

# The Irish Catholic

## MARTIN MANSERGH

Every effort needed to keep churches open  
Page 9



## #METOO MOVEMENT

How the sexual revolution ruined everything  
Page 16-17



## MARY KENNY

What Meghan's baby loss tells us  
Page 5



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# 'Relief' at return to Mass as parishes now face challenge of Christmas

Chai Brady, Ruadhán Jones and Jason Osborne

There is widespread relief at a return to public Mass in the Republic, with many parishes now looking to the challenge of having as many people as possible present for Christmas Mass.

Catholics in the North, however, will have to wait until December 11 before a return to public Masses.

Fr Tom Ryan of Ennis in Co. Clare told *The Irish Catholic* "there's nothing like the presence of people on the ground and people are very happy that Mass is resuming and looking forward to being part of the community".

In Co. Roscommon, Fr Joseph Gavin in Ballaghaderreen said parishioners are "absolutely enthusiastic...I suppose people are anxious to get back, the volunteers are delighted to be able to come back again to help out".

Many parishes are now looking to the challenge of Christmas Masses and are conscious that not everyone will be able to attend either on Christmas Day or Christmas Eve. Instead, parishioners will be asked to attend a Mass at some stage over the Christmas period and many parishes will operate a ticketing system.

In Portlaoise, Co. Laois Fr David Vard said: "We're glad to be open, but we're a bit nervous about crowds and how we're going to do it and how can we get to as many people as possible during Christmas with-

out turning anyone away and with being safe".

In Co. Galway, Headford parish priest Fr Ray Flaherty said that "Absence makes the heart grow fonder! There's that kind of sense about it, that they've really, really missed it.

"I suppose it's a bit like the water pump, it's only when the water goes that people realise the importance of it," he said.

Fr Francis Judge in Crossmolina, Co. Mayo said that "even though the Masses won't be long it's just the fact that they can come together and to be together and to pray.

"It means an awful lot to them. It means an awful lot to the community," he said.

In Abbeyleix, Co. Laois Fr Paddy Byrne summed up the feeling as "relieved".

"The Eucharist is about being together, and whilst obviously we maintain our correct procedure, we're well fit for it and we really are confident that we will do so absolutely as we did robustly with proper procedures and sanitisers".

Fr Denis O'Mahony in Co. Kerry said that the overwhelming feeling "is happiness and relief that people can get to Mass.

"But Christmas will be a different situation: it will be more difficult to

» Continued on Page 2

## 'Come and be what you receive'



Fr John Bracken PP of Holy Cross Church in Dundrum, Co. Dublin, gives Communion to a parishioner on December 1 after public worship restrictions were lifted in the Republic. Photo: Chai Brady.

## OUR CHURCH

The glue holding communities together  
PAGE 19



## DAVID QUINN

Judging John Paul II

PAGE 13



## MICHAEL KELLY

Re-shaping the Church to suit ourselves  
PAGE 18



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## Inside this week

**Maria Byrne**

**Stopping Grinches from stealing Christmas**

Page 32



**Personal Profile**

**Al Byrne: Turning work into prayer**

Page 34



**Book Reviews**

**The meaning of Christmas customs**

Page 37



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# As we approach Christmas, we need to cultivate more patience

**Editor's Comment**  
**Michael Kelly**



One of the most edifying things about Church history is that in every generation the Christian community rises to the challenge and response to crises as they occur. And the Faith emerges stronger and the faithful discover God in a new way.

Covid-19 is far from the greatest test that the Church has ever faced. The last 2,000 years have often seemed like one crisis after another, but the response has also often shown people at their greatest.

## Returning to Mass

I was thinking about this during the week when I returned to Mass for the first time in weeks as coronavirus restrictions were lifted. In my local parish in Dundrum there was a lively team of volunteers ensuring that everyone was safe and that physical distancing and sanitising protocols were adhered to. They were, as parish priest Fr John Bracken noted, more than stewards – they were exercising a ministry of welcome.

Maybe when Covid-19

restrictions lift and parishes get back to a more normal routine, we might consider whether a ministry of welcome as a permanent feature in a parish would be a good thing.

Such 'greeters' are commonplace in American parishes and Irish people who attend Mass while in the US often comment on how welcome they feel.

## Challenge

Christmas is going to be a particular challenge for parishes. In Dundrum, for example, usually around 3,000 would attend Mass on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. This year, it will be possible only to accommodate around 300. Many parishes will be the same and so many people may be unable to go to Mass on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day itself. Parishes will encourage people to participate in the Eucharist over a more extended period – say, for example, the twelve days of

Christmas. Those of us who can, should do this.

**“Covid-19 is far from the greatest test that the Church has ever faced”**

We will need to show great patience and kindness this Advent and Christmas – to one another and to our priests and parish volunteers. It's a bit of a cliché to say that this will be a Christmas like no other, but it will – and we need to be realistic about expectations. Many parishes

will lay on extra Masses this festive season, but priests will not be able to say Masses back-to-back on Christmas Day to facilitate everyone who wants to attend. We must be understanding about this and accept the limitations the pandemic imposes upon us. Rather than complaining, a gentle smile of understanding would go a long way.

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## Continued from Page 1

please people – they have their preferences,” he said.

Cork-based Dominican Fr Maurice Colgan said there was a huge “sense of excitement” amongst parishioners.

However, he also expressed concern about the upcoming celebration of the nativity.

“The church is normally packed, with standing room only. For that Mass we'll definitely do a booking system. We're considering it for the weekends. But what we're definitely going to do is put on more Masses,” he said.

In the Dublin suburb of Ballinteer Fr Liam Belton said that people are delighted to be back, but that it is also a boost for priests. “It's a big plus to ourselves here to see people in the pews again, it really is”.

In Clara, Co. Offaly Fr Joe Deegan said people “are very happy that we're allowed back to have some kind of public worship...It's positive for people – it's great”.

Fr Gary Chamberland of Dublin's Newman University Church said that “The Eucharist is never really complete without the people of God present...People were really beginning to feel this time, even more I think than the first time, a separation from the Eucharist”.

Fr Ted Sheehan in Glounthaune, Co. Cork sounded a note of caution. He said he is worried that a lot of young families have not yet returned to Mass. “We're looking at the future of our parishes, and a lot of families with young children didn't appear to come back”.

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# Irish 'Mother Teresa' Sr Ann praised on air for her good works

Jason Osborne

Tribute was paid to Sr Ann Thomas on *Live-line* earlier this week, as Ger Smith told of her care for himself and his siblings in Ballymun after their mother was taken into care for Schizophrenia.

Mr Smith related how himself and his siblings were left in a flat in Ballymun, with his brother being the oldest at 14. Asked who ran the house, he referenced the "home-help", Sr Ann Thomas, of the little Sisters of the Assumption.

Sr Ann worked for Sophia, a housing agency, and quickly became more than home-help. She began to visit twice a day, sometimes more frequently.

"She'd come in in the morning and make sure

we were up, getting out the school – I never got on well in school so I went and done a course, so she made sure we went to that. And she'd reward us then," Mr Smith told.

"We were very, very lucky... We knew that out of everyone that was in our flat the day our mammy went the one person we could trust was Ann, and she was the only one who never left us. Everybody else just done their job and got on with it, but her job wasn't just Sophia housing... the time that lady gave us. We would have never seen past six months."

Sr Ann's cousin, Josie Flynn, corroborated Mr Smith's story, saying, "We actually never knew until Anne died just all the good work she had done because she never told anybody that she did all this good work."

"She was just quiet and she went about her business, and not one of us ever knew, including her sister....She definitely, definitely was a Mother Teresa," Ms Flynn said, a sentiment which Mr Smith echoed.

Sr Ann died in October, but Ms Flynn said her goodness was recognised by all: "Even the condolences, like if you looked at the condolences that people had left it was from families, 'We would have never managed without Ann, Ann really helped us.'"

## Bring the light of Christ home



Parish secretaries of Glynn/Barntown parish, Co. Wexford, Lorraine Sheridan and Alice Purcell with candles and cards for collection at the parish office, as part of their 'Drop in during Advent' and 'Bring the Light of Christ home for Christmas' campaigns.

## Limit on funeral attendance 'inhumane'

Ruadhán Jones

Aontú leader Peadar Tóibín called restrictions on attendance to funerals "illogical and inhumane" after the Government confirmed only 25 may attend.

As part of the decrease in restrictions, public worship is allowed with a max attendance of 50, while funerals remain limited to 25 people.

TD Peadar Tóibín told *The Irish Catholic* that the restrictions on funerals "do not make sense".

"We think it's completely illogical and inhumane to keep the figures for funerals down to 25," Mr Tóibín said. "We think that funerals are one of the most important events in any family's life."

"When we say goodbye to our loved ones, it's a critical time emotionally and for our mental health and our personal relationships. All of those radically suffer if we don't have the opportunity to grieve properly with our community and family."

Mr Tóibín added that he has seen no explanation from the Government as to why funerals are more restricted than Masses.

"I can only figure out that it's an oversight or a slowness on the part of the Government to respond because the fact that they have 50 as the maximum for regular Mass," he concluded.

## Bishop calls for prayer after football star Maradona dies



Diego Maradona pictured in his element in 1986.

Chai Brady

A bishop has called for prayer for Argentine soccer star Diego Maradona who died last week after suffering a heart attack at the age of 60.

Maradona is regarded as one of the greatest soccer players of all time, and was recognised by FIFA as one of two Players of the Century. After Maradona's death, one Argentine bishop encouraged prayer for the athlete's soul.

"We will pray for him, for his eternal rest, that the Lord offers him his embrace, a look of love and his mercy," Bishop Eduardo Garcia of San Justo told *E11 Digital*.

Maradona's story is "an example of overcoming," the bishop said, noting the humble circumstances of the athlete's early life. "For many children who are in dire straits, his story lets them dream of a better future. He worked and reached important places without forgetting his roots."

Maradona was captain of the Argentine soccer team that won the 1986 World Cup, and was a highly successful professional soccer player in Europe.

Despite his talent, substance abuse problems kept him from reaching some milestones, and kept him from playing in much of the 1994 World Cup tournament, because of a suspension from soccer.

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## Church organisations 'not taken seriously' by politicians – Bishop Paul Dempsey

Ruadhán Jones

Bishop Paul Dempsey called on Government to recognise the integral role churches play in their communities, saying their work is often overlooked.

### Heart of society

Bishop Dempsey said the Church should be at the heart of society, not at the fringes and it should be "drawn on more from the political sphere".

"I think somehow or other that Church organisations are not taken as seriously as they could be and should be

in our local parishes," Bishop Dempsey said.

Commenting on a report about the role of the Church post-Covid-19, the bishop of Achonry told *The Irish Catholic* that the Church is often "the glue that holds communities together".

"Any priest in a parish, any lay volunteer or parish minister, is very much in tune with the local community because we're at the heart of community – we're there in people's lives, we're there in their joys, we're there in their sorrows," he said.

The pandemic highlighted

the important social and spiritual work the Church does, Bishop Dempsey said.

### Education

He emphasised the Church's contribution to education in particular, saying he is "amazed" when politicians talk of a "baptism barrier".

"They talk about this thing called the 'baptism barrier'," he said. "I have never in my 23 years being a priest and bishop come across a baptism barrier. We've always been opening and welcoming to people of all faiths in our schools."

The Church should be

more outgoing in preaching its message, Bishop Dempsey added, saying that it has "so much to say to society".

"Sometimes, unfortunately, we don't hear the commentary in society about what the Church has to say and the importance of its message because we get caught up in our own internal affairs," Bishop Dempsey said.

"We shouldn't be internalising; we should be reaching out to as many people as possible to try and help them and inspire them with the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

» See on Page 19

## Celebrating a return to public mass



Fr Maurice Colgan and Becky Kealy, who headed up the campaign in Cork for a return to public Mass, celebrate the announcement of the return to public Mass.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Advent is our 'circuit breaker'

Advent holds the key to 'saving Christmas' and "unlocking its true powerful meaning" the Primate of All-Ireland Archbishop Eamon Martin has said.

In a homily delivered on the first Sunday of Advent, Archbishop Eamon spoke of the North's two-week 'circuit breaker' lockdown which led to public worship being stopped until December 11.

He said: "It is Advent that holds the key to 'saving Christmas' and unlocking its true and powerful meaning. The season of Advent is a four week 'circuit-breaker' in preparation for Christmas, a call to come back to God."

## A commitment to truth is more important than ever



Jason Osborne

The age of social media has given heftier weight to the old saying about how a lie can travel around the world before the truth has put its shoes on.

### Prime example

Here in Ireland, we were given a prime example of this when it was reported that female students at a Catholic school in Carlow were told they shouldn't be wearing tight clothing because the male teachers at the school found it "distracting".

It's a good story, but the only issue is – there was nothing about it.

Speaking on RTÉ's Morning Ireland, the principal Ray

Murray clarified the situation, and in doing so, poured cold water on all of the incendiary claims that had long been circulating on social media at this stage – including from journalists.

Mr Murray described how some of the school's female students hadn't been adhering to the dress code, with the principal describing the situation as becoming more like a "fashion show" than anything else. As such, the school organised a number of assemblies to remind its female students of the uniform policy.

And that's it. That's the story: the age-old tale of a school reminding its students of the rules.

The storm that developed out of this reveals far more about some sections of the media, and a growing desire to seek out and punish than it does about unsavoury behaviour at a secondary school.

On Twitter and in print, journalists and politicians

grasped at rumours and hearsay that the girls had been "body-shamed" by male teachers who couldn't control themselves. A mob was whipped up which promptly descended upon the school's male staff, with the word 'paedo' being used liberally.

All this because a school decided to enforce its uniform rules.

### Response

The disproportionality of the response to the actual events belies a profound sickness lurking below the surface of our society. It's reminiscent of – if not demonstrative of – the scapegoating mechanism societies have employed since time began, which sees the singling out of a person or a group of people based on their perceived slights or unworthiness, and the subsequent negative treatment of them.

While social media, coupled with fast, loose and irresponsible journalism has provided

new challenges for those seeking to nudge the world in a loving direction, there is one large step that can be taken to slow the headlong rush into a world ruled by the mob.

### Truth

A commitment to the truth is essential to the building of any sort of stable society. Had journalists not promulgated an untrue story and run with it, there would be fewer people today in Ireland living under a black cloud, namely, the male teachers at Presentation College Carlow. Had we been a little quicker to search out the truth of the matter, we would have been more clearly able to see Christ in the teachers, rather than monsters.

If creating a more loving, just and truthful world is ever to be successful, each member of society has to make a personal commitment to the truth. The alternative is to swing at shadows until the whole world falls down around us.



# What Meghan's baby loss tells us

Meghan, Duchess of Sussex, was much praised for writing openly about having suffered a miscarriage last July. She and Prince Harry felt "unbearable grief" after they lost their second baby. The miscarriage occurred while she was changing the nappy of her one-year-old son, Archie. "I knew as I clutched my firstborn child that I was losing my second."

## Sorrow

She wrote about her experience in the *New York Times* because, she said, many women went through the sorrow of miscarriage, and it was seldom spoken about. "Despite the staggering commonality of this pain [of miscarriage], the conversation remains taboo, riddled with shame, and perpetuating a cycle of solitary mourning." Although she acknowledged that not everyone wished to speak publicly about their private issues, she wanted miscarriage to be recognised as "a grief" and "a loss".

Indeed so. Miscarriage should be recognised as a real loss, and in recent years



**Mary Kenny**



Meghan Markle.

a more sensitive attitude has developed among the medical profession. In our mothers' time, the medical view was, "get over it – put it behind you."

## An unbearable grief

Yet within Meghan's plea for understanding and compassion for those

who lose a child, there is another message, of which the Duchess herself may not be entirely aware. She is describing a pregnancy (and she hasn't disclosed how many weeks she was pregnant) as "a child". She calls this episode "an unbearable grief" and a cause for mourning, because a

human person has perished, albeit in the course of nature.

Duchess Meghan has given recognition to an affirmation always made by pro-life advocates: that the unborn is a human life.

Meghan, now aged 39, was brave to expose her feelings in the way she did, as she does attract unkind criticism and malicious

remarks: there's a simmering British resentment that she "stole" Harry away from his family, his country and his regimental mates, turning him into a hipster Californian. So she is vulnerable to the brickbats.

## Harry's feelings

She has also exposed Harry's feelings, by being open about this personal – and family – issue. Harry said a little while ago, in his support for climate change that he would only

have two children – "two, max", in his own words.

But Harry, too, was devastated about the miscarriage. It may cause him to reflect that we cannot always assume that we can have the number of children we "plan". Sometimes nature, both benign and destructive, is in the driving seat.

Hopefully, Meghan and Harry will be consoled by another pregnancy, safely accomplished.

## Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith

Fr Tony Flannery, who has had his difficulties with the Vatican, has been asked by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith to assent to Catholic orthodoxy on a number of issues, including "gender theory". Fr Flannery has quite reasonably remarked "I don't know enough about gender theory to have any strong views on it."

Allow me, if I may, to elucidate "gender theory". Basically, it rests on the notion that there is no such thing as biology: male and female differences are merely "socially constructed". That is, they

are made by society, not chromosomes. The most influential gender theorist is an American academic called Judith Butler, whose prose is almost incomprehensible, but whose power has entered, and conquered, practically all of academia.

This is behind the muddle over trans-genderism and whether persons born male can become women, including menstruating, giving birth and breast-feeding. Contradict this at your peril! *The Guardian's* star columnist, the left-wing feminist Suzanne Moore was denounced by over 300 of her colleagues and had

to quit her job because she challenged "gender theory" with the revolutionary claim that only women give birth.

The Vatican is on-trend in raising the inflammatory issue of "gender-theory", and Fr Flannery is probably wise to withhold any opinion about it.

Anyway, it's a welcome step that Fr Flannery has been allowed to say Mass again for the funeral of his brother. Any ordained priest should be able to say Mass, it seems to me, and doctrinal differences with the Vatican's office should be put in a separate category.

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# Dundrum parishioners delighted as they return to public Mass



Worshippers were delighted to return to public Mass this week as Covid-19 restrictions were lifted on December 1.

Fr John Bracken PP of Holy Cross Church in Dundrum, Co. Dublin, welcomed the Faithful after the six weeks of level 5 lockdown ended.



Photos: Chai Brady



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# Churches light up red to highlight Christian persecution



Martina Purdy, Elaine Kelly and lighting designer Ciáran Kelly stand outside St Patrick's Church which was lit red for Red Wednesday in Downpatrick, Co. Down.

## Chai Brady

Churches across Ireland were illuminated red last week to highlight the continuing persecution of Christians around the world.

The initiative was inspired by the charity Aid to a Church in Need which supports Christians facing intimidation, torture and even death.

St Patrick's Church in Downpatrick, Co. Down along with the crucifixion scene outside, were lit blood red from 8pm for seven nights. This was done during the 'Week of Witness' which is a global initiative and ran from November 25 to December 1.

"Our red church on St Patrick's Avenue has been a reminder that Christians continue to shed their blood for their faith," said Fr John Murray PP. "And this stark image has certainly been noticed by

the people passing. A group of young people even got out of their car one evening to take photos.

"When one Christian suffers, the whole church suffers because we are the body of Christ. Too often this persecution is hidden and not highlighted. It's important to shine a light in this darkness," he said.

A new Dublin group called 'Stop the Persecution of Christians D15' was set up this year to highlight the issue.

They held a series of events during the Week of Witness and pushed for the illumination of church exteriors throughout West Dublin on Red Wednesday, November 25.

They featured a guest speaker Fr Peter Johnson after Mass in Our Lady Mother of the Church on Sunday November 22, who spoke

about the current persecution in his native Nigeria.

Praying the Rosary and prayer vigils were held during the Week of Witness and they coordinated the ringing of church bells at 3pm on Friday November 27. Information leaflets were given to schools and members of the public.

Famous landmarks that have been illuminated red in recent years to highlight this issue include The House of Parliament in London, the Colosseum in Rome, where Christians were put to death, the statue of Christ the Redeemer in Rio Brazil, St Patrick's Cathedral in Melbourne and the Vatican.

It is estimated that many thousands of Christians are martyred every year for their faith and 245 million Christian face serious forms of persecution in more than 70 countries, including imprisonment and torture.



Volunteer Team of Stop the Persecution of Christians D15 at Our Lady Mother of the Church, Castleknock.



Stop the Persecution of Christians D15 volunteer Cathy Molloy and Fr Sean outside Chapelizod church.



Paula Donnelly, Mary Desmond and Martin Sneyd hand out leaflets about Christian persecution to the public outside Our Lady Mother of the Church, Castleknock.



Volunteers Edward MacManus, Rosemary Lennon Maher and Ellen Troy distribute leaflets in Castleknock in Dublin highlighting the persecution of Christians.



Stop the Persecution of Christians D15 volunteers Gerard and Daire Sheehan outside Our Lady Mother of Hope Church, Clonoe.



Fr Billy Meehan at St Mary's Church, Irishtown, Clonmel, Co. Tipperary celebrates a special service after their evening Mass for Red Wednesday.

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## Martin Mansergh

### The View



# Every effort needed to keep churches open

**N**ovember was the month the skies began to lift. In a year that for most people has been an endurance test there was some limited compensation in the fact that on average, despite incidents of flooding and high winds that brought trees down, the weather has been distinctly better than average, though not in all places.

As usual, the Covid-19 crisis lasted far longer than originally anticipated, but the extensive counter-measures embedded in an EU-wide safety net should tide us through to the point where a strong pent-up recovery takes over. The new normality will not be exactly like the old. We have learnt that there are other and sometimes better ways of doing things, but that certainly does not mean abandoning valuable activities that we have regrettably temporarily had to forego. Renewed and near-normal safe social interaction, when it comes, will be appreciated by everyone.

**“The Government have to balance the needs of health and the economy”**

Few countries, including Ireland, succeeded in avoiding a second wave. But quite a lot has been learnt here. The death rate and hospitalisation were well down, and the alarming escalation in cases was arrested in time. The schools re-opened, and have largely remained open. There have been tragedies, but overall neither the health damage nor the economic damage has been as catastrophic as earlier feared. Despite lapses, community cohesion and discipline have been good. The Government have to balance the needs of health and the economy, which, except for the very short term, are more complementary than contradictory, but the community has to remain persuaded to stay with the strategy. In emergencies, personal liberties are curtailed for the common good, but they must be restored, once the emergency is over.

