mission beyond the confines of Israel. Anger is now beyond control and violence takes over.

They spring to their feet and hustle him out of the town, intending to throw him off a cliff. The swaying journey up the hill anticipates another day, another crowd, another hill. The escape of Jesus is rather vague. "He slipped through the crowd and walked away." An angry crowd will not easily let the object of its wrath slip away. Luke is really hinting at that later day when Jesus would pass through this angry world on his journey back to the Father.

Idealists face rejection

The episode is consolation to all whose idealism or commitment to a good cause meet with resentment, jealousy and opposition. They are in good company

with Jesus who was rejected by his own neighbours. The horrible thing about jealousy is that it is a sick reaction to the talents or good fortune of another person. It is a poisonous parasite sucking growth out of a good tree.

Gossip is a contagious virus

It was amazing how rapidly the initial approval of Jesus at Nazareth swung in the opposite direction. The most active germ of negativity is gossip. It is something Pope Francis speaks about quite often. We have become familiar with wearing a face mask

to prevent the spread of a virus. We might profit too if we masked our mouths when tempted to spread contagion about another person. It is advisable to think before you talk, and to be guided by the five letters that spell the word think. Is it true? Is it helpful? Is it inspiring? Is it necessary? Is it kind? There is a story in the Gospel about a woman with a bad name. Some of the religious leaders were scandalised because Jesus did not hunt her away. She was not born with a bad name. It was given to her. I wonder who gave her the bad name? I bet it was the people who regarded themselves better than others.

Prayer

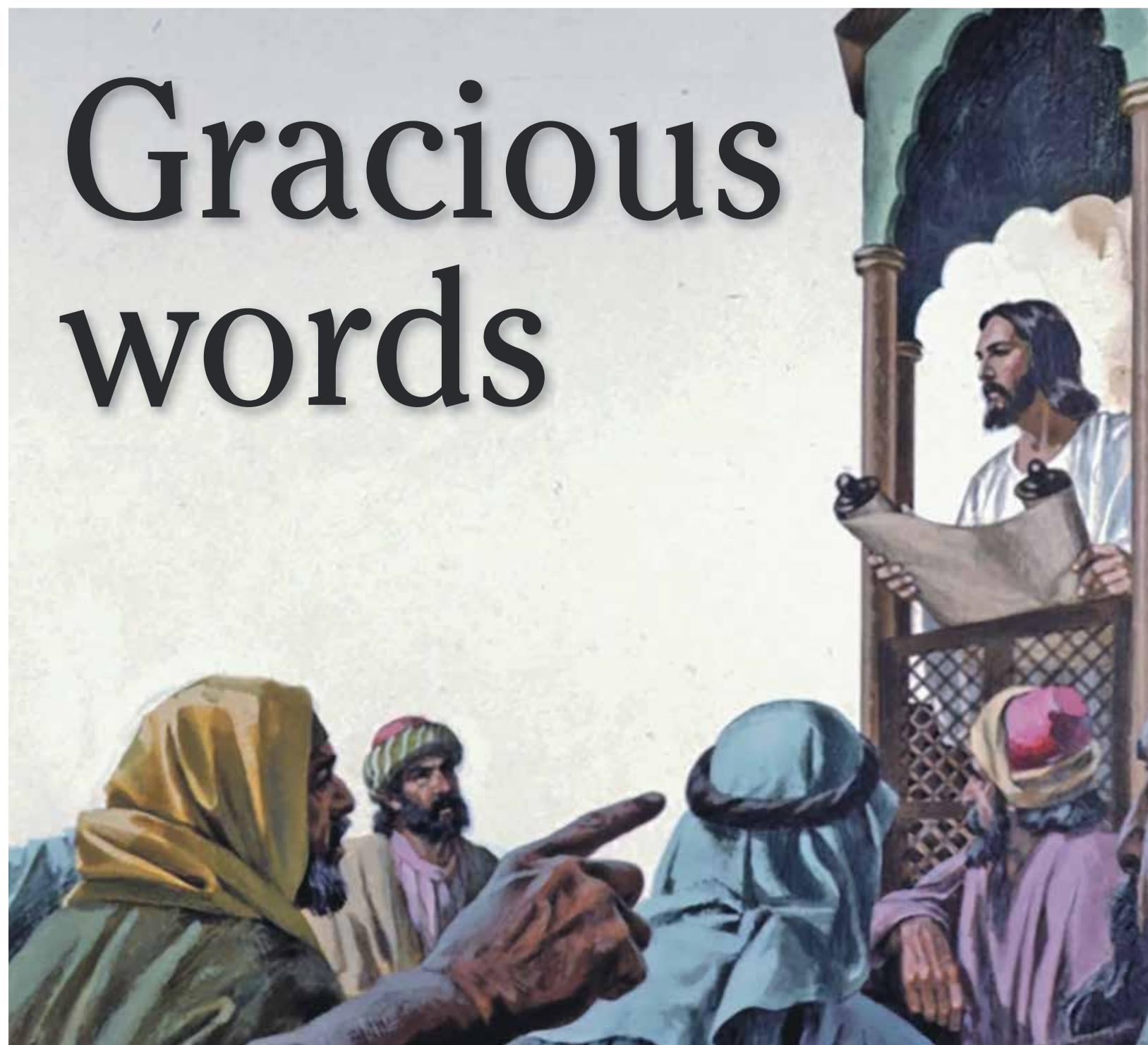
Gracious words are always patient and kind; they are never jealous or boastful or conceited; they are never rude or selfish. Gracious words do not take offence and are not resentful. The loving heart takes no pleasure in other people's sins but delights in the truth; it is always ready to excuse, to trust, to hope and to endure whatever comes. Love does not come to an end.

Lord, may our judgments be kind and our words gracious.

Is my talk poisonous or gracious?

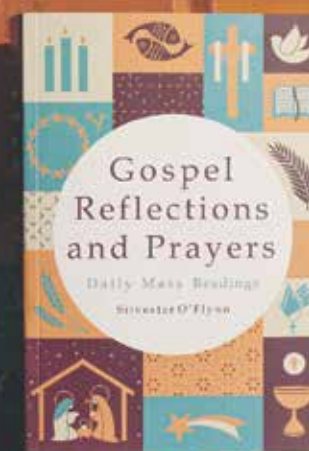
In contrast to the sick words of his opponents, the words

of Jesus were gracious. Today's second reading is St Paul's hymn to love. With a slight alteration we can take this text to describe the qualities of gracious speech.



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Irish Government should not recognise commercial surrogacy



Commercial surrogacy is tantamount to baby-buying, writes **David Quinn**

The Government has just announced the establishment of a special Oireachtas committee to examine the issue of international surrogacy. In practice, this means commercial surrogacy, that is, paying a woman to become pregnant with your baby.

Originally, Ireland was planning to allow so-called 'altruistic surrogacy' only, that is, where a woman agrees to bear a baby for another person or couple, but without being paid a fee for it, only expenses.

But because it is so hard to find surrogate mothers in Ireland, some couples are going abroad instead to places like Ukraine, and that means contacting commercial surrogacy companies in those countries.

“RTÉ certainly seems to agree, because the station regularly runs very soft, wholly sympathetic items about the issue”

When they come home, the couples can have difficulty being recognised as the legal parents of the children acquired via surrogacy. They are demanding that this be changed, in the interests of the children. They say it is unfair that it is so hard to become their legal parents and this puts the children at a disadvantage compared with other children.

Set out like that, the case seems unarguable; we should simply plough ahead and allow commercial surrogacy.

RTÉ certainly seems to agree, because the station regularly runs very soft, wholly sympathetic items about the issue. As usual,



our politicians are allowing themselves to be railroaded along. But it is not so simple. In fact, the area is an ethical minefield, both in its 'altruistic' and commercial forms.

First of all, before we even consider any commercial aspect, surrogacy splits motherhood in two, that is, a child would have a birth mother (the surrogate) and a genetic mother (whoever provided the egg).

Social mother

There may actually be a third mother, that is, the woman who raises the child. She is called the 'social mother', or 'intending mother' in the jargon now used in this area. She will not have used her womb to have the child precisely because she has used a surrogate instead, and she might not have used her egg either, meaning she will have to buy one, or find a woman who will donate eggs to her. (Almost certainly more than one egg will have to be used for a successful pregnancy).

The 'intending mother' or parent, is whoever intends raising the child. That will not be the surrogate because she intends all along to hand the child over once it is born. It will not be the genetic

mother either if she has sold or donated her eggs.

In other words, the intending mother might have no biological tie to the child whatsoever.

This brings us to another big difficulty, namely that surrogacy has little to no regard for the natural ties. This is very strange when the Government is currently passing legislation to make it easier for adopted children to find their natural parents. Why is it upgrading the natural ties with one hand, while downgrading them with the other? There is no consistency to it and a lot of hypocrisy.

A further problem before we consider commercial surrogacy, is that the surrogate is generally impregnated with more than one baby. But what happens if two or more babies look like they will come to full term, and the couple don't want that many? The answer is so-called 'pregnancy reduction', a euphemism for abortion.

Usually, a couple will agree to take twins if two babies 'take hold' in the womb, but not three. So the surrogate will usually be asked to have an abortion, and if she doesn't agree to that, then

she will have to raise the baby herself or place it for adoption.

Also, what happens if the surrogate changes her mind and decides to keep the baby she had agreed to hand over? Or if the 'intending' parents change their minds, especially when the surrogate is in a different country and the contract can't be enforced? Sometimes babies are left in limbo.

“This is what Ireland is now getting set to allow even as we are aghast at past adoption scandals here”

We can see, therefore, that surrogacy in all forms has intrinsic problems which simply can't be surmounted. It is why some European countries ban surrogacy completely.

Commercial surrogacy makes things even worse. The fees involved often run to tens of thousands of euro, with some going to the woman and some to the agency that recruits them. It is almost always low-income

women who come forward to rent out their wombs, whether in India, Thailand or Ukraine, or indeed, in countries like the United States. It is a case of relatively well-off couples paying much poorer women to have babies for them.

Rights

It is why UN expert, Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, has said: "There is no right to have a child under international law...Children are not goods or services that the State can guarantee or provide. They are human beings with rights."

In a report from 2018, she explains that if a surrogate mother receives remuneration for the transfer of a child, a sale occurs, as defined under international human rights law. She describes commercial surrogacy as tantamount to baby-buying.

This is what Ireland is now getting set to allow even as we are aghast at past adoption scandals here. It is as if we have learnt nothing.

One of the main justifications in favour of recognising commercial surrogacy is that it is happening anyway, and it is better to accept that

fact and regularise what is happening for the sake of the children involved.

But this simply legitimates what the UN considers to be the sale of babies. It also means that we drag down our levels to those of the black market.

“Ireland would be much better off helping to campaign for an international agreement that bans commercial surrogacy in toto”

Parents who have already been through this process probably do need to have their legal situations regularised in some way, but it cannot be *carte blanche*.

Ireland would be much better off helping to campaign for an international agreement that bans commercial surrogacy in toto.

The committee being established to examine the issue needs to hear from international experts well familiar with the pitfalls of the practice, including the numerous scandals. It cannot hear only from advocates.

'Live life to the full,' students told at Mass

Ruadhán Jones

Bishop Donal McKeown encouraged students to "live life to the full", as he celebrated Mass to launch Catholic schools' week 2022.

Jesus wants us "to be full of love and life", the bishop of Derry said, adding that this "is the message that Catholic schools have always tried to communicate by word and by deed".

"When we forget life to the full for each student and get caught up in league tables, we miss the point," Dr McKeown said.

Following Jesus' vision, Catholic schools have a "specific idea" of what leading a life to the full means, Dr McKeown continued, speaking before a congregation of primary and post-primary students in St Eugene's Cathedral, Derry.

However, he warned that we must recognise that "there are people who want to get rid of any role for faith in public life and especially in schools".

"We are told that Catholic education is a negative influence on our society and that we ought to have schools that must talk about everything – except making reference to God," Dr McKeown said. "There is clearly a campaign to blame Catholic schools for being something to be embarrassed about in a modern society."

But Catholic schools want "to form young people to be healthy citizens of a vibrant varied society. That, too, is part of handing on the idea of life to the fullest," Bishop McKeown said.

He also pointed out that Catholic schools offer a "wise education" that "integrates the various dimensions of a young person's life and seeks to help them flourish".

Dr McKeown invited "our schools to find opportunities in Catholic Schools Week to celebrate the great work that you do".

Catholic Schools Week runs from Sunday January 23 to 30. For more information visit www.catholicschools.ie.



Students carry pieces of a sign that was placed at the top of the church. Together, the pieces said: "Care, Hope, Pray, Act".



for Catholic schools



Photos: Stephen Latimer.



Bishop of Derry Donal McKeown celebrated Mass in St Eugene's Cathedral, Derry, January 20, to launch Catholic schools' week 2022.



Out&About

Visiting baby Jesus in the New Year



CARLOW: Four children visit the crib in the Sacred Heart Church in Borris, January 14. Photo: John Dowling.



DOWN: Dáithí Mac Gabhann helps launch the new St Mary's goalkeeper jersey and their specially commissioned Donate4Dáithí (<http://donate4daithi.org/>) St Mary's jersey, with college players Charlie Smyth and Charlie Shevlin and principal Prof. Peter Finn, January 18.



CARLOW: Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin Denis Nulty (centre left) visits the Carlow Capuchins with their provincial Bro. Sean Kelly (centre right). The Capuchins are leaving the town after 44 years service.

IN SHORT

Bishop Leahy launches new religious education programme

Bishop Brendan Leahy launched Credible Catholic, a new religious education programme for Catholic Voluntary Secondary School in Ireland, January 26.

Credible Catholic is "a wonderful programme that quenches the thirst of the mind, expands the outreach of the heart and points in the direction of doing many good actions", said Bishop Leahy, chair of the bishops' council for catechetics.

Dr Leahy added that the programme promises to be of great value to teachers and students, as it "responds to Jesus' call

to love not just with our heart but also with our mind".

The programme is an optional resource "which will be very helpful to teachers of religious education", a spokesperson for the bishops' council said.

"Credible Catholic aims to stimulate dialogue, encourage reflection and critical reasoning, foster religious literacy, build community, and nurture faith, and in doing all of these things, to promote student wellbeing," the spokesperson continued.

Bishop Leahy was joined at the webinar by Dr Alexander O'Hara, national director for catechetics of the Irish Catholic bishops' conference; Dr Tom Finnegan, lecturer in theology and religious education, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick; and by Ms

Kate Liffey, Chaplain at Saint Brendan's Community School, Birr, Co. Offaly.

The Credible Catholic programme, which features seven modules, is free and the multi-media materials can be downloaded from www.catholicschools.ie/crediblecatholic.

Nine-week novena to St Patrick broadcast online

A nine-week novena in honour of the father of Catholicism in Ireland, St Patrick, was launched in St Patrick's Cathedral, Armagh, January 19.

The novena takes place on Wednesday evenings at 7pm, to pray for the renewal of the Faith in Ireland at this time. The novena

began January 19 in St Patrick's Cathedral and will run until March 16.

The second broadcast took place in Our Lady Queen of Peace Church, Slemish, and on February 2 will be broadcast from St Patrick's Church, Saul, Co. Down. It will conclude Wednesday March 16 in St Patrick's Cathedral, Armagh.

The churches included in the broadcast schedule are: St Mary's Church, Westport, Co. Mayo; St Patrick's Church, Rathvilly, Co. Carlow; St Patrick's Well, Limerick, Co. Limerick; St Mary's Church, Pettigo, Co. Donegal.

St Patrick and Shalom World Prayer will broadcast the Novena every Wednesday in different Churches across Ireland. Visit www.swprayer.org for more information.

Edited by Ruadhán Jones
Ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie

Events deadline is a week in
advance of publication



LOUTH: The community of Dominican Nuns of the Monastery of St Catherine of Siena, Drogheda, celebrate the joyful occasion of Sr Léonie Marie Langley's first profession, January 6.



LOUTH: Sr Léonie is pictured with her family after making her first profession, January 6.



CORK: The chaplaincy team of University College Cork enjoy some downtime together, having spent the day planning for the new semester, January 17.



DOWN: Baby Máire, mum Eveanna and dad Ronan visit their old haunt, the Catholic Chaplaincy in Queen's University Belfast, January 14.



GALWAY: Sr Faustina and community cat Max (named after Polish St Maximillian Kolbe) of the Poor Clares Galway enjoy the fine weather, January 15.



ARMAGH: Archbishop of Armagh Eamon Martin is pictured with Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh John McDowell and singer Malachy Cush in the Market Place Theatre for the cathedral's partnership Advent celebration.

Events

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

Odds still stacked against tenants and homeless



Homelessness support and prevention services predict no improvement as Ireland becomes more inhospitable for the vulnerable, writes **Chai Brady**

Continued lack of housing, inflation and the stalling of construction during Covid has heightened the housing crisis, pushing Ireland further away from its targets.

While the Government has introduced a range of policies to support people attaining or retaining accommodation, the cost of rental accommodation has continued to rise making it unaffordable for many.

For the CEO of priest-founded housing charity Threshold, Covid-19 has created a disparity of outcomes for people, particularly between those who could work from home and increase their savings and people who had to avail of the pandemic unemployment payment, which has led to greater inequality and hugely different experiences of the pandemic.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, CEO John-Mark McCafferty said: "We're seeing a K-shaped result of Covid, which is, a group of people actually have more money in their pocket because of Covid and another group of people who are in those very much premises-based services, like hospitality, retail and others, they were relying solely on the pandemic unemployment payment."

