

The Irish Catholic

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Church moves to protect quality of Catholic teaching in schools

Ruadhán Jones

Church leaders have moved to ensure that those teaching religion in Catholic schools will have a good grounding in Catholic theology and belief.

It comes after the teaching council – the State body which regulates the teaching profession – lowered the level of understanding of Catholicism necessary to be employed to teach religious studies at second level.

The bishops have now moved to implement new policies from next year to try and ensure that what is taught in the schools is authentically the Catholic Faith and that candidates for employment in such roles will have a solid grounding in the Faith.

A document seen by *The Irish Catholic* and circulated to Catholic school leaders insists on new minimum requirements.

The hierarchy decided at a recent meeting in Maynooth that “any graduate seeking employment as a religion teacher in a Catholic secondary school from 2023 must have a qualification” based on a thorough understanding of Catholic theology.

The National Director for Catechetics in Ireland Dr Alex O'Hara said that formation of teachers is “critical” to “protect the standard of Catholic education children are receiving”.

“We're faced with a tricky situation at the moment,” he told *The Irish Catholic*. “Formation of teachers is critical as we're obviously living in a more secular society.”

He added that there is “a need and desire” among young people and adults to know more about the Faith, pointing to the findings

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'I will feed my flock...'



Children from the Ukrainian Catholic parish in Ireland feed a goat while on a trip for children and mothers to Newbridge Farm, September 24, an initiative of the St John the Baptist parish, Clontarf, and the Ukraine Support Group.

Irish monk to head up Vatican relations with Anglicans

Staff Reporter

An Irish priest has been tapped by Pope Francis to take over the Vatican's dialogue with the worldwide Anglican Communion.

Fr Martin Browne OSB, a monk of Glenstal Abbey, will shortly take up the appointment in the Vatican's Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity *The Irish Catholic* can reveal.

It is a key time given that speculation is high that Britain's King Charles III may soon pay an official visit to Pope Francis at the Vatican. As Supreme Governor of the Church of England, the new king is seen as an important player in the ecumenical landscape. Charles has also spoken on numerous occasions about the importance of good relations between believers of different traditions.

There are around 85 million members of the Anglican Communion, which includes members of both the Church of Ireland and Church of England.

Anglicanism split from the Church at the time of the English Reformation when King Henry VIII rejected the authority of the Pope.

Relations warmed significantly in the 20th Century, particularly around the time of the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s. Pope St

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Church moves to protect quality of Catholic teaching in schools

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of the Irish national synod.

The national synthesis showed that a number of people wanted to share their faith, but didn't feel confident enough in their understanding of its basic teachings.

Catholic secondary schools can play an important role in this context as wider society becomes more secular, Dr O'Hara told *The Irish Catholic*.

In the past, the Irish bishops' focus had been on primary education, as religious orders had traditionally been heavily involved at second level, he explained.

In responding to the teaching council's changes, Dr O'Hara said the bishops want to ensure that teachers being hired for Catholic secondary schools "are qualified in this area".

Parents have "a constitutional right that we provide Catholic education for their

children", he added.

The bishops are currently in negotiations with third-level institutions to ensure the provision of courses for teachers preparing to teach RE in Catholic secondary schools.

The minimum qualification now required for teaching religious education in Catholic secondary schools will comprise at least 60 credits in theological disciplines or disciplines closely related to theology.

This includes a particular focus on teaching religious education through a Catholic ethos, according to the document.

It also included understanding of scripture, moral theology, Christology as well as Catholic theology around the sacraments.

A key requirement will also be on the philosophy of religion and comparative world religions.

The perils of counting Catholics

The long-anticipated results of the census in the North (see page 6) have demonstrated what has been obvious for some time: Catholics now make up a plurality in the region.

The news has been greeted in some quarters in the extreme. Some unionist commentators have deemed the results "meaningless" in the context of the broader constitutional question. At the same time, some republicans have insisted that the results mean that there must be immediate preparation for a border poll to decide on whether or not the North and Republic should be reunified.

“In fact, it might even be argued that unionists are really British nationalists, but that is a discussion for another day”

It's an unfortunate truth that when it comes to Northern Ireland, counting people is a hazardous occupation.

It's hardly ideal that we ask people to tick a box indicating their religious attachment and then extrapolate from that whether or not they are members of the broadly unionist or broadly nationalist communities.

Nor are these groups as homogeneous as they once were. There are Catholic unionists and Protestant nationalists. In fact, it might even be argued that unionists are really British nationalists, but that is a discussion for another day.

Further complicating the mix are the newer communities. Take, for

example, a Polish Catholic or a Nigerian Protestant living in Belfast. Where do they fit in to the 'national question'?

It's not simple – but it is seismic. Set aside the future in terms of the constitutional arrangement for a moment. The fact is that a little over a century ago, Northern Ireland was established as a sectarian state. The border was drawn in such a way so as to guarantee a permanent Protestant majority. It was, to quote the first prime minister Sir James Craig, "a Protestant state for a Protestant people".

Shipyards

The tone was set immediately: many Catholics were quickly expelled from their jobs in the shipyards in Belfast. Discrimination in terms of voting rights, housing and employment was rife. Basil Brooke, the Minister for Agriculture, excoriated Protestant farmers for having the temerity to employ Catholics.

The period of 1921-1972 – when London scrapped the old Stormont and implemented direct rule – was a hellish time for Catholics in the North. The Catholic community was never supposed to prosper under the Ulster sky, according to the founders of that State. And here we are in 2022, more people now describe themselves as Catholic than Protestant.

But, what the numbers mean for our parish communities is an entirely different matter. It would be a mistake to assume that since so many people enthusiastically tick the

Editor's Comment

Michael Kelly



'Catholic' box on the census form that the Faith is in rude health.

Demonstrably it is not. No priest I knew had plans to put on more Masses or Confessions when he saw the results of the census.

“Many people who don't articulate their faith do have it in a nascent form”

We are dealing with a reality where many people, let's be honest, are Catholics in name only. We have many of our people who are baptised but don't believe. Or, if they do believe it doesn't motivate them to want to participate with the rest of us on a Sunday morning.

But, at the same time it would be wrong to assume that the link that is there is meaningless. Many people who don't articulate their faith do have it in a nascent form. It's better, for example, that they're cultural Catholics rather than cultural atheists.

Catholic leaders

One other thing that Catholic leaders might take heart from is the fact that people from a Protestant background are twice as likely as Catholics to now say they have 'no religion'.

It's hard to explain why that is or precisely what it means. But, it might – just might – mean that there is still an openness in many of the people who rarely if ever attend. That's a starting point.



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Babies in the womb grimace for greens and smile for carrots

Jason Osborne

The first direct evidence that babies in the womb react differently to different smells and tastes by looking at their facial expressions has been presented by Durham University.

Researchers found that babies exposed to carrot flavour showed more “laughter-face” responses while those exposed to the flavour of kale showed more “cry-face” responses.

The study took 4D ultrasound scans of 100 pregnant women who had taken either carrot or kale capsules beforehand, with the researchers watching to see how the babies reacted.

They found that exposure to just a small amount of carrot or kale was enough to stimulate a response from the baby.

While most humans experience flavour through a combination of taste and smell, babies in the womb do so through inhaling and swallowing the amniotic fluid they’re surrounded by.

Speaking to the press, post-graduate Beyza Ustun, who led the research, said: “A number of studies have suggested that babies can

taste and smell in the womb, but they are based on post-birth outcomes while our study is the first to see these reactions prior to birth.

“As a result, we think that this repeated exposure to flavours before birth could help to establish food preferences post-birth, which could be important when thinking about messaging around healthy eating and the potential for avoiding ‘food-fussiness’ when weaning.”

She said that it “was really amazing to see unborn babies’ reaction to kale or carrot flavours during the scans and share those moments with their parents”.

The research could advance scientists’ understanding of the development of human taste and smell receptors.

Researchers also think that what pregnant women eat could influence babies’ taste preferences post-birth, which could have implications for helping the child establish healthy eating habits.

A follow-up study has been started with the same babies post-birth to see if the influence of flavours they experienced in the womb affects how they accept different foods.



The baby on the left smiles in reaction to the flavour of carrot, while the baby on the right frowns in response to kale. Photo: FETAP Study, Durham University.

Italy’s likely new PM faces European kickback on family values

Staff reporter

Europe has been warned to be “careful” to ensure member states, respect access to abortion following the election of Italy’s likely new Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.

Ms Meloni’s Brothers of Italy party won the most votes in Italy’s snap-election on Sunday, with Ms Meloni saying they would “govern for everyone” and wouldn’t betray people’s trust.

“Italians have sent a clear message in favour of a right-wing government led by Brothers of Italy,” she told journalists in Rome as she held up a sign saying “Thank you Italy”.

French Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne took to the airwaves in response, saying, “In Europe, we carry a certain number of values and of course, we will be careful (with) the President of the European Commission, that these values on human rights, on respect for each other, including respect for the right to abortion, for example, are respected by all.”

Meanwhile, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said that Commission was willing to work with “whatever democratic



government is willing to work with us,” but that if “things go in a difficult direction”, the Commission has “tools” at its disposal, such as those used against Hungary and Poland.

Ms Meloni stated in a 2019

speech, “I am a woman, I am a mother, I am Italian, I am a Christian, and you can’t take that away from me,” which has been widely-cited as evidence of her positive stance on religion and the family.

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Carers fear we're losing ability to deal with grief

Jason Osborne

Bereavement support workers dealing with grieving people have called for a wider education in Ireland about the complex issue, insisting that modern culture allows less space for grief.

Issue

Sr Helen Culhane of the Children's Grief Centre in Co. Limerick said she believes that previous generations handled the issue in a more

supportive way.

In Ireland "we were much better" at supporting people through grief she said, and that "we have changed".

"You see, after about three weeks, we expect them to be smiling. We don't want to see them crying, and even with children we want to fix them. When a family is grieving, whether an adult has lost a partner, grief is normal," Sr Helen said, adding, "We want to fix it now, we want

a quick fix...we don't want to see people sad."

Sr Helen said she's heard people say "I must pull myself together", but that "her husband could be dead in six weeks".

Empathy

Sharon Dagg, CEO of Anam Cara bereavement support services, said that people are "great at showing a bit of empathy at the start", but then they feel "you need to nearly snap out of it

now".

"The situation about grief is that there's no time limit on it whatsoever," Ms Dagg said.

"I suppose it's a case of you might see somebody walking along the street and know that they've just buried a child, and they almost avoid them because they don't know what to say. They might walk across the street," she said.

There's an "educational" job to be done by way of helping people

to learn how to support people through grief and bereavement, Ms Dagg said, adding that "it's learning to listen, really, really listen, and not say 'I understand' - if you haven't lost a child, you don't really understand".

"It's educating the communities and employees to support people when they are going back to work and knowing what's right and what's wrong to say," Ms Dagg said.

See pages 29 & 31

Catholic ethos 'inspires' integration of migrants in schools

Ruadhán Jones

A study suggests that Catholic ethos inspires schools to "go the extra mile" to integrate newly arrived migrant students (NAMS).

The study published in the *International Journal of Educational*

Research suggests that the ethos of the founding order of a Catholic school has particular "resonance" in welcoming NAMS.

"All participants reference the ethos of the school as a reason for experience of fostering a culture of inclusion and a caring community," the study says.

However, in the schools studied, one in Ireland, one in Malta, "it is the connection with the founding religious order rather than a general sense of Catholic ethos, that is the articulated primary inspiration".

The Irish school, St Anne's secondary school, intentionally uses the vision and work of Irish nun Nano

Nagle to inspire "everyone, teacher, parent, pupil, regardless of faith tradition or country of origin".

"With a large migrant population which has grown over two decades, St Anne's has developed practices such as evening classes for parents, some of which are non-language dependant so that language ability

is not a condition of participation."

The study was conducted by Amalee Meehan of Dublin City University and Glorianne Borg Axisa of University of Malta. It is titled 'How school ethos influences the integration of newly arrived migrant students into second level schools in Ireland and Malta'.

Creating intentional disciples...



Fr John Carroll of Ferns diocese, Cecilia Carrillo and retired Irish international soccer player Keith Fahey take part in the one-day Alpha Conference in St Catherine's, Thomas Street, Saturday, September 24.

Number of Catholic marriages holding strong in North

Staff reporter

The number of Catholic marriages in the North returned to near pre-pandemic levels in 2021, statistics from the Registrar General's annual report show.

Some 2,205 Catholic marriages took place in Northern Ireland in 2021, significantly more than the 844 in 2020 and on par with the 2,216 in 2019.

Catholic marriages made up 27.7% of the 7,962 marriages that took place in 2021, down from 30.5% in 2019.

The percentage of civil marriages has dropped significantly on pre-pandemic levels, from 39.3% to 19.8%.

The average ages of brides and grooms in Northern Ireland have risen by seven years in the last 30 years, to 33.4 and 35.4 respectively. In 1991, those figures were 26.5 for women and 28.6 for men.

There were 2,040 divorces granted last year, which represented a significant increase on the 1,507 in 2020. The 2021 total was still 30% lower than the peak number of 2,913 in 2007.

Irish monk to head up Vatican relations with Anglicans

» Continued from Page 1

Paul VI was the first pope to receive an Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, in official audience after his predecessor Pope St John XXIII met Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher privately in 1960.

In 1982, Pope St John Paul II visited Canterbury Cathedral becoming the first Pontiff to do so and participated in a historic meeting with the then Prince Charles, before attending a ceremony with the Archbishop of Canterbury Robert Runcie. During

the service, the two men renewed their baptismal vows together.

Fr Browne has previously worked as part of a group with the World Council of Churches preparing texts for the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, held every January.

Based at the Vatican, Fr Browne will work alongside president of the dicastery Cardinal Kurt Koch and fellow Irishman Bishop Brian Farrell who is secretary of the department which advises Pope Francis on promoting Christian unity.

Advice on family tension: Maybe it's in the Gospel...

It seems, according to the celebrity reports that are part of our lives these days, that Mrs Victoria Beckham, familiarly known as 'Posh' (from her days with The Spice Girls), is experiencing the strains of being a mother-in-law.

Sumptuous wedding

Her eldest son Brooklyn married a beautiful young American heiress, Nicola Peltz, and, at the time of the sumptuous wedding, there were – according to interviews given by Nicola, the new Mrs Beckham – fallings-out over a matter of a wedding dress.

The bride wore a Valentino creation, when it was expected that she would



Mary Kenny

don an ensemble designed by her mother-in-law, but the Posh frock was not forthcoming. The misunderstanding over the issue, and other tiffs that have been aired, are disputed. The outcome is the same, as it has perhaps been for centuries on end: there have been family tensions. For the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship is a delicate one. Mothers-in-law of my acquaintance have described it as "walking on eggshells".

It can be hard for some mothers – especially, perhaps, mothers of sons – to

accept that there is now another woman in the boy's life who is now more important to him.

Enmities

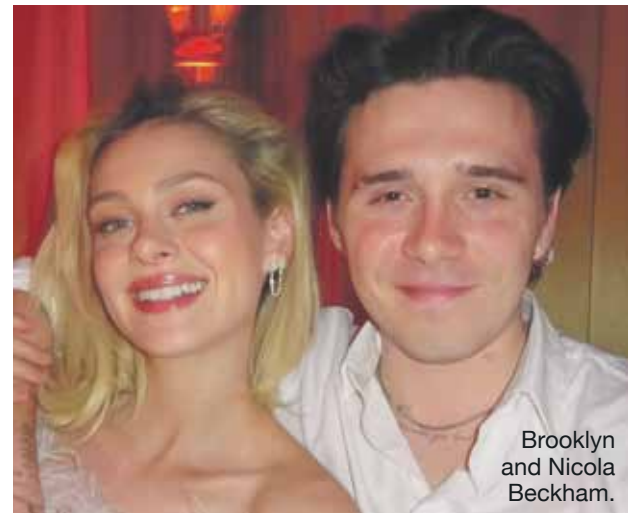
There are even stories and songs about the enmities between a man's mother and his betrothed. In Delia Murphy's classic ballad *Let Him Go, Let Him Tarry*, the narrator sings with some sharpness: "Let him go to his old mother now and set her heart at ease/I hear she is an old, old woman very hard to please", with some further allusions to the older

mother's general toxicity.

And there's many a story of a mother obstructing and restraining a son from marriage for fear of a rival.

But this is surely not the right path: in the final analysis, the mother-in-law must cede to the daughter-in-law, and allow her to take first place. She must welcome her son's choice of spouse, and put a smile on her face, whatever she feels deep down.

If Victoria Beckham wanted advice about this, she might turn to the Gospel, where, in St Matthew's Chapter 19, Jesus says: "A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife." In the Old Testament, too, (sometimes called the Hebrew Bible) the story of Ruth and Naomi is told as an example of edifying harmony between mother-



Brooklyn and Nicola Beckham.

in-law and daughter-in-law, when the widowed Ruth shows love and devotion to her mother-in-law Naomi – perhaps underlined because it was unusual.

A thousand jokes tell

us the mother-in-law role can be awkward ("Take my mother-in-law – please!" being a standard comic routine), but the Scriptures wisely instruct us to keep the family peace.

Legend prevails over facts...

It's interesting when a fictional character gains such fame that the death of the thespian who played the part is ever associated with the role.

Louise Fletcher, an esteemed American film actress, died last weekend aged 88. She grew up with deaf parents in Alabama, and was an expert in sign language.

But she was celebrated as the odious 'Nurse Ratched' in the 1975 film *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, when she symbolised all that was inhumane, repressive and fearful

about authoritarian control freaks. Ms Fletcher took a pantomime bad-die role which had been rejected by Jane Fonda and Angela Lansbury as too negative.

And maybe the Nurse Ratched character did some harm to the image of the hospital nurse, previously represented as a Florence Nightingale-inspired heroine. Ratched was monstrously insensitive to mentally-ill patients.

A friend of mine, who runs a mental health charity, thinks the movie

itself also spread misinformation about mental health. Ken Kesey's original book had suggested that mental hospitals were about 'controlling' people who were merely social rebels – who didn't fit into respectable society.

Doubtless this may have been true for some cases – people were consigned to mental asylums because they were seen as 'deviants' (and sometimes for problems such as alcoholism).

But the book, and the movie,

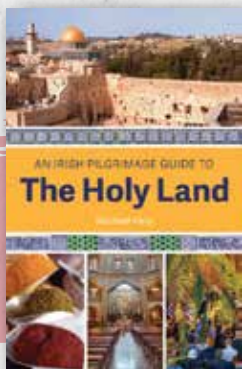
seemed to brush aside the fact that mental illness can be very real: schizophrenia and psychotic conditions are not cured by a hippy approach about 'different strokes for different folks'. They need serious, attentive, psychiatric care. And most medics working in the field of psychiatric medicine are not 'Nurse Ratched's' just for the pleasure of controlling patients.

Yet the legend so often prevails over the facts.

● The temperature is dropping – with episodic peaks of rising again – but the mornings, especially, grow colder. I have resolved to keep the heating firmly turned off for as long as I can, and called upon my schoolgirl convent training in accepting the encroaching cold. Shawls, hot-water-bottles and breakfast porridge are used as warmers, not electrical energy. A cat on the lap is also a warmer. Let's see if my resolution lasts past November!

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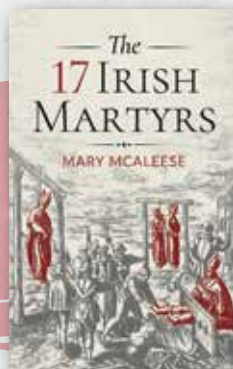
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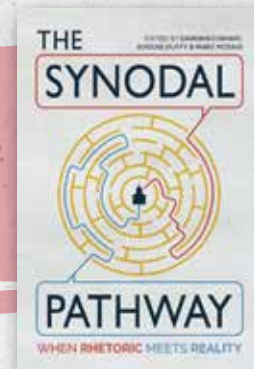
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Catholic growth in North not translating to church attendance, Belfast priest warns

Ruadhán Jones

Catholics now make up the largest religious identity in the North, but it's not translating into people coming to church, a well-known Belfast priest has said.

Responding to the findings of the 2021 census, Fr Martin Magill told *The Irish Catholic* that it shows the challenge of faith formation facing the Church in Ireland.

The census figures released September 22 showed that Catholics outnumbered Protestants in Northern Ireland for the first time since it was founded.

Some 45.7% of inhabitants are Catholic or from a Catholic background compared with 43.48% from Protestant or other Christian backgrounds. The 2011 census figures were 45% Catholic and 48% Protestant.

The result is "not a big surprise", Fr

Magill said when asked about the census finding's significance to the Church community.

However, he added that there's "quite a disconnect between what the figures are saying and what's happening on the ground".

The high numbers on paper are not being reflected "in the number of those coming through the door on Saturday evening or Sunday morning".

"We're not seeing it in the number

of people volunteering, particularly since Covid," Fr Magill continued. "It's not translating into people coming to the church."

"We need to be reaching out to these people," he urged.

However, the parish priest of St John's on the Falls Road warned that there is a "real piece of work to do" for faith formation.

Fr Magill pointed to the difficulty around preparation for the sacraments.

Parishes have moved away from having one "big day", but are still finding that parents and children are not coming back to church after.

Reflecting again on the census figures, the Belfast-based priest said it is important that Catholics are not gloating or acting as though the figures are about Catholics "getting stronger".

"The language we should be talking about is a shared society, where we can all feel part of it," Fr Magill said.

After tight victory, Ireland's favourite hymn revealed

Chai Brady

In a very close result 'Amazing Grace' was pipped at the post by 'Lady of Knock' in the search for Ireland's favourite hymn.

The competition was run by the Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin and Bishop Denis Nulty at the National Ploughing Championships last week.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* after the results were announced, the rector of Knock Shrine Fr Richard Gibbons said

people at the Marian shrine are "delighted" and thanked the organisers of the competition.

Fr Gibbons said that in recent years Knock Shrine has done a huge amount of work to promote the shrine which has heightened people's awareness.

"Our Lady of Knock is very popular, not just in Ireland but in Britain and US. It's there in the Irish psyche really and when it's sung well and when it's performed well, it really is

an incredible hymn. When you hear it sung well in the Basilica, everyone joins in because they all know it," he said.

"We're delighted it's the country's favourite hymn," he added.

Written by Dana Rosemary Scallan in 1980, it has been performed countless times at Knock Shrine during many important historic Masses and events, including during the visit of Pope Francis to Knock in 2018.

Senator Mullen launches Oireachtas essay competition



Senator Ronán Mullen with students from Pobal Scoil Iosolde in Palmerstown, Jaiden Grant and Chloe Efi at the launch of the 'Aiste an Oireachtais' in Leinster House, September 22. Photo: John McElroy

Staff reporter

Senator Ronán Mullen launched an Oireachtas essay competition on the theme "Parliamentary Politics Matter" for second-level students in Leinster House, September 22.