### Level 3

A feature of the return to countrywide level 3 restrictions this week is that this

time Mass and religious services will be allowed with limited numbers. If it is necessary to move back from level 2 over Christmas to level 3 in the New Year, every effort should be made to keep churches open. Religious practice makes an important contribution to the well-being and satisfaction with life of worshippers as well as to the wider wellbeing of the parish. Many places round the country only have a church, a school and a sports ground, where other facilities such as a shop, pub or post office are long gone.

Vaccination provides some prospect that next year the siege will be lifted. Health experts will determine the priorities, but once vaccination starts the incidence of the disease and the risk from it should begin to reduce for everyone. The discovery of vaccines has raised the prestige of university research, and in Germany underlined the value coming from the Turkish immigrant community now into its second generation.

### Election

The sky has been lifting elsewhere as well. The level of participation in the US presidential election was very encouraging, and gives the lie to cynics who say that if voting changed anything ‘they’ would abolish it. American institutions have certainly been stress-tested. The populist wave in many countries in recent years and now receding should not be dismissed, but taken as a warning that the causes of alienation need to be seriously addressed.

The vital difference democracy makes is giving people the opportunity at regular intervals to change their rulers and political direction peacefully and constitutionally, without the necessity for either revolution or civil war. That does depend on those who contest elections being democrats willing to accept an adverse result. The level of partisanship in the world’s leading democracy, including systematic denial of the other’s legitimacy, has become extreme, and a far cry from when a Republican President Reagan worked constructively with a Democrat Speaker of the House of Representatives Tip O’ Neill. All-out political warfare, which led to impeachment proceedings first against



A socially-distanced congregation are pictured at the first public Mass on June 29 at St Patrick’s Church in Wicklow after the first lockdown. Photo: Susanna Braswell

President Clinton, then President Trump, is not healthy. A better domestic atmosphere and a return to multilateral cooperation are devoutly to be wished.

Joe Biden is proud of his Irish roots. He is only the second Catholic US President after John F. Kennedy, who lifted Irish morale, when it was badly needed, in 1963. There is no disguising that Catholic opinion is divided, here and in America, because of Biden’s support for the status quo on abortion and same-sex marriage. However, these are primarily matters for the individual states to legislate on, with the courts, including the Supreme Court, interpreting the law. So far, US presidents have seldom featured in these decisions. As experience in Poland and Irish experience relative to the ‘X’ case show, changing the law where potentially emotions on both sides of the argument can run very high is no easy matter.

**“Joe Biden is proud of his Irish roots. He is only the second Catholic US President after John F. Kennedy, who lifted Irish morale”**

For campaigners, support for their position is what matters. Others wonder whether candidates for supreme office should thereby gain a free pass with regard to everything else. Few of us here can identify with the composite slogan

that appeared on a recent banner of pro-Trump supporters, ‘Pro-Life, Pro-God, Pro-Gun’.

There is the old thorny question, whether truly Catholic public officials are bound to implement

the moral teaching of their Church in their executive decisions and legislative enactments. Debates about this do not always acknowledge that the function of law and of religious moral teaching is different, or that in a

diverse society, as opposed to a largely homogenous one that independent Ireland was in its early decades, the degree to which religious values should be reflected in law and the constitution is a matter, following democratic argument, for judgment and consent expressed either directly by the people or their representatives.

Brexit has yet to be resolved, but the shift away at the last minute from creative destruction to more conventional norms of democratic government and administration at Westminster may help. No deal makes no sense. Devolution, however challenging to work, is indispensable in tackling both Brexit and Covid, which is running much higher in Northern Ireland than in the Republic, so that solutions for both can be best adapted to NI circumstances, including its border with the rest of Ireland.

## How would you like to be remembered?

### Leave a priceless gift as part of your legacy

One small action now could change the future for a child like Nalukena from Western Province, Zambia.

By including Sightsavers in your will you can help our hero surgeons like Mr Ndalela (pictured at the right) treat and protect children like Nalukena from avoidable blindness in some of the poorest parts of the world.

Nalukena is now smiling as she received medication that will protect her from the painful eye condition trachoma for a year.

**Last year, generous support from those who chose to leave a gift in their will to Sightsavers was enough to protect 8,695 communities from the pain of trachoma.**

### Please remember Sightsavers in your will

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**Sightsavers**



# Fr. Donal O'Mahony's home-saving legacy



**F**r Donal O'Mahony – an activist, an advocate, a peacemaker and a negotiator – was an extraordinary man. For more than 30 years, he was on the frontline of homeless prevention. He had a unique vision, improving housing rights for families and individuals. And he did something no one had done for tenants in Ireland before – gave them a voice. He had the courage and dedication to make a real difference. His legacy now lives on in Threshold, a charitable organisation dedicated to housing rights and homeless prevention, founded by Fr. O'Mahony in 1978. And now in an era when housing has become one of our most scarce resources, Fr. O'Mahony's vision for a safer and fairer Ireland is more important than ever.

**“In 2004, he founded the Capuchin Franciscan Peace Centre in Pretoria, South Africa”**

Hailing from Cork, Fr. O'Mahony was educated at CBC, Rochestown College. After



initially working as a sports writer, he joined the Capuchin order in 1958 and travelled the world. Unable to remain a bystander to injustice, he fostered a role in peace-building, and being a gifted and natural mediator, achieved many outcomes where violence was averted and lives were saved.

Fr. O'Mahony acted as an intermediary in a number of high-profile kidnappings including that of Tiede Herrema, the Dutch-born industrialist who was kidnapped by an IRA splinter group led by Eddie Gallagher and Rose Dugdale in 1975. The case led to a long-running siege in Monasterevin, Co Kildare, which lasted for 35 days. It was eventually ended with the help of Fr O'Mahony and the safe release of Dr Herrema, who ran the Ferrenka company in Limerick.

Fr. O'Mahony also worked in Northern Ireland during the Troubles, promoting and facilitating dialogue between opposing paramilitaries, as an alternative to violence.

Further afield, he was a member of an international team who successfully negotiated the release of 106 Nicaraguan university students imprisoned by the government in Honduras. He later successfully negotiated the release of an English-Jewish mother and daughter kidnapped in Italy. He also entered talks with Muslim leaders with regards to protecting Christian schools in Lebanon.

Fr. O'Mahony sought to instil the concept of non-violence further internationally. As a visiting scholar in Berkeley University, California, he

**“Fr. O'Mahony turned his activism to seeking housing justice and he put homelessness firmly on the political map”**

gave a series of public lectures on the subject.

In 2004, he founded the Capuchin Franciscan Peace Centre in Pretoria, South Africa. It was from this centre that emerged the major non-violence project for the continent of Africa: The Damietta Initiative.

But outside of the international arena, Fr. O'Mahony's greatest contribution in Ireland was the establishment of Threshold in 1978. He was appointed chaplain to Dublin's flat-dwellers by the Archbishop of Dublin in the 1970's. In the course of his work he saw the conditions of returned emigrants and young people who had travelled up to Dublin looking for employment. Forced to live in squalor and sub-standard accommodation with no protection of tenancy, he was sympathetic to their plight. Fr O'Mahony knew that someone had to speak out for these young people. He was far ahead of his time in his approach to creating change – and redefined what we now understand homelessness to be. He believed that just because someone had a roof over their head did not mean that they necessarily had a home.

“A person may have an address and a door key but if they are living in overcrowded conditions, without basic facilities in unsanitary conditions, if they are cold because they cannot heat themselves, if they face eviction, if they are poor and can't reasonably afford rent, then it is only right to call that person homeless.”

Fr. O'Mahony turned his activism to seeking housing justice and he put homelessness firmly on the political map. This stirred him to set-up Threshold. Since Threshold's foundation it has assisted in the region of half a million people on the cliff edge of becoming homeless.

Fr. O'Mahony passed away in 2010 at the Marymount Hospice in Cork at the age of 74. The announcement of his death was met with golden

tributes. People spoke of his modesty and his dedication, giving song to an “unsung hero”. It is thanks to him that in Ireland today, there Threshold is still working to end homelessness, in all its guises.

**A legacy still going strong**

A significant legacy was left on the housing sector in Ireland. Threshold has continued with the work and pioneering ethos of Fr O'Mahony, expanding to serve the needs of communities all over Ireland. Threshold is still fighting for the most vulnerable; to improve standards in rented accommodation and ultimately helping to protect families from the nightmare of homelessness.

Today, during Ireland's housing crises and throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, Threshold remains a frontline service, often a person's first port of call if they are losing their home. With so many suffering job losses and reduced incomes this year, people from all walks of life are dialling Threshold's number, and finding help at the other end of the line. Threshold is more determined than ever to do everything possible to ensure families can stay safe in their homes, the homes they have come to know and love.

Because once a person or family falls into homelessness, it's a frightening spiral that is incredibly difficult to break out of. So Threshold acts before that happens, preventing homelessness, and fulfilling Fr. O'Mahony's mission in Ireland. Still to this day, Threshold remains the only organisation working with tenants to prevent homelessness, proof of the remarkable vision of the late Fr. O'Mahony.

**How Threshold works**

Now operating a nationwide Freephone service and Web-Chat function for all those seeking assistance, Threshold responds to 300 requests for help a day. Last year, Thresh-



old helped 70,000 people with housing problems. Of those, 20,000 people were protected from homelessness thanks to Threshold's intervention.

Housing Advisor gets to work – taking every possible action – offering sound and practical advice; negotiating with landlords; representing the person or family; finding

**“The enthusiasm and determination to help every person who needs help, regardless of their location in Ireland”**

A team of 40 Housing Advisors work 9am to 9pm, taking calls and operating weekend emergency lines when needed. In addition to our helpline, the public are invited to email in queries or questions, or to use our newly launched Webchat live on [www.threshold.ie](http://www.threshold.ie). Throughout the pandemic, our team has been working solidly to understand the effect of the crisis on renters, and amplifying their voices to government to protect their rights and to create lasting change.

When a person contacts Threshold, a specialised







# 8,351

## families saved

The number of families we saved from homelessness in just one year. This included 7,916 children.



ways for them to meet their rent and keep their home; helping them find an alternative home when needed; bringing sensible solutions to government.

Student or family, retired or working, there's no criteria – Threshold is here with a listening ear, with the know-how and experience, the enthusiasm and determination to help every person who needs help, regardless of their location in Ireland.

### Threshold: Who we are

When a family, couple or individual suddenly find themselves at risk of homelessness, Threshold takes immediate action to help keep them in their home.

- We offer free, confidential and expert housing advice.
- We challenge unreasonable rent increases and illegal evictions.
- We act as a point of contact to provide guidance and negotiate solutions between landlord and tenant.
- We are a frontline service for those most at risk of losing their privately rented accommodation.

### A phone call – the difference between home and homeless

It was 4.30pm on a damp afternoon during the pandemic. A family of five, the Stauntons, Maggie and Christy, and their three young children had just done

the 'big shop' in the supermarket. But when they got home they saw their entire lives scattered in the front garden – personal belongings, clothes, the kids' toys and even their pets.

The men who had been sent to evict them during the Covid-19 emergency moratorium on evictions were still working, and wouldn't listen to Maggie's pleas to stop.

Maggie had already called and emailed their landlord, begging him for a temporary rent reduction. They had been threatened with an eviction if they didn't pay up. But as both Maggie and Christy had lost their jobs, they simply couldn't.

**“There are countless stories like these that go from the brink of disaster to a happy ending”**

Jack, the youngest, was already crying, watching his favourite teddy being tossed in the mud. Maggie says, “I broke. It was my most terrifying moment as a parent.”

A sympathetic neighbour advised them to call Threshold. Sinéad, their Housing Advisor, told them the landlord's eviction notice was invalid – he couldn't evict them because of Covid legislation. Also, that the family qualified for rent supplement.

This is just what Maggie needed to hear. Because of public kindness, we were able to help Maggie's family right through their battle and ultimately save their home.

There are countless stories like these that go from the brink of disaster to a happy ending. But now more than ever, families like the Stauntons need kindness like yours.

### Making a Will, leaving a gift for future generations

In these difficult times, many are looking to the future, thinking about the legacy they want to leave on the world. Making your Will is a personal, sensitive and important thing. It's a decision you make in your own time, when you're ready. Naturally, your loved ones will come first when you're making your Will. But all of us want to leave the world a better place – not just for our family and friends – but for people who have been hit by traumatic events, by bad luck or unfairness.

A gift in your Will to Threshold can help to deliver

hope for children and families into the future. It can help Threshold to answer more calls, support more families to keep their homes, improve the rights of tenants and ensure their voices are being heard. Your legacy will be the gift of a safe, secure home for generations.

### Your gift is a foundation for life

We all know that homelessness is not just the absence of a home. It takes away the foundation for life. It damages health, emotional health and childhoods. So your gift will truly be a foundation for people's lives.

### It's a wonderful promise to future generations

Your gift is like a wonderful promise to people, families and future generations – that no matter what homelessness problems and challenges arise in the future, Threshold can be there for those who need us most, when they need us most. So even a small gift in your Will can save people from homelessness for generations.

### You define your own legacy

By being so visionary and kind – by standing up for your values in this way – you are

shaping your own legacy and how you wish to be remembered. But you are also being a powerful role model for family, friends and future generations of your family.

“For me making my Will was about three things that matter to me. Firstly, and most importantly, it was about the legacy I leave to my loved ones. The second thing was more about who I am today – making a promise to my family and a charity now while I'm still living life. And third, it's part of my own modest personal legacy – how I want to be remembered by those that matter most to me.”

– Legacy Donor

## Our gift to you

We know that making or amending a Will can feel daunting and can be costly. This is why we have partnered up with LawOnline (www.lawonline.ie) to offer you a free Will making service. This free and simple-to-use service means you can make a Will for free or amend an existing Will for a significantly reduced price.

Call us today, in confidence, to avail of this service. There is no obligation to leave a gift to Threshold to use the service, but of course if you do, your support

will help to protect families from homelessness for generations.

To avail of this offer or to find out more about leaving a gift to Threshold in your Will, just contact Katie Hennessy on 01 635 3618 or email Katie at [legacy@threshold.ie](mailto:legacy@threshold.ie).

If you enjoyed learning about the life of Fr. Donal O'Mahony, and would like to know more about the work of Threshold please send a message to [fundraising@threshold.ie](mailto:fundraising@threshold.ie) or write to us at Threshold, First Floor 25-28 Strand Street Great, Dublin 1 D01 XP04. You can also find out more about our work at [www.threshold.ie](http://www.threshold.ie).

**If you know of anyone who is facing an eviction or struggling to pay the rent – please tell them to contact Threshold straight away by calling our National Freephone Helpline on 1800 454 454.**



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## Prepare a Way for the Lord

### The Sunday Gospel

Fr Silvester  
O'Flynn  
OFM Cap.



Two great prophets stride into our liturgical readings for the Second Sunday of Advent, Isaiah and John the Baptist. We usually think of prophets as people who foretell the future but that is only partially true. The real meaning of prophecy is revealing and proclaiming God's presence in dark and difficult times.

Last Sunday we reflected on hope as the great virtue of Advent. Hope is one of the three theological virtues, along with faith and charity, which keep us rooted in God. Hope is the strong root that keeps us going even when faith can see no clear answers and love struggles in the face of injustices and hurt. Hope is stronger than optimism. Optimism may be based on a false foundation such as a hunch or a superstition. Hope is rooted in nothing less than God's presence even at the worst of times. God's time will come. In today's second reading, Peter tells us how God's calendar is different to ours, for with the Lord a day can mean a thousand years, and a thousand years is like a day.

Situations can change overnight. Most of us clearly remember a few months in 1989 when the Berlin Wall was smashed and communist rule was overthrown in one country after another without a shot fired. Who could have foreseen it?

### Isaiah

The greatest of the prophets (God's 'revealers'), Isaiah, provides today's first reading. The Jews were quashed, exiled in Babylon for 50 years. They hung up their harps, so joyless was their depression. Then, overnight there was a new king, Cyrus, who announced that they could return to Jerusalem. "Her time of service is ended, her sin is atoned for," Isaiah tells them to prepare a way for the Lord, get ready for the return to their homeland. He compared the road home to a new highway through the wilderness.

In Adolf Hitler's time the 'final solution' was like Babylon revisited. Many of the inmates of the concentration camps lost all belief in God. How can you believe in God if this mad, murderous regime is allowed to exist? But there were heroic believers, prophets, who assured the prisoners that the voice of the prophets was louder than that of the thundering demagogue, Hitler. One brave prisoner scratched these words on a cell wall: I believe in the sun even when I see it not; I believe in love even when I do not feel it; I believe in God even when He is silent. That is hope.

### John the Baptist

John the Baptist is a link between the Old Testament and the New. His time was like our own in many ways. Although there were very dedicated people and reform groups like the Essenes, yet by and large religion had lost its vitality. Mediocrity prevailed. The legalistic people, scribes and pharisees, had choked all joy out of religion. The clerical people who ran the temple were into a money-making racket, fleecing the pilgrims with all sorts of taxes. Excessive legalism



Christ's baptism by St John the Baptist at the Jordan River is depicted in a stained-glass window at the Co-Cathedral of St Joseph in Brooklyn, New York. Photo: CNS

and authoritarian clericalism...sounds a bit familiar. We are the untouchables.

There had been no outstanding prophet for hundreds of years until John the Baptist. His primitive appearance and association with the wilderness struck a chord with peoples' deep memory of God leading their ancestors through the wilderness into freedom. He buoyed up their hope that someone special was coming after him. His task was to prepare the people through repentance of their sins and a ceremony of washing.

### Prepare for Christmas

John the Baptist recalled Isaiah's roadworks and we too can take that imagery to challenge our conscience in preparing the way for Christmas.

Do I have crooked ways to straighten where I have deviated from the commandments and ideals of Christ? Are there winding ways where I am not fully honest with God...with others...with myself?

Every valley must be filled. These valleys are the low times when I wandered from God's presence and support. Confidence in God has been low. I have allowed the bad news take over my thinking. I have not given adequate time to prayer. The light of faith is very dim.

Every mountain must be laid low. These mountains are the huge obstacles which I imagine are insurmountable. I lack the confidence of the psalmist. "I lift up my eyes to the mountain. From where shall come my help? My help shall come from the Lord who made heaven and earth."

What hills must be flattened? Pride makes me look down on others. I subject them to my judgement. I boss them. I need the grace of humility.

Rough ways must be made smooth. The jagged edges of my personality irritate others...when I am insensitive, lacking in generosity or unwilling to compromise.

### Prayer

*O God, may I always know you as Someone-Coming. May I never lose hope. Help me to see that you are always present.*

*Take me and use me to be someone-coming for others. May I be caring towards those who are neglected, and sensitive to those who are hurt.*

*Use me as the source of good news for those burdened by the sadness of sin, as the spark of joy for those who are depressed.*

*Maranatha, come Lord Jesus, come.*



# Judging a saint: the legacy of John Paul II after the McCarrick report



The Polish Pontiff's reluctance to believe abuse allegation is a black mark against him, but it does not take from the greatness of his papacy, writes David Quinn

Pope St John Paul II does not emerge well from the recently published Vatican investigation into Theodore McCarrick, the former and now disgraced cardinal archbishop of Washington DC [Pictured below with the Pontiff]. His long career flourished under the pontificate of the Slavic Pope. But does this mean there is now such a black mark against his papacy that all his achievements must now be discarded and forgotten about? Emphatically not.

Let's first of all examine what John Paul knew about Theodore McCarrick, or rather, what he heard about him.

In 1981, John Paul made Fr McCarrick Bishop of Metuchen, followed by Newark in 1986, both dioceses in New Jersey. At this point no allegations against Archbishop McCarrick were known to the Vatican.

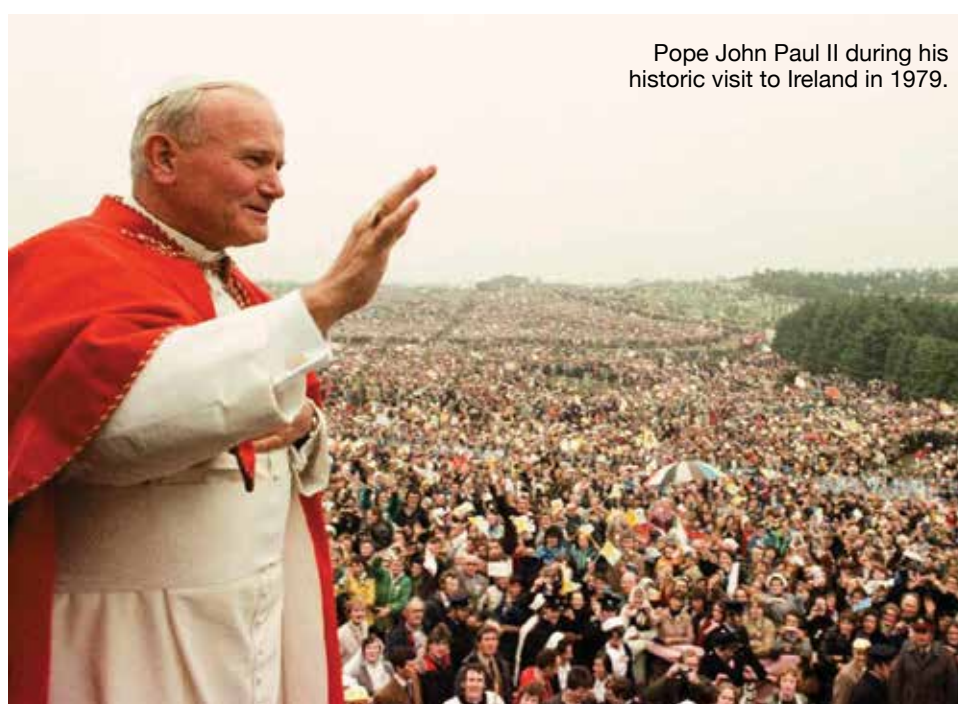
His big appointment came in 2000, when he was moved to Washington DC, becoming a cardinal the following year.

By this time, allegations that Cardinal McCarrick had engaged in sexual relations with seminarians were known to the Vatican and the Pope. There were also allegations that he was guilty of paedophilia with his 'nephews'.

In the end, John Paul chose not to believe any of the allegations, just as he chose not to believe allegations of abuse made against the founder of the Legionaries of Christ, Fr Marcial Maciel, who was a monstrous figure who abused men, women and children.