Agreements

He explained that some tenants made agreements to pause rent payments with landlords when they were out of work but now have to pay them back.

"They are now having to make right those debts, those historical arrears. That's a real challenge for many people we assist. Renters are disproportionately in those sectors like retail, like hospitality, and they are the very ones that have been impacted by reduced hours, reduced salary, and that's still washing out as we move through this whole Covid process," Mr McCafferty warned.

The Parliamentary Budget Office has confirmed what most people already knew, that home ownership among young adults has "collapsed" and that compared to other countries housing costs are severely unaffordable. The trend of increasing rents and house prices was also said to continue – shooting past the rise in people's earnings.

Working at the coalface, Threshold assists, advises, advocates and medi-



ates with landlords and other statutory agencies, to keep tenants in their homes and "save them from the spectre of homelessness".

"Because we are a national charity, we work mostly with private renters," Mr McCafferty explains, saying that many of the issues revolve around the cost of rent "in the context of increasing energy bills and wider inflation, so we know rents have become increasingly unaffordable for many people on middle to low incomes for many years".

“There are changes coming into the legislation now but there are many legal reasons why tenancies can end”

Their focus is on homelessness prevention. Mr McCafferty says: "It's one thing to place a family in emergency accommodation after they've been evicted, what's much more structurally important is to prevent that family from being made homeless in the first place and we know that at least half of all households who are homeless are made homeless from private rentals, because landlords are ending tenancies."

Landlords can end tenancies for a variety of reasons including if themselves or one of their family members intends to move in, if they're going to undertake substantial physical changes to the property, or they intend to sell the property.

"There are changes coming into the legislation now but there are many legal reasons why tenancies

can end, there are also other ways, whereby landlords are not adhering fully to all of the rules and regulations and I suppose that's where Threshold comes in to advise and assist tenants to ensure that they know their rights in relation to asserting the protections of their tenancy," Mr McCafferty says.

"Where we can't prevent a tenancy from ending, we can often increase the amount of time a tenant might have in order to look for alternative accommodation. We can remind landlords that, for example, if a tenant has been with the lease for five or 10 years, they have a substantial notice period before they have to leave the tenancy and that buys time for the family to try and secure alternative housing."

Private rental

He added: "Many people may live in the private rental sector for a set period of time but they wish to own their own home so many are trying to save for a deposit and many simply cannot do that."

Twenty-five years ago the same people would have been able to enter the property ladder, but now, after household costs, "all their income goes on rent" leaving them with no savings for a mortgage deposit, Mr McCafferty says.

The price of housing has risen by 77% since 2011, according to the Parliamentary Budget Office, while earnings have only increased by 23%. Construction costs have also increased according to the Construction Industry Federation, who represent developers and builders.

"There's a historical issue of the stop-start construction industry activ-

ity over the last two years because of the various lockdowns.

"We're not seeing the level of housing output that had been planned for and anticipated over the last two years and that supply issue is a real challenge because there's been a growing level of demand for housing, it has grown rather than reduced because of these pauses in construction activity, add to that then the increase in the cost of labour and material in the construction industry and we will see henceforth a reduction in the number of units that can be built for the money that's available to Government," Mr McCafferty says.

“There are a variety of challenges for people depending on whether they are renting alone, in a house share or as a family”

"Whether that's social housing or owner-occupied housing, or the cost-rental sector which is this new sector being provided by housing associations – there are a number of stress points."

With a mortgage for a house costing 10% of the value of the property for first-time buyers, Mr McCafferty says prospective homeowners face "very, very substantial sums".

"So even from that point of view of families aspiring for home ownership, or moving out of a one or two-bed rented apartment into maybe a larger house that they want to buy and raise their kids in, many simply can't do that and have no prospects of being able to do it because so much of

their household income is given over to rent."

Threshold are currently "very busy" in terms of calls, web chats and video calls, and they foresee demand for their services continuing at a high level.

Looking to the future, and the effect of Covid, Mr McCafferty says that "We haven't seen all of the job losses play out yet, some of the private sector firms are still supported by the Covid-related supports, it's probably masking the fact that some of them may run out of business anyway and that will take a while to wash through."

"The accumulated debts that some tenants have from the drop in income over the last two years... that debt is eventually going to manifest itself in terms of perhaps historic non-payment of rents or other debts that aren't rent related but which people's limited and maybe reduced household budgets can't stretch, so they may be trying to pay off debt in other areas of their life and that puts further pressure on their ability to pay the rent. That's an ongoing issue," he says.

There are a variety of challenges for people depending on whether they are renting alone, in a house share or as a family.

Homelessness risk

Single people are more likely to be at risk of homelessness according to Threshold, they are less likely to be rehoused due to it being more expensive. Some couples and households will have multiple income sources, meaning a single person has less purchasing power.

House shares can also create their own difficulties without the landlord being involved. Mr McCafferty says: "I think what's also important is that there can be disputes between tenants in a house share, they may be strangers to one another and they have to share because they can't afford a place on their own, you could have a situation where one tenant is paying the bills and the rent and others are not paying are a pay-

“Whether that's social housing or owner-occupied housing, or the cost-rental sector which is this new sector being provided by housing associations so there are a number of stress points”

ing less than they should and you get tensions and you get conflict."

Home working

He adds: "It's an incredibly stressful time, because it continues to be a very uncertain time for people. You've got to throw into the mix as well people working from home, that's fine if you own your own place and you have plenty of room.

"Go back to the scenario of three or four adults all sharing a house, they're probably working from their bedroom rather than a spare room. They may not even have enough space in their bedroom, they may not have enough space for a desk and a chair, they may be sitting on the bed and working from home. Even from a health and safety point of view it's problematic and it's stressful.

While Threshold work to prevent homelessness, Cork Simon work with those who have already lost their homes"

"Because there's a lack of supply there's a lack of options, if you're a private renter and you have an issue with your tenancy because there's dampness or there's mould or the landlord hasn't fixed the boiler or a window or something, if you approach the landlord and they are not fixing things in a timely manner and to the extent which is reasonable you might find yourself in a dispute.



"Now you may be reticent to enter into a dispute with that landlord because you know there are very few options available to you because the landlord may try to end the tenancy as a result because you're seen as a hassle."

Threshold was founded by Corkman and Capuchin Fr Donal O'Mahony in 1978 and it is continuing his works of charity. They operate a phone line, open from 9am-9pm at 1800454454 and are available from 9.30am-5pm on web chat and video conference.

While Threshold work to prevent homelessness, Cork Simon work with those who have already lost their homes.

Paul Sheehan of Cork Simon told *The Irish Catholic* that many of the

people accessing their emergency shelter would have been depending on the private rental sector, many of whom would be single and looking for one-bedroom apartments or flats. However, when these properties become available, they are "prohibitively expensive".

Rising living costs and inflation are another cause for concern for the charity, with Mr Sheehan saying "everybody is feeling the pinch, particularly around fuel costs".

"Quite often at our soup run we would meet people who are in private rented housing but all of their resources are going to keeping that roof over their head, they have nothing left for the basics like food, not to

mind trying to heat their home. We see them turning up at the soup run for the basics, for food, and also quite often for social contact and we're quite certain that we'll be seeing some of them over the next few months – looking for emergency accommodation," he said.

Mr Sheehan says Cork Simon has been working closely with the HSE along with Cork County Council. During the pandemic they have endeavoured to help vulnerable people isolate, referring them to specific HSE accommodation where he says they also get the health support they need.

Mr Sheehan said: "The city council were able to identify additional beds particularly in B&Bs around the city which allowed us to reduce the capacity temporarily in our emergency shelter so we didn't have things like double occupancy rooms and what-not and that alleviated the pressure somewhat."

Efforts

"There were tremendous efforts by the HSE in particular to make sure people using our services were vaccinated and that programme rolled out very successfully, not only the first round of vaccinations but the second round and the booster rounds."

He added that while Cork Simon encourage their service users to get vaccinated, it is not a necessity for them in order to access the charity's services – but they encourage all other hygiene protocols.

The homelessness situation has deteriorated in Cork according to November figures from the Department of Housing which state 443

adults were in emergency accommodation, a 13% increase in the last year.

"We've seen a slow but steady rise in the number of people depending on the emergency accommodation since around August," Mr Sheehan said.

Regarding the November figures, he said "it was the highest monthly figure since November 2019, so that back to pre-pandemic levels".

Rising living costs and inflation are another cause for concern for the charity"

"The story is pretty similar for the south-west, for Cork and Kerry when you look at the number of men, women and children in emergency accommodation, in November it was 661. That was up 6% since the beginning of this year.

"But I think interestingly it's up 14% since April 2021, and that's interesting because that's when the Government's moratorium on rent increases and evictions into homelessness were lifted, when general restrictions around Covid were lifted so obviously the increasing cost of rent is beginning to kick in and we're beginning to see the impact of that now."

Both charities are doing their best to support the most vulnerable, but the dire need for increased housing supply is the bottom-line problem that is causing much of the strife they are trying to alleviate – an issue that continues to wrack the nation.

It's my way of leaving Cork a better place.

Helping people who are homeless after I've passed on... that's my legacy to Cork, the city I love.

Join me by leaving a gift to Cork Simon in your Will.



For more information please call Leona on 021 4929 418 or email Leona@corksmon.ie

Thank you Irish Catholic readers from Merchants Quay Ireland

We're on this earth for a reason... how you lift lives up all year through

2021 presented serious hardship, huge challenges, and great hope at Merchant Quay Ireland. Thank you for being the wonderful friend you are. Legacies Manager, Emma Murphy can tell you without a doubt that some people wouldn't have made it without you.

As we look forward to the New Year, all the MQI team want to thank you for being our strength in 2021. You were with us every single day. In the early months before indoor dining could reopen, your generosity expanded our outreach teams, so we could bring more help onto the streets. For people who were utterly lost and alone, you were their lifeline with daily food, water, and care. Wherever clients found a place to lie, you helped us be there to offer support. Thank you!

Through the cold weather you provided hats, gloves, and scarves. You kept people from burning in the hot days of summer with sunscreen and lip salve, wipes, and band-aids in care kits. Every day you provided new socks and underwear whenever they were needed. These basic essentials, offered with kind words and understanding, did so much more than restore dignity and bring comfort. Your help made it possible for staff to start building with clients the trusting relationships that lead to recovery... where life can start anew.

Nourishing body and mind at Riverbank drop-in centre

Your welcome was there when indoor dining restrictions were lifted and Riverbank re-opened. People arrived

so grateful to be able to come inside for a shower, a meal and to talk. For those who were deeply depressed and in crisis, you made it possible to offer extensive mental health support not only during the week but also on Sundays. So that along with a nourishing, hot Sunday lunch, the most vulnerable and isolated people in our community could get professional help for their anxiety and trauma. **Your humanity was a comfort to people in their darkest hour.**

Supporting vulnerable women out of exploitation and homelessness

You responded when frightened women began to open up about their need for safety. Services for women have been a priority since before the pandemic. Female clients have been advocating for a place where they can feel safe talking about the trauma and violence they experience in homelessness. But last year saw many more women in dangerous situations, and the demand for female support became desperately urgent.

You stepped in to help when it was most crucial. Legacies and donations made it possible to hire two female key workers to begin responding to our most vulnerable women... building trust, listening with patience, offering ways out of exploitation and

the misery of homelessness. **Thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your leadership and vision.**

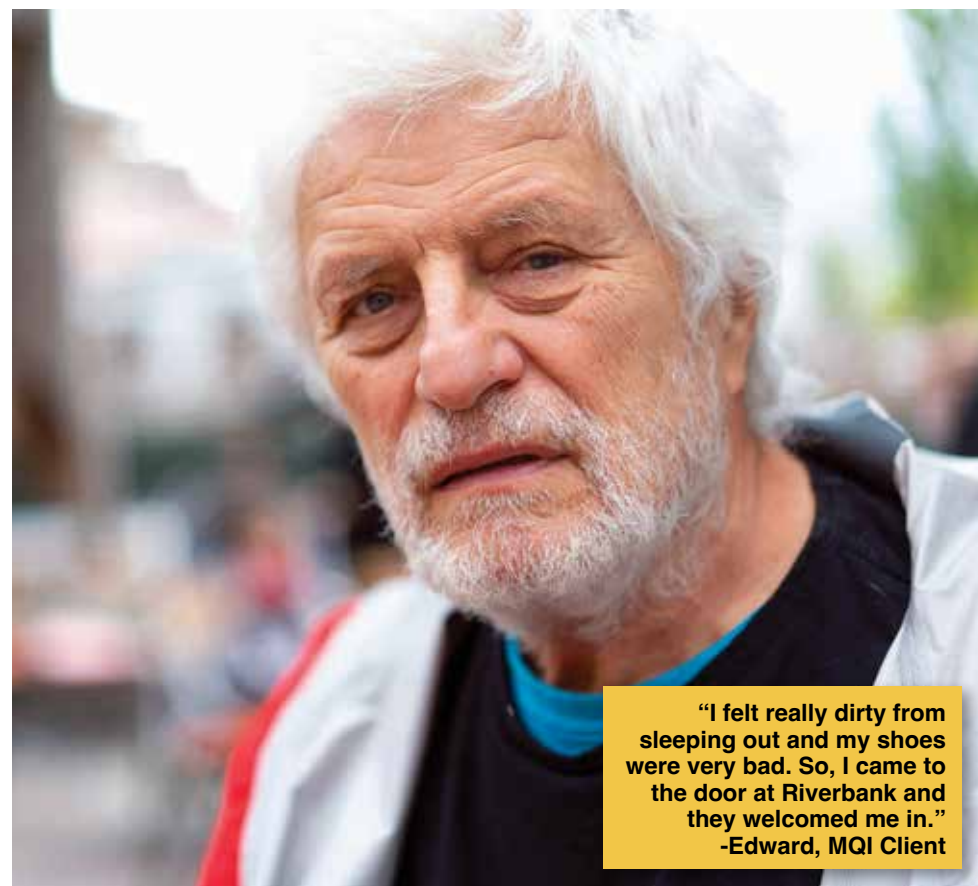
Your wisdom and inspiration shared in the first MQI Book of Love

You also shared your life's legacy as words of encouragement and your own lessons learned in the first volume of MQI's Book of Love. This very special collection of stories from the heart is being compiled and bound for clients to read and take inspiration from. Thank you for sharing the value of your experiences.

To find out how your legacy and your life's wisdom can touch the lives of our clients now and for years to come through the MQI Book of Love – just ring Emma Murphy at 01-5240965.

It takes every single one of us, every single day to do this work together. **Merchants Quay Ireland is living proof of the commitment you show -- the same goal clients work towards** to fulfil our potential and make the world a little bit kinder and more compassionate. Thank you for caring and for sharing your values with us as we embrace 2022 together.

From the hearts of MQI clients: Thank you for a refuge from the streets, for hope and dignity, for second chances, for all your tender mercies...



"I felt really dirty from sleeping out and my shoes were very bad. So, I came to the door at Riverbank and they welcomed me in."
-Edward, MQI Client

Declan – MQI Volunteer



Elizabeth – Donor Care



Lourdes – Community Engagement Worker



At MQI we respect everyone who turns to us for help – and many are just beginning their fresh start in life. So while these quotes are directly from clients, their names are changed and stock photographs of models are used for illustrative purposes and to protect client privacy. Thank you for your understanding.

"It was around Christmas week. I was in a sleeping bag out in the rain. MQI staff said, 'Phil, you are going to get pneumonia' because I was actually soaking wet. So, they brought me to Riverbank for a shower and gave me hot food. It was wonderful."

Phil, Riverbank homeless centre client

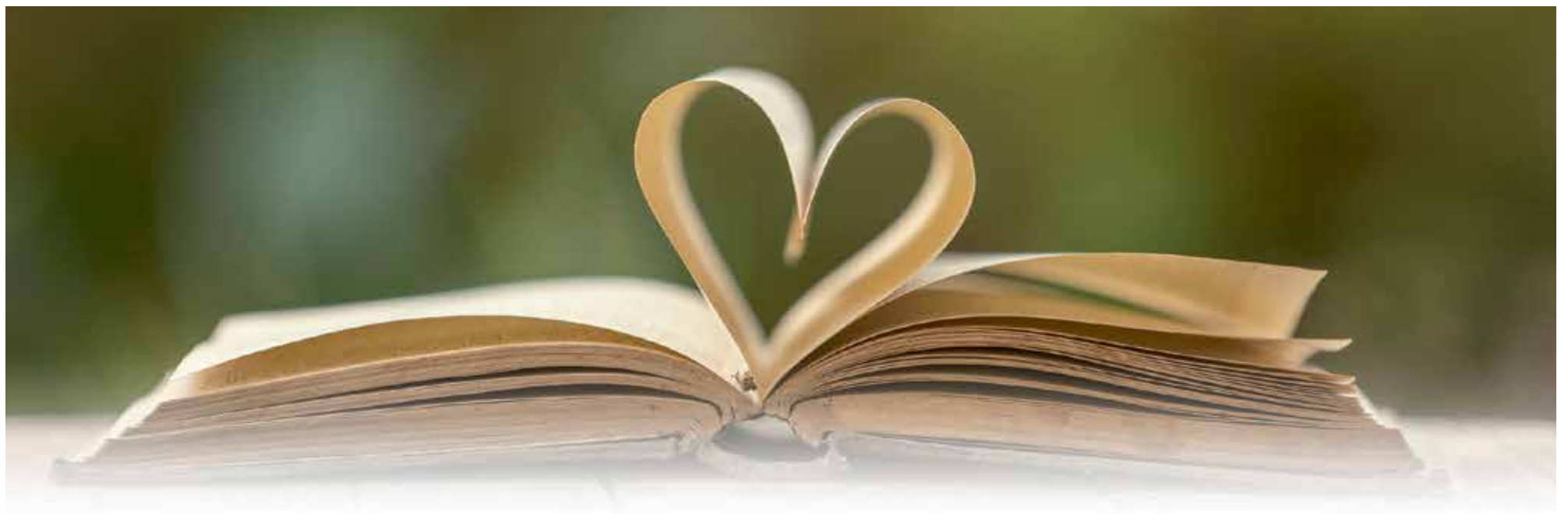
"You've changed not just my life – you've changed my whole family's life too. My younger sisters now look up to me. I have a relationship with my mother that I never had before. I am so lucky, I get to start my life again, you know? Anything is possible."

