

The Irish Catholic

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Church return faster than gyms, pubs and restaurants, says ESRI

Chai Brady

Church-goers were faster than any other sector to return when restrictions were lifted according to the latest Government research, a revelation which has been dubbed "a hopeful sign" by people in frontline ministry.

Dr Pete Lunn, head of the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) Behavioural Research Unit, told *The Irish Catholic* that in general people returned to activities slowly at each stage of reopening, but church attendance was an outlier.

"For people returning to eating outdoors, gyms and hospitality venues and so on, we saw that change steadily week on week," Dr Lunn said.

"But when the restrictions were lifted to allow church services again there was a step jump in the data. The people who would normally go to Mass - and then obviously were not allowed to go - as soon as they were allowed go to Mass they went back pretty quickly."

He said that when churches reopened in May, along with some other indoor venues as part of the Republic's reopening plans, attendance at indoor locations jumped from 5.5% of the population to 13.7%.

"This is very different from the other curves that we are generating of people's behaviour," Dr Lunn said. "When we looked at that, what we discovered was the large majority of that was accounted for by people going back to church, it wasn't the libraries, the museums, the galleries. It's not a huge proportion of the population but what made it different was that it happened suddenly in one go."

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Celebrating age and beauty...



The Watters family are pictured with the Grandparents Tree at The Church of the Immaculate Conception, Kingscourt, Co. Cavan, which was planted on the World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly, July 25. See page 8.

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Michael Kelly's Editor's Comment will return in the autumn

Business as normal, bishops assure Latin Mass communities

Ruadhán Jones

The Irish Catholic understands that bishops in Dublin and Cork have assured Latin Mass communities that nothing will change following recent reforms in Church law.

The bishops' assurances come after Pope Francis restricted the celebration of Latin Mass in his *motu proprio*, *Traditiones Custodes*, placing responsibility for its regulation in the hands of the bishops.

The Latin Mass Chaplaincy in Harrington St, Dublin, were assured by Archbishop

Dermot Farrell that nothing would change, and that he is happy for things to continue as they are, *The Irish Catholic* understands.

Meanwhile, St Peter and Paul's Church, Cork, received similar assurances from Bishop Fintan Gavin of Cork and Ross diocese, according to a member of a Latin Mass youth group.

"There was uncertainty for a few days, but the bishop decided to allow" Latin Mass to continue being celebrated in Peter and Paul's Church, Patrick Williams told *The Irish Catholic*.

Mr Williams, who co-founded the Cork branch of the international Latin Mass youth group *Juventutem*, said the Pope's letter "couldn't have come at a worse time" for their Latin Mass community.

The Covid-19 pandemic left *Juventutem* Corcaigh in a "grey area": "We're not inactive, but we're not active either, as Covid made having events a hard thing to do," Mr Williams explained. "It feels like we're dead in the water, but the people who make up the group find ways to get together."

He said the decision to limit celebration of the Latin Mass, sometimes called the Extraordinary Form, was "emotionally heart-wrenching".

"We're feeling marginalised," Mr Williams admitted. "I've listened to a lot of different views from societies, even SSPX (Society of St Pius X) priests, who say it feels like a bit of a downer because we've made a lot of strides since the council to really not be marginalised anymore."

Mr Williams concluded, saying "it does feel like a step back".

'Living faith' of Brendan Óg O'Dufaigh remembered

Staff reporter

The 19-year-old Monaghan GAA player who was killed in a car accident was remembered as a "shining star", shining on family and loved ones.

Brendán 'Ógie' Ó Dufaigh was driving home after playing in the Ulster football championship semi-final when the crash occurred.

The funeral took place in St Macartan's Cathedral in Monaghan, where Fr Paddy McGinn thanked God for "the love, kindness, and happiness Ógie gave to family and to all who knew him".

In his homily, Fr McGinn praised Ógie's "very living faith". "In pre-Covid times, he

would go to morning Mass before a game," Fr McGinn said. "He had his rosary beads and cross in the side pocket of his kit bag last Friday night."

"He lit candles in Saint Joseph's Church here in Monaghan town and served the 8:30 Mass along with his two siblings."

Ógie's father Brendan, mother Esther and sisters Claire and Áine were joined by his relations, his friends, fellow players in Monaghan Harps GFC and U20 county team and his work mates in Kingspan.

Ahead of the service, teammates formed a guard of honour as the young footballer's coffin, draped in a Monaghan flag, was carried into the church.

Church return faster than gyms, pubs and restaurants, says ESRI

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The Director of Youth Ministry for the Redemptorists in Ireland, Dermot Kelly, described the enthusiastic return as "definitely a sign of hope".

"As humans, as people of God in these times we seek and gravitate towards community and communion with Christ and one another...When something is taken away, our heart grows fonder."

He added that for those that have been working behind the scenes doing "sterling work to keep churches safe" during the pandemic, "it's a sign more than ever that our churches are a safe place and all are welcome".

Máire McAteer, who is part of the leadership team of Youth 2000 said the need for worship is "written into our being" and that "you don't realise how much public worship or worshipping together is part of your life until it is taken away".

The quick return, she said, reflects "a realisation that coming together in public worship has been done for centuries and is God-ordained, it's something that we're called to do. It also reflects the great trust in church settings, I think people feel safe in the church and they knew all precautions are being taken and Church leaders are taking the pandemic very seriously."

Donegal-based theologian Fr Niall Coll said it was clear that there are people "who were very determined to come back and have returned consistently".

"There was a big feeling of injustice among people that churches were forced to close, because parishioners were very aware of the extent to which their particular parish had gone to ensure the highest standard of Covid-19 protection and I think there was a great awareness that the Government seemed to be totally unaware - or didn't seem to respect - or value the importance of the spiritual in people's lives."

"It's not surprising that a lot of people came back quickly because a lot of people were frustrated and sad and couldn't see the rationale when they saw that shops were opened and things like that."

He added: "I think the pandemic has led to some people having a clearer understanding of the importance of faith, that it is an absolute priority for them and they can't be so passive about it and they have to show more agency."

For Bosco McShane, school retreat co-ordinator of Sólta Retreats based in Co. Tyrone, people were "eager to get back to the sacraments...nothing beats being there in person".

"There's still going to be work to be done to get people back again, even though many people did return. Some of the older people are still frightened of the pandemic."

"It's definitely a good starting point - you're always going to have the faithful who are looking for the sacraments, they are a must, we need them. It's easier to live without the sun than it is to live without Mass," he said paraphrasing Padre Pio.

Brendan Óg O'Dufaigh.



Archbishop lashes 'groupthink' on faith in mainstream media

Staff reporter

One of the country's most senior Churchmen has warned that elements of mainstream media "managed" to deprive people of the ability to think critically about faith and society.

Reshape

Archbishop of Tuam Michael Neary warned that: "Forces are endeavouring to reshape our values, fears and dreams in ways that are quite liter-

ally opposed to the joy of the Gospel".

"It has become standard today to adopt and embrace a form of 'groupthink' which allows some to believe they can determine our outlook and reactions to various situations and realities, and not least, our attitude to religion and matters of faith and morals," the archbishop said during a homily at the vigil Mass ahead of 'Reek Sunday' in Westport.

He criticised what he

described as a tendency in the media to concentrate on what divides people rather than what brings people together.

Competitive world

"In a competitive world the media will tend to focus on the dramatic or even sensational as extreme positions vie with each other. Consensus and collaboration are frequently overlooked. This has an impact on the way in which religion is pre-

sented. Of its very nature, religion is intended to bind people together and to God, rather than to divide and conquer.

"Religion as a counter-cultural force has today become marginalised," he warned. "It is not uncommon to find the coverage of religion per se and religious affairs generally viewed through a political prism and treated in political terms.

"The great organs of news and information in society

are, it seems, being managed to serve distorted and sometimes questionable ends, which are calculated to deprive us of our critical faculties," the archbishop said.

Criticism

While he said that criticism of the Church is healthy and has a place, he also warned that: "it is convenient to be dismissive of the Church and faith in a rather uninformed and prejudicial manner.

"For people to whom faith

is important and who have a great love for and appreciation of the Church – in spite of its shortcomings – this is a very challenging time.

"In a society enslaved by the tyranny of 'relevance', the truth of the Gospel can easily be dismissed because it is too challenging to hear, or, because it is perceived to be unsuitable in an open, modern and progressive society," he said.

Youth 2000 launch summer festival with a twist

Jason Osborne

Youth 2000 Ireland has launched registration for their ambitious summer 2021 initiative aimed at 16-35 year-olds. Their annual festival, which usu-

ally attracts crowds of over 1,000 people from around Ireland, had to move online last summer. This year it will go ahead from August 13-15, but in multiple satellite locations, with public liturgies all happening simultaneously

across the country.

Newbridge College in Co. Kildare will act as the epicentre from where the retreat content will be broadcast and live-streamed. Modern technology will virtually connect each of the 12 venues and

allow interactive participation. Everyone is encouraged to tune in, not just those unable to attend the public liturgies each day.

All Church and Government guidelines regarding Covid-19 will be adhered to and numbers will be strictly limited. The young organisers are extremely excited to

have bodies in seats, people on the ground enjoying an in-person (albeit hybrid version) of their massive signature event.

Keynote speakers for the weekend will include Fr Aelred Magee OCSO, a Cistercian monk of Bethlehem Abbey in Portglenone – he is a former chaplain to students at

Queen's University Belfast.

The theme for this year's festival from Psalm 16:8 "I keep the Lord ever in my sight, since He is at my right hand I shall stand firm".

For more information on each of the venues please visit www.youth2000.ie

Reek Pilgrimage organiser thanks priests and pilgrims for season's success

Ruadhán Jones

Fr Charlie McDonnell praised the "support and cooperation" of priests and pilgrims in making the extended Reek Pilgrimage season a success.

Traditionally, the last Sunday of the month – called Reek Sunday – was dedicated to making pilgrimage up Croagh Patrick. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it has been going ahead this year in an extended format from Wednesday to Saturday, throughout this month of July.

Fr McDonnell, Administrator of Westport Parish, Co. Mayo, praised the "tremendous flexibility" the extended season allowed for pilgrims to climb "the holy mountain".

It allowed for increased availability of sacraments and other faith ministries, while Adoration and Confessions took place on the base of the mountain for the first time ever.

"I sincerely wish to thank priests and pilgrims for all their support and cooperation in making the 2021 pilgrimage season a success to date," Fr McDonnell said.

Engaged at sunrise



Tuam Archbishop Dr Michael Neary, who greeted and blessed pilgrims climbing Croagh Patrick on Saturday, July 24, meets a young couple who got engaged on the summit at sunrise.

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Concern remains after assisted suicide bill scrapped on technicality

Ruadhán Jones

While many were relieved that the Oireachtas Committee on Justice scrapped the *Dying with Dignity Bill*, a prominent medical ethicist has warned another effort will come soon.

The Committee said in a July 21 statement that the Bill, introduced by People Before Profit TD Gino

Kenny, “has serious technical issues in several sections”.

It “reluctantly” decided that the Bill should not progress to Committee Stage, but a Special Oireachtas Committee should be established to progress the matter.

However, Dr Noreen O’Carroll warned that this “is not the time to sit back on our oars”, saying she is concerned that the bill was defeated on “technical and not ethical grounds”.

Dr O’Carroll, a lecturer in medical ethics at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) since 2009, said she expects the issue will “undoubtedly reappear”.

“We need to begin now, because this is, if you like, a battle won, but this is coming back even better drafted, more strongly, more persuasively in terms of the language,” Dr O’Carroll told *The Irish Catholic*. “It will be much more

difficult to dislodge it the next time around.”

If the bill is put before a special committee, Dr O’Carroll expects the process will last up to a year. The bill that would emerge would likely have a “more ‘sophisticated’ formulation” than either Gino Kenny’s bill or John Halligan’s 2015 bill.

Dr O’Carroll added that people need to be educated on the ethical

implications of the legislation, but added that in Ireland, the assumption is that “anything ethical comes from the Catholic Church, and we hate the Catholic Church”.

“The people who really are important in this regard are the legislators – the Senators and TDs – and from what I’m picking up from the press release and report is that the primary concern is technical” and not ethical, Dr O’Carroll said.

Sharing a sign of peace



Bishop Paul Dempsey of Achonry Diocese greets pilgrims on their peace walk from Derry and Belfast to Knock, including Bishop of Derry Dr Donal McKeown, July 25.

Masks no longer mandatory at Mass in North

Staff reporter

The Stormont Executive has decided that it will no longer be mandatory to wear masks in places of worship, however some parishes are expected to keep the rule for now.

Ministers announced this week that it would no longer be obligatory to wear masks during Mass and other liturgies, but would instead be guidance. The new measure took effect on Tuesday at 6pm.

Face coverings will still be legally required when entering and exiting the building and will be strongly advised while singing or moving around the church.

The Irish Catholic understands that bishops are concerned that making masks optional may deter Mass-goers who feel vulnerable from attending despite the fact that they are fully vaccinated and therefore as protected as they will be.

At the same time, some parishioners who have been resistant to wearing masks or feel that the rule is now burdensome given levels of vaccination will be keen to move closer to normal liturgy once the legal requirement is relaxed.

Whereas churches in the Republic can only have pods of up to 50 people at Mass, churches in the North are currently allowed to accommodate as many people as can safely fit with a two metre distance. However, ministers are due to meet again on Monday to consider relaxing social distancing from two metres to just one metre.

‘Exciting times’ for Ballintubber Abbey after major funding windfall

Ruadhán Jones

Ballintubber Abbey is set to receive €350,000 from the National Monuments Service for reconstruction and renovation of the 800-year-old church.

Green Party TD Malcolm Noonan announced the contribution while visiting the Mayo abbey, where Mass has

been celebrated for more than 800 years, July 22.

He was “delighted” to announce the funding, as “the local community have put in immense effort over many years to protect this site and it will contribute greatly to the heritage tourism assets of this rural area”.

In a statement, Ballintubber Abbey expressed their gratitude to Mr Noonan,

“for this gesture of support and look forward to developments getting underway”

They added that there are “exciting times ahead for Ballintubber Abbey”, and congratulated Fr Frank Fahey, who has been heavily involved in promoting the abbey.

The funds have been allocated towards the reconstruction of the east wing of the Abbey.



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Harry's family troubles echoed by US study

The American family is in trouble: according to a report carried out by Cornell University (by sociologist Karl Pillemer) more than a quarter of Americans are estranged from a close family member. He says the figure could be higher because people can be ashamed to admit their isolation from family connections.

Estrangement

The most common estrangement is between parent and child – with divorce playing a key role here. Seventy per cent of parents estranged from a son or daughter had divorced the other parent.

Other factors figure as well, including more emphasis on individualism, personal life satisfaction chosen rather than filial duty, and mobility – people move around a lot more and put old ties behind them.

Perhaps California-dwelling Harry and Meghan, the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, relate to this profile of the fractured American family. Meghan is not on speaking terms with her own father, nor



Mary Kenny

with her half-siblings: her parents divorced.

Harry, who has just signed a \$20m (€17m) contract with the publishers Random House for a 'tell-all' autobiography to be published next year, is in a similar position.

“We mustn't judge his book before it is written – assisted by an accomplished ghost-writer, J.R. Moehringer”

Patrick Jephson, who was Diana's equerry, is in little doubt that Harry's family will be pretty upset by the publication – nicely timed to coincide with his granny's Platinum Jubilee as queen.

It's a “glum prospect” for the House of Windsor. “The damage may go deep,” Jephson has written.

We mustn't judge his book before it is written – assisted by an accomplished ghost-writer, J.R. Moehringer. But since the publishers are paying twenty million bucks for the proposed text, it's a fair bet that it's expected to contain some hot material. And it's a fair bet, too, that much of Harry's ire will be directed towards his family – perhaps most particularly his father Charles.

Family fracture

In alignment with the sociologists' findings that divorce contributes to family fracture, evidently the very public divorce of his parents seems to be a root of some of Harry's 'mental health issues' (as well as the tragic death of his mother).

Families ever were complicated. But family relationships are also vulnerable, and the Cornell study indicates that estrangement can prove difficult to repair.



The newly married Duke and Duchess of Sussex, Meghan Markle and Prince Harry, leaving Windsor Castle after their wedding in 2018. Photo: Reuters

“Harry, who has just signed a \$20m (€17m) contract with the publishers Random House for a 'tell-all' autobiography to be published next year, is in a similar position”

An attempted assassination

It's 50 years since Freddy Forsyth penned *The Day of the Jackal* – his thriller about the attempted assassination of General Charles de Gaulle, subsequently made into a famous film. The book was written in just 35 days, and is now regarded as a classic of the crime genre.

The movie made the career of the lead actor, Edward Fox, but greatly admired in a lesser but significant role was the Irish actor Cyril Cusack. Cusack plays the gunsmith to whom the Jackal resorts for expertise, and a movie director I know regards this cameo itself a perfection: “a man's

whole life is encapsulated in Cyril Cusack's masterly performance.”

Cusack was a much-revered man of the theatre – Alec Guinness said he was only one of three actors in the world who he really respected. He made 90 films, with directors such as Zeffirelli, Truffaut and Zinnemann. He was a complex and enigmatic character. He was not a faithful husband to his first wife, yet he was a pious Catholic, a regular Mass-goer, president of the Catholic Stage Guild, and a voluminous letter-writer to the Irish national newspapers on the subject of abor-

tion, which he vehemently opposed.

I was keen to write a biographical profile of this fascinating Irish actor, and I approached his daughter Sinéad to seek the family's co-operation. After some deliberation, the Cusack family declined, on the grounds that “Cyril's religion was very private to him”. Puzzling, because Cyril had been very open about his Catholicism – his letters to the newspapers in the 1980s are evidence of that.

His grandson is Richard Boyd Barrett, People Before Profit TD for Dun Laoghaire.

● Although the Church doesn't really approve of it, many people like to pay tributes to the dead at a funeral. Personally, I have left instructions that I wish for no such tributes at my own funeral: if such an oration were merely praise it would not be honest: if it were honest, it would be embarrassing. Just a straightforward Requiem Mass, thanks!

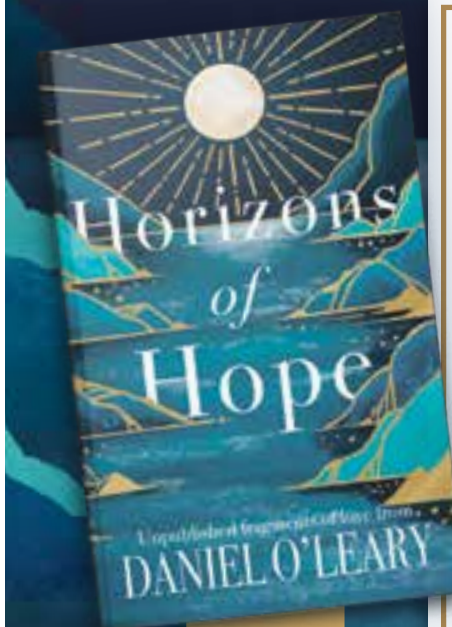
But there is a compromise, which I worked out for my husband's funeral – which was to write, print out and distribute, a description of the life, which can be fully nuanced and include humour, and give that to mourners to take away.

Incidentally, someone reported on Twitter earlier this week that at Irish funerals he had attended recently, the music included Frank Sinatra's *My Way*, I *Could Have Danced All Night* from *My Fair Lady*, and Crystal Gayle's *Don't It Make My Brown Eyes Blue*. Is this the trend?

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Westminster's direction to NI to implement full abortion services 'gravely disquieting'

Chai Brady

The Northern Catholic bishops have said Westminster's direction for the North of Ireland to establish full abortion services is "gravely disquieting".

They said it is the latest in "a line of decisions by the current Westminster government which we believe threaten the fragile balance of relationships at the heart of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement".

"Sadly, some of our local political parties seem content to welcome this unilateral move by Westminster on an issue which is of fundamental importance to local voters, while rightly challenging such unilateral impositions on other issues."

This comes after Northern Ireland Secretary Brandon Lewis directed Stormont last week to set up full abortion services no later than next March.

Legislation was passed in Westminster in 2019 liberalising the North's abortion laws while Stormont was defunct. Full services have not been centrally commissioned due to Executive party disagreements.

The bishops said that they have con-

sistently held that the right to life of every person is the prior and essential right of all other human rights.

"Thankfully, we live in an age when sensitivity to the preciousness and fragility of all life on our planet, even in its most microscopic forms, is better understood and appreciated. The failure to extend this sensitivity and care to our own fellow human beings in the womb, as well as to mothers in pregnancy will, we believe, one day be seen as a grave moral blindness on the part of this generation..." the bishops said in their statement.

They encouraged all Catholic and pro-life people to reflect on the issues raised by "this succession of unilateral impositions by the Westminster government".

Focusing on future elections to the North's assembly, the bishops said: "We encourage everyone who believes in the equal right to life and compassionate care for a mother and her unborn child to ask local candidates and political parties to explain their position on these interventions and on this most fundamental of all issues."

The statement was signed by Archbishop Eamon Martin, Bishop Noel

Treanor, Bishop Donal McKeown, Bishop Larry Duffy and Bishop Michael Router.

The leader of Aontú, Peadar Tóibín described the direction from Westminster as a "violation of devolution and human rights" and it was "shocking" that several parties in the North supported "an undemocratic imposition of an extreme abortion law on the North of Ireland".

"For us it's quite shocking that Sinn Féin and the SDLP leadership were in many ways behind this push to lobby Westminster to force abortion through in the North of Ireland," he said.