Speaking at the launch, Senator Mullen warned that Ireland faces a time when "many people are wondering about the quality of our politics and the future of democracy itself".

He hoped the competition would "stimulate interest in the political process and help each student find their role in our demo-

cratic system".

The competition is open to senior cycle secondary students in all 32 counties who are asked to submit essays in English or Irish and compete for a prize fund of €4,000.

Students are asked to register for Aiste an Oireachtais by November 15 with the final date for submitting entries being December 8.

The competition was launched by the Ceann Comhairle Seán Ó Fearghaíl and retired RTE broadcaster Sean O'Rourke.

Speaking at the launch, the Ceann Comhairle said it was vital to secure the interest and engagement of young people.

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Nuala O'Loan

The View



Dominant minority voices can lead society down destructive paths

Growing up can be very hard. Young people in their early teens and even younger have always faced serious questions of identity. Who am I? What am I here for? Who do I want to be? Why am I different from my friends? Why do I not fit in the way others do? Children can feel so alienated from their families and peer group that they may come to believe they do not belong at all.

For those whose home and school life is stable and lived in a constructive environment, these questions can be answered over a long period. Indeed, for most people those questions of 'Who am I?' and 'What am I here for?' will recur periodically throughout their lives.

“Texting and messaging may in many cases comprise the bulk of their communication with others”

Young people today, though, live in a world which is almost incomprehensible to those of us who do not engage with them on a daily basis. Their lives are lived to a very significant extent online. They will be subjected not only to the immense pressure to be perfect (which is virtually impossible for most of us), to have the right clothes, shoes, make-up and technology. They communicate differently from older generations.

Texting and messaging may in many cases comprise the bulk of their communication with others. It seems to me that it is inevitable that such communication is limited. To be in the presence of another person and to speak to them is to engage not just through words, but through all the other responses - movement, expression, eye contact: much richer communication. When communication is limited to a series of truncated words it is impoverished. It leaves the recipient of the communication, very often, wondering what lies behind the brief words of response; and so it goes on.

Add to this the question of gender identity and life becomes even more com-



plicated. There are multiple terms to describe gender identity today, such as 'gender-queer', 'gender-fluid', 'gender expansive', 'omnigender', 'pan gender' and 'two-spirit'. Young people growing up have often known the wish that they were born in the other gender because it might allow them to do things which they wanted to do, or which were not expected of or welcomed by their contemporaries. Things have changed - most sports are open to all, career options have changed utterly. People are free to express themselves through their clothing etc. as they will.

Gender, they say is about how one feels about one's self and how we present ourselves to others - whether by the clothes we chose to wear, the make-up we wear, what we do. It is about who I am. There are many forms of gender identity, many ways of expressing it.

We do, however, know that children who experience gender dysphoria may also have a number of co-occurring psychiatric diagnoses, self-harm behaviours and suicide attempts compared to the general population. Sweden states that "the diagnoses that stand out are depression, anxiety disorders, ADHD and autism".

Sexuality

Sexuality it is said is about how we are attracted to others - sexually and physically, so that sexuality is about the other. There is said to be an infinite number of sexualities - well over 100. New expressions are being created regularly. So people describe themselves as heterosexual,

demi-sexual, gay, lesbian, omni-sexual, pansexual and by many other forms. More uncertainty for the young person trying to work out who they are and why they are here.

Young people today live in the middle of all this, and as they search the web trying to learn more, they leave a trail for others to follow up. Then they may be bombarded by messages about matters about which they are originally just curious. It is the same with depression and suicide. Search for it and you may begin to receive communications about suicide - there are reported cases of children being inundated with harmful



material, leading on occasion to tragic consequences.

The young person growing up in the midst of this melee of information can, on occasion decide that they are no longer 'male' or 'female' but actually want to change their sexuality. The only way to do is through the use of surgery and medication.

We do not know the dangers inherent in prescribing for pre-pubertal and pubertal children the chemical blockers to their natural hormonal development. We do know that these induced hormonal imbalances have effects throughout the body, including weakening of bone density, and some of the symp-

toms of the menopause when children go through such treatment. The UK government states that the psychological effects are unknown.

Surgery is even worse. Young girls have undergone double mastectomies, desperate to remove the visible signs of their female sexuality. The tragedy is compounded if they subsequently realise that they actually want to be the women they were born to be, but what has been done cannot be undone.

“In a society which does not acknowledge the existence, let alone the moral teachings of God, there has emerged an absence of values, or a distortion of values”

Over the past 20 years or so we have seen significant minority voices becoming dominant and leading our society down paths which have done great damage. Of course there are a very few babies whose sex is difficult to determine at birth, but that does not mean that society has to concede when a child expresses the desire to change sex, or even to change gender identity. Children experience all sorts of hormonal and emotional challenges - childhood, which should be a safe time, is becoming a time when some children are being enabled to make profoundly wrong and virtually irreversible decisions because adults are, it appears,

often afraid to object.

The closure of the Tavistock Clinic in London and the growing awareness across the world of the dangers of the current situation have resulted in limitations on the availability of procedures. More needs to be done. The long-term consequences for children of what is currently happening when a child decided to change gender or sexual identity are very largely unknown, although brave young women like Keira Bell in England and Chloe Cole in the US are being really effective in letting people know some of those consequences.

In a society which does not acknowledge the existence,

let alone the moral teachings of God, there has emerged an absence of values, or a distortion of values. The time has surely come for a recalibration of society's response to these issues, so that children are cared for in their questing to find out who they are, but they are not facilitated or encouraged in making decisions which may have tragic consequences for them. Sweden, and other countries, have legislated to forbid the prescribing of puberty blockers and cross sex hormones for under 18s. We, too should do this. Our call as Catholics is to speak up for what is right. We have work to do - sensitive and important work.

JOE WALSH TOURS

PILGRIMAGES 2022



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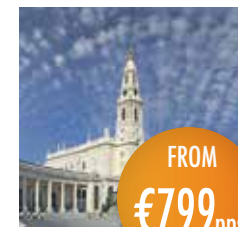
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Irish Jesuit urges President Higgins to highlight Tigray war

Ruadhán Jones

The director of Irish Jesuits International (IJ) has urged the President of Ireland to “use every platform possible” to highlight the war in Tigray.

Fr John Guiney SJ lamented the lack of coverage given to the war in the North of Ethiopia, which has claimed the lives of half a million people since November 2020.

In a letter sent to Michael D. Higgins, Fr Guiney says IJ are calling for “urgent action and humanitarian support” for the “innocent

victims of the war” raging between Ethiopian and Tigrayan forces.

“The Tigray conflict is a severe humanitarian crisis and one which the media has largely ignored as countless people suffer grave human rights violations,” writes Fr Guiney.

“We kindly ask the President to use his immense influence and platform to highlight the war in Tigray and join with us in amplifying the innocent voices of suffering and peace which are currently silenced.”

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Fr Guiney encouraged the Irish Government to use its

platform on the UN security council to highlight the war.

Fr Guiney’s comments come as a report from the United Nations found evidence of crimes against humanity by all sides involved in the conflict.

The main forces involved in the war are the Tigray Defence Forces, the Ethiopian National Defence Force and Eritrean Defence Forces.

On the Ethiopian side, the report said there were “reasonable grounds to believe that the Federal Government and allied regional State governments have committed

and continue to commit the crimes against humanity of persecution on ethnic grounds and other inhumane acts”.

They were “intentionally causing great suffering or serious injury to body or to mental or physical health based on their ongoing denial and obstruction of humanitarian assistance to Tigray”, the report said.

The September 19 UN report also found reasonable grounds to believe that Tigrayan forces had committed war crimes, including large-scale killings of Amhara civilians, rape and sexual violence.

i See pages 18-19

Mercy Sisters to retain trusteeship of Mary I

Staff Reporter

The Sisters of Mercy will maintain their presence on the board of trustees of Mary Immaculate College, the sisters have told *The Irish Catholic*.

A spokesperson for the sisters confirmed that the order will continue its almost 125-year involvement in the Catholic third-level institute.

It comes as speculations circulated

that the sisters, who co-founded MIC in 1898, were to withdraw from trusteeship of the college later this year.

The trustees appoint the Governing Authority, and have responsibility for overseeing the ethos of the college.

“Two sisters remain on the board of trustees and have no plans of stepping back,” spokesperson Padraig McKeon told *The Irish Catholic*.

“One Sister of Mercy is retiring from the governing authority and the sisters

have asked that she not be replaced.”

Discussions are planned to take place on a “closer structural alignment” between the University of Limerick (UL) and Mary Immaculate College, but no talks of a merger.

MIC is likely to be the last publicly funded third level college with a Catholic ethos, as St Angela’s College, Sligo, and St Patrick’s College, Carlow, are set to be handed over to the State.

Have heart and lead students through difficult times – Archbishop Farrell

Chai Brady

Young people in schools, colleges and universities undertake their studies at a time of much “uncertainty, anxiety and hardship”, the Archbishop of Dublin has said.

In a homily given at the opening of the academic year Mass at DCU’s St Patrick’s Campus, Archbishop Dermot Farrell said a good leader, who has a heart open to the prompting of the Spirit, can steer a course that will make a school flourish.

In the context of the “brutal” war in Ukraine and several other major wars across the world, a food crisis in the Horn of Africa, environmental and crippling economic issues, young people are studying, he

said.

Archbishop Farrell said: “A good leader, a person of vision, one whose vision is born of experience, someone who can establish a good direction and steer a good course, makes all the difference in the flourishing of a school, or indeed any institution where people lie at the core, and that includes our parishes!”

“In the end, it is not a question of methodology or technique, it is a question of the heart. The good leader is a person of heart—with a heart for their colleagues, with a heart for their students, with a heart open to the promptings of the Spirit, even when these are not recognised as such. Let us never forget that God is always at work among us.”

A warm welcome...



First year students received a warm welcome on their first day at Queen’s University Belfast from the QUB Catholic Chaplaincy, September 24.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Communion & Liberation talks to commemorate founder

The Catholic community of Communion and Liberation in Ireland is hosting a series of talks with the theme ‘A Life Lived to the Full – A Tender Passion for the Person’ to commemorate the centenary year of the birth of Fr Luigi Giussani.

Margaret Biondi, spokesperson for C&L, said that they hope the talks will “communicate what was at the heart of Fr Giussani’s teaching – that faith is reasonable and convenient”.

The talks are in St Laurence’s Church at TU Dublin, Grangegorman Lower, Dublin 7, from 7.30 – 8.30pm and are preceded by reception from 7pm. They are set to take place Thursday, October 6, and Saturday, November 15.

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NI bishops urge politicians and parishes to act against 'life or death' cost emergency

Chai Brady

The Northern bishops have warned that an absence of an Executive at Stormont is impeding efforts to respond to the cost of living "emergency" and called on parishes and politicians to do what they can to help.

In a statement this week the bishops warned that cost increases are creating "life threatening levels of deprivation".

They said: "Every day seems to bring news of dramatic and unplanned increases in the cost of basic essentials such as food, fuel and heating. More and more low and middle income families, older people and vital busi-

nesses in our economy, are gripped with fear as they think about what lies ahead this autumn and winter."

The bishops criticised the recent Westminster budget, which they said has done little to lift fears, and the absence of an Executive in the North is "unquestionably impeding the effort to respond to the depth and urgency of the situation".

The 'fiscal plan' presented last week to the Westminster parliament represents an "unjust distribution of resources which will benefit the richest but bring little comfort to those hardest hit and most at risk in these trying times", they warned.

"This highlights once more the

need for working devolved politics in Northern Ireland that can deliver for the real needs of people here, especially lowest income families and many small and medium businesses, key employers on this part of the island, on the brink of collapse."

A prioritisation of "concrete action" that will address the "life or death" situation many people and businesses face is the "urgent duty" of local MLAs and all parties despite political differences regarding the protocol and a future border poll, the bishops said.

They urged everyone in Church, politics and society to help address the crisis and "to act justly, to promote the common good and to show

solidarity with the many thousands of families who are enduring hardship and worry".

The bishops highlighted that in Northern Ireland one in four children are living in poverty. The prelates also pointed out research undertaken by Accord which found 81% of people surveyed reported that worries concerning money are a primary point of family and relationship pressure.

They called on parishes to be alert to those most impacted by the emergency, recognising that people often "suffer in silence" and are reluctant to seek help.

"We invite our congregations, like St Vincent de Paul and after the exam-

ple of Jesus himself, to put the poorest and most vulnerable among us first, and to reflect in prayer on what more they can do to help ordinary families and those in need over coming weeks and months," the bishops said.

"Food banks, St Vincent de Paul Conferences and other charitable outreaches urgently need new volunteers and more resources due to the unprecedented demand which is likely to get worse as winter approaches. Parish pastoral councils might consider extending their existing parish hall activities or providing warm spaces, hot meals, fuel vouchers or other helpful initiatives in response to this urgent situation."

Budget: More spending for schools and aid, but stay-at-home parents overlooked

Chai Brady, Ruadhán Jones and Jason Osborne

Catholic schools have welcomed moves in the budget to ease the cost-of-living crisis.

The Government announced on Tuesday that schoolbooks will now be provided by the State at a cost of €43m which is expected to save families €100 per child.

There is also more funding for special needs and to reduce primary class sizes.

Séamus Mulconry of the Catholic Primary Schools Management Association (CPSMA) told *The Irish Catholic* that he broadly welcomes "any supports for the special education sector."

"We welcome the free books programme as it is a move toward the free primary education that is provided for under the Constitution and which up to now has been more ignored than supported," he said.

However, campaigners working on the housing crisis have expressed disappointment at the low tax credit offered to people facing rising rental costs.

Threshold policy officer Ann-Marie O'Reilly told *The Irish Catholic* that she was "quite surprised to see the amount that is on offer."

"€500 of a tax credit isn't much more than

what it was back in 2010, and rent has in fact doubled since then.

"If you're a renter in Dublin paying the average rent, that is a week worth of rent – it's very little, it doesn't do much to alleviate the financial pressure on renters," she said.

On overseas development, Trócaire CEO Caoimhe de Barra told *The Irish Catholic*: "We welcome the increase in overseas aid announced in Budget 2023. Investment in global humanitarian and development needs is vital."

"Countries in the global south face escalating humanitarian crises due to climate change, the economic impact of Covid-19, conflict, gender inequality, unsustainable and inequitable global food systems, and the failure of international community to live up to their commitments on overseas aid," she said.

Ms de Barra said the special allocation announced for the Horn of Africa is particularly welcome "given that 22 million people in the region are currently facing starvation due to ongoing drought, with this figure projected to rise to 26 million by the end of 2022".

Meanwhile, pro-family think-tank The Iona Institute has insisted that the budget is "unfair and discriminatory towards all parents who do not use day-care."

"By allocating millions in public funds towards a big reduction in day-care fees, the Government has totally overlooked the big majority of parents of pre-school children who do not use day-care or wish to," a spokesman said.

He continued: "It would be much fairer if the Government restored the early child-

care supplement that was abolished in 2009 during the economic crash of that time. This consisted of a payment of over €1,000 per annum for all children under six and parents could spend it at their own discretion on the childcare option that suited them best. This was non-discriminatory."

A school wedding...

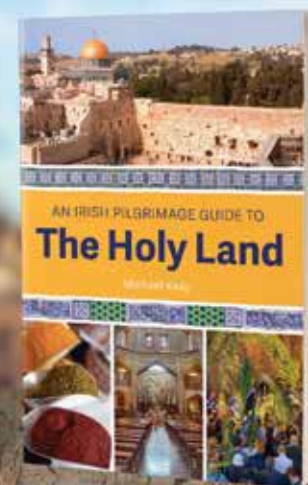


Year 11 students in Trinity College Belfast get an interactive learning experience on the Sacrament of Marriage during their religious education class, September 26.

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Women of faith and courage rightfully rewarded

Jason Osborne

The Knights of Columbanus launched their inaugural Ladies of Faith & Courage Awards in Ely House, Dublin on Saturday September 24, with four “exceptional” women of faith and courage receiving awards.

Supreme Knight Brendan McCann said that at the heart of the initiative “the Knights wanted to honour exceptional women of Faith and Courage who have through their lives faced down adversity with the conviction of their faith in Christ and especially Our Lady”.

Mr McCann went on to award Dr Deirdre Gleeson from Doctors For Life Ireland, Carolyn O'Meara from

Gianna Care, Alanna Bradley from FOCUS Ireland and Lucy Stones from Emmanuel House of Providence in Clonfert.

A cheque for €1500 was also presented by Mr McCann to Gianna Care on behalf of Council 75 which is the Blessed Matt Talbot council, with a further donation to be made to Mary's Meals on behalf of the women who attended.

Organiser Conor Deane added “We felt there was a great number of women who deserved the award but these were the ones we arrived at following some considerable reflection, debate and deliberation”.

Nominations for next year's awards will be accepted after Easter 2023.



The recipients of the inaugural Ladies Of Faith & Courage Awards, from left to right: Lucy Stones from Emmanuel House of Providence in Clonfert, Alanna Bradley from FOCUS Ireland, Carolyn O'Meara from Gianna Care, and Dr Deirdre Gleeson from Doctors For Life Ireland.



World-renowned Mary Louise O'Donnell plays for the event's attendees during the lunch.



Lucy Stones receives her award from Supreme Knight Brendan McCann.



Dr Deirdre Gleeson receiving her award from Supreme Knight Brendan McCann.



Alanna Bradley receives her award from Supreme Knight Brendan McCann.



Carolyn O'Meara of Gianna Care is presented with a €1500 cheque towards the organisation's work.



Carolyn O'Meara receives her Ladies Of Faith & Courage Award.



Event organiser Mrs Niamh Deane addresses those gathered for the awards ceremony.

Anti-social behaviour is a symptom of a broken society



Too many young men who father children do not play a proper role in raising their children, writes **David Quinn**

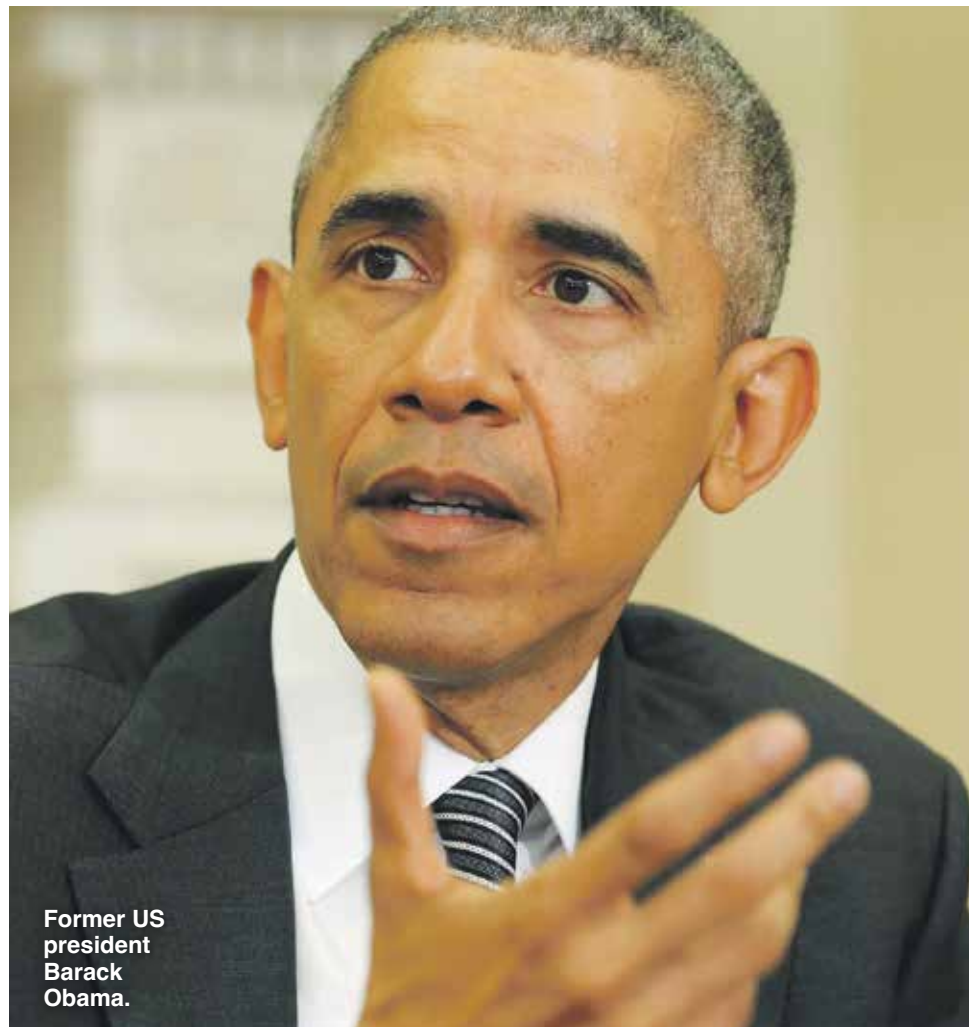
Here are words uttered some years back in an address to a Church gathering by a major American politician: “We know the statistics – that children who grow up without a father are five times more likely to live in poverty and commit crime; nine times more likely to drop out of schools and 20 times more likely to end up in prison. They are more likely to have behavioural problems, or run away from home or become teenage parents themselves. And the foundations of our community are weaker because of it.”

“The big message of his address was that fathers need to take more responsibility for their children”

Was this Donald Trump, stooping to attack families that don't conform to the traditional model of mother, father, child? Perhaps it was some other Republican politician? You might be forgiven for believing so, but in fact the speaker was Barack Obama. He was speaking on Father's Day in 2008 to a church audience in a black-American neighbourhood in his home city of Chicago. He was, at the time, a presidential candidate.

The big message of his address was that fathers need to take more responsibility for their children. He was well aware that all across America, especially in the most deprived areas, and unfortunately in those with majority black populations as well, many children grow up without a father.

He told the congrega-



Former US president Barack Obama.

tion that too many fathers are “missing from too many lives and too many homes. They have abandoned their responsibilities, acting like boys instead of men. And the foundations of our families are weaker because of it.”

He said fathers had to realise that “responsibility does not end at conception. We need them to realise that what makes you a man is not the ability to have a child – it's the courage to raise one.”

Relevance

Do these words have any relevance here in Ireland? Of course they do, because in Ireland many children are also growing up without a father and lots of young men who father children do not play a proper role in raising their children.

As at Census 2016, one in three families in the country were non-marital, that is, they were headed by a cohabiting couple or lone parent.

The number of households headed specifically by a lone parent (almost always the mother), was 218,817, double the figure in 1986.

