

# The Irish Catholic

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# 'All I wanted to do was cry'

## Myanmar missionary warns poor will suffer most

EXCLUSIVE

Chai Brady

A missionary in Myanmar has warned of imminent "disaster" after the military seized power in a coup this week. The country's Church leaders have appealed for calm. "All I wanted to do was cry," the missionary told *The Irish Catholic*.

The missionary – who spoke on condition of anonymity in case of retribution from the regime – also said that if the international community imposes sanctions on the junta this will affect the poor the most.

There are now fears that ethnic groups in the country – formerly known as Burma – will take up arms against the military, according to the missionary.

The missionary told this newspaper: "One of the big fears is that there are many, many ethnic armed groups in Myanmar, really a lot, and there was an attempt to bring them all together after the last election to form a national unity government and that's all fallen apart."

"One fear is that those groups now wrack up violence

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## Learning to reed



Lauren, Lucas and Zoe Cleary from Furies, Killarney, Co. Kerry make St Brigid's Crosses in honour of her feast day January 1, 2021. Photo by John Cleary.

## Irish welcome Pope's day for grandparents

Staff reporter

The Irish-based Catholic Grandparents Association (CGA) has welcomed Pope Francis' establishment of a 'World Day of Prayer for Grandparents and the Elderly' which will take place for the first time on July 25 this year.

Archbishop Michael Neary of Tuam, patron of the CGA, also welcomed the move saying the Pope is "highlighting the very important role grandparents and elders play in passing the Faith to upcoming generations of children".

"Grandparents and other family members of their generation proudly attend all the important sacramental milestones in the young person's life – Baptism, First Holy Communion, and Confirmation," Archbishop Neary said.

Founder of the CGA, Catherine Wiley, said the association has been at the forefront of campaigning for greater recognition of grandparents for their role and vocation in passing on their faith to the next generation.

Ms Wiley said that grandparents and the elderly are often "overlooked" but that the new day in the universal Church calendar is a "momentous achievement".

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**Managing Editor:** Michael Kelly, editor@irishcatholic.ie

**Northern Correspondent:** Martin O'Brien, martin@irishcatholic.ie

**Multimedia Journalists:** Chai Brady, chai@irishcatholic.ie

Ruadhán Jones, ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie

Jason Osborne, jason@irishcatholic.ie

**Newsroom:** news@irishcatholic.ie 01 6874026

**Books Editor:** Peter Costello, books@irishcatholic.ie

**Advertising:** advertising@irishcatholic.ie 01 6874094

**Accounts:** accounts@irishcatholic.ie 01 6874020

**Magnificat:** magnificat@irishcatholic.ie

**Shop:** shop@irishcatholic.ie

**Managing Director:** Garry O'Sullivan

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# Religious still helping those society might prefer not to see

**J**ust how toxic discussions about the Church and priests and religious have become in Ireland was evidenced a few years ago when novelist Marian Keyes suggested people throw stones if they see a priest.

"No matter how 'nice' a priest

is, no matter how many raffles he runs, he is still a foot soldier for a f\*\*\*d-up misogynistic regime," she said before posting a weepy message to social media days later claiming it was all a big joke. No-one was laughing, but the fact that there was little to no backlash against Ms Keyes was telling of the fact that it's open season on religious sisters, brothers and priests.

**"No-one was laughing, but the fact that there was little to no backlash against Ms Keyes was telling of the fact that it's open season on religious sisters, brothers and priests"**

The report of the mother and baby home commission unleashed another round of the 'nasty nun' caricature. I'm not talking about the honest and justified criticism religious congregations received over their failures and even cruelties, but there is too often a push to tar everyone with the same brush. Why aren't the countless kindnesses by heroic and saintly sisters

over many generations added to the balance sheet? Why is it always the actions of those who betrayed the Gospel that are to the fore?

While not ignoring the shameful wrongdoing and institutional failures to live by the values we profess, Ireland's priests and religious deserve a huge 'thank you' for their tireless work.

## Convent

There are convents and religious houses all over this country with retired sisters, brothers and priests who gave their lives in constant service whether in education, healthcare of caring for the most vulnerable members of society. Sometimes even in the Church we don't consider them, they are treated like an embarrassing reminder of what has been exposed in the reports as if all are guilty by virtue of the sins of some.

Our religious received a welcome (and overdue) affirmation this week from the incoming Archbishop of Dublin Dermot Farrell

"They [religious] have been at the forefront of renewal in the Church, taking bold initiatives, and making significant sacrifices, putting flesh on the hope that was within them," he said in the homily at his installation Mass on Tuesday (see page 12).