Marianne, former client

"I bless the day I met Mary who works here. I felt really dirty from sleeping out and my shoes were very bad. So I came to Riverbank, and they welcomed me in. When I go into the chapel, I light a candle for everyone who ever helped Merchants Quay. I hope they know their kindness saves lives, they saved mine."

Edward, Riverbank homeless centre client

To find out how your legacy and your life's wisdom can touch the lives of our clients now and for years to come through the MQI Book of Love – just ring **Emma Murphy at 01-5240965**



Write your page in the Merchants Quay Ireland Book of Love

You will not only be remembered.
At the heart of Merchants Quay Ireland, your story will live on.

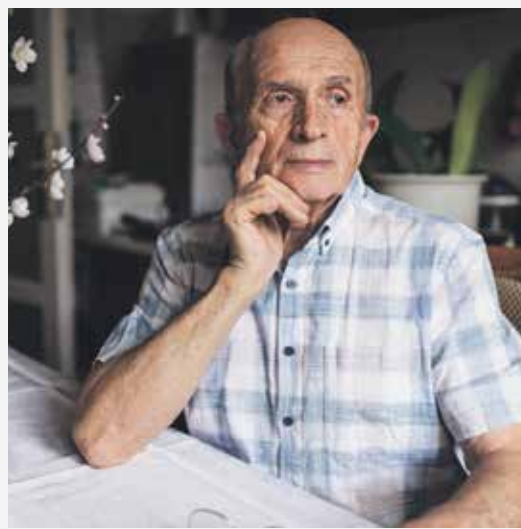
When you remember the work of Merchants Quay in your Will, your legacy ensures that Ireland's homeless and those who battle addiction will always have a place to turn.

But your words, your story - your testament – can also be a powerful force for good through the generations.

Sometimes the greatest healing comes in the gentle words of a stranger.

Someone we've never met touches our heart and mind with their story.

The **MQI Book of Love** is written by you for clients of Merchants Quay Ireland's homeless and drugs services to read. It is your enduring moment to offer them hope and encouragement. To inspire them with your insight and words of wisdom, gained through your own life's experiences: your struggles, lessons and victories.



The **MQI Book of Love** will be cherished here forever, always growing as more of our supporters add their pages. It will be kept and read here at Merchants Quay Ireland by people who are homeless, struggling with mental health problems and addiction, year after year.

Send your message through the generations to raise them up when they need it most.

Help them to always remember that they are loved.

Fill their hearts with your message of understanding and compassion.

Inspire them in the knowledge that you cared enough to think of them in your quietly amazing way.

This is your chapter in MQI's history -- your outstretched hand to the homeless.

A simple guide for your solicitor

When you leave a gift in your Will, the legacy of your story will also be shared with future generations. To remember MQI's work, here's information for your solicitor:

"I give to Merchants Quay Ireland of 24 Merchants Quay, Dublin 8, Registered Charity Number 20026240, X% of the residue of my estate whatsoever and wheresoever, and I direct that the receipt of the Treasurer or other officer for the time being of the said Organisation shall be a full and sufficient discharge of the same."

To receive your information pack on how to leave your legacy and your unique story in **MQI's Book of Love**, speak privately with **Emma Murphy** at 01-5240965 or Emma.Murphy@mqi.ie
You're never under any obligation and Emma is happy to help.



Merchants Quay Ireland
Homeless & Drugs Services





**A gift in your Will can secure homes for generations.
Including Threshold is a meaningful way to support those
at risk of homelessness.**

To find out more information on how to include Threshold in your Will,
please email **catherine.murray@threshold.ie** or call **01 6353 629**.

*We would also like to thank the Irish Catholic readers who kindly donated in 2021 to help those
at risk of homelessness. Your support means everything.*

The Irish Catholic

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World Report

IN BRIEF

Catholic politician rejects accusations in Islamophobia report

● A Catholic politician has objected to her inclusion in a report on Islamophobia in Europe, saying that it is based on “false accusations”.

Marijana Petir, a member of the Croatian parliament, said that the reference to her and others in the European Islamophobia Report 2020, published on December 29, 2021, amounted to an “attack on freedom of speech.”

The 886-page study, which defines Islamophobia as “anti-Muslim racism,” cited Ms Petir, a former member of the European Parliament, in a section entitled “Islamophobia in Croatia National Report 2020,” one of 31 country reports.

A footnote cited an article referring to a speech she gave in 2015, published in the Croatian weekly news magazine *Nacional* on November 25, 2020.

Ms Petir told CNA January 21 that the description of her 2015 speech, in both the report and the article, was inaccurate.

Popular Marian icon in Rome gets check-up

● Art restorers from the Vatican Museums checked the conservation of an important Byzantine Marian icon in Rome January 20.

The image of Our Lady *Salus Populi Romani* — Protection of the Roman People — was found still to be in “excellent condition,” according to a statement.

The icon, which has been revered by the people

of Rome for centuries, underwent a months-long restoration in 2017.

In January 2018, the image of Mary and the Child Jesus was returned to the Pauline (also called Borghese) Chapel of the Basilica of St Mary Major in Rome. It is now kept inside an air-conditioned display case to ensure its continued conservation.

Lebanese archbishop highlights country's hunger pangs

● On the outskirts of Tyre, the ancient coastal city in southern Lebanon where Jesus preached, life now has become one of impoverishment, as it has for most of the population of Lebanon.

“For two years, our country has been in a terrifying economic crisis. Our families are living in great distress,” Maronite Archbishop Charbel Abdallah of Tyre told *Catholic News Service*.

Most people’s “salary only allows them to live for two days.” Lebanon’s financial meltdown has been characterised by the World Bank as one of the worst worldwide since the 1850s; nearly 80% of the population now lives in poverty. With soaring inflation, basic needs, even for the previously middle class, have become out of reach.

Pope calls for prayers for Tonga

● In the wake of a massive underwater volcanic eruption in Tonga, subsequent tsunamis and now contamination from volcanic ash and saltwater, Pope Francis has appealed for prayers for the people of the region.

“My thoughts go to the people of the islands of Tonga, struck in recent days by the eruption of the underwater volcano, which caused enormous material damage. I am spiritually close to all the people suffering,

imploping God for the relief of their suffering,” the Pope said at the end of his general audience talk in the Vatican’s Paul VI audience hall.

“I invite everyone to join me in praying for these brothers and sisters,” he said.

The massive eruption January 15 triggered a series of tsunamis that inundated coastal communities, destroying homes, contaminating water supplies and cutting off power and communications.

Region hosting Olympic skiing has history of Catholic persecution

Chongli, a popular resort town and venue for the main skiing events during the upcoming Winter Olympics, holds a history of persecution and massacre of Catholics in the region during the imperial and communist regimes.

The attention on China, host of the February 4-20 Winter Games, has focused on the coronavirus pandemic, diplomatic boycotts due to crimes against humanity against Uyghur Muslims, constant trampling of human rights and an intensified crackdown on religious freedom.

But ucanews.com reported the Olympics have brought to the fore a little-known massacre of Catholics in Hebei province and the neighbouring Chahar region during the anti-Christian insurrection, Chinese civil war and Cultural Revolution under Mao Zedong.

The greater Chahar region, which includes Xuanhua and Xiwanzi-Chongli dioceses, has been a Catholic stronghold since the arrival of missionaries in the late 17th century and early 18th century.

The first bout of persecution against Christians started in 1723 when the Manchu-Qing emperor banned all Christian missions in mainland China, ucanews.com reported. The ban prompted missionaries to move outside of the Great Wall at Kalgan — now Zhangjiakou — and to settle in Xiwanzi village.



Workers move a sign at the Thaiwoo ski resort near skiing venues of the 2022 Winter Olympics in Chongli, a popular ski resort town in China. Photo: CNS.

The ban was lifted in 1858.

More missionaries, notably Belgian priests from the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, or Scheut Fathers, arrived and contributed to making the region a haven for Catholic missionaries and the Faithful.

The 1899-1901 Boxer Rebellion, an anti-foreign, anti-colonial and anti-Christian uprising, sought to destroy Westerners, including Christians who enjoyed privileged positions in China. Supported by the imperial Chinese army, the Boxer militia carried out brutal campaigns against Christians across northern China, including today’s provinces of Hebei, Shandong and

Chahar.

Many Faithful were killed and about 5,000 took shelter at the Cathedral Church of Xiwanzi and survived the massacre, according to *Bitter Winter*, a magazine on human rights and religious liberty.

Later, many Catholics joined the anti-communist side after the end of World War II. The communists started to view Catholics as enemies colluding with foreign forces. For instance, the communists detained and tortured 33 Trappist monks of Our Lady of Consolation Trappist Abbey at Yangjiaping of Xuanhua, leading to their deaths in 1937.

In the worst violence in 1946, the communists attacked

Kiwanzi village. About 1,000 civilians, mostly Catholics, were tortured and killed. Two years later, the communists recaptured and ravaged Chongli.

Following the communist takeover of China in 1949, Catholics in the Chahar region and other parts continued to face abuses and persecution.

In 1957, the communists set up the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, the state-sanctioned body to control the Catholic Church in China. Catholic bishops, clergy and Faithful who refused to join the association were abused and tortured.

French bishops offer advice on upcoming elections

France’s Catholic bishops urged citizens to use upcoming elections to restore basic freedoms and “rules of civility”.

“We are going through tough and perilous times, but fear is always a bad counsellor, whereas hope opens the way to courageous and healthy choices,” said the Permanent Council of the Paris-based bishops’ conference.

“The risk of fracturing our national community is real, as is the resurgence of international tensions. We cannot allow ourselves to be locked into bitterness and discouragement.”

French citizens will vote for a president

April 10, against a background of coronavirus restrictions and concerns over unemployment and national identity. Elections to the 577-seat National Assembly will be in June.

In a 60-page report, *Hope Does Not Disappoint*, the bishops said the Catholic Church had failed in its response to sexual abuse by clergy, which was exposed on a large scale in an October report by an independent commission.

However, the bishops said they still wished to “offer reflections with humility” on the current situation, at a time when politicians were tempted by secu-

rity concerns to “undermine freedom of expression, association, education and even worship,” as well as “the equality of citizens”.

“There will be no true and lasting security without scrupulous respect for personal freedom,” the bishops’ said. Among key priorities, they said Catholics should back policies “promoting liberty, equality and fraternity” and unconditional respect for all human life, as well as an authentically integral ecology, as urged by Pope Francis, to foster “a more sober way of life, less focused on consumption”.

Church in Ethiopia renews calls for aid

The Catholic Eparchy of Adigrat in Ethiopia has reiterated its urgent calls for dialogue and unhindered humanitarian access in Tigray, as the UN highlighted an opportunity for a peaceful settlement of the conflicts in the northern region.

Father Abraha Hagos,

director of the Adigrat Catholic Secretariat, said since December, the Church has been unable to deliver emergency aid to people because of war.

He said Adigrat, which covers the entire Tigray region, needs an urgent response to end the humanitarian crisis.

“We would like to call upon all our partners and other humanitarian aid organisations to continue urging and lobbying the international community, the United Nations, faith and rights organisations ... and diplomatic societies to push for political dialogue

for peace and for unlimited access to humanitarian aid,” Father Hagos said in a statement January 17.

“We are asking from our partners ... possible humanitarian aid” as well as asking them to be the “voice of the war-affected people”.



Edited by Jason Osborne
jason@irishcatholic.ie

Blesseds abound



Images are displayed on a screen of Jesuit Fr Rutilio Grande, Franciscan Fr Cosme Spessotto, top row, laymen Nelson Rutilio Lemus, Manuel Solórzano, during their beatification Mass in El Salvador. Photo: CNS.

Pro-choice messages projected onto US basilica

Pro-life Catholic leaders reacted with shock and disgust at an activist group's projection of pro-choice messages on the facade of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington DC, on the eve of the annual March for Life.

The group Catholics for Choice took responsibility for the images, which were beamed from across the street from the basilica while a prayer vigil to end abortion was going on inside.

In large letters visible from the basilica, the messages read "Pro Choice

Catholics you are not alone," "1 in 4 abortion patients is Catholic," and "Pro Choice Catholics".

Other slogans included the words "Stop stigmatising" and "Start listening" on the church. The words were projected on both the 329-foot bell tower and upper facade of the church above the front entrance.

Ashley Wilson, director of communications and strategy for Catholics for Choice, tweeted an explanation of the group's protest.

"I know that my faith teaches Catholics to honour personal conscience," she

wrote. "And yet, the Catholic hierarchy seeks to polarise pro-choice Catholics and villainise people who make the moral choice to have abortions."

"I am tired of feeling shame and stigma for being a pro-choice Catholic," Ms Wilson added. "And I'm not here for people to judge my own personal relationship with God."

At 6.42pm EST Catholics for Choice tweeted: "Fact: 68% of Catholics want #RoeVWade to remain the law of the land. The #MarchForLife & @uscbb want folks to think

they speak for Catholics, but nothing could be further from the truth."

The images were first reported on Twitter at 6.31pm EST by reporter Jack Jenkins of Religious News Service. Widely shared on social media, the images drew some support but also sharp denunciations.

"The attempted desecration is enormous. Diabolical," Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone of San Francisco tweeted, continuing "Mother Mary, pray for them, now and at the hour of death. Amen."

Afghanistan: Most dangerous place to be Christian

Afghanistan has unseated North Korea for the dubious distinction of the most dangerous country in the world for Christians, according to a group that reports on global Christian persecution.

A takeover of the government by the Taliban has made it even harder — now, impossible — to live openly as a Christian, advocacy group Open Doors writes in its annual World Watch List.

"The Taliban will make sure that Islamic rules and customs are implemented and kept. Christian converts

don't have any option but to obey them. If a Christian's new faith is discovered, their family, clan or tribe has to save its honour by disowning the believer, or even killing them. This is widely considered to be justice," the group writes.

"Alternatively, since leaving Islam is considered a sign of insanity, a Christian who has converted from Islam may be forcibly sent to a psychiatric hospital."

Afghanistan is over 99% Muslim, with the majority being Sunni. There

are small groups of Christians, including about 200 Catholics, as well as Buddhists, Hindus, and Bahá'ís.

Overall, 360 million Christians worldwide face persecution, according to Open Doors, an increase of 20 million from last year.

The "top ten" countries with the most Christian persecution this year are Afghanistan, North Korea, Somalia, Libya, Yemen, Eritrea, Nigeria, Pakistan, Iran, and India.

Vatican roundup

St Irenaeus declared 'Doctor of Unity'

● Pope Francis on Friday officially declared St Irenaeus of Lyon as the 37th Doctor of the Church, with the title Doctor Unitatis ('Doctor of Unity').

"May the doctrine of such a great Master encourage more and more the path of all the Lord's disciples towards full communion," the Pope wrote in a decree signed on January 21.

The Pope signed the decree mid-way through the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, taking place on January 18-25.

"St Irenaeus of Lyon, who came from the East, exercised his episcopal ministry in the West: he was a spiritual and theological bridge between Eastern and Western Christians," Pope Francis wrote.

"His name, Irenaeus, expresses that peace which comes from the Lord and which reconciles, restoring unity."

St Irenaeus is a 2nd-century bishop and writer revered by both Catholics and Orthodox Christians and known for refuting the heresies of Gnosticism with a defence of both Christ's humanity and divinity.

Roman Curia's Lenten retreat disrupted again by Covid-19

● For the third consecutive year, Pope Francis will not be gathering together with the Roman Curia for a spiritual retreat amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

Pope Francis has asked members of the Roman Curia to make their own arrangements for a private Lenten retreat from Sunday, March 6 to Friday, March 11.

All papal events will be cancelled between these dates, including the general audience that would have taken place on Wednesday, March 9.

The Pope usually spends five days on

retreat together with members of the Roman Curia participating in Lenten spiritual exercises.

The retreats took place in the Alban Hills southeast of Rome in a retreat house in the town of Ariccia from 2014 to 2020, although the Pope was unable to participate in 2020 due to a cold.

A statement from the Holy See press office on January 20 said that the retreat would not take place in Ariccia this year due to "the continuing epidemic emergency caused by Covid-19".

Apostolic visitor appointed for Eritrean Catholics in US, Canada and Europe

● Pope Francis appointed an apostolic visitor for Eritrean Catholics in the US, Canada and Europe, January 19.

The Pope named Fr Tesfaldet Tekie Tsada, chaplain of the Eritrean community of Los Angeles, on January 19 as apostolic visitor of Eritrean Catholics of the Alexandrian Ge'ez Rite in the two countries.