It is the case, of course, that a child raised by a single mother might have regular contact with his or her father, but often this is not so.

Data from the ‘Growing Up in Ireland’ study (which follows the lives of thousands of Irish children) show that if a child is born to a single-mother household, by the time the child is three, only half of fathers are making a financial contribution to the child, and in a third of cases, the mother and the father are no longer in contact with each other.

“This was an initiative of Barnardos aimed at increasing father involvement with their children”

A report called ‘Watch Them Grow’, said that “increased father-child contact and improved quality of parents’ relationship may be beneficial to both child development and maternal health”.

It said this fact “underscores the relevance of facilitating the involvement of non-resident fathers in their family's lives where practicable and removing barriers to shared parenting wherever they might be found.”

Back in 2006, Martin McAleese, husband of Mary McAleese, wrote the foreword to a report called the ‘Da Pro-

ject’. This was an initiative of Barnardos aimed at increasing father involvement with their children. He began by stating directly: “Children need their fathers”.

Two years later, when evaluating the success of the project, he spoke about the “dangerous blind spot” of ignoring the role fathers should play in the lives of their children.

He said: “To reduce a father to an absence or just a sum of money is to ignore the potential he has as a benign stabilising influence in his child's life, and the potential his more active inclusion in childrearing has for better, healthier, less resentful, family relationships all round.”

Family structure

An ESRI report from 2016 called ‘Cherishing All the Children Equally,’ looked at the issue of the “family structure” a child lives in and said: “family structure does indeed represent a source of inequality in children's lives, and places children in single parent households at risk of poorer developmental outcomes” compared with children raised in two parent households.

But how often do we have a proper discussion in Ireland about the importance of fathers to children, or express

concern that so many children now grow up without a father present in their lives. When do we debate the effects of this, never mind properly research it? The answer is, almost never.

The ramming of a garda car by thugs in Cherry Orchard in Dublin last week drew public attention once again to the problem of anti-social behaviour. We were told by some that more youth centres would help solve the problem. But maybe the absent youth centre is less a concern than the absent father.

“Leonhardt says it is especially important for boys to have an active and engaged father in their lives”

Family breakdown is highest in the most socially disadvantaged parts of the country. If you are poor, you are only half as likely to be married as someone from a professional, middle-class background.

I'm not aware of any research in Ireland that has properly investigated whether there is a link between absent fathers and social problems of the type Barack Obama has drawn attention to.

We seem scared to touch the issue. There are probably two main reasons for this. One is that it might appear ‘judgemental’ towards non-traditional families, and the second is that it would mean liberalism would have to reassess one of its core pretences, namely

that ‘family diversity’, as they like to call it, has no ill effects.

American writer, David Leonhardt, criticises his own side, the left, for downplaying the importance of family structure, and more specifically, the two-parent family.

Writing in *The New York Times* in 2018, he said that the left “too often dismisses the importance of family structure. Partly out of a worthy desire to celebrate the heroism of single parents, progressives too often downplay family structure”, and the value of the two-parent family.

He remarked: “All else being equal – income, race, educational outcomes – children who grow up in neighbourhoods with fewer two-parent families fare notably worse.”

Leonhardt says it is especially important for boys to have an active and engaged father in their lives.

Initiative

There is no doubt that many boys in the most deprived parts of Ireland are growing up without a father. Initiatives like the ‘Da Project’ were a response to this.

But it is mere drop in the ocean. We have to get more serious about this. A start would be commissioning in-depth and objective analysis of the prevalence of fatherlessness in Ireland and its effects. Then perhaps we can devise policies aimed at doing something about it. The first step, however, is to acknowledge that there is a problem. We still seem to be a long way from that.



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The Church of the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor.

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Day 1

Make your way to Dublin airport and check-in for Turkish Airlines flight to Tel Aviv via Istanbul, with onboard catering and personal entertainment on one of Europe's best Airlines. On arrival in Tel Aviv, we will be met by our Marian Pilgrimages representative and guide in the arrival hall before boarding our tour coaches. We can get acquainted with the group on the short transfer to Bethlehem – birthplace of Jesus Christ – for check-in to the four star Manger Square Hotel for four nights with dinner, bed and breakfast.

Day 2

After breakfast, we take the short walk to the Church of the Nativity where we spend the morning and celebrate Mass. Here we will visit the birthplace of Jesus, and the Holy Manger as well as the chapels of St Joseph, St Jerome, the Holy Innocents and the Church of St Catherine.

Leaving the Church of the Nativity, we make our way to the Milk Grotto Church before sitting down to lunch in Manger Square where we will have a chance to meet the Mayor of Bethlehem and hear from local Christians. After lunch, we board the coaches for the short drive to the Shepherds

Fields' where the angels heralded the birth of Christ. After lunch, we continue to Ein Karem and visit the Churches of the Visitation (where Mary met Elizabeth) and St John the Baptist before we return to the hotel for dinner.

Day 3

This morning we drive to Jerusalem and enter the Old City to the Church of St Anne and nearby, see the Pool of Bethesda where Jesus healed a man paralysed for over 40 years. Close by we begin the *Via Dolorosa* – the way of sorrow – and follow the stations of the cross through the markets and streets of the Old City to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the site of Calvary (where Jesus was crucified) and his tomb. Here we will celebrate Mass and take some time to reflect at this sacred site.

Afterwards we can enjoy some free time in Jerusalem for lunch and exploring the markets, before visiting the Western Wall.

Day 4

After breakfast, we drive to the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem where we take our group photo and enjoy the view of the Old City below. We make our way to the highest point on the Mount of Olives to the Ascension Dome that marks the site

where Christ ascended into heaven. After this, we continue to visit the *Pater Noster* Church, Dominus Flevit, the Assumption Church and Grotto and the Garden of Gethsemane. In the afternoon we celebrate Mass in the Church of St Peter in Gallicantu or 'cock's crow', where Peter denied Jesus three times and see the dungeon where Jesus was held the night of Holy Thursday.

Afterwards, we walk around Mount Zion and visit the Church of the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Tomb of King David and the Room of the Last Supper before returning to the hotel for dinner.

Day 5

This morning, we leave Bethlehem and visit Bethany where Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, for Mass. We will then drive via the Inn of the Good Samaritan to the Dead Sea – the lowest point on earth. We have some time to relax and float on the water near Qumran, where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. We will then continue to Qasr-al-Yahud where Jesus was baptised in the River Jordan by St John the Baptist for a renewal of baptism vows.

We then proceed to Jericho to see the Mount of Temptation where Jesus was tempted by the devil, and the Sycamore tree of Zacchaeus. After lunch,

we drive along the Jordan Valley to Nazareth and for check-in to the four-star Legacy Hotel for four nights, dinner, bed and breakfast. Optional Eucharistic Adoration at the Basilica of the Annunciation at 8.30pm.

Day 6

After breakfast, we will spend our morning exploring the city where Jesus lived as a child. We make our way to the Basilica of the Annunciation to celebrate Mass. Visiting the lower level of the basilica, we see the remains of Mary's house and where the Angel Gabriel visited her. Here inscribed on the altar are the Latin words of 'Here the Word was made flesh'. Adjacent to the basilica is the St Joseph's Church, where we will visit the site of Joseph's workshop and the house of the Holy Family.

A short walk from the basilica through the thriving market is Mary's Well where we have the opportunity to draw water from the same well as the Virgin Mary. After some time for lunch, we take the short coach journey to Cana where we visit

the Wedding Church, the site of Jesus' first miracle, turning the water to wine. Couples on the pilgrimage can take part in the special ceremony to renew their wedding vows and there is also prayers and blessings for spouses at home and deceased husbands and wives. In the lower level of the church we see artifacts from the site before having an opportunity to taste and purchase some wine from this sacred site. Afterwards, we make the short return journey to Nazareth for dinner in our hotel.

Optional rosary at the Irish icon at the Basilica of the Annunciation at 8.30pm.

Day 7

This morning we make our way to the Mount of Beatitudes overlooking the Sea of Galilee, Capernaum and Tabgha. Here we take some time to listen to the readings of the great Sermon on the Mount before continuing to Capernaum to see the old synagogue and the excavations of St Peter's house. We then visit

the nearby site of the multiplication of the loaves and fish at Tabgha, and the Church of the Primacy of St Peter.

We enjoy lunch on the shore of the Sea of Galilee before taking a boat trip on the lake. Before returning to the hotel, we visit Magdala and the magnificent retreat centre and celebrate Mass in the newly-built chapel at the home of St Mary Magdalene.

Optional candlelit procession at the Basilica of the Annunciation at 8.30pm.

Day 8

After breakfast we drive to Mount Tabor and ascend by taxi for Mass at the Church of the Transfiguration where Jesus is transfigured and speaks to Moses and Elijah. We have a chance to enjoy the view of the Valley of Armageddon before returning to Nazareth for some free time and dinner at the hotel.

Day 9

Early breakfast before taking our coach to Tel Aviv airport for return flights to Dublin via Istanbul.

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Time to question presenting a as reflecting authentic voice of



The unprecedented consultation process reveals that many self-styled liberals are intolerant of those who differ from them, writes **Fr Andrew McMahon**

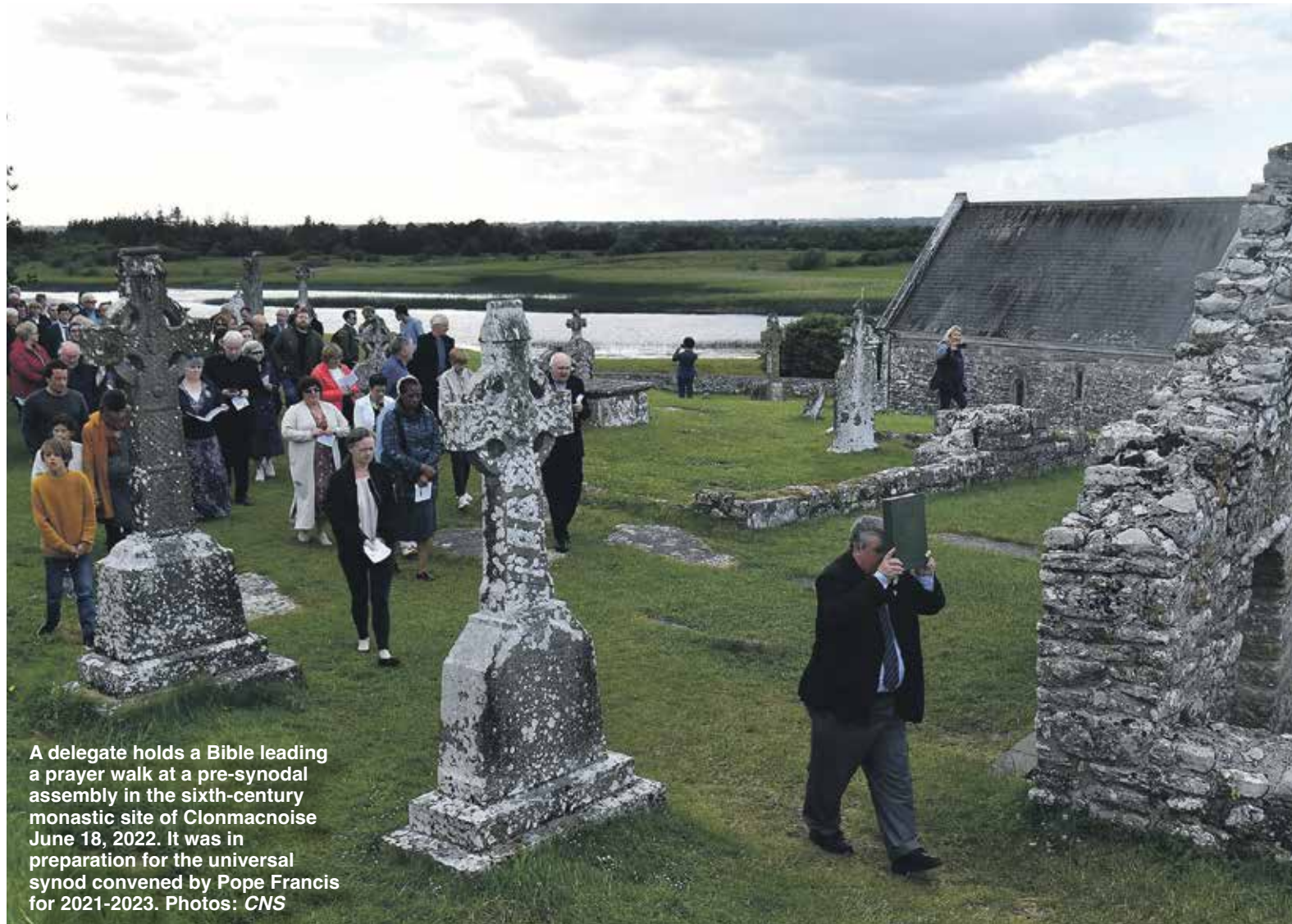
Former TV3 presenter, Ursula Halligan, returned briefly to our screens this summer, in the surprising circumstances of the national pre-synodal assembly. The past political editor, and prominent campaigner for same-sex marriage, featured in RTÉ's coverage of the June event. In a news item broadcast that day, Ms Halligan spoke of how encouraged she was by the presentation - in Athlone - of the feedback from diocesan listening exercises.

“Her enthusiasm for the synodal process and her positive experiences to date are obviously to be welcomed”

She described it as “raw” and “honest”. Identified on-screen as representing We are Church, Ireland, it was probably the first many viewers had heard of this group, or of Ms Halligan's association with it. It was, certainly, the first many Catholics learned that such campaign groups had been part of the Church's reflection on the feedback.

Ursula Halligan featured, more recently, in an article in *The Irish Examiner*, which combines reactions to the national synod synthesis with perspectives on the way ahead for the synodal pathway. She describes her fears, post-Athlone, “that the bishops might try to censor or dilute the view of Irish Catholics” and is gratified this didn't happen. Looking ahead, nonetheless, Ms Halligan is still wary. “We know that there will be forces at work within the Church resisting any change” she insists “because a lot of people in the institutional Church are comfortable with the status quo”.

“And a lot of them” she claims “have bought into a patriarchal mindset”.



A delegate holds a Bible leading a prayer walk at a pre-synodal assembly in the sixth-century monastic site of Clonmacnoise June 18, 2022. It was in preparation for the universal synod convened by Pope Francis for 2021-2023. Photos: CNS

“I do have hope” she adds “but I am under no illusions that it will be tough”.

Her enthusiasm for the synodal process and her positive experiences to date are obviously to be welcomed. Yet, underlying the obvious appreciation, are attitudes which should cause concern from a synodal perspective. While pleased that views she identifies with are strongly conveyed in the synthesis, her perceptions of those at odds with such views are a different matter. They are portrayed as ‘forces at work’ within the Church ‘resisting any change.’ The sense is of something

not just undesirable, but conspiratorial and sinister. And while she can recognise that there are ‘a lot of people’ who are ‘comfortable with the status quo’, these are effectively dismissed - adjudged as labouring under ‘a patriarchal mindset’.

Synodal pathway

Approaches like this certainly make the synodal pathway ‘tough’ - revealing, as they do, a ‘mindset’ not uncommon among many termed liberal, both in Ireland and beyond. Their liberalism is, in reality, highly circumscribed - marked by a suspicion and intolerance

of those who differ from them.

Reacting to the national synthesis, for example - in the *Irish Independent*, columnist Sarah Carey quotes advice from Christopher Lambe of the liberal Catholic weekly, *The Tablet*: “What we can expect” Mr Lambe tells her, “is a well-organised minority seeking to prevent any movement or development in Church discipline, doctrine or practice.” In urbane expressions of this brand of liberalism, detractors are merely warned about. More militant versions of the mindset, however, tend to gag dissenting views. The ‘cancel culture’, throughout much of our Western world today, is essentially an outworking of this same attitude.

“Political pundit and free-speech advocate, Brendan O'Neill, followed Ireland's same-sex marriage debate in 2015”

While ‘cancel culture’ may seem a concept still foreign to Irish ears, dismissal of the traditional and the orthodox has been a feature of ‘liberal’ attitudes here for quite some time. The Irish situation has been

exacerbated, moreover, by the mainstream media's unanimous support for anything furthering the liberal agenda. The problem has only been compounded, of late years, by the rallying of political parties to that same agenda - creating a uniformity so powerful that it is often left to voices outside the country to seriously challenge it.

Abortion

The Irish-born leader writer at London's *Evening Standard*, Melanie McDonagh, analysed its impact on the discussion of abortion in Ireland in 2018. She wrote, then, of “the suffocating consensus in print and broadcast media” in favour of deleting the Eighth Amendment. Acknowledging that a third of the population still voted ‘no’ in the subsequent referendum, Ms McDonagh concluded that “the only surprise was that it was that many, given that this not insignificant minority had nil, zero, nada representation in either politics or media.”

Meanwhile, the tendency of the ‘liberal’ mindset to malign alternative viewpoints was recognised by another London commentator of Irish descent. Political pundit and free-speech advocate, Brendan O'Neill, followed Ireland's same-sex marriage debate in 2015. Commenting on that referendum, he wrote: “One side of the debate - the side



Xavières Missionary Sister Nathalie Becquart, undersecretary of the Synod of Bishops, and Italian Jesuit Father Giacomo Costa, adviser to the secretary-general of the synod, arrive for a news conference to present an update on the synod process at the Vatican August 26, 2022.

potentially divisive report the Church in Ireland



Auxiliary Bishop Michael Router of Armagh, poses with the steering committee during the launching of the national synthesis of the Catholic Church in Ireland from Knock shrine August 16, 2022. Pictured with the bishop are Janet Forbes, and Fr Eamonn Fitzgibbon, both with the Task Group, Nicola Brady, chairwoman of the Irish Synodal Pathway steering committee, and Julieann Moran.

that is critical of gay marriage - is demonised daily, treated virtually as heretics, almost as criminals. It's accused of causing psychological harm, branded as 'hate-speakers' and frequently forced to make apologies simply for expressing its belief that marriage should be between a man and a woman."

“The problem will have ramifications, of course, well beyond the immediate functioning of democracy and inevitably impact much else in Irish society”

Looking at the wider Western context, Mr O'Neill proposes that “the gay issue has in recent years been absolutely central to the ramping up of the culture wars, to the fashioning of a new divide between allegedly enlightened elites and apparently bigoted mobs”.

“Indeed, gayness” he argues “has become a kind of sacred symbol of moral authority and celebrating it has become a means of winning almost instant media and activist support”. Its claims amount to “a new orthodoxy” which, he believes, “you question at your peril.” Looking to Ireland, meanwhile, and the possibilities for debate around abortion, Melanie McDonagh writes of “the problem with democracy” when, as she puts it, “the political and media establishment cohere on one side”.

The problem will have ramifications, of course, well beyond the immediate functioning of democracy and inevitably impact much else in Irish society. What happens, for example, to the pro-life voice in a culture whose ‘political and

media establishment’ largely ignore it? Being overlooked gradually disempowers it and it runs the risk of eventually falling silent. And what happens when a ‘new orthodoxy’ around gender or sexuality is to be questioned ‘at your peril’? People stop questioning, or voicing concerns, and begin to imagine their misgivings to be some ‘oddness’ on their own part. Freedom of thought becomes the ultimate casualty where freedom of expression has been curtailed and, in these ways, we become uncritically compliant with what popular culture imposes.

Pro-life

It remains very revealing that, despite the priority of pro-life concerns among at least a sizeable section of Irish Catholics, these remained as marginal to the reflections of the synodal process as they have become to Irish media and political discourse. Even more revealing, meanwhile, is that when - according to the national synthesis - the Athlone assembly went on to note issues missing from the diocesan feedback, this absence did not even strike them. Neither did the assembly appear to notice the lack of concern, in that feedback, for the erosion of the traditional family - marriage breakdown, the frequent lack of father figures, and the detrimental consequences of such trends for the children involved.

Most revealing of all, however, is the prominence accorded - in contrast - to what is termed in the synthesis ‘the LGBTQI+ community’. It seems especially remarkable when one considers that this particular version of that acronym didn’t even exist a decade ago. Yet it is now, supposedly, so well understood and embraced that - according to the synthesis - calls for full inclusion of this community were an ‘overwhelming’ aspect of the synodal process throughout the country. It

seems further surprising that concern for this matter had reached such levels within the Church in Ireland - given that same-sex marriage passed on a ‘yes’ vote of merely 38% of the total electorate in 2015 (62% voted ‘yes’ in an overall referendum turn-out of 61%).

“If ‘activist support’ was a concern in the shaping of the national synthesis, then Ursula Halligan’s endorsements will be significant”

Meanwhile, in light of Brendan O'Neill’s alarm at how the ‘no’ side were treated in the course of that campaign - and hounded to ‘make apologies’ for what they believed - it is interesting to read of “calls from an LGBTQI+ focus group for an apology from the Church” recounted in the national synthesis. Interesting, too, is the almost deferential way in which the synthesis appears to depict these demands: “Indeed, the visceral clarity of this particular focus group” it tells us “gave life to the rather more tentative and generalised positions on inclusion offered elsewhere”. Mr O'Neill’s observations, above - on the power of this lobby - seem pertinent indeed, and how “celebrating it” can bring “almost instant media and activist support”.

If ‘activist support’ was a concern in the shaping of the national synthesis, then Ursula Halligan’s endorsements will be significant. Media outlets were likewise supportive, as conveyed in the tone of a headline in *The Irish Times*: ‘Irish Catholics demand changes in Church’. This poses problems for

the synodal pathway, however, as it claims to be asking a very different question - ‘What does God want from the Church in Ireland at this time?’ The synthesis seems to resolve this dilemma in its own way, by assuming the anointing of the Holy Spirit on its most popular findings. This, despite the guidance - in the ‘preparatory document’ for the synodal process - that “The consultation of the People of God” should not depend on “the principle of majority”. As the synthesis reaches its conclusion, moreover, the limitations of this approach become obvious.

Holy Spirit

National committees had been asked - by the universal synod’s secretariat - to name “those points” viewed as meriting “the further discernment of the Church”. In doing so, they would indicate “that which was recognised as the call of the Holy Spirit”. The Irish response to this - it appears from the synthesis - was to apply the ‘majority principle’ and refer, onwards, those issues found to ‘emerge consistently’. ‘The Church’s approach to the LGBTQI+ community’ is cited, for example, as one of these.

It can hardly be that simple, however, as the synthesis had earlier included the following statement: “There are other minority, yet strong, voices that believe the Church, rooted in the Catholic Tradition, should not conform to secular standards when it comes to questions regarding gender, sexuality and relationships”. Furthermore, in its discussion of

youth - while clear that “a significant number disagreed with the Church’s teaching on sexuality” - the synthesis had also acknowledged how “some young people said that, for them, the Church’s teaching on sexuality is a welcome challenge.”