"In any poll that's been taken, even those who consider themselves pro-choice have said that the decision should be made in Stormont and in Stormont there has never been a majority for this kind of abortion bill. Every abortion bill that has gone through Stormont has failed to get a majority."

Mr Tóibín added: "For 200 years republicans have told London they had no right to legislate for any part of Ireland and here we are with Sinn Féin completely turning republicanism on its head, looking for Westminster to enforce its legislation on the North of Ireland."

Bishop hails Des O'Malley as man of courage

Staff reporter

Bishop Brendan Leahy has described former minister Des O'Malley as a man of "courage and decency". The former leader of the Progressive Democrats was laid to rest following requiem Mass in Dublin on Friday.

He represented Limerick in the Dáil for many years and served in numerous ministries, including the Department of Justice.

On hearing the news of his death, Dr Leahy said: "Unfortunately, I did not have

the pleasure of knowing Des O'Malley personally but the picture painted of him by those who knew him over the years, including priests of the diocese, was not just of a man and politician of unbreakable integrity but a devoted family man.

"He had a deep love for his late wife Pat, his children and grandchildren and it was clearly a shared love. So, for all that he did in the political world, it's essential too as we pay tribute to him that we acknowledge just what family meant to him," the bishop said.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Patron says GAA is healing the nation

The prelate who is patron of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) has said he feels certain the organisation is helping Ireland to overcome the Covid-19 pandemic.

Archbishop Kieran O'Reilly said he wanted to commend the GAA "for bringing live and exciting matches into our homes over the course of the last year and a half.

"I feel certain that these matches have brought excitement, comfort and, hopefully, a little healing, to those in our communities up and down the country who have suffered loss, pain and bereavement during the pandemic.

"It is wonderful to think that our superb players, in all codes, are contributing to the healing of a nation," he said.

He also congratulated the Limerick senior hurling team and management on winning three Munster titles in a row.

Anti-Catholic chants condemned

The wife of a former unionist assembly member has condemned sectarian anti-Catholic chants recorded in her family-run pub in Co. Tyrone.

Olga Walls Patterson was reacting after footage emerged online of Orangemen celebrating July 12 chanting "f--- the Pope" in a beer garden in Castlederg.

"We condemn this sort of behaviour outright and were appalled when we were made aware of the short clip," she said.

Mrs Walls Patterson – who is general manager of the Derg Arms where the incident occurred – is married to former UUP MLA Alastair Patterson.

Some of those involved can be seen standing on furniture and punching the air while chanting against Pope Francis, who was recovering from surgery at the time in Rome's Gemelli Hospital.

Hundreds take to new Irish Camino trail



Pilgrims at St Declan's way

Ruadhán Jones

St Declan's Way became Ireland's longest pilgrim path after receiving recognition from Sport Ireland, with Irish Pilgrim Path's founder comparing it to the famous Camino de Santiago.

More than 200 people embarked on the 115km trail, which begins in Cashel and ends in Armdore, Co. Waterford, July 24, which John G O'Dwyer said is a "fantastic sign" for the future.

"Up to now we've had relatively short pilgrim walks, not comparable to the Camino," Mr O'Dwyer of Irish Pilgrim Paths told *The Irish Catholic*.

"The demand was there and that desire has now been satisfied with this lovely walk."

Sports Ireland recognised the path as a fully waymarked long-distance walking trail, which Mr O'Dwyer said is "testimony to the high standard of the trail".

He hopes that it will match the

Camino de Santiago in terms of popularity and devotion.

"It fills a market for spirituality, it's different for the type of walking on the Kerry Way, which is very meritorious," Mr O'Dwyer explained. "Pilgrim walking is deeper, it's a journey of inner discovery.

"People expect on a walk like this – and also the Camino – that it will be transformative. That's what we're looking forward to here."

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Breda O'Brian

The View



Navigating the tougher aspects of being a teenager

I missed the movie, *Eighth Grade*, when it was in cinemas but saw it recently on Netflix. In the US, being in eighth grade is roughly equivalent to second year, a particularly difficult age. Hormones kick in and friendships become complicated.

Painful

Social media has made being a teenager even more difficult. The protagonist, Kayla, (an excellent 14-year-old named Elsie Fisher) is a painfully shy girl with acne. She makes YouTube videos giving advice to others about how to be confident and make friends. The contrast between the videos and her own life is painful.

The movie is a pitch-perfect rendition of what it is like to be a teenage girl who is not fitting in. I often found myself wincing in sympathy. As a teacher, I felt even more keenly than usual how difficult it is for adults to offer any comfort to someone who just wants to be part of the gang but has no hope of doing so.

“Kayla endlessly scrolls through her social media feeds, at one stage doing so to the swelling sound of Enya’s *Orinoco Flow*”

At one stage, she courageously accepts an invitation to a pool party, which must be the most excruciating invitation for a body-conscious teenager to accept. She is the only one wearing a one-piece swimsuit, and while a perfectly healthy weight, she has a little tummy and a few bulges, which none of her tanned and toned classmates have. She takes refuge in the pool but later suffers social shame when her gift of a card game is treated with silent disdain by the queen bee who is throwing the party. (The queen bee’s mother forced her daughter to invite Kayla.)

Kayla endlessly scrolls through her social media feeds, at one stage doing so to the swelling sound of Enya’s *Orinoco Flow*. Writer and director, Bo Burnham, says that he

begged Enya for permission to use it because he wanted to convey that for Kayla, this is like a religious or spiritual experience.

Kayla also has no idea how to navigate the kind of sexualisation that is common at that age. She has a massive crush on a skinny, good-looking creep called Aiden, who only shows even the slightest interest in her when she claims to have a folder of dirty selfies on her phone and that she is comfortable with oral sex. Of course, none of this is true.

The scenes that follow show her looking up tips about oral sex on the internet. There have been complaints about how graphic these scenes are, as we watch Kayla viewing a cheerful agony aunt describing (the sound is muted) how to perform fellatio.

It makes for uncomfortable viewing but it is also a vivid reminder that many teenagers will be looking up this kind of thing, and far worse. In this scene and in a later one where an older boy tries to manipulate Kayla into taking off her shirt, Burnham is showing the reality of premature sexualisation. Rather than endorsing it, Burnham is showing how vulnerable young girls are.

However, I think we could have done without an earlier, very brief scene, where a fellow student is shown using his shirt to hide the fact that he is masturbating during a sex education class.

Interestingly, Kayla says no to the older boy who tries to manipulate her, but feels nothing except shame for doing so. She is afraid that the older boy will tell their mutual friend, a kind high school age student called Olivia. The audience is aware that Olivia would have torn strips off the older boy for treating Kayla so badly but Kayla cannot see that.

Cultural inversion

It illustrates perfectly a weird cultural inversion. Girls feel shame, as if they are being prudes when not ready to have a sexual encounter, rather than anger at being pressurised and manipulated.

Kayla has a sweet, kind, somewhat dorky, single dad, who is endlessly patient.



Bo Burnham and Elsie Fisher star in a scene from the movie *Eighth Grade*. Photo: CNS/A24 Films.

I would never have put up with the way Kayla treats her father, which includes being constantly on her phone at mealtimes and treating him like he is an idiot. It is great, nonetheless, to see a positive male role model, whose love provides Kayla with a refuge even though she wants to be too cool to need it. Kayla eventually also makes friends with a nerdy boy, who is also sweet and kind.

“Neither is there any mention of transgenderism, which shows how fast things change”

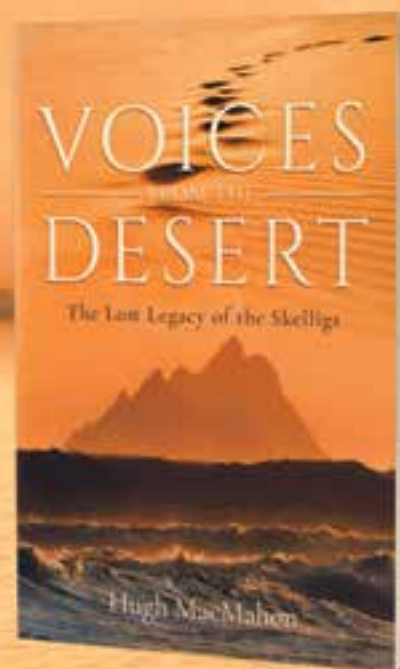
Even though it was only made in 2017, things have only got worse on social media since then with the advent of TikTok, which consumes even more time and attention than the apps Kayla uses. Neither is there any mention of transgenderism, which shows how fast things change.

The movie ends on a positive note and despite the scenes I mentioned and some graphic language, could provide parents and children with a valuable entry point to discussing some of the tougher aspects of being a young teen.

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Kingscourt parish celebrates grandparent's day in the sun

Nuala and Austin Carolan.



Ruadhán Jones

The Co. Cavan parish planted a tree to celebrate the inaugural World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, introduced by Pope Francis earlier this year.

The community gathered for a special Mass Sunday July 25, and celebrated afterwards in the sun with the tree planting.



Mary Carolan and her granddaughter.



Sean Kieran and Collette Reilly.



Millie celebrates her third birthday, July 25, along with her mother Charlene.



The Hand family.



The Yorke/Monaghan Family, including birthday girl Millie, at Mass for the World Day of Grandparents and The Elderly.



Mary and Jamie Gargan and their grandson Alex plant a tree in the grounds of the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Kingscourt, to mark the World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly.



Angela Kieran.

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Holy Communion in Beragh

● Pupils from St Oliver Plunkett's, Roscavey Primary School and Drumduff Primary School make their First Holy Communion in the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Beragh. Photos: Jason McCartan.



St Oliver Plunkett pupils who made their First Holy Communion in the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Beragh.



A proud day for Donna and Justin Conroy as son Caolan makes his Holy Communion.



Hannah Donnelly with parents Enda and Nuala, grandparents Kathleen and Liam Donnelly and Anna Donnelly.



Beragh boys Peter McCaughey, Matthew Tracey, Tomás Conroy, Finn Donnelly and Michael McCartan raise a cheer as they receive their ice-creams.



Ronan Donnelly with parents Katrina and Declan.



Drumduff PS trio, Caolan Conroy, Hannah Walls and Daithi Kelly.



Michael McCartan with parents Deborah and Brian, siblings Ruby and Aimee.



Tomás Conroy with sisters Clíodhna and Aoibhe, parents Fiona and Barry.



Twins Donnacha and Amelia Harley with parents Delores and Adrian.



Cathal Dillon and family.



Eve Kelly with parents Nicola and Martin and brothers Cathair, Lorcan and Conor.



Finn Donnelly, sisters Ella and Lily, parents Shauna and Dominic, grandparents Rosey and Sean Gormley.



Twins Donnacha and Amelia Harley.



A special day for the Tracey family as Matthew makes his First Holy Communion.



Roscavey Primary school pupils Oisín Boyle, Finn Johansen, Cahir McNelis, Sean McCrystal, Hannah Donnelly, Ronan O'Neill, Connor Lappin, Ryan McCrory and Rory Moore.



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Holy Communion joy at Strathroy

● Pupils from Christ the King Primary School and Omagh Integrated Primary School hold separate First Holy Communion services in the Church of Christ the King, Strathroy. Photos: Jason McCartan.



Christ the King pupil Junior McAlinney and family.



Riley Liggett and family.



Integrated pupil Ryan Braden with brother Corey and parents Jolene and Lee.



Jack Taggart with dad Kyle, mum Donna, brothers Jake and baby Alfie.



Omagh Integrated pupil Layna Allison and family.



Christ the King's Chelsey Lynch with Kelly and Darren.



Christ the King pupil Aimee Fleming with parents Lisa and Ryan, siblings Anna and Adam and grandmothers Tish and B.



Omagh Integrated pupil Jessica Gavin with brothers Matthew and Ronan and parents Cathal and Mary.



Nathan Dziurla and family.



Sadie Hamill with mum Janice and aunt Avril McConaghy.



Caleigh Mullan, brother Senan, mum Ana and dad Jason.

Will we soon need a vaccine passport to go to Mass?



Churches must seek to reduce social distancing requirement so that public worship can return to normal as soon as possible, writes David Quinn

Public worship was permitted again in Ireland in May. Nowhere else in Europe had stopped people from gathering together for religious worship for so long.

But now, as we face into August, numbers who can go to Mass still face severe limits. The social distancing requirement of two metres remains. In the case of the Mass I normally go to, for example, this has halved the number who were attending pre-pandemic. No more can be accommodated under the current rules.

There is no real hint at present of when the two metre rule might be changed. Will it be reduced to 1.5 metres, or one metre over the next few weeks?

The rise of the Delta variant seems to have put paid to any such prospect for the time being. As we know, the Delta

variant is far more transmissible than the original version of Covid-19.

On the other hand, the vast majority of Mass-goers are double vaccinated by now. As at the time of writing, 68% of the adult population has received both jabs and the percentage is much higher among the older age groups that mostly comprise Mass-goers.

Religious gatherings

In other words, Mass-goers are about as safe as they are ever going to be short of Covid-19 disappearing from the face of the earth, which may never happen. Therefore, Church authorities will have to approach the Government soon, if they have not already done so, to discuss the social distancing requirements at Mass and other religious gatherings such as First Holy Communion and Confirmation.

This raises the terrible prospect that NPHET may recommend that parishes require people to show their vaccine passports before they enter places of worship as the 'price' of reducing social distancing at Masses below 2-metres never mind eliminating it entirely.

After all, this is now the rule in restaurants and bars for anyone over the age of 18. Restaurateurs and publicans may not like it, but before anyone can enter their premises, they must show their vaccine passport and photo identification.

The Church will rightly balk at anything similar and for two reasons. First, there is the practical aspect. Imagine how long it would take to file into Mass if volunteers at the door had to check to see if people's documentation was in order.

On its own, this would make any such suggestion a non-starter.

But NPHET, recognising this, may then not agree to the two metre rule being changed, or if they did, they might not reduce it below one metre. Do we then face the prospect of an indefinite delay in the restoration of full normality at Mass? Will parishes at Christmas still have to impose limits on the numbers who can crowd in for Christmas services this coming December?

“The Church of England has considered the matter of vaccine passports”

The second objection to a vaccine passport requirement would be moral. For the first time ever, the Church would be turning away from Mass people who decided for one reason or another that they could not receive a vaccine. Some individuals may have judged for themselves they could not receive any of the vaccines because of their very remote connection to an abortion that took place in the 1970s, even though the Church has said repeatedly that this does not affect the moral licitness of the vaccines.

The Church of England has considered the matter of vaccine passports. It says on its website: “The Church has adopted a clear policy of encouraging people to be vac-

inated, but, other than in very exceptional circumstances, it would be difficult for it to justify limiting access to church services or organisations on the basis of vaccine passports.

Such an approach would run contrary to the principle of the Church being a home and a refuge for all.”

It does not say what those “exceptional circumstances” might be. It would be better if it categorically ruled out vaccine passports, but at least it has a public position of some sort.

In April, over 1,200 religious leaders from across England signed a statement objecting to vaccine passports in any setting, church or otherwise. They said a passport requirement would lead to a “two-tier” society and the creation of a “surveillance State”.

They said that regardless of any position the British Government adopted, they would never agree to asking for a vaccine passport as a condition of entering a church.

Assuming Church leaders in Ireland are opposed to vaccine passports, what should be their position with regard to social distancing going forward?

They need to be conscious of the fact that many older people are still very nervous about Covid-19 even though they are fully vaccinated. They might be reluctant to attend Mass if the social distancing requirement is totally eliminated in the months ahead, and especially next Winter if cases start increasing again, as they well might.

Perhaps a compromise in

“The two metre rule must be reduced soon, with a view to a restoration of full normality in the months ahead”

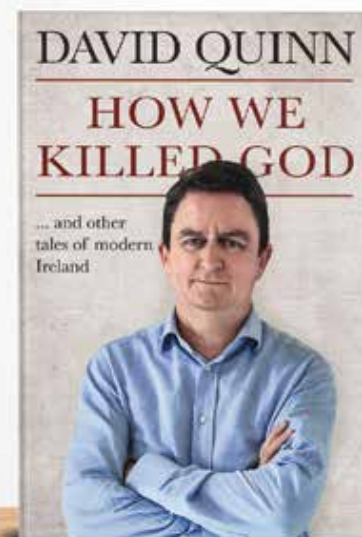
the meantime is to ask for the social distancing requirement to be reduced to one metre. NPHET and the Government are not likely to agree to this with the Delta variant on the increase, but come the autumn there will need to be some movement, especially as by then every adult willing to receive a vaccine will have both of their jabs. It so happens that Ireland has less vaccine hesitancy than prac-

tically any other country in Europe. Vaccine take-up has been huge.

If they are not already doing so, bishops need to discuss this vital matter among themselves and then approach the Government about the restrictions on the number who can attend Mass at any one time. The two metre rule must be reduced soon, with a view to a restoration of full normality in the months ahead.

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Lockdown gambling addictions won't disappear after pandemic



Ireland has some of the worst gambling rates, with the effects of lockdown on addiction expected to be felt for years to come, **Chai Brady** hears

A study released this month found that Irish people are the fourth biggest gamblers in the European Union and while this may be hard to believe, for a Cuan Mhuire addiction counsellor based in Limerick, it comes as no surprise.

The amount Irish gamblers spent last year adds up to €1.36 billion, the fourth highest in the EU. This amounts to €300 per adult. Industry analysts H2 Gambling Capital ranked Ireland as having the 14th highest gambling losses in the world.

A European School Survey conducted in 2019 found that 10% of the Irish population were excessive gamblers, and just over 5% were problem gamblers.

Michael Guerin, who is based in Cuan Mhuire's centre in Bruree, told *The Irish Catholic* that "given the trends that we have seen in gambling in the past two or three years, for a report to say to us that we are the fourth highest gamblers in the European Union wouldn't surprise me at all".

Some 10-15 years ago in Ireland gamblers would have mainly been middle-aged men who were backing horses in betting centres, Mr Guerin said, but now the demographic has completely shifted, with many more women presenting as problem gamblers.

Mr Guerin explains: "We're seeing far more women than we used to with problematic gambling issues and they are almost always online, on non-sporting sites.

They don't necessarily bet on sport", which points to more interest in online casinos or other gambling sites.

"We are seeing young men now that have a co-morbid issue with drug dependence and problematic gambling. Alcohol, cocaine and gambling would be a very common combination," he said.

"A lot of the young men would be gambling on sporting events but they would be doing so online and there are multiple opportunities within any sporting event to bet on various things, like who scores the first goal, who takes the first corner kick, who will be the first player to be booked and that kind of thing.

“It has become increasingly easy to place bets just using a tablet or smartphone, with 44% of all online bets being made on these devices”

"In actual fact you could have one hundred betting opportunities in one match. It's very cleverly designed by the people who sell gambling products to keep the

clients engaged for the duration of the event. There are so many variables on which somebody can bet within one sporting event."

The H2 statistics noted a large increase of online gambling in Ireland. More than a third of gambling occurred online (36%) in 2019, this increased to almost half in 2020. Of course, this makes sense due to the pandemic when all other venues were closed for extended periods. It has become increasingly easy to place bets just using a tablet or smartphone, with 44% of all online bets being made on these devices.

Lockdown effects

"I suppose the interesting part about lockdown was that betting offices were closed and there were three or four months there was no sports whatsoever yet it would appear that the turnover of gambling companies during that time increased," said Mr Guerin.

"It points to the fact that people were engaged in gambling for the sake of gambling rather than making a bet based on judgement, based on which team would win or what horse would win the race or whatever the case might be."

While Cuan Mhuire do not

“The issue of gambling advertisements has also been in the public sphere, with the President criticising its close association with sport”

offer services to anyone below the age of 18, he said that the young people they meet "all say that they have gambled underage. That would be prior to us engaging with them in adulthood".

With many people losing their jobs, being bored, and perhaps moving to more high-risk online gambling, there are dangers for people long after the pandemic's restrictions have been lifted.

Mr Guerin said: "There's no question about it, that there is a connection between the restrictions and everything that went with them, the isolation, the anxiety, the worry contributed and, in some cases, exacerbated an existing problem and then maybe in other cases created a problem where there wasn't one beforehand.

"Anybody who develops an addiction to anything during the lockdown, their addiction is not going to go away simply because there are no further restrictions

or even if there is a time in the future when there's no Covid, so these people who ended up with difficulties that are maybe Covid, lockdown related, will have to live with these conditions in perpetuity."

There could be a large increase in people needing supports who have already been badly affected by a gambling addiction developed during lockdown, according to Mr Guerin, who added: "We would reasonably predict that we will see increases in people looking for help with gambling and alcohol dependency for the next three to five years."

This comes as the Minister of State for Justice James Browne said this month a gambling regulator is due to be appointed by the end of the year, eight years after a bill aimed at regulating the industry was introduced but never passed.

Mr Browne said legislation would be introduced in



Former Armagh GAA star turned gambling counsellor Oisín McConville.

September to reform regulation of the industry.

Advertisements

The issue of gambling advertisements has also been in the public sphere, with the President criticising its close association with sport. At the end of June at the opening of an addiction rehabilitation centre in Wicklow, President Michael D. Higgins said: "I'm a lifetime supporter of sport, and during Covid, my heart broke regular times, to think sport is being saturated with gambling advertisements which are so dangerous and have done so much damage to families and to individuals."

For former Armagh GAA footballer turned counsellor Oisín McConville, Ireland has become an "embarrassment" regarding its regulation of gambling. Having struggled with his own addiction to gambling, Mr McConville now helps others with their addictions.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Mr McConville said: "The Government has to start to take notice of young people and how it's destroying their lives, and not just young people, lives in general. Something needs to be done about. It's OK recognising it, it's OK talking about it, it's OK for the President to talk about advertising, but we have to start doing something as well, if you talk about a gambling regulator, we were promised that years ago and still nothing has happened. Micheál Martin, Leo Varadkar, they should be hanging their heads in shame."