Crucially, he was quick not to consign them to history: "This is not a

## Editor's Comment Michael Kelly



mission that belongs to the past. In another age, they were at the forefront of addressing the educational, social, and health of those who risked being left behind. Today they continue their prophetic ministry in the service of those whom our society might prefer not to see: those who suffer from addiction, those who struggle to put food on the table, women trafficked, those without a roof over their heads, or a front door of their own," he said.

## Reminder

It is a timely reminder that this work goes on: quietly, patiently and without fanfare. It goes on in every community in Ireland and indeed abroad. Missionaries return from long and difficult ministries overseas and their first thought when they return to Ireland to – in theory – retire is: what more can I do? They are keen to work with parishes and communities in Ireland to help people

experience the love of God and have an encounter with Jesus Christ.

**“Our religious received a welcome (and overdue) affirmation this week from the incoming Archbishop of Dublin”**

The work of religious today – whether working with the vulnerable or helping people to deepen their relationship with God – continues to be a vital part of the life of the Church.

**❗ To join Friends of The Irish Catholic and support Catholic journalism, please phone the office on 01 6874094 for more information or to make a contribution.**

## Myanmar missionary warns poor will suffer most

**» Continued from Page 1**

against the military, some of them have promised to do it, that if the military took over they would start the fighting again and that would be a disaster for here that's for sure."

Civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other top civilian leaders were taken into custody by soldiers on the same day as the first new parliamentary session was due to be held on Monday. Military leaders have alleged that there was voting irregularities in the national election in November after Ms Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy won a landslide victory.

Currently soldiers are patrolling the streets and a night-time curfew is in force. A one-year state of emergency has also been declared, after which the military say there will be another election – but no clear timeline has been given.

When news of the coup reached the missionary, they said: "Honestly when I heard it, all I wanted to do was cry,

these people have suffered so much so this is certainly not going to improve the situation, that's for sure.

"Covid is here like it is everywhere, it's just the worst possible time for something like this". They said they were concerned of the effect any international sanctions would have on the country, saying: "I presume the international community will respond negatively so will sanctions be introduced again? They generally affect the poor – depending on what they do with them."

The missionary added: "I don't know how this is going to affect how things are but I know that the overriding feeling that I've experienced among people is sadness, it's not even anger among the people I've met, just sadness, things were quite positive before the coup."

Regarding another election, which General Min Aung Hlaing has promised, the missionary said they don't believe "the results will be any different – if they have them fairly".



Photo: Abbie Traylor-Smith / Concern Worldwide

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# Priest decries EU, Irish Government's 'betrayal' of Irish fisheries

**Ruadhán Jones**

A Donegal priest has criticised the Irish Government and the EU over the Brexit deal, which he calls a "huge disaster" for Irish fisheries and a "betrayal" of the industry.

Fr John Joe Duffy from Creeslough, Co. Donegal, estimated that the deal could cost up to €100 million for Irish fisheries. It will be a particularly "awful hit for coastal communities" such as Fr Duffy's own parish.

"For my own community, we may lose up to €60 million," Fr Duffy told *The Irish Catholic*. "There's going to be a decommissioning of Irish fishing boats and it's going to have an awful impact on jobs in the border, midlands and western region of which Donegal is part."

## Questioned

Fr Duffy questioned the Irish Government's understanding of Irish fishing's importance to the country and communities, saying they were "outmanoeuvred" by bigger states.

"Our officials were inept and they were thrown onto the

French guillotine. On average – for mackerel and pelagic mackerel alone – we have lost over three times more than any other country," Fr Duffy said. "For our pelagic sector, we have lost almost €28 million. Other countries have lost a lot less, Spain lost €750,000, Belgium €142,000, France €6.9 million, Netherlands €15 million – they have a massive sector, a huge factory ship industry, Denmark lost €5 million."