Difficulties must remain, therefore, with the synthesis’s conclusion - which effectively overlooks these perspectives in favour of the ‘majority’ viewpoint. Neither does it attempt to justify its apparent conviction that majority opinion in these matters indicated “the call of the Holy Spirit”, while minority views didn’t. Similarly, if “The Holy Spirit was truly present” at Athlone - as the synthesis believes it was - how exactly did it persuade those gathered to privilege one approach to Church teaching over the other?

“The synthesis seems to resolve this dilemma in its own way, by assuming the anointing of the Holy Spirit on its most popular findings”

Given, moreover, that there was dissension from the majority view - and mindful that the consultation had engaged but a tiny section of the Catholic population - what legitimacy was there in presenting a potentially divisive proposal as reflecting the authentic voice of the Irish Church? Furthermore, given that very low response rate - unacknowledged anywhere in the synthesis - with what validity could the document conclude that “The Church in Ireland is heartened by the enthusiasm, energy and expectation generated by the Diocesan Phase of the Universal Synod”?

Fr Andrew McMahon is a priest of the Diocese of Dromore.



Pope Francis leads a meeting with representatives of bishops’ conferences from around the world at the Vatican October 9, 2021. Also pictured is Maltese Cardinal Mario Grech, secretary-general of the Synod of Bishops.

Mary Kenny launches new book

Ruadhán Jones

A large crowd turned out for the launch of veteran Irish journalist Mary Kenny's new book, *The Way We Were: Centenary Essays on Catholic Ireland*.

Sabina Coyne Higgins, long-time friend of Ms Kenny

and wife of the President of Ireland Michael D. Higgins, launched the book in the United Arts Club, Dublin on Wednesday September 14. Published by Columba Books, *The Way We Were* traces the development of Catholicism in Ireland from 1922 to the present day.



Mary Kenny (centre left) and Sabina Coyne Higgins (centre right) greet guests at the launch of Ms Kenny's book in the United Arts Club, September 14. Photos: Alexis Sierra



First Mass for Cork’s newest priest

Ruadhán Jones

Fr Ronan Sheehan (27) celebrated his first Masses in his native parish of Murragh and Templemartin, Co. Cork, on Monday September 19.

A large crowd attended the celebration, which occurs as the parish marks the 150th anniversary of the opening of St John the Baptist Church, Newcestown.

Fr Sheehan also celebrated Mass Tuesday, September 20, in the second church in Murragh and Templemartin parish, St Martin’s Church Farnivane.

The diocese’s youngest priest studied an arts degree in Maynooth for three years, before entering St Patrick’s Seminary in 2013.

He was ordained by the Bishop of Cork and Ross Fintan Gavin, Sunday September 18.



The altar servers who assisted Fr Sheehan.



Christopher and Ruth O’Donovan, along with Fr Ronan’s uncle Pat Sheehan.



Ronan Desmond ringing the bell before Mass



Fiona Collins (left) follows the lead of choir director Antoinette Baker, pictured facing away from the camera.



Margaret Furlong, Finbarr Sheehan (uncle of Fr Ronan) and Fr Ronan’s father Bud Sheehan are pictured after he celebrated his first Mass, September 19. Photos: Jerry O’Mahony.



James Coleman.



Fr Ronan Sheehan talks with parishioners.



Fr Sheehan celebrates Mass in St Martin’s Church, Farnivane, September 20.



Tigray – the forgotten war



Young Eritrean refugees walk outside of the Adi Harush Refugee camp in Mai Tsberi town in Tigray Region, Ethiopia, June 26, 2021. According to reports, war in Tigray has displaced nearly 2.5 million people and left 900,000 on the verge of starvation. Photo: CNS/Tiksa Negeri, Reuters



Half a million people have lost their lives in the Ethiopian region, Ruadhán Jones hears

There is an ongoing war in the world that has cost the lives of 500,000 men, women and children since November 2020. Between 60-100,000 of them were killed directly by fighting, the rest by a lack of food, water and medicines.

But this war in Tigray, a region of North Ethiopia that borders Eritrea and Sudan, is “probably the most forgotten war in the world at the moment”, Fr John Guiney SS, director of Irish Jesuits International (IJI), tells *The Irish Catholic*.

Speaking just days after the United Nations released a report detailing atrocities and possible war crimes commit-

ted by both sides of the conflict, Fr Guiney called on the Irish Government and the President of Ireland Michael D. Higgins to “use every platform possible to bring the world’s attention to the atrocities that are happening”.

The UN’s Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia released its report September 19. The investigators said they believed Ethiopia’s government was behind ongoing crimes against humanity in Tigray and warned the resumption of the conflict there increased the risk of further “atrocities crimes”.

Ceasefire

A ceasefire agreed in March had offered hopes of a resolution to the conflict, but at the end of August, fighting resumed. Now, with Eritrea – an African country bordering Tigray – having invaded the region, hope has turned to fear.

“What is tragic about it is that the federal government has cut off regular supplies of food, medicine, fuel, the whole communication system – you cannot make a phone call to Tigray for the last seven months – and banking services as well,” Fr Guiney says.

“And that’s not to speak about how food is being used as a weapon of war. The human rights report spoke of food being used as an instrument of starvation; starvation

as a method of warfare. The report says, ‘we have reasonable grounds to suggest the federal government is using starvation as a method of warfare’. This is tragic. And obviously, it doesn’t get much airtime in any of our media.”

Another aspect of the atrocities highlighted in the report was the use of sexual violence as an act of war: “The commission found that rape and crimes of sexual violence had been perpetrated on a staggering scale, with Tigrayan women and girls being targeted with particular violence and brutality by Ethiopian and Eritrean forces and regional militias,”

Fr Guiney says. “At times the attackers used dehumanising language.”

Tensions

The war began in November 2020 after tensions between the federal government and the local government in the northern region of Tigray flared up. National elections were to be held in 2020, but the federal government postponed them due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

“However, the Tigrayan regional government held their own elections, which the federal government consider to be illegal,” Fr Guiney explains. “Then the federal

government accused the Tigrayan government of attacking their forces in Tigray. What triggered it [the war], they say, was they went in to actually release or relieve the pressure on their own forces that were being attacked by the local regional government in Tigray.”

But these tensions have deeper roots, Fr Guiney says, relating to a power struggle between the federal and regional governments: “The new president, who is a non-Tigrayan, wanted to reconstitute the relationship between the federal government and the regions. So it downgraded the influence of Tigray, who

had a huge influence in the last government.”

According to Fr Guiney, what really triggered the Tigrayan war was “a political reconfiguration by the federal government in an attempt to have more control over the regions”. What also proved to be a trigger point was that, after the elections, “the federal government decided to reduce the federal subsidy to the region of Tigray, which Tigray said was almost like a declaration of war.

“The Tigrayan regional government held their own elections, which the federal government consider to be illegal”

“Obviously the Tigrayans were seen as the dominant force in the last government. Now there is a kind of exercise of getting one’s own back from the federal government on the Tigrayans. There’s quite a bit of vengeance in this, which is tragic,” the Irish Jesuits International director finishes.

The two main forces involved in the war are the Tigray Defence Forces (TDF) and the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF), while the Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF) have also become



Ethiopian Bishop Tesfaselassie Medhin of Adigrat is pictured in a February 15, 2017 photo. Bishop Medhin had been in contact with Irish Jesuits International before the Ethiopian government cut out communications. Photo: CNS/Petterik Wiggers, courtesy CNEWA



A 14-year-old boy receives treatment at Ethiopia's Dubti Referral Hospital February 24, 2022. The teen lost his right leg from grenade explosives during fighting between the Ethiopian National Defence Force and the Tigray People's Liberation Front. Photo: CNS/Tiksa Negeri, Reuters

involved. All sides have been accused of committing war crimes by the UN.

On the Ethiopian side, the report said there were "reasonable grounds to believe that the Federal Government and allied regional State governments have committed and continue to commit the crimes against humanity of persecution on ethnic grounds and other inhumane acts".

They were "intentionally causing great suffering or serious injury to body or to mental or physical health based on their ongoing denial and obstruction of humanitarian assistance to Tigray", the report said.

Report

However, the UN report also found reasonable grounds to believe that Tigrayan forces had committed war crimes, including large-scale killings of Amhara civilians, rape and sexual violence.

The experts voiced alarm at their findings, which they said "reflect profound polarisation and hatred along ethnic lines in Ethiopia... This has created a disturbing cycle of extreme violence and retribution, which raises the imminent threat of further and more pronounced

atrocities crimes," their report warned.

Regardless, many innocents have been caught in the crossfire. Severe restrictions on humanitarian access by the Ethiopian government have left 90% of the region's population in dire need of assistance, according to the UN.

“Fr Guiney warns that the situation appears to be going from bad to worse”

Irish Jesuits International seeks to support people who are marginalised, disadvantaged and living in poverty, and many of the people in the Tigray region fit this profile. However, because of the Ethiopian government's blockade, they have been unable to offer monetary support or resources.

"A good friend of mine is Bishop Tesfaselassie Medhin of Adigrat," Fr Guiney explains. "We have been helping him especially with his diocese, even before the war. But we have been unable to actually send money or any resources to him because there's almost a

Berlin wall in terms of communication because access to Tigray and to that diocese [is blocked]."

However, although they have not been able to reach Bishop Medhin, they have received communications revealing the stark conditions on the ground. The IJI received a letter at the end of August from the coordinator of the Daughters of Charity, Sr Medhin Tesfay, who is based in Mekelle, the capital of Tigray.

Sr Tesfay wrote to IJI in late-August, just as a ceasefire that had held for several months was collapsing. In her letter, she writes "with a burdened heart filled with much concern and sadness".

"Since the dawn of 24th August dark clouds loom over Tigray because war has broken out once again and this afternoon, we had an airstrike in Mekelle killing innocent children in one of the schools," writes Sr Tesfay.

The people in Tigray have endured a "stifling blockade", have witnessed children murdered, have watched the life they worked hard to establish crumble and have had to "forgo their dignities and contemplate unthinkable and harrowing

acts just to survive".

"I beseech you to pray on our behalf, and become our voices as we are about to be silenced once more," Sr Tesfay continues. "In the name of the poor, please advocate for this madness to end, as your support is critically needed right now. This is the juncture from which there will be no return, and in such time, it would show how humanity could prevail over injustice and cruelty."

Letter

This letter had quite an effect on Fr Guiney and his colleagues.

"She pleaded with us in the last week, please be a voice for the voiceless amid the atrocities that are occurring amongst our people," Fr

Guiney says. "We are using every means possible to try to highlight the dire situation in Tigray."

Fr Guiney warns that the situation appears to be going from bad to worse, as the Eritrean forces "crossed the border two days ago and are pursuing violence against the people of Tigray".

"These particular forces are notorious for the amount of gender violence they have perpetrated on the women and children in the past 12 months. We really are asking for Church solidarity in relation to calling for peace but also for being a voice and an articulate voice for the war crimes that have been committed as the UN Human Rights Commission has said. And we are also asking that

the federal government would restore basic services, and would ensure full and unhindered humanitarian access."

Efforts

While Fr Guiney acknowledged that efforts have been made by international bodies like the UN, publicity about the war has "fallen off the table with the concentration in Europe on the Ukraine". He encouraged Ireland to use its presence on the UN Security Council to highlight the war.

"I've written a letter to our president [Michael D. Higgins] in the last few days to use his platform and influence and every means possible, every platform possible to bring the world's attention to the atrocities that are happening," Fr Guiney says.

“The UN report also found reasonable grounds to believe that Tigrayan forces had committed war crimes”

In his letter to President Higgins, the director of the IJI says they are calling for "urgent action and humanitarian support" for the innocent victims of the war. The situation is made more complex by the presence of 96,000 Eritrean refugees who had sheltered in Tigray prior to the conflict.

"The Tigray conflict is a severe humanitarian crisis and one which the media has largely ignored as countless people suffer grave human rights violations," writes Fr Guiney. "We kindly ask the President to use his immense influence and platform to highlight the war in Tigray and join with us in amplifying the innocent voices of suffering and peace which are currently silenced."

“The war began in November 2020 after tensions between the federal government and the local government in the northern region of Tigray flared up”



An Afari militia member walks next to a house destroyed in the fight between the Ethiopian military and the Tigray People's Liberation Front forces in Kasagita, Ethiopia, February 25, 2022. Photo: CNS/Tiksa Negeri, Reuters

Armagh youth receive JPPII awards

Ruadhán Jones

Young people from across the Archdiocese of Armagh gathered with their families and award leaders to receive their Pope John Paul II and Muiredach Cross award, September 15.

The ceremony held in St Patrick's Cathedral, Armagh, was the first since 2019.

The diocese said in a statement that the "recipients are to be commended as they completed the awards during the Covid-19 pandemic. A fact that makes their achievements more commendable".

Auxiliary-Bishop of Armagh Michael Router presented the medals, while Archbishop Eamon Martin also congratulated the recipients and their families.



Recipients of the John Paul II and Muiredach Cross awards are pictured with Auxiliary-Bishop of Armagh Michael Router in St Patrick's cathedral after a celebratory gathering, September 15. Photos: Liam McArdle



Archbishop of Armagh Eamon Martin welcomes parents and friends of the award recipients.



Out&About

Making merry for Mass



DUBLIN: On Sunday September 18, RTÉ's televised Mass was celebrated with staff and students from St Leo's College, Carlow. Music was led by members of the St Leo's Folk Group and the Chamber Choir, musicians were from the school's Trad group and they were directed by teachers Áine Shiels and Carrie McCarthy.



BELFAST: The team of Queen's University Belfast's Catholic Chaplaincy take up position on Elmwood Avenue to dispense tea, coffee and plenty of freebies for the first day of term, 20 September.



ROME: Ireland's outgoing ambassador to the Holy See Derek Hannon pays a farewell visit to Pope Francis as he leaves after four years' service. Photo: Vatican Media

IN SHORT

Demand increasing for Crosscare's Food Poverty Service

Some 600 families and individuals, including 800 children, have come forward to a new food poverty service in Dublin seeking help with food supplies.

Crosscare's Food Poverty Service was established nine months ago, and demand has steadily increased, with many people presenting in food poverty for the first time.

Most of those coming forward say they are struggling with the rising cost of living and are falling into debt. To meet demand, staffing at the service has grown from one

caseworker to three.

The Food Poverty Service relies on grant aid and donations. Staff at the service say they are anxious about what the coming months will bring, as energy costs continue to rise and further impact people who are already finding it difficult to cope.

The new service model, developed by Crosscare, offers families support and advice to help them move out of food poverty in the long term and end dependence on food parcels.

Caseworkers meet with them and, depending on the circumstances of each family, offer help with budgeting, debt restructuring, access to social welfare, mental health services and other supports.

Public urged to sign petition tackling global hunger

Concern Worldwide is urging the Irish public to add their voice to its campaign calling on global leaders to tackle the leading cause of hunger in the world – conflict.

The Irish humanitarian organisation's 'Nothing Kills Like Hunger' campaign was launched in September 2021 to appeal to global leaders to take the urgent action needed to save lives as levels of conflict-driven hunger around the world continue to rise.

A central part of the campaign is an open letter calling on global leaders to prevent

and end conflict, assist those affected, and demand greater accountability for those using starvation as a weapon of war.

To date almost 10,700 people have signed the open letter which will be delivered to the Permanent Mission of Ireland to the United Nations in New York on October 20, marking World Food Day – a reminder that 828 million people are facing hunger today.

"Currently, 50 million people around the world are on the brink of famine – more than 10 times the entire population of Ireland," a statement from Concern reads.

"Climate change is increasingly a factor, especially in East Africa. But conflict remains the single biggest driver of hunger around the world."



CAVAN: Stained glass master craftsman Patrick Muldowney is pictured at the installation of new stained glass in the north and south transepts of the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Kingscourt, one dedicated to Our Lady and the other to Ulster Ss Killian, Bronach and Colmcille, honouring the 150th anniversary of the church.



TIPPERARY: Members of the Legion of Mary from the eastern section of Killaloe Diocese held a prayerful gathering in Birr, Roscrea.



ROSCOMMON: Christopher Garrett (left) was ordained a transitional deacon for the Diocese of Elphin by Bishop Kevin Doran on Saturday September 17 in St Patrick's Church, Castlerea. Photo: Jimmy O'Brien



DUBLIN: Cyclists recline after completing the Peter McVerry Trust Wexford Cycle 2022 to raise funds for the housing charity, September 17.



MAYO: Minister for Education Norma Foley visited St Mary's Ballina with TD Dara Calleary where she was treated to music and song from the students, September 15.



CLARE: Graduates with a Youth Ministry Certificate, sponsored by the Redemptorists, from Killaloe are pictured with Fr Donagh O'Meara. Pictured are: Yvonne O'Rourke, Roscrea; Mairéad O'Neill, Toomevara; Claire Connellan, Ballyea.

Edited by Ruadhán Jones
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Events deadline is a week in
advance of publication



CORK: All the Irish Dominican friars currently in initial formation are pictured with their formators and the Prior Provincial Fr John Harris OP. Photo: Bro. Sean Blackwell OP.



WATERFORD: Bishop of Waterford and Lismore Alphonsus Cullinan attended St Paul's Parish for their 50th anniversary, September 20. Mickey Harte, All-Ireland winning football manager with Tyrone, gave a talk on the power of faith.



CORK: Sr Anthony Mary receives the Papal Blessing from Pope Francis on the occasion of her Silver Jubilee (25 years) of religious profession, at the Poor Clare Monastery, College Road. Sr Mary is from Mallow, and made her vows September 8, 1997.



CAVAN: Fr Martin Gilcreest, recently appointed PP of Laragh, blesses the grave of his great-great grand uncle Fr Patrick Gilcreest, who was appointed to the same parish 100 years ago.

ANTRIM

Pathways adult faith development programme, a two-year, part-time course, is now enrolling for 2022-2023 intake. The course runs one Saturday per month (10am-4.30pm) from October to June, either in-house at Drumalis, Larne or online via Zoom. To register, contact 028 28276455/28272196 or email maura@drumalis.co.uk.

ARMAGH

The feast of St Therese of Lisieux will be celebrated Saturday October 1 to mark the beginning of the Month of Mission. People will have an opportunity to venerate the relic of St Therese at the 7.30pm Mass on Friday 30 September and at the 10am Mass on Saturday October 1 in St Patrick's Cathedral. Roses will be blessed at both Masses.

CORK

The Poor Clare Sisters Cork are hosting a zoom meeting for those discerning religious life Saturday October 1 at 3pm. Email vocation-spoorclarescork@gmail.com to receive the link for the meeting.

The Diocese of Cork and Ross is holding Connect 2 in UCC, on Sunday October 16 from 10.30am. It is a gathering for people aged 18-35. Please save the date.

DONEGAL

The 150th anniversary celebrations for St Brigid's Church, Golan, Milford take place Friday, October 14, at 7pm. Bishop of Raphoe Alan McGuckian will be the main celebrant. Refreshment and entertainment afterwards.

Making sense of this world, a men's introduction to philosophy begins Friday October 7 at 8pm at the Villa Rose Hotel, Ballybofey.

DUBLIN

The Pallottine Community is hosting a weekend of reflection/discernment for vocations from Friday October 8 to Sunday October 10. For more information call Fr John Regan 0876499724.

Pure in Heart are organis-

ing a trip to the Tayto Park After Dark event on Saturday, October 29 at 4pm. Contact info@pureinheart.ie to book and pay. Cost is €25.

FERMANAGH

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament will take place each Tuesday from 10.30am-9pm at the Crypt Chapel, St Michael's Church, Enniskillen.

KERRY

The diocese of Kerry is hosting a mission month seminar October 20. Guest speaker will be Pakistan-based missionary Fr Liam O'Callaghan. Visit dioceseofkerry.ie to register.

KILDARE

An African Mass is held on the third Sunday of the month in St Brigid's Church, Kildare at 2pm.

KILKENNY

The rosary is said at 2.30pm on Fridays in the Grotto Graiguenamagh.

LIMERICK

Youth 2000 are hosting prayer meetings with adoration, reflection, music and socialising on October 3 in Our Lady Help of Christians, University of Limerick and October 10 in St Saviour's Dominican Church, Limerick City.

A come and see retreat for those exploring vocations with the Dominican Sisters of Saint Cecilia takes place October 14-16. For more information or to register email limerick@op-tn.org.

LOUTH

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place in Holy Family Parish, Drogheda, with the priests of the Institute of the Incarnate Word, daily from 8.30-9.50am; 3-5pm; 6.30-7.30pm. There is also evening Mass from Tuesday to Sunday at 7.30pm.

Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal host a come and see retreat for women age 18-35 who are discerning a vocation in St Anthony's convent October 12-16. If interested, contact Sr

Agnes 041 983 0441.

LEITRIM

Ballinamore prayer group meet on Tuesdays 8.30-9.45pm, in St Brigid's Parish Centre, Ballinamore.

MAYO

The annual Blessing of Pets ceremony returns to Knock Shrine on Saturday, October 8 at 11am. The blessing will take place in the Shrine grounds at the Hub.

MEATH

Introduction to the Bible on Kells webcam beginning Monday October 10 at 12 noon, led by Fr John Byrne. Each session will last 25-30 minutes. You can access the talks as you would the Mass each day on www.kellsparish.ie. For queries, contact Fr John on jplowebyrne@gmail.com.

TIPPERARY

'Get used to different' weekend retreat inspired by *The Chosen* TV series takes place Friday September 30-Sunday October 2 in Glencomeragh House. Full board accommodation, the cost is €195. For 18s and over. To book contact info@holymissionmission.ie or 052 6133181.

WATERFORD

Lectio Divina, a time of Gospel reading, sharing and socialising, takes place Tuesdays 2.30-4pm in St John's Pastoral Centre and on Thursdays 7.30-9pm in Sacred Heart Convent, Cedar Lodge. Contact Sr Kathryn 087 404 2784 or waterford@ascj.us.org.

WESTMEATH

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place in the Cathedral of Christ the King from 2.30-7pm Monday-Friday.

WEXFORD

Wexford parish mission takes place October 2-9 with the theme 'A Mission for All'. Events will include Mass, talks, testimonies, conferences and much more. Speakers include Bishop of Ferns Ger Nash, Fr Pat Collins CM and Sr Stephanie O'Brien.



World Report

IN BRIEF

Strong education key to 'better world,' cardinal tells UN summit

● During a UN education summit, the Vatican's secretary of state reiterated Pope Francis' pre-pandemic call that education is "one of the most effective ways of making our work and history more human".

Addressing the final day of the Transforming Education Summit September 19, Cardinal Pietro Parolin described how the Pope has been moved by "strong conviction that through education we can strive for a better world".