"It's a scandal in this country, it has gone beyond a joke. The few people at the top that matter or can do something about it they don't care and that's the thing that is so annoying for people. There's no drive. The gambling bill has been there since 2013, the bill is sitting in purgatory, it's absolutely disgusting what is happening."

"People talk about pandemics, they talk about cancer and all these things, and you know what? Gambling addiction is as big a cancer as anything and it is ruining families lives all over the place, highest rate of suicide, and unfortunately nobody gives a damn they've just let this country spiral out of control."

“Some young people may have already slipped through the gaps as Mr McConville says some children are starting to gamble as young as 12-13 years old”

In the North there is incoming legislation to tackle gambling, including online gambling, as the laws have not been changed since 1985. The North's Communities Minister Deirdre Harghey announced in May 2021 that they would reform the laws under a proposed two-phase approach.

The first phase involves imposing a levy on gambling operators, establishing a code of practice for license

holders, making gambling contracts enforceable and making it illegal for children to use gambling machines.

Some young people may have already slipped through the gaps as Mr McConville says some children are starting to gamble as young as 12-13 years old. He has also found that lockdown has "magnified" gambling issues, with families becoming more aware of the addiction.

"People have a little bit more time on their hands, I think the people who were spending small on gambling, that spend has increased, but also it has introduced a whole new demographic of people to it," he said, adding that more women are getting involved and they are "as prone to addiction as everyone else".

Sports was the most popular type of online gambling in 2019, according to the European Gaming and Betting Association. It makes up 41% of the market.

“Chances are if you feel as if you have an issue then you have an issue, that's my experience”

When sporting events were cancelled due to the pandemic, people "flipped on to something else" to gamble on, according to Mr McConville.

"I know of people who would make £1,000-£5,000 bets on an under 21 game in Azerbaijan or something like that. People don't really

understand, it doesn't have to be Italy and England in the Euro final or Kerry and Dublin in the All-Ireland final, for a gambler it doesn't really matter what the sport or occasion is because when we're gambling, the event is the gamble."

Online gambling

"The online stuff is pretty serious because recovery is very, very difficult. There's so many issues with it as regards what the pandemic has done, certainly people have been a lot more reckless than they have been in the past," Mr McConville said.

"When people gamble online they think of it as monopoly money, it's easy to forget how much you're gambling and again how much you're gambling over your means. Online gambling is the exact same as gambling has always been, hugely hidden."

"There's still huge swathes of people who think it's a great way to make money and obviously that's not the case, but you feel as if it is the case at the time."

"Nobody expects that having a bet could spiral out of control in a big way in short period of time but that's exactly what happens. I'm speaking to people now who only started gambling six months ago and are already in major bother."

Mr McConville explained that a good way to know if gambling has become a problem for an individual is by setting a limit on the money they can realistically spend a week on gambling, if they continuously break the limit and are then unable to stop, then there is an issue. "Chances are if you feel as if you have an issue then you have an issue, that's my experience," Mr McConville added.

There are obvious warning signs for family members or friends and it is not just that a person can't pay their bills. "A family in lockdown would realise that the person who is gambling is flying off the handle a lot

more, they are irritable, and I think once you see that – more so during lockdown because the person is maybe spending a lot more time at home – well then that's the time to recognise it. I think as an individual you recognise when you're more irritable and you recognise that there is an issue," Mr McConville said.

“Sometimes a good way of letting people know that you know is leaving literature on their bedside table or their car or wherever it is, work station or wherever they spend a lot of time”

"The individual needs to talk to somebody it could be family, friends, doctor, teacher, work colleague, counsellor, whatever, once it's shared there's an opportunity. Family may need to carry out an intervention in order to tell the person that their gambling is affecting everybody in the household, or the workplace, or sporting environment or wherever, and I think they need to address it with the person who is in addiction."

"But until that person is ready to hold their hands up, it's very, very difficult for families because it will feel like a lot of times like they are banging their head against a brick wall. Sometimes a good way of letting people know that you know is leaving literature on their bedside table or their car or wherever it is, work station or wherever they spend a lot of time."

"That's sometimes how you set the wheels in motion," he said.



Hungers of the Spirit

The Sunday Gospel

Fr Silvester
O'Flynn OFM Cap.



In last Sunday's Gospel, Jesus miraculously fed people by multiplying loaves and fishes. In John's Gospel miracles are usually called signs. In today's Gospel (John 6:24-35), Jesus asks the people to see the miracle of the bread as a sign of something greater, to move on to the hungers of the spirit. "Do not work for the food that cannot last but work for the food that endures to eternal life, the kind of food the Son of Man is offering you, for on him the Father, God himself, has set his seal." They ask him what are the works that the Father wants from them. Jesus answers, "This is working for God, you must believe in the one he has sent".

To believe means to belong...to belong to God in accepting Christ's teaching, straining for his ideals, and walking the road of life in his company. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. And so, when the people ask him for the bread of direction, he proclaims, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, whoever believes in me will never thirst."

Hunger of the spirit

When Mother Teresa of Calcutta sent some of the sisters to a deprived area in New York they were startled by a new form of hunger, particularly the hunger of loneliness among old people, living on their own and rarely if ever visited by their family. The hunger which the sisters were familiar with in Calcutta could be satisfied by bread and rice. The hunger of loneliness had to be fed with a different bread, so the sisters visited these lonely people, chatted to them, and helped with laundry, cleaning and shopping.

Hunger of the spirit is experienced by people who have been abandoned, abused, rejected, mocked or deprived of human dignity in one way or another.

Jesus touched on another hunger in one of the Beatitudes. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for what is

right: they shall have their fill." This hunger is the yearning for social justice, for peace in every land and for a fair sharing of the wealth of the world.

Thirst of the mind

If the emptiness of the heart can be called a hunger, the searching of the mind can be called a thirst. Thirst for a meaning to life, thirst for a future, thirst for truth, and for a solid foundation to life.

The Good Shepherd will guide his followers along the right path for he is true to his name. Sadly, many people have drifted away from Christ. Just listen to the disrespect for Jesus Christ in the thoughtless way the sacred names are used. It is no longer Christ who is guiding people but false shepherds.

The aimless lives of pagans

In today's second reading, St Paul urges people not to go on living the aimless kind of life that the pagans live. When the light of faith weakens in any country, murders multiply, crime rates soar, there is less respect for life on every level, less stability in marriage, more dependence on drugs, abortion of life is legalised, and perhaps saddest of all, more suicides. There is a nagging thirst for a meaning to life, for hope, for stability, for everlasting love and inner peace.

There are many changes in society, some for the better but many for the worse.

Saved by a Person

At the beginning of the new millennium, Pope St John Paul II wrote an apostolic letter encouraging us to a fresh start, a new impetus in Christian living, making it the force which inspires our journey of faith. He was well aware that there are many problems to be faced and new questions to be answered. Some people wonder if we need a new formula, but he replied that we are not saved by a formula but by a Person, and

the assurance which he gives us: "I am with you at all times; yes, to the end of time" (Matthew 28:20).

Having fed the physical hunger of people in the multiplication of loaves and fishes, Jesus urged them to see this miracle a sign to move on to the inner experiences of hunger and thirst. They asked him, "What must we do if we are to do the works that God wants"? He replied, "You must believe in the one he has sent".

Set your mind and heart on the ideals of Jesus Christ. Believe in him, trust him, enjoy his love and walk the road of life with him.

"I am the bread of life.

Whoever comes to me will never be hungry; whoever believes in me will never thirst."

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you said of yourself, "I am the bread of life." You provided bread for people when you multiplied the loaves and fishes. You moved on to describe yourself as the spiritual bread to satisfy the hunger of the heart and mind. And then you promised to give the bread which would be your flesh offered up on the cross for the life of the world. This is your presence in the Blessed Eucharist. Strengthen our faith. Call back those who have strayed away. Help them to realise what they have been missing.

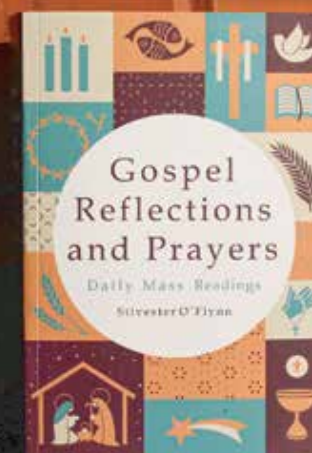
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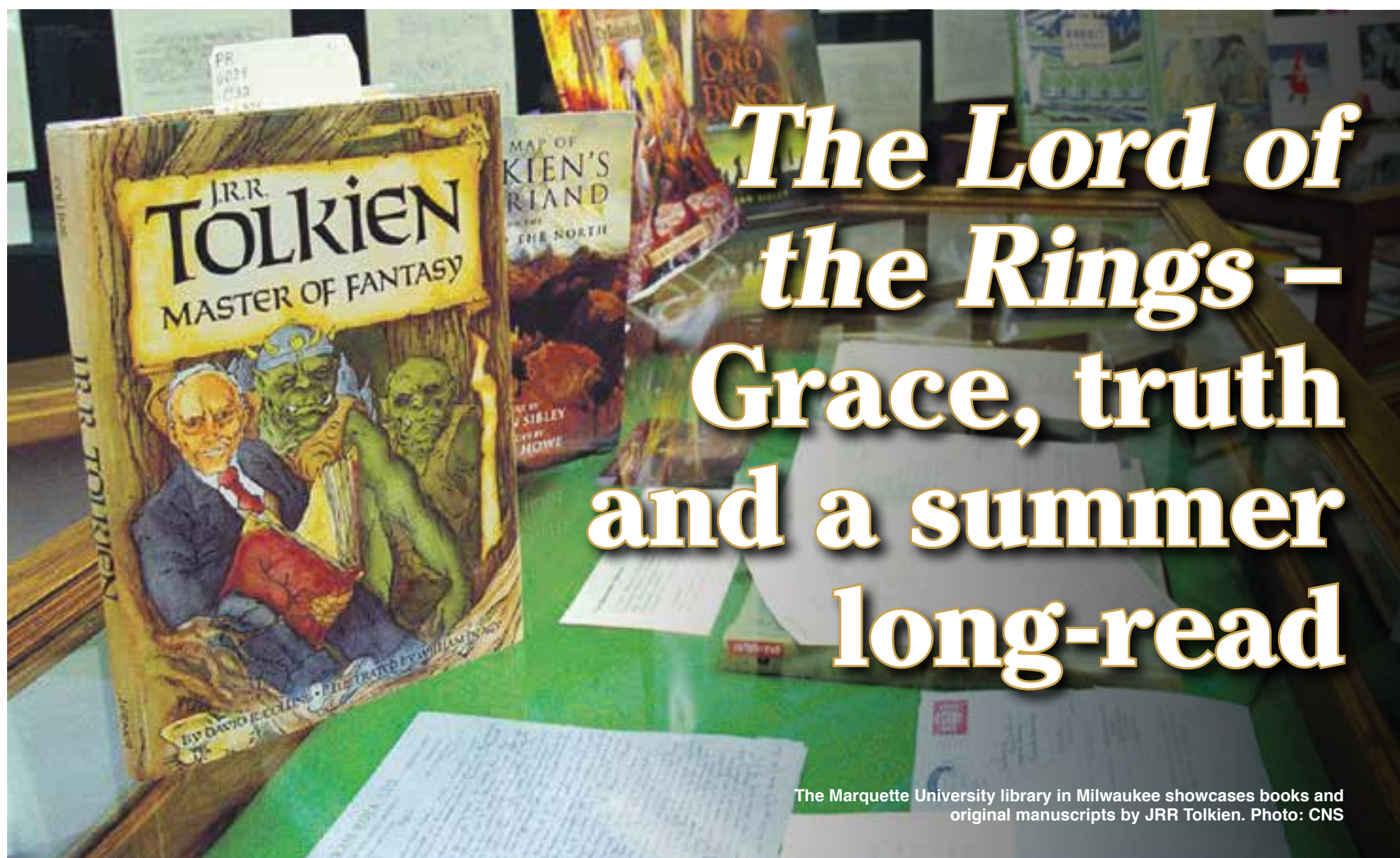
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The Lord of the Rings – Grace, truth and a summer long-read

The Marquette University library in Milwaukee showcases books and original manuscripts by JRR Tolkien. Photo: CNS



With a month of summer left, **Ruadhán Jones** reflects on the ideal Catholic long read

The *Lord of the Rings* by JRR Tolkien has a broad fan base, within and outside Catholic circles, but due to its length – 900 pages and some – it can be off-putting. For many, Peter Jackson's film adaptation is the first access point, and it's a good place to start. But if you want to get a full appreciation for the pre-eminent Catholic work of fiction in the 20th century, you should go to the source.

With a month of summer left, it's a good chance to tackle it for the first time, or perhaps to renew once more your acquaintance with Tolkien's Middle Earth. The book has much to offer, in terms of enjoyment and thematic depth. Perhaps the slow beginning put you off before, or its mere size. But it's a book that will draw you along if you let it, running like the course

of a river – it begins with a trickle from the source, rushing then like a great stream, before expanding and finally entering the sea.

JRR Tolkien

To help you on your way, a brief introduction to the man himself is in order. In the barest sketch, John Ronald Reuel Tolkien was an Oxford don – a lecturer in philology, with an especial interest in the Anglo-Saxon and Norse myths and languages. From a young age, he developed a love of creating languages which was to serve him well as he went on and laid the foundation for much of the world building in *The Lord of the Rings*. He had a love of words and an irrepressible imagination that seemed to constantly burst forth.

Following on from his love of words, was his belief in the mythic, fantastical qualities of life. It upset him to see fantasy abused as a term to describe something unreal or unlikely. For him, myths and stories were the best way of accessing truths about the world. Facts are fine, but they are only useful once integrated into a story.

"Mythology is not a disease at all, though it may like all human things become diseased. You might as well say that thinking is a disease of the mind... The incarnate mind, the tongue, and the tale are in our world coeval," Tolkien wrote in his essay, "On Fairy-stories".

Language itself is an act of myth-making or storytelling, and so telling stories is an extension of our fundamental desire to make sense of the world. It is not only a factual

description, but also a description which fits our understanding of the world and the narrative we tell about ourselves.

Catholicism

The most vital element for Tolkien's life was his Catholicism – this is the narrative in which he understood himself. Born and raised a Catholic, the Faith took on for him the emotional element of his life after his mother died, and it remained so for the rest of his life. That's not to say he didn't think deeply about it – quite the contrary – but his connection was both a deeply felt appreciation and an intellectual one.

“All acts of creation are themselves an outworking of or reflection on our initial creation by God”

The Lord of the Rings is infused with this Catholic spirit and he considered all his works to be acts of 'sub-creation': "We make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker," Tolkien wrote in *The Monsters and the Critics*.

All acts of creation are themselves an outworking of or reflection on our initial creation by God – we create because we are created, and what we make, at its best,

reflects the truth of God. An excerpt from Tolkien's poem, *Mythopoeia*, expresses this vision of God's light shining through us perfectly:

"Man, sub-creator, the refracted light through whom is splintered from a single White to many hues, and endlessly combined in living shapes that move from mind to mind."

The Lord of the Rings

And with this in mind, we turn to the book itself, which began as a sequel to Tolkien's popular children's book, *The Hobbit*, and morphed into a modern epic. Tolkien wrote it over the course of 12 years, receiving support from friends – in particular Christian author CS Lewis – in *The Inklings*, an informal literary discussion group based in Oxford.

He began working on it late in 1937, and continued on and off for the next decade, finishing the manuscript in 1949. It was first published in 1954, and became a surprise hit in the 1960s. Set in Middle-earth, the world at some distant time in the past, the story's main antagonist, the Dark Lord Sauron, is attempting to regain the One Ring, a weapon in his campaign to conquer and rule all of Middle-earth.

The story ranges across Middle Earth, beginning in the Shire, a hobbit-land reminiscent of the English countryside, from which comes Frodo Baggins. He takes on the mission of destroying the ring to defeat Sauron, which is the central struggle of the book.

Style and tone

I re-read *The Lord of the Rings* earlier this year, the first time in a couple of years that I had tackled it. I had re-watched the films regularly in that time and more and more my memory of the story reflected the film version rather than the original. Re-reading the book was quite a shock to the system because the pacing and tone are very different from the films. It's important to bear this in mind if you're coming to the books through the films.

“The drama resides in the fact that even though they do the right thing, it may not be enough, and that tension keeps up the whole way through”

In part, the origins of Tolkien's style are the Norse sagas that he loved, as well as in inherent or interior poetry that came from himself. It takes quite a while to get going, the first 150 pages or so can be a bit of a slog – especially if you read the Tom Bombadil sequence, which I don't anymore. Even once it's into the heights of tension, it rarely addresses action or dramatic sequences as you would expect.

Much of this is to do with the style. It's not a melodrama of the



Sean Astin, Elijah Wood, Dominic Monaghan and Billy Boyd star in a scene from New Line Cinema's *The Lord of the Rings*. Photo: CNS

kind we're used to today, which the films from Hollywood and a lot of our TV now represent. The drama in *The Lord of the Rings* doesn't reside in the conflict between characters as much as today's stories because, for Tolkien as for the ancient heroic societies, what a person has to do is clear to him or her based on the social context.

Today, characters in stories spend most of their time agonising over what the right thing to do is, or else doing the wrong thing and getting angry with each other. In *The Lord of the Rings*, fate plays a much bigger role. The characters display a determination to do the right thing – but even if they do the right thing, they can't know if it will be enough. And yet still they do it! The drama resides in the fact that even though they do the right thing, it may not be enough, and that tension keeps up the whole way through.

Grace

As well as being a tense, exciting adventure, Tolkien's epic is thematically rich and provides much for contemplation. Tolkien's dramatic style in particular opens up his world to the need for grace. As I said, one of the characteristics of modern films, particularly melodramas, is that they centre over whether or not a character will do the right thing. If they do the right thing – if they overcome their fatal flaw – then everything about the world will be right. The world is perfectible by human action alone.

That is not the Christian understanding, nor was it the understanding expressed in the ancient sagas and myths of Anglo-Saxon and Norse societies. These sagas suggest that their mythology of the world precluded an ultimate victory over evil.

You may have heard of Valhalla, touted as the Viking heaven which can be reached if you die in battle. In reality, that heaven was another extended battle, this time on a cosmic scale, which the Vikings and their gods were fated to lose. Creation wasn't perfectible, in their view, even with the help of the gods.

Christianise

What becomes clear in reading *The Lord of the Rings* is that Tolkien takes their view and Christianises it, much as the Christian monks who recorded the Norse sagas did. While the cosmic vision of fate remains, we can attain perfection, but only with the help of God. And God can help us because the world was created good and goodness dwells in man.

“Grace, good and evil are examples of the Catholic worldview permeating and shaping the novel as a whole”

We see this worked out so many times in the individual stories of the various characters. There's a moment in Shelob's cave when Frodo feels his will being drawn towards the ring, the locus of evil, not by his own desire – he is *being* drawn to it. Only when he exerts his will and moves his hand instead to the phial given to him by Galadriel – who is a Marian figure – is he able to reclaim this inherent goodness. That is the struggle central to the book in a microcosm.

We are only truly exerting ourselves when resisting evil and doing good, but this can only happen through grace. The ending of the book brings this home even more clearly. I'm not going to spoil it, and will only say that while goodness triumphs, it's not by the hand of the good, but by the strength of goodness itself and the corresponding weakness of evil.

Allegory

Grace, good and evil are examples of the Catholic worldview permeating and shaping the novel as a whole. Within that worldview, there are many other Catholic themes that can be drawn out. But when reading the book, don't think of it as a work of allegory. In allegory, characters typically stand as a one-to-one replacements for certain themes or real-world situation, as Aslan stands for Christ in CS Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

Instead, Tolkien describes Catholicism as being infused into the writing of the story and more consciously written into the themes and characters when he refined it. Here is a quote from one of his Letters: “Myth and fairy-story must, as all art, reflect and contain in solution elements of moral

and religious truth (or error), but not explicit, not in the known form of the primary ‘real’ world.” That is something which works so well in the story, drawing on Catholic themes and imagery without ever resorting to, as Tolkien puts it, “conscious and intentional allegory”.

Catholic themes

I can't go into to detail on all the themes that the novel explores, but here are a couple more to be aware of while you're reading, and on which you can reflect. The first is the trio of Aragorn, Gandalf and Samwise Gamgee, who can be seen as three symbols of Christ – priest, prophet and king. At different stages in the story, each takes on aspects of Christ.

For example, Aragorn must take on the role of King, descended as he is from a race of men that combined the perfection of the elves with the imperfections of man – this mirrors Christ's bodily and spiritual element. Gandalf plays the role of priest and, as one of my lecturers pointed out, effectively Pope in crowing Aragorn at the end of the films, anointing his reign. And Sam in his self-sacrifice emblematises the sacrificial actions and faith of Christ.

“The last theme which emerges time and again is the corrupting power of evil over man's will”

Then there are the female figures in the book, most notably Galadriel, but also Eowyn and – as the films emphasise – Arwen. Galadriel is a particularly important figure, representative of a new Eve, in other words,

the Virgin Mary. One sequence highlights this, when Sam effectively offers a prayer to Galadriel for water and light – and both of them come to him, even in Mordor, the home of the evil one on Middle-Earth.