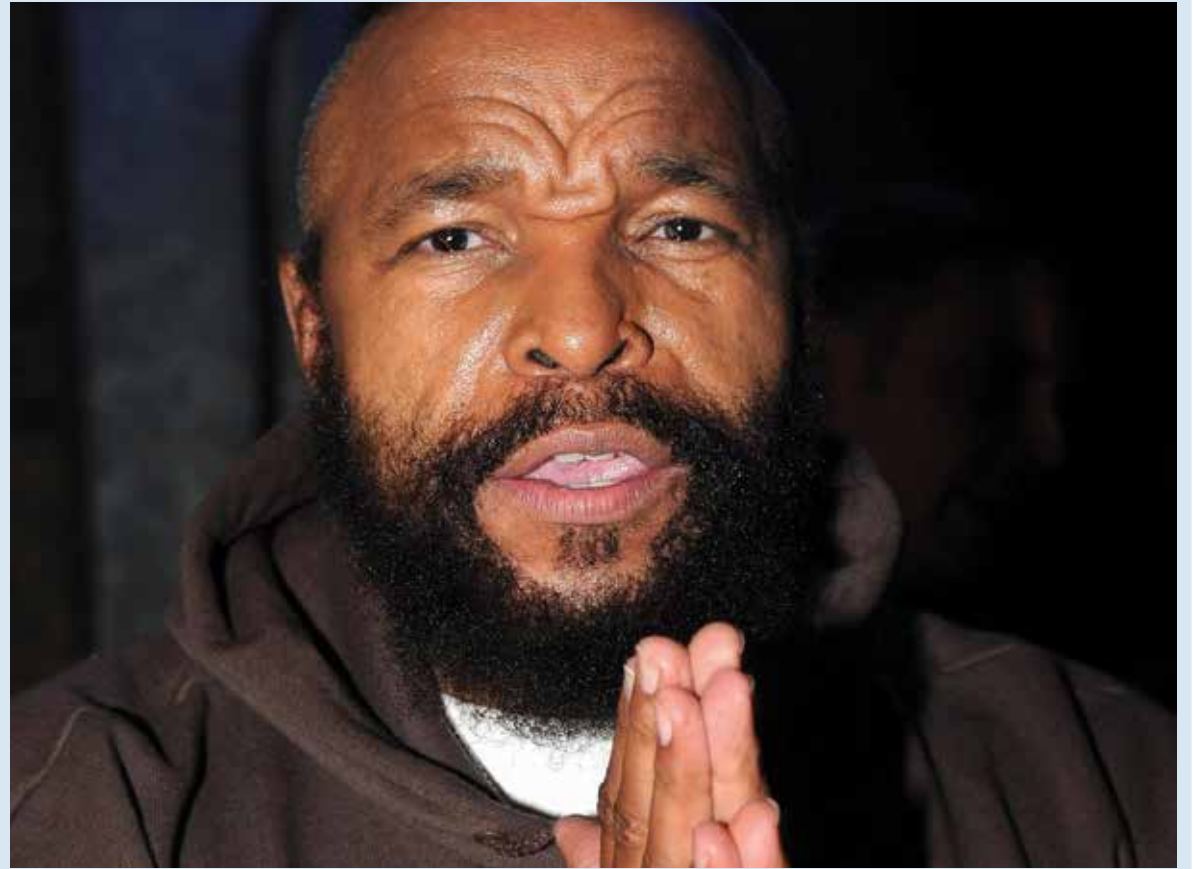
## Disaster

"It's a huge disaster. I would say it's the greatest sell out ever of Irish business and a betrayal. It protects Denmark, it protects Germany, it protects Holland particularly, the Spanish and the French, at Ireland's expense."

Fr Duffy added that due to the lack of ports in Ireland, Irish fisherman in the North of Ireland face 16-24 hour long journeys to reach a designated port.

"I am very, very worried that lives are going to be lost by what the Irish Government are implementing," Fr Duffy said.

## Mr T 'pities the fool' who says there's no God



Tweeting up a storm lately, Mr T hasn't been shy about his faith in God.

A devout Christian, the famous actor, wrestler and bodyguard has taken to Twitter to espouse God's love and mercy. "We have to stop worrying about when this pandemic will end! Instead, let's ask God to change us while we are in it! Don't you know God can bless you in the midst of it," he tweeted out as his #TuesdayThought.

Always steeped in Christianity, Mr T attributes the resurgence of his faith to his struggle with cancer. Speaking to *beliefnet.com*, he said, "The story of Job gave me strength when I had cancer. I said, 'T, if you just hang in there, God will give you double for your troubles.'"