He said the Pope has stressed the need to create an "educational village" in which all people "share the task of forming a network of open, human relationships" that overcome discrimination and allow people to flourish.

'Rise in interest in Aquinas' among young Catholics

● A new generation of young people are deeply invested in the study of St Thomas Aquinas, according to Fr Thomas Joseph White.

The Dominican theologian and rector of the Angelicum in Rome said that he has witnessed both a new academic emphasis on

historical accuracy regarding the 13th-Century saint and attention to his potential contemporary relevance.

"We're seeing a modest renaissance of Thomism in the Church, particularly in the English-speaking world," Fr White told CNA.

Eight churches damaged by earthquake in Mexico

● A Catholic church in Tangamandapio and seven other Catholic churches were damaged in the state of Michoacán by a 7.6-magnitude earthquake that struck Mexico on September 19.

According to the Facebook page 'Diocese of Zamora, Michoacán: history, art and tradition,' the earthquake that took place at 1.05 pm local time damaged several places of worship but did not claim any lives of the Faithful.

"Let's be ready to support our parishes in repairing the damage incurred, for the well-being and safety of the Faithful who come to these places" and "to restore [the churches'] former appearance", the diocese encouraged.

St Peter's Basilica to light up with projection of first pope

● Visitors to the Vatican in October will be able to see the facade of St Peter's Basilica illuminated with a video display telling the story of the Church's first pope.

An eight-minute video, "Follow Me: The Life of St Peter," will be projected onto the facade of St Peter's Basilica every night from

October 2 to October 16, starting at 9pm.

A short preview of the video at a Vatican press conference on September 20 revealed that it will showcase video renderings of Renaissance artwork found in the Vatican Museums and inside the basilica.

Cardinal Zen's trial delayed due to Covid

● The criminal trial of Cardinal Joseph Zen of Hong Kong was delayed after the judge presiding over the case tested positive for Covid-19, Hong Kong media reported.

Cardinal Zen, 90, was to have stood trial beginning September 19 in connection to his role as a trustee of a pro-democracy legal fund, which he and other trustees are accused of failing to register civilly.

The cardinal is the bishop emeritus of Hong Kong, an outspoken advocate for religious freedom and democracy, and a sharp critic of the Vatican's 2018 agreement with Beijing on the appointment of bishops.

Cardinal Parolin, Russian foreign minister meet at UN

Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York, Vatican News reported.

While the Vatican press office issued no statement regarding Cardinal Parolin's September 22 meeting, the Russian foreign ministry tweeted a video of the two officials shaking hands and exchanging greetings.

"We thank you for the suggestion to have this meeting," Mr Lavrov is heard telling the cardinal. "We appreciate your efforts in this not-very-quiet time."

"Unfortunately," Cardinal Parolin replied, interrupting Mr Lavrov's welcome.

The Russian foreign minister continued expressing his appreciation for the cardinal's efforts "to promote more stability, more justice and, of course, the rule of law". The Russians' video stopped there.

In a statement published after the meeting, the Russian foreign ministry said Mr Lavrov "made clear the reasons for the ongoing crisis in relations between Russia and the West" and blamed increasing tensions on "NATO's crusade to destroy Russia and split the world".

After Ukraine's counteroffensive drove Russian troops from occupied territories,



The Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov shakes hands with Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York. Photo: MFA Russia /Twitter

on September 21 Russian President Vladimir Putin announced a partial mobilisation of military reservists and threatened the use of nuclear weapons to defend Russian territory.

Mr Lavrov told Cardinal Parolin that "the steps taken by Russia are designed to ensure independence and security, as well as to counter the United States' hegemonic aspirations to control all global processes".

The day before their meeting, Cardinal Parolin addressed the 10th meeting of the Friends of the Com-

prehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

In that speech, Cardinal Parolin warned that "as global tensions rise and we hear rhetoric threatening the use of nuclear weapons, it is more crucial than ever to bring the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty into force".

The multilateral treaty, which bans all civilian and military nuclear weapons test explosions, was adopted in 1996 by the UN General Assembly. However, several countries, including the United States and China, have not ratified the treaty.

Speaking to journalists September 15 after his visit to Kazakhstan, Pope Francis emphasised the need for dialogue, even if it means engaging "with states that have started a war".

"I don't exclude dialogue with any sort of power that is at war, even if it is with the aggressor," the Pope said. "It may 'smell,' but one has to do it. But we must always be one step ahead, with an outstretched hand, always! Otherwise, we close the only reasonable door to peace."

Nicaragua expels another religious congregation

The dictatorship of President Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua has expelled the Religious Sisters of the Cross, thus continuing its attacks against the Catholic Church in Nicaragua.

"Today, victims of the harassment and threats of the dictatorship, the Religious Sisters of the Cross (founded in Mexico) who had been in Matagalpa for years doing spiritual work left the country," *Nicaragua Informa* reported September 18 on Facebook.

The nuns of this congregation describe themselves on their website as "eucharistic contemplative women".

The nuns served in the Diocese of Matal-

galpa and dedicated themselves to praying the rosary in the cathedral and promoting adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

The Mexico-based congregation reported on Facebook that the last nuns had arrived from Nicaragua.

A source close to the congregation, who asked to remain anonymous for security reasons, said that "their departure was due to the pressure exerted by government workers to know where each contribution the sisters received came from, even the smallest small donations".

The source said the demand was absurd, because the nuns, like the par-

ishes, subsisted "from the offerings that our faithful give".

In addition, "the residence permit of the foreign sisters was not renewed and they had to leave the country" before the rest of the sisters.

The source explained that "the religious community, which leads a semi-contemplative life, couldn't sustain itself with just three sisters, since their charism is to maintain constant adoration of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. For this reason, their superiors saw that it was best to close the house they had here in Matagalpa".

Eucharist found intact after church burned by armed men in Cameroon

In the aftermath of the fire that gutted a church in Cameroon, Bishop Aloysius Fondong of the Diocese of Mamfé entered the ruins to retrieve the Blessed Sacrament and found the sacred Hosts and the ciborium containing them to be intact.

On the night of September 16, armed men set fire to St Mary's church in the town of Nchang, located in the Diocese of Mamfé, and kidnapped five priests, a nun, and three lay people.

In a video released September 21 by Aid to the

Church in Need (ACN), Bishop Fondong is seen entering the burned-out church and making his way through the rubble until he reaches the tabernacle, placed on a wall next to a cross.

After opening the tabernacle, the prelate genuflects

and proceeds to remove the ciborium containing the consecrated Hosts from the tabernacle.

"What happened is abominable. They are testing the patience of God," the bishop said, according to a tweet from ACN.



Edited by Jason Osborne
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Moscow on the march



Military men walk across the Red Square near Moscow's St Basil Orthodox Cathedral and the Kremlin's Spasskaya Tower September 21, after Russian President Vladimir Putin's announced mobilisation of reservists in the Russia-Ukraine military conflict. Photo: CNS/Evgenia Novozhenina, Reuters.

Bishops in Belgium defy Vatican by blessing same-sex unions

In open defiance of the Vatican, Catholic bishops in Belgium September 20 announced the introduction of blessing ceremonies for same-sex couples in their dioceses.

The bishops of Flanders also published a liturgy for the celebration of homosexual unions.

"In doing so, they are going directly against the Vatican," reported *Nederlands Dagblad*.

The Vatican published an official clarification in March 2021 that the Catholic Church does not have

the power to give liturgical blessings of homosexual unions.

However, basing their argument on *Amoris laetitia*, Cardinal Jozef De Kesel of Mechelen-Brussels and other bishops of the Flemish-speaking part of Belgium on September 20 published a document titled *Being pastorally close to homosexual persons – For a welcoming Church that excludes no one*.

The bishops' publication contains a suggested liturgy for same-sex blessings, including prayers, Scripture reading, and parts in which

the couple can "express before God how they are committed to one another".

The bishops of the Flemish-speaking part of Belgium also announced that each diocese will appoint a person as "concrete response and fulfilment to the desire to give explicit attention to the situation of homosexual persons, their parents and families in the conduct of policy. Pope Francis also expressed this explicitly in his April 2016 apostolic exhortation on the pastoral care of families, *Amoris laetitia* ('The Joy of Love')."

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) issued its latest declaration on same-sex blessings on March 15, 2021, in a document known as a *Responsum ad dubium* ("Response to a question").

In reply to the query, "Does the Church have the power to give the blessing to unions of persons of the same sex?" the CDF answered, "Negative".

The congregation outlined its reasoning in an explanatory note and accompanying commentary.

Russian priest says Catholics fear conscription

A senior Russian priest dismissed President Vladimir Putin's threats of nuclear war as "just words," but said many young Catholics now fear being forcibly conscripted with their priests to join the war against Ukraine.

"Although I'm not a military person, I don't think the Russian army could even use nuclear weapons – and if it did, this would be much more dangerous for Russia itself than anyone else," said the priest, who asked not to be named.

"People are certainly frightened here, particularly since Catholic parishioners and clergy could now be called up, beginning with those who've done military service. But I don't think there's much to fear from Putin, who's just coming out with words."

Street protests erupted in Russia after Putin's September 21 order for a nationwide call-up of 300,000 reservists after setbacks in the Ukraine war.

The priest told Catholic News Service

September 21 students and young people had "reacted very emotionally" to the mobilisation order, with many debating its practical consequences.

He added that there had been "no consultation" with Russia's minority churches and said he had consulted lawyers about the order's implications for Church personnel.

"Some young Catholics have already left the country, and more are doing so now," the priest told CNS.

Vatican roundup

Editor says renewal of Vatican agreement with China on the horizon

● As the October deadline approaches for the extension of the Vatican's agreement with the Chinese government, the newly appointed editor of the news agency of the Dicastery for Evangelisation said the deal has been instrumental in allowing Catholics to practice their faith openly and in communion with the Church.

In an editorial published September 22, Gianni Valente, who was appointed earlier in the month as editor of *Fides* news agency, also said recent statements by Pope Francis and Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, "hinted at a positive intention on the part of the Holy See to continue the process of negotiation".

The agreement, he wrote, has allowed for Chinese Catholics to "experience the adventure of confession of faith in Christ in today's China as it is, without privileges, without being pointed at and perceived as a foreign body, as exotic guests or representatives of distant cultures".

First signed in Beijing September 22, 2018, the Vatican and the Chinese government agreed in 2020 "to extend the experimental implementation phase of the provisional agreement for another two years".

The provisional agreement, the text of which has never been made public, outlines procedures for ensuring Catholic bishops are elected by the Catholic community in China and approved by the Pope before their ordinations and installations, according to news reports at the time.

Pope asks financial consultants to put people before business

● Pope Francis has encouraged financial advisers and consultants to make decisions that put the good of individuals and communities before that of businesses.

The Pope spoke about the role of integral human development in the financial sector during a September 22 meeting at the Vatican with consultants for Deloitte, a global auditing firm.

Deloitte provides services including auditing, consulting, financial advising, and risk advisory to nearly 90% of the Fortune Global 500 companies and thousands

of other private companies. It employs approximately 350,000 people around the world.

The Pope drew attention to worsening environmental conditions and the undignified living conditions of many people who lack access to nutrition, health care, and education.

"While our human family is globalised and interconnected, poverty, injustice, and inequalities remain," he said, pointing out that consultants and managers are in a position to if not reverse the situation, at least to help correct it.

Vatican urges support for Hurricane Fiona victims

● Pope Francis has called on Christians to support communities in the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico devastated by Hurricane Fiona.

The Pope expressed his solidarity with all affected by the category 3 hurricane in a telegram sent to bishops in the Caribbean countries.

The telegram signed by Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin said that Pope Francis "asks the entire Christian community and all people of good will to increase solidarity to help those affected by this disaster".

More than 1.3 million homes and businesses were left without power in Puerto Rico after the storm dumped 30 inches of rain, causing surging floodwaters, submerged homes, and damaged roads.

Authorities have reported four deaths in Puerto Rico and two deaths in the Dominican Republic, where more than 1.15 million households were left without potable water after the storm hit on September 19.



Letter from Rome



Elise Ann Allen

In 1935, an aspiring painter and member of a prominent Jewish family in Turin by the name of Carlo Levi was sentenced to exile in Italy's neglected southern region of Basilicata for his anti-fascist sentiments. Basilicata, at the time, was considered more or less Italy's equivalent of Siberia, which is to say, a prison all by itself.

“While some of that has changed, Italy's southernmost regions still trail behind the affluent north in most indices of development”

Levi wrote a memoir, the title of which is taken from a popular saying among inhabitants of the region: “Christ stopped at Eboli”, a town just south of Naples. The idea was that Christianity had never really reached the Basilicata, and nor did democracy, the rule of law, or any other traces of a civilised world. People felt abandoned, ignored, and forgotten.

Inside the Basilicata is a small town called Matera, roughly 80 miles east of Eboli. With its *Sassi* neighbourhoods literally carved out of rock, Matera was once defined in 1948 as a “national shame” for the poverty and neglect in which people lived. While some of that has changed, Italy's southernmost regions still trail behind the affluent north in most indices of development.

However, while many inhabitants of the Basilicata might still argue that Christ did stop at Eboli, Pope Francis this weekend went beyond.

On Sunday, September 25 – the same day Italians went to the polls in general elections which yielded national leadership at odds with much of Francis's social agenda – the Pope travelled to Matera to close a national Eucharistic Congress, which was held in the city under the theme, ‘Let us return to the taste of bread’.

While there, the Pope offered a reflection on loving the poor based on the day's Gospel reading, in which Jesus tells the parable of a rich man who dons opulent robes and dines on lavish feasts while ignoring a poor man, Lazarus, begging at his door.

In his homily, Francis said the reading is reflective of the fact that, “bread is not always shared on the table of the world; the perfume of communion does not always emanate; (bread) is not always broken in justice”.

There is a contradiction between the rich man showing off his wealth

Maybe Christ stopped at Eboli, but Pope Francis didn't



People participate in a eucharistic procession during Italy's National Eucharistic Congress in Matera, Italy, September 24. Photo: CNS

“In his remarks, the Pope noted that among the most recent victims of the fighting are at least 11 children who died when their school was bombed”

and the poor man begging, the Pope said, saying the rich man “is not open to relationship with God: he thinks only of his wellbeing, of satisfying his needs, of enjoying life”.

The rich man

Noting that this man is not named in the Gospel but is simply referred to as “the rich man,” Francis said he has lost his identity, which is based “only on the wealth he possesses”.

“How sad it is that even today this reality, when we confuse what we are with what we have, when we judge people by the wealth they have, by the titles they exhibit, by the roles they hold, or by the brand of the clothing they wear,” he said, saying attachment to these things “leaves us with empty hands”.

The poor man, on the other hand, is named Lazarus, whose name, the Pope said, means “God helps.”

Even in his poverty and marginal-

isation, Lazarus “can keep his dignity intact because he lives in relationship with God. In his very name there is something of God and God is the unshakeable hope of his life,” the Pope said.

“Here then is the permanent challenge that the Eucharist offers to our life: to adore God and not ourselves. Putting him at the centre and not the vanity of oneself,” he said.

Francis urged attendees to keep in mind that “only the Lord is God and everything else is a gift of his love”.

The Eucharist, Pope Francis said, is “the sacrament of love par excellence,” because Jesus offers himself to humanity “and asks us to do the same, so that our life may be ground wheat and become bread that feeds our brothers and sisters”.

Referring to the day's Gospel reading, the Pope noted how it was not until the rich man died and had

to give an account of his life that he took notice of Lazarus. However, by then it was too late, he said, noting that Abraham told the rich man that there was “a great abyss” between him and Lazarus.

“Our eternal future depends on this present life: if we dig an abyss now with our brothers and sisters, we ‘dig the grave’ for later; if we raise walls against our brothers and sisters now, we remain imprisoned in loneliness and death even afterwards,” Francis said.

“When hope is extinguished and we feel inside of us the loneliness of heart, the internal fatigue, the torment of sin, the fear of not succeeding, let us return again to the taste of bread”

Pope Francis voiced his desire for a “eucharistic” Church composed of women and men “who break like bread for all those who chew on loneliness and poverty, for those who are hungry for tenderness and compassion, for those whose lives are crumbling because the good

leaven of hope is lacking”.

The Pope closed his homily with a word of encouragement: “When hope is extinguished and we feel inside of us the loneliness of heart, the internal fatigue, the torment of sin, the fear of not succeeding, let us return again to the taste of bread.”

After concluding the Mass, Pope Francis led attendees in the praying of the Angelus and offered prayers for what he said are some of “the most urgent needs” in the world today. Specifically, he prayed for Myanmar, which for over a year has been ravaged by violent conflict following a military coup.

In his remarks, the Pope noted that among the most recent victims of the fighting are at least 11 children who died when their school was bombed. “May the cry of these little ones not go unheard! These tragedies must not happen!” he said.

Francis also offered prayers for peace in Ukraine, asking that political leaders “obtain willpower” to quickly find “effective initiatives leading to the end of the war,” and for Faithful in the diocese of Mamfe, Cameroon, where several people were recently kidnapped.

Making room: Catholics with disabilities hope synod will hear their voices



Junno Arocho Esteves

The Gospel of St John tells the story of Jesus' encounter with a man who was born blind. Upon seeing him, the disciples asked Jesus if the man's blindness was due to his sins or that of his parents.

"Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him," Jesus replied before healing the man.

One could dismiss the disciples' query as a reflection of the beliefs of a bygone era. But Luz Elena Bracamonte Zamora, a member of the Deaf Catholic Youth Initiative for the Americas, knows those beliefs are still prevalent today.

"In the world, especially in Latin America, there is this ideology that still exists that says we (persons with disabilities) are punished, that we are sick, that we have been bewitched," she told Catholic News Service September 22. But "we are normal people and come from normal families".

Ms Bracamonte joined other people with disabilities at a two-day synodal listening session at the Vatican sponsored by the Dicastery for Laity, the Family and Life.

A report of the listening session, which highlighted both the needs of disabled people and their contributions to the life of the Church, was presented to Pope Francis September 21 after his weekly general audience.

“Ms Bracamonte joined other people with disabilities at a two-day synodal listening session at the Vatican”

According to the dicastery, the text also was “delivered to the general secretariat of the synod” to ensure that “for the first time, the voice of the Faithful with disabilities reaches the synod fathers”.

The listening sessions took place as bishops' conferences around the world published their reports synthesising the 10-month synodal process in dioceses. With the release of those reports, a team of 25 people from around the world began 10 days of work and



Pope Francis accepts a document on people with disabilities from Giulia Cirillo, a member of the Sant'Egidio community, at the end of the general audience in St Peter's Square at the Vatican September 21. Photos: CNS

reflection in Frascati, Italy, September 21 to draft the document for the continental stage of the synodal process.

Report

The US Conference of Catholic Bishops released its report September 19, summarising the concerns, hopes and desires of an estimated 700,000 participants who joined thousands of listening sessions and other events during the diocesan phase in the lead-up to the Synod of Bishops on synodality in October 2023.

Among the concerns brought up by US Catholics, the report stated, was the “wound of marginalisation” that exists in the Church experienced by groups “who are made vulnerable by their lack of social and/or economic power,” including “people who have disabilities or mental health issues”.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales released its report in July and said Catholic disabled persons in the country “have called on this synod for attention to be given to their needs”.

Participate

“They want to participate more in the life of the Church. This might mean introducing or making use of particular facilities and technologies, but the predominant voice asks that the people of God listen to their experience,” the report stated.

Ms Bracamonte told CNS that some in the church believe disabled persons “cannot live the sacraments or understand them”. Addressing the pastoral needs of those with disabilities, she added, should be included in priestly formation.

Speaking to journalists

at the Vatican press office September 21, Schonstatt Fr Alexandre Awi Mello, secretary of the Dicastery for Laity, the Family and Life, said he was moved “by the testimony of faith of these people with disabilities who are often not taken into consideration”.

“I think we tend to misconstrue disability, because disability is one instance of limitation”

“At times, there is an association made with intellectual disability and disability in general, as if people with intellectual disability don't understand about life, about God or about other things,” Fr Awi Mello said.

But “to hear them talk about God, about their own encounter with Jesus, is something that moves me deeply,” he said. “It was the first time I had this opportunity, and I hope that the Church also has this opportunity” to listen to them.

Jesuit Fr Justin Glyn, who serves as general counsel of the Jesuits' Australian province and is legally blind, said the listening sessions were a “spirit-filled experience” and that the report delivered to the Pope and the Synod of Bishops

“hopefully has the potential to be a groundbreaker within the Church itself”.

Insights

The insights of people with disabilities, he said, “have often been pretty low on the radar of people who don't see themselves as having a disability”.

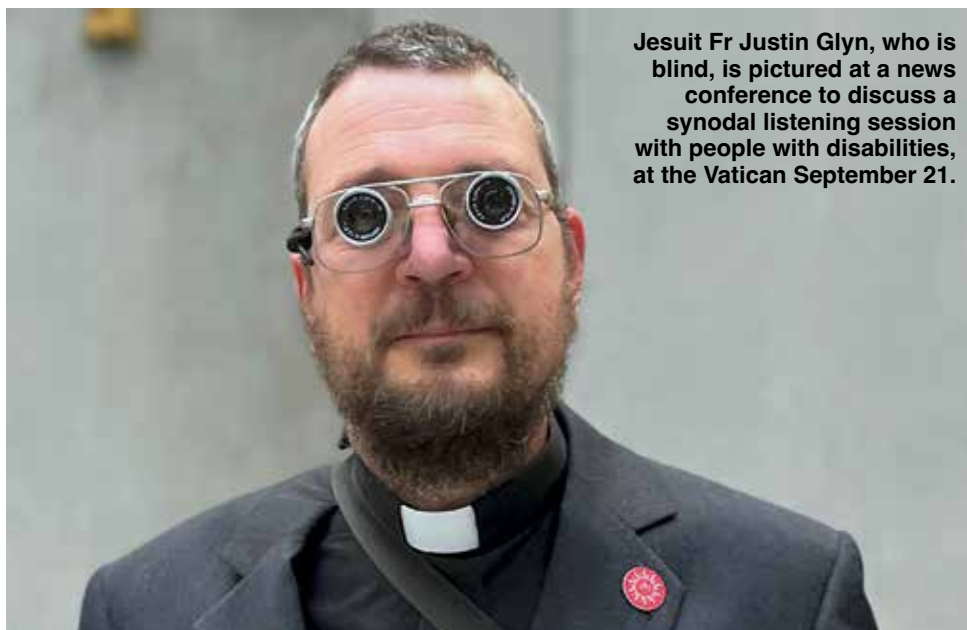
“I think the most pressing pastoral need really is the mindset that sees people as being equal participants in the Church rather than objects of charity,” Fr Glyn told CNS.