## Believing

This is, of course, very different to believing the allegations, and turning a blind eye, which is what occurred



Pope John Paul II during his historic visit to Ireland in 1979.

again and again in the Church worldwide making the clerical sex abuse scandals even worse than they already were.

Is John Paul's reluctance to believe the allegations against former-cardinal McCarrick and Fr Maciel a black mark against him? Yes. Does it call into question his personal sanctity or discredit his entire pontificate? No, because personal holiness does not protect a person against terrible, damaging errors of judgement. Sainthood is not the same as perfection, it is instead confirmation that a particular individual led a life of holiness and great personal virtue and service to others.



As his for overall pontificate, beginning in 1978, let's review it again and remind ourselves of its achievements. The first thing to remember is that John Paul II was Polish, and was elected Pope when Poland was still a communist country. Half of Europe still languished behind the Iron Curtain under the domination of the Soviet Union.

At this point, it was by no means certain how long this situation would persist. The Cold War still raged, and in many ways intensified. The Polish Pope helped to set in motion the events that would

help to bring about the fall of European communism. His epoch-making, historical visits as Pope to his native country galvanised resistance to the communist government in Poland and added huge impetus to the Solidarity movement.

## Communism

Within a few short years, communist rule in Poland had been fatally undermined and this helped to undermine communist rule in the rest of Eastern Europe and then the Soviet Union itself. The Berlin Wall came down in 1989, and the Soviet Union was no more by 1991. The speed of the fall was incredible in the end.

Not long after that, the countries of Eastern Europe were members of the European Union, ardently supported by Pope John Paul.

Was he alone responsible for the fall of European communism? Obviously not. But he played a very important role, and for this alone his place in history is assured.

He also lent his assistance to democratic movements in other parts of the world, not least in South Korea, the Philippines and South America. The Catholic Church helped to bring about the fall of the military dictatorship in South Korea, Marcos in the Philippines and Pinochet in Chile.

Ahead of a visit by John Paul to Chile in 1987, he told reporters that the church should play the same role in Chile as it did in the Philippines.

The paper pointed out: "In Chile, as in the Philippines before President Ferdinand E. Marcos's overthrow last year, the Church has forcefully denounced human-rights violations and limitations on political freedoms by the government."

Within the Church, John Paul is remembered, among many other things, for some of his great encyclicals including *Veritatis Splendor*, a very necessary rebuttal of moral and theological relativism, and *Evangelium Vitae*, in which he coined the phrase, 'the culture of death', and gave massive impetus to the pro-life movement with his leadership.

## Historic

He inaugurated World Youth Days and World Meetings on the Family, the former galvanising millions of young people, and the latter drawing attention to the Church's key teachings on the family, a matter dear to John Paul's heart.

He is remembered in Ireland for his visit here in 1979, which drew enormous crowds, even if what happened that year was wider than it was deep.

But in other countries, his visits had long-lasting effects, not least those to Poland, already mentioned, the Philippines, various parts of Latin America as well as Africa.

In France, he revealed the Church to be more alive than it looked to many people when a crowd of over one million young people gathered in Longchamp racecourse outside Paris for the final Mass of World Youth Day in 1997.

A firm believer in ecumenism, he further improved relations with various of the Protestant Churches, the Orthodox Churches, as well as with the non-Christian faiths, in particular Judaism. Who can forget the image of him praying at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem in March 2000, the Millennium Year?

This has only been the briefest review of his papacy, but even this ought to be enough to remind us of its epochal, historic and overwhelmingly positive impact on the world, which is one reason why so many people, including so many world leaders, flocked to Rome for his funeral in 2005. John Paul should not be consigned to history because he helped to make history.



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# It is the Faith that sustains us in times of trial



To many secular eyes, the very idea that anyone would seek participation in public worship of God is alien, writes **Declan Ganley**

**O**n Wednesday of last week, just before America relaxed for its annual Thanksgiving holiday, the US Supreme Court ruled against the Governor of New York's Covid-19 related ban on public worship. The full judgement makes interesting reading (and for those interested it can be found on the internet) but as part of his opinion, Justice Neil Gorsuch summed up the situation in New York as follows: "the Governor has chosen to impose no capacity restrictions on certain businesses he considers 'essential.' And it turns out the businesses the Governor considers essential include hardware stores, acupuncturists, and liquor stores. Bicycle repair shops, certain signage companies, accountants, lawyers, and insurance agents are all essential too. So, at least according to the Governor, it may be unsafe to go to church, but it is always fine to pick up another

bottle of wine, shop for a new bike, or spend the afternoon exploring your distal points and meridians. Who knew public health would so perfectly align with secular convenience?"

## Justice

In that short paragraph, the Justice captures the modern world's perception of what is important, and what is not. To many secular eyes, the very idea that anyone would seek participation in public worship of God, is alien, odd, and unworthy of serious consideration. In a sense, they are right - it is not of this time. It is, in fact, timeless. Our need to engage in public worship stretches back beyond history itself.

**“Some in modern Ireland might want to forget why these rights were enshrined in our Constitution in the first place”**

Catholics do not need to be told the central importance of public worship and access to the sacraments. And that importance was not lost on those that drafted the Constitution, who had the foresight to include this line in the opening paragraph: "We, the people of Éire, humbly acknowledging all our obligations to our Divine Lord Jesus Christ, who sustained our fathers through centuries of trial..."

And later, in article 44, went on to write: "The State acknowledges that the homage of public worship is due to Almighty God. It shall hold His Name in reverence, and shall respect and honour religion."

**“Under the Constitution, it should have been left to the sole discretion of churches and other religious groups to temporarily restrict, reduce, or otherwise mitigate against the risk of Covid-19”**

Article 44 continues: "Freedom of conscience and the free profession and practice of religion are, subject to public order and morality, guaranteed to every citizen."

Notably, these are stronger and more specific guarantees of the right to public worship than provided for in the U.S. constitution, which was the basis for last week's US Supreme Court ruling.

On Friday, the Government here announced that the ban on public worship would no longer apply as of this week and Catholics returned to Mass on Tuesday.

We will, they say, be 'allowed' to return to Covid-mitigated public worship. This was a great relief to many Irish Catholics, and to those of other faiths, who yearn to return to safely managed public worship, and receive the sacraments.

But this was never something that is the Government's gift to give. The ban itself - and any return to level 5 or any further ban on public worship - is clearly unconstitutional.

## Legal ban

There should never have been a legal ban, nor even an 'advisory' ban. Under the Constitution, it should have been left to the sole discretion of churches and other religious groups to temporarily restrict, reduce, or otherwise mitigate against the risk of Covid-

19. A job, which, to the Church's great credit, it seemed by all evidence to be performing well.

The only circumstances in which the State would be within its constitutional right to impose a ban would be if there was clear, unimpeachable, evidence, that public order was threatened by the holding of religious services. No such evidence has ever been made public - likely because no such evidence exists.

## Public worship

Because the State has not ruled out bringing back the ban on public worship, it is now a matter of public interest that the ban's constitutionality be tested in the Irish courts in a similar manner to the way New York's ban was tested in the US Supreme Court. That is why the case presently before the Irish courts seeks to do just that. In that case, we are asking the courts simply to reaffirm the rights that were written into the Constitution and adopted by the people.

Of course, some in modern Ireland might want to forget why these rights were enshrined in our Constitution in the first place. They may not even understand why such rights would be considered essential by so many of us.

And that's why those rights are in the constitution in the first place - not for the days when there was no prospect of them being threatened, but because the people who drafted our Constitution had the foresight to realise that a time like the present might come. When it came, they wanted to ensure that the right to public worship was protected.

As people of faith, and Irish citizens, we have a responsibility to ourselves, and to future generations, to defend those rights today, so that they are there when they are needed by generations to come.

The Faith, the constitution says, "sustained our fathers through centuries of trial". In this present time of trial, it sustains us still. And we must fiercely defend our right to practice it.

*Declan Ganley is a Co. Galway-based businessman and his case challenging the ban on public worship is due before the courts again on December 8.*





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# How the sexual revolution ruined everything



The relaxed moral norms of today come at a much greater cost than advertised, writes **Oisín Walsh**

**W**e've landed in a paradoxical place in terms of sexuality. In the bad old days, it was scandalous to deviate from the Catholic norms surrounding relationships. Nowadays, to be seen to adhere in any way to such norms is infinitely more scandalous. Pre-marital relations or (God forbid) promiscuity, were considered abnormal, disordered, even pathological. Today, the reverse is true. Chastity or (God forbid) celibacy, is viewed as unhealthy, suspect, or evidence of some sort of sexual repression.

For art, film, music, books, or television shows to have an impact in our culture, it is almost a necessity for them to be sexually explicit. This year has seen the monumental rise of *Normal People*, a BBC series that has the entire country and beyond tuned in to watch a pair of teenagers having sex. Then there's *WAP*, a song by former stripper Cardi B, that opens with the line: "There's some whores in this house." And due to Covid-19 restrictions, the HSE has

promoted 'phone sex' as a healthy alternative, given that most young people, supposedly, are already used to sending nude photos to each other. Anyone who raises an eyebrow at any of the above is liable to be ridiculed, laughed at and swiftly dismissed as a sexually repressed prude.

## Relaxed morals

However, the relaxed moral norms of today come at a much greater cost than advertised. It has been said that since our abandonment of Christian values, we have traded a world where nothing is permitted but everything is forgiven, for a world where everything is permitted but nothing is forgiven. Since the introduction of reliable artificial birth control in the 1960s, it seemed like people were now free to do what they wanted, when they wanted. We were never going to have to put up with finger-wagging moralists again.

Fast forward half a century, and the opposite has happened. Sexual encounters have been divided almost entirely into two distinct categories: casual or criminal. The former type brings with it a total disregard for the true purpose of sexuality within a relationship; the latter brings a set of rules, regulations and taboos the 1950s could not have dreamed about.

For example, most major college campuses in Ireland have in the last few years set up periods in the calendar for 'Sexual Health Awareness and Guidelines,' or 'SHAG Week.' These weeks usually

occur at the start of the academic year, when new students arrive amid a flurry of handouts about sexually transmitted infections (STIs). When students arrive on campus they are handed free contraception and are simultaneously instructed to attend consent classes, which are increasingly becoming compulsory in an effort to educate young boys out of rape and sexual assault. Here is the paradox in action: "We encourage you to use these condoms in the next week or so, yet suspect that you are a potential sex offender until we teach you otherwise."

**“For art, film, music, books, or television shows to have an impact in our culture, it is almost a necessity for them to be sexually explicit”**

This paradox stems from the obvious fact that all sexual encounters are not morally permissible. The old line was drawn at the unambiguous pillar of marriage; the new line is drawn at the flimsy post of consent. The flimsiness is laid out on the Planned Parenthood website: underage people can't consent, intoxicated people can't consent, consent for one thing never means consent for another, consent is never implied, consent can be



withdrawn at any time, etc. If consent is absent, the encounter immediately jumps across no-man's land, from the casual to the criminal. All notions of unspoken romance, no matter how hopeless, have been abandoned. In its place we now have state-sponsored ads showing a young, very uncomfortable man having his shoulders massaged by a middle-aged woman, under the banner 'enough is enough'. Is it little wonder that in 2020, sexual activity among young people is at an all-time low?

The modern world wants all expressions of sexuality to be completely shame-free, yet all

sexual misconduct to be brutally punished. It is these hot and cold winds that have created the unstoppable tornado of 'sexual misconduct allegations' that we read on a daily basis. A pursuit of excessive 'mercy' is followed closely by a pursuit of excessive 'justice.'

## Teaching

So, what does Church teaching have to say to this mess? The commandments on sexual morality are clear. The Lord himself tells us that we should neither commit nor think about adultery. In the New Testament, particularly the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), Jesus reiterated and even strengthened the laws governing sexuality. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* assures us: "The sixth commandment and the New Testament forbid adultery absolutely" (2380). The Church emphasises the integration of sexuality within the person. In

**“Fast forward half a century, and the opposite has happened. Sexual encounters have been divided almost entirely into two distinct categories: casual or criminal”**



this way, sexuality becomes a unified force driving us towards the good, as opposed to a barrage of temptations leading us to disintegration. God's plan for sexuality occupies the hollowed-out middle ground of today's casual/criminal paradox. It protects the sanctity of sexuality, while acknowledging its great risks. The heart of that divine plan is that the expression of sexuality belongs within the context of marriage and must be open to the possibility of new life. Everything else is off the cards.

**“The modern world wants all expressions of sexuality to be completely shame-free, yet all sexual misconduct to be brutally punished”**

That puts us in quite a tough spot. How can we respond to this seemingly impossible call? It's safe to say that we do not live in a culture that plans to revert to any form of biblical chastity any time soon. Furthermore, Church teaching on sexuality is arguably as unpopular within our individual selves as believers, as it is in the broader culture. Human nature being what it is, this can apply even to faithful Catholics. The only way out of the moral meltdown is for us to take, as individuals, the first steps in



Normal People promo image. Photo: BBC.

moving toward a fully integrated view of sexuality. This means changing our outlook and refusing to model ourselves on the world around us.

During the 2018 campaign to repeal the Eighth Amendment from the Constitution, I heard some prominent repealers citing chapter eight of John's Gospel - the parable of the adulterous woman who was presented to Jesus to be stoned for her

sin. Apparently, this parable is evidence that Jesus wasn't too bothered about old taboos around adultery. But on closer inspection, it's clear that by saying, "let he who is without sin cast the first stone," Jesus upheld the law with one hand, and with the other reminded the accusers where the law came from. Jesus does not brush over or ignore the woman's wrongdoing. He acknowledges her sin, and forgives her.

G.K. Chesterton observed that people thought it would be easier to forgive sins if there were no sins to forgive. We can all slip into the tendency to ignore some or all of our sins, to say: "I'm not as bad as him or her," or: "I'm basically a good person." We need to work against this by recognising when we miss the mark. This implies a recognition of the mark itself in the first place. The truth is the truth, whether or not we live up to it.

## Sin

Ultimately, sin is death. This is not news to Catholics. Abortion is the natural consequence of removing sexuality from the confines of marriage and disregarding its purpose. Once that ball starts rolling there is no stopping it, and we should not shy away from that fact. We must change our hearts first and our actions will follow.

**“We can all slip into the tendency to ignore some or all of our sins”**

Easier said than done! Thankfully, Jesus came neither to ignore our sins nor to condemn us on account of them. He came to forgive us, and to sacrifice himself for us. He offers us freedom, and a concrete way out if we are brave enough to take it, especially in the sacrament of reconciliation. Judging the faults of others and assuming we will be automatically forgiven for our own transgressions makes us feel good in the short-term, but it only adds insult to injury. In the Lord's eyes, which is the greater sin: breaking one of his laws and genuinely seeking forgiveness through repentance, or looking him in the eye and telling him that he need not have taken up the cross for us?

*Oisín Walsh works at the Catholic Communications Office. This article first appeared in Intercom magazine.*



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# The temptation to re-shape the Church to suit ourselves



Ellen's Coyne journey through faith could have been gripping – unfortunately it ended up confirming her pre-existing beliefs writes Michael Kelly

I was 17-years-old in 1996 when then finance minister Ruairi Quinn referred to Ireland as what he described as a “post-Catholic, pluralist republic”.

The comments provoked controversy at the time with many people asking whether this meant that modern Ireland – with a new-found prosperity that had long eluded the State – was becoming a cold house for Catholics and, by extension, all people of faith.

**“For my entire adult life, the Church in Ireland has been in crisis”**

It was not yet 20 years since the triumphant visit of Pope John Paul II in 1979 during which he had referred to the Irish as *semper fidelis* – always faithful. At the time, many people took it as a pat on the back that as secularism and indifference raged across the western world Ireland stood virtually alone in defence of the ancient faith. But, the Slavic Pope was a prophet. His words at Shannon Airport that misty morning must be read in the context of his remarks the day beforehand in Limerick where he warned of the tide that would soon reach Ireland's shores. *Semper fidelis* was not so much an act of praise but an appeal to remain faithful to

the light of Christ brought by St Patrick.

For my entire adult life, the Church in Ireland has been in crisis. Names such as Eamonn Casey and Brendan Smyth have become bywords for the failure to protect people and the consequent humiliation of the institutional Church and the loss of the spontaneous faith of so many Irish people.

In 1997, as scandal raged, Mary Kenny on this parish published *Goodbye to Catholic Ireland: How the Irish Lost the Civilisation They Created*. It remains a masterpiece that has survived the test of time. In her book, Mary sketched a nuanced version of 20th Century Irish Catholicism that avoided both the extremes of triumphalism and the tendency to judge the past as an appalling period with nothing redeeming. In so doing, she paints a fair picture of what made traditional Irish Catholicism both admirable and reprehensible.

## Church

The latest attempt to situate the Church in contemporary Ireland *Are you there, God? It's me, Ellen* by the eponymous Ellen Coyne lacks the insight or experience of earlier works.

Ms Coyne is no Mary Kenny, but in fairness the book claims only to be a personal reflection on a journey of sorts rather than anything agenda-setting. Readers taken in by such blurbs as “this is a book the Church doesn't know it needs for its own survival...why is this woman not the Pope?” (journalist Justine McCarthy) will be sorely disappointed. The publishers also highlight the views of novelist Louise O'Neill on the cover predicting that Ms Coyne's musings will “inspire a thousand conversations across Ireland about the role of the Church in our society and our future”.

Having read Ms Coyne's book in one sitting I think it is a missed opportunity.

I came to this with an open mind expecting that there might be some insightful commentary that could be useful for the

Church in engaging with contemporary Irish culture and helping build a bridge of dialogue. What one gets, instead, is somewhat of a ‘come out with your hands up’ approach to the Church where – for Ms Coyne – for Catholicism to retain any meaning it must be stripped of what is essentially Catholic.

**“It's hard to step away from the abortion issue since this is a dominant theme, but there is a lot more here”**

There are lazy caricatures aplenty. Where there are elements of the Faith that Ms Coyne disagrees with, these are predictably described as “Vatican hardlines” rather than the sincere articulation of the Catholic Faith.

A constant in the book is the campaign to repeal the Eighth Amendment from the Constitution, Ms Coyne having cut her journalistic teeth writing for the short-lived Rupert Murdoch venture *The Times Ireland Edition*. Despite that vote passing by a margin of 2-1, there is little sense of graciousness in victory in the book (amongst other things, pro-lifers – the author prefers anti-abortion – are dismissed as being very Catholic but not very Christian).

It's very disappointing that Ms Coyne appears to be making a plea for a Church where all God's creatures have a place in the choir, but she appears so uncomfortable with encountering orthodox Catholics. Perhaps it's a danger we all fall into – to imagine a Church made up only of people like us. Still, she has chosen to stay and engage rather than simply walk away.

Ms Coyne – perhaps without even knowing it – articulates a very real prob-



Irish Independent news correspondent Ellen Coyne

lem for the Church: whether Catholicism is defined by the actual Faith, or what people who call themselves Catholic actually do.

## The right to life

Recalling the jubilant scenes that greeted the removal of the right to life of the unborn in 2018, Ms Coyne writes: “Me and a few other reporters stumbled into a pub across the road. Later on, a few drinks in, someone was holding court. ‘This isn't a Catholic country anymore,’ they said. Oh, but it is, I thought. This is the most Catholic thing we've done in ages”.

This muddled thinking should provide much food for thought for Church leaders scratching their head about the failures of teaching and conscience-forming that led many Mass-going Catholics to believe that stripping the unborn of the right to life was the Catholic thing to do.

It's hard to step away from the abortion issue since this is a dominant theme, but there

is a lot more here. No-one can doubt the sincerity of the journey in search of her childhood faith that Ms Coyne has embarked upon. One wonders, however, whether she might've been better served in that journey if the guides she chose along the way were not people who she found it so easy to agree with. Faith should, after all, be a challenge not a confirmation of the biases we already hold.

**“In this, she is not the first whose plea for a ‘listening Church’ is for a Church that listens to them more”**

The author writes movingly about her decision to leave the Church when she

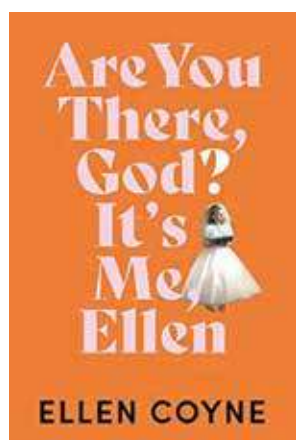
felt overwhelmed with negative news about Catholicism (and there has been, sadly, lots of that). She is insightful in her dawning realisation that it is not so much that the Church is missing out on her, but the absent Catholic who is missing out of the beauty and ritual that the Faith has to offer. “It also means losing a layer of beauty in the world. Everything is in lower definition – to me anyway – when you can't see God in things like nature of other people's kindness. Worst of all, it means losing the invaluable comfort of knowing it's not the end when somebody dies”.

It's a heartfelt honesty that will also resonate with many people who have long since convinced themselves that the Church is part of their past.

Overall, one gets the distinct impression that every time Ms Coyne has been met with the challenge of whether she is right of Church teaching is right, she has always resolved the dilemma in her favour. The book – and indeed, one has the impression, the author – would benefit from an understanding of what is actually meant by conscience. Towards the end she writes, for example, “you cannot raise

**“It's a heartfelt honesty that will also resonate with many people who have long since convinced themselves that the Church is part of their past”**





people with Catholic values, teach them about Catholic beliefs and give them everything they need to be guided by their own conscience only to turn around and tell them they're wrong when what they're saying doesn't suit you". It would be naïve in the extreme to imagine that everyone who is brought up as a Catholic has the tools to always act correctly – it's certainly not borne out by history.

## “Let's hope this book is the first step on a longer journey”

Overall this book leaves me unsatisfied, it is as if the author dipped her toes in a vast and exciting ocean but quickly retreated to more familiar and shallower waters as the depth appeared riskier. But, there is no faith without doubt and this involves risk. Ms Coyne appears to have come to the conclusion that if the Church is to have a credible future, it must become more like her rather than more authentically itself. In this, she is not the first whose plea for a 'listening Church' is for a Church that listens to them more. At the same time, I cannot doubt or take away from the journey that the author finds herself on: "I have chosen this. I've made an active decision about my faith and made it something that I want to have rather than something I was simply born with". In an age where the world is crying out for intentional disciples, the choice to engage in some deeper thought is a welcome one. Undoubtedly it would have been greatly enhanced by a more challenging mentor or guide. Let's hope this book is the first step on a longer journey – perhaps it's fairer to see it as a contribution to a dialogue rather than a conclusion.