The Vatican announced on the same day that the Pope had chosen an apostolic visitor for Eritrean Catholics in Europe: Msgr Kesete Ghebreyohannes Weldegebriel, protosyncellus of the Archeparchy of Asmara, the metropolitan see of the Eritrean Catholic Church.

The move follows the Pope's decision in January 2020 to appoint an apostolic visitor for Ethiopian Catholics in Europe and name an apostolic visitor for Ethiopian Catholics in the US and Canada in July of that year.

In the Latin Rite Church, an apostolic visitor refers to officials who perform a short-term mission on behalf of the Pope. But in the Eastern Catholic Churches, an apostolic visitor often has a long-term role supervising communities which do not yet have their own ordinary.



Letter from Rome



John L. Allen Jr

Over the centuries, the Catholic Church often has led the pack in two distinct specialties: Breaking your heart, and then stitching it back together again with a fresh infusion of hope. This past week brought classic examples of both.

Out of Munich, we got a report from a law firm commissioned by the archdiocese documenting almost 500 cases of clerical sexual abuse stretching over 74 years, including four abusers who served on the watch of the future Pope Benedict XVI when he served as Archbishop of Munich from 1977 to 1982.

Whatever one makes of the report at the level of detail – and there's already vigorous debate over its assertions about the then-Cardinal Ratzinger – on the whole, it's another depressing reminder of the way the abuse scandals have laid waste to both the Church's moral credibility and also its internal morale.

Yet beyond Munich, there's also Mustafa. He's a 5-year-old from Syria born without limbs due to a developmental problem during pregnancy, apparently caused by his mother's inhalation of chemical weapons during an attack by government forces during the Syrian Civil War. His father, Munzir al-Nazzal, also lost a leg during the conflict.

“The al-Nazzal family, which has experienced far more than its fair share of life's hardships, is getting a new start”

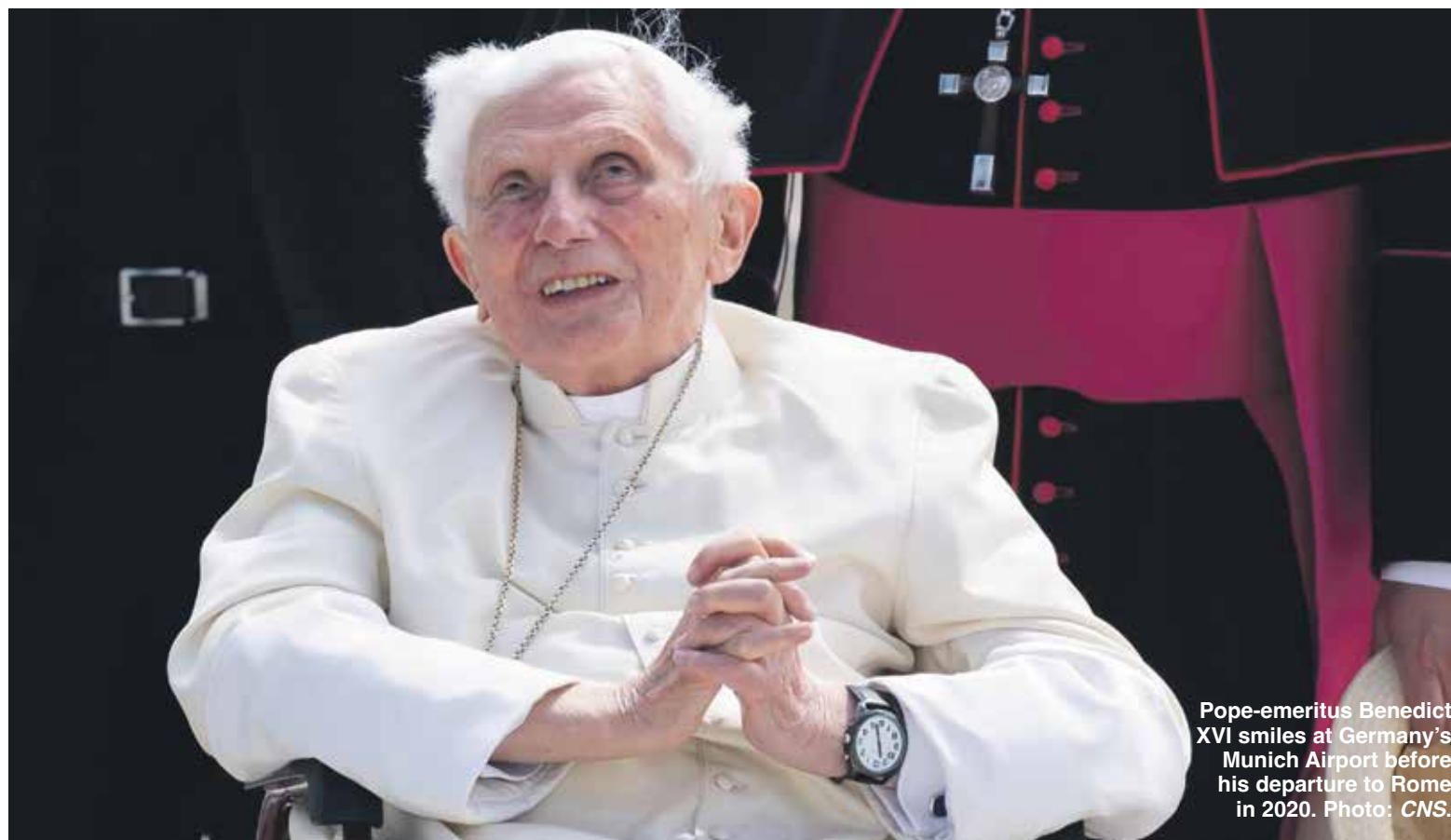
A picture by an Italian photographer of the two playing together went viral after winning a photo competition in Siena, and a collection inspired by the photo generated more than \$100,000 to fund the prosthetics treatment that both father and son need.

Family

Now the entire family, which also includes two sisters and the mother, Zeibab, has left their refugee camp in Turkey to settle in Siena, a move arranged by a variety of civil organisations led by the Archdiocese of Sienna-Colle and the Catholic charity Caritas, which already had a strong presence in Turkey aiding refugees. The family will live in an apartment provided by Caritas while traveling to the Vigoroso Prosthesis Centre, near Bologna, for the necessary medical treatment.

In other words, the al-Nazzal family, which has experienced far

Munich and Mustafa needed for week's Catholic story



Pope-emeritus Benedict XVI smiles at Germany's Munich Airport before his departure to Rome in 2020. Photo: CNS.

“As for the Munich report, most media attention, naturally, has focused on the section regarding Benedict XVI”

more than its fair share of life's hardships, is getting a new start thanks in large measure to Catholic leadership and energy. If ever there were a story of hope, this has got to be it.

These are the two faces of Catholicism, which may alternately wax and wane, but which are always, inextricably, woven together. To focus on one without the other, to celebrate hope or to condemn heartache in isolation, inevitably fails to tell the whole story.

The Munich report

As for the Munich report, most media attention, naturally, has focused on the section regarding Benedict XVI.

To begin with, it has to be said that given the time frame involved, and the miserable fashion in which the Church responded to abuse claims more than 30 years ago, it would be a deep statistical anomaly if there were no cases during the Ratzinger years. In some ways, given the size of the archdiocese, it's remarkable that only four such cases have surfaced.

Further, it's also important to stress that of the four Ratzinger cases cited in the almost 2,000-page

report, in one instance the authors themselves ended up giving him a clean bill of health because there's no factual basis for assuming he had any knowledge of the abuse: “Against this background, [the experts] no longer see any reliable basis for continuing to proceed from the knowledge initially assumed and for critically assessing the actions of the then Archbishop Cardinal Ratzinger in this case, as was done in the context of the preliminary assessment. Rather, they see him as exonerated overall.”

The most infamous case of the four involves a priest named Peter Hullerman, who was originally from the Diocese of Essen and who later transferred to Munich. That case was thoroughly examined in 2010, when it first came to light due to reporting by the German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. At that time, the former Vicar General of the archdiocese, Fr Gerhard Gruber, took full responsibility for decisions that allowed Hullerman to serve in Munich unimpeded and stressed that he had never discussed the matter with Ratzinger.

We'll have to see what emerges regarding the other two cases, and

whether others now come to light. Given Pope Benedict XVI's aggressive track record regarding weeding abusers out of the priesthood, including laicizing more than 400 in one year of his pontificate alone, there's certainly no reason to believe he was ever a knowing co-conspirator in covering up abuse, even if his management during the Munich years suffered from the same deficiencies as the rest of the Church at the time.

“We'll have to see what emerges regarding the other two cases, and whether others now come to light”

Haggling over who dropped the ball and who didn't, of course – however essential to the historical record – can never diminish the awful reality that hundreds of people suffered abuse at the hands of Catholic priests in Munich alone.

As for Mustafa, Caritas in Siena has pledged not only to provide housing, but also to pay for food expenses and pocket money for the

family. They've also volunteered to help them forge relationships in the city to favour the process of integration in Italy, including learning the language – presumably a far easier task for the young children than mother and father.

(Language school, however, will have to wait until the family has completed Italy's mandatory Covid quarantine for new arrivals who aren't fully vaccinated.)

Key role

Reportedly, Cardinal Augusto Lojude of Siena played a key role in working with Italy's Foreign Ministry to secure the necessary entrance visas for the family, and in overseeing plans for their assistance now that they're in the country. Coincidentally, the 57-year-old Cardinal Lojude currently is considered among the candidates to succeed Cardinal Gualtiero Bassetti of Perugia as president of the Italian bishops' conference when Cardinal Bassetti turns 80 in April.

While Mustafa's future is anyone's guess, it seems a safe bet it's more likely to be a happy one today than before the Catholic Church got involved.

That, in a nutshell, is the Catholic story. For anyone paying attention, this past week brought both agony and ecstasy, both pain and pride – much as the Church has done, often on a weekly basis, for the last 2,000 years, and undoubtedly will continue to do until the end.

Bishops claim Russian offensive in Ukraine poses a global threat



Ukrainian snipers take part in military exercises in the Donetsk region of Ukraine. Photo: CNS.



Elise Ann Allen

As the threat of a Russian military incursion in Ukraine continues to loom, European bishops have urged peace, asking that both international law and the sovereignty of each nation involved in the conflict be respected while tensions escalate.

In the statement, signed by Archbishop Gintaras Linas Grušas of Vilnius, Lithuania, President of the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE), the bishops conveyed their closeness to Ukraine and urged the international community to offer support "in the face of the danger of a Russian military offensive".

"While the entire international community interprets the actions of the Russian military forces as a real threat to peace throughout the world, we embrace – in this time of fear and uncertainty for the future of the country – our brothers and sisters in the faith and all the people of Ukraine," they said.

Military operation

In recent months, Russia has amassed around 100,000 troops at Ukraine's border, with an estimated 175,000 poised for a military operation that could begin sometime in the next few weeks.

After Ukrainian citizens ousted pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich in 2014, Russia annexed Ukraine's southern Crimean peninsula and backed separatists who overtook large swaths of the country's eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk.

That move came just 23 years after Ukraine gained independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union, to which it belonged. Ukraine still maintains deep social and cultural ties with Russia, and the Russian language is widely spoken.

“Negotiations are currently underway, and while Russia has insisted that they have no plans to invade Ukraine, tensions remain”

In the years since the conflict in eastern Ukraine began, shelling and sniper attacks have become a daily occurrence, with the United Nations estimating that so far around 1.5 million people have been displaced and an estimated 14,000 have died, many of whom were civilians.

Russia has long resisted Ukraine's advances toward European institutions and its efforts to join the Euro-

pean Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).

Recently, Russia has been pushing for a promise from the West that Ukraine will not be allowed to join NATO.

Negotiations

Negotiations are currently underway, and while Russia has insisted that they have no plans to invade Ukraine, tensions remain high and Russian President Vladimir Putin has threatened "appropriate retaliatory military-technical measures" if what he perceives as the West's aggressive approach to the issue continues.

Russia has also demanded that NATO cease further expansion into Eastern Europe and that they put an end to military activity in the region. If that were to happen, NATO troops would be pulled out of Poland and the Baltic nations of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

Observers watching the situation play out fear the gathering of Russian troops could mean an offensive is being planned for early 2022, which could jeopardise European security as a whole.

In their statement, CCEE echoed statements made by Pope Francis in support of Ukraine, urging those involved to "resolve the crisis through serious dialogue and not with arms."

“Russia has long resisted Ukraine's advances toward European institutions and its efforts to join the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)”

Citing the Pope's recent speech to the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See, they stressed that "Reciprocal trust and readiness to engage in calm discussion should also inspire all parties at stake, so that acceptable and lasting solutions can be found in Ukraine."

The bishops appealed to international leaders, asking that "they do not forget the tragic World Wars of the last century and so that international law as well as the independence and territorial sovereignty of each country will be defended".

“In the years since the conflict in eastern Ukraine began, shelling and sniper attacks have become a daily occurrence”

"Together with the Holy Father, we want to call on governments to find acceptable and lasting solutions in Ukraine based on dialogue and negotiation and without resorting to arms," they said.

"At this extremely delicate time, we ask Christians to pray for the gift of peace in Ukraine so that those responsible may be filled with, and radiate, a peace that is contagious and that the crisis will be overcome

exclusively through dialogue," they said.

Closeness

Pope Francis has repeatedly voiced his closeness to Ukraine and it is rumoured that he will visit the country sometime this year.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy first issued the invitation for a papal visit when he met Francis in February 2020, before the coronavirus pandemic erupted. Mr Zelenskyy reiterated the invite last summer during a private phone call with the Pope.

The last pope to visit Ukraine was St John Paul II in 2001, when he became the first pontiff in modern history to travel to the former Soviet nation.

In his January 23 Sunday Angelus address, Pope Francis voiced concern over the recent escalation in tensions along the Ukrainian border, saying these tensions "threaten to inflict a new blow to peace in Ukraine" and "question security on the European continent".

He issued an appeal to all people of goodwill "to raise their prayers to Almighty God, so that every political action and initiative be at the service of human fraternity, rather than partisan interests".

"Whoever pursues their own goals to the detriment of others despises their own vocation as a human being, because we have all been created brothers and sisters," he said.

In a bid to quell rising tensions between Russia and Ukraine, Pope Francis designated Wednesday, January 26, as a day of prayer for peace.

Letters

Letter of the week

Lovely Irish language is neglected and fading fast

Dear Editor, I would agree with Fr Padraig Ó Cochláin's sentiments [*The Irish Catholic* – January 13, 2020] as regards our lovely Irish language, it is the richest of all languages in its bounty of old truisms, seanfhocail agus beannachtaí. It is now an official language of the EU but my regret is that it is not our very own 'Irish' language and the reality of Gaeilge as our 'spoken word' is almost non-existent. We hear of Gaelscoileanna sprouting up all over the country but do you hear a word of Irish on our streets, our shops or any public places? I applaud the Gaeilge grassroot voluntary Conversation Ciorcail, who silently endeavour to keep the 'cúpla focal' alive

but unfortunately get little support, encouragement from local Government bodies or indeed Rialtas na hÉireann.

I was excited at first to hear Irish recognised as an EU language, where has it got us? I think the language has even declined more rapidly, though all these documents (featuring quite sophisticated, challenging mountains of 'modern terminology') to be meticulously translated and who can read them, who wants to read them? I have toiled over the years to voluntarily keep Gaeilge alive and to the forefront among many interested groups but I feel my efforts have failed and our Irish language is neglected in our nation and

is fading fast. I will finish with one of our seanfhocal jewels, which encapsulates the frustration I feel at the plainly obvious decline of our lovely Gaeilge bhlasta, shaibhir and it seems to be happening, almost unnoticed. Baist do leanbh fhéin ar dtúis I know that would be Tomás Ó Criomhthain's advice to Rialtas na hÉireann; he who showed in all his rich writings from the Blaskets experience his heartfelt grá for our national tongue as the spoken word here at home.

Yours etc.,
Eilís Uí Bhriain
Castlelyons, Co. Cork

How private deeds can affect others

Dear Editor, In reference to the article 'What we do in private' [*The Irish Catholic* – January 13, 2022] by Fr Rolheiser.

He states, in referring to his thesis that what happens in the privacy of our own lives affects others, that "we don't have a metaphysics, a phenomenology, or a science through which we can tease this out explicitly". May I respectfully suggest that we do.

The concept of morphogenic fields that Professor Rupert Sheldrake writes about, and which is based on some of the newly discovered principles of quantum physics provides a scenario that helps to explain how our private thoughts and deeds can affect others.

The late Judy Canatto writes about it in her book *Field of Compassion*. In fact, as she mentions, the Body of Christ and the Kingdom of God are such morphogenic fields, to which all Christians belong.

Yours etc.,
Fr. B. Cronin
Cork City, Cork



Congratulating courageous article defending de Valera

Dear Editor, I wish to congratulate Rory Fitzgerald on his very courageous and analytical article [*The Irish Catholic* – January 13, 2022] on the moral and social shift that has occurred in Ireland during the last 40-50 years. How right Mr De Valera was in 1943, but the 'culture of death' brigade have suc-

cessfully demonised him, and the 1937 Constitution. The same applies to St John Paul II's sermon in Limerick in 1979.

Today our bishops and priest have been silenced, or, choose to remain silent in the face of Satan's onslaught on our country's men and women, not to mention our unborn

citizens. Those of us who are still practising Catholics have looked on in horror at these modern-day developments, even though we did our best to prevent them. Sadly we are now strangers in our own country.