Disabled persons, he added, often face issues such as “the denial of Communion to people with intellectual disabilities, the physical lack of access to many Church facilities, discrimination in formation and other issues”.

Like Ms Bracamonte, Fr Glyn said he also experienced “subtle discrimination” in the Church and recalled being told, “If you had prayed more, you would have been healed” from blindness.

“I think we tend to misconstrue disability, because disability is one instance of limitation. We are all limited,” Fr Glyn said.

Catholics need to change their mindset and start seeing “people who have disabilities merely like everyone else: limited people,” he said.



Jesuit Fr Justin Glyn, who is blind, is pictured at a news conference to discuss a synodal listening session with people with disabilities, at the Vatican September 21.

Letters

Letter of the week

Contributors have a gift for interpreting the Gospel

Dear Editor, Every week *The Irish Catholic* supplies us with words of wisdom, but your September 15 issue surpassed itself when I found two paragraphs on Pages 34 and 35, which were worth the €2.50 price of the paper on their own.

The first was written by Fr Silvester O'Flynn OFM Cap, and read: "Forget all your stories about St Peter at the gates of heaven. It's the poor who operate the ticket turnstiles. They are the ambassadors of God's welcome, the friends who

will welcome you in God's name."

"Whatsoever you do to the least of my brethren, that you do unto me" (Mathew 25: 40). Concluding his piece, Fr O'Flynn wrote: "Every gift of the Creator comes with the responsibility of using it and sharing with the poor."

On the following page, Fr Ronald Rolheiser OMI wrote about exorcism: "Two contraries cannot co-exist inside the same subject and so an actual exorcism works this way: the more we embrace

charity, joy, peace, patience, goodness, long-suffering, fidelity, mildness and chastity, the more we exorcise paranoia, distrust, fear, pride, envy, greed, gluttony and lust – and less demonic hatred spews from our mouths."

Interpreting the Gospel of Christ in succinct and readable language is a gift – and your contributors have it.

*Yours etc.,
Sean Ryan
Dundrum, Dublin 16*

No joined up thinking on abortion, contraception and infertility

Dear Editor, Since the Eighth Amendment was repealed and the 'pro-choice' side claimed a two-thirds majority, I have often wondered how many of the two-thirds were male i.e., humans who would never need an abortion themselves?

And now we have the rules in place to offer free contraceptive 'devices', with hints the same will be offered for men, in due course. Strange that, at the same time, abortion is freely available, but the Senate are in discussion about fertility problems.

Could the plan be to speed up the onset of the demographic winter? We must now draw some comfort that the Government are spending millions on a new children's hospital for...?

Where is the joined-up thinking?

*Yours etc.,
John Boylan
Boyle, Co. Roscommon*



Government must address school funding 'scandal'

Dear Editor, Following on from Ruadhán Jones article [The Irish Catholic – September 15, 2022] outlining the Catholic primary sector's call for increases in funding of national schools it is worth outlining the even bigger discriminatory funding in the secondary sector.

At the recent AGM of Catholic Secondary Schools Parents Association (CSSPA) delegates unanimously backed a plea to Minister Norma Foley to address the funding discrimination against Church secondary schools where, unlike other secondary schools, they are docked an annual €562 per

teacher.

For many Catholic schools this leads to a loss of approximately €40,000 per annum and which in turn usually leads to requests for voluntary contributions of or in excess of €100 per student to make up the discriminatory funding shortfall.

Just over half of the country's second level students attend our Catholic schools. In this time of financial crisis it is surely time to end this funding scandal.

*Yours etc.,
Alan Whelan President
CSSPA
Killarney, Co. Kerry*

Archdiocese's changes to sacramental formation welcome

Dear Editor, It is long overdue that dioceses make meaningful moves to involve family and parish more fully in the preparation of young people for the sacraments. As shown on your front page [The Irish Catholic – September 15, 2022] the Archdiocese of Dublin has outlined the need for fuller parish involvement as well as the need to meet smaller groups of children rather than huge groups which has been the norm for too long.

These are important steps for several reasons. The feedback from their four-year consultation found clearly smaller groups were better – more "prayerful" – which obviously will lead to better outcomes for children's sacramental formation. Hopefully it will also lead to a move away

from the 'showy' sacramental celebrations which seem to be more about who looks the flashiest, perhaps less children will lead to less pressure to look a certain way.

In addition, schools are becoming increasingly secular and this trend will continue if the Government and lobby groups get their way, this currently looks inevitable. For this reason, in the future, the majority of schools cannot be relied upon to faithfully deliver sacramental preparation. Parishes and families must become more involved.

This of course leads to bigger questions about the future. Will families actively engage more with parishes or will this just lead to less children receiving the sacraments? The latter seems much more

likely, sadly. Also, will parishes have the resources to facilitate smaller groups of children? Many parishes, particularly those with a lot of schools, are inundated with children. People are already overworked. Hopefully the host of new deacons who started training recently will help, but that won't be enough. Laity will have to step up to make any of this a reality.

I'm not sure why there was a need for a lengthy four-year consultation, but at least the report seems to have got to the right place, in my view at least – despite the possible complications in delivering.

*Yours etc.,
John O'Neill
Swords, Dublin*

facebook community

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

'Extreme concern' as parishes brace for winter energy costs

What did we do before central heating...or even microphones. Wrap up. – **Isabella Oliver**

Keep them open, I'll wear my winter woolies. I've had it up to my teeth with not being able to attend Mass. – **David McCall**

Our PP said it cost €10,000 per annum to heat the church and that as this figure will now double, decisions regarding the no. of Masses etc will have to be made. The Govt will be delighted if it forces churches and small businesses to close. – **Mary Duggan Murphy**

I remember one of our local churches which did not have any heating system and yet people walked to Mass through all weather conditions. – **Edward Duffin**

Close the doors and keep the heat in. – **Dualta Roughneen**

Our PP told us to wrap up well and he is right. Get a hat and scarf and gloves. – **Bernie O'Hara**

Kildare and Leighlin announces plans for lay-led liturgies to help overstretched priests

What about having adoration of the Blessed Sacrament for a few hours every day to pray for vocations to the priesthood and the diaconate. Lay people can not replace the priest. Why not arrange for priests from Africa and India to come here? Irish priests went out to many countries, maybe now is the time for these countries to come here. – **Mary King**

Here's an idea: promote car-pooling so that everyone can get to Mass every day if they'd like. Instead of prayer services, we could have bigger congregations, even if at fewer churches. We live in a very small country! – **Petra M Conroy**

Good to see such positive action being planned. We are a Church in transition and Bishop Denis and his team are certainly embracing that transition in a way that will enable their people to come together to pray and worship, all the while retaining the centrality of the Eucharist, at those times when it is possible to have Mass. – **Jim Deeds**

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

Loss of a much-loved Australian singer

Dear Editor, Recently we saw the loss of one of the most loved voices to top the charts in the 60s and 70s.

Judith Durham of the Seekers singing group was another great voice to come out of Australia. In 1965 they visited Ireland and played the national stadium. They also appeared on Gay Byrne's Late Late Show.

Judith was a beautiful interpreter of spirituals and recorded many, like for instance 'When the stars begin to fall'. These are well worth looking up on YouTube. She was 75.

*Yours etc.,
Paul Roberts
Rathmines, Dublin 6*

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.

Family & Lifestyle

The Irish Catholic, September 29, 2022

Personal Profile

Finding fulfilment
in a religious
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Helping Ireland's children cope with grief



Since 2009, the Children's Grief Centre in Co. Limerick has been offering a support service for children, young adults and their families affected by death, separation or divorce. Established by Sister of Mercy, Sr Helen Culhane, the centre aims to provide a safe and supportive environment for young people and their families to process grief and bereavement, with the service provided by a number of trained and professional support workers.

They also provide grief education to support schools, organisations and communities in effectively dealing with



The Children's Grief Centre has released a new bereavement toolkit to better help primary school teachers support their communities through grief, writes Jason Osborne

the blows that life doles out. It's in support of that work that they recently released their bereavement toolkit for primary schools.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper, Sr Helen says that they were getting "a huge amount" of contact from primary school teachers and educational settings looking for

advice on how best to support a child, family or teacher through grief.

"We're up and running 13 years and what we've found over those years was that...we would be getting at least once a week, maybe twice, phone-calls from schools looking for guidance or support around either a staff member had died

or usually a parent of a child or sadly maybe a child. Teachers didn't know what to do," Sr Helen says.

"We thought, 'Look, what if we put a toolkit together?'"

The Children's Grief Centre's *About Death...A Toolkit for Primary Schools* provides a wealth of content for teachers on how to best support their students, the school's families and colleagues through what are often the toughest times in their lives. Examples of the topics covered include:

- Ages and stages of development
- Death by suicide
- School response following a

death in the school community

- Teaching about death in the classroom
- When a child in your class experiences a bereavement – what to expect
- Helping a student returning to school after a death in the family
- Helping classmates to know how to respond
- Self-care of the teacher
- Sample letters to bereaved parents following a significant death
- Cultural diversity
- Death and funerals in world religions

The toolkit provides all of

» Continued on Page 31

Family News



AND EVENTS

STUDY SUGGESTS 20 QUADRILLION ANTS ON EARTH

There are at least 20 quadrillion ants on Earth, AFP reports.

This is according to a new study that says even that towering figure likely underestimates the total population of the insects, which are an essential part of ecosystems around the world.

Determining the global population of ants is important for measuring the consequences of changes to their habitat – including those caused by climate change.

Ants play a significant role, dispersing seeds, hosting organisms and serving as either predators or prey.

Some studies have already attempted to estimate the global ant population, but they resulted in a far smaller number than 20 quadrillion, which is 20 million billion.

For this new attempt researchers analysed 465 studies that measured the number of ants locally in the field.

While surveys have been carried out on all continents, some major regions had little or no data, including central Africa and Asia.

This is why “the true abundance of ants globally is likely to be considerably higher” than estimated, the study says.

HOLLYWOOD SIGN GETS FIRST PAINT JOB IN A DECADE

The famous white Hollywood sign in Los Angeles in the United States is due to get a makeover as it gets its first paint job in a decade.

Close to 1,500 litres of paint and primer will be lavished on the 13.7m high sign, AFP reports the Hollywood Sign Trust as saying.

A crew of ten prepped and pressure washed the enormous letters, which sit on hills above the movie capital.

The nine-letter landmark turns 100 years old in 2023.

The sign, which is a must-see attraction for any film buff or tourist visiting LA, initially read Hollywoodland, and was constructed as an advertisement for an upscale real estate development.

But in 1949, as the movie industry entered a golden age, the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce lopped off the last four letters.

GERMANY'S FAMED OKTOBERFEST RETURNS AFTER PANDEMIC BREAK

Oktoberfest, Germany's famed beer festival which draws millions of visitors from around the world, has opened in Munich after a two-year pause due to the coronavirus pandemic.

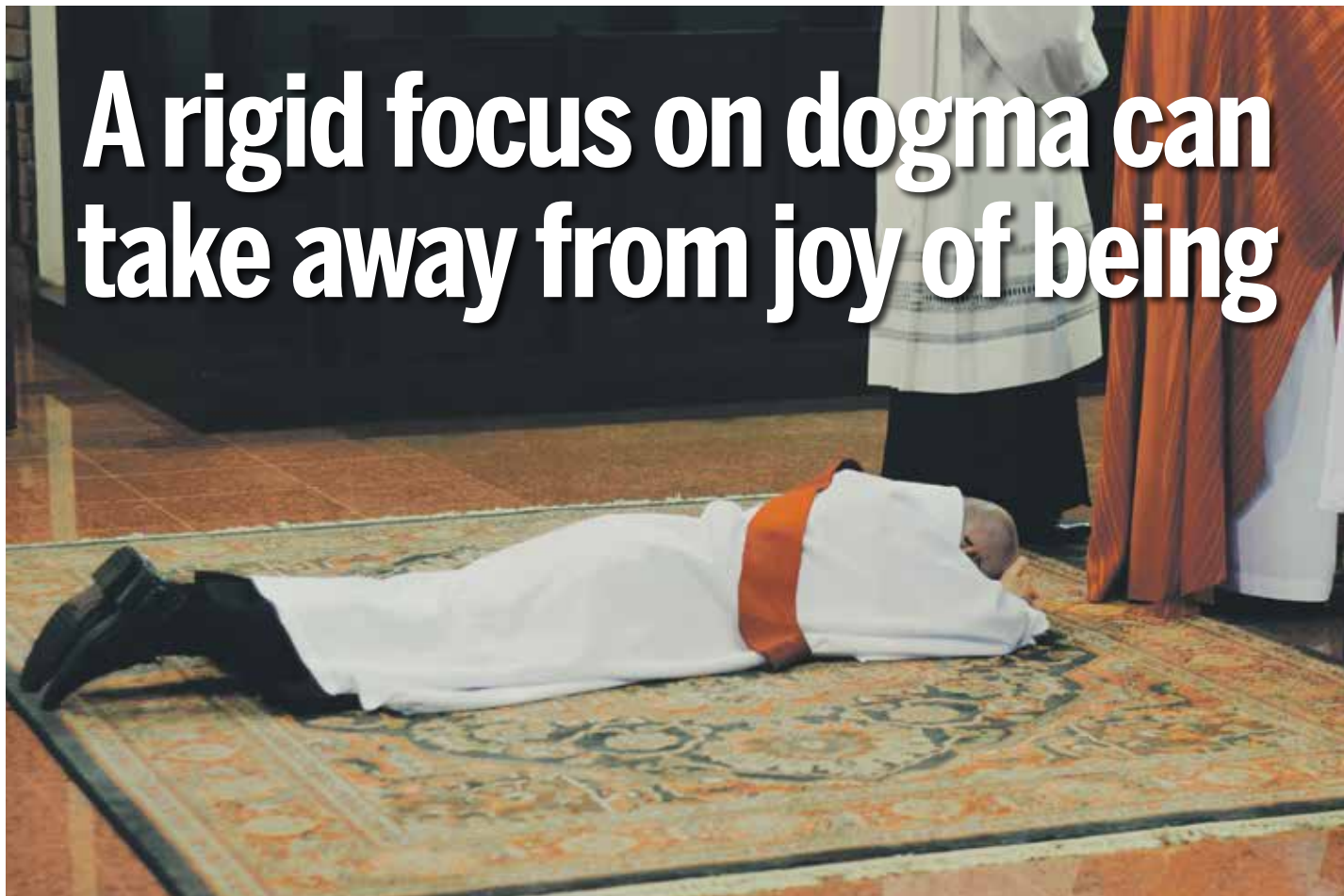
In its 200-year history, the world's biggest folk festival has been cancelled just 26 times, mostly due to World Wars I and II but also twice due to cholera outbreaks.

The last time the festival was held was in 2019, with the 6.3 million guests drinking more than 7.3 million litres of German beer.

Munich mayor Didier Reiter kicked off the ceremony by opening a beer keg with a hammer blow and offering the first tankard to the head of the regional government Markus Soeder.

The festival will run until October 3 with no restrictions and no face masks will be necessary.

A rigid focus on dogma can take away from joy of being



The Garden of Love by William Blake

I went to the Garden of Love,
And saw what I never had
seen:

A Chapel was built in the
midst,
Where I used to play on the
green.

And the gates of this Chapel
were shut,
And Thou shalt not. writ over
the door;

So I turn'd to the Garden of
Love,
That so many sweet flowers
bore.

And I saw it was filled with
graves,
And tomb-stones where flow-
ers should be:

And Priests in black gowns,
were walking their rounds,
And binding with briars, my
joys & desires.

William Blake (1757–1827) is one of the key English poets of the late 18th and early 19th Centuries. His key themes are religion and the plight of the most downtrodden or oppressed within society. Many of William Blake's greatest poems are written in clear and simple language.

Blake was a deeply spiritual artist and poet, but he disliked the institutional religion, and this can be seen clearly in this poem, where the garden of love, formerly associated with play and carefree childhood, is now the site of an unwelcoming, forbidding chapel. Gardens in poetry often tempt us to recall the first biblical garden, the Garden of Eden and the title of this poem, 'The Garden of Love' readily brings this comparison to mind.

But the garden does not live up to its name, to the ideal it suggests. The gates of this Chapel

Mindful living

Dr Noel Keating



were shut, and 'Thou Shalt Not' writ over the door. Written with a capital 'C' suggests the word 'chapel' stands for the Church, for organised religion. Even the garden which surrounds this chapel has changed, and has become a graveyard: death has replaced life, as it were, as tomb-stones have displaced and replaced the flowers in the ground.

“In Christian terms, meditation helps each of us to see with the mind of Christ from our own unique place in the world”

The message of 'The Garden of Love' appears to be fairly clear: organised religion, instead of promoting love, can instead displace it. Dogma that demands unconditional obedience can view asking questions as a threat: 'Thou shalt not (ask) written over the door.'

Is this not a tension we can experience in the Church today, in our time, where a rigid focus on dogma and doctrine can displace the joy of being. Questioning dogma and exploring the alternative orthodoxy of original goodness as against that of original sin can be painful – as painful as the description

in Blake's poem. But we must each take personal responsibility and that requires us to walk the path of unknowing, doubt, and loss of certainty. This can be stressful because as we discover the validity of heart-knowing, of experiential knowledge – as our capacity for spiritual realisation deepens – this calls us to let go of past certainties and dwell in unknowing and confident doubt. This is not a modern concept; writing to his brothers George and Tom in December 1818, the poet Keats referred to the importance of becoming “capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries and doubts”. This can be very difficult in a culture that values certainty, especially in a religious culture which



does not tolerate questioning old orthodoxies, cannot abide doubt and will not allow open debate. It puts one at risk of being seen as subversive, even a troublemaker! Yet it is vital that contemplative voices are heard within the Church, especially at this time as we continue to walk the synodal pathway together.

John Main always said that meditation creates community and it does; in it we meet with others who share our understanding of the contemplative pathway, who know that meditation awakens the heart to a very under-valued but deeply valid way of knowing. We must give voice to the fact that meditation leads us joyfully along

this contemplative pathway of unknowing, and we discover it is the path where we experience God's unconditional love.

Meditation awakens the heart and puts the mind in the heart. In Christian terms, meditation helps each of us to see with the mind of Christ from our own unique place in the world. As we spend time each day in the stillness and silence of our inner room, it becomes not a place we retreat to but the centre from which we see the world more clearly, through the lens of love.

“Lord, may our hearts remain open to your presence and guide us to love like you”

And we strive to maintain this way of seeing not just during the time of meditation, but all of the time, in all our ordinary everyday activities and encounters – washing clothes, changing nappies, walking the dog and wondering how we can make the world a better place for our being in it. That is why our closing prayer asks: “Lord, may our hearts remain open to your presence and guide us to love like you.”

i After 40 years in the education sector Noel Keating was awarded a PhD for his research into the child's experience of meditation and its spiritual fruits. Noel now leads, in a voluntary capacity, a project which offers free in-service to primary schools who may wish to consider introducing meditation as a whole-school practice. Noel is author of *Meditation with Children: A Resource for Teachers and Parents*.

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this and much more besides. Sr Helen says they felt this was necessary, as they were frequently being plied with questions by primary school teachers who felt themselves ill-equipped to deal with some of the situations they were being presented with.

“This work is a vitally important addition to the Irish landscape, as in 2011 it was estimated that there were 3,360 16-year-olds who had experienced the death of one or both parents”

“A lot of teachers would say – and even though a lot of them would be parents themselves – they’d say, ‘Oh Helen, I don’t know when the child comes back, what should I say? Should the class know that he has been bereaved? If they get sad in the class, what do I do?’

“All of these questions then come up for teachers in schools,” she says.

It was very important to include a section on self-care for teachers, Sr Helen says, as it’s all too easy to overlook the toll the effects of grief can have on everyone.

“We put that in because, we’ve found most teachers are very caring, very compassionate, but equally it’s important that they have to look after themselves and I suppose in the wider school that they look after each other.”

This work is a vitally important addition to the Irish landscape, as in 2011 it was estimated that there were 3,360 16-year-olds who had experienced the death of one or both parents. According to the Irish Hospice Foundation, a similar number had experienced the death of a sibling. Still more recently, accord-

ing to the *Growing Up in Ireland* study, a Government-funded study of children carried out jointly by the ESRI and Trinity College Dublin:

“Over one-third of 9-year-olds had experienced the death of a close family member (not including a parent) since the age of five.”

Despite advances in medicine and health sciences, death, grief and bereavement are still core elements of the human experience, and providing the proper supports for those going through them is as necessary as ever – particularly as the Irish approach to these things has changed in recent decades, Sr Helen says.

“I remember when I was eight and my grandmother died...my mother sewed a diamond shape into my father’s coat... When my Granny, my mother’s mother died, my mother wore black for the whole year.

“So as a child growing up, what that taught me, I knew then if I saw a man in the shop and he had that diamond in the side of his coat, I learned ‘Someone must have died, he’s sad’. If I saw a lady in

black, a black dress or a black skirt and cardigan [I knew the same]. I believe we have lost that in Ireland. I really do. I think we’re very good at the removal and we’re very good the next day, whether that’s a Mass or whatever kind of a service, we’re very good.

“But I’m working with bereaved families 20 years now, because I previously worked in a hospice and when adults come first to me and talk to me about their bereavement, I often sat there and said, ‘If they had one good friend that would listen to them, they wouldn’t need to come to me’,” Sr Helen says.

“We want to fix it now, we want a quick fix, it’s like going out into the supermarket rather than being at home, peeling the potatoes”

“After about three weeks, we expect them to be smiling. We don’t want to see them crying, and even with children we want to fix them. When a family is grieving, whether an adult has lost a partner, grief is normal, and I smile because I often use a quote of Queen Elizabeth’s....I read one time that she wrote, ‘Grief is the price we pay for loving’.

“We want to fix it now, we want a quick fix, it’s like going out into the supermarket rather than being at home, peeling the potatoes. We want everything, no we don’t want to see people sad. People have to grieve. Grieving is a normal reaction to the death of a loved one,” Sr Helen says.

As long as young people grieve in Ireland, the Children’s Grief Centre will be there to support them. For more information, visit www.childrensgriefcentre.ie



Dad's Diary

Rory Fitzgerald



The end of September marks a tipping point in the year. From the 21st of the month, night becomes longer than day. We are surprised by the ever earlier dusk, and the biting cold which follows it. Yet summer puts up a brave rear-guard action, as it slowly retreats into the oblivion of winter. On some days, it manages to create the impression that it is still the height of summer. Yet the browning leaves tell a different story.

The kids have been back in school for almost a month now. New routines have been solidly established, and they are getting to know their new teachers and their new school books. Our child who has moved up to secondary has made that step with relative ease and is settling in nicely.