Are you there, God? It's me, Ellen by Ellen Coyne is published by Gill.

# 'The Church is the glue that holds communities together'



Bishop Paul Dempsey tells Ruadhán Jones about the integral role the Church can play post-Covid

**T**oday, religion is often viewed as a "risk factor for division... at worst, as a problem to be solved", according to a lengthy new report by the Free Church of England. Religious views are seen as divisive barriers to progress and must be reserved for the private sphere.

**“Bishop Dempsey believes that the pandemic has highlighted the central role the Church continues to play in communities, as a spiritual and a social force”**

The Free Church report, however, demonstrates that the opposite is more frequently true – churches are active supporters of social cohesion, not enemies. The report, 'The Church and Social Cohesion: Connecting Communities and Serving People', shows this in a number of different ways.

It highlights the work that is done by churches "working quietly and concertedly to enhance their communities". It points out the research which shows that regularly practising Christians are the most likely religious grouping "to join a political party, make a charitable donation, or volunteer regularly for a local charitable initiative".

Why are Christians so engaged? The report has an answer: "When participants have told us about their motivations for civic and community engagement, we have found they do so for authentically Christian reasons, as an outworking of their faith convictions".

### Ireland

While the fine detail of the report focuses on, and is derived from, the faith-context in England, Bishop Paul Dempsey of Achonry believes that it has much to offer for the Church in Ireland. "I think this kind of report actually shows that the

Church is the glue that holds a lot of communities together," Bishop Dempsey told *The Irish Catholic*.

Bishop Dempsey believes that the pandemic has highlighted the central role the Church continues to play in communities, as a spiritual and a social force.

"The whole importance in our communities around funerals, around weddings, around the gathering of people, even at weekends for the Eucharist," he said. "We're starting to realise how important these things that we maybe took for granted are."

As a social force, Bishop Dempsey emphasised the Church's role in education; how churches reach out to other groups in society; and the "very important work that's going on in parishes that we don't hear about, so many projects through volunteers reaching out to those worse off in society – that the Church is playing a very central role in all of those issues in parishes around the country".

### Education

Bishop Dempsey was especially firm in emphasising the excellent work done by Catholic schools. He said he found commentary to the contrary from some politicians "amazing", most especially claims of a "baptism barrier".

"When we talk about Catholic schools, and again I know this from my own experience of education, the Catholic Church is wide open to welcoming people from all faiths and none," Bishop Dempsey said. "Again, that's bringing community together, it's including people, it's welcoming people, and our Catholic schools are doing that."

"I'm amazed at the commentary I hear sometimes from our politicians, how you'd swear – they talk about this thing called the 'baptism barrier'. I have never in my 23 years being a priest and bishop come across a baptism barrier. We've always been opening and welcoming to people of all faiths in our schools."

### Integral

Regarding the role churches play in cohering their local communities, Bishop Dempsey said he felt the work they do is often overlooked.



"I think somehow or other that church organisations are not taken as seriously as they could be and should be in our local parishes," Bishop Dempsey said. "Any priest in a parish, any lay volunteer or parish minister, is very much in tune with the local community because we're at the heart of community – we're there in people's lives, we're there in their joys, we're there in their sorrows."

**“Bishop Dempsey highlighted in particular the wealth of the churches social teaching”**

Bishop Dempsey called on the Government to recognise the integral role that the Church plays in building communities, and can play in rebuilding them after Covid-19 has passed. The Church should not be seen as an irrelevance; instead, it should be "drawn on more from the political sphere to be more included in our society," Bishop Dempsey said.

"I think one of the interesting points in relation to Covid in recent

times, in relation to worship and in relation to the Church, is that somehow or other the Church is seen as being on the fringe of society, you know it's seen as being a gathering," Bishop Dempsey said.

"But for us to gather as Christians, it's more than just gathering socially, it's who we are and that we are central in society and that we have a very important message for society. And that should be at the very heart of society, not at the very fringe."

Bishop Dempsey also believes that the Church should be more outgoing in preaching its message, that it has "so much to say to society". Bishop Dempsey highlighted in particular the wealth of the churches social teaching.

"The Church has so much to say about that," he said. "Sometimes, unfortunately, we don't hear the commentary in society about what the Church has to say and the importance of its message because we get caught up in our own internal affairs. We shouldn't be internalising, we should be reaching out to as many people as possible to try and help them and inspire them with the Gospel of Jesus Christ."



# Trachoma is Found where the Road Ends



A phrase I've often heard in my time at Sightsavers is that 'trachoma is found where the road ends' and here - the road had very clearly ended. A Sightsavers' field report by **Declan White**

**T**he overnight floods had washed the road away and there was no way to travel on to Kumba Village.

This is the rainy season in Binga – a district in north western Zimbabwe and flooding is one of the many challenges the Sightsavers team here must face in their battle to combat trachoma.

Trachoma is the leading infectious cause of blindness and research carried out by Sightsavers Zimbabwe had shown the disease to be rife in Binga district.

The disease is easily spread to the eyes through personal contact like when you rub your eyes or by flies that in dry climates are attracted to the liquid area of the eyes. Trachoma can cause your eyelashes to turn inwards and scrape against the cornea of the eye and, if left untreated over time it can lead to blindness.

A straight-forward treatment by tablet, taken annually can protect people against the effects of trachoma. The treatments are donated free to Sightsavers and with the help of our partners we just need to distribute them to people throughout the community to save sight.

However, Binga is a low-income district with poor infrastructure with people living in small widely dispersed communities and added to this is the threat of seasonal floods and drought which seem to worsen each year. Reaching people in a district like Binga is an immense challenge!

## Front line to combat trachoma

We had driven two hours along dusty roads to reach Sinakoma Clinic and we had hardly seen a soul. We had not passed through any towns or villages yet here in this small community clinic were over 300 mostly elderly people waiting patiently to have their eyes screened and to be treated. Community volunteers are specially trained by Sightsavers to raise awareness of eye care and allay



Ophthalmic nurse Jeremiah treats a patient at Sinakoma Clinic

**“It would actually be a victory, because this is war against trachoma if we manage to eliminate it, we will have won... because it is actually a scourge in this district... we are almost there”**

any fears the local people may have, and they had done their job well. Now it was over to the nurses to screen the queue of people and identify the teary eyes and the inflamed follicles – the first early signs of trachoma.

Two ophthalmic nurses Jeremiah and Ndumeso, trained by Sightsavers and employed by the Ministry of Health, are working on the front line with us to combat trachoma. With endless patience, devotion and commitment, they set to work.

Once everyone is seen to in the clinic, we cross over the road to Nsigna

Primary School. Here in a classroom converted into a treatment centre, class by class, student by student are again treated by the nurses until over every one of the 700 students has been treated. In just an afternoon at this small rural crossroads over 1,000 people have been treated and protected against trachoma.

This is repeated throughout the region. There are 15 rural health centres in the district as well as six mobile teams all fully resourced as well as trained by Sightsavers in the delivery of the trachoma treatments. Each person treated is care-

fully recorded, summary updates of each distribution are sent to a district office where the trachoma program is carefully co-ordinated for the entire district.

## Achievement

By the end of two-week program 154,437 people in Binga district had been protected against trachoma. Reaching so many is quite an achievement and if this round of trachoma distribution can be repeated in a district for 3 continuous years it can play a huge part in the elimination of the disease.



Road Washed away by Overnight Rains

Of course, it is the power of people that makes this work possible. It is the generous supporters behind Sightsavers and heroes like Ndumeso and Jeremiah who are committed to doing such extraordinary work.

Both are so proud to be working and playing their part eliminating trachoma. Growing up Ndumeso had seen one of his uncles lose his sight and the impact it had on his young cousins stayed with him. When offered to be trained by Sightsavers in ophthalmology he jumped at the chance. I ask Ndumeso what it would mean to him for trachoma to be eliminated from the district and from Zimbabwe – “it would actually be a victory, because this is war against trachoma if we manage to eliminate it, we will have won ... because it is actually a scourge in this district... we are almost there”

Jeremiah and Ndumeso have seen first-hand the devastation of trachoma on families and indeed on whole communities in their country.

## Muchimba family

Later that week they take me to meet the Muchimba family. Here I am shocked to see how three gen-





Opthalmic nurse Jeremiah meets his patient Sophie



Tawanda with his children Chantelle, Oscar, Anisha and Blessing (L-R), and his mother Julia



Children line up to receive their trachoma treatment at Nsigna Primary School

**“This makes me feel great, because she spent almost all her adult life sitting there at home because she was unable to do anything but suddenly I meet her here today, she is not home she is travelling on her own – this makes me just absolutely happy”**

erations of the one family all have been affected by trachoma.

Grandmother Julia developed trachoma as a young woman following the birth of her third child. As her sight worsened, she could no longer work in the fields or help support her family. Tawanda her son, watched his mother struggle with trachoma for most of his life and recently he started to see signs that his own daughters were beginning to struggle with the disease. His eldest daughter Blessing had started to miss school and he worried about the future for her and her sisters. Listening to Tawanda's story it was clear that this awful disease can steal hope as well as sight.

Thankfully Sightsavers had reached Tawanda and his family in time. His mother Julia received a sight restoring trichiasis operation from the team last year and his daughters were screened and were

now going to receive their trachoma treatment.

We had planned to return the next day to Kumbu village and see the Muchimba children receiving their trachoma treatment in their local school. However heavy



**“I can now see on my own and I am so thankful and happy to meet Jeremiah today... if I had something to give to Jeremiah I would give him as a token of thanks and if I had any extra I would extend the hand to you – I did not know you were from Sightsavers”**

overnight rains meant the road to their village was simply washed away (as pictured in opposite page). Disappointed but not defeated, the team told me of times they slept by their car waiting for floods to pass and if they didn't get to the school that day they would try again the next day and they would get there. When working to save sight in Binga you need that kind of resilience

### Hope

Standing by the roadside we hear a shriek of delight and turn to see an elderly woman rushing over to hug Jeremiah. The woman is named Sophie. She had developed advanced trachoma and until last year had given up hope of ever seeing again. Jeremiah, it turns out was the opthalmic nurse who performed her trichiasis operation and now here they were meeting again by chance on the road.

Though his beaming smile said it all, I still ask Jeremiah how he feels seeing his patient again – “this makes me feel

Opthalmic nurse Ndumeso trained by Sightsavers and committed to ending trachoma

great, because she spent almost all her adult life sitting there at home because she was unable to do anything but suddenly I meet her here today, she is not home she is travelling on her own – this makes me just absolutely happy”. Sophie also smiles broadly as she tells me how ahead of her operation she had to put her trust in Jeremiah and Sightsavers and she is so glad now she did “I can now see on my own and I am so thankful and happy to meet Jeremiah today ... if I had something to give to Jeremiah I would give him as a token of thanks and if I had any extra I would extend the hand to you – I did not know you were from Sightsavers”.

### A real difference

Listening to her story I feel humbled but also reassured that the work of Sightsavers is making a real difference to people's lives.

Over the last 12 months the generous support from readers of the Irish Catholic has been enough to help treat 66,379 people at risk of trachoma or to help provide a sight restoring trichiasis operation for 890 people suffering with advanced trachoma. Each of these numbers represent real people – people like Sophie or like the Muchimba family whose lives you have helped change forever. Thank you for supporting our work and for helping to save sight.

To learn more about Sightsavers or to help more people at risk of blindness please log on to [www.sightsavers.ie](http://www.sightsavers.ie) or call us today on (01) 6637666

All photos © Sightsavers/Jason J Mulikita



# Out&About

## The end of an era



**ANTRIM:** The Clonard community and the men's Holy Family Confraternity gather one last time, as they mark the close of the Confraternity. The men's Confraternity began in July 1897 and ended 123 years later.



**DUBLIN:** Sr Lucy Conway welcomes Sr Stacey Cameron into the Redemptoristine community in Drumcondra.

## IN SHORT

### Maynooth St John Paul II Theological Society hosting lunchtime Advent talks

The St John Paul II Theological Society of St Patrick's College Maynooth and Maynooth University is set to hold a series of lunchtime Advent talks. The current schedule is set out as follows: On Wednesday December 2 at 1:30pm there is a talk on pilgrimage today by Msgr La Flynn, the Prior of Lough Derg. On Wednesday December 9 at 1:30pm there will be a talk on the Irish Penitentials by Msgr Hugh Connolly, Chaplain of the Irish College, Paris. And on Wednesday December 16 at 1:30pm there will be a talk on Mary, the Heart of a Universal Home by Sr Rose Miriam, Dominican Sister of St Cecilia, Limerick.

Due to the current Covid-19 restrictions, the talks will take place on Microsoft Teams. All

are welcome and will be given access to any or all of the talks by e-mailing a request to [jp2@mulife.ie](mailto:jp2@mulife.ie).

### Concern wins Good Governance award

Concern Worldwide has won the 2020 Good Governance Award for its annual reporting. The international humanitarian organisation won the award for large not-for-profit organisations at a virtual awards ceremony last night.

The Good Governance Awards, developed by Carmichael, recognises and encourages adherence to good governance practice by non-profit organisations in Ireland.

"Concern is delighted to receive this award, which is recognition of the hard work which has been done by our board and staff to ensure the organisation is run to the highest

standards," Concern Chief Executive Dominic MacSorley said.

"Our supporters and partners – Irish Aid, the corporate sector and the general public – generously fund our work, and our responsibility is to be fully accountable and transparent, not only to them, but also and importantly to the communities we serve."

The judges commented that Concern's annual report provided a good overview of performance indicators of the organisation's achievements during the year in relation to each of its strategic goals. It also included good disclosure of the actioned recommendations for improvement to its governance system, as highlighted by a 2018 evaluation. "Ultimately, though, what distinguished the winning report for the judges was that the report was the strongest in actually telling the story," the judges noted. "The winning report contained some very compelling and

strong storytelling. The winning organisation also won on consistency, in the use of metrics in relation to the various programmes, and good Covid disclosures as well as being an all-round well balanced report."

Mr MacSorley paid tribute to the sector as a whole and in particular to the other organisations shortlisted for the award: the Central Remedial Clinic; Barnardos; Oxfam; and Trócaire.

In recent months Concern has also been awarded Charity of the Year at the Charity Excellence Awards and received the 2020 Published Accounts Award.

"2020 has been a particularly challenging year for Concern and all not-for-profit organisations, but the external recognition which these awards provide of the quality of the work being done is a tremendous encouragement for our staff, volunteers and supporters," Mr MacSorley said.



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Events deadline is a week in  
advance of publication



**CORK:** Bishop Fintan Gavin meeting with the NET Ministries Team, which is set to be based in Cork for the next year.



**ARMAGH:** Fr Barry Matthews joins members of Armagh Vocations Commission, Sr Carmel Flynn RSCJ and Bredge Casey, at a “Come and See” evening for men who are discerning the call to priesthood.

**VATICAN:** Cardinal Farrell participates in #FromPanama2Lisbon online meeting, which sees the World Youth Day transition from Panama to Lisbon.



**ROSCOMMON:** Fr John McManus blessing the graves in St Joseph's Cemetery, Castlerea, prior to an online cemetery Mass.



**GALWAY:** Bishop Micheal Duignan with Bishop John Kirby laying a wreath at the grave of Fr Michael Griffin on behalf of Clonfert diocese as the 100th anniversary of Fr Griffin's death during the War of Independence is commemorated.

Events

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



# World Report

## IN BRIEF

### China claims papal critique over Uyghurs has 'no factual basis at all'

● Following Pope Francis' mention in passing of the Uyghurs as persecuted in a new book, the Chinese foreign ministry said the claim is groundless.

"I think often of persecuted peoples: the Rohingya, the poor Uyghurs, the Yazidi – what ISIS did to them was truly cruel – or Christians in Egypt and Pakistan killed by bombs that went off while they prayed in church," Pope Francis is quoted as saying in the book, *Let Us Dream*, according to the AP.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian responded to Pope Francis' mention of the Uyghurs by saying that there was "no factual basis at all" to the Pope's comment.

"People of all ethnic groups enjoy the full rights of survival, development, and freedom of religious belief," Mr Zhao said at a daily briefing, according to AP.

### Cardinal Schönborn deplores attack on rabbi in Vienna

● Cardinal Christoph Schönborn deplored an attack on a rabbi in the Austrian capital, Vienna. Writing on his Twitter account November 27, the archbishop of Vienna said: "I am dismayed by yesterday's attack on a rabbi in the middle of Vienna. I assure our fellow Jewish citizens of my complete solidarity. Anti-Semitism must have no place among us. It endangers the peaceful

coexistence of us all." The *Associated Press* reported that a woman in her 50s confronted the rabbi with a knife on Thursday afternoon. She kicked him in the leg, knocked off his hat, then tore off his skullcap. Before running away, she shouted an anti-Semitic threat. Austria's Chancellor Sebastian Kurz condemned the attack.

### Vatican dicastery urges youngsters to share wisdom of elderly people

● A Vatican dicastery launched a new campaign urging young people to share wisdom gleaned from the elderly facing Christmas alone because of the pandemic.

In a press statement released November 27, the Dicastery for Laity, Family, and Life said that Christmas presented youngsters with the chance to "receive a special gift" from elderly people.

"Today, in the difficult circumstances of a Christmas still overshadowed by the pandemic, we are proposing that young people post on social media a memory, a piece of advice, or a 'gift of wisdom' they have received from one of the elderly people with whom they have formed a bond in recent months," the dicastery said.

### Vatican says bishop ordained in China is in communion with Pope

● The Vatican confirmed that a bishop recently ordained in China is in full communion with the Pope and that more Vatican-approved nominations would be coming.

Bishop Thomas Chen Tianhao, 58, is the new bishop of Qingdao in Shandong province and was ordained November 23, according to *AsiaNews*.

Matteo Bruni, director of the Vatican press office, said in a written communique November 24 that Bishop Chen was the third bishop to be named and ordained within the regulatory framework of the provisional agreement between China and the Holy See regarding the appointment of bishops.

"I can also add that undoubtedly other episcopal consecrations are foreseen" given that work is currently underway for the appointment of several new bishops, Mr Bruni wrote.

## Pope Francis creates 13 new cardinals

Pope Francis created 13 new cardinals last Saturday, urging them to remain vigilant lest they lose sight of their goal of the cross and resurrection.

"All of us love Jesus, all of us want to follow him, yet we must always be vigilant to remain on the road," Pope Francis said at the consistory.

"Jerusalem always lies ahead of us. The cross and the resurrection are ... always the goal of our journey," he said in his homily in St Peter's Basilica.

In the seventh consistory of his pontificate, Pope Francis created cardinals from Africa, Europe, North and South America, and Asia.

Among them is Cardinal Wilton Gregory, archbishop of Washington, who became the first African American cardinal in the Church's history. He received the titular church of St Mary Immaculate in Grottarossa.

Archbishop Celestino Aós Braco of Santiago, Chile; Archbishop Antoine Kambanda of Kigali, Rwanda; Archbishop Augusto Paolo Lojudice of Siena, Italy; and Fra Mauro Gambetti, Custos of the Sacred Convent of Assisi also joined the College of Cardinals.

Pope Francis placed a red hat on each cardinal's head and said: "To the glory of almighty God and the honour of the Apostolic See, receive the scarlet biretta as a sign of the dignity of the cardinalate, signifying your readiness to act with courage, even to the



Pope Francis celebrates a Mass with new cardinals in St Peter's Basilica at the Vatican on November 29, 2020. Photo: CNS

shedding of your blood, for the increase of the Christian faith, for the peace and tranquillity of the people of God and for the freedom and growth of the Holy Roman Church."

Each of the newly elevated cardinals received a ring, and was assigned a titular church, tying them to the Diocese of Rome.

In his homily, the Pope warned the new cardinals of the temptation to follow a

different road than the road to Calvary.

"The road of those who, perhaps even without realising it, 'use' the Lord for their own advancement," he said. "Those who – as Saint Paul says – look to their own interests and not those of Christ."

"The scarlet of a cardinal's robes, which is the colour of blood, can, for a worldly spirit, become the colour of a secular 'eminence,'" Francis said, warning them of the

"many kinds of corruption in the priestly life."

Pope Francis encouraged the cardinals to reread St Augustine's sermon number 46, calling it a "magnificent sermon on shepherds".

"Only the Lord, through his cross and resurrection, can save his straying friends who risk getting lost," he said.

Nine of the new cardinals are under the age of 80 and thereby eligible to vote in a future conclave.

## Twitter criticised as 'Burn the clergy' hashtag trends in Spain

On the same day that Pope Francis approved the beatification of 127 Catholics killed in Spain in hatred of the faith in the 20th Century, a hashtag calling for Catholic priests to be burned was trending on Twitter in Spain.

Twitter permitted the hashtag #FuegoAlClero, meaning 'Burn the Clergy', to trend online in Spain November 24, despite its message of hatred against Catholic priests. Twitter's current user policy states that the promotion of violence on the basis of religious affiliation is not allowed on its platform.

Prominent tweets that used the hashtag included images of flames on priests' heads and others that labelled priests as "paedophiles" and "thieves", *ACI Prensa* reported November 24.

Users commented on the site that they were surprised that Twitter had not eliminated the messages in accordance with its hateful conduct policy.

Other Twitter users began using the hashtag #YoApoyoAlClero, which means 'I support the clergy', in response to the hateful posts.

Hate crimes against Christians and Catholic churches are once again on the rise in Europe. The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe published data last week documenting more than 500 hate crimes against Christians in Europe in 2019.

Incidents in Spain included attacks against Catholic priests, arson attacks on Catholic churches, the destruction of images of the Virgin Mary, and the theft of consecrated Eucharistic hosts from tabernacles.

## French bishops launch second legal appeal to reinstate public Masses for all

The French bishops' conference announced last Friday that it would submit another appeal to the Council of State, calling a proposed 30-person limit on public Masses during Advent "unacceptable."

In a statement issued November 27, the bishops

said that they "have a duty to ensure the freedom of worship in our country" and therefore would file another *référé liberté* with the Council of State regarding the latest government coronavirus restrictions on Mass attendance.