Corruption

The last theme which emerges time and again is the corrupting power of evil over man's will. The ring and Sauron function quite explicitly as types of evil – disembodied and, in a sense, powerless except by the force they exert over man to distract him from noble ends. Human's fail when their wills are passive with regard to evil, as when Frodo is being drawn to the ring and almost succumbs.

More obvious are the effects of evil on Gollum and Boromir. Gollum is Frodo's unofficial guide on his path to Mordor. He once was a hobbit, we learn, but has become a creature purely at the mercy of evil, decrepit and deformed by the experience. He has no will of his own and now doesn't recognise goodness at all, recoiling from the sun, or any pure light, and good food.

Similarly, Boromir, a noble but impetuous warrior, shows how evil tempts us to see it as responsive to man's will – that man can use evil for his own ends. But it can't be, as evil is parasitic on good and by its use corrupts us. Had Boromir taken hold of the ring, he would have become like Gollum – not free, but completely subjected and enslaved. Freedom, which comes through grace, is the exertion of our will for good. And that is the essential theme and drive of the story.

Enjoy

Bolstered now with an understanding of how the novel's style and themes work, perhaps *The Lord of the Rings* will prove less daunting. It is a book that can take you out of the world, so that whether the sun shines or the rain pours, the final month of summer will be a memorable one.

“Human's fail when their wills are passive with regard to evil, as when Frodo is being drawn to the ring and almost succumbs”



Gandalf (Ian McKellen) wields a sword in battle during a scene from *The Return of the King*, the finale in the *The Lord of the Rings* movie trilogy.



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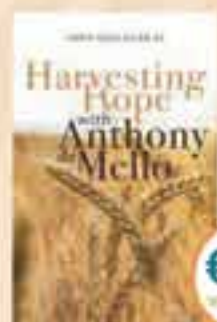
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Out&About

Baby Ethan is welcomed into the Church



LIMERICK: The family of baby Ethan James McCarthy celebrate his Baptism in the Parish Church of the Holy Rosary, Ennis Road. Pictured (from left) are Godmother Niamh McCarthy, Godfather Alan Brereton, Fr Des McAuliffe, Godfather Nathan Brereton, James McCarthy (father), baby Ethan, Naomi Brereton (mother) and Godmother Gráinne McCarthy.



GALWAY: Limerick's 20th Century martyr, Fr Timothy Leonard, was remembered on the 92nd anniversary of his slaying, July 17, with a special Memorial Mass celebrated by fellow Columban Fr Gerry Neylon, at St Joseph's Church. Pictured is John M Leonard, a close relative of Fr Leonard.



DUBLIN: Fr Peter O'Connor and the Boyle family, including the newest member baby Noah with his grandparents, great-grandparents and great-aunt, are pictured with the statue and shrine to St Anne and Our Lady as a child, after an anniversary Mass for the Boyle family at St John the Baptist Church, Blackrock, July 18.

IN SHORT

SVP celebrates long-time volunteers with garden party

Representatives from across St Vincent de Paul Armagh and Craigavon Area celebrated volunteers who have devoted more than 20 years to the SVP.

The garden party provided an opportunity for volunteers to meet face to face for the first time in more than a year. Throughout the pandemic, conferences have been hosting area gatherings via Zoom, with regular online meetings taking place across the area.

Speaking at the event, Ms Mary Waide, Regional President of SVP North Region, congratulated those who have emulated the founder of SVP, Blessed Frederic Ozanam, in their selfless acts of helping those in need.

"It's a privilege to recognise volunteers who have given a lifetime of service to St Vincent de Paul," Ms Waide continued.

"Undeterred by the pandemic, our volunteers have shown resilience in how they have continued to safely help those in need and how they embraced online meetings to stay connected and committed to society."

Ms Waide thanked the volunteers on behalf of the SVP "for their faithful and continued service and, in particular, I would

like to pay tribute to Annie Jordan who is celebrating 50 years of volunteering with SVP".

Minister Confirms Rodents in Direct Provision Centres – Aontú

The Minister for Children Roderic O'Gorman confirmed to Aontú leader Peadar Tóibín that a slug was found in food served at a direct provision centre last month and that there have been many infestations of rodents in direct provision centres.

Speaking on the topic, Mr Tóibín said

July 20 that the news confirms the Direct Provision system is "cruel and unfit for purpose".

Mr Tóibín pointed out that a company previously engaged by the Government also provides food to US prisons and "has come under the spotlight there following reports of maggot-contaminated food being served to prisoners".

"What does it say about the system here if the same company engaged in running prisons in America were contracted by the Irish government to run Direct provision centres?" the Aontú leader said.

Mr Tóibín said he has written to the minister, asking if the contract with this company is still in place.

Edited by Ruadhán Jones
Ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie

Events deadline is a week in
advance of publication



GALWAY: JPPII award ceremony that was held in the Church of the Assumption and St James Claregalway, on July 19. Pictured (from left) are Grace Cormican, Maire Geraghty, pastoral council chairperson Ann Farrell, Fr Ian O'Neill, Riona Keenan, Anna Cormican, Miriam Green and Katie Doyle.



ARMAGH:

Brendan McKernan, SVP Area President for Armagh and Craigavon, Peter McVeigh, SVP Regional board member for Twinning and Prisons and Patrick Friel, SVP Regional Treasurer, with Pauline Browne, SVP Regional Manager, and Mary Waide, Regional President of SVP North Region, at a garden party celebrating St Vincent de Paul volunteers, July 19.

DONEGAL:

Scoil Mhuire Buncrana students had a very busy first few days of their summer camp 2021, including a visit to Wild Ireland, July 14.



MAYO: Bro. Kevin McQuillan from Monaghan Town holds the Tempus Fugit Banner from the Monaghan Order of the Knights of St Columbanus on the summit of Croagh Patrick, July 10.



CORK: A man sits in a pew with his mask on and rosary beads in hand saying prayers before the start of Mass at Holy Trinity Capuchin Church in Cork City July 14. Photo: Cillian Kelly.



WATERFORD: Sr Veronica, Little Sister of the Poor, leaves after vespers in Mount Mellera Abbey while on retreat, July 17. The monastery has opened up again in recent weeks, including its guest house, shop, cafe, and church. Photo: Cillian Kelly

Events

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



World Report

IN BRIEF

'Do not abandon Mozambique', say Catholics, amid jihadist attacks

● Islamist terrorism threatens the future of Mozambique, according to a Catholic community aiding hundreds of thousands of refugees driven out by attacks.

"Do not abandon the people of Mozambique," Fr Angelo Romano urged at a press conference in Rome on July 21.

"The future prospects of the country are in fact now in danger because of the terrorist onslaught that began in 2017 that is endangering peace throughout the country," he said.

The priest is a member of the Catholic community of Sant'Egidio, a group that has been active in Mozambique for more than three decades and helped broker a peace agreement in the country in Southeastern Africa in 1992.

Nine members of Sant'Egidio have been killed in Islamist attacks in Mozambique since 2019.

US Congress urged to pass comprehensive immigration bill

● At a Capitol Hill media event July 21, Cardinal Wilton D. Gregory of Washington joined immigrants, agriculture and business representatives and two US senators in calling for legislative protections for immigrants that keep families together, including a pathway to citizenship.

Speaking on the lawn of the Capitol, Cardinal Gregory said that "like many of our own family members

who made a new life here ... we too are called to demonstrate kindness and a spirit of welcome to our migrant and refugee sisters and brothers, who are greatly contributing to our society through work and service".

He added a note of gratitude "for their dedication and service to this country in positions classified as essential work, health care and military service" during the pandemic.

Orthodox church in British Columbia destroyed in 'suspicious' fire

● A Coptic Orthodox church in British Columbia was destroyed in a fire on Monday, July 19, just days after an attempted arson attack damaged the church's door.

Local police said they were alerted to a fire at St George Coptic Orthodox Church in Surrey around 3:17 am on Monday. By the time the fire was extinguished, the building was almost entirely demolished and only a single wall was left standing. No one was reported injured in the fire.

"While today is a day of sadness, we will not be deterred and we will rebuild," said Bishop Mina of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Mississauga, Vancouver and Western Canada in a statement on Monday. "Our church will always be open for all."

Neocatechumenal Way requests opening sainthood cause of co-founder

● Members of the Neocatechumenal Way formally presented to the archbishop of Madrid a request to open the sainthood cause of their co-founder, Carmen Hernández.

Cardinal Carlos Osoro Sierra of Madrid celebrated Mass in the city's cathedral July 19, the fifth anniversary of her death.

Church rules require a waiting period of five years before opening a sainthood cause.

The initial stages include collecting the writings and speeches of the candidate and interviewing witnesses who knew the person. The information forms the basis of the *positio* or position paper, which is forwarded to the Vatican Congregation for Saints' Causes.

When the cardinals and bishops who are members of the congregation are satisfied that the *positio* is complete, they recommend the candidate to the Pope.

Vatican reports €66.3 million deficit, also releases APSA report

The Vatican reported the Roman Curia had a €66.3 million deficit in 2020, and on the same day, the Administration of the Patrimony of the Holy See, which administers Vatican properties and investments, made a summary of its annual budget public for the first time.

Releasing both reports July 24, the Vatican said the coronavirus pandemic had a serious negative impact on the Vatican's financial situation, including the €66.3 million deficit in the consolidated budget report for 2020.

In an interview with *Vatican News*, Bishop Nunzio Galantino, president of the Administration of the Patrimony of the Holy See, known by its Italian initials APSA, said making the budget synthesis public was "a step forward in the direction of transparency and sharing".

"The release of the balance sheet is a sign of great respect for all those who, with trust and generosity, have placed and continue to place part of their resources in the hands of the Catholic Church," Bishop Galantino said.

In 2019, Italian journalist and author Gianluigi Nuzzi claimed in his book *Giudizio Universale* (*Universal Judgment*) that decades of mismanagement of the Vatican's investment portfolio and real estate holdings by APSA would leave the Vatican no choice but to default by 2023.

APSA directly administers 4,051 properties in



Jesuit Fr Juan Antonio Guerrero Alves, prefect of the Vatican Secretariat for the Economy, is pictured near the Vatican in an undated photo. Photo: CNS

Italy and entrusts to outside companies the administration of some 1,200 properties in London, Paris, Geneva and Lausanne, Switzerland, the Vatican report said.

During the 2020 fiscal year, APSA reported a profit of almost €22 million, compared to €73.21 million in 2019.

Aside from the economic challenges posed by the pandemic – including a need to reduce the rents of businesses that could not function during lockdown – Bishop Galantino told *Vatican News* the drop in its income was largely due to

the "changing behaviour of the securities market".

Jesuit Fr Juan Antonio Guerrero Alves, prefect of the Secretariat for the Economy, told *Vatican News* that, while 2020 was not a good year, the Roman Curia's budget deficit was "better than what we expected".

Before the pandemic, he explained, the Vatican projected a budget deficit of €53 million. However, in the midst of the pandemic, the office figured the best-case scenario would be a deficit of €68 million while the worst

case would be a deficit of €146 million.

"Instead, with a deficit of €66.3 million, the end result was slightly better than the projected best-case scenario, and decisively better than what we had projected in the revised budget in March," Fr Guerrero said.

While most Vatican offices reduced costs during the year, Fr Guerrero also noted that in 2019 the Peter's Pence collection was used to subsidise 32% of Vatican dicasteries' expenses, while in 2020 it was used to cover only 24%.

Cuban government preparing a law regulating dissidents' defence lawyers

Cuba's communist government has drafted a law that would equate the role of dissidents' defence lawyers with that of public officials.

In May, the People's Supreme Court, Cuba's highest judicial authority, drew up a series of legislative proposals that it sent to the island's legislature, the National Assembly of People's Power, for passage.

Among these proposals is the "Draft Law on Criminal Procedures", which could equate the role of a defence lawyer for dissidents with that of a "public

employee or official", putting the lawyer at the mercy of pressure and sanctions from the government.

A group of Cuban lawyers, who asked to speak on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals from the government, warned that this bill "would violate impartiality", because "the Prosecutor's Office represents the state, it's a public functionary. Imagine if the defence lawyer also were".

The lawyers pointed out that "this is something that for many years they have tried to accomplish".

"Now, with a new criminal procedural text, an attempt is being made to introduce it in a very underhanded way," they said.

The most controversial texts of the bill are found in the fifth special provision, which defines what is an employee and a public official.

The Cuban jurists told ACI Prensa that "although the word 'lawyer' is not mentioned, the generality of the expression 'non-state sector' is the way to allow this interpretation where the judges don't enjoy authentic judicial independence".

USCCB general secretary resigns; reports allege 'improper behaviour'

Msgr. Jeffrey D. Burrill, the general secretary of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops since November, has resigned from the post after the USCCB "became aware of impending media reports alleging possible improper behaviour by Msgr. Burrill", said Archbishop José H.

Gomez of Los Angeles, USCCB president.

In a July 20 memo to bishops, Archbishop Gomez said he had accepted Msgr. Burrill's resignation, effective immediately.

"What was shared with us did not include allegations of misconduct with minors.

However, in order to avoid becoming a distraction to the operations and ongoing work of the conference, Monsignor Burrill has resigned," the archbishop said.

"The conference takes all allegations of misconduct seriously and will pursue all appropriate steps to address

them," he said.

In a lengthy story posted midday July 20, *The Pillar* said Archbishop Gomez's memo came after it had contacted the USCCB and Msgr. Burrill regarding evidence the news outlet claimed to have "of a pattern of sexual misconduct on Burrill's part".



Edited by Ruadhán Jones
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Here we go, Tokyo!



Students at Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart in Bethesda, Maryland, cheer on alumnae Katie Ledecy and Phoebe Bacon during an Olympics pep rally July 19, 2021. Photo: CNS

Ethiopia's bishops plead for peace in Tigray

As the war over control of Ethiopia's Tigray region expands into neighbouring regions, the country's bishops on Saturday urged an end to the violence.

"It saddens our hearts hearing about war while we all would like to hear about peace and reconciliation," read a July 17 statement from the Ethiopian bishops' conference. The conference had held its ordinary assembly July 13-16 in Mojo, about 50 miles southeast of Addis Ababa.

Fighting has been taking place in Tigray since November 2020 between the

regional government of the Tigray People's Liberation Front and federal forces.

In the last week, the Tigray war has expanded into the neighbouring Afar region; it had already crossed into the Amhara region.

Ethiopia's bishops commented that "as Pastors, we cannot but feel the anguish and pain that the people are going through".

The bishops "prayed for the peace of our country and the safety of our people", making special mention of Bishop Tesfasilassie Medhin of the Ethiopian Eparchy of Adigrat.

The bishops said they "kindly urge" the parties in conflict to halt the violence and strive toward peaceful co-existence, saying, "War only destroys lives and properties and nothing more and the choice to be made should not be a war but peace and reconciliation".

Violence, the bishops said, "is never a remedy for wrongs or a solution to a crisis".

"It is never too late to stop the violence, to acknowledge that the only way forward, for the good of the people, is peace and reconciliation, to satisfy the demands of truth

and justice, to ask for and grant forgiveness, to do what is necessary to restore mutual trust, to recognise others as our brothers and sisters, no matter who they are and how deep our disagreements are, and to settle any differences through dialogue and negotiation," they stated.

The bishops also encouraged the people of God to put their hope in Christ, saying, "It is the only way that we can heal together as a country, as a society, and as a Church".

Cardinal seeks saint's intercession to save Lebanon from 'total collapse'

Cardinal Bechara Boutros Rai has implored Lebanon's patron saint to help save the country from "total collapse" amid one of the worst financial crises the world has seen in decades.

In a homily for the feast of St Charbel, the leader of Lebanon's Maronite Catholics said that he sought the intercession of the 19th-century Lebanese saint for "the miracle of our salvation from this total collapse".

The cardinal also decried Lebanese political leaders for their failure to ful-

fil the "most basic duties toward their people".

"The political establishment gives proof after proof each day of its inability to perform its most basic duties toward their people and the country," Rai said July 18.

"This group is incapable of solving simple daily problems such as waste, electricity, food, medicine, and fuels, incapable of combating corruption, facilitating the work of the judiciary ... and incapable of settling issues such

as resolutions and measures to address major reforms," he added.

The cardinal's comments came days after Lebanon's Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri resigned after failing to form a government over the last nine months.

"It is a time to assume responsibilities, not a time to retreat," Cardinal Rai said. "The country is not facing an ordinary governmental crisis, but rather a comprehensive national crisis."

Vatican roundup

Synod of Bishops publishes list of commission members

● The Vatican released the names of members of two commissions charged with assisting the leaders of the Synod of Bishops' general secretariat in reviewing documents, drafting resources and developing best practices.

According to the synod website, the theological commission and the methodology commission will include religious and lay experts from around the world.

The theme chosen by the Pope for the next synod is: "For a synodal church: communion, participation and mission."

Cardinal Mario Grech, secretary-general of the Synod of Bishops, told *Vatican News* in May that, although originally scheduled for 2022, the synod will take place in October 2023 to allow for broader consultation at the diocesan, national and regional level.

In revisions to the synod process announced in May, Pope Francis has asked that it begin with consultations with laypeople on the diocesan level before the discussion and discernment moved to a national level and then the 2023 synod assembly itself.

The theological commission, led by Bishop Luis Marín de San Martín, is comprised of 25 experts in theology, philosophy and canon law from around the world, including the United States, Italy, Spain, Burkina Faso, Syria, Tanzania and Mexico.

Pope 'deeply saddened' by Baghdad market bombing

● Pope Francis expressed his condolences after a suicide bombing in a busy market in Baghdad claimed the lives of dozens of people.

In a telegram sent July 21 to Archbishop Mitja Leskovar, papal nuncio to Iraq, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, said the Pope was "deeply saddened to learn of the loss of life in the explosion at the al-Wuhailat market".

The Pope "sends condolences to the families and friends of those who have died", Cardinal Parolin said.

"Entrusting their souls to

the mercy of almighty God, His Holiness renews his fervent prayers that no act of violence will diminish the efforts of those who strive to promote reconciliation and peace in Iraq," he said.

According to the news network *Al-Jazeera*, an estimated 35 people died and dozens more were wounded after a suicide bomber detonated an explosive July 19 in the crowded market on the eve of the Eid al-Adha festival.

The Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack in a message posted to the group's Telegram channel, *Al-Jazeera* reported.

Vatican publishes schedule for papal trip to Hungary, Slovakia

● Pope Francis' September trip to Hungary and Slovakia features a jam-packed schedule that shows he has no intention of slowing down despite his recent recovery from colon surgery.

The Vatican July 21 released the Pope's schedule for the trip September 12-15, including the closing Mass of the International Eucharistic Congress in Budapest.

The Pope announced the trip July 4 to pilgrims gathered in St Peter's Square for his Sunday Angelus address.

"From the bottom of my heart, I thank those who are preparing this journey, and I am praying for them," he said. "Let us all pray for this journey and for the people who are working to organise it."

Arriving in Hungary September 12, the Pope will meet with Hungarian President János Áder and Prime Minister Viktor Orbán before meeting with the country's bishops and representatives of the Ecumenical Council of Churches and several Jewish communities.

After celebrating the closing Mass of the International Eucharistic Congress, the Pope will immediately depart for Bratislava, Slovakia, where he will participate at an ecumenical gathering at the apostolic nunciature before meeting privately with a group of Jesuit priests.



Letter from Rome



John L. Allen Jr

Indicted Italian cardinal wants his day in court ... more than one, actually

Though it hardly made a dent in the weekend's news cycle given Pope Francis's bombshell crackdown on the Latin Mass, Italian Cardinal Angelo Becciu announced his latest lawsuit Saturday, in this case suing an Italian newspaper called *La Verità* for defamation over a report regarding movements of money in Becciu's home diocese in Sardinia.

Non-charitable ends

In effect, the report claimed that Becciu caused around €3,000,000, most of it from the Vatican's Secretariat of State and the Italian bishops' conference, to be deposited in an account of a branch of Caritas in the Diocese of Ozieri in Sardinia, an account which, at the time, was controlled by his brother. From there, the *Verità* report claimed, much of the money was either spent for non-charitable ends or simply disappeared.

A statement from Becciu's attorney, Rome-based criminal lawyer Fabio Viglione, described the report as "alarmist propaganda not justified by the legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of the press".

On Sunday, a lawyer acting for Bishop Corrado Melis of Ozieri released a statement backing Becciu, insisting on the "unequivocal and incontestable absence of interference or influence by anyone, much less His Eminence Cardinal Angelo Becciu", on how the local Caritas handled its money, attributing the *Verità* report to "the drunken speculation of journalistic outlets".

Though it's difficult to keep an accurate count, the lawsuit against *La Verità* appears to be one of around ten Becciu has either filed, or threatened to file, against various press outlets and individuals. Most notably, Becciu has filed one defamation lawsuit demanding \$12 million in damages and threatened at least four more against *L'Espresso*, sort of the *Time* magazine of Italy.

At various points, Becciu has also announced plans to sue Italy's national TV broadcaster, Rai, as well as *Corriere della Sera*, the country's newspaper of record.

The flurry of litigation is largely related to Becciu's role in the Vatican's \$400 million London real estate scandal, including the fact that Becciu recently became the first cardinal in history to be indicted by Vatican criminal prosecutors and to be cleared for trial by the Pope. The first hearing in that trial is set for next Tuesday, July 27, though the expectation is that it may be adjourned to the fall.

From the beginning, Becciu has vigorously asserted his innocence.



Pope Francis greets Cardinal Angelo Becciu at the Vatican December, 16, 2019. Photo: CNS

“In any event, one point seems clear: No matter what the Vatican tribunal decides, it's unlikely to be the last word in Angelo Becciu's already improbable story”

Notably, he hasn't tried to sue the Vatican itself or its magistrates, in part, possibly, because the Vatican's sovereign immunity would make such a case almost impossible to hear in an Italian court.