"Saint Paul of the Cross gathered companions to live together and to proclaim the Gospel of Christ to all." • (Constitutions, I)

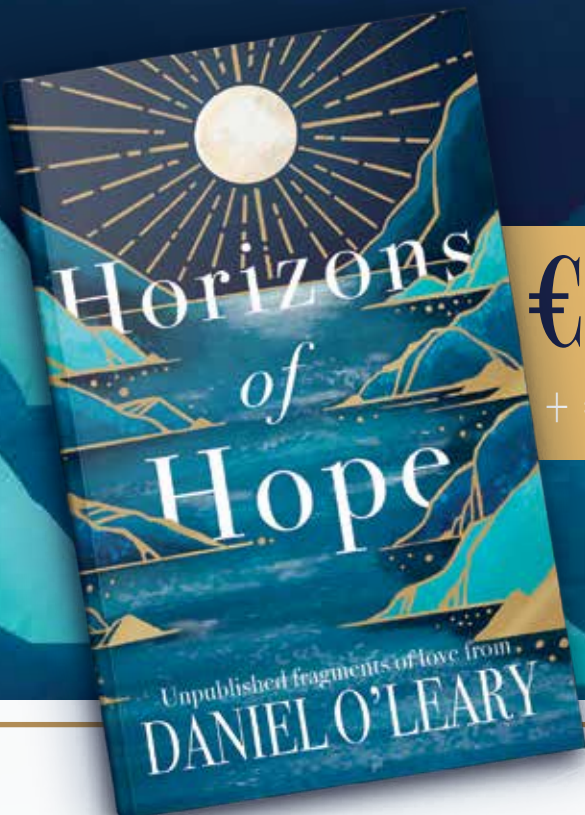
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## Sectarian hate crime on Derry church dubbed 'disgraceful'

Chai Brady

Police in Northern Ireland are investigating a sectarian hate crime on a Catholic Church in Derry which has been decried as "disgusting" and "disgraceful".

A door of St Mary's Church in Limavady as well as a standing crucifix on the church grounds were defaced with graffiti which included the names of loyalist paramilitary organisations such as the UDA, UFF and UVF and the acronym KAT (Kill All Taigs) over the weekend.

The PSNI confirmed they were treating the attack as a hate crime. Local Sinn Féin MLA Caoimhe Archibald condemned the sectarian vandalism saying those responsible should be "brought to book".

"Parishioners and locals were disgusted by this disgraceful and offensive graffiti, which is nothing more than blatant sectarian vandalism. I am pleased that the offensive graffiti was removed swiftly by a local company, this is much more reflective of the Limavady community," she said and asked anyone with any information to come forward.

SDLP MLA Cara Hunter described the attack as "disgusting". Speaking to this paper she said: "This act of smearing words of hatred, violence and discrimination on a place of worship is unacceptable. Not only has this been a scary incident for the local congregation, to desecrate a chapel, the very place people find safety and comfort during these difficult times is entirely disrespectful.



"I strongly condemn these acts and have called upon all leaders to calm these tensions and be mindful of the damage that rash statements can have."

A similar attack occurred on the church in 2018. A PSNI spokesperson said their enquiries into the incident were continuing.

"I would appeal to anyone with any information about this incident to contact police on 101, quoting reference number 31/01/21," the spokesperson said.

"A report can be made using the online reporting form via [www.psnipolice.uk/makeareport](http://www.psnipolice.uk/makeareport). Information can also be provided to Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111 or online at [www.crimestoppers-uk.org](http://www.crimestoppers-uk.org)."

## Irish reader takes Vatican news site to task

Staff reporter

The Vatican's official news agency has vowed to do better after an observant Irish reader spotted they refer to 'UK bishops' when they mean just prelates from England and Wales.

*Vatican News*, a news information portal provided by the Vatican's Dicastery for Communication, was taken to task by a concerned reader of *The Irish Catholic* Alan Whelan who said in an email to *Vatican News* that the wording might "confuse the fact that there are three distinct and separate national hierarchies and bishops' conferences within the UK".

The UK includes the Bishops' Conferences of England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland – which of course is part of Ireland's

bishops' conference.

Mr Whelan asked: "Can anything be done to educate your news team on both ecclesiastical and political geography?"

In a response seen by this paper one of their news editors responded thanking him and saying he was "absolutely correct" regarding their "often erroneous use of the denomination 'UK' in our headline and texts".

They added: "We will do our best to be more careful in the future. What's more, your comments have triggered a further-reaching detail that regards the 'tag' we use in the publication of our web articles, not only in English, but in the other languages of *Vatican News* as well. We are taking immediate action to correct that too."

## Pub of saints and scholars



Members of the Swiss Guards – the Pope's elite bodyguards – wasted no time on Monday when life got back to relative normality in Rome with the opening of bars and restaurants. The guardsmen sampled a pint of Guinness in the eternal city's famous Irish pub Scholars Lounge.

# Gender equality among Irish saints!



## Mary Kenny

There's been a campaign afoot to make St Brigid's Day, on February 1, a national holiday on a par with St Patrick's Day. Gender balance among Irish saints!