Our youngest is meanwhile in her final year in preschool. We’ve had one kid or another in preschool since 2012. So we must savour this last year of having a pre-schooler. Children of that age are incredibly sweet, but also a lot of work to parent, what with waking at night and the tantrums and other demanding behaviour that is a natural part of that stage of life. A measure of sadness, but also of relief, will come when we bid farewell to that chapter of our parenting lives.

There will also be one less school drop-off too once preschool is over. I was literally mistaken for a taxi driver by a guard during the morning school run the other day. With my minibus full of kids, it was an easy mistake to make at that hour!

Sometimes the sheer intensity of dawn to dusk parenting of four kids hits home. It normally happens on those rare occasions when you find yourself somewhere without the kids – in a strange environment where you’re able to finish your sentences and where an eerie background silence prevails. Such places also generally do not have toys and other random items strewn across the floor.

My wife and I have recently developed the habit of giving ourselves some of that quiet time each week. It has been a balm to get away to a restaurant or for a walk by the sea and really take time to talk, uninterrupted. Even a few hours of such time is invaluable, as it gives us space to really communicate and to simply enjoy each other’s company. It also means that we return to our busy home with a greater sense of appreciation of just how fortunate we are to be so busy.

The summer months are golden, but it is good to once again have the solidity of routine now that school and work have returned in earnest. As the evenings draw in, the fires are lit with greater frequency.

I’ve been gathering firewood with my son and getting the house ready for winter. There is something grounding about the earthy scents of autumn which now fill the woods. We’ve been gathering the last of the blackberries too, and making jam with the kids, which then led on to making delicious jam tarts. As the seasons move on, we can only embrace the changes that they bring.



Finding fulfilment in a religious vocation

Personal Profile



Ruadhán Jones

Bro. Barry Noel FPM came into contact with the Presentation Brothers while attending their secondary school in Grenada. The Irish missionaries' commitment and dedication made a great impression on the young man, who decided to follow them into the missionary life.

There was only one secondary school on the island before the Presentation Brothers came out, Bro. Noel explains. He adds that, as a result, "there wasn't a hope of most young men like myself getting a secondary education.

"I think the first nudge came when there used to be an elderly brother who came around to the schools promoting the brothers"

"I really see that as a lifesaver, the brothers were able to come and open a school, it was accessible to anyone. That was a great privilege and a great need for the West Indies at the time. I really cherish that," he says.

Bro. Noel grew up in a Catholic family – he can remember no time in his life when he wasn't



Bro. Barry Noel FPM (left) with new Presentation Brothers.

involved in Church life in one form or another. It was in the Brothers' secondary school that he felt the first "nudge" from God regarding his vocation.

"I think the first nudge came when there used to be an elderly brother who came around to the schools promoting the brothers," he recalls. "He would always ask if there was anyone interested and thinking about religious life and religious brotherhood in particular.

"A few of us would put up our hands and say yes and he'd take our names down. It was early days yet, we were still young, we were not making hard decisions about life at that stage. But you know it was, for me, the first thought that this is a possibility."

After completing his A Levels, Bro. Noel studied in college and pursued, as he calls it, a normal

kind of career. But the thought of his possible vocation was always in the back of his mind. The inspirational example of the brothers he had met continued to interest him.

Commitment

"I saw this missionary work, this great sense of commitment that the brothers were handing on to us and it dawned on me as part of the whole call. And maybe God was saying, this is something I want you to do, to do what they were doing.

"They were giving great service to others in a completely strange part of the world. They were as committed and dedicated as anyone else. It [my vocation] was a desire to reflect that in my own life."

So while working with an accounting company, there was

an unhappiness, a feeling for Bro. Noel that he was not contented with what he was doing. He had maintained his involvement in the life of the Church through choirs and altar serving – but it was getting to the point that he wanted to do more and he entered the novitiate.

"Since Ghana was the only operating novitiate, I was asked to go there," Bro. Noel explains. "It was two interesting years I spent there. It cemented my own vocation, I was able to make my first vows.

"It was while he was working in this field that the Presentation Brothers asked Bro. Noel to continue his studies"

"I came back then to the West Indies and got involved with the schools of the brothers. I was asked to help out in an alternative education programme that the brothers had started in St Lucia, which was for kids who had probably dropped out of mainstream education.

"I wanted to offer that sense of support and encouragement. I was really involved in that programme, committed to it because I saw what it was providing to young people and students. It was a great fulfilment of my vocation because that's what I want to do, to give service."

It was while he was working in this field that the Presentation Brothers asked Bro. Noel to continue his studies. He came to Ireland, studying for three years in Milltown College. He came with the

intention of returning to the West Indies, but God had other plans.

"The brothers said then, would you stay here and work in Ireland in formation," he says. "It was something I had to discern, it was a big surprise. My intention was to go back then to the West Indies to do as much as I could with these young people.

"To be asked then to do something completely different that I wasn't even thinking about, forming young men to be brothers. I had to discern around that because it was a new direction.

"It was my own understanding around religious life that you can be called to go anywhere and I guess after that discernment period, I had to say yes, it's something God is calling me to that is new and challenging. That's how I ended up in Ireland working in formation."

Crucial

Having taken up the position, Bro. Noel found it to be a greatly fulfilling one. After feeling daunted at the start of this new ministry, he recognised how "crucial" it was to the young men.

"The young men who themselves feel called and the ones who want to become brothers, I am now the person journeying with them, accompanying them on their journey," Bro. Noel says.

"But I must say that after a few years, it's amazing how God directs us into new paths in our journey and in our lives. That kind of work has been very fulfilling to me. I've always felt it a great honour to journey with people who feel called. It is a critical aspect of their lives, they're making a huge commitment. To be able to be part of that is a great privilege and honour."

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



Children's Corner

Chai Brady

Perfect your secret messages with invisible ink

If you don't know what invisible ink is, or how to make it, you are missing out. It can be a great way to send secret messages to your friends that won't be intercepted by anyone else.

It's a method that can be tracked back for thousands of years and has been used by many spies seeking to avoid their messages falling into the wrong hands. The earliest examples humans can find of the use of invisible ink date back more than 2,000 years ago. But how can you make it?

Making invisible ink is a lot of fun and all you need are some basic household objects and the power of lemon juice.

Apparatus

- Half a lemon
- Water
- Spoon

- Bowl
- Cotton bud
- White paper
- Lamp or another something else with a light-bulb

Method

- Squeeze some lemon juice into the bowl and add a few drops of water.
- Mix the water and lemon juice with the spoon.
- Dip the cotton bud into the mixture and write a message on the white paper.
- Wait for the juice to dry so it becomes completely invisible.
- When you are ready to read your secret message or show it to someone else, heat the paper by holding it close to a light bulb.

Lemon juice is an organic substance that oxidises and turns brown when heated. Diluting the lemon juice in water makes it very hard to notice when you apply it to the paper, no one will be

aware of its presence until it is heated and the secret message is revealed.

Other substances which work in the same way include orange juice, honey, milk, onion juice, vinegar and wine. Invisible ink can also be made using chemical reactions or by viewing certain liquids under ultraviolet (UV) light.

Invisible ink was used in World War I by secret agents to send messages while they were on missions. British secret agents even had a list of ideal invisible ink materials in their training manual during World War II. During the wars both sides tried to one-up each other. They created new ways to hide their messages using a whole host of different methods to create invisible inks in order to escape detection by the other side.

After finessing the lemon juice technique, it would be worth becoming adapt at new methods of sharing secret messages, just in case the lemon juice secret is discovered and your cover is blown!

TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



Streaming often brings more to disappoint than to interest

I'd suspect most people's experience of TV dramas, especially on the streaming services, includes a long list of disappointments – especially series that were started but then abandoned after one or two episodes.

These thoughts were prompted by my lack of enthusiasm for the new *Star Wars* series **Andor** (Disney+). This is a prequel to a spin-off! *Rogue One*, the spin-off film, was quite enjoyable but the new series is lacklustre and, two episodes in, I don't think I'll stay the course. It was the same with *Obi-Wan Kenobi* and *The Mandalorian*. While it looks like no expense was spared on special effects, and the visuals are impressive, all of these series are let down by ropey plots, ponderous scripts and stiff acting – there must have been no money left in the kitty. Also, **Andor** is trying too hard to be edgy – in the opening scene our 'hero' Cassian murders someone and goes on the run, while there's a sleazy atmosphere at times that sits uneasily in a show that will attract children.

I won't give up yet on that other high profile prequel **Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power** (Amazon Prime). Watching on a big screen, the spectacle is eye-popping and the music is enhancing and entrancing, but like the others the script



J. A. Bayona directed the first two episodes of *The Rings of Power*.

is sagging under its own weight. The plot, however, has some promise with a quest that seems part justice and part obsessive revenge. Morfydd Clark shows promise as Galadriel (the part played by Cate Blanchet in the original trilogy) and it will be interesting to see how her tainted quest will

turn out. Two episodes in at this stage, I'll probably stick with it, though I prefer to steer away from the fantasy stuff as a general rule, and you won't catch me within a mile of all those Marvel Universe films. The universe as we have it is marvellous enough for me.

Back in this real world it

was good to hear a grown-up and thought-provoking debate on **The Hard Shoulder** (Newstalk, Friday). David Quinn of The Iona Institute explored issues around duty and freedom with Piaras Mac Éinrí of UCC. I don't know if it was intended to be a debate of opposites but the guests mostly found common ground, with some differences of emphasis. David wondered whether the concept of duty tended to be seen as old fashioned and 'musty', with the pendulum swinging now in favour of choice, rights and self-fulfilment, with a tendency to walk away from commitments once seen as lifelong. He instanced high divorce rates as an example, and indeed low marriage rates suggested there was a tendency to shy away from commitment in the first place. Today there was a danger that the one person's happiness was all important even if children and abandoned spouses suffered as a result. He thought we should be concerned rather than fatalistic about these trends.

Piaras Mac Éinrí had worked with the homeless and refugees and was impressed by the religious he met, committed to duty and putting the needs of others first. He found these nuns and priests "utterly dedicated" and "entirely admirable". Though critical of some Church actions

PICK OF THE WEEK

MASS

RTÉ One Sunday October 2, 11am

Fr Brendan O'Connor celebrates Mass in the RTÉ studios, Donnybrook, with a group of musicians and singers led by Cavan-based Angela Uí Fhloinn.

MONDAY NIGHT LIVE

RTÉ One Monday October 3, 10.35pm

New current affairs show, with panel and invited guests. Presenters include David McCullagh.

LEAD KINDLY LIGHT: REFLECTIONS ON THE LIFE OF JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

EWTN Tuesday October 4, 7pm

Deacon Stephen Morgan and Fr James Bradley discuss John Henry Newman's call to the Catholic Faith and the many sacrifices he made to follow God's will.

of the past, he said "believers and non-believers don't have to be at each other's throats".

Presenter Kieran Cudihy sounded like he was enjoying the discussion and usefully suggested that our generous response to the Ukrainian crisis showed a willingness to make sacrifices for others though he did get the rise of individualism, with some people self-obsessed – "the stars of our own show".

Finally, on **The Pat Kenny Show** (Newstalk, Wednesday), Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly was enthusiastic about some new initiatives – e.g. the abolition of children's hospital charges and free GP cards for children aged 6 and 7 – all positive (as with the

free primary books scheme announced last Monday morning) though some will be uneasy about how it will benefit rich people as well as the poor and others will think it might be better to give children back their right to be born. Though there was going to be only a reduction in drug payments there was to be free contraception for young women aged 17-25. Apart from the surprisingly sexist nature of this, I wondered what disease or ailment this move was addressing. There was no talk of free medications for those who are actually ill.

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Film

Aubrey Malone



Slow burning search for a lost childhood

It Is In Us All (15) begins with London-based Hamish (Cosmo Jarvis) travelling to his native Donegal to prepare his deceased aunt's house for sale. On the way he has a car accident. A boy from the other car is killed. Another one, Evan (Rhys Mannion), survives.

Hamish self-treats his injuries like a Buncrana Rambo. His DIY bandaging with duct tape and a Jeyes cloth, not to mention a bone-crushing arm setting, is near-primeval. (Was the taxi fare to the hospital too expensive?)

He doesn't seem to have any psychological ill-effects from the smash but afterwards two crucial questions are raised. The first is whether he had time to swerve before

crashing into the other car. The second is who was driving that car. Was it the dead boy, as Evan told the police, or himself?

The film also addresses another issue, i.e. that of Hamish's emotional ties to Donegal. He was there as a lad with his mother.

Did she harbour a love for Ireland that wasn't indulged? Hamish's father, a cold fish whom Hamish Skypes as he recovers from his injuries, insists she didn't. Hamish comes to doubt this after a series of interactions with locals. They know more about his past than he does.

This is a wonderfully understated film that asks more questions than it answers. It



Director of *It Is In Us All* (2022) Antonia Campbell-Hughes.

ends on a cathartic note that gives us tenuous closure on them – if that doesn't sound like a contradiction.

The cast is excellent. Not a false note is struck. Mannion shows great range. He goes

from taunting Hamish with allegations of negligence causing his friend's death to a burgeoning bond with him that's almost filial.

Jarvis keeps us on the edge of our seats wondering if he's

suffering more Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome than he lets on. He's a man of few words; everything is in the face.

Who's going to crack first, him or Evan?

A sense of foreboding characterises almost all the scenes. The fields brood in silence as the camera lingers on them, then moves onto another penumbral vignette. There are Pinter pauses. Scenes break off suddenly.

This is the directorial debut of Antonia Campbell-Hughes. She also wrote the script, and appears briefly as the dead boy's mother. What a wonderful actress she is. In a few short scenes she shows herself to be as effusive before the camera as she is restrained behind it.

Shooting often in shadow, she paints the Donegal landscape in rain-soaked shades that underscore the ponderous atmosphere coating the film. The tension echoes everyone from Martin McDonagh to the Coen Brothers.

From the get-go the film gives us the feeling it could segue either into love or violence. Campbell-Hughes treads that delicate tightrope with meticulous care.

She mixes the vaguely threatening behaviour of Evan and his ballet-dancing friends (no kidding) with Hamish's oscillation between guilt and a sense of diaspora that's calibrated as cerebrally as everything else in this captivating mood-piece.

Keeping going when there are no signs of gratitude



Daily fidelity is what keeps the spiritual life functioning in a healthy way. Photo: CNS

There are 10 meals in Luke's Gospel and each one is not only a table of food but also a table of the Word... just as we have in the liturgy of the Eucharist. Each meal is the setting for some important teaching. We are familiar with the Last Supper, the revelation of the Risen Lord at the meal shared on the road to Emmaus, the banquet to celebrate the return of the Prodigal Son, and Martha sitting attentively at the feet of the Lord while her sister prepares the food. The Gospel for this Sunday (Luke 17:5-10) is, what I call, the 'Parable of the Unadorned Table'.

“To believe is to give not only assent of the mind but also one's heart in a personal relationship with God”

The apostles asked the Lord to increase their faith. How did he answer them? Would their faith be deepened by an astounding miracle like planting a mulberry tree in the sea, defying all the laws of science? Sadly, many of those who witnessed the miracles of Jesus did not become believers. To believe is to give not only assent of the mind but also one's heart in a personal relationship with God. The word *creed* derives from the Latin, *cor-dare*, to give one's heart. Responding to the request of the apostles

The Sunday Gospel

Fr Silvester O'Flynn OFM Cap.



to increase their faith, Jesus did not give them lessons in theology, or visions or charismatic experiences. His answer is in the parable of the servant who is faithful to his daily chores. The increase of faith that Jesus wants is everyday faithfulness.

Imagination

Luke, as a writer, was a master of painting a picture in words, and it invites us to use imagination to get inside the story. The table in today's parable is unadorned and lonely. Here is a small farmer who has the one servant for field and table. One hopes that between field and table the servant will wash his hands! There is no womanly warmth or sensitivity to settings here. Drab, bachelor bareness. The place could do with a good cleaning...and new curtains. Last week's newspaper serves as a tablecloth, mottled in a crazy pattern of brown tea rings. The food is unexciting, but functional. No idle talk interrupts the serious business of replenishing an empty stomach. Each knows his place and keeps to it. There is mutual acceptance that 'good fences make good neighbours'. The master offers not so much as a grunt of gratitude: the servant expects none. Duty is done, another day is lived and life goes on. Unexciting, hum-

drum, ordinary. The parable ends thus: "When you have done all you have been told to do, say, 'We are merely servants: we have done no more than our duty.'"

To be faithful is to persevere, to stay the course, to keep going, especially when the going is tough and there are no signs of affirmation or gratitude. In today's first reading, the prophet, Habakkuk, encourages people to persevere in faith. He writes in a time of oppression, tyranny, outrage and violence, announcing a message of hope from God, but he encourages his people to be patient. "If it comes slowly, wait, for come it will, without fail. See how he flags, he whose soul is not at rights, but the upright people will live by their faithfulness" (Habakkuk 2:4).

“Some people gave up on winding their clocks or watches”

Our second reading today is Paul's encouragement to his disciple Timothy. "God's gift is not a spirit of timidity, but the Spirit of power, and love and self-control" (II Timothy 1:6). One of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit is piety, which is not to be confused with piousness. The real meaning of piety is being faithful to one's daily duties.

There is an old story about a remote Jewish village where they had somebody qualified in each of the necessary trades except

one. They had no clockmaker. This was long before there were digital clocks. No two clocks or watches showed the same time. Some people gave up on winding their clocks or watches. But others continued to keep them wound. Then a girl in the village married a clockmaker who came to live among them. People rushed in to him to get their clocks up to an agreed time. He had no problem with the clocks which had been wound daily. But the neglected timepieces had seized up and were beyond repair.

One's prayer-life might be for long periods at the unadorned, humdrum table. The faithful servant continues to wind the clock even when there is no excitement, no inner enlightenment, and no answers coming through. Faith grows through fidelity to the daily routine.

The faithful performance of daily duties is a sign of faithfulness in any job. But some people complain about repeated religious exercises. Mass is boring! The rosary is so repetitive! I'm always making the same confession! Yet the most important acts in life are repetitive...your heartbeat, breathing, eating, sleeping and so on. We breathe about a thousand times each hour. The human heart beats more than 4,000 times each hour. As I have a slow heartbeat, I had to get an implant inserted to ensure that my ticker will not dip below a safe rhythm. Do we ever call

these repeated actions boring? Daily fidelity is what keeps the body functioning in a healthy way. It is the same with the spiritual life.

Faithfulness

There is nothing glamorous about this unadorned faithfulness. One perseveres quietly and lovingly

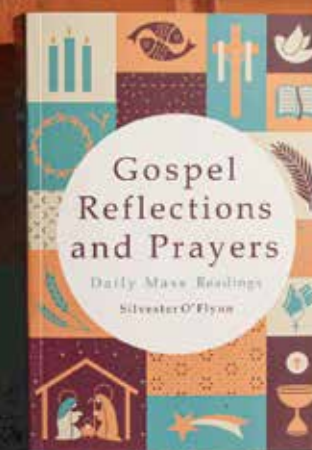
because faith believes that God is faithful. And that is enough. God reaches out to me 365 days each year in unwavering, faithful love. The least I owe to God is to make space for prayer 365 days of the year. We are merely servants: we have done no more than our duty.

Prayer

With the apostles we pray, "Lord, increase our faith." When our prayer is in darkness and lack of consolation, remind us that the Spirit we received in the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation is praying with us in ways beyond words. Strengthen us to remain faithful even when the table we dine at is unadorned, routine and lonely. We are merely your servants, doing our duty.

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Dying alone in the desert



Recently I received a letter from a friend who shared that she was afraid to accept a certain vocation because it would leave her too much alone. She shared this fear with her spiritual director who simply said, “Charles de Foucauld died alone in the desert!” That answer was enough for her. She went ahead with it.

Is that answer enough for those of us who have the same hesitancy, the fear of being alone?

“What can we learn from Charles de Foucauld who chose a life that left him to die alone in the desert?”

The fear of being alone is a healthy one. Jean-Paul Sartre famously wrote that hell is the other person. That couldn't be further from the truth. Hell is being alone. All the major religions teach that heaven will be communal, an ecstatic coming together of hearts, souls, and (for Christians) bodies, in one union of love. There will be no solitaires in heaven.

So, our fear of ending up alone is a healthy nagging from God and nature, perpetually reminding us of the words God spoke as he created Eve, it is not good for a person to be alone. Children are always mindful of that and feel insecure when they are alone. That's one of the reasons why Jesus taught that



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

they go to heaven more naturally than adults do.

But, is being alone always unhealthy? What can we learn from Charles de Foucauld who chose a life that left him to die alone in the desert? What can we learn from a person like Soren Kierkegaard who resisted marriage because he feared that it would interfere with a vocation he intuited was meant to have him die alone? Not least, what can we learn from Jesus, the greatest lover of all, who dies alone on a cross, crying out that he had been abandoned by everyone and then, in that agony, surrenders his loneliness in one great act of selflessness in which he gives over his spirit in complete love?

In a recent book, *The Empathy Diaries*, Sherry Turkle reflects on, among other things, the impact contemporary information technology and social media are having on

us. As a scientist at MIT, she is one of the people who helped develop computers and information technology as they exist today, so she is not someone with a generational, romantic, or religious bias against computers, smart phones, and social media. Yet, she is worried about what all of this is doing to us today, particularly to those who get addicted to social media and can no longer be alone. “I share, therefore I am!” She names a hard truth: If we don't know how to be alone, we will always be lonely.

Temperament

That's true for all of us, though not all of us are called by either faith or temperament to a monastic quiet. What Jesus modeled (and what persons like Charles de Foucauld, Soren Kierkegaard, and countless monks, nuns, and celibates have felt themselves called to) is not the route for everyone. In fact, it is not

the norm, religiously or anthropologically. Marriage is. Thomas Merton was once asked what it was like to be celibate, and he responded by saying, celibacy is hell. You live in a loneliness that God himself condemned; but that doesn't mean it can't be fruitful.

In essence, that's the response my friend received from her spiritual director when she shared her fear of taking up a certain vocation because she might end up alone. If you can be a Charles de Foucauld, you will be alone but in a very fruitful way.

“To sustain oneself in the loneliness of Jesus, as Merton says, is sometimes a flat-out hell, albeit a fruitful one”

There can even be some romance in proactively embracing loneliness and celibacy. Some years ago, I was doing spiritual direction with a very faith-filled, idealistic young man. Full of life and youthful energies, he felt the same powerful pull of sexuality as his peers, but he

also felt a strong draw in another direction. He was reading Soren Kierkegaard, Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, and Daniel Berrigan and felt a romantic attraction towards celibacy and the loneliness and aloneness within which he would then find himself. He was also reading the gospels, telling how Jesus died alone on a cross without any human person holding his hand. Like Jesus, he wanted to be a lonely prophet and die alone.