However, fellow Catholics, do not despair or become despondent, God is in charge, and he alone has

control of the future, not the vocal anti-God brigade.

Also, the triumph of the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin as promised in Fatima over one hundred years ago will occur, and a new peaceful era will be ushered in, DV.

Yours etc.,
Eilís McNamara
Glin, Co. Limerick,

Importance of disciplinary matters and Christian faith

Dear Editor, Sean O'Connell [*The Irish Catholic* – January 13, 2022] argues that in making no distinction between disciplinary matters and articles of faith we risk repeating the mistake of the 'clerics' of Jesus' own time who expanded 10 Commandments to 613 Levitical laws.

His argument rests on the false belief that Christian disciplinary matters are not expressions of Christian faith. May I remind him that the word discipline is intimately

connected to the word disciple? And that the disciple of Jesus is invited to take up the cross and follow his example?

As an illustration: Jesus' own example of freely choosing not to ordain women has something to teach us, the Church in freely choosing to imitate his discipline also has something to teach us. Both teachings point to the correct relationship between God and humanity, between creator and created, and ultimately between man and

woman, a relationship he came to heal, and which is expressed in words in the Creed.

God does not force his loving activity on anyone, it is all pure gift, which is to be received in trust, and of course can be freely rejected, he puts that much power into our hands, so let us use it in all wisdom.

Yours etc.,
Jane Campbell
Ballina, Co. Mayo

facebook community

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

St Brigid to be honoured with public holiday

I am only delighted, it was too long coming. We can honour the great woman St Brigid and allow the younger generation to enquire into the traditions of this great country of ours. Lá Féile Bríd. – **Breda Eiffe**

Demographic ice-age behind Pope's pets comment, economist says

His Holiness was right to speak out on this looming crisis. A falling birth rate should be a major worry to all of us because of its far-reaching impact. Of course the usual suspects were more interested in a throw away comment. – **Thomas O'Mahony**

Administrator appointed for Ardagh and Clonmacnois diocese

While wishing Fr Tom all the many graces he will need, I say that before long a diocese will be found that can amalgamate Armagh and Clonmacnois. – **Alan Whelan**

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

Synod invitation to all, but what about the Traditional Latin Mass?

Dear Editor, 'Turn no one away from synod, archbishop pleads' is the leading headline in *The Irish Catholic* of January 13. Does this include priests and lay Faithful who practise and attend the Traditional Latin Mass (Tridentine Rite) that the Bishop of Rome is trying to suppress?

Yours etc.,
Fr Oliver Skelly
Coole, Co. Westmeath

Pro-life people should boycott RTÉ

Dear Editor, People ask what can be done to get pro-life issues heard on our RTÉ stations. I would suggest a way to those with a pro-life view. Instead of not paying your licence fee which can lead to prosecution I would ask you not to engage with phone-ins to presenters or taking part in RTÉ competitions or taking part on anything used to promote any shows. If there is a charity event that RTÉ are backing, if you wish contribute directly to that charity. In other words, boycott RTÉ as much as possible.

Yours etc.,
John O'Riordan
Rathfarnham, Dublin

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

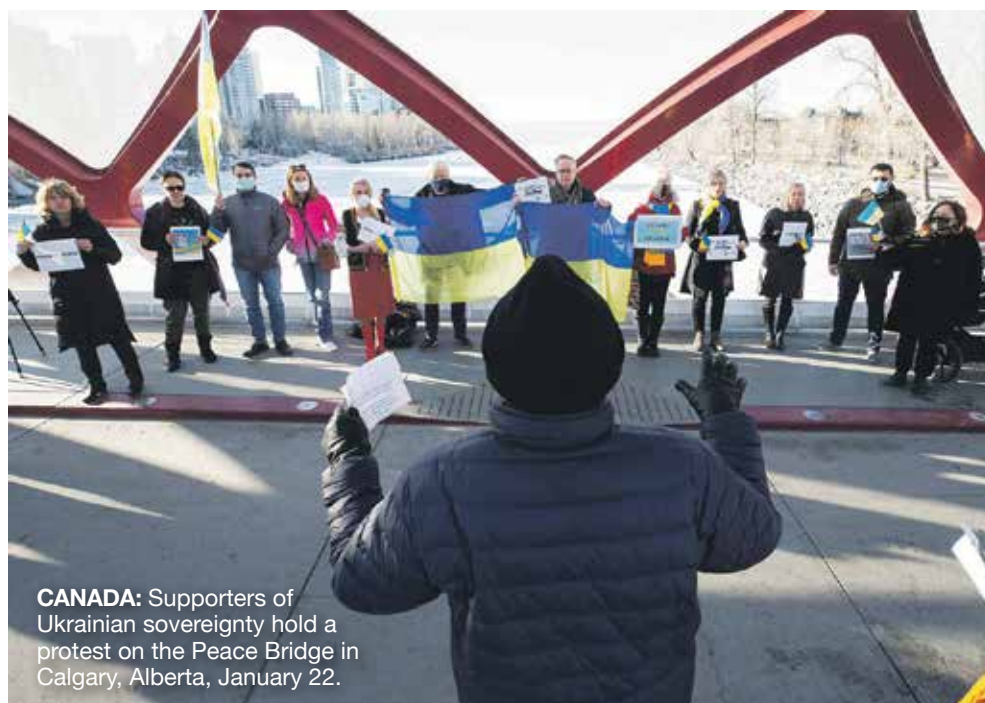
merits of letters. We do not publish pseudonyms or other formulae to conceal the writer's identity, such as "name and address with editor". We do not print letters addressed to someone else, open letters, or verse. Letters to the Editor should only be sent to *The Irish Catholic*, and not other publications.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

Around the world



▲ **MEXICO:** A woman wearing a protective mask sits with her roosters in the pews of a church in Mexico City, January 17, during the blessing of the animals on the feast of St Anthony, the patron saint of domestic animals. Photos: CNS.

◀ **USA:** People walk up Constitution Avenue headed toward the US Supreme Court while participating in the 49th annual March for Life in Washington, January 21.



CANADA: Supporters of Ukrainian sovereignty hold a protest on the Peace Bridge in Calgary, Alberta, January 22.



VATICAN: Pope Francis celebrates Mass marking Sunday of the Word of God in St Peter's Basilica at the Vatican, January 23.



ETHIOPIA: Survivors of an airstrike by Ethiopian government forces receive treatment at the Shire Shul General Hospital in the northern region of Tigray, Ethiopia.



PARIS: Pro-life activists hold banners that read "Stop the culture of waste" during the March for Life rally at Trocadéro Plaza in Paris, January 17.

Making love with the divine



Kabir, a 15th-century Hindu mystic, writes: "What you call 'salvation' belongs to the time before death.

If you don't break your ropes while you're alive, do you think ghosts will do it after?

What is found now is found then. If you find nothing now, you will simply end up with an apartment in the City of Death.

If you make love with the divine now, in the next life you will have the face of satisfied desire."

To make love with the divine. I suspect most of us will picture that as a warm, privatised, affective intimacy, the way we imagine romantic love, except here the other partner is God. Indeed, Christian mystical literature abounds with images of this kind, as does the Gospel of John. There's nothing wrong with that, except that such a conception is over-idealised and over-privatised. Making love with the divine, if Jesus is to be believed, is something more assessable and more communal than our affective image of intimacy.

How do we make love with the divine in this life? I have always taught that there are four non-negotiables to Christian discipleship: moral fidelity in our private lives, a commitment to social justice, some involvement within ecclesial community, and a mellow, gracious heart. We make love to the divine by living



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

out these in our lives.

To make this more assessable, let me suggest that making love with the divine in this life asks ten things of us.

1. A moral fidelity in our private lives

Scripture tells us that those who love God keep his commandments and those who say they love him but don't keep his commandments are liars. Moreover, it tells us that we are inside a body within which even our most private actions affect everyone else. We make love with the divine by not having any dark, hidden secrets.

2. An effort to live out our lives inside of community

We are called to live our lives and come to God inside of a community. We cannot make love with God alone. It's always God, others, and ourselves. When we stand before God in judgment, as Charles Peguy suggests, we

will be asked, "Where are the others?" Making love with the divine means being both spiritual and religious.

3. A mellow heart that radiates gratitude and forgiveness

Like the older brother of the prodigal son, we can do all the right things, but with the wrong energy. We make love with God by fueling ourselves with gratitude rather than bitterness, and by forgiving others (and God) for life's unfairness and all the things that have wounded us.

4. A proactive reaching out to the poor and a perennial concern for justice to the world

We cannot make love with God inside an intimacy that does not also take in the poor and the broken. Likewise, we cannot make

love with God when we are indifferent to injustice. As Jesus makes clear, a private personal relationship with God never compensates for indifference to the poor and to injustice.

5. A life lived in truth which refuses to lie no matter how inconvenient

To make love with the divine is to live in the truth. Satan is the prince of lies. The single most dangerous thing we can do spiritually is to refuse to acknowledge what is true, and the single most important way we make love with God is never to lie.

6. A childlikeness that never falls into the illusion of self-sufficiency

Life may never be taken for granted, but only as granted. We make love to the divine by never living the illusion of self-sufficiency, by acknowledging always that life is gift and that we are dependent and interdependent with others and with God.

7. A perennial effort to love those who hate us, to not give back in kind

We make love with the divine whenever we love those who hate us,

bleed those who curse us, and forgive those who hurt us. This is its very essence.

8. A heart open to all

God's eternal banquet table is open to everyone who is willing to sit down with everyone. Since God loves everyone, we make love with the divine by sharing God's universal embrace.

9. A habitual openness to let God's energy flourish within our lives

We make love with the divine by letting God's energy flourish through our lives, namely, when we let the divine energy inside us be joyous and generative so as to radiate life no matter what cards we are dealt.

10. A willingness to wait, to live in patience

We make love with the divine whenever we accept to live in patience, to wait for life and love to unfold according to their own inner dictates. We make love to the divine whenever we carry healthily the tension of chastity, not just in the area of sexuality, but also in all areas of life.

The prophet Micah puts all of this succinctly: act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly.

“We make love to the divine by living out these in our lives”

Family & Lifestyle

The Irish Catholic, January 27, 2022

Personal Profile

Keeping up a strong Capuchin tradition

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Preventing pornography in the home

While technology certainly has its many advantages, one of the unfortunate aspects of it is that it allows all manner of unsavoury things to infiltrate our homes. Whereas once the television was the only window into the home, smartphones, tablets and computers have greatly expanded the volume and type of content that the world can send our way, right into the cosiest corner of what should be our safest spaces.

In terms of destructive and damaging material, pornography is right at the forefront of the cyber-plague assailing many a home. What compounds the issue is that it is still a topic about which many parents and spouses are unaware, many of whom are also surprised when the extent of



Pornography is more widely available than ever before, so it's important to be aware and educated about the threat it poses, writes Jason Osborne

its reach is laid bare.

NUI Galway attempted to shed some light on pornography use among university students in Ireland with an anonymous online survey, the results of which were released in 2018. A total of 1,943 students completed the survey, and the results were enlightening.

More than 53% of male respondents said they first saw porn, either accidentally or on purpose, between the ages of 10 and 13, which compared to about 23% of female respondents. When asked how

often they watch pornography, nearly 25% of male respondents answered "daily", while just 1.6% of female respondents answered the same. However, that number skyrocketed to 44.6% of men when asked whether it was a "few times per week", while 11.8% of women said they did the same.

This was a couple of years ago, and for a limited sample size and population. Many reports found lockdown to have exacerbated pornography usage, and it's reasonable to expect that will have

a lasting impact. But why is this a problem? After all, it's often proposed as "harmless fun" that doesn't hurt anyone. So why should the prevalence of pornography and its usage set alarm bells ringing?

Catholic answer

To give the Catholic answer first, the catechism tells us that pornography is "a grave offense" because it "offends against chastity" by perverting "the conjugal act, the intimate giving of spouses to each other". It goes further by saying it does "grave injury" to the dignity of its participants, the actors, vendors and consumers, since each party becomes an object of "base pleasure and illicit profit for others". The catechism describes pornography as immersing all who are involved in it in the "illusion

of a fantasy world".

Heavy and serious wording, but there's no empty moralising to be found here. As time goes on, as research progresses and as testimonies come to light, the truth that it's causing deep individual and social harm is becoming unavoidable.

Modern research is showing that pornography, coupled with its concomitant masturbation, affects the brain like a drug, pornography usage has the characteristics of an escalating behaviour, can be extremely difficult to quit and affects the operation of our brains by flooding them with excessive quantities of dopamine, essentially "highjacking" the brain's reward system.

On a relational level, evidence

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AND EVENTS

GIANT PANDAS STAY CHUBBY ON BAMBOO DIET DUE TO GUT BACTERIA

Despite almost exclusively eating fibrous bamboo, giant pandas manage to stay chubby and healthy due to a seasonal change in their gut bacteria, a new study has shown.

Researchers have found that the animals' gut bacteria changes at the time of year when nutritious bamboo shoots become available.

This shift helps the bear gain weight and store more fat, and may help compensate for the lack of nutrients in seasons when there are only bamboo leaves to chew on, the study suggests.

Depending on what part of the grass they are eating, pandas need to eat around 11.7 to 38 kilograms of bamboo every day.

"This is the first time we established a causal relationship between a panda's gut microbiota and its phenotype," First author Guangping Huang, at the Institute of Zoology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, said.

SINGLE PAGE OF COMIC SELLS FOR €3M AT US AUCTION

A single page of original artwork from an acclaimed 1984 comic featuring Spider-Man has sold for a record \$3.36m (€2.93m) in the United States, making the webslinger the world's mightiest auction superhero.

The page features the first appearance of Spidey's black symbiote suit that would later lead to the creation of anti-hero Venom in artwork by Mike Zeck from Marvel Super Heroes Secret Wars no. 8.

"This page was the big reveal teased on the cover! This is where Peter Parker actually got his spiffy new black costume," Heritage Auctions said in its description of the artwork for page 25 of the issue.

"But... it's a costume with a secret! Because it very soon turns out to be alive and have its own agenda. This is the origin of the character Venom!"

Bidding for the artwork started at \$330,000.

CHINESE COUPLE TRAPPED ON LOCKDOWN DATE GET ENGAGED

A Chinese couple who were trapped on a never-ending date thanks to a coronavirus lockdown have been relieved to find that love, and not Covid-19, is in the air and have agreed to tie the knot.

It is the second time this month that China's state media have published reports about a couple on a date getting trapped by sudden lockdown rules – but this one has a happier ending.

Zhao Xiaoqing, a 28-year-old woman from northern China's Shaanxi province, thought her date in mid-December with a young man living in a different city would be a one-day affair where she would also get to know his family.

However authorities in her date's city of Xianyang suddenly ordered a lockdown due to a spike in virus cases, leaving the woman unable to return home.

Despite the awkward start, the pair began to develop feelings for each other, and have now decided to get engaged.

Motor neurone disease: Challenges and new treatments



There are approximately 500 people living with motor neurone disease (MND) in Ireland with about 140 cases diagnosed every year. Though rare, in recent years, the stories of several well-known people with MND has been highlighted in the media and has increased awareness of the condition. The globally recognised 'Ice Bucket Challenge' that was launched in 2014 also promoted awareness and helped raise funds for MND research.

“While this variant has a better prognosis, average life expectancy is still only between 3-5 years”

So what exactly is motor neurone disease? It's a progressive and incurable neurological condition that results in damage to the nerves in the brain and spinal cord that control motor function. As nerve fibres degenerate, nerve signals that normally result in muscle contraction are lost causing muscle weakness and wasting. There are four main types of MND resulting from different patterns of disease involvement, though there is often a lot of overlap between all forms. The most common type accounting for the majority of cases causes weakness and wasting of muscles in the arms or legs. This typically manifests as painless loss of power in one limb that then spreads to the opposite side and early on can result in changes in walking, falls or dropping items, though eventually leads to complete paralysis. While this variant has a better prognosis, average life expectancy is still only between 3-5 years. Furthermore, in most cases (75%) weakness will later develop in muscles used for swallowing, speaking and breathing.

A more aggressive type of

Medical Matters

Dr Kevin McCarroll



MND called Progressive Bulbar Palsy (PBP) accounts for about 30% of cases and mainly affects neurones controlling speech and swallow. It often presents with changes in the voice (slurred speech) and/or swallow problems. Over time, the ability to speak and eat is lost, though in the majority of cases the disease becomes more widespread also affecting the limbs. In some patients, there can be inappropriate emotional responses such as excessive laughter or crying. Unfortunately, life expectancy with this type is shorter and ranges from six months to three years.

Is it hard to diagnose? Most cases (85%) of MND arise sporadically but there can be genetic causes with familial types. The average age of onset is about 60-65 with time from initial symptoms to diagnosis varying by type and ranging from several months to over a year. The diagnosis is largely clinical and supported by neuro-physiological testing. Patients may have features of muscle wasting and spasticity or muscle twitching. However, diagnosis can be more difficult when it presents with only central involvement that may cause early subtle alterations in speech or swallow. Several conditions mimic MND and so MRI brain and spine imaging and other tests are needed to exclude these conditions first.

Older age of symptom onset, shorter duration of symptoms before diagnosis and early evidence of reduced lung function are all poor prognostic factors.