A *référé liberté* is an urgent administrative procedure that is filed as a petition to a judge for the protection of fundamental rights, in this case, the right to freedom of worship.

On November 24, President Emmanuel Macron announced that public wor-

ship could resume November 29 but would be limited to 30 people per church.

"It is a totally stupid measure that contradicts common sense," Archbishop Michel Aupetit of Paris said November 25, according to the French newspaper *Le Figaro*.





Edited by Jason Osborne  
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## The seed of the Church



A man walks past a stone commemorating those who died during the Spanish Civil War in this photo from Ronda, Spain. On November 23, Pope Francis advanced the sainthood causes 127 Spanish martyrs.

## Supreme Court overturns New York Church restrictions

The US Supreme Court said that New York state restrictions during the coronavirus pandemic are a violation of the First Amendment's protection of free religious exercise. After the ruling the Bishop of Brooklyn, whose diocese was a plaintiff in the suit, said that religious worship should be considered an essential during the coronavirus pandemic.

"It is time – past time – to make plain that, while the pandemic poses many grave challenges, there is no world in which the constitution tolerates color-coded executive edicts that reopen liquor stores and bike shops but shutter churches, synagogues and mosques," Justice Neil Gorsuch wrote in a concurring opinion in a November 25 decision, which temporarily bars restrictions on religious worship that were enacted on October 6 by New York Governor Andrew Cuomo.

The court's ruling is temporary, as lawsuits filed by the Diocese of Brooklyn and by Orthodox Jewish synagogues in New York will continue, though the Supreme Court's November 26 decision is likely to weigh heavily in the outcome of those cases.

The state's restrictions forbade the attendance of more than 10 people at religious services in state designated "red zones", and 25 people in "orange zones."

### Synagogue

"In a red zone, while a synagogue or church may not admit more than 10 persons, businesses categorised as 'essential' may admit as many people as they wish. And the list of 'essential' businesses includes things such as acupuncture facilities, camp grounds, garages, as well as many whose services are not limited to those that can be regarded as essential, such as

all plants manufacturing chemicals and microelectronics and all transportation facilities,' the court's majority opinion found.

"These categorisations lead to troubling results," the decision added.

"Not only is there no evidence that the applicants have contributed to the spread of Covid-19 but there are many other less restrictive rules that could be adopted to minimise the risk to those attending religious services. Among other things, the maximum attendance at a religious service could be tied to the size of the church or synagogue," the court wrote.

The 5-4 decision found newly confirmed Justice Amy Coney Barrett deciding with the majority, while Chief Justice John Roberts sided with the court's three liberal judges in dissent.

## Cardinal Nichols urges UK government to reconsider cut to foreign aid

Cardinal Vincent Nichols urged the UK government to reconsider a proposed cut to its foreign aid budget.

In a letter to MPs released November 26, the president of the bishops' conference of England and Wales expressed concern at the proposed cut in overseas aid from 0.7% of gross national income to 0.5%.

"In today's figures that

amounts to a cut of around £4 billion in spending on help to the world's poorest people," he wrote.

Chancellor Rishi Sunak announced November 25 that the government intended to abandon its commitment to the 0.7% target contained in the Conservative Party's 2019 general election manifesto.

He insisted that cutting

the overseas aid budget by a third was a temporary measure that was necessary as the country faced its worst recession in more than 300 years.

In his letter, Cardinal Nichols acknowledged the pressures on government officials responding to an economic emergency caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

"A clear measure of a nation's greatness is the manner in which it responds to the needs of its poorest. The same is true for the response to poverty between nations. If we truly wish to be a great nation, then cutting the overseas aid budget is a retrograde step," the archbishop of Westminster said.



## Pope thanks Argentinian women's network for pro-life commitment

● Responding to a letter sent by the women's network Mujeres de las Villas, the Pope offers his "sincere thanks" for their work.

Since 2018, the network has been fighting for the protection of the unborn, especially in the working-class neighbourhoods of Buenos Aires.

In particular, the signatories of the letter asked for Pope Francis' support in their commitment against the legalisation of voluntary abortion, currently much debated in the country. In his handwritten letter dated November 22 and addressed to the network's intermediary and Argentine Congress member Victoria Morales Gorleri, the Pope expresses admiration "for their work and their testimony" and encourages them to "move forward".

"The country is proud to have women like this", he writes, stressing that "the problem of abortion is not primarily a question of religion, but of human ethics, first and foremost of any religious denomination".

For this reason, the Pope reiterates that "it is good to ask two questions: Is it fair to eliminate a human life to solve a problem? Is it right to hire a killer to solve a problem?". The Pope's letter concludes with a blessing for the women and a request to pray for him.

## Pope authorises eight decrees regarding candidates to sainthood

● Pope Francis has authorised the Vatican Congregation for the Causes of Saints to promulgate eight decrees, including a decree on the martyrdom of 127 Spaniards. Bishop Marcello Semeraro, the Prefect of the Congregation, on November 23 presented the causes to the Pope, who approved them. Among them is a decree on a miracle attributed to the intercession of Italian Venerable Servant of God Mario Ciceri, a diocesan priest of Milan Archdiocese. He was born on September 8, 1900 in

Veduggio (Italy) and died on April 4, 1945 in Brentana di Sulbiate (Italy). This clears him for beatification with the title Blessed.

The decree on martyrdom concerns the Servants of God Father Juan Elia Medina, a diocesan priest and his 126 companions, priests, religious and lay persons of the Diocese of Cordoba, Spain. They were killed in "hatred of the Faith" during the Spanish Civil War between 1936 and 1939. These martyrs have now been cleared for beatification with the title Blessed.

## 'Set Your Captives Free': ACN report on kidnapped and jailed Christians

● Entitled, 'Set Your Captives Free', the report by the Pontifical Foundation ACN, an international Catholic charity, lists specific cases of Christians detained mainly in Nigeria, Eritrea, Pakistan and China.

It speaks about imprisonment for reasons of conscience, arbitrary detention, unjust trials, inadequate prison conditions, cases of torture and pressure to induce people to abandon the Faith.

It was released on November 25 to mark Red Wednesday. During Red Wednesday, many church buildings and monuments are illuminated in red light, a colour associated with martyrdom, to remember those who cannot practice their faith freely throughout the world.

ACN regards the kidnapping of Christians in Nigeria as very serious. Every year more than 220 faithful are kidnapped and unjustly imprisoned by groups of jihadist militiamen. Kidnappings for ransom often result in the killing of Protestant and Catholic priests.

It is the same story in Egypt, where "young Coptic Christian women are kidnapped and forced to marry their non-Christian kidnappers". In Eritrea, more than a thousand Christian faithful are feared to be unjustly detained.





# Letter from Argentina

## Light blue is the pro-life colour in Argentina's abortion debate



Inés San Martín

Self-described as the “light blue majority” and backed by polls that show most Argentines oppose legalisation of abortion pushed by the government, thousands of families rallied in 400 cities across Pope Francis's native country last Saturday to voice support for the life of the unborn child and that of the expectant mother.

The idea of a “legal, safe and free” abortion greatly divided Argentina in 2018, when it was first debated and rejected by Congress. Leftist President Alberto Fernandez promised to bring it back on the campaign trail last year, and it's front and centre in Argentine politics now.

**“Abortion is only legal in some states of Argentina in cases of rape or threats to the life of the mother”**

The Covid-19 pandemic delayed the debate: Mr Fernandez decided not to present it after he asked Argentines to lock themselves at home for over 200 days to combat spread of the disease, arguing the economy can rise up again but a life lost is forever.

Though the anti-abortion rallies were organised through social media, they had the support of both the Catholic bishops' conference in Argentina and a union of Christian churches. Indirectly they had the Pope's backing too, since Francis last week answered a request from a network of mothers who live in the slums of Buenos Aires who'd asked him to “be our voice” in a debate in which pro-choice forces claim it's women who live in poverty who want abortion and die having it in clandestine clinics.

On Saturday, the cathedral church of Merlo in Buenos Aires woke up sprayed with green painting and graffiti saying things such as, “Neither Fernandez nor Bergoglio: Legal Abortion”.

(“Bergoglio” is Pope Francis's given last name, Jorge Mario Bergoglio.)

Abortion is only legal in some states of Argentina in cases of rape or threats to the life of the mother. The bill presented by Mr Fernandez would make it legal and free under all circumstances in public and private hospitals across the country for girls as young as 13 up until week 14 of pregnancy, and then up the ninth month if it was product of rape or endangers the “physical or mental” health of the mother.

### Pro-life camp

Rallies opposed to the bill took place in every state capital but also in many other cities, always under the premise of social distance – with thousands joining from their cars adorned with the Argentine flag, balloons and light-blue handkerchiefs, the colour of the pro-life camp, in opposition to the green one the pro-abortion supporters' sport.

Writing in Argentina's daily of record, *La Nación*, journalist Marino De Vedia argued that this year ecclesiastical structures, from the Pope to the parishes, will focus their energies on rejecting a bill that is even more radical and negative, in their view, than the one rejected two years ago.

This might become problematic, the journalist who specialises in Church affairs argued, as the government took for granted the institution's support not for legalising abortion but for containing the social unrest likely to explode in Argentina at the end of a bad year.

It happened, for instance, back in 2001, when protests brought down a government.

Through soup kitchens, Caritas offices, a bishops-coordinated dialogue table and homilies from the many priests who live and minister in the slums of Buenos Aires, the left-wing government hoped to avoid a civil revolt this December. It's expected to happen taking into account that after the world's longest



A woman participates in a demonstration on November 4 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in favor of legalising abortion. CNS

lockdown and some of the highest per-capita deaths due to Covid-19, between 50 to 60 percent of Argentines will greet the new year living under the poverty line.

“The bishops are conscious that the Government will aim to score a success with the ‘Legal Abortion’ operation, at the end of a year in which it practically did not achieve successes, conditioned by the pandemic, the deepening of the crisis and, as if that were not enough, the recent scandal of the incidents in the Casa Rosada itself during the funeral of Diego Maradona,” wrote Mr De Vedia, referring to incidents in the government house during the funeral of the soccer star who passed away last week.

Many observers and commentators saw the fact that people temporarily took over the house of government as a sign of the simmering anger and discontent, and many are already warning the government that abortion is an ideological battle fought mostly by artist and middle-class Argentines, but it won't help feed the poor.

Francis got involved in the debate not only through a hand-written letter to the women in the slums, which

he sent through a national legislator from the opposition party, but also by calling the head of the opposition block – PRO – in the chamber of deputies, Cristian Ritondo, to express his support. This is another explicit blow by the head of the Catholic Church to a government that saw the Pope as an ally.

**“A distraction can't be ruled out: having social platforms and the media discuss abortion while they reform the justice system”**

Back in 2018, Francis was mostly in the margins, with no known attempts to interfere in the vote, and the bishops had a “let the laity act” attitude. Yet this time around, he decided to get involved. The reasons for this are plenty, including the fact that virtually every time he's spoken about the legalisation of abortion, Mr Fernandez brought the Pope to the debate, saying that he hoped Francis “won't get angry at me” because “I'm

Catholic but trying to resolve a matter of public health.”

Mr Fernandez presented the bill last week, and Congress is hoping for an “express” debate, meaning to have it legalised before the end of the year.

### Legalise abortion

Jorge Nicolas Lafferriere, a pro-life lawyer and faculty member of Argentina's Pontifical University, underlined that this is the first time that it's the president who presents a project to legalise abortion, and its “not easy in this country for Congress to reject a proposal when the Executive is so involved”.

“It is very surprising that the issue is incorporated into [Congress'] extraordinary sessions, after such a difficult year, with so much poverty and care for life due to the pandemic,” he said on Saturday, after taking part in the rallies in Buenos Aires. “A distraction can't be ruled out: having social platforms and the media discuss abortion while they reform the justice system.”

Mr Lafferriere notes opinion in the capital and the rest of the country is very different, explaining why the Senate, which represents the

“interior” rejected the abortion project in 2018 and could do so again. The numbers are not clear, explaining nationwide mobilisations on both sides: in the interior, there's a clear “light blue” majority, and a poll released last week showed that there are more people in Argentina rejecting abortion today than in 2018.

Asked about a possible domino effect should the Pope's own country legalise abortion, Mr Lafferriere said that “there's no doubt Argentina is a point of reference in the region,” visible, for instance, by the light blue and green handkerchiefs that have spread like powder throughout Latin America.

“There is something ideological in wanting to legalise abortion in Pope Francis' country, who reminds us of the need for a political system that looks for the common good and takes into consideration the dignity of each person, from the unborn life to the poorest among us or the elderly,” he said. “Regrettably, we see a radicalisation of an ideology that tries to legitimise the throw-away culture.”

**i** Inés San Martín is a correspondent with *CruxNow.com*



# Cardinal Gregory says he won't deny Biden communion but how will Catholics respond?



JD Flynn

**W**ashington's Cardinal, made a cardinal last weekend, told a journalist on November 24 that in his diocese, he will not deny Communion to a politician who has pledged to enshrine access to abortion in federal law and permit federal funding of abortions. That politician is President-elect Joe Biden.

Archbishop Wilton Gregory's comment is sure to raise questions about the Church's pro-life witness. But for some Catholics, the remark might also raise questions about the sincerity of US bishops on the topic of ecclesial reform.

In 2004, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, then head of the Church's doctrinal office, told US bishops in a memo that a Catholic politician "consistently campaigning and voting for permissive abortion and euthanasia laws" is engaged in "manifest" and "formal cooperation" in grave sin.

In such a case, the politician's "pastor should meet with him, instructing him about the Church's teaching, informing him that he is not to present himself for Communion until he brings to an end the objective situation of sin, and warning him that he will otherwise be denied the Eucharist," Cardinal Ratzinger wrote.

**“Some will argue that Archbishop Gregory has substituted his own judgment for the law of the Church”**

If the Catholic perseveres in grave sin and still presents himself for Holy Communion, "the minister of Holy Communion must refuse to distribute it".

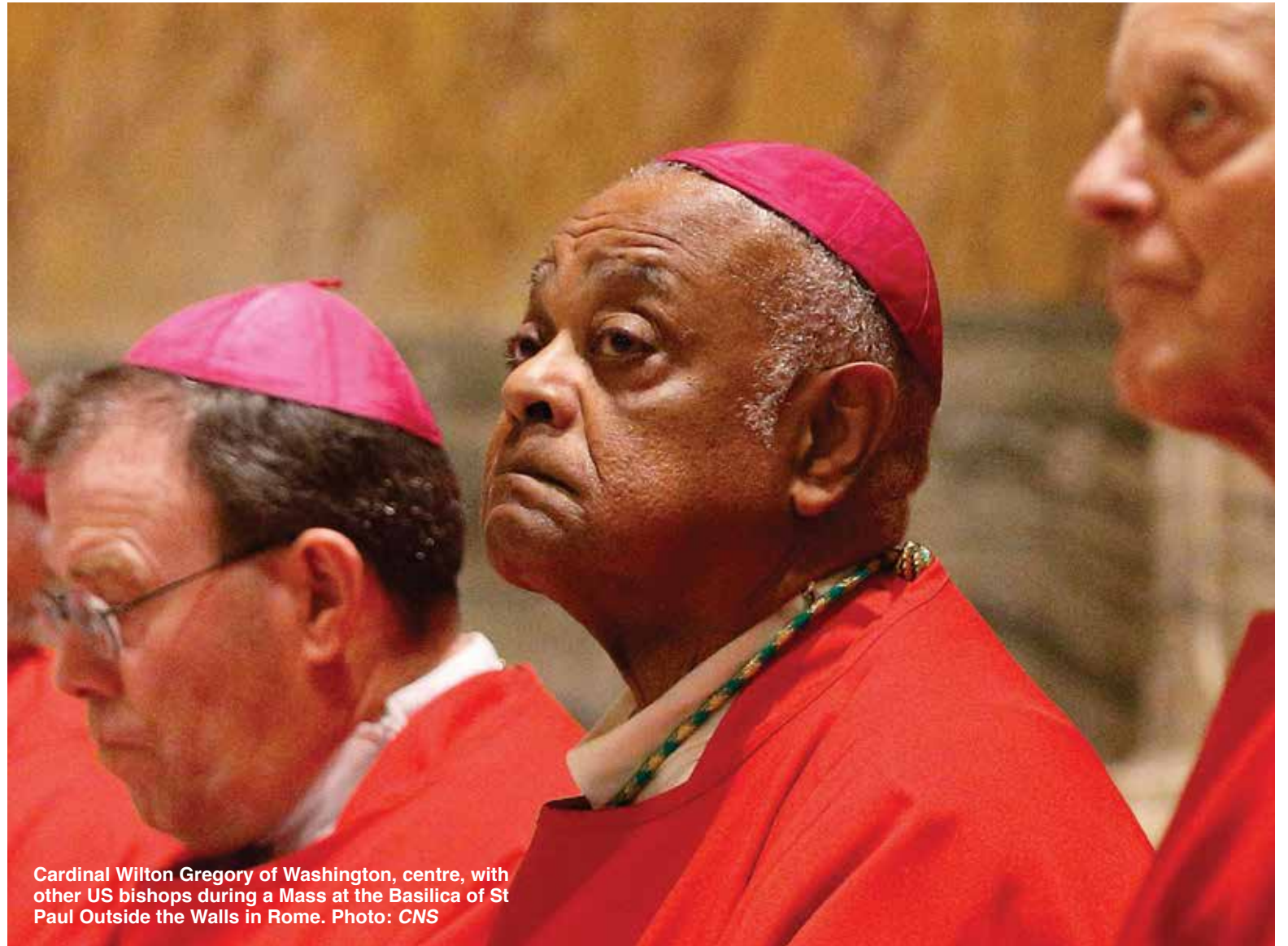
## Canon 915

Cardinal Ratzinger's memo was an application of canon 915 of the Code of Canon Law, which says that Catholics "obstinately persevering in manifest grave sin are not to be admitted to Communion".

In short, Cardinal Ratzinger's memo gave bishops instruction on how to apply the Church's law. On November 24, Archbishop Gregory said he has no plans to do so.

Some Catholics will soon raise objections to Archbishop Gregory's remark.

Pro-life activists will say bishops should stand up for the unborn, and that distributing the



Cardinal Wilton Gregory of Washington, centre, with other US bishops during a Mass at the Basilica of St Paul Outside the Walls in Rome. Photo: CNS

Eucharist to pro-choice politicians implies that abortion is not a serious moral issue. Some will accuse the Cardinal of preferring secular approval to uncomfortable evangelical witness.

Those are exactly the arguments Catholics made when Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York said in 2019 that he would not deny the Eucharist to New York's Governor Andrew Cuomo, who signed one of the most permissive abortion laws in the country's history, and again in October of that year, when Cardinal Dolan said he would not deny Mr Biden the Eucharist.

If history is predictive, other Catholics will praise Archbishop Gregory as a witness of civility and tolerance. They will say that no one should politicise the Eucharist, and that denying Communion is not pastoral, or prudent.

They will not be the first to use that language.

In 2004, when US bishops discussed pro-choice politicians

and the Eucharist, one cardinal among them was charged with summarising the memo sent from Cardinal Ratzinger to bishops on the subject, as few of them had yet received it. The cardinal downplayed the memo, saying addressing the matter at all was up to the discretion of US bishops.

**“A Biden presidency promises ‘certain challenges’ for the bishops of the US”**

"The question for us is not simply whether denial of Communion is possible, but whether it is pastorally wise and prudent," the cardinal said.

That cardinal was Theodore McCarrick.

## Spring meeting

At the 2004 spring meeting of US bishops, which took place in Denver, he inaccurately summarised the instructions of the

Vatican on Communion, omitting Cardinal Ratzinger's normative direction. Under the former cardinal's influence, the bishops decided the best way to handle the question was to defer to the individual judgement of bishops.

The memo, incidentally, was sent ahead of the meeting to two US bishops: McCarrick, and the president of the US bishops' conference, Bishop Wilton Gregory.

In the wake of McCarrick's more recent scandal, pro-lifers will not be the only ones to lament Archbishop Gregory's decision about Mr Biden. Catholics concerned with ecclesial reform are also likely to have concerns.

Archbishop Gregory is charged with leading the Archdiocese of Washington after the scandal of McCarrick, and in the wake of serious questions raised about his immediate predecessor, Cardinal Donald Wuerl. The ttt is charged with promoting healing, and enacting reform, and he's pledged to do so.

## Critics

But his critics are likely to see his remarks on Mr Biden as a setback to reform. Some will argue that Archbishop Gregory has substituted his own judgment for the law of the Church, and the Vatican's instructions on how to apply it. That practice, they'll say, is the kind of clericalism that made the McCarrick scandal possible.

**“If history is predictive, other Catholics will praise Cardinal Gregory as a witness of civility and tolerance”**

Archbishop Gregory may not see that matter that way, or believe himself to be flouting canon 915. But if his priests think he is not taking seriously ecclesiastical law, his reform agenda may be seriously jeopardised.

Archbishop Jose Gomez said last week that a Biden presidency promises "certain challenges" for the bishops of the US. As Archbishop Gregory wades into controversy over canon 915, the reach of those challenges may soon become apparent.

**“If the Catholic perseveres in grave sin and still presents himself for Holy Communion, ‘the minister of Holy Communion must refuse to distribute it’”**



# Letters

## Letter of the week

### Prelates must raise voices about suicide

**Dear Editor,** I write this email with great frustration, sadness, and disappointment, yet I feel compelled to express my feelings publicly in the hope that those in positions of authority, the media, politicians, bishops, and doctors, will act.

I am living in Dundrum, County Dublin, a suburb of the capital. In recent days our community has become aware of three suicides, three tragedies where beautiful and beloved family members, daughters, mothers, sons and fathers,

were driven beyond their limits. In the language of lockdown, these people were denied what they believed to be essential. After months of the same and no end in sight, they despaired.

In Dundrum in recent weeks, we have more suicides than Covid-19 deaths, and this in just one small suburb.

The media is silent on suicide figures, the state is silent on suicide figures, but why are the bishops silent on suicides occurring all across Ireland.

Are their priests, who console their flock during times of loss, failing to fulfil their obligations to inform their bishops on the quantity of suicides? Are the bishops not aware of what is happening in their dioceses?

Who are we to hold accountable for the silence? Who has the authority to declare what is essential for a human being?