Deeply intriguing

Depending on how Becciu's lawsuits fare, they raise the deeply intriguing prospect that two different courts could be asked to adjudicate basically the same set of facts, one a Vatican tribunal and another an Italian secular court, either simultaneously or sequentially.

In effect, Becciu's hope appears to be to ensure two bites at the apple – defending himself vigorously before the Vatican tribunal, but simultaneously demanding that a different court, one that doesn't work for the Pope, provide another set of eyes.

It's not a slam-dunk. While Italy does have fairly draconian defamation laws – in theory, a reporter

could be fined up to \$30,000 and spend up to six years in prison if found guilty – most defamation suits are dismissed fairly early in the process.

According to the Italian National Statistics Institute (Istat), in 2017, the most recent year for which data is available, there were a total of 9,479 defamation suits filed against journalists in Italy, but 60% were dismissed after a preliminary investigation and just under seven percent actually went to trial.

These suits are often more effective against smaller media outlets or individual journalists, without deep pockets to defend themselves and facing potentially crippling costs to mount a defence even if they're eventually vindicated. They tend to have less impact on larger and more established operations, such as *L'Espresso*, or RAI, or *Corriere della Sera*, for whom fighting off nuisance suits is a line item in a

much larger budget.

Nonetheless, Becciu only needs one of his filings to survive in order to set the stage for a judicial round of “dueling banjos”, in this instance with secular judges providing an unintentional layer of checks-and-balances on whatever the Vatican tribunal ends up concluding.

To date, the Vatican magistrates' track record when an independent, external judge reviews their findings is mixed.

In March, British judge Tony Baumgartner of Southwark Crown Court was asked to hear an appeal from London-based Italian financier Gianluigi Torzi, now one of the principal defendants in the looming Vatican trial, who had appealed the seizure of his assets following a Vatican request.

Baumgartner clearly wasn't impressed, ruling that the Vatican's “non-disclosures and misrepresentations” in its legal filing were “so appalling that the ultimate sanction” of reversing the asset seizure was appropriate.

Among other things, Baumgartner questioned why the two top Vatican officials who authorised the London deal, the No. 2 in the secretariat of state, Venezuelan Archbishop Edgar Peña Parra, and his boss, Italian Cardinal Pietro Parolin, hadn't provided a witness statement

to back up prosecutors' claims.

That bit of *obiter dictum*, perhaps, hints at Becciu's endgame.

So far he's had little luck with Vatican magistrates with the argument that everything he did was approved by Parolin and continued, even expanded, by Peña Parra. Instead, those magistrates have accepted claims from Parolin and Peña Parra that they were duped by Torzi and other financiers, in cahoots with Becciu.

Defamation trial

A defamation trial in an Italian court, however, presumably would afford less benefit of the doubt to two figures who just happen to form the current power structure at the Vatican under Pope Francis. At the least, Parolin and Peña Parra could be called as witnesses, and then would have to decide whether to invoke their sovereign status to avoid answering the summons – creating the impression, perhaps, that they have something to hide.

In any event, one point seems clear: No matter what the Vatican tribunal decides, it's unlikely to be the last word in Angelo Becciu's already improbable story.

i John L. Allen Jr is Editor of *CruxNow.com*

Grandparents admit, like Pope said, sometimes they feel 'discarded'



Pope Francis with participants in a meeting sponsored by the Charity Commission and Health of the CEI in the Vatican's Clementine Hall on February 10, 2017. Photo: CNS.



Inés San Martín

Celebrating the first Church-sponsored day of grandparents, Pope Francis said Sunday that he's fearful of a society that treats individuals as part of a nameless crowd.

Grandparents who were in St Peter's Square for his weekly Angelus prayer agreed, acknowledging that they too fear being forgotten.

Grandparents and the Elderly

"How do we see our grandparents and elderly persons?" Francis asked during the homily he had prepared for the first World Day of the Grandparents and the Elderly. "When was the last time we visited or telephoned an elderly person in order to show our closeness and to benefit from what they have to tell us?"

"I worry when I see a society full of people in constant motion, too caught up in their own affairs to have time for a glance, a greeting or a hug," he wrote. "I worry about a society where individuals are simply part of a nameless crowd,

where we can no longer look up and recognise one another. Our grandparents, who nourished our own lives, now hunger for our attention and our love; they long for our closeness. Let us lift up our eyes and see them, even as Jesus sees us."

Still recovering from his July 4 intestinal surgery, Pope Francis did not celebrate the Mass in St Peter's Basilica as originally planned. Instead, Italian Archbishop Rino Fisichella, head of the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization, led the Mass and read the homily prepared by the Argentine pontiff, who at 84 has often referred to himself as elderly.

“At noon, Francis did appear from the window of the Apostolic Palace from where Pope’s have traditionally led the Sunday Angelus prayer, and greeted the thousands who had gathered in St Peter’s Square”

Older people are not “leftovers” to be discarded, Francis had written, defining instead as precious nourishment for families, young people and communities

Some 2,000 people attended the Mass, including multi-generational

families, older people and their caregivers. Large-print Mass booklets were made available.

“Grandparents and the elderly are not leftovers from life, scraps to be discarded,” he wrote. “They are a precious source of nourishment.”

“They protected us as we grew, and now it is up to us to protect their lives, to alleviate their difficulties, to attend to their needs and to ensure that they are helped in daily life and not feel alone,” he wrote.

Reconnect

In his homily, the Pope urged those present to reconnect with older people, visit and call them, and to make sure they never feel discarded: all generations “will be the better for it”, he wrote.

At noon, Francis did appear from the window of the Apostolic Palace from where Pope’s have traditionally led the Sunday Angelus prayer, and greeted the thousands who had gathered in St Peter’s Square.

Marco and Maria, in their late 70s, attended with two of their three children, and five grandchildren. Keeping with the traditional Italian custom of families getting together on Sunday, they were planning on having lunch as a group after the Pope was done. They live some 10 blocks from the Vatican, and the youngest of their daughters, a chef, had stayed behind to make final preparations.

“I’ve gladly relinquished ownership of the kitchen to her!” Maria joked when speaking with *Crux* on Sunday, minutes before the Pope’s

traditional “*buongiorno*”!

“I’ve taught my daughter everything I know about cooking,” she said. “More importantly, however, I think I’ve taught them all what truly matters so that they can have a good life: Follow their dreams, trust their guts, and above all, love God. He’s the first thing we should think about when we wake up, and the last thing on our minds when we fall asleep.”

With her entire family blushing, she brought her voice several decibels lower to suggest this also applies for “young married couples”.

The Bianchi’s were just one of several intergenerational families present in the square, and they were not the only ones who’d fulfilled Sunday’s obligation to attend Mass before heading to the Angelus.

However, not every elderly person in St Peter’s was there with children or grandchildren.

Paolo and Gabriella, for instance, are a couple in their 80’s “who’ve been in love for the past 45 years, even if we’ve had our fair share of fights and nights on the couch”.

“I wish our children were here,” Paolo said. “I know they’re busy, they have their lives and their own families. But when you grow old, you come to accept that you don’t have that much time left, and you want to make sure you spend it with those you love.”

With tears in his eyes, he couldn’t help but wonder “if we’d done something wrong” when raising their three children, as they sometimes feel “as Pope Francis says, that we’ve

been ‘discarded’. I know that as parents we failed. Just like we all fail at most things, but well, you don’t get a do-over when you’re a father. But still. They’ve all gone to college, have good jobs, found love. We couldn’t have been that bad, right?”

Gabriella, “like a mother hen”, as her husband calls her, defended the children, saying it’s understandable that they all “have better things to do on their Sundays. That doesn’t mean they can’t give us their Mondays, or Tuesdays... I’m not picky”.

“We need to take this up again, it is a challenge for our culture”

Protective of their children as a new parent would be, they asked *Crux* to withhold their last name: “No need to guilt them into seeing us!”

Almost as if he had heard them, at the end of the Angelus the Pope urged for intergenerational dialogue, saying that without young people and grandparents talking to one another, “history does not move forward, life does not move forward: we need to take this up again, it is a challenge for our culture. Grandparents have the right to dream while watching young people, and young people have the right to the courage of prophecy from their grandparents.”

i Inés San Martín is Rome Bureau Chief for *Cruxnow*

Letters

Letter of the week

'Safe access zones' an attack on democracy

Dear Editor, The concept of 'safe access zones' around places that provide abortion is still being bandied about, most recently by Limerick City and County councillors. A group of councillors do not have the power to deprive people of the right to pray quietly outside abortion clinics for the unborn children losing their lives through abortion.

It is an attack on democracy that has been masterfully wrapped up by pro-choice activists as a compassionate thing to do. Even the language is false.

The idea of a 'safe access zone' implies that these areas currently are unsafe when that is far from the case. Even the Garda Commissioner in 2019 said bringing in legislation for 'safe access zones' was unnecessary as they already have laws in place to protect people from harassment etc.

Pro-abortion campaigners have long been trying to quash any discussion about abortion before and after the referendum, often falling back to snide comments and emotional, not

factual, language. This was epitomised when former TD Kate O'Connell said to pro-life advocates in the Dáil in the winter of 2019, "We won. You lost... it must be hurting".

Unluckily for them, the third of people who voted against abortion have not disappeared and their voices will not be silenced.

Yours etc,
Margaret Doyle
Waterford City, Waterford

Dangers of othering the unvaccinated

Dear Editor, Some have taken exception to Mattie McGrath TD referring to the treatment of Jews in the run up to the Holocaust, during the recent Dáil debate on the introduction of vaccine passports for indoor-catering.

Are we not going down that same road of "othering" those who won't or can't vaccinate/comply; isolating them, making their presence unwanted and even their motives suspect? So often such exclusion can have regrettable unintended consequences.

For those facing marginalisation, "choosing" to vaccinate will become less and less based upon an assessment of its morality, necessity and efficacy. Rather it will be taken under duress; pressure to conform from an overbearing media, the very real threat of social exclusion and dire career implications.

Concerning indoor-dining, the Government could have followed the vaccine roll out age-based approach with each age-cohort being admitted when it was considered to have herd immunity.

For some, this pandemic has been a shot-in-the-arm to their popularity, while for big-pharma and high-tech companies it has become a money-spinning bonanza. It is just so difficult to know in whose interest it is to tell the truth or to step back from denigrating those whose appraisal of the situation sets them apart from the herd.

Yours, etc.
Gearóid Duffy,
Lee Road, Cork



Voluntary contributions keep poorly funded Catholic schools afloat

Dear Editor, Ruadhán Jones' [IC 15/07/2021] article on 'voluntary contributions' deserves serious consideration by every Catholic Parents Association. Almost all secondary parents are faced with massive costs of bespoke uniform and even more expensive books. Added to this is the annual demand for 'voluntary contributions' averaging €150 per student. So much for the notion of free education!

When some years ago I queried some of these costs I contacted the Catholic Secondary Schools Parents Association (CSSPA) and I was given ESRI statistics which showed the extent of under-funding of Catholic secondary schools.

I learned that compared to Education Training Board schools Catholic schools get 20% less capitation. In addition, Catholic secondaries alone are docked €562 per teacher. Baring this in mind, like the parents of 200,000 students attending Catholic secondaries I willingly joined them in paying the much-needed voluntary contribution.

Meanwhile the Department of Education claims that 'voluntary contributions' are discouraged when in fact fair funding of Catholic schools would eliminate this ongoing scandal.

Yours etc.,
Alan Whelan
Killarney, Co Kerry

Hoping for an Irish Christian Democratic party

Dear Editor, David Quinn succinctly described the growth of Christian democracy as a third option between unbridled capitalism and socialism [IC 15/07/2021]. The political situation here in Ireland for a voter is rather depressing considering the parties currently either running the country or vying for the steering wheel. I would find it difficult to vote for any one of them. However, a Christian Democratic party, similar to that of Germany, could be something to get behind – particularly as a party like this would value Europe's Christian roots and culture.

Having a religious faith in Ireland means being quickly labelled by many

people as either foolish, backward or a far-right lunatic. This is a country that is moving at breakneck speed towards secularism and when even the cultural Catholics stop receiving the sacraments and these 'traditions' end with more 'woke' individuals, there will be a gaping vacuum in society. People will look for something else to follow and believe and turn their backs on God. Mr Quinn writes that "The present political tide in Ireland will have to change again before people are ready for Christian Democratic-style answers to our problems..."

He is correct, perhaps this will happen with the new generation, whose parents have ardently rejected God to

pursue lives of hubris and hedonism. Perhaps when these parents teach their children their 'values', the children may come to realise the drab emptiness of their existence and come looking for the truth. Perhaps this will translate into a Christian Democratic party?

This is of course hypothetical. Anyone who understands Ireland's political circumstances will see this as rather far fetched considering the depth of anti-Church feeling that exists in the Dáil, but we live in hope.

Yours etc.,
James Kiernan
Swords, Dublin

facebook community

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

Appealing to need for unity, Pope restores limits on pre-Vatican II Mass

I have to say, and as much as I agree with and 100% support the TLM, I believe Pope Francis was left with no choice but to do what he did. He's correct in his assertion that the TLM is being used by hardline conservative Catholics in their bid to bolster their agenda against Vatican II. Now while I agree that not all conservative Catholics are against Vatican II, there are many who see the TLM as somehow superior to the Novus Ordo... this is completely unfounded. The TLM and the Novus Ordo bear the exact same valid Eucharistic Lord. Again, I completely agree that the reverence and respect shown to the Eucharist in the TLM is far above the Novus Ordo, but there's nothing stopping priests and lay pastoral workers showing the same respect and reverence to the Eucharistic Lord in the Novus Ordo. – **Anthony O'Shaughnessy**

I didn't think the Church could afford to restrict any Mass. – **Daragh Harmon**

As a 'non-partisan' on the issue my gut instinct is that this is a very bad move. If the Pope had consulted the laity he might have gotten a different answer. – **John Kehoe**

It's a curious way to promote unity. I'm saying that as someone with no great attraction to the Latin rite. That said, the Latin rite is attracting many to Catholicism, especially young people apparently. – **Seán de Bhéalatún**

I'm not what you'd call a devotee of the Extraordinary Form but two things stand out to me about this decision. First, it seems in bad taste to overturn Pope Benedict's decision when the man is still alive. Secondly, this doesn't seem to be a particular response to anything. If anything this will exacerbate division rather than solve it. – **Adam Conroy**

Still needed: an Irish Christian Democracy

I think a lot of ordinary people would be okay but the media wouldn't and the Government would play to their tune. – **Chris Curley**

The Government wouldn't want such a party either. We are the only country in Europe where churches were in lockdown despite them being the safest buildings in the country. There seems to be a concerted effort by both media and Government to suppress religion. Banning Confirmations was disgraceful as all it would involve is parents and a sponsor. There is no justification whatsoever for such a decision other than anti-Church bias. – **Mary Duggan Murphy**

We do need one, but they would need to have a very strong back bone as unfortunately to be a Christian/Catholic in this country, we seem to be fair game for ridicule. – **Flo Fahey**

It would not do well at the moment but hope springs eternal and the Holy Spirit works in our hearts and souls 24/7. Our job is to listen to His whisperings. – **Margaret Nealon**

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

Letters to the Editor

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

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

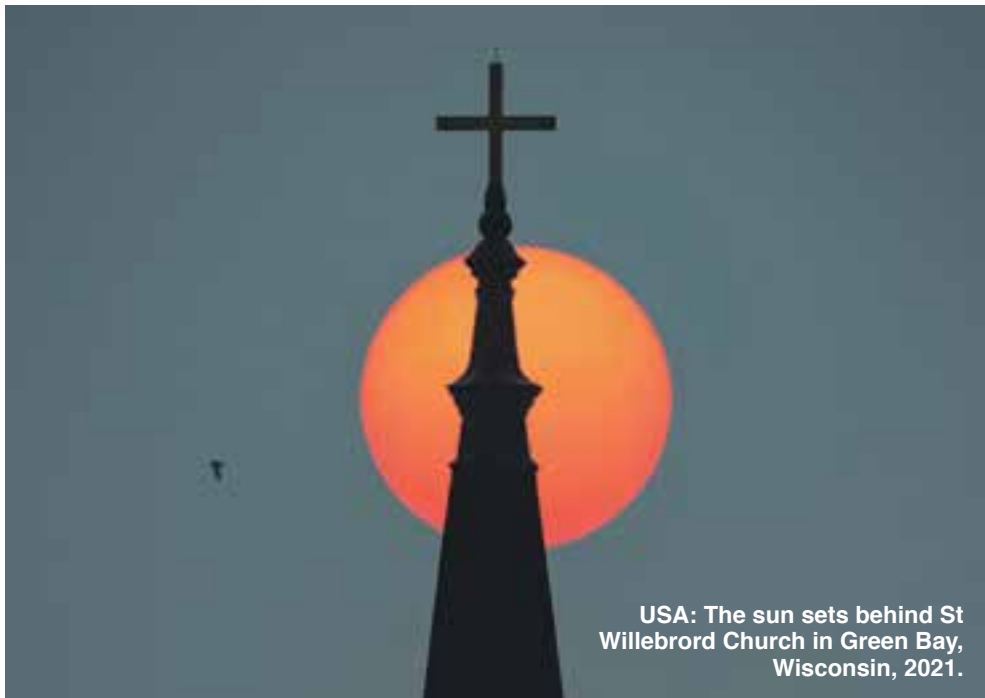
merits of letters. We do not publish pseudonyms or other formulae to conceal the writer's identity, such as "name and address with editor". We do not print letters addressed to someone else, open letters, or verse. Letters to the Editor should only be sent to The Irish Catholic, and not other publications.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

Around the world



▲ **ETHIOPIA:** A tank damaged during the fighting between the Ethiopian National Defense Force and Tigray Special Forces is pictured on the outskirts of Humera, 2021.

◀ **CHINA:** A man holding a baby wades through a flooded road following heavy rainfall in Zhengzhou, China, July 22, 2021. All photos: CNS



USA: The sun sets behind St Willebrord Church in Green Bay, Wisconsin, 2021.



JAPAN: Flag bearers Mohamed Sbihi of Britain and Hannah Mills of England lead their contingent during the opening ceremony of the Tokyo Summer Olympics July 21, 2021.



USA: A woman in Miami shouts and waves a Cuban flag, 2021, following reports of protests in Cuba against the government and a deteriorating economy.



HOLY LAND: Foreign tourists visit the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, 2021, as coronavirus restrictions ease in the Israeli-occupied West Bank.



There is a profound truth at the heart of the story of St Christopher.

Can we prove that God exists?

I wrote my doctoral thesis on the value of various philosophical arguments that try to prove the existence of God. Can there be such a proof? Brilliant philosophers, from Anselm, through Aquinas, through Descartes, through contemporary intellectuals like Charles Hartshorne, submit that the existence of God can be proven through rational argument. Except, a lot depends upon what exactly we mean by the word 'prove'. How do we prove something?

“He became a ferryboat operator, spending his life helping to carry people across a dangerous river”

There's a legend about St Christopher that's pertinent here: Christopher was a man gifted in every way, except faith. He was physically strong, powerful, good-hearted, mellow, and well-liked. He was also generous, using his physical strength to help others, but he found it hard to believe in God, even though he wanted to. For him, the physical was what was real and everything else seemed unreal. And so as the legend goes, he lived his life in a certain honest agnosticism, unable to really believe in anything beyond what he could physically



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

see, feel, and touch.

However, this did not prevent him from using his gifts, especially his physical strength, to serve others. This was his refuge, generosity and service. He became a ferryboat operator, spending his life helping to carry people across a dangerous river. One night, as the legend goes, during a storm, the ferryboat cap-sized and Christopher dove into the dark waters to rescue a young child. Carrying that child to the shore, he looked into its face and saw there the face of Christ. After that, he believed for he had seen the face of Christ.

A profound lesson

For all its piety, this legend contains a profound lesson. It changes the perspective on the question of how one tries to 'prove' God's existence. Our attempt to prove God's exist-

ence has to be practical, existential, and incarnate rather than mainly intellectual. How do we move from believing only in the physical, from believing only in the reality of what we can see, feel, touch, taste, and smell, to believing in the existence of deeper, spiritual realities?

The lesson in the Christopher story? Live as honestly and respectfully as you can and use your gifts to help others. God will appear. God is not found at the conclusion of a philosophical syllogism but as the result of a certain way of living. Moreover, faith is not so much a question of feeling as of selfless service.

There's a further lesson in the biblical account of the apostle, Thomas, and his doubt about the resurrection of Jesus. Remember his protest: "Unless I can (physically) place my finger in the wounds of his

hands and stick my finger into the wound of his side, I will not believe." Note that Jesus offers no resistance or rebuke in the face of Thomas' scepticism. Instead, he takes Thomas at his word: "Come and (physically) place your finger in the wounds of my hand and the wound in my side; see for yourself that I am real and not a ghost."

That's the open challenge for us: "Come and see for yourselves that God is real and not a ghost!" That challenge, however, is not so much an intellectual one as a moral one, a challenge to be honest and generous.

“God does not ask us to have a faith that is certain, but a service that is generous and sustained”

Scepticism and agnosticism, even atheism, are not a problem as long as one is honest, non-rationalising, non-lying, ready to efface oneself before reality as it appears, and generous in giving his or her life away in service. If these conditions are met, God, the author and source of all reality, eventually becomes sufficiently real, even to those who need physical proof. The stories of Christopher and Thomas teach us this and assure us that God is neither angered nor threatened by an honest agnosticism.