Are there any treatments? Despite over 50 drugs having been studied for its treatment, only two therapies are currently in use. The main drug 'Riluzole' has been around since the 1990's and taken as a daily tablet has been shown to improve survival by three months, but has no effect on muscle strength. It's mechanism of action is unclear but it may reduce the effects of glutamate, a chemical involved in nerve signalling. More recently, in 2018 the drug edaravone was approved by the US FDA and found to benefit a highly select group of patients with early onset and rapidly progressive disease.



Importantly, managing MND with a multidisciplinary care team is crucial. This will include a neurologist, nutritionist, speech therapists and specialised nurses and has been shown to increase survival, reduce hospital admissions and improve quality of life. Muscle spasticity is present in most patients, but only a small proportion will need treatment. Pain can be a feature in 15-85% of patients though typically responds well to analgesics. Speech therapy can delay the progression of slurred speech in some patients though there are no effective treatments for impaired swallow where modifications of diet may be required.

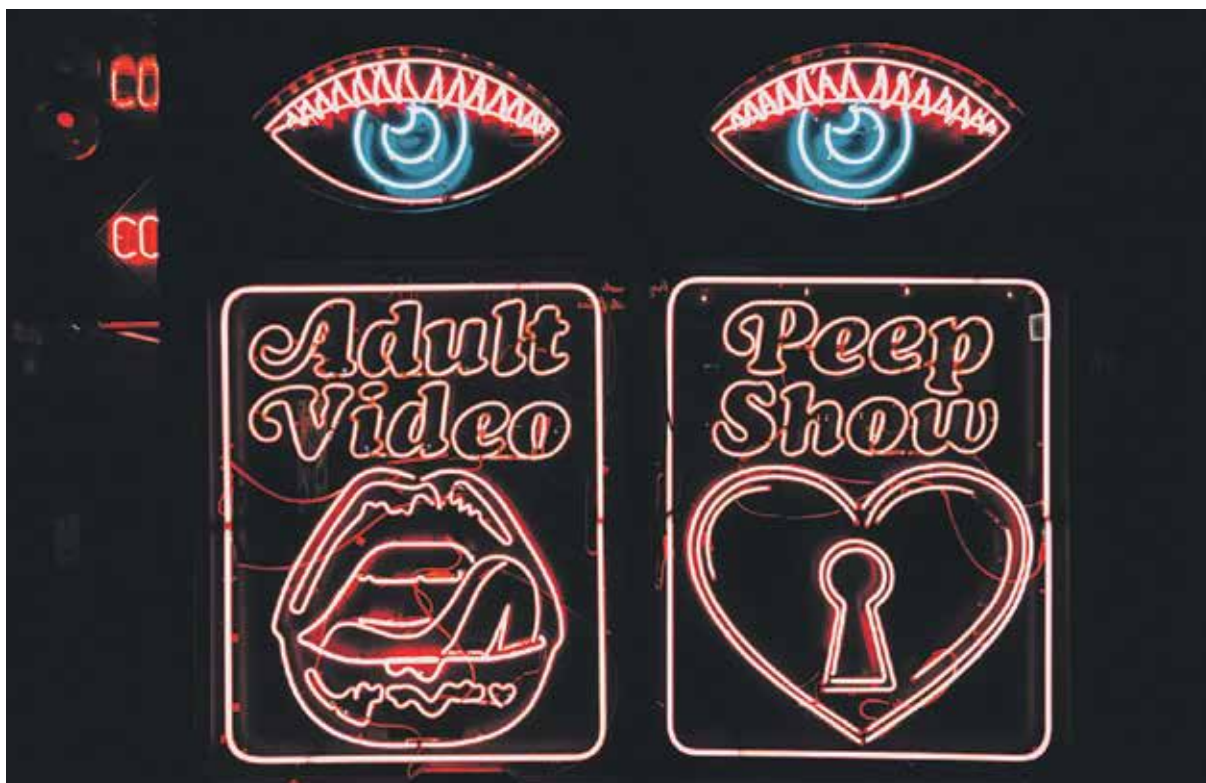
When severely affected or impacting on nutrition, insertion of feeding tube may need to be considered. Pooling of saliva in the mouth and drooling can be troublesome for some patients and can be medically treated. Cognitive and behavioural changes may also occur in up to 50% of patients with MND, it can be severe in about 15% and may be due to changes in the frontal lobe of the brain.

“Just last month researchers at Trinity College Dublin found four distinct patterns of electrical signal changes in the brain, which may help in the development of therapies for specific subtypes of the condition”

While the prognosis for MND remains poor, much research is being undertaken to gain a better understanding of the different subtypes. This is because one of the major barriers will be in providing the right drug for the right patient, given the heterogeneity of the disease. Just last month researchers at Trinity College Dublin found four distinct patterns of electrical signal changes in the brain, which may help in the development of therapies for specific subtypes of the condition.

Dr Kevin McCarroll is a Consultant Physician in Geriatric Medicine, St James's Hospital, Dublin.

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is coming forward that pornography use can negatively impact on both physical and emotional intimacy in relationships, normalises sexual objectification and can impact on mental health, fuelling cycles of loneliness and stress. And finally, on a wider, societal level, pornography has been found to fuel sex-trafficking, promote sexual violence and distort societal understanding of healthy sexuality. These effects aren't exactly unknown, either, with many prominent personages speaking up about them in recent years.

Other famous figures who've spoken out against it in recent years include actors Orlando Bloom, Emma Thompson, Chris Rock, Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Andra Day, Russell Brand, and Hugh Grant

US actor, widely known for his role in hit TV show *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, Terry Crews first spoke out about pornography in his book, *Manhood*, where he revealed he had been addicted to pornography since the age of 12, and his habit deeply affected his marriage. Mr Crews also took to Facebook using the live video feature to go in-depth about his struggle, how it damaged his relationships, and how he finally overcame it.

"This thing has become a problem, I think it's a worldwide problem," Terry said in his first video.

"Pornography really messed up my life in a lot of ways. Some people deny it and say, 'Hey man you can't really be addicted to pornography, there's no way.' But I'll tell you something: if day turns into night and you're still watching, you probably got a problem. And that was me." Other famous figures who've spoken out against it in recent years include actors Orlando Bloom, Emma Thompson, Chris Rock, Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Andra Day, Rus-

sell Brand, and Hugh Grant.

An acknowledged problem, then; what can be done about it? Fortunately, there's plenty.

Protecting children

The obvious fear is that with pornographic content so readily available, children might get their hands on it. Unfortunately, many do, but steps can be taken to try and prevent this from becoming the case.

'Protect Young Eyes' is an online resource that tries to show families, schools and churches how to create safer digital spaces, and they recommend four layers of digital protection in all homes:

The relationship layer involves leading by example, being curious and not condemning your child, having persistent and consistent conversations, all of which are intended to lead to greater trust between you both.

The locational layer: This means guarding against private spaces, bathrooms, bedrooms, and any other trouble spots for tech use. A "tech basket" at night-time is an idea, possibly in the kitchen (and parent devices go there, too). Look at your family and decide what locational safeguards are right for you.

The next layers are technical layers. It starts with controlling the Wi-Fi network in your home with a strong router. Protect Young Eyes has recommendations on their resources page.

And the final level is to control the devices when they're not connected

to the home Wi-Fi with software like Screen Accountability or Covenant Eyes.

Covenant Eyes

While the name is perhaps a tad American, the idea is solid. If you or anyone you know is struggling with kicking a pornography habit, this is where Covenant Eyes comes in. It's an online resource and software, which can be catered to whether you want to give it up, you want to give it up with someone, or whether you want to help someone give it up.

It essentially provides a person and their chosen accountability partner with monitoring and blocking software, alerting the accountability partner to the presence of explicit content on registered devices and blocking what it catches. While in the long run, one would hope the habit of or temptation to look at pornography can be broken, this provides a good platform for clearing away in bulk many tricky situations.

Discipline

As with everything, a disciplined and consistent spiritual life is the best medicine. Exercise, a good diet, plenty of sleep, prayer and the sacraments are just as effective at keeping pornography at bay in the long run as any tips or tricks.

A balanced lifestyle and God's grace, taken seriously, do work wonders at preserving us and our families from falling into the pitfalls of the age, and in this matter, it's no different.

Theology of the Body

A final addition is to say that those looking to get past pornography and view human sexuality in its true goodness and beauty would do well to delve into St Pope John Paul II's teaching, *Theology of the Body*. In it, he reveals the internal logic of God's creating us male and female, and seeks to reassure the Faithful that the Church's understanding of sexuality is good, true and beautiful. Seeing sexuality as God does will surely keep pornography at bay in our homes.

Dad's Diary

Rory Fitzgerald



The satirical magazine *Viz* runs an amusing ad for a theme park called 'JanuaryLand', which is billed as having "computerised climate control technology", which ensures "cold grey January weather even on the warmest summer day". Patrons can "wait for a bus in the sleet in our authentic Januarytown city centre" or enjoy a "warming cup of Lemsip" while they "enjoy the misery of the year's most depressing month".

Like most families around the country, our 2022 JanuaryLand experience has involved much disruption thanks to various Covid outbreaks in the kids' schools and preschool, along with all sorts of other interesting viruses running through the household. Our preschool even was closed for a few days, thanks to Covid, and we seem to have had the kids at home as much as they have been in school this month.

Antigen tests are now routine, as every couple of days they are needed due to symptoms, or thanks to their being a close contact in school. I feel like a part time laboratory assistant, so expert have I become at doing antigen tests. Yet even on those miraculous days when the kids do make it to school, they find that there are only as few as ten kids out of 25 kids in their classes. In such circumstances, how can teachers manage to teach without leaving most of the kids behind?

To add to the confusion, antigen tests can give vaguely positive results, but are perhaps invalidated by the faintest line only appearing perhaps just after the 30-minute waiting period, followed by several negative results and negative PCR

results, leading to a general state of confusion. Amidst such chaos, we continue to follow the latest ever-changing guidance scrupulously, in all conscience, to avoid any risk to others. This means often keeping healthy kids at home, just in case. In the midst of all this, we've had to deal with other non-covid related injuries, such as a potentially broken arm which required x-rays.

When it comes to sick kids, I'm a great believer in the medicinal power of cosiness. Our house feels like a sanctuary. A warm and safe refuge from the biting weather, the early darkness and the muddy drear outside. Sick kids get to wrap up warmly, under blankets by the fire. Cups of cocoa and kind words do as much good as paracetamol, I always feel. Good books and the odd family movie take them away from the mundane miseries of illness for a time. Even as my nursing experience grows by the day, I have to work from home too. Yet caring for poorly kids brings an intimacy. Increasingly grown-up kids become dependent again. In their hour of need, they see how much you care for them, and are shown how much you love them.

As January wears on, even evening, the light which bleeds pale grey through the clouds is subtly slower to retreat before the darkness. With these first hints of approaching spring, the prophecies of some epidemiologists give us cause for hope, almost two years into the pandemic. There are political predictions made that the restrictions might soon ease. Some dare to predict a return to normality by spring. Even in this strange and fractured January, there is cause for hope. Brighter days are coming.



Keeping up a strong Capuchin tradition

Personal Profile



Ruadhán Jones

Fr Jim Connolly OFM Cap. first arrived in Zambia in December 1970, one of around 50 Irish Capuchins based in the country. Almost 52 years later and one of the last two Irish Capuchins remaining, Fr Jim continues to keep up their great tradition.

Fr Jim, who grew up on a small farm in Cavan, left secondary school before completing the equivalent of the Junior Certificate. He moved to Dublin and it was there that Fr Jim came into contact with the Capuchins at their parish on Church Street. He was attracted to them, but didn't think he had much hope due to not finishing school.

Friaries

"But a nun I met told me there was a way in for people who hadn't completed their secondary schooling," Fr Jim explains. "She put me in contact with the Capuchins. I wrote, I was interviewed in one of the friaries on Church Street. Eventually I got a letter of acceptance, technically a late vocation at the ripe old age of 17!"

Having completed his studies, Fr Jim got the call to serve on the mission in Zambia in 1970. He explains that there was a "favourable climate" in the country for the Church when he arrived.

"The missionaries had by then made their impact, especially in the area of education," Fr Jim says. "Schools, primary schools were established in what was then the diocese of

Livingstone. From the time the Capuchins came in 1931, something like 220 primary schools were established by the missionaries in the area of the western province. And of course medical facilities, some of them were Church clinics and some hospitals.

"All of that created a favourable climate towards the Catholic Church. That has continued. In more recent years, sometimes the relationship would be strained at times because of the bishops speaking out on social issues and respect for the rights of people and against corruption."

Fr Jim's main focus on arriving in Zambia was evangelisation and pastoral work, he tells me, particularly in rural parishes. He spent the first 15 years of his mission dedicated to this

cause, giving the example of the Mangango township to exemplify his work.

"It would have about 30 out-churches, outlying communities," Fr Jim says. "At the beginning, the first few years, our apostolate centred on schools. In my first years in Mangango, we had 27 schools in the management. I would have visited all of them. I would have had Mass in the school... and seen if children were prepared for the sacraments, especially Baptism."

After the schools were handed over to the government in 1974, the shape of Fr Jim's work changed. He and the Capuchins began to set up churches and centres apart from the schools, which led to more adults coming to church.

"The school apostolate was kind of

limited to the children," Fr Jim begins. "Sometimes a whole class might be baptised. When they would go back home, because the environment was not Christian, they would maybe fall away from the practice of their faith. Many of them who passed through our schools were important people in the government and civil society."

"But there was a definite change when schools were handed over. We concentrated on evangelisation of the adult population. That led to the establishment of small Christian communities. It has been an overall success. Some of these places have grown into parishes."

“There are around 50 local Capuchins and just two Irish. Fr Jim reflects with pride on the vocations that have sprung up from the community”

Reflecting on his missionary life, Fr Jim says there were a number of phases to it: "Number one was many years in pastoral work in rural areas, 15-20 years. The second stage, I was in the vocation scene, director of postulants for six years. Then came leadership, I was the first vice-provincial in 1992. I was in that role for six years too."

"Then I was back to pastoral work or parish work, sent to the north-western province. In a sense, it was like being dipped into cold water, it was a whole new start. I didn't know the language. People were greeting me, I was looking at them and they were looking at me. I had to get a crash course."

"I was there for six of the happiest years I had, very happy years. The people there were quite responsive faith-wise. In some places they weren't, especially in one of the missions I was on. But it was life-giving, the response in many places. It gave me energy."

Having arrived to a community of 50 Irish Capuchins in 1970 and no Zambians, the situation is reversed today. There are around 50 local Capuchins and just two Irish. Fr Jim reflects with pride on the vocations that have sprung up from the community.

"I look back in amazement and I say, we've come thus far with the grace of God. In the 1970s, when I came out, in a sense we were sitting comfortably because every year there came out three or four from Ireland. Then about 1977 or so, we had a provincial come out – the late Fr Brendan O'Mahony, who was professor of philosophy in UCC – he addressed us, saying: 'You guys are doing great work. But you have to wake up, you think that you are going to get vocations from Ireland every year. It's not going to come. You have to become more serious about the implantation of the order.'"

So the Capuchins in Zambia had their first mission chapter in 1979, and from that two key priorities emerged, Fr Jim explains. One was getting the structures and personnel in place to promote vocations; the second was caring for people with disabilities. From this meeting, the fruits of their labours have slowly but surely been realised.

"It has been uphill. We are about 50 now, but the challenge to us here is to become more self-reliant, and in supporting ourselves financially. That's the thrust and the focus we have at the moment," Fr Jim says.

Do you know someone who we should profile? Send an email to ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie

Living Laudato Si'

Jane Mellet



Practical steps to respond to the first *Laudato Si'* goal

In November 2021, Pope Francis launched the *Laudato Si'* Action Platform, a seven-year programme for the Church to live out the call to care more deeply for God's creation.

The platform is based around achieving seven *Laudato Si'* Goals across seven Church 'institutions' over seven years – a jubilee for the earth. The institutions include: families and individuals; parishes and dioceses; educational institutions; healthcare institutions; organisations and groups; businesses; and religious orders.

As the ecological crises and its effects continue to worsen around the globe, we are invited as individuals, families, parishes and schools to engage with this *Laudato Si'* platform. But what does this involve?

This week let us look at *Laudato Si'* goal number one: 'Response to the Cry of the Earth.' This is a call to protect our common home for the wellbeing of all, as we address the climate crisis alongside bio-

diversity loss, and try to live more sustainably. The big actions for this goal include switching to more renewable sources of energy, in the home, school and parish and introducing energy saving measures. These are the big asks for 'Goal 1'. However, each *Laudato Si'*

Goal has a low, medium and high ask so we could begin to look at energy use simply by conducting an energy audit in our parish buildings and see what might be realistically possible from there. Installing more efficient appliances when they are due to be replaced is another possible action.

Laudato Si' Goal 1 also includes the call to protect biodiversity and perhaps for families and parishes this is a good place to start.

As spring approaches, we can look at the land around our churches, graveyards, schools and our homes and consider planting pollinator friendly flowers and plants, which can replace a boring lawn. We can all engage with local groups to plant

Irish native trees where appropriate, restoring them to the landscape.

Hosting workshops locally on litter and recycling comes under Goal 1 as a means to address what *Laudato Si'* calls a "throw-away culture". Inviting the wider community to such workshops can be a means of sharing Church teaching on care for creation and seeing where local groups could collaborate with the parish or school.

Most of us are overwhelmed when it comes to the environmental crisis. But the *Laudato Si'* Action Platform is a way forward, a roadmap, a gift. As we begin this new year each of us can discern where we are called to act and we can begin by becoming familiar with this platform. Go to www.laudatosi-actionplatform.org

Perhaps your family, school or parish could consider signing up?