And why not? St Brigid has a strong devotional tradition, and the St Brigid's cross is a symbol cherished in so many Irish households.

Brigid, who died in about 523 in Kildare, also had a further reach across the seas, and even in wicked old Fleet Street in London the favoured church of far-from-pious scribes for matches and despatches was – and is – St Bride's, Bride being a version of Brigid.

**“I never knew that there was a tradition of leaving a scarf outside the door so that Brigid might pass and impart healing”**

But it must be admitted that St Patrick has something of a head start in the celebrity of Irish saints. Brigid's renown grew with oral knowledge and transmitted tradition – her beauty, spiritedness and spirituality, her community of women, her healing powers, her wells – and such traditions are often reliable.

But Patrick's life has been much better documented, and has attracted more continual scholarship – new biographies of Patrick appear quite regularly.

### Diaspora

St Patrick's Day was universalised by the Irish diaspora from the Famine period onwards, and its global reach is now terrific. (And yes, the Taoiseach should go to Washington on March 17 to present the shamrock – it would be surely unpatriotic not to!) Although Brigid always had her following – especially among Irish nuns on missions overseas, who recommended Brigid as a baptismal name for converts – it would be hard to match the star status of Patrick.

And I'm not sure if the feminist champions of St Brigid are wise to portray her in a more 'diverse' way – presenting her as black, for example. Or indeed, presenting her as pre-Christian and a pagan goddess.

This, as the marketing men say, is confusing the brand. If we want to promote Brigid, don't muddy the waters by mixing her up with all kinds of different messages. Keep it simple. Modernise portraits of Brigid by all means, but show her as she has always been known: the Abbess of Kildare.

And teach more about the old Irish traditions around Brigid. Growing up in Dublin, I don't think we learned that much about the practices around devotion to Brigid. I



The St Brigid's cross has become a powerful symbol of devotion.

never knew that there was a tradition of leaving a scarf outside the door so that Brigid might pass and impart healing.

### Grateful

I am now grateful to Padraig Belton who has written about a tradition practiced in Lifford, Co. Donegal around St Brigid's Day. A child outside the threshold of the house says: “Gabhaigí ar bhur nglúine: Osclaigí bhur súile: /Agus ligigí isteach Bríd Bheannaithe”. (“Go on your knees, Open your eyes, And let Blessed Brigid enter.”)

Then an older woman replies: “Se beatha; se beatha na mná uaisle.” (“She is welcome; welcome to the noble lady.”)

What a lovely devotional practice, kept and cherished in so many parts of Ireland down the centuries.

● I was delighted to have my first Covid-19 vaccine last weekend: a jab of the Oxford Astra-Zeneca dose delivered with cheerful efficiency at Folkestone in Kent to promptly-moving lines of oldsters. Every jab helps the wider community develop immunity: truly a definition of ‘the common good’.

## An ill-fated meeting

Katharine O'Shea – disparagingly dubbed ‘Kitty O'Shea’ – died a hundred years ago, on February 5, 1921, as the widow of Charles Stewart Parnell. The magazine *History Ireland* has just conducted a discussion podcast on the theme: What if Katharine and Parnell had never met? The current Irish Ambassador to Washington, Dan Mulhall, had written a fascinating essay around this ‘alternative history’, imagining Parnell living into an age of Irish independence, and dying of the Spanish Flu in 1918 (rather than of pneumonia in 1891, four months after marrying the divorced Katharine – and the famous split in the Irish Parliamentary Party).

It's a fascinating round-table discourse, with Mr Mulhall, the scholar Patrick Maume, the Queen's University Belfast academic Margaret O'Callaghan, and myself, chaired by Tommy Graham (available now on <https://www.historyireland.com/hedge-schools/>). Dan Mulhall notes that both Joyce and Yeats made the Parnell controversy central to their imaginative work. (Joyce's famous scene in *Portrait of the Artist* begins with a woman calling Mrs O'Shea an ‘unmentionable’ name – probably ‘prostitute’.)

### Blamed

The Catholic Church was blamed for the scandal which followed the O'Shea divorce, although initially

Archbishop Croke kept his distance – Parnell and Katharine were Protestants. It was the fiery Methodist preacher, Hugh Price Hughes, who led a campaign in the *Methodist Times* against “immorality in high places” – backed by the crusading journalist W.T. Stead.

Divorce wasn't admissible for political figures in Britain until well into the 1950s. Anthony Eden was the first prominent British politician (Prime Minister 1955-57) to have been divorced, and even so, the fact was kept discreet.