Idealism

There's some admirable idealism in that, though perhaps also a certain unhealthy pride and elitism in wanting to be the lonely hero who is admired for stoically standing outside the circle of normal intimacy. Moreover, as a lifelong celibate (and a publicly vowed one for more than 50 years) I would offer this word of caution. A romantic dream of celibacy, no matter how strongly rooted in faith, will meet its test during those seasons and nights when one has fallen in love, is tired, is overwhelmed, and has his or her sexuality (and soul) cry out that it does not want to die alone in the desert. To sustain oneself in the loneliness of Jesus, as Merton says, is sometimes a flat-out hell, albeit a fruitful one.

To die alone in the desert like Charles de Foucauld is answer enough.

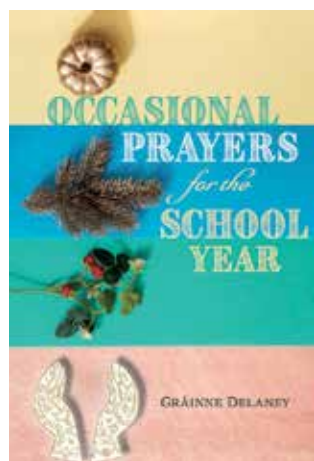
“There's some admirable idealism in that, though perhaps also a certain unhealthy pride and elitism in wanting to be the lonely hero who is admired for stoically standing outside the circle of normal intimacy”

BookReviews

Peter Costello



Prayers at school and the bonds of common belief



Occasional Prayers for the School Year
by Gráinne Delaney
Messenger Publications,
€12.95/£11.95

Peter Costello

This is an interesting book, and one which parents as well as school chaplains will want to read. Gráinne Delaney is Chaplain in Crescent College Comprehensive SJ for the last twenty years. A native of Dundalk she was educated in St Vincent's Secondary School and later at Mater Dei Institute of Education.

Activities

Long ago, in her activities with students and community, she realised that while formal school prayers could be readily approached, there were increasingly those special occasions which needed something immediately relevant. What do you say to guide and assuage the fears of young people when one of their contemporaries takes their own life, a terrible disaster, a shooting, bombing accident involving mass casualties, one has only to open the news online or in print to see the sort of unparalleled things that now regularly happen. What, too, does one say in approaching the outbreak of an ongoing crisis such as the war in the

Ukraine in which Ireland becomes involved by taking in refugees.

These prayers were collected or composed by Gráinne Delaney to be used most frequently at the Friday Morning Prayers in the Crescent. She observes, "If you pray these prayers you will be in this weekly praying community. Daily the assembly prays the prayer of St Ignatius. Others are welcome to join in: echoes here surely of the familiar apostleship of prayer!"

To give some structure to the book she follows the arrangement not of the ecclesiastical year, but the School year starting in September, and breaking off for Christmas, Easter and Summer holiday. July is marked off for prayers for past pupils, the "great majority" of the school community; and August, when students will be most in contact with nature and the outdoors, brings an adaptation of Pope Francis's message in *Laudato Si'*.

Simplicity

The compendium closes with the simplicity of the prayer of St Ignatius, which is perhaps worth closing this notice by bringing it once again before readers, perhaps less familiar with Ignatius in this important year in commemorating life and work.

Dearest Lord,
teach me to be generous;
teach me to serve you as you deserve;
to give and not to count the cost,
to fight and not to heed the wounds,
to toil and not to seek for rest,
to labour and not to ask for reward
save that of knowing I am doing your will. Amen

“These prayers were collected or composed by Gráinne Delaney to be used most frequently at the Friday Morning Prayers in the Crescent”



God in No 10: The personal faith of the Prime Ministers, from Balfour to Blair
by Mark Vickers
SPCK, €28.99/£25.00

Peter Costello

This is a remarkable book, one which goes where historians have in the past been reluctant to go. It is, even more remarkably, written by a working parish priest in London.

As the religious beliefs of the prime ministers in the 20th century was a topic regular historians felt best avoided, he has broken new ground in some way, having to go behind the standard biographies (of which there are many) and recull the archives, manuscript sources, and a wide variety of "minor sources", to find the material he has used. Anyone interested in British history from the aftermath of the Boer War to the Iraq invasion, will want to read this book.

It is packed with information and insights on some nineteen figures which are most enlightening. The pervasive influence of Renan on these people is interesting, for the French scholar had long passed out of fashion among controversialists.

The period covered by this book is often seen, especially since 1945, as one in which there has been a continuous decline in religious belief and church attendance. However, it is striking that there was no decline in No. 10. Even those few prime ministers who had not faith themselves had an official duty to see to the appointment of Anglican bishops, often a matter of disagreement if not outright public dispute. Once in office as First Lord of the Treasury, they could not escape religious duties.

Some of these people are, for the Irish reader, of greater interest than others. The last of his prime ministers is Tony Blair. Vickers carefully charts the religious career of Mr Blair, a career that many even in the Labour Party were

not familiar with. While he was in office Blair, following his wife's lead, was a sort of Catholic.

“Some of these people are, for the Irish reader, of greater interest than others”

Yet he was careful not to convert formally until he had left office. Politically and practically it would not have worked while he was still PM. However many Catholics were disgusted at the lies and subterfuges surrounding the Iraq invasion and the alleged "weapons of mass destruction". Blair's behaviour at the time seemed to many quite unworthy of a supposed Catholic, especially one who admired Hans Küng, as he said he did.

However, his interest in religion helped him greatly in Northern Ireland, as did his family connections with Northern Protestants; he spent many early holidays in Donegal. He could discuss religion with Ian Paisley in a way other British ministers could not.

Retirement

This is striking. On my one meeting I had in his retirement with Lord Bannside at an event in Trinity College Dublin, he was more than happy to discuss with me his book collecting hobby: he focused on Protestant theologians of the 16th and 17th century – not a field I was familiar with. He also talked to me of his regular visit to West Africa. I confess that I, like Tony Blair, found him an interesting character. And from this personal contact he was able to construct a peace deal.

Mark Vickers explores ultimately not personal belief alone, but also possible insight into the nature of God and the process of divinity. But it also raises, for Irish readers, the thought of what would such a book about our heads of government be like: what were the religious thoughts of Michael Collins, de Valera, J. A. Costello, and the others. I suspect that whatever may be thought by so many, they too may not have been quite as "orthodox" as we have come to think. What, for instance, in his heart of hearts did Mr Haughey believe? Clouds of unknowing surround them all.

This is a book so full of new perception that it has to be read not just by political buffs, as the Americans would say, but by anyone concerned with the role of religion in public life.

Religion and the lack of it at the heart of government

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.



Tony Blair in reflective mood.

History and all human life

Ask A Historian: 50 Surprising Answers to Things You Always Wanted to Know
by Greg Jenner
Weidenfeld and Nicolson,
€19.99/£16.99

J. Anthony Gaughan

This is a quirky book, but it could be very useful for one organising a pub-quiz. It records a history professor answering 50 questions from his students. The questions range across all the ages and even into pre-history. And for the most part they refer to the more bizarre episodes of human experience.

As the *News of the World* posters used to claim back in the 60s, 'All human life is here'! Greg Jenner classifies the Questions and Answers as follows: fact or fiction; origins and firsts; health and medicine; nations and empires; wars and battles; language and communication; history and pop culture. In replying to his students' questions, he exhibits the qualities of a remarkably able historian.

Under 'Fact or Fiction' Jenner is asked: "Is it true that a dead pope was put on trial?" In January 897, Pope Stephen VI ordered that the corpse of a previous pope, called Fortunatus, be dug out of his grave and tried for various crimes at a special synod! It was a show trial beyond parody.

Dark Ages

The question prompts Jenner to describe a period which historians named the 'Papal Dark Ages', when in the words of Eamon Duffy, the renowned Cam-

bridge historian, "The Chair of St Peter became the prize of tyrants and brigands and a throne fouled by fierce tides of crime and licentiousness...a ticket to local dominance for which men were prepared to rape, murder and steal."

Some Catholic apologists would claim that the survival of the Christian Church for 2000 years, despite its being administered by corruptible men, is a proof of its divine institution!

“The question prompts Jenner to describe a period which historians named the ‘Papal Dark Ages’”

Under Origins and Firsts one question prompts a discussion on the 'Windrush generation'. On June 21, 1948 a ship, the *Empire Windrush*, arrived in England with 1,000 passengers, 800 of whom had been residents of the Caribbean islands. Many were tempted to come by the promise of a job on the buses.

Most of these passengers were embarking on a new life in the 'Mother Country', having been citizens of the British Empire. They were the first members of the so-called 'Windrush generation', a community of predominantly African-Caribbean immigrants who came to live and work in the UK between 1948 and 1976.

Initially the British authorities sought to have these returned to the West Indies. The Labour govern-

ment feared that racial disharmony would add to Britain's then mounting problems. The immigrants subsequently faced widespread discrimination and were exploited by slum landlords such as the infamous Peter Rachman.

Then there was the sinister influence of Enoch Powell's 'rivers of blood' speech. And in recent times Prime Minister Theresa May's anti-immigration policy of creating a 'hostile environment' made their lives miserable with cruel and unlawful harassment.

Exchanges

The exchanges between the professor and his students reveal some curious facts. Caesar Augustus, the Roman emperor, is declared to have been the richest person who ever lived.

The first joke-book was the *Philogelos*, literally 'The Laughter-Lover', compiled by Hierocles and Philagrios in the Fourth century. Beauty treatment can be dangerous, even deadly – cue Botox.

'Why is Italy called Italy?' prompts a delightful pocket history of the modern State. Jenner is at his best when writing about the greatest 'lost texts' from history that we know existed but have not survived.

So this book is much like the 'curate's egg'! While it is interesting and very readable, the professor in some exchanges espouses the sophomoric humour of his students. And the book could well do without his strange personal attack on Mel Gibson.

A manual for church crawling

If These Stones Could Talk: the History of Christianity in Britain and Ireland Through Twenty-One Buildings
by Peter Stanford
Hodder and Stoughton,
€12.99/£10.99 pb

Peter Costello

Published two years ago in hardback, this book aimed at a popular readership now appears as a paperback and so becomes accessible to many who might have missed it. It runs from first century Glastonbury (a controversial beginning, but one which many like myself will sympathise with) down to the building of what they call "Paddy's Wigwam"

in the City of Liverpool – the Catholic Metropolitan Cathedral in Liverpool. Thus every development of faith, from the Middle Ages, the Reformation, and modern revivals and its public expression is covered. The book was written with great difficulty during the Covid-19 lockdowns. Now that wandering around is simpler, a copy of this book should provide ideas about destinations for many trips.

Possibilities

His final chapter deals with the possibilities of church going in the future. This is all very problematic. But it is noticeable of late in Ireland, that though at present few

teenagers and 20-year-olds attend any kind of church, among Catholics at least there seems to be a rise among those parents with young children. Some might see this as a happy augury for the future. But at the moment who can really tell.

Perhaps these attendees are among the New Irish, bringing into Ireland the more active habits of attendance shaped by other cultures.

But reading this book and going in search of the places he describes will provide an interesting experience, if not a revived sense of faith. In any case a book well worth buying, reading, and following in the path of.



Peter Stanford in a moment of leisure.

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of Holy God**

"May God enrich with every blessing all those who recommend frequent Communion to little boys and girls proposing Nellie as their model"

— Pope St Pius X, June 4, 1912

Children's Competition



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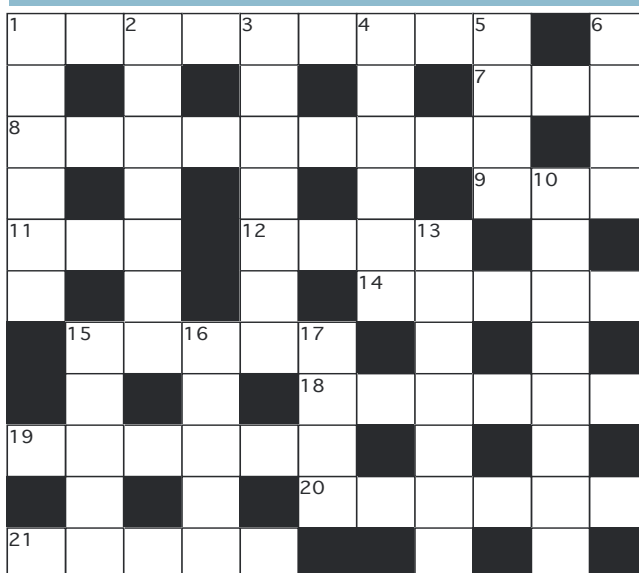


Classifieds: 01 687 4094

Leisure time

Crossword Junior

Children's 452



Across

- 1 Prize for winning in the Olympics (4,5)
- 7 Number that means a single thing (3)
- 8 Copying someone (9)
- 9 Took a seat (3)
- 11 You listen with this (3)
- 12 Unlock (4)
- 14 '_____, steady, go!' (5)
- 15 Break completely (5)
- 18 You should stand when you sing the national _____ (6)
- 19 Cask, keg (6)
- 20 In the Greek legend, Jason went looking for the Golden _____ (6)
- 21 Put seed in the ground (5)

Down

- 1 Plane that has no engine (6)
- 2 Carrick-on-Shannon is in this

county (7)

- 3 Grassy fields (7)
- 4 Golfers often use this club for the first shot (6)
- 5 Large pieces of wood for the fire (4)
- 6 Finest (4)
- 10 The people who come to see a show (8)
- 13 These plants might sting you (7)
- 15 Tiny (5)
- 16 Wear it in the kitchen to protect your clothes (5)
- 17 Fifty percent (4)

SOLUTIONS, SEPTEMBER 22

GORDIUS NO. 577

Across — 1 Appetisers 6 Amid 10 Icing 11 Esperanto 12 Yew tree 15 Nicer 17 Thai 18 Heel 19 Toast 21 The Holy Trinity 23 Risky 24 Yoga 25 Rain 26 India 28 Godetia 33 Greengage 34 Vying 35 Yelp 36 Horse sense

Down — 1 Arid 2 Priceless 3 Tight 4 Swede 5 Ripe 7 Manic 8 Deo gratias 13 Rich 14 Etching 16 Charmingly 20 Abolition 21 Tyranny 22 Lied 27 Dwell 29 Opens 30 Elvis 31 Mayo 32 Ogre

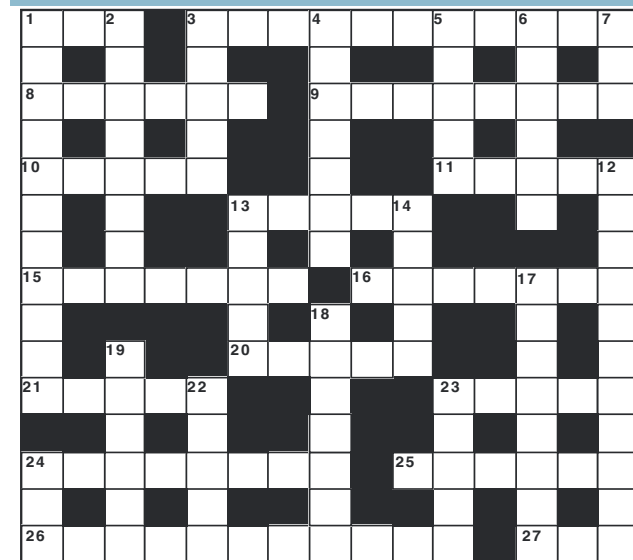
CHILDREN'S No. 451

Across — 1 Kilometre 7 Lambs 8 Ghost 9 Stream 11 Ink 12 Ashes 15 Acted 17 Bike 18 Rainbows 20 Jet 21 Presents

Down — 1 Kells 2 Limerick 3 Mistake 4 Togs 5 Enough 6 Bath 10 Enter 13 Stable 14 Skis 15 Aimed 16 Drive 19 Wet

Crossword

Gordius 578



Across

- 1 "The Local" (3)
- 3 Nonsense poem by Lewis Carroll (11)
- 8 Take what has been offered (6)
- 9 & 25a International dominion prevalent during Christ's lifetime (3,5,6)
- 10 Locomotive (5)
- 11 Work this when baking bread (5)
- 13 Makes a contented sound, as a cat does (5)
- 15 & 24d The source of a particularly difficult litter problem (7,3)
- 16 It may be attached to a motorcycle (7)
- 20 Small farm, especially in Scotland (5)
- 21 Strike an object with the fist (5)
- 23 Criminal (5)
- 24 Item of jewellery worn as a symbol of marriage (4,4)
- 25 See 9 across
- 26 George Harrison single which topped the charts

worldwide in 1970 (2,5,4)

- 27 In which a builder carries bricks (3)

Down

- 1 It is placed around a broken bone to help it heal in place (7,4)
- 2 Heck! A cab crashed, causing pain in the lumber region (8)
- 3 The Land of the Rising Sun (5)
- 4 Bird that frequents reed beds and marshy areas (7)
- 5 The Earth (5)
- 6 College grounds (6)
- 7 Oriental symbol, seen in pairing with Yang (3)
- 12 Extremely sharp turn (7,4)
- 13 Contagious fear (5)
- 14 Lady's garment (5)
- 17 Puerile (8)
- 18 County in the North West of Ireland (7)
- 19 Reservations one may have about something (6)
- 22 Super arrangement for keeping money (5)
- 23 Was engulfed with inner anger and frustration (5)
- 24 See 15 across

Sudoku Corner

452

Easy

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

Hard

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

Last week's Easy 451

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

Last week's Hard 451

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

Notebook

Fr Vincent Sherlock



Our role in sharing the blessing

MY AUNT MARY MARGARET will be 99 in November, please God.

I visited her recently in her home in Richmond, Virginia. This has become an almost annual event as I spend some time in a parish on Long Island, New York each year. Whilst there, I do a little parish work but enjoy a fair bit of free time as well. This gives me the chance to visit places but more importantly people I like to catch up with. A friend of mine says: "People make places" and I am a firm believer in that truth.

My aunt is one of those people who makes places. Throughout her life, she has had an incredible ability to connect with people. She might be filling her car with petrol (or "Gas" as she would say!) and strike up a conversation with someone at the next pump, doing likewise. The conversation would lead to a deeper chat and an invitation to call to see her if in Richmond.

Invitation

Quite often the invitation would be accepted, the person would arrive at her door and the story would continue. I prefaced this by saying "she might" but, in truth she did.



This happened more than once. Equally a conversation with an Arabian woman on a train, led to years of friendship and visits. On that occasion, my aunt was carrying a large potted plant and the "stranger" offered to carry it for her. They sat beside each other on the train journey, the stranger became Miriam, and the rest was "future"! It is a gift to be able to connect in this way and it is a gift she has fully utilised through the years.

St Paul's letter writing is well documented, so too my aunt's. She has through the years written countless letters to people all over

the world that she encountered along the way. Just as Paul offered encouragement and support, my aunt shared messages of support, encouragement, love and friendship with those who had come to occupy a sacred place in her life, albeit from a chance but meaningful meeting.

As I was leaving her this year, she asked me if I would like to take an image she had of Our Lady. She said she did not want to "force religion on me" but I said I am happy enough with religion! Going to her room, she returned with an image of Our Lady and the child Jesus. "I would like you to have this," she said, "but only if you want it." Then the story...

Pots and pans

Many years ago, as she drove down the street, she noticed a woman on the footpath who was carrying pots and pans. She stopped and asked if she could help. The woman told her that she was taking the pots and pans to her brother's house and my aunt invited her to sit in the car and that she would take her to her brother's house. The address was given and these two strangers, surrounded by pots and pans made the journey.

On arrival, the lady went into the house but came out immediately as my aunt was driving away, saying that her brother insisted she come in for a while. She did! A friendship began between my aunt and this Greek family. Through the years she kept in touch and in the woman's final days, my aunt visited with her. She asked my aunt to take the image, it was from her home in Greece and she wanted my aunt to have it. It has been in her home since that day, until she handed it to me. I think she felt I would look after it and, in that way, she was extending the wishes of her Greek friend, Kiki, that the image would be looked after.

I was happy to be entrusted with this and, at a deeper level, I share it with you because we are all being asked to look after something precious. Others have entrusted to us stories of the past, memories and blessings and their hope, in doing so, was that we would keep them alive and share them with others.

That is the way I see the Faith and our role in sharing the blessing that it is. If we neglect to recall and share the story, there are many who will never come to hear, know and love it. The sharing of the story

Month of Our Lady

I recall a priest at home speaking of Our Lady once. He had an incredible devotion to her and when you would meet him in his car, he would wave and always, always there was a rosary beads in his hands. He spoke of Our Lady – maybe it was the Feast of The Assumption. I don't recall the homily but he finished with a prayer to Our Lady that he attributed to a young man who saw Mary very much as his mother. His prayer for her intercession was personal and direct: "You can't say you can't. And, you won't say you won't. So, you will, won't you?"

does not have to be complicated. Taking a leaf from my aunt's book of life, it is as simple as saying "hello" to the person beside you. Who knows where the conversation will lead?



LITTLE WAY PAKISTAN FLOODS APPEAL

Flood-hit victims urgently need our help

Bishop Khalid Remat, of the Apostolic Vicariate of Quetta, is urgently asking for our help for 3,600 of those in great need as a result of the very heavy monsoon rains. He writes to The Little Way Association: "Those whose homes were damaged or destroyed need above all food and clean water. Polluted water is likely to cause, especially to children and pregnant women, pneumonia, diarrhoea, dengue fever, on top of the malnutrition they are enduring."

"Our project, upon which ten volunteers and ten members of staff will work free of charge, will aid flood victims in the districts of Sibi, Loralai and Pashin. With your help 600 families will be provided with food items such as wheat flour, cooking oil, sugar, tea, pulses, rice and milk packs. The families will be given drinking water, high energy biscuits, soap, washing powder and other hygiene products."

PLEASE GIVE WHAT YOU CAN TO HELP SOME OF BISHOP KHALID'S PEOPLE

THE SITUATION IS DESPERATE. Your gift will be forwarded WITHOUT DEDUCTION to Bishop Khalid to provide food, and basic essentials to help the flood victims to overcome their sorrow and hardship. Please give whatever you can. Thank you.



"Our Lord does not look so much as the greatness of our actions, but at the love at which we do them."

~ St Therese

PLEASE HELP FEED THE HUNGRY

Please spare a thought for the millions who die each year of hunger and disease in mission lands. Your donation will relieve the pangs of starvation, and every euro you send will be forwarded to a missionary priest or sister for food for the hungry.

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 €6 or more for each Mass

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:

€..... **PAKISTAN FLOODS APPEAL**

€..... **HUNGRY, SICK AND DEPRIVED**

€..... **WELLS AND CLEAN WATER**

€..... **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.

IC/09/29