"Your unique 'culture, experience, involvements, and talents' are needed on our journey towards greater love for our Creator, each other, and the home we share. (LS 14)" – *Laudato Si'* Action Platform

Jane Mellett is the *Laudato Si'* Officer with Trócaire



TVRadio

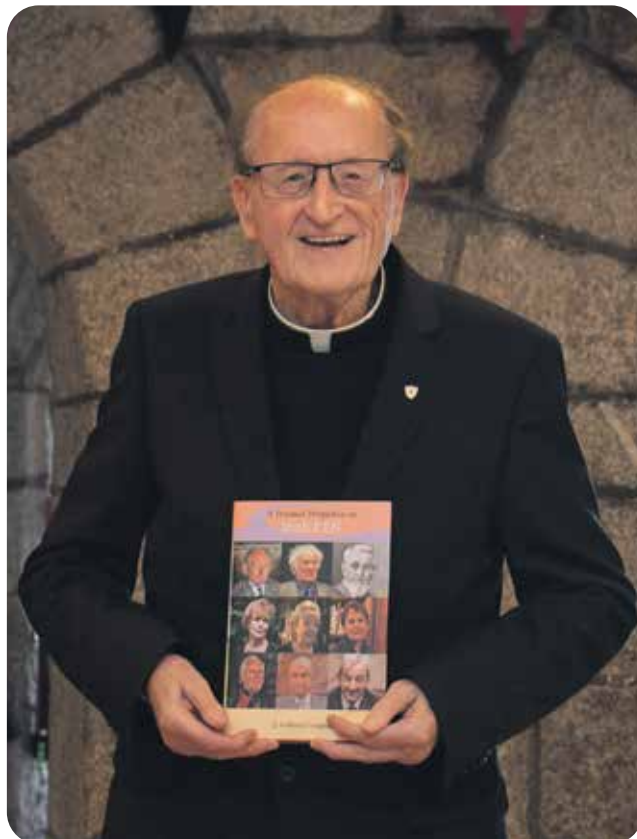
Brendan O'Regan



Spirit of nation lifts along with restrictions

Last weekend the spirits of the nation lifted, but they were heavy at the start of last week.

I tend to complain a fair bit about the **Pat Kenny Show** (Newstalk, weekdays), so it behoves me to give credit when it's due. On Tuesday of last week when discussing the vigils related to the sad and horrific death of teacher Ashling Murphy, the host drew attention to the religious elements in these events. That was particularly obvious in the coverage of her funeral that same day on the **News at One** (RTÉ Radio 1). The music was beautiful and the words of the homily by Fr Michael Meade struck home – “together we grieve, together we pray, together we hurt and this is the very heavy price we all have to pay for love”. Bishop Tom Deenihan referred to “a depraved act of violence” and the questions it asked of society. After the coverage it was good to hear presenter Bryan Dobson suggesting they would deal with the broader societal issues on the programme when more appropriate. As I suggested last week some activists jumped the gun rather inappropriately in the previous days and since. Targets included Catholic schools, single sex schools and in one bizarre intervention it was suggested that perhaps men needed some



Fr J. Anthony Gaughan (89), who has written 35 books, said he's still going strong on *Today With Claire Byrne* on RTÉ Radio One during an item on the shortage of priests.

sort of licensing to go into the 'social sphere'!

Warm and positive

Later in the week, on **Today With Claire Byrne** (RTÉ Radio 1, Friday), there was a very warm and positive item about the shortage of priests and related issues in the Catholic Church in Ireland.

Among the issues explored in Evelyn O'Rourke's reports were the creation of new pastoral roles apart from the ordained ministry, priests coming from abroad to serve here (indeed, as our priests served abroad in the past), limited roles for women, the availability of other career paths. Fr Michael Collins said

that in a way the Church was a victim of its own success – leaving us now with a huge infrastructure but with less human resources to manage it. He lamented how a small number of perpetrators caused such huge damage but he wasn't too worried as the Church had weathered many storms before. He thought the Church shouldn't be relying on people past retirement. Sociologist Brian Conway from Maynooth University spoke of how 'the secular opportunity' found the Church competing with jobs outside the Church. He also thought the decline had set in before the scandals.

The most enjoyable part of the item was the interviewing of two priests in their 80s who were still serving – they were described as 'extraordinary men' by Claire Byrne. Fr Anthony Gaughan had written 35 books and was still going strong and enthusiastic. Now in his 90th year, he said he was busy, active and happy and hoped for 10 more years! Fr Bill Fortune, also in his 80s said the priesthood was a commitment like marriage and was such a worthwhile life. But he was realistic – you can only do so much, and he urged us not to have “cracked expectations”. Cathal Galligan spoke enthusiastically about his work as a permanent deacon – a distinct ministry, he said, “not

PICK OF THE WEEK

MASS

RTÉ One Sunday January 30, 11am

To mark Catholic Schools Week, Fr Gareth Byrne celebrates Mass with students from Oatlands College, Stillorgan, Co. Dublin. Musical Director - Adam McDonagh.

LILLIES OF THE FIELD

BBC Two Sunday January 30, 3.30pm

Travelling handyman Homer Smith helps out five German-speaking nuns on their small Arizona farm. Oscar winner for Sidney Poitier, recently deceased.

THE STORY OF SAINT BRIGID OF IRELAND

EWTN Sunday January 30, 4pm and Thursday February 3, 9am

A documentary on one of the pillars of Irish Christianity, St Brigid of Kildare: a religious foundress and tireless champion for the poor.

like a mini-priest”. He was glad to be “a presence of Our Lord in people's lives” – he regarded it as “time well spent”.

Claire Byrne added a slightly jarring note at the end. Listening to Deacon Galligan she said it was “bizarre” that women weren't allowed to become ordained deacons. Arguments have been made for and against but just because she doesn't understand doesn't make it “bizarre”. A bit of an issue of religious literacy is at play I think, and this bedevils so many media discussions of religious matters.

Bizarre

What I did find rather bizarre was the puzzlingly sudden lifting of most restrictions related to the pandemic. I was expecting a slightly more

gradual approach. Something just didn't add up. One media commentator said it felt like a ‘war is over’ moment. I hope Covid got the memo – or was that Omicron sniggering at the back of the **Press Conference** (RTÉ News Channel, Friday)?

Whatever the case I was glad to see the end of those socially divisive vaccine passports (except for international travel, which is what they were originally intended for) though I know people of goodwill have varied views on those. I suspect history will not look kindly on those documents, even as they are consigned to history.

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[@boreganmedia](https://www.boreganmedia.com)



Pat O'Kelly



Music

Vivaldi's tale of intrigue, confusion and death

As I write I hope Covid-19 restrictions will soon be lifted. Two groups – Irish National Opera (INO) and the National String Quartet Foundation – have had their current tours disrupted with changes to starting times and even some cancellations.

Supported by Culture Ireland, INO's nationwide tour of Vivaldi's *Bajazet* is drawing to a close with performances in Maynooth College this evening, (Thursday), and in Dún Laoghaire's Pavilion Theatre on Saturday 29 and Sunday 30 beginning at 5 pm.

Conducted by Baroque enthusiast Peter Whelan and produced by Adele Thomas, in association with London's Royal Opera House (ROH),



Bass-baritone Gianluca Margheri

Bajazet moves to the British capital's Linbury Theatre, close to the ROH, for a run of six, already ‘sold out’, perfor-

mances between February 4 and 12.

Dating from 1735, *Bajazet* had its première in Verona during that year's carnival season. The story deals with the plight of title character Bajazet, emperor of the Ottomans, imprisoned by rival Uzbek emperor, Tamerlano. Naturally, there are intrigues, confusions and even death en route but the opera ends with a ray of ‘hope for the abandonment of hate’.

Title role

INO's cast has bass-baritone Gianluca Margheri in the title role with countertenor James Laing as Tamerlano. Mezzo Niamh O'Sullivan is Bajazet's daughter, Asteria, who is

in love, alas, with an ally of Tamerlano – Grecian prince Andronico, being sung here by countertenor Eric Surenas.

A pupil of the late Veronica Dunne before moving on to the Bavarian State Opera Studio in Munich, Niamh O'Sullivan made her Wexford Festival debut last year. In sets and costumes by Molly Ó Catháin, soprano Claire Booth and mezzo Aoife Miskelly complete the *Bajazet* cast.

Remaining with the human voice, visiting tenor Ben Johnson is being joined by Niall Kinsella, a star among our younger generation pianists, in Smock Alley Theatre on Sunday 30 for Schubert's song cycle masterpiece, *Winterreise* (Winter journey).

Poems

The poems of his contemporary Wilhelm Müller (1794-1827) came to Schubert's attention in 1823 when he read a compilation of Müller's verses. Schubert took 20 of them for his *Die schöne Müllerin* (The maid of the mill) cycle and, almost four years and over seventy other songs later, the composer returned to Müller and set a further 24 of his poems between February and October 1827. Indeed, one of Schubert's last tasks was proof reading *Winterreise* for publication in 1828.

Winterreise has been described as a wholly interior drama. A plot, as such, does not exist and there is

little change of mood. The hero or wanderer is alone in his despair and only in the final song is there an intrusion of another being – a hurdy-gurdy man.

The protagonist is something of a romantic hero at war with society and with fate. In isolation he is condemned to suffer without respite. He is denied the solace of redemption through love; his fate is a life in death relieved only by the companionship of the hurdy-gurdy man.

The heartbreak and despair in the poems, against their background of ice and snow, generated an unusual depth of feeling in Schubert.



BookReviews

Peter Costello



The shadowed life of a republican 'true believer'

On Dangerous Ground: A Memoir of the Irish Revolution

by Máire Comerford
ed. Hilary Dully (The Lilliput Press, Dublin, €20.00)

J. Anthony Gaughan

This is a fascinating diary written by a republican 'true believer'. From 1916 until her death in 1982, Máire Comerford was totally committed to the struggle for independence as understood by many of those elected to the first Dáil.

Máire was born on June 29, 1893 at Rathdrum, Co. Wicklow. She was educated at two convent schools, and a secretarial college in London. On returning to Ireland she was engaged in the co-operative movement in Co. Wexford and in assisting Belgian refugees following the outbreak of World War I.

She was visiting relatives in Dublin during Easter Week 1916. What she witnessed then and in its aftermath, had a profound effect on her and directed the course of the rest of her life. She joined the Wexford branch of Sinn Féin in 1916 and Cumann na mBan the following year.

Máire was employed by the historian Alice Stopford Green in 1918, the author of *Irish Nationality*. She was the widow of Richard Green, the British author of *A Short History of the English People*, from which he left out all the battles, remarking rightly enough, that historians "too often turned history into a mere record of the butchery of men by their fellow men."

Working for Mrs Green she met most of the nationalist leaders of the time and was involved in providing assistance to dependants of those who took part in the Rising.

After leaving Mrs Green's employment she became fully engaged in campaigning for Sinn Féin in elections. And during the War of Independence (1919-1921) she organised Cumann na mBan branches throughout the country, carried dispatches for the IRA's Fourth Northern Division and reported Black and Tan atrocities.

Opposed

Máire was opposed to the Anglo-Irish Treaty, as she did not wish any change from the Republic established by the 1916 Proclamation. She was actively involved in the Civil War, carrying dispatches between the Anti-Treaty forces in the Four Courts and the IRA's Dublin Brigade and later acted as a courier to IRA units in various parts of the country.

She was arrested and imprisoned, spending time in Mountjoy Jail and in Kilmainham Jail and she went on hunger-strike on two occasions. After the defeat of the Anti-Treaty forces she continued to support Sinn Féin. Éamon de Valera then sent her on a fundraising campaign to the US. On her return to



Máire Comerford, an embattled Republican in old age.

Ireland she settled in Wexford and eked out a paltry existence on a poultry farm.

Máire was appointed to the Irish Press in 1935, where she worked as editor of the 'Women's Page'. Her enthusiasm for 'The Republic' was in no way dimmed and she continued to write for the IRA's War News through the 1930s. She also remained politically active through her involvement with the Anti-Partition League and the Mansion House Committee.

She retired as a full-time journalist in 1964 to compile a book on the republican movement and she published *The First Dáil* in 1969. She continued her republican activities and was before the courts in 1976 for attendance at a banned Sinn Féin rally in Dublin.

Chief merit

The chief merit of Máire's diary is the light it sheds on some remarkable, albeit non-central, figures from the revolutionary period. Among them there is her employer – Mrs Alice Stopford-Green.

At the other end of the spectrum was Albina Broderick/Gobnait Ní Bruadair, daughter of the Eighth Viscount Midleton, whose guilt at the long-suffering of the Irish poor saw her throw in her lot with the republicans, join Cumann na mBan, set up a hospital in south Co. Kerry and eventually sit as a representative of Sinn Féin in Kerry County Council.

Máire was a lifelong friend and supporter of Dom John Francis Sweetman OSB, another remarkable figure of that period. He had served as a chaplain in the Boer War. On his return to Ireland he established an admired school, Mount St Benedict's, near Gorey.

Máire helped him in running the establishment. Eventually it was closed by Bishop Codd "because it had become a hotbed of republicanism" and Dom Sweetman was transferred to an appointment in Liverpool. Before she died on December 15, 1982 Máire arranged to be buried next to the monk on the grounds of their former school.

Hers was a republicanism that was a true faith, a creed that for her and many others was neither popular or profitable in the long run.

Haughey: reassessing his controversial career

A moment of private introspection: Charles J. Haughey at home in Kinsealy, his north Dublin mansion.

Haughey
by Gary Murphy
(Gill Books, €27.99/£25.99)

Felix M. Larkin

The distinguished philosopher, Sir Anthony Kenny, wrote apropos of an encounter with Charles J. Haughey that "on no other occasion in my life has anyone, with a straight face, told me so many lies that he knew were lies, and that he knew I knew were lies".

Many of Haughey's contemporaries in public life and in the media shared Kenny's view of him as shamelessly unprincipled, and this perception has been reinforced by the findings of the tribunals which inquired into his affairs after his resignation as Taoiseach in 1992.

Gary Murphy's new biography of him recognises that, but argues nevertheless that he was more sinned against than sinning. Prof. Murphy accepts that Haughey's "reputation is such that he can be accused of almost any misdeed from subverting the State from within to behaving like some sort of South American dic-

tator", but he suggests that "the reality is far more complex and nuanced" and so "it is time for a reassessment of Haughey".

Prof. Murphy has spent eight years preparing this biography, which makes use of Haughey's papers deposited in Dublin City University (where he is a professor of politics). Having access to these papers has enabled Prof. Murphy to present Haughey's own perspective on the events of his controversial career, and he rarely challenges that perspective – even when it is patently obvious, and subsequent developments have confirmed, that Haughey was skating on thin ice.

Example

An example of this is his treatment of the questions that Conor Cruise O'Brien raised about Haughey's finances during the general election of 1969. Prof. Murphy dismisses O'Brien's criticism as betraying "his [O'Brien's] own patrician ignorance of the fact that large swathes of the Irish electorate were imbued with an unshakable reverence for wealth and cared little about its origins or

propriety". The tribunal revelations would show that O'Brien's concerns were justified. It was, of course, Haughey – rather than O'Brien – who affected patrician airs and graces.

Charles Haughey's childhood in northside Dublin was spartan, but he was a brilliant student and before entering politics he enjoyed a successful career as an accountant in the firm that he founded with his old school friend, Harry Boland, the son of a Fianna Fáil cabinet minister. In 1951 he married a daughter of Seán Lemass, another Fianna Fáil cabinet minister and the future Taoiseach.

He became a TD in 1957 – after three failed attempts to win a Dáil seat – and was in the cabinet as Minister for Justice by 1961. He later served as Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Finance and Minister for Health and Social Welfare, before becoming Taoiseach in 1979.

Prof. Murphy claims that there was much resentment within Fianna Fáil and elsewhere at the rise of someone of his humble origins. Maybe so, but the opposition to Haughey's rise was largely a function of the doubts about his character that were commonplace

“Many of Haughey's contemporaries in public life and in the media shared Kenny's view of him as shamelessly unprincipled”

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



long before the tribunal revelations. The most often quoted expression of these doubts was Garret FitzGerald's comment in Dáil Éireann about Haughey's "flawed pedigree" when he was first elected Taoiseach.

Social snobbery

Some, as Prof. Murphy notes, have characterised that comment as "social snobbery" – a slur on Haughey's modest background.

The Dáil record is, however, clear about why FitzGerald had reservations about Haughey's suitability for high political office. He stated that it was because Haughey's "motives have been and are widely impugned, most notably but by no means exclusively, by people within his own party, people close to him who have observed his actions for many years and who have made their human, interim judgment on him.

"They and others, both in and out of public life, have attributed to him an over-weening ambition which they do not see as a simple emanation of a desire to serve but rather as a wish to dominate, even to own the State."

The most infamous episode in Haughey's career is the arms crisis which led to his sacking as Minister for Finance in May 1970. He then stood trial twice on the charge of conspiracy to import arms illegally – arms which, it was alleged, would be passed to nationalist communities in Northern Ireland.

The first trial was abandoned when the judge withdrew because of criticism of his conduct of the trial. Haughey was acquitted at the end of the second trial, along with three other defendants – but the whiff of cordite attached to him forever afterwards.