Still, the Parnell case remains a tragic story, and if he and Katharine hadn't met, how different would Irish history have been?

## Conference on Prayer

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# 'Joy and hope' after Pope Francis announces day for grandparents

Chai Brady

The Catholic Grandparents Association (CGA) has welcomed Pope Francis' establishment of a 'World Day of Prayer for Grandparents and the Elderly' which will take place for the first time on July 25 this year.

Archbishop Michael Neary of Tuam, patron of the CGA, welcomed the move saying the Pope is "highlighting the very important role grandparents and elders play in passing the Faith to upcoming generations of children".

"Grandparents and other family members of their generation, proudly attend all the important sacramental milestones in the young person's life – Baptism, First Holy Communion, and Confirmation," Archbishop Neary said.

## Generous

"Grandparents are often very generous with their time and wisdom, they gently and lovingly teach their grandchildren the well-known prayers, and share the gift of faith in a very edifying way."

Founder of the CGA, Catherine Wiley, said the association has been at the forefront of campaigning for greater recognition of grandparents

for their role and vocation in passing on their faith to the next generation.

## Overlooked

Ms Wiley said that grandparents and the elderly are often "overlooked" but that the new day in the universal Church calendar is a "momentous achievement".

"It is refreshing also to note the renewed commitment by the Church for the pastoral care of the elderly, a group of people who have suffered greatly during the Covid-19 pandemic due to being isolated from family, from their faith and from many of their daily supports," she said.

"I firmly believe that grandparents and the elderly are needed now more than ever, not just as teachers of the faith, but as fountains of wisdom and sensibility - qualities which our world needs these days."

While the first World Day of Prayer for Grandparents and the Elderly will be celebrated on July 25, it will subsequently be celebrated on the Sunday closest to the Feast of Saints Joachim and Anne – the grandparents of Jesus.

She added: "Today is a day of joy and hope for all of us in the Catholic Grandparents Association and a day



Catherine Wiley founder of the Catholic Grandparents Association meets Pope Francis.

to give thanks to our Holy Father, who has a great love for grandparents and the elderly, and who often talks about his own grandmother Rosa. We look forward to being part of this new annual celebration so as the charisms of grandparents and the elderly are brought to the fore and passed on to the next generation."

# RTÉ to extend additional religious content until the end of June

Jason Osborne

RTÉ has confirmed that it will continue to offer extra religious content until the end of June while the national vaccination programme is implemented. The national broadcaster has aired weekday and Sunday Masses since the first lockdown last March in partnership with church-services.tv.

Commissioning editor of religious content at RTÉ, Roger Childs, commented, saying that even with the national roll-out of the vaccine taking place, it's clear that it will take months before people "especially in vulnerable age groups" will feel safe or confident enough to congregate in their places of worship.

## Colleagues

"I am grateful to colleagues in RTÉ News for making space for this daily content on the RTÉ News channel," he said.

Tony Bolger, CEO of church-services.tv, added that he is "delighted" to see RTÉ offer to continue their "successful collaboration" until June 30, 2021. He thanked the bishops, priests and ministers of the cathedrals and churches around the country that have been used to host streamed services throughout the duration of the pandemic. He also acknowledged the "tremendous" effort his own team has made at churchservices.tv in delivering the service without interruption since March.

RTÉ has also partnered with minority faith communities since the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic, offering content to mark the celebration of their own major festivals. In a statement, RTÉ said that they will transmit programmes to mark Passover, Ramadan, Nawruz, Vaisakhi, Rosh Hashanah and other selected minority faith festivals.

# Man charged after spate of church collection box robberies

Ruadhán Jones

A priest-turned-detective in East Cork tracked down an alleged collection box thief who is now in Garda custody.

The priest became aware of the thief when he found cheques for annual church

donations from another parish in his collection box Sunday January 24, according to *The Sun*.

The cleric investigated using CCTV footage from cameras installed in his church to see if someone was raiding the collection boxes.

It's understood the alleged robber used a hooked piece of wire to extract envelopes containing cash from collection boxes in Catholic churches throughout East Cork. The priest contacted Gardaí in Cobh who began a surveillance operation in the church.

A man returned to the church in Carrigwohill to allegedly attempt to take money from the collection box. He was followed by Gardaí at a safe distance and was stopped and arrested near Cork City. He will appear in court on charges related to these incidents.