Yours etc.,  
**PJ O'Duibhir**  
Dundrum, Co. Dublin

### Abortion propaganda seen in supermarket

**Dear Editor,** In a well-known Dublin supermarket yesterday, a young woman was checking out her purchases. She was wearing a tracksuit top, and written on the back were the words: 'Join the global struggle – safe abortion, using pills' with a website address.

Perhaps other readers have seen similar propaganda?

Yours etc.,  
**Judith Leonard**  
Raheny, Co. Dublin



### Trump brought pro-life agenda and curbed religious suppression

**Dear Editor,** As a weekly reader of *The Irish Catholic* I am disappointed with the recent article by Aubrey Malone [IC 19/11/2020] on Donald Trump where he gives a scathing account of Trump's presidency. I will deal, briefly, from my perspective with what Trump achieved in his first four years as president. He has been a bastion of support to the Pro-life Movement cutting funds to Planned Parenthood. He was the first US president in history to attend the march for life.

The WHO and Communist China are indisputably close. WHO receives \$50 million from China annually, a pittance from a population of 1.44 billion, while the US contributes \$450 million with a population of only 331 million. WHO ignored the fact that China banned travel within China but allowed external travel during Covid. Trump was the first to ban travel to China. If all countries followed suit Covid-19 deaths would be lower worldwide. Malone criticises Trump's rallies. What about BLM ter-

rorising people and vandalising property? Federal police had to be deployed to protect St John's Church from BLM who showed blatant disregard for Covid restrictions with months of rioting without masks. Trump's further achievements: Built much of Mexican wall to stop illegal immigration, brokered more peace agreements than any other US President, Israel/Sudan and Israel/Bahrain for example, built the greatest economy in US history resulting in highest employment and lowest

unemployment, prevented American jobs going to China, created nine million jobs in three years, added three conservative Christian judges to Supreme Court. He is the only US President to forfeit his salary! Labelling Trump a liar, bully etc.. is exactly how the radical liberal far left media describe him. To deliver a strong pro-life agenda and curb religious suppression we need the integrity of Donald Trump.

Yours etc.,  
**Tony Burke**  
Loughrea, Co. Galway

### Article on Trump article 'left a lot to be desired'

**Dear Sir,** Aubrey Malone's article on Donald Trump certainly left a lot to be desired. While he grudgingly accepted that 'it was gratifying to see the Christian bills he put through congress' he went on to state 'people have to practice what they preach'. That would be the ideal – have we many examples of this today? He went on to say that 'a pro-life stance has to have more to it than being anti-abortion'. President Trump has ensured that black people and low income earners have seen a huge increase in their wages and an increase in employment, he has worked for religious freedom by having the Little Sisters of the Poor no longer having to fund contraceptives and abortion pills for their employees (which Joe Biden has promised

to change if he becomes president), spoken out against the huge increase in the persecution of Christians worldwide (which had been ignored by Ireland) and is perfectly correct regarding NATO, the World Health Organisation.

I do not agree with him on everything, especially on the death penalty, but at present the main battle as far as I am concerned is the worldwide imposition of abortion, which Mother Teresa so correctly identified as the greatest destroyer of peace in the world.

Regarding President Trump's handling of the virus, no country comes out too well in that regard and not ours with all the damage it has done through lockdowns. Very many people are dying because of the virus and not

necessarily from it. So many are left undiagnosed.

How interesting that Mr Malone asked how the president had changed from pro-choice to pro-life. How many of our politicians have been asked how they changed from pro-life to pro-abortion? Personally I do not mind what the president's motive for change was, I'm just grateful that he did change his stance. He is not in the running for sainthood but for doing what he could to improve the lives of so many despite being thwarted at every turn by the Democrats, who, incidentally never accepted the result of his election and spent the last four years trying to oust him.

Yours etc.,  
**Mary Stewart**  
Ardeskin, Co. Donegal

## facebook community

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

### 36% plan to attend Christmas Mass

I expect a very high percentage will attend Christmas Mass celebrations. – **Deirdre Quinn**

Only thing is, if we are still restricted to 50, unless extra masses are put on, a lot of people are going to end up standing outside. – **Siobhan Mallen**

I for one can't wait for Christmas Mass this year. – **Thomas O'Mahony**

They won't be able to attend mass at all if the churches remain bolted to the faithful. – **Mona Ryan**

### Appeal for Govt to raise voice for 'tortured' Christians

How are they fit to appeal to anything Christian, when they are denying the Irish population from attending Christian services in our own country. – **Patrick J Cowley**

People should write to their TDs and minister for foreign affairs, to highlight this atrocity. – **John Corcoran**

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

## Archbishop Martin provides great service to diocese

**Dear Editor,** It was a bit of a reality shock to read in *The Irish Catholic* that Archbishop Diarmuid Martin expects his successor to be announced before this Christmas. He took on the office of Archbishop of Dublin in the most dreadful times for the Irish Church. His major achievements included dealing with the clerical abuse of children, setting up a strong child protection programme and major participation in ecumenical matters. It has been said that Dublin was blessed with its two Archbishops, Michael Jackson and Diarmuid Martin.

I was thus surprised to read David Quinn's critical comments on the lack of attention or statements by Archbishop Martin on such important matters as abortion, same sex marriage and assisted suicide. Mr Quinn seems to have forgotten that the bishops of Ireland had issued statements and advice on these and other important issues. Archbishop Diarmuid was a major figure in the preparation of these statements, issued by the hierarchy, being the Primate of Ireland. History will, I trust, give a balanced account of the great service that Archbishop Diarmuid gave to the Church and in particular to the Diocese of Dublin.

Yours etc.,  
**Daithí O'Muirneachain,**  
Drumcondra, Dublin.

## Letters to the Editor

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

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

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



# Around the world



▲ **COLOMBIA:** Laidy Betancourt sits with her son, Joel (10) inside the Nuestra Señora de los Dolores Church on Providencia island. The family sleeps in a tent in the church after their home suffered significant damage during Hurricane Iota.

▲ **SUDAN:** Ethiopian women who fled the ongoing fighting in the Tigray region of Ethiopia are pictured in Sudan.



**PHILIPPINES:** A resident carries his belongings through mud and debris in Manila after flooding caused by Typhoon Vamco.



**VATICAN:** The Christmas tree is positioned in St Peter's Square at the Vatican.



**USA:** Demonstrators in Salem, Oregon, hold signs during a rally for religious freedom. More than 400 attended.



**ENGLAND:** People walk through London's Burlington Arcade adorned with Christmas decorations.





Diana, Princess of Wales, bows to Mother Teresa

# Our wounds and our power to heal others

**N**early 50 years ago Henri Nouwen wrote a book entitled, *The Wounded Healer*. Its reception established his reputation as unique spiritual mentor and he went on to become one of the most influential spiritual writers of the past half-century. What made his writings so powerful? His brilliance? His gift for expression? He was gifted, yes, but so are many others. What set him apart was that he was a deeply wounded man and from that disquieted place inside him issued forth words that were a healing balm to millions.

**“Our gifts and talents often become the reason we’re disliked and perhaps even hated”**

How does this work? How do our wounds help heal others? They don’t. It’s not our wounds that help heal others. Rather our wounds can colour our gifts and talents in such a way so that they no longer educe resistance and envy in others but instead become what God meant them to be, gifts to grace others.

Sadly, the opposite is often true. Our gifts and talents often



**Fr Rolheiser**

[www.ronrolheiser.com](http://www.ronrolheiser.com)

become the reason we’re disliked and perhaps even hated. There’s a curious dynamic here. We don’t automatically, nor easily, let the gifts of others grace us. More often, we’re reluctant to admit their beauty and power and we resist and envy those who possess them and sometimes even hate them for their gifts. That’s one of the reasons we find it hard to simply admire someone.

But this reluctance in us doesn’t just say something about us. Often it says something too about the persons who possess those gifts. Talent is an ambiguous thing, it can be used to assert ourselves, to separate ourselves from others, to stand out and to stand above, rather than as a gift to help others. Our talents can be used simply to point to how bright, talented, good-looking, and successful we are. Then they simply become a

strength meant to dwarf others and set ourselves apart.

How can we make our talents a gift for others? How can we be loved for our talents rather than hated for them? Here’s the difference: we will be loved and admired for our gifts when our gifts are coloured by our wounds so that others do not see them as a threat or as something that sets us apart but rather as something that gifts them in their own shortcomings. When shared in a certain way, our gifts can become gifts for everyone else.

Here’s how that algebra works: Our gifts are given us not for ourselves but for others. But, to be that, they need to be coloured by compassion. We come to compassion by letting our wounds befriend our gifts. Here are two examples.

When Princess Diana died in 1997 there was a massive out-

pouring of love for her. Both by temperament and as a Catholic priest, I’m normally not given to grieving over celebrities, yet I felt a deep sorrow and love for this woman. Why? Because she was beautiful and famous? Not that. Many women who are beautiful and famous and are hated for it. Princess Diana was loved by so many because she was a wounded person, someone whose wounds coloured her beauty and fame in a way that induced love, not envy.

**“Those gifts are real, come from God, and should never be denigrated in God’s name”**

Henri Nouwen, who popularised the phrase, “the wounded healer” shared a similar trait. He was a brilliant man, the author of more than 40 books, one of the most popular religious speakers of his generation, tenured at both Harvard and Yale, a person with friends all over the world; but also a deeply wounded man who, by his own repeated admission, suffered restlessness, anxiety, jealousies, and obsessions that occasionally landed him in a clinic. As well, by his own

repeated admission, amidst this success and popularity, for most of his adult life he struggled to simply accept love. His wounds forever got in the way. And this, his wounded self, colours basically every page of every book he wrote. His brilliance was forever coloured by his wounds and that’s why it was never self-assertive but always compassionate. No one envied Nouwen’s brilliance; he was too wounded to be envied. Instead, his brilliance always touched us in a healing way. He was a wounded healer.

Those words, wounded and healer, ordain each other. I’m convinced that God calls each of us to a vocation and to a special work here on earth more on the basis of our wounds than on the basis of our gifts. Our gifts are real and important; but they only grace others when they are shaped into a special kind of compassion by the uniqueness of our own wounds. Our unique, special wounds can help make each of us a unique, special healer.

Our world is full of brilliant, talented, highly-successful, and beautiful people. Those gifts are real, come from God, and should never be denigrated in God’s name. However, our gifts don’t automatically help others; but they will if they are coloured by our wounds so that they flow out as compassion and not as pride.

**“Here’s how that algebra works: Our gifts are given us not for ourselves but for others. But, to be that, they need to be coloured by compassion”**



# Family & Lifestyle

The Irish Catholic, December 3, 2020

## Personal Profile

Al Byrne: Turning work into prayer

Page 34



# Shopping safely online



**I**t's a truism at this point to say that online shopping has skyrocketed during the pandemic. Recently, the closure of non-essential stores, black Friday and Christmas' imminent arrival have driven sales even higher.

Many will be new to the world of online shopping and may be finding the ease with which it's completed very convenient. Often, all it takes is a few clicks and, especially if you have stored your card details with a store, a few numbers and your presents are on the way.

But we should still be aware of the possibilities for fraud it opens us up to, ones its convenience can conceal. According to a report by



## Ruadhán Jones explains how to protect yourself while shopping online

the Gardaí, in the period from 1 January 2020 until 31 October 2020, 489 Online Shopping Frauds were reported. The average loss was €2,306 per incident representing an overall loss to Irish citizens of €1,127,972.

In order to raise awareness about the dangers of online fraud, the Gardaí are supporting a Europe

wide campaign which gives some golden rules to follow when shopping online. In this article, I'm going to cover the basics.

### Before ordering

The first thing to say is that ordering online using your credit or debit card is a safe method, as long as you exercise the same

care as in other shopping. The most fundamental rule is to buy from reputable brands and shops. There are quite a few, from Amazon to Dunnes, who are trustworthy online sellers.

However, it is still worth your while being cautious when using sites like Amazon as they serve as a platform for independent companies. There are a few ways you can assess how good or trustworthy such companies are.

As a general rule, for any site you're using for the first time, check to see if they list the name and full contact details, including postal address, of the web trader so you know who you are dealing with. Do not rely on just

an e-mail address or a post box. If you're still uncertain, check the business registration number where applicable.

The more verifiable information they give, the better. For professional sellers and companies like Dunnes or Brown Thomas, you won't find names and numbers, but these sites are typically less of a threat as they control all their own sales.

### Check reviews

Another way to check if a seller is real, or simply to check if he or she provides a good service, is to look up reviews online. A

» Continued on Page 33



## Family News

### AND EVENTS

#### WRISTBANDS TO HELP FIND MISSING PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA

Wristbands which can help locate missing people with dementia have given families "peace of mind", according to a BBC report. The bracelets, developed by emergency services and charities in Somerset, store essential information about the wearer including their name and next of kin. The information can be accessed by an app when a mobile is held nearby using Near Field Communication (NFC) technology – the wearer's personal information can be accessed using the NFC app. Avon and Somerset Police, charity Senior Citizen Liaison Team and Avon Fire and Rescue Service developed the wristband, with a manufacturing cost of £1, as part of their Dementia Safeguarding Scheme. The scheme is currently limited to the Somerset region, but hopes are high that it will prove successful. Sergeant Stuart King said calls to missing persons with dementia come with a "high cost" for emergency services and hopes the wristbands will help families find their loved ones before having to report them missing.

#### THIRD VACCINE SHOWING SIGNS OF SUCCESS

Studies suggest the Oxford and AstraZeneca produced vaccine is up to 90% effective, and may prevent transmission. In studies of more than 22,000 people in the United Kingdom and Brazil, the vaccine was 90% effective in preventing Covid-19 when people got a half dose of the vaccine followed by a full dose one month later, AstraZeneca said November 23 in a news release. When participants got two full doses of the vaccine one month apart, its effectiveness dropped to about 62%, the company reported. Overall, the combined results showed that the vaccine had an average effectiveness of 70%. AstraZeneca's vaccine may be easier to distribute than those from Pfizer and its German collaborator BioNTech and from Moderna because the vaccine doesn't need to be frozen as the other two do. It may be less expensive than the other vaccine as a result.

#### 'GOOD NEWS' AS ANTIBIOTIC USE DROPS

Antibiotic prescriptions have dropped 20% during the pandemic, which doctors consider "good news" as antimicrobial resistance remains a threat. Up to the end of October, the number of private and medical/GP visit card antibiotic prescriptions fell by almost 700,000 compared to the same period last year, according to new data from the Health Service Executive. Irish College of General Practitioners lead adviser on Covid-19 Dr Nuala O'Connor told The Irish Times the decline is an "amazing drop-off" and a "good news story" to emerge from the pandemic. Commenting on the threat of antimicrobial resistance in the community, and the "frightening statistic" that it is predicted to be responsible for more deaths than cancer globally by 2050, Dr O'Connor said that the challenge after Covid-19 would be in sustaining the welcome reductions. According to the HSE, using antibiotics needlessly "allows bugs that cause infections to build up resistance against antibiotics and renders them useless over time".

# No Grinch can steal Christmas when hearts focus on Christ

Christmas is rapidly approaching, one of the most exciting times of the Church year for Catholics. We already have Christmas adverts competing to achieve that much desired place as the one advertisement that most captures the spirit of what Christmas is all about. Many of the central themes involve the excited anticipation, the watching and waiting and the heightened awareness of the great event that is about to occur. One particular advert has really touched the heart of many, featuring a little boy who, with mounting excitement, repeatedly asks the anxious question: "Is he coming, is he coming?"

**“Children love these sorts of challenges and grandparents or relatives who've been confined to home can join in the fun”**

We, the viewers, are led to believe that it's the typical festive scenario of a small child impatient for the arrival of Santa Claus. In an unexpected twist, we are pleasantly surprised to find that the little lad is actually referring to his beloved grandfather who makes his appearance much to the boy's delight.

I won't join in the chorus of people who keep reminding us that Christmas is going to be very different this year. Some even suggested moving Christmas to January, an idea that went down like a lead balloon. I found it strange to note the number of people who alluded to the fact that we might



## A parent's perspective Maria Byrne

even have to consider sacrificing Christmas, all for the benefit of the 'common good' of course. Some radio presenters seem intent on telling us that "it's only one day" which doesn't gel well with the Catholic celebration of Christmas which only begins on December 25 and is celebrated for twelve days. The time before Christmas, the days of Advent, is a time of preparation and anticipation. Like the boy in that charming Christmas advert, we are waiting for the arrival of a very special guest, the only guest that can give Christmas its true meaning.

With many of the usual events cancelled and families more constrained in what they can do, parents need to be more creative in finding ways to make Advent meaningful. A lot of the focus recently has been on online shopping, who'll be able to gather for Christmas dinner and how on earth we'll all cope without our annual Christmas knees-up. Children are being reassured over the airwaves that they need to get their Christmas lists in early and that they won't miss out whether they were naughty or nice. The baby Jesus is not getting much of a mention so it's up to Catholic parents, parishes and pastors to do all they can to put the spotlight on the true reason for the season.

We get children involved with all the fun preparations like shopping, baking, sending cards and decorating the house; why not have them equally involved with the spiritual preparations?

We've all missed going to Mass but many churches are still open during the day. With so many parents working from home, it would be a lovely preparation to visit a church or oratory every day during Advent to light a candle and pray. I saw a great suggestion involving taking a photograph every day which



represents some aspect of our spiritual journey to Christmas. These could be posted on parish websites or social media pages or even on a shared family WhatsApp or Facebook chat.

Children love these sorts of challenges and grandparents or relatives who've been confined to home can join in the fun. Children get very animated and enthusiastic about the setting up of the Christmas crib. In our house, the baby Jesus isn't put into his manger until Christmas morning. It's become a yearly ritual that each person in the family gets the opportunity to place the baby in the crib.

My 21-year-old daughter suggested that this year we go

all out and make a crib scene to remember with everyone helping to make it extra special. I saw a great idea for younger children on a blog page called Rainy Day Mum, flat stones are painted with simple pictures from the first Christmas. These story stones are great for all ages but the younger children and toddlers will really love them, and no great artistic skills are required. This is a project that older and younger children can work on together. Another fantastic idea is to use Advent to learn and sing a few of the classic Christmas hymns and carols that tell the true story of Christmas. We often know the first verse or two but struggle when the singing extends to further verses. YouTube is your friend here and this is another area where intergenerational efforts can be pooled to have a lovely Zoom carol service at Christmas. A recorded Christmas carol would be a lovely gift for a grandparent on Christmas Day. My own grandchildren's other grandparents and great-grandmother live in Canada and really miss that human contact with the children. A carol sent across the miles would be such a joy for them at Christmas.

Finally, don't forget to get to Confession. Many Catholics haven't been for months and months and what better way to prepare for the coming of the Christ Child. With the grace of God, we'll all be able to celebrate a return to Mass before Christmas and enjoy the best Christmas gift of all after a very tough year and a well-spent Advent. No matter what the challenges, as long as we keep our hearts focused on Christ in the Eucharist, no Grinch can ever steal Christmas.



» Continued from Page 31



simple Google can tell you an awful lot about a site. You can see the type of feedback previous customers have left them, whether their experience was positive or negative.

## Take the time to read the terms and conditions attached to delivery, such as delivery costs, accepted currencies, taxation and the like

You can check shop and service reviews on known reviews sites such as Amazon Customer Review, Trustpilot, Which?, Google My Business, Facebook Ratings and Reviews.

You can also check for trust marks. These are electronic labels on websites that indicate that the e-trader has agreed to follow the rules and regulations of a trust mark scheme, like the EU Trusted Shops Guarantee, and click on the trust mark to verify its official registration.

The next step the Gardaí advise is to read the small-print, as it were. Take the time to read the terms and conditions attached to delivery, such as delivery costs, accepted currencies, taxation and the like. It's important to be attentive to delivery conditions, as websites apparently based in Ireland or the UK may in fact ship from, for example, America. This will have a major effect on the shipping cost, among other things.

## Making a purchase

Once you have determined that the website or individual seller is legitimate, you can move onto the next step – making a purchase. There are still things to look out for here, namely methods of payment, checking the website security and saving all documents relating to payment. The Europol campaign has four tips when making your payment.

- Save or print the description and the terms and conditions which are displayed by the merchant and which you need to accept before you can place your order.

- Accept the payment by entering the number and expiry date of your

card on the online form and follow the merchant's instructions. If the online store uses full authentication, you will then be transferred for instance to your online banking service for identification.

- Save or print the acknowledgment of your payment displayed by the merchant.

- Keep the saved or printed details in case they are needed later for checking or for comparison.

One further consideration to make is how secure the site you are using is. There are two signs that it is secure. The first is that the website will have the text <https://> at the start of it. You can view this by checking the taskbar. The second is a little lock symbol should be visible in the top left corner of the taskbar, beside the refresh button. These two signs indicate the site is secure.

## Returns

Make sure to have checked return policies before paying, as not every seller's will be the same. Some may do full returns, others will require you to pay for postage on any item returned. If there is no obvious returns policy, it's advisable to contact the seller before proceeding or else to look elsewhere.

If you have problems with a product or delivery, always contact the store where you made the purchase first. Preferably use e-mail so that you have a record of your correspondence. If you cannot resolve the matter with the merchant, contact your bank's customer service. They

will give you further instructions, for example if you should file a report to the police.

It is best to carry out any contact you have with the seller or your bank through email so that you have written copies of all transactions. Copies should be saved of any important documentation.

## Avoid scams

The last thing I advise you to be aware of are spam emails from websites which come directly into your personal inbox without your permission. These types of emails will typically be easy to spot under the 'too good to be true' principle.

## As a general rule, regardless of who you are in contact with, do not share your credit or debit card details over email

If the email promises of huge rewards such as lottery winnings, messages stating urgent action is required to claim your winnings, and requests for upfront payment or private information, then it's probably spam. If it looks too good to be true, then it probably is!

The main aim of these 'phishing' emails is to get you to send sensitive data such as personally identifiable information, banking and credit card details, and passwords. In order to avoid such potential threats, never reply to unsolicited e-mails and do not click on links or attachments in these e-mails.

As a general rule, regardless of who you are in contact with, do not share your credit or debit card details over email. The bank will never ask you for them, nor should a reputable online seller. In the end, you should approach online shopping with same wariness as you would in store – don't give your details to strangers, if it seems suspect pull out and take good care of your bank card details.