He always refused to discuss the matter: as Prof. Murphy writes, nobody could "get the truth of the arms crisis and trials out of Haughey, or even Haughey's version of it". Sadly, the full truth will probably never be known. It is buried with Haughey and the other principal actors in the crisis.

Haughey died in 2006, aged 80. Prof. Murphy's reassessment of this highly talented but flawed figure is deeply researched and well written, but it will not salvage Haughey's reputation.

The World of Books

By the books editor

Honouring our culture and its strange heroes



Artist Aidan Harte with the maquette for his Púca statue.

The public fracas down in Ennistymon, Co. Clare over the erection of a statue representing the Púca of folklore has attracted a deal of amused comment around the country.

Certainly the affair focused the attention of the nation on aspects of our own modern Irish culture which deserve more serious attention than a few quick phone calls made by some journalists can provide. These are our attitudes to our folk tradition, and how we commemorate our political heroes and people who are much admired.

Clare County Council wished to erect a piece of modern sculpture, a worthy project, and indeed one to be admired. But on the way to fulfilment something went wrong. The maquette artist Mr Harte created and put forward, which was to cost some €30,000 to cast in bronze, was of the Púca (much of this money would go on the bronze and the fees of the foundry workers.)

In accounting for himself after the controversy broke out Aidan Harte said there was "nothing pagan" about his concept. This is an odd thing to say. He should have stuck to his original view that he was creating an image of a figure from our folklore past.

Problem

Why this should be a problem, I cannot understand. Humans have been on this island for some 300,000 years (the date is Prof. Frank Mitchell's and I take from Dr Peter Harbison). If that seems unlikely, well 10,000 years ago is acceptable to most experts for Mesolithic humans. Some of the islanders have been Christian – or as in these days quasi-Christian – for only some 1,500 years. If we are to have nothing to

do with our 'pagan past' we would have to ignore most of the human history of Ireland (which most people seem happy to do anyway).

No: the problem I have is not that the image is 'pagan', but that it takes a poorly thought out approach to the Púca. My mother-in-law, who came from rural Co. Galway, taught my wife when she saw a snail in the garden, to say "Pooka, pooka, put out your horns."

“We have to remember that traditions of rural Ireland were not graphic but oral”

But for many others the pooka was something much larger, more akin to a small horse, a donkey, or a larger dog. This idea is based on what those who saw what they thought was a pooka in the first half of the last century – as recounted by Yeats' close friend Dermot Mac Manus in his richly informative book *The Middle Kingdom* published back in 1959, an exploration through the words and experiences of named witnesses of "the faerie world of Ireland" in recent times; the real thing and not the faked up codology.

We have to remember that traditions of rural Ireland were not graphic but oral, the tale or the poem, and not the painting or drawing. It was American and British illustrators in Victorian times who created our all-too-common notions of the 'gentry'. Aidan Harte draws upon this modern graphic genre and not on what was really believed in rural Ireland.

The second thing is the matter of public sculptures. Today these are decided upon by local authorities ('the elected representatives', so often evoked by 'community workers' in matters of controversy). Local people often feel they are little consulted.

Victorian days

It was very different in Victorian days. In Dublin the statues to Daniel O'Connell and Charles Stewart Parnell were not paid for by the corporation (as it was then) but by public subscriptions which a committee collected over a long number of years. The public voted with their cash, so we may take it that they were keen on the project.

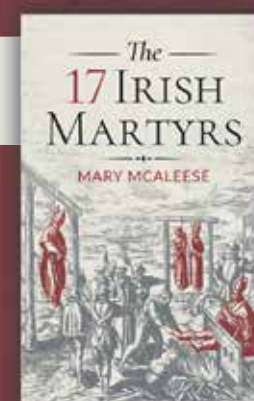
But would this work now? As we all know, all too many people expect the Government or the councils to pay for these things without troubling us beyond our taxes. But if our Victorian forefathers had a strong say on what was imposed on them where they lived; different districts meant different heroes – hence the powerful image of Edward Carson in Stormont.

Maybe the present system is in the end more equitable and makes for less controversy, though here if there is a chance of a row we will seize it.

But this is a cultural matter that needs talking about from time to time.

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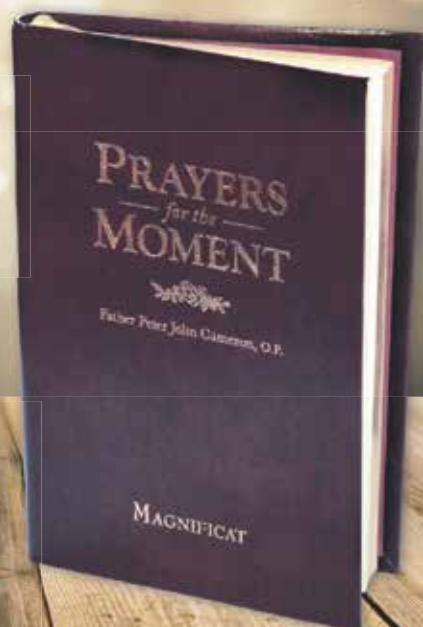
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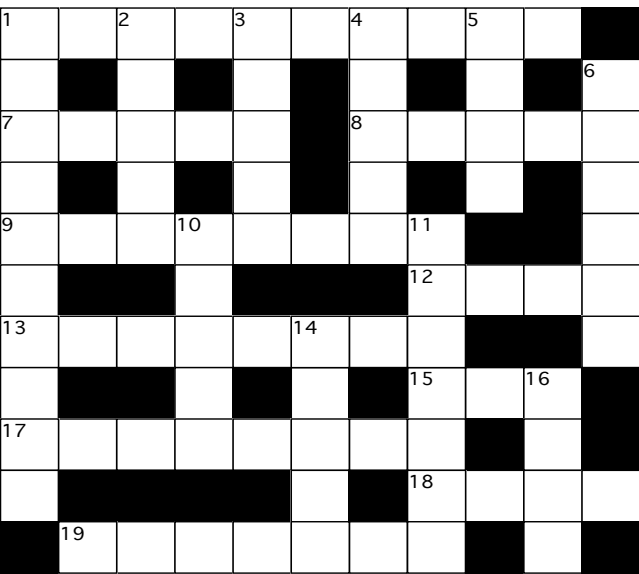
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Crossword Junior Children's 417



- Across**

1 They're no longer in their pods, and you keep them in the freezer (6,4)

7 Not long (5)

8 Hammer them in (5)

9 Delicious cold treat (3-5)

12 You roast meat in this (4)

13 Your child's boy is this to you (8)

15 Use it to open a lock (3)

17 High is the _____ of low (8)

18 The yellow part of an egg (4)

19 Painters or sculptors per-haps (7)
- Down**

1 You use it when casting your line and hook (7,3)

2 People are worried about the _____ Layer (5)

3 Go in (5)

4 Black and white bear (5)

5 Harsh, cutting liquid (4)

6 Putting a question (6)

10 Huge river in Africa that gives its name to two coun-tries (5)

11 These clever, playful crea-tures usually have tails (7)

14 They're bigger than boats (5)

16 Shout (4)

SOLUTIONS, DECEMBER 20

GORDIUS NO. 542

Across – 1 Derisively 6 Frog 10 Gecko 11 Sweetshop 13 Manx cat 15 Fable 17 Half 18 Edge 19 Elbow 21 Popcorn 23 Creel 24 Biro 25 Ache 26 Abbot 28 Tea cosy 33 Buccaneer 34 Broke 35 Risk 36 Parliament

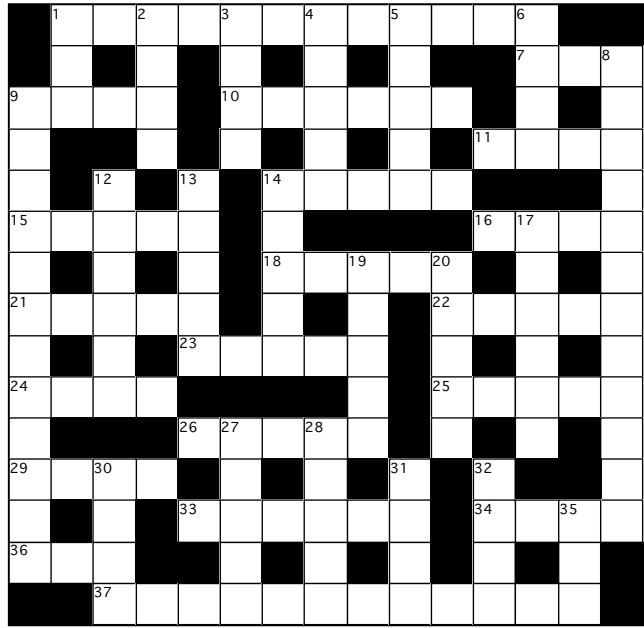
Down – 1 Digs 2 Rectangle 3 Sioux 4 Vista 5 Leek 7 Rehab 8 Gopher wood 9 Stiffen 13 Ciao 14 Thicket 16 Bedchamber 20 Brimstone 21 Plateau 22 Rhea 27 Bucks 29 Enrol 30 Cobra 31 Feta 32 Left

CHILDREN'S No. 416

Across – 1 Bird table 7 Tomato sauce 8 Easier 11 Sled 12 Alps 13 Forest 15 Sinbad 16 Index 17 Wheels 18 Sligo

Down – 1 Butterflies 2 Ramps 3 Title 4 Boss 5 Equals 6 Fields 9 Iceberg 10 Rats 11 Spaniel 14 Tails

Crossword Gordius 543



- Across**

1 On which the intensity of earthquakes may be meas-ured (7,5)

7 Drinking vessel (3)

9 City in Nevada that describes itself as "the biggest little city in the world" (4)

10 & 23a Spy (6,5)

11 A Native American people trapped in a massacre, even-tually (4)

14 Stopping apparatus (5)

15 Chap (5)

16 Short name for a book of the New Testament (4)

18 Petty quarrels (5)

21 Mares scattered large amounts of paper (5)

22 Large South American water rodent (5)

23 See 10 across

24 & 25 Constellation - the Little Bear (4,5)

26 Pulverise (5)

29 Hobbling from Los Angeles with me (4)

33 Out of the country (6)

34 The national airline of Israel (2,2)

36 A rocky height (3)

37 See the agitated sacristan
- Down**

1 Fish eggs (3)

2 Prepare food (4)

3 Some juntas select a Rus-sians news agency (4)

4 Happen again (5)

5 Verify (5)

6 Middle-Eastern potentate (4)

8 Must this tree-dweller neces-sarily be old? (4,8)

9 This is sometimes fired in a riot situation (6,6)

12 Distribute no arms for capital Italians to whom Saint Paul wrote (6)

13 Organization for people with high IQ (5)

14 Clean up or go for a swim (5)

17 Weeping, sobbing (6)

19 Retrieve (5)

20 I leave some seafood for a rascal (5)

27 Red-breasted bird (5)

28 Bend down (5)

30 The Red Planet (4)

31 Greatest of the Viking gods (4)

32 Rip, lacerate (4)

35 Donkey or fool (3)

Sudoku Corner 417

Easy

9		4	6		2		1	7
6					1			
		1	9		3	8		6
4	3	2				9		8
5		6				4	7	3
1		5	8		9	7		
			7					9
3	7		5		4	6		1

Hard

		7		8	3		4	
			2			7		3
	6							1
7			5				1	
9	8						2	4
	2				8			7
1							3	
6		9			7			
	3		1	5		4		

Last week's Easy 416

8	5	3	9	1	2	4	6	7
6	7	9	4	3	5	8	1	2
1	2	4	6	7	8	5	9	3
9	6	2	1	8	3	7	4	5
5	4	8	7	2	6	9	3	1
7	3	1	5	4	9	2	8	6
4	9	7	3	5	1	6	2	8
3	8	6	2	9	7	1	5	4
2	1	5	8	6	4	3	7	9

Last week's Hard 416

6	3	5	1	8	2	7	4	9
2	1	9	4	6	7	3	5	8
8	4	7	3	9	5	1	2	6
7	2	3	9	1	4	8	6	5
1	8	4	2	5	6	9	7	3
9	5	6	7	3	8	4	1	2
5	9	8	6	7	1	2	3	4
3	7	2	5	4	9	6	8	1
4	6	1	8	2	3	5	9	7

Notebook

Fr Martin Delaney

A reunion at a border post

RECENTLY I DROVE across the border from Northern Ireland into the Republic. To be honest these days you have little sense that you are crossing from one jurisdiction to another but I was reminded of how different it was when I first travelled that route in the late 70s and 80s. It was a nerve-wrecking and often fearful experience to cross that border at certain points. There was one crossing which had a heavily fortified British Army post on the outskirts of the town and there were many violent exchanges, some of them fatal at that particular border post. Depending on who you met at the checkpoint the interrogation from the army officers could be quite awkward and there was always the fear that a wrong word from either side could become quite inflammatory. During my recent uneventful border crossing while I reflected back on an earlier time, now hopefully in the far distant past, I was also reminded of an incident that happened at that very border crossing back in the 1980's.

An elderly Irish missionary priest I knew was home from Africa where he had spent most



of his religious life. One day at the height of the troubles he was traveling from his family home in Northern Ireland to his order's house in the Republic. As he approached the border crossing there was a long queue leading up to the British Army post.

Tension

A long queue always added to the tension because it meant that each car was being searched and drivers questioned at length. When Fr Paddy finally reached the army post he was approached by

a young dark-skinned officer who asked the priest to produce some form of identity. Fr Paddy silently showed the soldier his passport. The soldier examined Fr Paddy's document very carefully and then asked the priest to stay there as he walked back into the make-shift building behind him with the priest's passport still in his hand. This all made Fr Paddy more nervous as clearly this was not going to be a routine check. To his surprise after what seemed like an age the soldier returned with a big smile on his face and as he handed Fr Paddy back his passport, he also produced a little well-worn card from his own wallet and showed it to the priest. The card was actually a form of Baptismal cert which his parents had been given at his Baptism in Kenya 25 years earlier. The

card was signed by the priest who had baptised him and yes, the signature was the same Fr Paddy now in front of the soldier at a border post in Northern Ireland. The tension of the previous 15 minutes dissolved into an emotional reunion between this young soldier and the priest who had baptised him in a far-off land 25 years earlier. Much I'm sure to the bemusement and possible annoyance of the cars behind in the queue there was an animated conversation between the two men, a request from the soldier for a photograph together to send home to his parents. But most significantly in the short conversation the young soldier told the priest how proud he was to be a Catholic and that he carried this Baptismal card as an essential part of his identity of who he was.

A suspicious wife

When Adam stayed out very late for a few nights, Eve became upset. "You're running around with other women," she charged. "You're being unreasonable," Adam responded. "You're the only woman on earth." The quarrel continued until Adam fell asleep, only to be awakened by someone poking him in the chest. It was Eve. "What do you think you're doing?" Adam demanded. "Counting your ribs!"

Prayer to St Brigid

Brigid, you were a woman of peace.
You brought harmony where there was conflict.
You brought light to the darkness.
You brought hope to the downcast.
May the mantle of your peace cover those who are troubled and anxious,
and may peace be firmly rooted in our hearts and in our world.
Inspire us to act justly and to reverence all God has made.
Brigid, you were a voice for the wounded and the weary.
Strengthen what is weak within us.
Calm us into a quietness that heals and listens.
May we grow each day into greater
wholeness in mind, body and spirit. Amen



The Little Way Association

COULD YOU HELP TO SAVE A POOR HELPLESS CHILD

The Little Way Association receives numerous requests from missionaries throughout the world asking for help to feed, support and educate needy, deprived children. Due to COVID-19 they are faced with many sufferings. They tell us of orphaned children left alone with no one to love or care for them, of families so poor that they cannot afford to send their children to school, and of street children, totally abandoned, hungry and homeless, experiencing much anguish and hardship during their most tender years. The whole future of these children often depends upon whether a missionary can find sufficient funds to care for them.

Your New Year's gift will mean a chance of health and happiness for a deprived child.

Crossed POs and cheques should be sent and made payable to:

THE LITTLE WAY ASSOCIATION
Sacred Heart House, 119 Cedars Rd, Clapham Common, London SW4 0PR
(Registered Charity No. 235703) Tel 0044 20 76 22 0466
www.littlewayassociation.com

I enclose €..... to be allocated to:
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(Please state no. of Masses _____)
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☐ Please tick if you would like an acknowledgement

Name (Rev. Mr. Mrs. Miss) _____ (Block letters please)

Address _____

To donate online go to
tinyurl.com/lwadonations

DONATIONS FOR THE MISSIONS ARE SENT WITHOUT DEDUCTION FOR ANY EXPENSES.

As 2022 begins, please consider making a gift to The Little Way Association's fund for children.

Every euro you send will be gratefully received and sent without deduction, to enable a missionary priest or sister to carry the love, care and compassion of Christ to a deprived, abandoned or orphaned child.

Thank you, and may God reward your generosity.

It was St Therese's vocation to be **"love in the heart of the Church, and to assist priests, missionaries and the entire Church"**, and this has been the continuing inspiration of The Little Way Association. Ever since St Therese's death on 30th September 1897, countless priests and missionaries have given witness to the extraordinary way in which she has helped them. Let us pray for the fulfilment of her desire that the Gospel message would be spread throughout the world.

We wish all our friends and benefactors a very happy and peaceful New Year

May St Therese reward you in a special way for the sacrifices you make to support our work, and may she obtain all the blessings and graces you need for 2022.

Daily Mass for your intentions

You and your intentions are remembered in a special Mass offered in the Missions for all Little Way benefactors and friends.