Faith is never certainty. Neither is it a sure feeling that God exists. Conversely, unbelief is not to be confused with the absence of the felt assurance that God exists. For everyone, there will be dark nights of the soul, silences of God, cold lonely seasons, sceptical times when God's reality cannot be consciously grasped or recognised. The history of faith, as witnessed by the life of Jesus and the lives of the saints, shows us that God often seems dead and, at those times, the reality of the empirical world can so overpower us that nothing seems real except what we can see and feel right now, not least our own pain.

Christopher and Thomas

Whenever this happens, like Christopher and Thomas, we need to become honest agnostics who use our goodness and God-given strengths to help carry others across the burdensome rivers of life. God does not ask us to have a faith that is certain, but a service that is generous and sustained. We have the assurance that should we faithfully help carry others, we will one day find ourselves before the reality of God who will gently say to us: "See for yourself, that I am real, and not a ghost."

Can we prove that God exists? In theory, no; in life, yes.

“God is not found at the conclusion of a philosophical syllogism but as the result of a certain way of living”

Family & Lifestyle

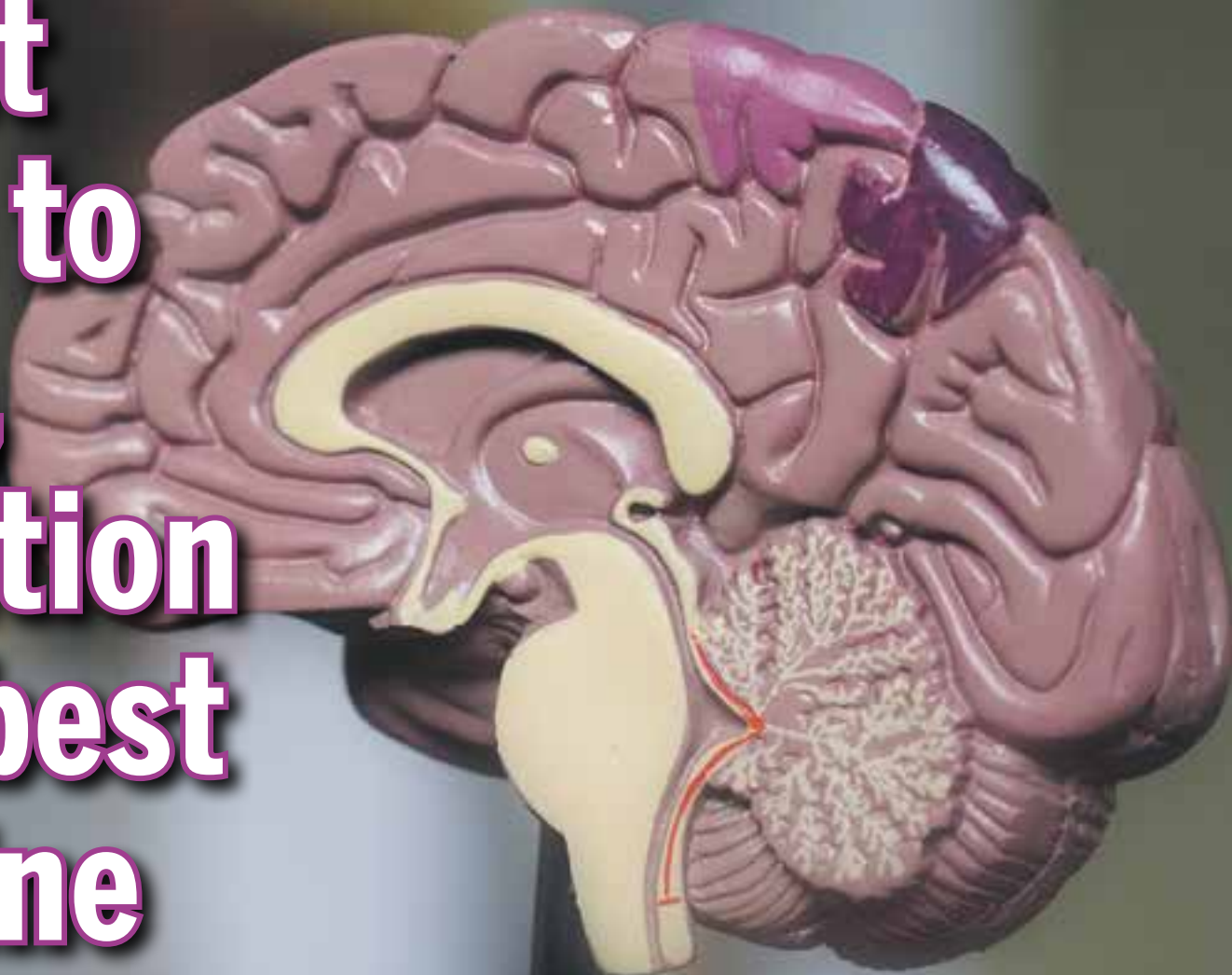
The Irish Catholic, July 29, 2021

Personal Profile
Fr McCann combines
biochemistry with a
priestly vocation

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When it comes to stroke, prevention is the best medicine



On the island of Ireland, more than 13,000 people have a stroke every year. About 205 of these will die as a result of the stroke.

Time is of the essence, and medics have come up with a quick formula for those who suspect that someone has had a stroke – think FAST.

Face – is it drooped?
Arms – can they be lifted?
Speech – is it slurred?
Time – to call 999.

The traditional thinking has been that strokes happen without warning. However, scientists from Erasmus University in The Netherlands have now revealed people may experience a decline in cognitive function up to ten years before actually having a stroke.

The researchers also say that they may also struggle to wash, eat or keep on top of their finances.



New research suggests that the tell-tale signs of a stroke may be evident a decade before the life-threatening event, writes Chai Brady

Cognitive function

Stroke survivors often endure a persistent decline in cognitive function or find it difficult to look after themselves.

However, the scientists now say that changes within the brain may be “already present before a first-ever stroke”. And identifying those who could be more at risk may allow medics to administer preventative treatments.

Between 1990 and 2016, the participants in the research underwent tests that assessed their

memory, speech and reaction times. Their ability to wash, eat, dress themselves and manage their finances was also investigated.

Up until 2018, the participants’ medical records were studied to tally the number of strokes that took place.

Each stroke patient was then matched against three healthy participants, according to their age and sex.

Results reveal a “clear difference” in the cognitive and daily functioning between the participants who did and did not later

have a stroke.

The so-called Mini Mental State Exam – widely used to assess memory and dementia severity – threw up different results between the two groups up to eight years before a stroke.

The results of the Purdue Pegboard test – which assesses dexterity – and the Stroop task – measures the speed of mental processing – started to differ around nine and ten years before a stroke, respectively.

Stroke

The stroke patients’ ability to care for themselves and their finances declined up to three years ahead of the event, the results show.

Stroke is often considered a leading cause of death among men.

Carrying the APOE gene – associated with Alzheimer’s – and having fewer academic qualifications were also linked to a stroke, with

both of these considered a marker of “cognitive reserve”.

The scientists have stressed the study was observational and therefore does not prove cause and effect. It is also unclear what type of stroke the patients had or how severe the event was.

Nevertheless, the scientists wrote: “Our findings demonstrated future stroke patients start to deviate from stroke-free controls up to ten years before the acute event, suggesting individuals with cognitive and functional decline are at a higher risk of stroke and are possible candidates for prevention trials.”

“The accelerated decline in cognition and daily functioning before stroke suggests individuals with future stroke suffer from accumulating intracerebral [within the cerebrum in the brain] damage years

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Family News

AND EVENTS

BRINGING FUN FROM ALL AROUND THE WORLD TO KIDS

The Building Bridges Community Theatre (BBCAT) in Lurgan, Co. Armagh are gearing up to deliver their 'All Around The World Summer Scheme' for children.

It runs for five days from August 2-6 for children aged 7-11 years old at Market Street in Lurgan. There will be an open marquee enabling Covid-19 guidelines to be followed.

Attendance is £15 for the full week and numbers are limited to 12 children per session. There is a variety of activities including arts and crafts, singing and dancing, games and activities and a treasure hunt, all within their theme for this year.

However, unlike previous years, they will not be holding an end of week showcase due to social distancing restrictions.

BBCAT leaders are Child Protection Level 2 trained and have completed Paediatric First Aid Training. Attendees can choose their child's ticket based on the time they prefer. Youth scheme tickets can be purchased by searching BBCAT Youth Summer Scheme. Tickets can also be purchased on Eventbrite by following this link: www.eventbrite.ie

SUPPORT LACKING FOR CHILDREN WITH A FAMILY MEMBER IN PRISON

Opportunities to safeguard the rights and support the needs of children and families with a family member in prison are continually being missed due to gaps in service provision and policy, according to the Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT).

The group came to the conclusion after assessing progress on recommendations made in 2012.

A report entitled 'Piecing It Together: Supporting Children and Families with a Family Member in Prison in Ireland', was launched by the Children's Ombudsman.

The IPRT pointed out a number of issues highlighted by the report, including limited national recognition of the rights of children with a family member in prison; the continued lack of any national support services for these children; visiting conditions that are not child-friendly; limited data and research; and stigmatisation of these children and their families.

HEALTHY GUT, HEALTHY LIFE

How to age well is certainly a question that requires a multifaceted response. However a new study points to your gut health as being one of the most important aspects of successful ageing.

The study found that it may be possible to predict your likelihood of living a long and healthy life by analysing the trillions of bacteria, viruses and fungi that inhabit your intestinal tract.

The research, published in the *Nature Metabolism* journal, found that as people get older, the composition of this complex community of microbes, collectively known as the gut microbiome, tends to change.

In healthy people, the kinds of microbes that dominate the gut in early adulthood make up a smaller and smaller proportion of the microbiome over the ensuing decades, while the percentage of other, less prevalent species rises. But in people who are less healthy, the study found, the opposite occurs: the composition of their microbiomes remains relatively static and they tend to die earlier.

Serious precautions needed before relishing summer sun



The good weather has seen many of us take to spending a lot of time outdoors, soaking up the sun and enjoying the heat. But it's also the season to be reminded of the need to protect ourselves from sunburn and heat stroke. This month the HSE launched its 'Sun Smart' campaign to increase awareness of the steps you can take to avoid sunburn and reduce your risk of skin cancer.

Skin cancers

Every month, over 1,000 people in Ireland are diagnosed with skin cancers and that number has increased substantially in the last decade. The vast majority of these cases are directly related to excess sun exposure. However, it is predicted this number may double by 2040 unless more people take precautions. Concerningly, cases of melanoma which is the most serious type of skin cancer continue to rise. Indeed, in a survey carried out by the HSE, nearly half of all Irish adults were sunburned in 2018, yet one in three felt it was worth it for the sake of their tan. Those who work in outdoor jobs including farming, construction and fishing are more likely to get sunburned and this group accounts for about a quarter of all skin cancer related deaths.

While awareness of skin cancer has increased, sometimes it's simply too late before people realise they are burned or they were not properly prepared when outdoors. From April to September the sun is at its strongest, especially between the hours of 11am to 3pm. Don't be deceived by cloudy weather

Medical Matters

Dr Kevin McCarroll



or a day when there's a strong breeze and you don't feel the sun's rays, you can still get sunburned.

“For children up to 1 year old, it is best to keep in the shade and wear clothing that covers their skin outdoors”

Most people in Ireland (75%) have pale skin and any more than about 15 minutes in the sun can result in burns. Importantly, you don't need to spend any longer than this to make vitamin D. However, studies show that those with lighter skin types often judge themselves to be darker than they actually are. UV rays can also have damaging effects even before your skin becomes red or inflamed.

In general, make sure if you're out in the sun for longer periods to cover your skin, especially exposed areas such as the face. Wide brimmed hats can protect your face, ears and neck and also consider using shirts with collars or rolling down longer sleeves.

For adults, use a sunscreen

with a factor of at least 30+ and for children 50+ and one that has high UVA protection and ideally is water resistant. You may also need to apply it up to every 2 hours. Make sure the sunscreen products are in date and stored under 30C! For children up to 1 year old, it is best to keep in the shade and wear clothing that covers their skin outdoors. Children's skin is very sensitive and bad sunburn more than three times before the age of 20, more than doubles the lifetime risk of skin cancer.



UV index

Keep an eye on the UV index which is a measure of the amount of UV radiation that reaches the earth's surface and can be found on Met Éireann's website. When the index is 1-2, there's no need for sunscreen unless you are out for long periods. However, an index of 3-5 will require you to use sunblock and when higher to seek shade at midday. Last week the UV index was as high as 6-7. UV rays can also damage the eyes and can cause cataracts so wearing protective glasses is important.

If you get sunburned, stay away from the sun! Cooling your skin with cold water sponges or even an ice compress can give good relief. Using a moisturiser that contains aloe vera cream

can also be quite soothing. Sunburn can draw fluid from the body to the skin's surface so it's important to drink lots of water and not become dehydrated. If you find it quite uncomfortable, try paracetamol or ibuprofen.

“If a mole turns black, gets itchy or bleeds it needs to be checked out by your doctor”

Many of us have acquired moles over the years which in the majority of cases are harmless. However, they can occasionally change and become malignant which is why it's a good idea to keep an eye on them. In particular, moles on the back or feet are often missed. But what should I look out for when checking a mole? Well, an easy mnemonic to remember is the ABCDE guide. More concerning features are Asymmetry or if one half of the mole is significantly different than the other. Check the mole Border for irregularity and look for a change in Colour or different colours or if the Diameter (width) has increased by 6mm or more. Finally watch out for any Evolving features including change in size, shape, colour or elevation from skin. If a mole turns black, gets itchy or bleeds it needs to be checked out by your doctor.

So remember to be safe, and make sure to keep your skin well protected this summer!

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

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before the acute event, such as cerebral small vessel disease, neurodegeneration, and inflammation," they said.

In Ireland, the average age which someone will have a stroke is 74, though about 30% affect those under 65.

Geriatric medicine

Dr Kevin McCarroll is a consultant physician in geriatric medicine at St James's Hospital in Dublin and a columnist with *The Irish Catholic*. He says that "while stroke can lead to severe disability and is the third leading cause of death in Ireland, a significant proportion of stroke survivors continue to lead active lives".

About 85% of strokes occur when a clot blocks off an artery in the brain cutting off blood supply and thereby causing brain damage. The remaining 15% result from a haemorrhage into brain tissue when a blood vessel ruptures.

According to Dr McCarroll, "the extent of disability after a stroke varies hugely depending on its location and size. Some strokes are quite small and recovery can be quick, within days.

"Some of the biggest risk factors for stroke are high blood pressure, smoking, diabetes and high cholesterol which all cause the build-up of plaque on the arteries supplying blood either to or within the brain.

"As well as causing narrowing of these vessels, they can become acutely blocked when a plaque ruptures leading to a clot forming, so it is important to keep a close eye on your blood pressure and cholesterol and avoid smoking. Watch out too for your alcohol intake, as in excess it is also a risk factor for haemorrhagic strokes," according to Dr McCarroll.

Another cause, which accounts for about a third of all strokes is atrial fibrillation - a type of irregular heartbeat. This causes clots to form in the heart which can embolise and block arteries in the neck or brain. Atrial fibrillation occurs in about 10% of those aged over 65 and can also happen intermittently.

Dr McCarroll says that many people are not aware of having an irregular heartbeat, yet treatment with blood thinning medications can reduce the risk of stroke by about 70%. "For a long time warfarin was the main drug used, but there are now several newer medications which are equally as effective but have a more predictable response

and need less monitoring.

"Most importantly, if you ever get symptoms or signs suggestive of a stroke then you should go immediately to the hospital," Dr McCarroll warns.

He says that "Clot busting drugs can be delivered in the hospital (thrombolysis) within 4.5 hours of having stroke signs or symptoms provided certain other criteria are met. It can result in an improvement in about 35% of patients. In some cases, its benefits are so great that in its early days of use it was described as the 'Lazarus effect'!"

Last year about 11% of strokes that presented to hospital in Ireland received clot-busting drugs. But time is of the essence, as every minute millions of brain cells are dying so it is vitally important to get to the hospital as early as possible.

"The effects of stroke vary hugely along a spectrum from minimal loss of power or sensory function to more severe disability and/or death"

Dr McCarroll is acutely aware that when it comes to health concerns in later life, "there are few others than stroke that conjure up as much fear.

"In truth, while stroke is the leading cause of acquired physical disability in Ireland, the outcome for many with stroke is very good and has improved in recent years due to more coordinated stroke care and modern medical advances.



"Stroke should no longer be considered as a condition that inevitably leads to severe disability, and indeed a sizeable proportion of stroke survivors continue to live active lives," Dr McCarroll insists.

The effects of stroke vary hugely along a spectrum from minimal loss of power or sensory function to more severe disability and/or death.

This, according to Dr McCarroll, depends largely on both the size and location of the area of damage in the brain.

Loss of power or sensation in the limbs, impairment of co-ordination or perception, balance, speech, vision and swallow problems are common after stroke. Some degree of cognitive decline is usually apparent, but for some may be very minimal.

According to Dr McCarroll, recent advances in interventional radiology also now mean that clots can be physically retrieved from arteries under minimally invasive techniques guided by x-ray.

"While still an evolving area, promising results from a recent study now mean that it is likely to become part of our standard treatment for carefully selected stroke patients in the future," he says.

Some stroke presentations will be self-resolving and are called mini-strokes or TIA's (transient ischaemic attacks).

Disabling condition

"They are however, harbingers of potential future strokes and should always prompt a full medical workup for potential causes, particularly atrial fibrillation and narrowing of the carotid arteries in the neck (which is amenable to surgery)," Dr McCarroll warns.

In summary, outcome for strokes are continuing to improve and for many it is not the once thought of disabling condition that it used to be. Experts say that identifying and addressing risk factors adequately will go a long way in reducing stroke incidence.

The research from The Netherlands will likely put fresh focus on just how early therapy to stop a stroke can begin.

Dad's Diary

Rory Fitzgerald



Irish people are not usually designed for the sunshine. In fact, the stereotypically Irish fair skin evolved so as to enable people to manufacture vitamin D under the murky grey skies of northern Europe. It's therefore quite a shock to the system when Ireland, without warning, becomes a tropical paradise. We become fish out of water, floundering as we try to cope with these strange conditions. Dazed, we are found rummaging around in the bottom drawer for some long forgotten shorts, or ordering yet another choc-ice.

Yet, just as snow does occasionally fall in the Sahara, some rare meteorological happenstance can result in Ireland becoming temporarily like the Mediterranean, as happened last week, to widespread national consternation. This sudden reversal of meteorological fortune does however enable the Irish people to seamlessly transition from complaining about the rain to complaining about the "terrible heat".

As the bizarre phenomenon of genuinely warm weather settled over Ireland last week, we were pleased to find ourselves on an island off west Cork, ideally positioned to make the most of it. Layers of sun cream were slathered on, hats were administered to the children - with strict instructions to actually wear them. Cool drinks were supplied in abundance. We were then ready to venture out. Even by 9am, it was baking. The water was measured at a remarkable 21 degrees in the sheltered, shallow harbour nearby. The usually essential wetsuits were forgotten and the old kids practiced taking running jumps off the pier into the bath-like water. The smaller kids were content with paddling, exploring rockpools or drifting along in a lifejacket. I've always been a keen sea swimmer and I was happy to join them for many happy hours splashing about.

The calm weather resulted in unusually clear water, which meant we could see starfish and scuttling crabs

metres below. The older kids especially became fascinated with the revelation of the undersea world. Happily, I had packed a bag of old snorkels and masks and these were adjusted for the older kids.



Having just really become competent sea swimmers last year, they were astonished to suddenly be able to see under the water. The bright sunshine and clear water showed us the undersea landscape in vivid technicolour.

We explored along rocky ledges, and through forests of kelp, discovering giant crabs, beautiful colourful seaweeds, shoals of shrimp, the odd tractor tyre, and - to add the spice of a little danger - there were also plenty of pulsing compass jellyfish to avoid. Sometimes, we glimpsed larger fish such as mullet or pollack as they flashed by. We explored reefs, where we discovered mysterious underwater caves. We experienced that sense of flying you get when floating serenely over underwater cliff edges. The kids were hooked, and wanting to go deeper, they implored me teach them how to duck dive.

When we made it back to the beach, we would find the younger kids, also fascinated by the creatures in the rockpools along the shore. Yet the older kids were overflowing with the wonder of what they had seen. They spoke excitedly about the marvellous creatures they had seen in the deep. Sensing their joy at their first glimpses of the underwater world let me see afresh the strange beauty of the ocean, and the subtle interwoven complexity of all forms of life.

Fr McCann combines biochemistry with a priestly vocation

Personal Profile



Ruadhán Jones

Fr Henry McCann is one of the few priests who can relive his ordination in full, even though it took place 25 years ago. The parish priest and hospital chaplain recently celebrated his Silver Jubilee, and, in light of the occasion, had a look at the video footage of the ceremony that took place June 30, 1996, in Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Moneyglass, Toomembridge, Co. Antrim.

Historical thing

"I'm younger looking and very thin," Fr McCann jokes about the video. "It has been a great help in that a lot of people were looking at the video online and noticing members of their own family who had gone. It was a great historical thing. It was a lovely thing to have as a memento anyway."

"For a long time actually I thought that the video had gone missing," he tells me over the phone. "The VHS, I thought either I'd leant it out to somebody or whatever, but I found it in one of the boxes in one of my moving's, so I converted it into a digital format and put it onto YouTube for posterities sake. It was the first ordination in the parish – there were ordinations other places – for 50 years."

Ever since he was young, Fr McCann knew he either wanted to be a priest or a doctor. In the end, the priesthood won out, and feels he is in "a very privileged position".