# Keeping a feast in honour of 'Mary of the Gael'



Bosco Serrats from Spain (left) and Dixon Chongo from Mozambique (right) participate in an online assembly on St Brigid's Day at Glenstal Abbey School in Co. Limerick.

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## Maria Steen

### The View



# Church must foster anchor of marriage amid growing decline and disregard

In addition to dedicating this year to St Joseph, Pope Francis has announced a special year dedicated to the family, beginning on St Joseph's feast day, March 19. A year dedicated to the family is wonderful news; but how should it be approached and celebrated?

Despite what the world tells us, it is marriage that is the linchpin of the family, and it is to marriage that we need to direct our attention.

Young people have already been conditioned by society to postpone marriage until as late as possible, if not to reject it altogether. For those who do choose it, it is a capstone on their relationship, rather than the foundation stone. People are marrying later, usually after they have achieved educational and career success, often after dating or co-habiting for a lengthy time.

**“Young people have already been conditioned by society to postpone marriage until as late as possible”**

This is borne out by OECD figures which show that the crude marriage rate in Ireland has dropped dramatically from its high point in 1973 of 7.4 to 4.6 marriages per thousand people in 2017. Meanwhile, the mean age of first marriage has increased from 26 for women and 28 for men in 1990 to 32 for women and 33 for men in 2015. In the same year, 6.6% of people marrying were previously divorced. While proponents of divorce often comment on how low our divorce rate still is, they fail to mention that it doubled between 1998 and 2008. In summary, fewer people are getting married, people are marrying later, and divorces have increased. To that cultural background, add the fact that fewer couples are choosing to marry within the Church.

### Difficulties

Being conscious of those whose marriages are in difficulties first requires acknowledging the factors that have led to that sad state. We are all products of



our culture, and the culture around us is decidedly anti-marriage – or at least anti-Christian marriage, which is to say the life-long, faithful union between a man and a woman that is open to new life.

### Referendum

Although it may not appear to be so, it was the divorce referendum – not that on same sex marriage – that effected the more significant change in the societal understanding of marriage. Once the idea of marriage as a life-long union was rejected, it was just a matter of time before the whole idea of marriage as an institution unravelled. Christian marriage is by definition life-long – this is a fundamental and central feature of the Sacrament. If the commitment you make on your wedding day can be broken at any time, for any reason, then it ultimately means nothing at all. Once that commitment was deprived of its meaning, marriage could mean anything. No longer life-long, no longer faithful, no longer for the purposes of procreation, no longer between a man and woman.

Against this background of a growing disregard of marriage, many young people have been affected by negative experiences of marriage within their own family. So then, how do we encourage and give hope to people that not only is a life-long, faithful marriage an ideal worth striving for, but more importantly, that it is possible?

First, we need to encourage people to marry

younger. The knitting together of two lives to form a new family calls not only for commitment, but the kind of compromises that are needed to build a life in common together. This is easier – for most people – when they are younger, before they have become accustomed to their own way of doing things. Marriage is better regarded as the foundation for a life together, rather than as a final flourish after lengthy cohabitation, when professional goals have been achieved. This approach allows a couple to grow together from young

adulthood to maturity, building a life together. Marrying young also addresses the biological reality of sexual maturity, and the fact that while not impossible, it is certainly extremely difficult to expect most people to live in perfect chastity until marriage if that happens much later. For couples to marry young however, they will need help of the material as well as the spiritual kind, and this is where the Church as a whole, needs to get creative about providing supports to allow young families to flourish.

### Proclaim

Second, the Church needs to proclaim – without apology – that marriage is the ideal. The beauty of Catholic marriage, including the joy of true sexual intimacy, needs to be extolled. This is not an act of insensitivity to those who are not married, but rather an act of charity, to give hope to those who are not married that the ideal is possible. This also encompasses providing marriage preparation that actually challenges couples in their understanding of sex and marriage. Couples can get society's views on sex and marriage free gratis

anywhere at all; when they come to the Church for guidance, they should hear something else. Many marriages break down because couples genuinely did not understand what was required to make a life-long marriage work.

Third, if we want people to make Catholic marriages, we must acknowledge our minority status and, as other religious traditions do, provide opportunities for people to meet.