# Dad's Diary

Rory Fitzgerald



I had never been quite so delighted to be dropping the kids off at one of their clubs. The clever old Brownies had organised an outing to the beach. The government, in their wisdom, permit parents to drive outside the 5km limit during the lockdown, to enable children to attend sports and clubs. The logic was inescapable: I was going to the beach!

The winter sunshine penetrated the morning mist as we busted merrily through the 5km travel limit for the first time in over a month. I wondered if we might somehow be stretching the space-time continuum as we hit the dizzying distance of the 10km mark. As we moved further onwards, I gained some inkling of how Columbus felt, as we ventured into those mysterious and unknown parts of the world beyond Ballinadee. As we drove along the high ridges of this strange faraway land, golden sunlight lit the winter fields, while the ghostly lakes of mist lingered in the valleys below. Suddenly, we rounded a bend, and there, in all its vast sparkling glory, lay the living sea. This beloved entity lies under 15 kilometres from my home, but I had not seen it for four long weeks. As we skirted along the beach, clean blue breakers crashed upon the shore, sending white spray scattering like the cold morning air.

We parked up and flung open the doors to gulp in the sea air, like a sick man might a tonic. The dog burst out of the boot, his eyes ablaze, looking for mischief. My daughter, dressed smartly in her uniform, ran off into the dunes, where her troop were assembling.

As I looked around me, I slowly registered the vast numbers of cars and many hundreds people milling about, walking dogs and building sandcastles. There was even a coffee van with a long queue. Either all these people live within 5km of the beach, or I've been the only sucker following the rules in the entire county of Cork.

Perhaps there is some justice in the widespread flouting of rules which needlessly prevent people from merely going to the beach, which is hardly a hotbed of Covid transmission. Either way, this was not a time to ruminate on the Irish predilection for observing rules in the breach. This was a time to savour every one of these precious 90 minutes of legitimate

liberty. With this my aim, I set off at a brisk pace along the beach, intermittently hauling back my vast hound from "greeting" the many passers-by on the crowded shore.

At the end of the beach, I stepped away from the throngs and onto a lonely cliff path, where I had often



walked as a boy. Each winter Sunday, my father and I would walk the cliffs of south Cork, and this was one of our favourite haunts. Flashes of memory were triggered as I rounded a turn in the path and saw a once-familiar scene. This rugged coast always whispers of the past, and the many ships that came and went in the age of sail.

At the appointed time, I collected my daughter, who was full of delight after her outing. A large exhausted dog collapsed into the boot. We drove home, where a Sunday roast was being laid on the table, and the range was lit, to warm our bones. After the meal, I pulled from the shelf an old maritime tome and reclined by the fire. I read the very words of a privateer who sailed from Bristol in 1708 and called to Cork to victual and take on board many men, before proceeding to sail around the world, privateering against the Spanish, rounding Cape Horn and even plucking Alexander Selkirk from his isolation. Such are the tales of the Cork coast.

As the fire crackled and I turned the pages, the glowering sky darkened. I was content to be once again confined. Despite my odyssey to the beach, this was the greater journey. From the comfort of my fireside, I had travelled 300 years into the past. Putting the book aside, I played chess with my boy, and as the storm brewed outside, I plied him with old tales of privateers out of Cork, and their adventures upon the south seas.



# Al Byrne: Turning work into prayer

## Personal Profile



Jason Osborne

While the modern offices of Citibank and the humble carpentry workshop of Christ seem to many as though they couldn't be further apart, Al Byrne informs me that they are really one and the same place, for one trying to live in imitation of Christ.

"I see that through work, we can participate in the creative power of Christ, the creative power of God. So, you're co-creating, you're basically renewing that time of Christ's being in the workshop as a carpenter – trying to emulate the way he works. And trying to turn it into sacrifice and uniting that sacrifice, that work we do, to the sacrifice of the Mass, you know? It's Christ's giving himself over to us and we can give our work over to him," he tells *The Irish Catholic*.

An earthy spirituality that is not often given voice in Ireland, it is typical of where Al came from. "I should say it's mainly my parents. It was passed onto me by my parents. 90% of the responsibility lies with them...they did a great job. One of the things I have to say about my parents that really helped, kind of made it really real to me, was to see that my parents actually prayed. I've memories as a child of seeing both my parents early in the morning, or at least it was early for me at the time, during the week and weekends, sitting in the sitting room in silence just for half an hour straight or longer. Just in prayer. It adds a bit of reality to the whole belief system. It's not



just talking about Church-stuff or having to go to Mass, following traditions – there's some backbone. It's something that's inspiring, a way of life.

"It was a very material spirituality, so by that what I mean is that it was really reflected in the day-to-day life, you know? It's pretty much embedded in the spirit of Opus Dei, to sanctify everyday life. It was really passing on that thing – encouraging us to do things well, to tidy up our room, to devote time to study. So what any responsible parent would do, but there was always a spiritual dimension to it," he says.

Having been introduced to the firm foundation of God by his parents, Al still found the chal-

lenges waiting for him that await all young people:

"I really grew into it because of them. Then, throughout the different stages of my life, my teenage years, going into college, I suppose I went over these things again. It was a continual renewal; you renew yourself through crises, right? Through questioning things, because obviously, I went to a Catholic school and most certainly not every kid in my class would have been from a good Catholic background or wouldn't have faith necessarily, but a good few of them did, so there was a good support network. However, you go into college and that, sort of, disappears and you really need to have a good

backbone because if society is against it, or if society doesn't seem to go with it, you need a solid reason to believe it, especially when it demands so much effort."

The effort he speaks of is the same one spoken of by G.K. Chesterton, who famously said, "The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried." For faith to flourish outside of a church, in the workplace, in family life, amongst those who disagree with you, Al believes a less-explored view of Christ is required.

"Getting to know Christ in his humanity...I think that's a key thing. That was a big discovery for me. It wasn't that God is just this supreme

being that's not palpable... he takes on our flesh, he takes on our weaknesses and overcomes them and then, I don't know, I began to see in Christ a person with struggles but who overcame them. And that's inspiring. It inspires you to want to overcome things because there's that person you look up to who already did that."

It is in this way that Al comfortably sees himself toiling alongside Christ in the heated offices of investment banking. All of the stresses and struggles of our most mundane realities are there to be transformed for those who know and love God.

## “Prayer is to direct your life towards God, to grow in love”

"I think the key for me is to strive to turn work into prayer and that is done by first understanding what prayer is. Prayer is to direct your life towards God, to grow in love. To get to know him a bit better and to be more like him because union with the person makes you like the person. Turning work into prayer is trying to live out the virtues, trying to do your work with the intention of obviously offering it up to God, but also trying to purify our reason over time, because there's always a temptation, which is reasonable, to want to do well, or to want to look well in front of your boss, and that's all fair and good and fine, but that shouldn't probably be the ultimate reason to why we try to do our work well, to why we want to spend so much time of our day there, you know?"

By this example, it is hoped that his colleagues come to see that God is not limited to the buildings erected in his name, but rather, is to be found everywhere. Even in work, where they least expect him.



## Children's Corner

Chai Brady

## Making your own Christmas snowflake crystals

Some people will be hoping for a white Christmas this year but what is snow and what natural conditions are necessary for it to be created? There is an easy and fun science experiment you can do at home that will allow anyone to make their own snow crystals. You can learn how to make a snowflake using borax and a few other easy to find household items.

### Apparatus:

- String
- Wide mouth jar
- White pipe cleaners
- Blue food colouring (optional)
- Boiling water
- Borax
- Small wooden rod or pencil

### Method:

- Get a white pipe cleaner and cut it into three sections of the same size. Twist these sections

together in the centre so that you now have a shape that looks something like a six-sided star.

- Take the top of one of the pipe cleaners and attach another piece of string to it. Tie the opposite end to your small wooden rod or pencil. You will use this to hang your completed snowflake.
- Carefully fill the jar with boiling water
- For each cup of water add three tablespoons of borax, adding one tablespoon at a time. Stir until the mixture is dissolved but don't worry if some of the borax settles at the base of the jar.
- Add some of the optional blue food colouring if you'd like to give your snowflake a nice bluish tinge.
- Put the pipe cleaner snowflake into the jar so that the small wooden rod or pencil is resting on the edge of the jar and the snowflake is sitting



freely in the borax solution.

- Leave the snowflake overnight and when you return in the morning you will find the snowflake covered in crystals!

### What's happening?

Crystals are made up of molecules arranged in a repeating pattern that extends in all three dimensions. Borax is also known as sodium borate. It is usually found in the form of a white powder made up of colourless crystals that are easily dissolved in water.

When you add the borax to the boiling water you can dissolve more than you could if you were adding it to cold water, this is because warmer water molecules move around faster and are more spread apart, allowing more room for the borax crystals to dissolve.

When the solution cools, the water molecules move closer together and it can't hold as much of the borax solution. Crystals begin to form on top of each other and before you know it you have your completed crystal snowflake!



# TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



## A jaundiced view of religion on the box

**W**ho would have thought that an absorbing drama could be made of someone playing chess!

Up to now the best chess film I'd seen was *Queen of Katwe* but drama series **The Queen's Gambit** (Netflix) is making quite a stir and everyone I know that has seen it is impressed. Anya-Taylor Joy plays the enigmatic Beth, a chess prodigy who sweeps all opposition before her as she rises to the top of her game, literally. But is she happy? She has had a troubled past, was orphaned at a young age, was raised for a while in an orphanage that wasn't brilliant but wasn't as harsh as the usual clichés and was eventually adopted by a childless couple where the father is not enthusiastic and eventually drifts away. The mother is supportive but drinks a lot and finds some validation in Beth's successes. Beth has addiction issues and seems to have difficulties with emotional connections. Chess is her obsession and others do warn her about negative aspects of her life.

### Brilliantly

It is filmed and scripted brilliantly and holds the attention through all seven episodes. Like so many good dramas the secondary characters are interesting and three-dimensional and suggest their own



Anya Taylor-Joy in *The Queen's Gambit*.

internal dramas – the mother, the chess opponents, the amiable chess-loving twins who are her true friends. The story arc is unpredictable, and though it's based on a novel it has the feel of a true story. We could have done without the relatively mild 'adult content', the intermittent crude language and one particularly offensive profanity. Otherwise it would have been a drama that parents and teens could

profitably enjoy together. I found a jaundiced attitude to religion where it did feature, which wasn't very much.

### Lies

A few weeks ago I reviewed the first episode of drama series **Sacred Lies** (Facebook Watch). Over the remaining episodes I found the story still engaging, but though it was exploring the world of a cult, the idea of religion

in general didn't fare very well. There were too many insulting swipes at God and religion without any apparent understanding of it, or any awareness of the love that's preached and practised by so many. Religious characters were portrayed as naïve, gullible or superstitious. One cynical character in prison, a young woman with same-sex attraction, who seemed to be clued in to reality at a certain level posited the lazy notion that science and religion conflict with instead of complement each other. She quoted the 'Big Bang Theory', unaware – I presume – that this was developed by a Jesuit priest-scientist. Asked by the young girl, Minnow, who's an ex-cult victim, what was there before the Big Bang she said we don't know...yet. Minnow is confused but knows she's had a strange experience that can't so easily be explained away. As well as dismissing the idea of God, the cynical young woman was also, significantly, dismissive of the idea of love, and was both blasphemous and violent. The hard shell seemed indicative of inner trauma – both characters are in a reform institution for young offenders. One episode explored the age-old question about why bad things happen to good people. An FBI psychologist said this question was one of the reasons why people turn to God. Despite Minnow's awful experiences

### PICK OF THE WEEK

#### A VERY COUNTRY CHRISTMAS

BBC One Sunday December 6, 10.30pm

To mark Advent 2020, Ellie Harrison and Angellica Bell will celebrate three very different country Christmases by joining in the making, shaping, gathering and worshipping of three regions in Britain as they prepare for Christmas.

#### MASS

RTÉ One Sunday December, 11am

Celebrating the work of the Society of St Vincent de Paul in meeting the needs, and sustaining the dignity, of the marginalised in our society.

#### GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS, PRIEST-POET

EWTN Tuesday December 8, 9am and Wednesday December, 5pm

An examination of the life of Gerard Manley Hopkins, an English poet and Jesuit priest who spent time in Dublin.

at the hands of the cult, he said that "not all things done in the name of God are bad", that faith can inspire charity, loyalty and compassion and that religion can give people a sense of meaning. Minnow, thoroughly disillusioned with her cult's version of religion, explored the approaches to faith of the Christian, Jewish and Muslim girls in the juvenile detention centre. In response to her atheist cellmate she said that "science is great but it doesn't have all the answers I'm looking for". When she heard a Bible quote urging us to beware false prophets it really resonated with her. In the final episode she concluded "no matter what you believe it's no excuse for hurting someone".

### Crude

Last Thursday night saw the last episode, thankfully, of **Fantasy Island** (RTÉ 2) – a crude cartoon series featuring a repulsive priest, Fr Murphy, described in the show as a "dog-collared deviant". The whole thing is crude, pointless, humourless and offensive, as if foul language is inherently edgy and creative.

It's strange how even the tiniest of perceived offences to some groups cause outrage, but others can be thrashed with impunity.

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# Film

Aubrey Malone



## Pre-Christmas offerings from streaming platforms

As someone who grew up within 100 yards of two cinemas, I was going to films almost as soon as I could walk. If someone told me I wouldn't be in one more than a dozen times this year I'd probably have told them to send for the men in the white coats. But that's what happened with the coronavirus. More often than not I had to exchange the big screen for the small one.

Referring to television as 'the small screen' is probably a misnomer nowadays. When we got our first set in 1962 it certainly was minute but today, particularly with people who've installed home cinemas, the term is hardly applicable. Nothing can compare with the

atmosphere of a cinema to get the full film experience but widescreen televisions help to reprise it somewhat.

As we get closer to Christmas you may wish to order some of the yuletide classics like *Holiday Inn* or *It's a Wonderful Life* but the likelihood is that these will be on some television channel or other anyway, which would make such purchases superfluous.

Veering away from seasonal fare, Sky Atlantic has *The Undoing*, a six-part thriller that's also viewable on NOW TV. Hugh Grant plays an oncologist who's married to therapist Nicole Kidman. Their cosy world is turned upside down when a mysterious woman



Nicole Kidman and Hugh Grant in *The Undoing*. Photo: HBO

is murdered. Mr Grant's character had an affair with her but denies having had anything to do with her murder.

Along similar lines, in *The Bay of Silence*, available on DVD and download, stars

that fine Scottish actor Brian Cox. He plays a character who begins to suspect his wife may have been involved in their son's death.

The BBC Player has Steve McQueen's anti-racist drama *Small Axe*. It's based on

the real-life experiences of London's West Indies community between 1969 and 1982. Another film on a related theme is *Time*, available on Amazon Prime. It's a documentary about a black woman battling to get her husband's 60 year prison sentence for robbery reduced.

### Documentary

On the IFI Home Player there's an interesting Norwegian documentary, *The Painter and the Thief*. It deals with an unusual relationship that develops between an artist and a man who robbed one of her paintings. She becomes a carer for him after he has a car crash and even asks him to sit for a portrait

before their relationship undergoes a sea-change.

VOD (Video on Demand) has *One Man and His Shoes*, a documentary about Air Jordan, the company endorsed by the American basketball champion Michael Jordan. It's a parable about the huge power consumerism exerts in the sporting world. Nike runners are so sought after, people have been killed trying to procure them.

Younger viewers will be attracted to the Chinese-American animated musical feature *Over the Moon*. It's a moving story about a young girl who decides to build a rocket to fly to the moon to meet a mythical goddess her mother told her about before she died.





# BookReviews

Peter Costello



## Voices of the silent minority

**Different and the same: a folk history of the Protestants of independent Ireland**

Deirdre Nuttall

(Eastwood Books/Wordwell, €25)

Ian d'Alton

This illuminating book is about “the stories of the ‘old’ Protestant communities of independent Ireland and how these stories have justified feelings of belonging, entitlement, estrangement, marginalisation, and more in the context of a State that they have sometimes historically perceived as hostile, or at least indifferent, to their interests”.

The evidence here would strongly suggest that while assimilation and integration has been accepted by the Protestant community generally, the journey has been anything but smooth for many, and still not over for some. The book is primarily a cultural, not faith-based, exploration of those who weren't in the elite Protestant groups. While these are stories and histories specific to southern Irish Protestants, there are many aspects which could equally be applied to southern Catholics. Marginalisation, economic and social deprivation, feeling different were by no means a Protestant preserve.

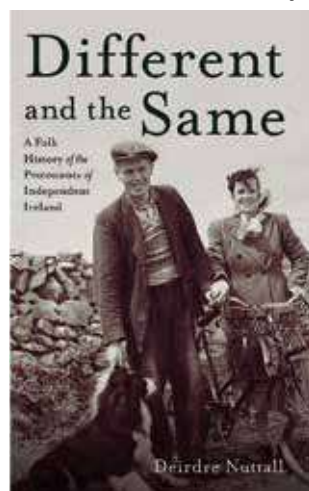
### Background

The author has a background in folklore, archaeology, social anthropology and ethnology, and thus has a valuable grounding in categorising and characterising social and cultural communities such as this. Ms Nuttall examines narratives and remembrances of origin, the past, identity, loyalty and culture, love and marriage, feelings of difference and sameness, land and landscape, of rural and urban.

The idea emerged from the absence of Protestant contributions to the collections assembled by the Irish Folklore Institute and the Irish Folklore Commission in the 1930s.

That absence did not originate in any sectarian bias *per se*, but was largely the consequence of the emphasis on collecting stories from those of a rural and Gaelic background – the “noble Catholic peasantry”, as Ms Nuttall describes them.

Her source material was principally, though not exclusively, a series of 98 interviews and 76 responses to questionnaires that were generated by letters placed in *The Irish Times*, the *Irish Independent*, regional newspapers, the *Irish Farmers' Journal* – but not the *Church of Ireland Gazette*,



as she didn't want to skew towards the most religiously-observant people.

She also followed interviews in the broadcast media that emphasised the desire to hear the stories of ordinary ‘small house’ Protestants. Most respondents were over 70 years of age.

**“Context is interwoven through the stories that Ms Nuttall details”**

The author is acutely conscious that “All these stories are subjective; they are not an objective historical record of the recent past, and they may not be reflective of everyone's experience”. This is a wise caveat – the feelings of alienation and nostalgia for a ‘loyal’ past often articulated by the respondents in this study would not, for instance, have been as evident in this reviewer's household (Church of Ireland, 1950s and 1960s Dublin and Cork, middle-class). His family felt more the ‘same’ than ‘different’.

Throughout, context is interwoven through the stories that Ms Nuttall details; this is one of its many strengths and attractive features. The Introduction is a model of its kind, a balanced and informative account of what constitutes a ‘Protestant’; the effect of demographic changes; and whether Protestants really do constitute a distinctive and delineated cultural group.

This well-written book captures a sense of peoplehood and distinctiveness that, though, appears to be on the way out – Ms Nuttall writes that “It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the story of the Protestants of independent Ireland as a cultural, if not a religious, minority is drawing to a close”.

That's quite sobering, if true. What does it say to northern Protestants and the chances of their traditions being treasured and surviving in an all-island entity?



## Thinking about the universe

**A theory of everything (that matters): A short guide to Einstein, Relativity and the Future of Faith**

by Alister McGrath  
(Hodder and Stoughton, £14.99)

Christopher Moriarty

Last year saw the celebration of the centenary of the validation of Albert Einstein's general theory of relativity. An event of the utmost importance to science, the observations of 1919 received universal coverage in the press – in spite of being comprehensible only to a small minority of human beings. While of no apparent importance in terms of the day-to-day living of anyone, the theory is central to the understanding of how the universe – and hence ourselves being part of it – evolved and operates. At a mundane level, aspects of relativity are essential to the understanding and development of the maps on our mobile phones and an array of other familiar applications.

### Remarkable career

The author, Alister McGrath – Professor of Science and Religion at Oxford – has had a remarkable career, first in science and subsequently in philosophy and religion. His

books aim, above all, to demonstrate that science and religion are complementary rather than antagonistic. The underlying aim of this one, first published in 2019 for the centenary and now made available in paperback, is to continue the author's championship of this unity, but his method is to present a very readable and largely comprehensible account of the life and thinking of Dr Einstein. This leads him to expand on the feeling which he shares with the latter, that religious

belief is as valid as scientific observation – but has a different purpose.

### Outline

The book begins with an outline of the state of scientific thought at the end of the 19th Century when Dr Einstein, a rather undistinguished graduate with an important but almost unrelated post in the patent office of Switzerland, was thinking at a higher level than perhaps any other human being.

His thoughts resulted in the publication in 1905 of three epoch-making papers in theoretical physics. Prof. McGrath traces the dazzling career that followed from these and also paints a portrait of the warm-hearted individual whose name and features became familiar to thinking people throughout the world.

**“The book begins with an outline of the state of scientific thought at the end of the 19th Century”**

Dr Einstein failed in his pursuit of the ‘Holy Grail’ of a single mathematical theory that would explain the workings of the entire physical universe.

He did not believe that such a theory would do anything more than that. In his mind the reason for why the same universe existed was a matter, not for science but for spiritual contemplation.

Prof. McGrath expands on this, leading to a conclusion on how Christianity provides a basis for such thought. His book is short, inspirational and a perfect Christmas present.



Einstein at the Swiss Patent office



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

# The meaning of Christmas customs



Nativity play in Belfast

**Christmas Tradition, Truth and the Total Baubles**  
by Nick Page  
(John Murray Press, £6.99)

**Peter Costello**

The contents of this book may seem very familiar to some readers, for every Christmas articles and books appear about the traditions of the Nativity and the events surrounding it.

Nick Page, who is an agreeable yet well-informed writer with an amusing style, deals in some 24 chapters with a whole range of beliefs people have about Christmas, most of them with little true foundation, it seems, in history.

Yet where would the season be without them? They surround what for others (including Nick Page, we can assume) is the profound mystery of

the incarnation. Could we so easily engage the attention of children to both Christmas and Easter if it were not for these traditions?

**Complain**

These days we all complain about 'the commercialisation of Christmas,' by which is meant those dreadful Coca-Cola advertisements, with their stout red-coated

older traditions and customs, where they survive and are celebrated in a familial or community atmosphere, keep these commercial ravages at bay.