"I either wanted to be a doctor or a priest as a child," Fr McCann begins. "I didn't get the points for medicine, so my second choice was biochemistry. I was going to do biochemistry in Liverpool University, but Queens Univer-



Fr Henry McCann (centre), pictured with the Bishop of Down and Connor Dr Noel Treanor (right), on the occasion of his Silver Jubilee.

sity Belfast offered it here so I stayed closer to home.

"We have a very musical family and I joined the chaplaincy choir in Queens and sure half the male voices in the choir were already students of the priesthood. Before I knew it, I was being called away to vocations week-ends and seeing the chaplain, his sort of lifestyle, I said I could do that yes."

“Fr McCann is the third of eight children, and explains that they were all raised in the Faith”

"I remember going home again and phoning my dad and saying, what would you think if I became a priest. Dad said, 'well I'd be very chuffed, it

would be very hard work, a very hard life, and if it doesn't work out there'll always be a room back in the house'. I thought I would give it a go and if I'm happy, I'll continue with it. It's been difficult yes, it has been difficult at times, it's a very privileged position to be in with the families and people you know, enjoying their faith," he finishes.

Fr McCann is the third of eight children, and explains that they were all raised in the Faith. They were heavily involved with the local church choir, which he calls "a very magical time, very mysterious and engaging". Since becoming a priest, Fr McCann has been able to combine his interest in medicine with his vocation, working as a chaplain to a number of hospitals.

He worked in Antrim Hospital, Coleraine, first and now in Ulster Hospital. Reflecting on the experience during the pandemic, he says it was a stressful time.

"It was a stressful time, we were having emergency meetings as chaplains to

see what would happen," Fr McCann says. "We were noticing that the staff were more nervous than perhaps the chaplains were. We spent a lot of time with staff, going round to wards, not necessarily one-to-one with patients, but with the staff originally."

Spirits up

"We were trying to keep their spirits up, and listen to their stories and pray with them. After a month, that seemed to calm down a bit. But yes, it's difficult when you're coming in contact with patients, when families couldn't make it because hospitals were closed to visitors, and you were having to sort of at least be the go-between, between the families and loved ones."

Fr McCann has enjoyed his time as a parish priest so far, although it's not always been an easy one. He remembers an incident that took place shortly before Christmas 2002, when he was hit over the head with

a figure from the Church crib while celebrating Mass.

"We had set up the crib figures in front of the ambo the Saturday before Christmas, I think Christmas was a Wednesday," Fr McCann begins, laughing at the memory. "Anyway, this fella came into the Church shouting and so on and came up the middle – I thought he was special needs. So he came up the middle and then went to the side and put his bag down."

“With 25 years down, Fr McCann laughs when asked if he's looking forward to the next 25”

"I thought, let him get settled, ok. Then he came over to the crib and the figures and I thought, maybe he wants to pray, that's fine I'll continue doing the Gospel. And he came down, took the statue of a shepherd and hit me over the head. I wasn't knocked out, but I was bleeding badly so I lay down and then he started to kick me in the side. And that's when the parishioners realised what was happening. I was home in bed that week."

"But anyway," Fr McCann continues, "what happened was that the parishioners had phoned the media, so the parish priest had to speak to the media while I was away in hospital getting staples in me head. They asked, how is Fr Henry and Fr Jim said, 'Oh, Fr Henry is in a stable condition!'"

With 25 years down, Fr McCann laughs when asked if he's looking forward to the next 25.

"I think it's an arbitrary number, I suppose. I understand it's a quarter of a century and all of that, but you take each day as it comes. Yes there are rhythms of the year and all that, but the time does fly if you're enjoying it."

Living Laudato Si'

Jane Mellet



Floods in Germany and fires in US call us to action for creation

This month, the Vatican highlighted the potential good that the world's 1.3 billion Catholics can bring about during the 'Season of Creation', which starts on the September 1, the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, and ends on October 4, the Feast of St Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology. The theme for this year's season is 'Restoring Our Common Home'. This ecumenical season in the Church's calendar is an opportunity for Christians worldwide to come together in prayer, reflection and action for our common home.

As we have seen in the past few weeks, devastating floods have caused much destruction in Germany, Belgium and Holland, killing more than 200 people, 1,000 are still missing, and thousands more are displaced. Thousands of homes have been destroyed in one of the worst natural disasters to hit the region in decades. In the USA record temperatures have literally burned entire towns to the ground,

forcing people into emergency shelters. There is growing consensus that the changing climate is causing parts of world to become uninhabitable for human beings.

The Season of Creation is an opportunity for the world's 2.2 billion Christians to highlight what is happening to our world, to encourage communities to listen to the cry of the earth and the poor, to come together in prayer and action for God's creation. We can do this in many ways in our parishes, families, communities, schools and workplaces. The *Laudato Si'* working group of the Irish Bishops' Conference have prepared numerous resources for this season which will soon be available on www.catholicbishops.ie (search Season of Creation). With beautiful prayer services and liturgy notes, multimedia reflections and practical tips, there is something there for everyone. One action we are encouraging this year is tree planting. Every parish community, family or school could



explore their church grounds or surrounding areas and see what might be possible in terms of restoring Irish native trees to a local area. We have teamed up with 'Easy Treesie' and produced a colourful resource which includes information on the practicalities of tree planting as well as prayers of blessing for a tree planting ceremony. This is one symbolic action we can all engage in this Autumn to help restore our common home.

While the realities of the environmental crises can overwhelm us, we read in *Laudato Si'* that "All is not lost. Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good and making a new start" (LS, 205).

Small actions have a ripple effect across a community and the Season of Creation offers us many opportunities to engage locally in whatever way we can. "For we know that things can change..." (LS, 13).

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



TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



Hard to decide if it's a hatchet job or fair reporting

Sometimes when you watch a programme you find yourself not much the wiser after it. Or you wonder if you're getting the full story, or a distorted story and you think you should find out more about the issue, but then life moves on and other priorities take precedence.

This is how I felt after watching the documentary **Hillsong Church: God Goes Viral** (BBC Four, Wednesday). Despite the good pedigree of the Storyville series I thought it was quite scrappy and rather inconclusive. Hillsong is one of those US-style megachurches but originating in Australia. I had come across them before but only in relation to their musical output in contemporary Christian music (CCM). I'm not a fan of megachurches, charismatic preachers and religious services that are marked by razzmatazz so I wasn't that well-disposed to begin with. Add in suggestions of lavish lifestyles, infidelities and allegations of historical child abuse against the founder's father and you have a thoroughly unpleasant mix.

But then you wonder if this is just a hatchet job – so many churches and institutions suffer from the sins, crimes and mis-judgements of their flawed members that you could make every one of them out to be unsavoury. What made me even more



The Hillsong denomination was featured in the BBC Four programme.

uneasy about this film was the way each segment was interspersed with strange sequences – an evil looking ram figured often and a weird sequence involving sheep was followed immediately by a scene from one of Hillsong's mass gatherings – not a very subtle juxtaposition. The one child abuse allegation, along with the all too familiar suggestion of cover-up, appeared randomly throughout the show, all very repetitious and disjointed.

As is often the case in such documentaries we heard from disillusioned ex-members whose stories seemed credible and were certainly interesting. This included one guy who, we were told in lengthy on-screen informa-

tion at the end, later re-joined Hillsong. Most appealing of all were the young and newish members who were searching for meaning after suffering various traumas in their lives so far. Here you felt you were getting something really genuine and you hoped they'd find their way through to a better place. There was a lot from church leaders about kindness and compassion and of being with people in their brokenness, but not much coverage of any hands-on work with the poor and vulnerable. Maybe it doesn't happen or maybe it was ignored.

Apart from skewed documentaries I don't like media discussions where the presenters talk only to people they agree with, and let that

agreement show. This applies more to discussion of issues rather than personal testimonies where a presenter who is a good listener can tease out an interesting story.

The GB News channel is prone to this flaw, with presenters very often having cosy chats with people who agree with them, each reinforcing the other in a bubble. But on two occasions last week I saw a welcome improvement. Both happened during **Tonight Live with Dan Wooten**, Wednesday. In one there was a spirited discussion Steve Valdez-Symonds of Amnesty International and Alp Mehmet of Migration Watch – both had very different takes on the arrival of migrants into Britain. The

PICK OF THE WEEK

MASS

RTÉ One Sunday August 1, 11.00am

Mass from Kairos Productions, Maynooth with music and singers from Co. Laois parishes. Celebrant is Fr Brian Kavanagh. Music Director is Tom Conroy.

EVERYBODY LOVES RAYMOND

Channel 4 Monday August 2, 7.50am

Debra challenges Ray on why he doesn't go to Mass with the family.

THE EIGHTH

RTÉ One Wednesday Aug 4, 9.35pm

"Following veteran campaigner Ailbhe Smyth as she navigates the complexities of convincing a historically conservative electorate to vote for women's reproductive autonomy" – from RTÉ's blurb!

show over-dramatised it by separating out the segment as 'The Clash' – this approach should be the norm, and differences of opinion don't have to be characterised as a 'clash'. Later Mr Wooten also interviewed Albie Amankone of Conservatives Against Racism for Equality about attitudes to race, including the wisdom or otherwise of 'taking the knee' – a debate I find increasingly repetitious and tiresome. Mr Amankone was well able for Mr Wooten's pushy questioning and was quite strong that racist abuse of Home Secretary Priti Patel was just as unacceptable as racist abuse of footballers.

I'm always fascinated by behavioural psychology and love listening to Prof. Pete Lunn, Head of the Behavioural Research Unit at the ESRI. He

spoke on Today With Claire Byrne (RTÉ Radio One, Thursday) about what motivates people in relation to Covid-19 restrictions – whether it be worry about catching the virus or the perceived the consistency or otherwise of the guidelines. He described how people could be slow about returning to activities which were off-limits during lockdown. Interestingly he said that of all these activities church going was the only one where there was a 'sudden jump' back into practice as soon as it was possible.

Now there's a sign of hope.

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



Film

The good, the bad and the ugly

The silly season is upon us. That means that we have to suffer nonsense like *Fast and Furious 9*, which even by its own (lack of) standards is pretty crazy, featuring an outer space element as well as a mad car chase through Edinburgh. But Vin Diesel (whose very name seemed destined to land him in a motor franchise) continues to laugh his way to the bank.

Here are some of the other attractions on offer:

Free Guy

Science fiction comedy about a bank teller (Ryan Reynolds) who realises he's living inside a video game so he decides to become an action hero – as you would. (Advisory content for parents: violence and crudity).

The Sparks Brothers

A documentary chronicling five decades in the lives of the siblings behind the rock/pop group, Sparks.

Jungle Cruise

Starring Dwayne Johnson – arguably the richest man in movies – and the ever-busy Emily Blunt, this is a fantasy taking us into the Amazon jungle where various dangerous animals reside – and a tree with miraculous healing powers.

Summer of Soul

Documentary about the 1969 Harlem Cultural Festival featuring the *crème de la crème* of African American music:



Scarlett Johansson plays Natasha Romanoff in *Black Widow*.

Stevie Wonder, Nina Simone, Mahalia Jackson, B.B. King and many, many more. An apt backdrop to the Black Lives Matter movement.

Still Water

Dalkey's favourite resident Matt Damon plays the father of an estranged daughter who travels from Oklahoma to Marseille to try and free her from a prison where she's incarcerated for a crime she didn't commit.

The Green Knight

Fantasy re-telling of the Arthurian legend starring Dev Patel as Sir Gawain, the reckless nephew of King Arthur. Alicia Vikander and Joel Edgerton also warm their hands at the medieval fire.

The Last Letter from Your Lover

This has two interlocking stories from the past and present dealing with the attempt of a journalist (Felicity Jones) to unlock the mystery of a forbidden love through a stash of letters.

The Courier

Not to be confused with the Veronica Guerin biopic, this is a kind of wry throwback to *Enigma*, that other Benedict Cumberbatch Cold War offering. Wearing a moustache that makes him look faintly ridiculous, he plays a businessman employed by MI5 to act as a go-between to a Russian dissident (Merab Ninidze). He's been sending top secret information to Britain and the US, something hardly likely to make the KGB dance with delight.

Black Widow

Scarlett Johansson has already played the assassin Natasha Romanoff in previous *Black Widow* outings. This is a prequel so she hasn't quite reincarnated herself. Expect lots of computer-generated special effects from the Marvel Comics extravaganza.

Spirit Untamed

This animated film deals with a young girl whose life is changed dramatically after she moves from her city home to a frontier town where she befriends a wild mustang.

Space Jam: A New Legacy

Another animated film, this centres around the kidnapping of a basketball player and features Bugs Bunny, Yogi Bear and Fred Flintstone. Yabba dabba do!

Aubrey Malone



BookReviews

Peter Costello



The Letters of St Ignatius



Counsels of the Holy Spirit: A Reading of Saint Ignatius's Letters,

by Patrick C Goujon SJ,
translated by Joseph Munitiz SJ
(Messenger Publications, €14.95 /
£12.95)

Ruadhan Jones

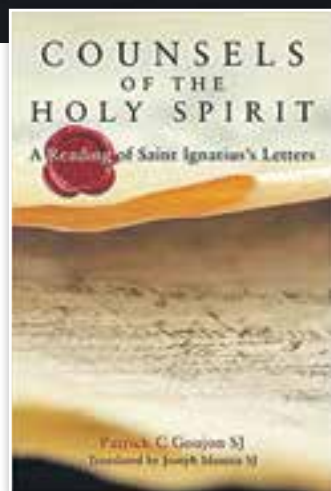
Counsels of the Holy Spirit promises in the blurb that "the lay reader will find [it] an accessible and practical guide to the core concepts of Ignatian spirituality". Being myself a lay reader, and one with only a vague knowledge of the Ignatian way, I am well qualified to say that it achieves its aim. It is an excellent introduction to the teachings and spirituality of St Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits.

Its strength is down in part to the clever 'hook' of using Ignatius' letters as an entry point, and then the very readable prose of its author, Fr Patrick C Goujon SJ. Fr Goujon is a professor of Spirituality and Theology at the Centre Sèvres – Jesuit Faculties in Paris. He is also an adviser to the journal *Études*, and as of 2020-2021, he is a Visiting Fellow at Campion Hall, Oxford. Thankfully, however, he wears his learning lightly, conveying in well organised summaries the broad scope of Ignatian spirituality.

The book is just 130 pages long, with eight chapters all broken down further by sub-headings. The bulk of the book is devoted to analysing closely several letters St Ignatius sent to friends and those seeking his counsel. This, as I say, is the hook or unique angle the book takes, and it is one that works well.

It enables Fr Goujon to explain with concrete examples the rules for spiritual counselling laid out by St Ignatius in his famous *Constitutions*. One of the aims of the book is to answer the simple question, why have rules? This is the title of the second chapter, and here Fr Goujon devotes the most time to answering that question.

However, it's one that recurs frequently in the next 90 or so pages.



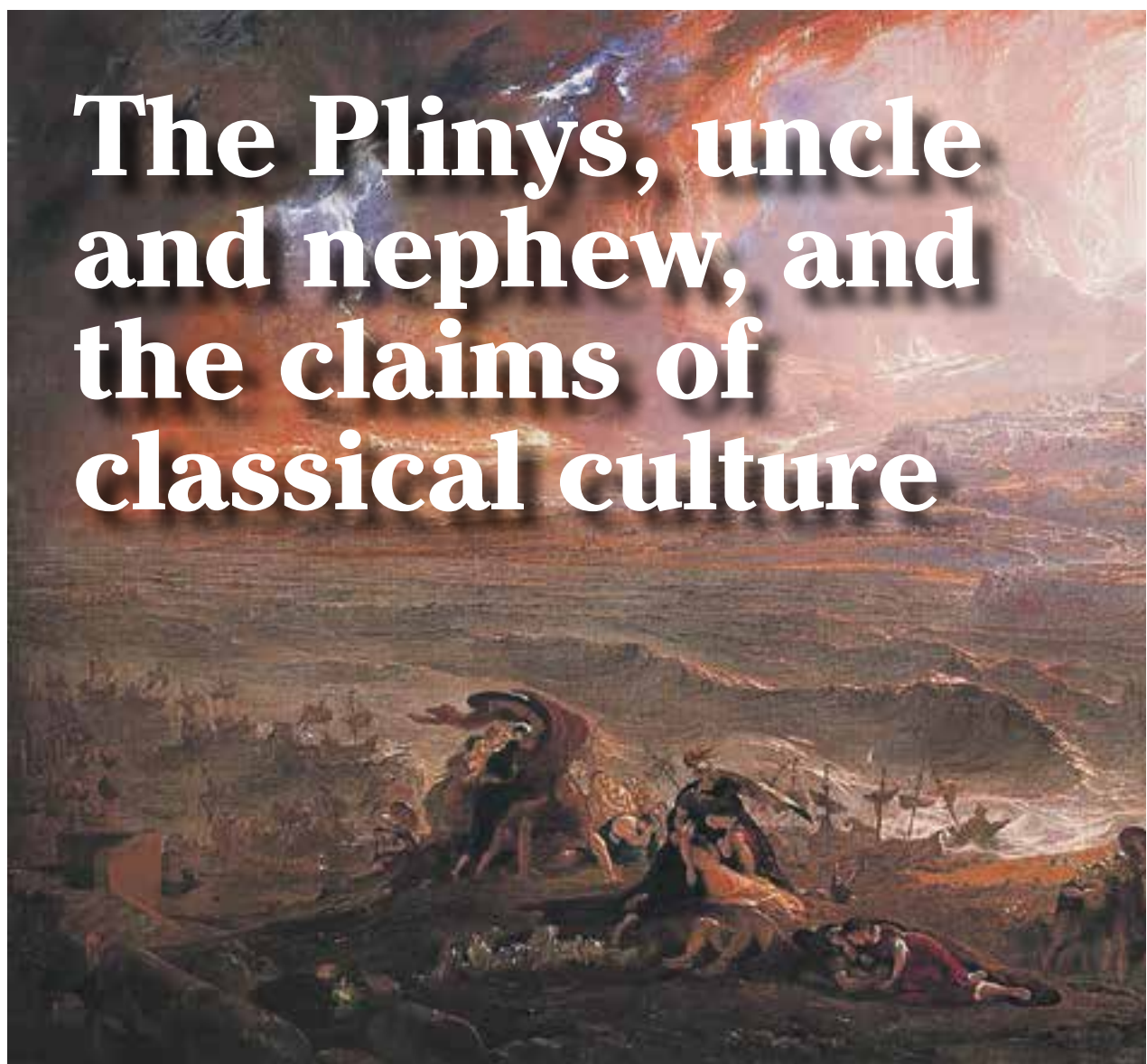
The Ignatian way is full of rules, Fr Goujon explains, which are intended to cover as many different situations as possible. How does this square with the freedom we are given by God to discern for ourselves what He is calling us to – a freedom which St Ignatius encouraged?

Fr Goujon's conclusion is, roughly, that the point of the rules is to free us from our limitations, so that we may conform freely to the will of God. The subtlety of Jesuit methodology – so often called sophistry by its detractors – encourages free assent to the rules, and also the prudence to know when they apply and when they don't.

The rules guard us from scrupulosity on the one hand or carelessness on the other, providing rational criteria against which to measure our interior states. But as the guidance given by St Ignatius in his letters shows, these rules only make sense in the context of a God who believes that we can freely choose to act well.

The role of the spiritual counsellor is to engage his excertant or retreatant as part of a tri-fold relationship – God, the counsellor and the excertant. The primary actors here are God and the excertant. A good counsellor will know when to act and when not, all in the name of furthering the excertant's understanding of God's will for them.

The Plinys, uncle and nephew, and the claims of classical culture



In the Shadow of Vesuvius: a Life of Pliny,

by Daisy Dunn
(William Collins, £9.00 / €11.90)

The Natural History,

by Pliny the Elder, translated with an introduction by John Healey

(Penguin Classics, €15.99 / £9.99)

The Letters of the Younger Pliny,

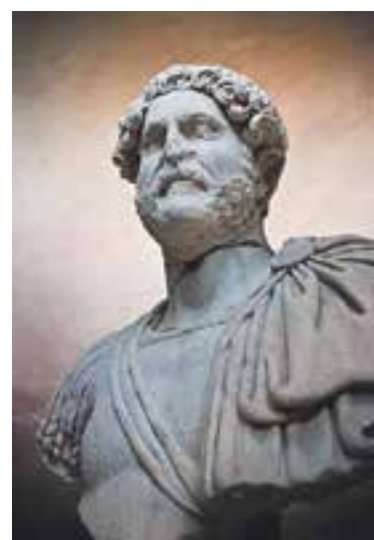
translated by Betty Radice
(Penguin Classics, £9.99 / €9.42)

Peter Costello

A life of Pliny? Yes please, I said, when I saw this book announced. Being under the impression, not having seen the book, that the "Pliny" referred to was that very important figure Pliny the Elder.

Latin literature

But no: the book is about his nephew, his adopted son and heir, Pliny the Younger. A young man of purely literary ambition he began to write and to retain a series of letters to his friends, which on publication became a landmark of Latin literature. The most famous is one describing in vivid detail how the Elder Pliny died while involved in sea operations during the famous eruption of Vesuvius that buried Pompeii and Herculaneum in 79 AD.



Pliny the Elder, an idealised image.

I am one of those who regard the older man – only 56 when he died – as a more important figure for human culture than the younger one.

Pliny the Elder was a creator of the *Historia Naturalis*, a 'Natural History of the World', an encyclopaedia running to some 37 books of what was known about the natural world, which now lights up all kinds of dark corners of the past, including for instance the invention of blown glass.

But readers might wonder how does this antiquated and surely long out dated literary work affect our lives? It is often forgotten that the great part of what was written by the Greeks and Romans is simply lost to us today. Pliny the Elder, for instance,

who went nowhere without a slave to take his dictation, composed 160 volumes of notes and comments on the books which formed his extensive sources. These rolls passed to Pliny the Younger, but today are quite lost. We know a great deal about classical times, but much, much less than we imagine.

“Pliny the Elder is one of those giants of the past upon whose shoulders the lesser figures of today perch precariously”

Pliny is therefore an immense asset, even if (as is the way of academics) modern academia disputes what he wrote. His brief passage on the Essenes is a vital and much respected source, in all the discussion of the community of Qumran and the nature of the Dead Sea Scrolls. All of this relates directly to the social and religious background from which Christianity eventually emerged. So Pliny is a relevant source for early Church history that few are aware of unless they are specialists.

I know that in my own case I cannot begin a project with any classical or medieval content without looking to see what Pliny the Elder has to say that bears upon it. Of course, in recent centuries modern scientists and his-

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.



Destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum in 79 AD.

figure in the history of Roman Literature. He is an artist in prose, and his work, involving as it does the revelation of an individual's character, is very much to the modern taste.

“Alas this pious simplicity of the first century had disappeared by the time of Constantine, and Christians, alas, were happy in their turn having taken power, to persecute their opponents”

But Pliny the Elder, with his dedicated daily search for knowledge as a constant factor in his life, is the essential scientist, the kind of man to whom the world owes far more than it sometimes cares to acknowledge.

From Pliny the Younger we hear also about the early Christians. When Trajan became emperor in 98 AD, Pliny the Younger was made consul, and soon after civil governor of Pontus and Bithynia on the Black Sea coast of Asia Minor (modern Turkey).

There he ended the persecution of the Christians in the province: he told Trajan back in Rome that “the Christians were a meek and inoffensive sect of men, their morals pure and innocent, they were free from all crimes, and the voluntarily bound themselves by the most solemn oaths to abstain from vice, and relinquish every sinful pursuit”.

Alas this pious simplicity of the first century had disappeared by the time of Constantine, and Christians, alas, were happy in their turn having taken power, to persecute their opponents.

exploring classical culture for those who would like to learn more but fear the task may be beyond them. This book is an excellent route, more accessible than and not as forbidding as say Mary Beard's formidable *SPQR* (Profile, £10.99pb). Certainly more reliable than Tom Holland's brisk tours of the past. For many Daisy Dunn may be the beginning of something really exciting.

Pliny the Younger is an important

torians have impugned his accuracy, but as he is often the only source for things we know this is hardly fair. Pliny the Elder is one of those giants of the past upon whose shoulders the lesser figures of today perch precariously.

Classical culture

Daisy Dunn's book, focused as it is on two extraordinary characters, provides an excellent entry route to

Explorations of the Ignatian spirituality

To Love and to Serve: Selected Essays Exploring the Ignatian Tradition,
by Brian O'Leary SJ
(Messenger Publications,
€25.00 / £23.00)

From the beginning of his career as a priest and academic Brian O'Leary has been involved in exploring various aspects of spirituality, especially as they derive from the Ignatian tradition to which he himself belongs. Much of his lecturing and teaching has been at the Milltown Institute of Philosophy and Theology.

Essays

For this Ignatian year he has brought together a selection of his essays in this area. The title derives directly from the *Spiritual Exercise* where Ignatius asks for “interior knowledge of all the great good I have received”, to the end of serving the Divine Majesty in all things.

The essays have been arranged in five parts. The first two parts focus on The Spiritual Exercises and on The Jesuit Constitutions, which are perhaps less well known to a general readership. There has been in the last seventy years or so a change of approach, he suggests, which has led to a different approach to both documents. The aim is no longer to teach and use them as they were for so many centuries, but to try and understand them as they were meant by Ignatius himself and the fuller perspective we now see them in: to see spirituality as not some things for “the special occasion” but as permeating our daily round, “affecting all aspects of our lives”. This is an ambition which (on the evidence of the world around us) is not often



Brian O'Leary, Irish Jesuit scholar.

achieved by many, except by the hidden saints of our time. The essays in the last three parts are more varied, some more biographical. They strike off into new directions to a discussion of Ignatius and John Wesley for instance, and aspects of the life of St Pierre Favre.

But some are very relevant to the moment, such as his ‘Thoughts on the Election of Pope Francis’.

Challenges

These essays were prepared for readers of specialised magazines and journals. They may well need to be slowly approached by general readers. But if anything is to be gained from this Ignatian year and its publications, it must be that readers will accept the challenges to understand posed not only by Brian O'Leary's essays, but by the spirituality of Ignatius himself.

(In connection with these Ignatian books reviewed here, readers may like to be reminded to look back at our review of Ignatian Spirituality & Interreligious Dialogue: Reading Love's Mystery by Michael Barnes SJ (Messenger Publications, €24.95 / £22.95) in our issue for 10 June 2021.)

Belfast life and its changing nature

A City Imagined: Belfast Soulscapes,

by Gerald Dawe (Merrion Press, €19.95)

Joe Carroll

Gerald Dawe grew up in pre-Troubles sectarian Belfast, and this slim book is his third attempt to re-capture what today can seem a magical time when poetry and music were flourishing on narrow streets.

As Dawe took his first steps as a poet, he was inspired by how famous predecessors could wring poetry out of a Belfast that to outsiders was identified with shipbuilding and linen mills. Louis McNeice, Seamus Heaney, Derek Mahon, Michael Longley, Ciaran Carson and a par-

ticular mentor, not so well known, Padraic Fiacca.

The Belfast novels of Brian Moore, especially *The Emperor of Ice Cream*, fascinated him while a young Ivan Morrison's music was spreading its hold as young Dawe played with a short-lived band called the Trolls.

He sums up those golden days: “A vibrant life spread throughout that generation in 1967 and maybe there was an awareness that something new was breaking through and that we didn't need to worry or complain about ‘where’ you were ‘from’, what school you went to, in order to sort and file under Protestant, Catholic, Jew, dissenter, unionist, nationalist, orange, green... I

don't think it mattered then, not to us. Later, unquestionably; but not then, no. We had a ball, no matter what anyone says.”

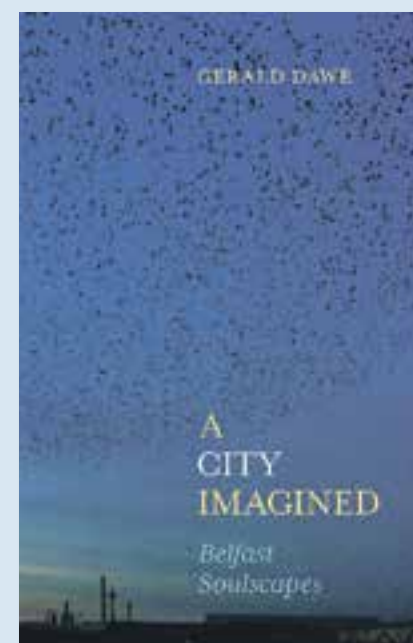
Compared with the freedom he could roam around Belfast streets at that time, the “peace walls” of today appal him. He is doubtful if the cultural diversity of that time can ever be retrieved. Yet he finds that “The revival of Irish as a spoken language throughout nationalist Belfast is truly amazing.” From being “an underground and repressed language in twentieth-century Belfast, spoken Irish is now a dynamic and empowering mark of cultural identity for nationalists”.

When Ireland, north and south, joined the EEC in 1973, it was “an

opening of our minds as well; no longer being obsessed with England”. A year later 22-year-old Gerald Dawe, went on a scholarship to Galway to study and later teach in UCG as it was called then. He later combined writing poetry with a professorship of English in Trinity College where his office was the room in which Oscar Wilde was born – the house was down Westland Row, with a plaque on the wall.

But “The Belfast I had left behind no longer exists except in people's minds and memories”. Especially his.

(The earlier volumes, *In Another World: Van Morrison and Belfast* (€12.95), and *Looking Through You: Northern Chronicles* (€16.95) are still available.)



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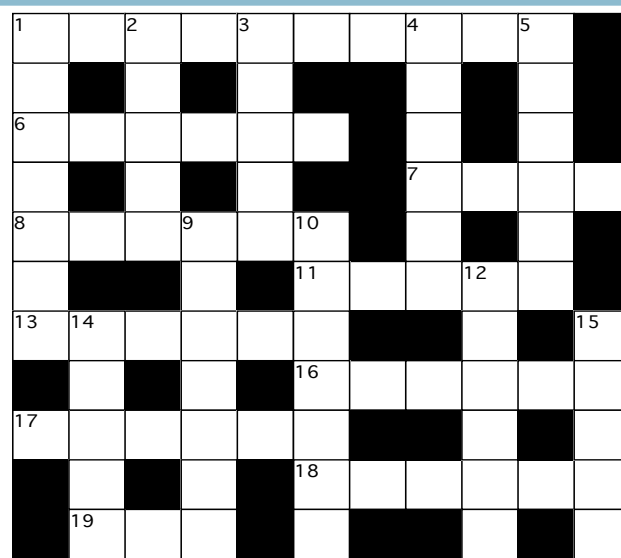
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Crossword Junior

Gordius 393



Across

- 1 Soccer player, for example (10)
 6 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe' is part of the Chronicles of _____ (6)
 7 Fall drop by drop (4)
 8 The opposite of outside (6)
 11 Say 19 across to (5)
 13 Places where people are buried (5)
 16 Creepy-crawly (6)
 17 A quick look (6)
 18 Small river (6)
 19 The opposite of 'no' (3)

2 Monsters such as Shrek and Fiona (5)

3 Unable to see (5)

4 Noisier (6)

5 Write this down to show how to cook or bake something (6)

9 Makes up something completely new (7)

10 Simplest (7)

12 The number of players on a soccer team (6)

14 You pass the baton in a _____ race (5)

15 You stick it on an envelope when posting a letter (5)

Down

1 Sport with swords (7)

SOLUTIONS, JULY 22

GORDIUS NO. 517

Across — 1 Periwinkle 6 Slap 10 Saint Louis 11 Water jump 12 Tethers 15 Sisal 17 Hilt 18 Liam 19 Lenin 21 Improve 23 Xenon 24 Silo 25 Bake 26 Nacho 28 Tally-ho 33 Reputable 34 Maori 35 Ards 36 Aristocrat

Down — 1 Puss in Boots 2 Raise Cain 3 Watch 4 Newer 5 Late 8 Papal envoy 9 Bristle 13 Edam 14 Sherbet 16 Alexandria 20 Neighbour 22 Veil 27 Coped 29 Abets 30 Limbo 31 Uber 32 Lift

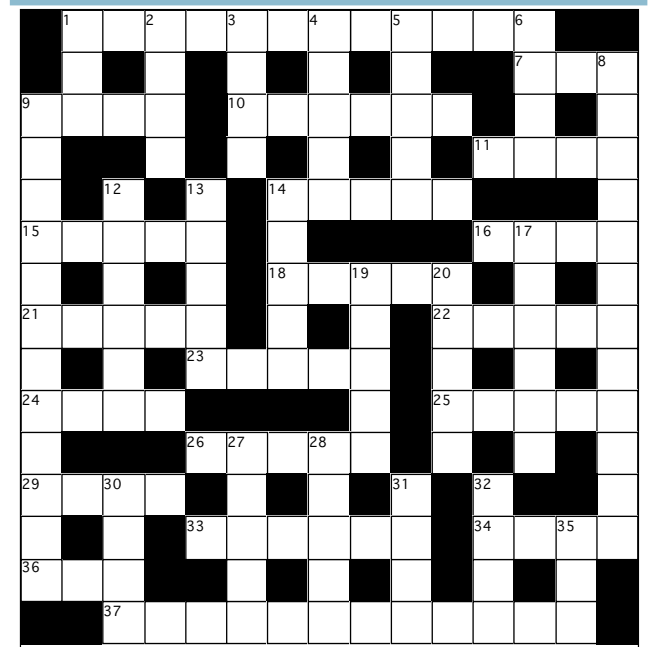
CHILDREN'S No. 392

Across — 1 One quarter 7 Bikini 8 Deeper 12 Shake 14 Measles 15 House 16 Rat 17 Eel 18 Art 21 Wallpaper 22 Moo

Down — 2 Neighbour 3 Quick 4 Acid 5 Tyre 6 Rome 9 Exact 10 Pulse 11 Rosslare 13 Emerald 18 Aim 19 Two 20 Tax

Crossword

Gordius 518



Across

- 1 If you look through it, do you get a view of Paris or the Cote d'Azur, perhaps? (6,6)
 7 An edge that has been doubled back and sewn (3)
 9 Shout (4)
 10 Cave which is often a shrine (6)
 11 Polaris or Betelgeuse, perhaps (4)
 14 The side of an animal (5)
 15 Peruses (5)
 16 Type of fossil fuel (4)
 18 Touches down (5)
 21 Pasta whose name is Italian for 'quills' (5)
 22 Release one's grip (3,2)
 23 Fear to disturb an adder? (5)
 24 & 33a Open space in Galway city centre (4,6)
 25 Acute (5)
 26 Essential oil from flower petals (5)
 29 Priest of Islam (4)
 33 See 24 across
 34 Massages (4)
 36 Large, flightless bird of Australia (3)
 37 Wiped out completely (12)

Down

- 1 Enemy (3)
 2 Jazz singer Ms Fitzgerald is to be found in a cellar (4)

3 In which to confine actor Nicolas? (4)

4 Constituent of a fingerprint pattern (5)

5 Out of the question (3,2)

6 & 9d What a teasing taste will do to help you to anticipate what's to come (4,4,8)

8 A set of values to guide you as to what is right or wrong (5,7)

9 See 6 down

12 One who treats animal hides, or slang for the old 6d piece (6)

13 Requested (5)

14 & 28d What made one anxious - for no reason, as it transpires (5,5)

17 Criminal such as Robin Hood or Jesse James (6)

19 Lowest point; the point opposite the zenith (5)

20 Melting snow (5)

27 Chef's hat (5)

28 See 14 down

30 Fever (4)

31 Sighted (4)

32 Worry, be agitated (4)

35 Rudimentary shoot (3)

Sudoku Corner

393

Easy

7		3	6	5			9	1
8	1						4	
		9		1	7	6		2
		5						8
6		8				5		4
2						3		
5		7	4	6		1		
	6						2	7
1	8			7	3	4		6

Hard

	7		5		6			
		3		2				1
		5			1	7	6	
3		4						5
	9						7	
7								6
	2	9	3			1		
6				7		2		
			1		2		5	

Last week's Easy 392

6	8	2	5	1	4	7	3	9
9	3	1	6	7	8	2	4	5
4	5	7	9	2	3	6	8	1
1	7	3	2	8	9	5	6	4
5	2	4	7	3	6	1	9	8
8	9	6	1	4	5	3	2	7
3	1	8	4	6	7	9	5	2
2	4	9	3	5	1	8	7	6
7	6	5	8	9	2	4	1	3

Last week's Hard 392

7	9	5	4	2	1	6	8	3
2	8	4	3	5	6	7	9	1
3	6	1	8	9	7	4	5	2
5	7	6	2	8	9	1	3	4
8	2	3	1	7	4	9	6	5
4	1	9	5	6	3	2	7	8
1	4	7	9	3	5	8	2	6
6	3	8	7	4	2	5	1	9
9	5	2	6	1	8	3	4	7

Notebook

Fr Bernard Cotter



Unity among Catholics must come first

THE POPE'S RECENT document, clamping down on the Tridentine Mass, has made difficult reading for some Catholics. The document issued by his predecessor Pope Benedict XVI authorising that Mass (which Pope Francis has now overridden), also made difficult reading for another band of Catholics.

Pontifex

The key thing to remember, however, is that neither document was really about the forms of liturgy permitted. For both Popes, the key issue was unity within the Church. The Pope's title of 'pontifex' makes him a bridge-builder, charged with promoting and maintaining unity among Catholics. The guidance both Popes have given is aimed at strengthening that unity.

When Benedict XVI launched *Summorum Pontificum* in 2007, his aim was to keep adherents of the Tridentine liturgy on board as members of the Church. He went to great lengths to see that their way of worshipping God was to be respected and preserved, and gave them every opportunity to have the Mass they loved, yet within the fold of the Church. Unfortunately, this did not work out in practice. The Vatican's questionnaire to the



world's bishops brought evidence of much unhappiness at ground level about the divisions that had been caused. Pope Francis' response reflected this.

In all our prayers for 'Unity among Christians', we sometimes forget that unity among Catholics comes first. The Pope cannot forget this. Any student of Church history can point to the fragmentation which disunity has brought among the family of believers. The Great Schism of 1054, which divided the East from the West, did a thousand years of damage. And necessary and

all as Martin Luther's opposition to Church abuses was, the splintering of the Body of Christ that resulted from the Reformation is another reminder of why unity is the better road.

Second Reading

Coincidentally (or providentially) this is what the Second Reading last Sunday was all about. Writing to the Ephesians (4:1-6), Paul reminded his flock to do all they could to preserve the unity of the Spirit, by the peace binding them together. "Bearing with one another in complete selflessness" was to be a mark of believers. That teaching remains a key challenge, to this day.

And the challenge affects not just the people at the top of the

Church, but each of us, wherever we find ourselves. The greater good trumps our local divisions. Anything that splits a community is harmful, whether it's devotion to a certain church or church area, a GAA team, a small section of a parish. I spoke in that way at one AGM of the local GAA club. I addressed the criticisms of people that can arise, the dissatisfaction members can feel when their ideas are not respected. I appealed to the greater good, the instinct that draws in members in the first place. This challenge applies no less to believers, Catholics, parishioners. We are to do all we can to preserve the unity, locally: St Paul, help us in this!

Full steam ahead for sacrament enrolments

We cannot celebrate First Communion or First Confession at present, but that doesn't prevent us from enrolling children for the sacraments. Normally, that enrolment would take place last autumn, but we couldn't do that in 2020 because we were in lockdown. During this June and July, we have been enrolling children at Sunday masses in this parish, a few at each Mass, ensuring a lovely mix of old and young. Our school trained them well in the academic year, now it's up to their parents and parish to help them prepare spiritually for the great events — whenever they are celebrated.

Welcoming Grandparents' day

Grandparents' Day went down a treat (last Sunday) — especially when we rehabilitated the title to "Grandparents' and Elders' Day". Somehow the title 'elder', with the suggestion of great vats of acquired wisdom available for sharing, hit the mark better than the (sometimes-frail) elderly. The resources sent from Rome were very suitable and helpful, especially the suggestion of prayers for elders who died in the pandemic and the lighting of candles for them. All we need now is for a major card company to get on board and we'll have a global hit! Thank you, Pope Francis, for this inspired idea.



KENYA'S SLUM CHILDREN DESPERATELY NEED YOUR HELP

The Holy Ghost (Spiritan) Fathers are helping afflicted children and their families in the slums of Migombani, Mombasa, Kenya.

Fr Peter Ndegwa CSSp writes to The Little Way Association: "Children as young as 13 are used as drug-runners and even younger children (girls and boys) become addicts. There is a culture of violence and sexual exploitation. Crime begins with petty theft escalating to major acts of stealing and violence."

Fr Ndegwa lists multiple problems caused by this culture in the slums. He adds: "Covid has only made things worse. A key way to alleviate this crisis is to offer beans, maize and oil to vulnerable families, especially those led by single mothers with small children. If families have food, they are less likely to resort to crime."

The Little Way Association wants to send the Spiritans sufficient funds initially to help 600 households and 400 children of drug-affected families through a six-month programme.

Crossed POs and cheques should be sent and made payable to:

THE LITTLE WAY ASSOCIATION
Sacred Heart House, 119 Cedars Rd, Clapham Common, London SW4 0PR
(Registered Charity No. 235703) Tel 0044 20 76 22 0466
www.littlewayassociation.com

I enclose €..... to be allocated to:
€..... **HUNGRY, SICK AND DEPRIVED**
€..... **CHAPELS IN THE MISSIONS**
€..... **MASS OFFERINGS**
(Please state no. of Masses _____)
€..... **LITTLE WAY ADMIN EXPENSES**

☐ Please tick if you would like an acknowledgement

Name (Rev. Mr. Mrs. Miss)

(Block letters please)

Address

To donate online go to
www.littlewayassociation.com

DONATIONS FOR THE MISSIONS ARE SENT WITHOUT DEDUCTION FOR ANY EXPENSES.



Donations to The Little Way will help the Holy Ghost Fathers' feeding programme bring smiles to the faces of vulnerable families in Kenya.

Can you help us?

Every cent that you send to our Hungry, Sick and Deprived fund goes to help people such as the drug-damaged families of Mombasa. **Please be generous towards these endangered children and their struggling parents.**



MISSIONARIES NEED YOUR MASS OFFERINGS

In these fraught times, missionary priests rely more than ever on stipends for their daily subsistence and for helping the poorest of their communities. The Little Way Association will convey your stipends and your intentions to the clergy overseas.

We like to send a minimum of €5 or more for each Mass.

You can help repair a mission chapel

The Little Way Association has a long history of providing humble places of worship for far-flung parishes in mission countries. Nature can take its toll on these simple buildings, and we receive requests from priests for help with repairs. We humbly ask that you allocate some of your kind giving to our chapels fund. By ensuring that these small but dignified churches are in good repair, you help to make possible the offering of Holy Mass in needy Catholic communities. **You and your intentions are remembered in a daily Mass offered in the Missions for all our friends and benefactors.**