**“These days we all complain about ‘the commercialisation of Christmas,’ by which is meant those dreadful Coca-Cola advertisements”**

This book also devotes itself largely to the sort of tradition and customs of these islands. A real survey of Christmas would have to cover France, Spain and Italy and their more Catholic customs, as well as the traditions of northern Europe in Germany, Scandinavia, Poland and Russia. But so much of these notions of tradition come from beliefs of the Eastern Churches, who hardly get a look in here. Also neglected are the new regions of Christian belief in Asia, in India and in China, and in Africa, with their still

evolving Christian customs of Christmas.

**Tradition**

All these go to show what a complicated thing, tradition, custom and sacred beliefs can be. Let us, though, not be too critical of them. Without them there might at this time of the year be nothing except commerce, self-indulgence and austere religious ceremonies.

We should hail and warmly welcome the Three Kings, who followed a mystical quest, and took back to their own country news of a strange and liberating story.

And of course, in the parish Nativity play (which will return) there has to be a role for every child in the class, if only among the little angles that crowd around the crib and the Holy Family. But then some Christians hope too for a similar angelic role for themselves in the future. We all of us should see ourselves in the guise of little angles.

So let's all simply wish each other well at this time, and relish the traditions that give some warmth and amusement to an often bleak season.

## Kevin Barry, a legend of the revolution

**Yours 'Til Hell Freezes: A Memoir of Kevin Barry**

by Síofra O'Donovan  
(Currach Books, €19.99/£17.99)

**J. Anthony Gaughan**

A century ago Kevin Barry became an icon of the republican movement. The ballads on his life and death were particularly popular among Irish expatriates. One of them even became part of Paul Robeson's repertoire in the 1930s.

His status derived from the tragic fact that Kevin was the first Irish Volunteer to be executed after the Easter 1916 Rising and the executions associated with it. But his celebrity stemmed mainly from the fact that at the age of eighteen ("just a lad of eighteen summers..." as the ballad said) he was hanged by the British authorities.

Kevin was born on January 20, 1902 in Dublin, where the family conducted a dairy business. The family also farmed at Tombeagh, near Hacketstown, Co. Carlow, and so Kevin attended Rathvilly national school. He began his secondary education at the Christian Brothers' O'Connell Schools, but soon transferred to the Jesuit-run Belvedere College. On leaving Belvedere, he registered at University College Dublin (UCD) to study medicine.

At the age of 16, Kevin joined the Irish Volunteers. He was registered as belonging to 'C' Company, 1st battalion, Dublin Brigade. Encouraged by a colleague, he also joined the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) and became its youngest ever member. From the outset Kevin was a totally committed member of both organisations, assiduous in attending meetings, marches, drilling, training and camping at Ticknock in the Dublin mountains.

**Raid**

The first 'operation' in which Kevin was involved was a raid on a military outpost at the King's Inns in Dublin on June 1, 1920. Without a shot being fired he and his colleagues secured a large cache of guns, ammunition and other military equipment.

The next operation planned by 'C' Company was an ambush on a military lorry collecting bread from Monk's Bakery in Church Street in Dublin. It was scheduled for September 20, the very day Kevin was to sit a medical examination at UCD.

Again the main aim was to secure the guns and ammunition of the soldiers on the detail. The raid was 'botched'. Firing broke out. One soldier was killed and two others were fatally wounded. One of the Volunteers was also wounded but managed to escape. Kevin alone of the attacking party failed to escape and was captured as he

attempted to hide under the military lorry.

Kevin was taken to Mountjoy Jail. Martial law was, in effect, established with the passing of the Restoration of Order in Ireland Act on August 9, 1920. Thus within a month Kevin was arraigned before a court-martial, was convicted of murder and sentenced to be hanged. Attempts were made by Joseph Devlin, MP, the Nationalist leader, Archbishop William Walsh of Dublin and Laurence O'Neill, Lord Mayor of Dublin, to persuade the authorities to commute Kevin's sentence.

To their pleas emphasising Kevin's age the authorities responded that the three soldiers killed in the affray were also teenagers and one of them was even younger than Kevin. They were also concerned that any reduction in Kevin's sentence would affect the morale of members of the crown forces. It seems the die was cast on his fate when Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, Commander of the British army, threatened to resign if the sentence was not carried out.

**Executed**

From the time of his capture until he was executed on November 1, 1920 Kevin exhibited a remarkably calm and courageous demeanour.

Most of the information in this book is to be found in Donal O'Donovan's, *Kevin Barry*



Kevin Barry

and *His Time*, published in 1989. However, Síofra O'Donovan provides a wealth of extra details on Kevin's family background and on members of the extended Barry family. And she also includes records of some of the very interesting interviews she conducted during her research.



# Classifieds

The deadline for advertising in the classifieds is 10.30am, the Friday before publication. Contact the Classified Team on 01 687 4094 or email [advertising@irishcatholic.ie](mailto:advertising@irishcatholic.ie)



Whitefriar Street Church

## CHRISTMAS MASS SHOP

Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church  
Whitefriar Street Dublin 2

Mass office open daily  
Click and Collect or online

[www.whitefriarstreetchurch.ie](http://www.whitefriarstreetchurch.ie)

Enrolment for Christmas Mass  
Bouquets now available.  
Selection of Christmas Cards,  
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Telephone 01 4758821



### Please remember GOAL in your Will

42 years on we continue to deliver lifesaving support to the most vulnerable people in our world. Leaving a gift in your Will is priceless.

Contact Courtenay on  
01 2809779 or via email at [cpollard@goal.ie](mailto:cpollard@goal.ie)

Registered Charity No. 20010980; CHY 6271

## The Gift Of A Lifetime

Be there for others after you're gone.

A gift in your will to Irish Hospice Foundation is a meaningful way to help ensure no-one faces death or bereavement without the care and support they need.

Email Clare Martin at  
[clare.martin@hospicefoundation.ie](mailto:clare.martin@hospicefoundation.ie)  
or call 01 679 3188

 Irish Hospice Foundation

[www.hospicefoundation.ie](http://www.hospicefoundation.ie)

### Remembering

MEMORIAM CARDS  
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT  
CARDS & NOTELETS  
BOOKMARKS

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### BÓTHAR

**PLEASE REMEMBER BÓTHAR IN YOUR WILL.**  
€1,800 will allow us to give an Irish, in-calf, dairy heifer to a struggling family in Rwanda, completely transforming their lives. Your gift will live on for generations. Phone the office on 061 414142 or [info@bothar.ie](mailto:info@bothar.ie)

### Consider leaving a gift to The Irish Catholic in your Will

Phone 01 6874028 in strictest confidence

Inspired by the vision and passion of Sr. Stan, many people are choosing to leave a loving gift in their will to support people who are homeless to find safety and a place they can call home.



To join in Sr. Stan's vision please contact [eve.kerton@focusireland.ie](mailto:eve.kerton@focusireland.ie) or phone 1850 204 205

**FOCUS**  
Ireland

### By remembering World Missions Ireland in your Will you are leaving a gift of hope for all God's children

World Missions Ireland is the Church's official charity for overseas mission  
Please help your Church to survive & flourish

To learn how, call Eimear on 01 497 2035 or email [eimear@wmi.ie](mailto:eimear@wmi.ie)



### SERVICES

**ALL UNWANTED** home waste removed. Cookers, fridges, beds, suites, wardrobes, carpets etc. Removed and disposed of in a proper manner. No job too small or big. Contact Tommy, 087 6406015.

### CATHOLIC CONNECTIONS

**IS YOUR LIFE PACKED FULL** because you are single? Wouldn't it be lovely to meet a kindred spirit to do life with? Call the Christian introduction specialists today on 01 568 6558.

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STATE UNDER WHICH HEADING YOUR AD IS TO APPEAR:

Minimum charge of €24.60 (inc. VAT) for 5 lines (25 words). Extra lines €4.92 each.

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Miracle Prayer €40

Please print your advertisement in the coupon, placing ONE word in each space. Below, please print your name and address. Do you require a Box Number? YES ☐ NO ☐ (Please tick ✓) Box Number €6 extra.

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2					
3					€24.60
4					
5					
6					
7					€29.52
					€34.44

Name and contact detail form MUST be filled out

Name .....

Address .....

.....

Landline ..... Mobile .....

I enclose Cheque/PO: €.....I wish to pay by Visa ☐ Mastercard ☐ Laser ☐  
My Visa/Mastercard/Lasercard number is:

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Expiry Date: .....Signature .....



# Leisure time

## LITTLE FLOWER PENNY DINNERS



Little Flower Penny Dinners have been providing meals and services to the homeless and the elderly for over 100 years.

**Please help us continue and donate what you can on our website [www.LFPD.ie](http://www.LFPD.ie) or by phoning us with your credit/debit card details or by post to Little Flower Penny Dinners, 11 Meath St, D8**

Reg. Charity  
No. 6179

**Phone 01 4536621 or 01 4546795  
e-mail: [srbrigid@littleflower.ie](mailto:srbrigid@littleflower.ie)**

**MQI**  
Merchants Quay Ireland  
Homeless & Drugs Services



## Your heart for the homeless

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

Your legacy, of any amount, can enfold the most vulnerable and lonely in wrap-around supports. You may wish to keep the details confidential. But we want to give you this little wooden keepsake, made by a client, for you.

This is your heart for the homeless and those on the road to recovery.

**To receive your little wooden heart and information on remembering**

**Merchants Quay Ireland in your will, ring Emma Murphy, Legacies Manager at 01-524 0965 or email [emma.murphy@mqi.ie](mailto:emma.murphy@mqi.ie)**

*Please pray for the beatification of*

## Little Nellie 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

## Will the MSC Missions

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

**Please help us with a gift in your Will**

Contact:

MSC Missions Office, PO Box 23 Western Road, Cork.  
Tel: 021-4545704 Email: [info@mscmisions.ie](mailto:info@mscmisions.ie)

**[www.mscmissions.ie](http://www.mscmissions.ie)**

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

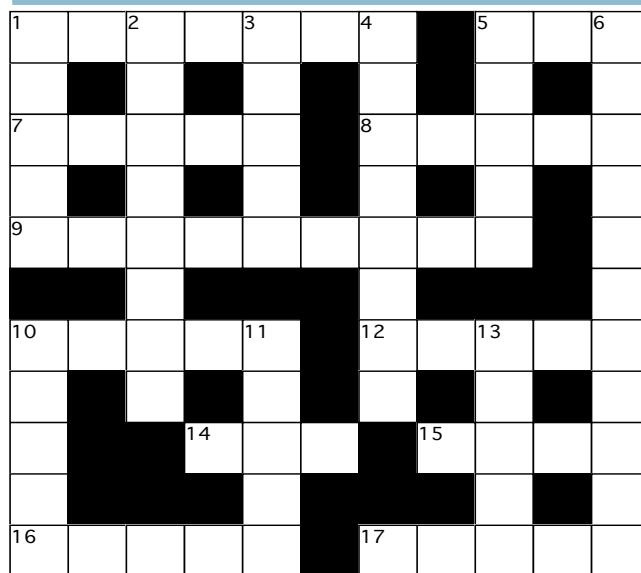
**trócaire**

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

**One day, parents and their children will tell the story of how your legacy of love changed their lives. Thank you for considering a gift to Trócaire in your Will.**

## Crossword Junior

Gordius 361



### Across

- 1 Miley Stewart character Hannah, or one of the United States (7)  
5 Pixie (3)  
7 Tokyo is the capital of this country in Asia (5)  
8 Turn these when you read a book (5)  
9 You pass the baton when you finish running your part of this (5,4)  
10 Great pain (5)  
12 'Is there any food left, or have you \_\_\_\_\_ it all?' (5)  
14 Insect (3)  
15 Costing nothing (4)  
16 Be careful - that bee might \_\_\_\_\_ you! (5)

- 17 Try an answer, even though you're not sure (5)

### Down

- 1 One rank of army officer (5)  
2 Historic French emperor Bonaparte (8)  
3 Get on someone's nerves (5)  
4 The ABC (8)  
5 Large bird of prey (5)  
6 Pieces of cod in bread-crumbs (4,7)  
10 Pains (5)  
11 Not old (5)  
13 The number of sides in a triangle (5)

## SOLUTIONS, NOVEMBER 26

GORDIUS NO. 483

**Across** – 1 Hot 3 Conspirator 8 Dither 9 Zeppelin 10 Eyrie 11 Scoop 13 Motet 15 Halberd 16 Gambled 20 Hired 21 Lunar 23 Petra 24 Firebird 25 Zagreb 26 Over the moon 27 Fix

**Down** – 1 Hedge school 2 Tutorial 3 Crepe Suzette 5 Ropes 6 Tallow 7 Ran 12 Pandora's Box 13. March 14 To and fro 17 Letter of freedom 19 Entree 22 Rebut 23 Plain

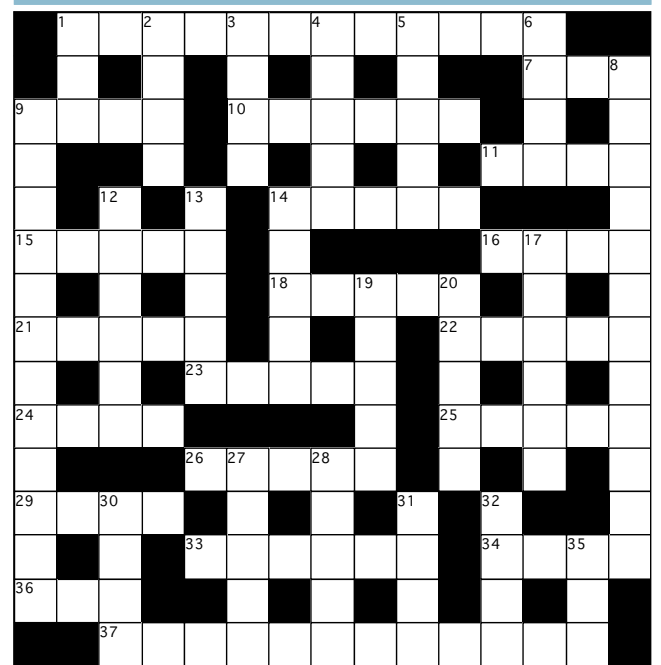
### CHILDREN'S No. 360

**Across** – 1 Banana skin 5 Ancestors 7 Aunts 9 Teacher 11 Tusk 13 Simple 16 Dogs 18 Butter 19 Energy

**Down** – 1 Belfast 2 Neatness 3 Nicest 4 Kite 6 Stories 8 Why 10 Empire 12 Kilts 14 Edge 15 Buy 17 Gag

## Crossword

Gordius 484



### Across

- 1 Looking up to the sailor? One is not accorded much status, so (5,3,4)  
7 Take goods or money by force - from Mr Kearney? (3)  
9 The smallest coin (4)  
10 Found out about rental adjustment (6)  
11 Goading attachment to a cowboy's boot (4)  
14 Stop; desist (5)  
15 Receiver of a stolen railing? (5)  
16 A farmyard bird is a loud predator (4)  
18 Being spirited, one encountered the periphery of Hades (5)  
21 & 22 A double name for the first pope? Mere points of different (5,5)  
23 Playwright who wrote 'The Playboy of the Western World' (5)  
24 Shannon tributary found in New York (4)  
25 The 'Belly Button' (5)  
26 Criticise a Marian shrine (5)  
29 Requirement (4)  
33 Smooth rut (6)  
34 A male cat is tiny (4)  
36 Which garland is this? The French one (3)  
37 The cardinal has left the nuns' cloister to get to an opera venue (6,6)

### Down

- 1 Cricket extra (3)  
2 What items may one bid for? Plenty! (4)  
3 Savage, untamed (4)  
4 Great push (5)  
5 It's found near the nose, but it's morally offensive to ourselves! (5)  
6 Snare ten rabbits, and prepare starters (4)  
8 Will it affect a rural Glam bar as it alerts one to intruders? (7,5)  
9 Box in church (to dispel falcon noises) (12)  
12 & 32d But might there be any number of women in such a musical set-up? (3,3,4)  
13 Plants from a south-eastern diocese? (5)  
14 It adds flavour to part of a locum interview (5)  
17 Covet a scale like this (6)  
19 Adjust slightly (5)  
20 Parted with money (5)  
27 This is never about to show mettle (5)  
28 The European looks right into a crombie (5)  
30 Mr Bana is seen in Central Jericho (4)  
31 Dave is upset by these Hindu writings (4)  
32 See 12 down  
35 Possess a topless dress (3)

## Sudoku Corner

361

### Easy

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

### Hard

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

### Last week's Easy 360

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

### Last week's Hard 360

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



## Notebook

Fr Martin Delaney



# Following the lead of the handmaid of the Lord

## DEAR MARY,

It's Advent time again, which for you equates to the last month of your pregnancy all those years ago. Down through the years a lot has been said and written about your son's birth in Bethlehem. Famous artists have tried to depict not only that famous night but also the day you first heard that you were going to be a mother to a very important baby boy. I have always been sceptical how most of those artists depicted your conversation with the Angel Gabriel. You always seemed to be so calm and serene, surrounded by beautiful flowers and gorgeous buildings. Then I came across a rather untypical painting of The Annunciation which I suspect was a little closer to how things really were for you. Henry Tanner's painting shows you as a young girl sitting on a rather dishevelled bed, with a great light in front of you. The angel has just spoken to you and you are just sitting there with your mouth open, dumbfounded. You have this stunned look on your face which says: "You must be having me on. How can this be?" You are confused and even scared to the point that the angel is compelled to say to you: "Do not be afraid."



Hence Tanner's painting appeals to me. Afraid! How could you not have been afraid? Over the years we have tried to airbrush what it must have been really like for you and Joseph and your parents, Joachim and Anne. Living in a small village where everyone knew everyone's business, you are engaged to Joseph but how are you going to tell him your news. He will know that it can't be his child. How did you translate what Gabriel told you about your special child in a way that would make any kind of sense to Joseph and your parents not to mention the Nazarene neighbours? Honestly, it was all a bit too much to ask of you. What happened to you Mary and how you were able to cope with it could only have come about because you were so close to God. Only your extraordinary trust in God enabled you

to say 'Yes', to this extraordinary request. You knew from your Jewish history that you were not the first that God had asked to do difficult things. Like yourself, Moses and Isaiah and others had been asked and they too had protested that they were not suitable. But when God calls it is not easy to turn him down. It had to be from an amazing place of faith and love and trust that you were able to say yes. You were so eloquent: "I am the handmaid of the Lord, let what you have said be done to me."

## Joys

I'm sure you had unspeakable joys as the mother of the most famous baby boy in history but that difficult 'yes' you gave to Gabriel was not the last one. And I'm not naive enough to think that your great faith and trust spared you the pain and the fear each time some new thing was asked of you. That image of you holding the lifeless body of your 33-year-old

son, taken down from the cross has touched humanity for two thousand years.

Mary, this year, as I'm sure you know, six mothers died in my parish who had already buried one or more of their children. Three other young women died whose mothers are still alive and had to stand at their gravesides, brokenhearted. I felt helpless in the face of such terrible loss. On those very sad days I was drawn back to you and how you were the only one who could really understand their grief.

Mary, I know that your 'yes' brought you pain but they also brought you indescribable peace and joy. You said as much when you sang to your cousin Elizabeth: "My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant...for the Mighty One has done great things for me and holy is his name."

This Advent, help me to follow your lead and say yes to God anew whatever the cost.

## Mary did you know...

(Songwriters: Greene Lee Rufus / Lowry Mark Alan)

Mary, did you know that your baby boy would one day walk on water?

Mary, did you know that your baby boy would save our sons and daughters?

Did you know that your baby boy has come to make you new? This child that you've delivered, will soon deliver you

Mary, did you know that your baby boy will give sight to a blind man?

Mary, did you know that your baby boy will calm the storm with his hand?

Did you know that your baby boy has walked where angels trod? When you kiss your little baby, you kiss the face of God

## SHOP EARLY!

● It was Christmas, and the judge was in a good mood as he asked the prisoner, "What are you charged with?"

"Doing my Christmas shopping early," replied the defendant. "That's no offence," said the judge. "How early were you doing this shopping?" "Before the shop opened," said the prisoner.



Sr Bernadu Mary offers vital assistance from the Little Way Association to a vulnerable lady in Pondicherry, India.



## Please help leprosy victims hit especially hard by covid

Covid particularly afflicts people with conditions like leprosy, and Little Way donors have been asked to help such people through their kind donations. Sr Bernadu Mary of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Social Service Society,

Pondicherry, India, writes "The pandemic situation here is so frightening. We have already lost five of our sisters to the virus. With the lockdown suspending all forms of work since March 25, our target people now face penury and deprivation. With very little savings and a poor social security net, families are having fewer meals, borrowing money and braving the threat of police violence in order to go out and work."

## Please give whatever you can

Sr Bernadu asked us for funding for soap, masks, food, school equipment, and special items for pregnant and lactating women. She and her sisters also counsel victims of domestic violence. She adds: "We have so far helped nearly 300 families with dry food materials enough for a month, but the needs persist, with four villages being identified for special help. People with leprosy often live as scavengers, salvaging what they can from refuse, and on their behalf we seek your kind support."

**Your contributions to our fund for the hungry, sick and deprived will go intact to missionaries like Sr Bernadu, helping the most afflicted victims of the current epidemic. Please give whatever you can.**



"Do not fear. If you are faithful in pleasing Jesus in little things, He will be obliged to help you in the greater things."

- St Therese

## MISSIONARIES NEED YOUR MASS OFFERINGS

The Little Way Association regularly receives appeals from bishops and religious superiors on the Missions for Mass stipends and intentions for their poor priests. Such payments help them to meet basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter.

Also, the poor and deprived people, whom the clergy serve so faithfully, often turn to their priests for assistance. Thus, your stipends for the missions can benefit priests and people, and your intentions are faithfully honoured at Holy Mass.

**We like to send a minimum of €5 or more for each Mass**

## HELP FEED THE HUNGRY

Please spare a thought for the thousands who die each year of hunger and disease in mission lands. Your donation will be forwarded to a missionary without deduction.

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  
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[www.littlewayassociation.com](http://www.littlewayassociation.com)

I enclose €..... to be allocated to:  
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☐ Please tick if you would like an acknowledgement

Name (Rev. Mr. Mrs. Miss)

(Block letters please)

Address

To donate online go to  
[tinyurl.com/lwadonations](http://tinyurl.com/lwadonations)

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