**“Being conscious of those whose marriages are in difficulties first requires acknowledging the factors that have led to that sad state”**

Fourth, for those who are already married, we need to protect and foster their marriages, in turn encouraging their children to view marriage in a positive light. This means offering ongoing retreats – and counselling where needed – to married couples

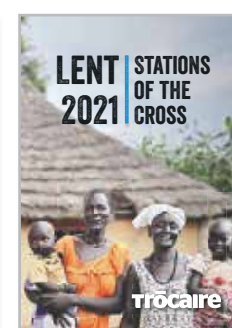
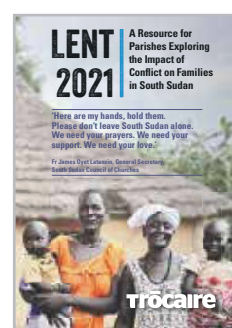
by people formed in the Faith and committed to the ideal of marriage. It also means listening to the testimonies of couples who are committed to each other and to the ideal of marriage as to how they try to live out their faith within marriage, how they have negotiated difficulties, and what has helped to make their marriages strong.

Finally, if, as the Catechism states, marriage is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring, then couples who actually want to educate their children in the Faith need to be supported. This need is perhaps the most urgent of all. This might be done by providing at least one authentically Catholic school in each diocese, or by providing supports for homeschooling families. Unless children are formed in the Faith, it will die, leading to fewer vocations to the priesthood and fewer lay people committed to lifelong marriage in the next generation.

Marriage provides the roots to anchor the family. When marriage flourishes, so too does the family, and so too does the Church.

## TRÓCAIRE LENT PARISH RESOURCES 2021

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For more information on our parish resources, parish workshops and parish Lent webinars, please contact [colm.hogan@trocaire.org](mailto:colm.hogan@trocaire.org)

# Trócaire

# Exodus and Fiat 90 bring God into lockdown in Killarney

Jason Osborne

Dozens of people in Kerry have benefitted from spiritual exercises Exodus and Fiat 90, which have proven “absolutely powerful” in helping people thrive during lockdown.

Exodus and Fiat 90 are a set of male and female spiritual exercises respectively which aim to strip life back to the basics of prayer, asceticism and community. An extended Lent, the programmes begin 90 days before Easter Sunday, with participants giving up luxuries

and taking up an increased spiritual workload, such as a daily holy hour.

One of the participants, Kate Whelan, told *The Irish Catholic* of Killarney’s spiritual success since people took up the challenge saying she’s “hardly noticed lockdown”.

Taking part in Fiat 90, Mrs Whelan described her initial hesitancy in signing up as many of the participants were much younger than her.

“Now I would have loved to have been able to say that it’s Youth 2000 that’s running Fiat 90 because most of the people are young, very

young, and I was a bit shy in going in because I’m over 70. But then other people who knew I was doing it, said look, I encouraged them to do it. So we got a group of my age doing it as well,” she said.

“But a lot of them are very young and very enthusiastic because a lot of them had been to Medjugorje and places like that.”

Not limited to Killarney, people have joined in from Cork and Tralee as well.

Spiritual director to the groups, Fr Jim Lenihan, recommended the exercise, describing it

as a “very, very positive experience”.

Having done it last year, Fr Lenihan knows the spiritual benefits that the exercises confer on those who take part. Speaking of his experience last year, he said the advent of the coronavirus had little impact on the mood of himself or his group and it’s the same for the current cohort of 18 men and over 50 women that he’s watching over.

“We almost found ourselves very joyous last year in the midst of people’s common sadness. We were very much at peace with things.”

## Irish Bishops, Israeli embassy spar over vaccine distribution

Ruadhán Jones

The Israeli Embassy in Ireland has hit back at a statement by the Vatican’s Holy Land Coordination Group that Israel has a “legal responsibility” to vaccinate Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.

In a statement released by the group, which included Irish bishops Dr Noel Treanor and Dr Fintan Monahan, they stated that Israel has a “moral, legal and humanitarian responsibility to make Covid-19 vaccines accessible for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza”.

A spokesperson for the Israeli Embassy responded to the statement, saying that “the State of Israel has done its utmost to assist the

Palestinian Authority throughout the pandemic by training Palestinian medical staff both from the West Bank and Gaza, by facilitating the supply of thousands of donated test kits, large volumes of Personal Protective Equipment, and assisting with other aid activities”.

The spokesperson continued, stating that under the Oslo Accords and international law, “all civic powers and responsibilities - including in the sphere of health - in the West Bank and Gaza are under the mandate of the Palestinians. This includes responsibility for vaccinations of the Palestinian population.”

The spokesperson affirmed Israel’s commitment to “do whatever is needed to facilitate the supply of such vaccines to the Palestinian Authority”.

## Govt to bring mother and baby homes report before Vatican

Jason Osborne

Simon Coveney has said that the Government will be bringing the findings of the mother and baby homes report to the attention of the Holy See.

Responding to an enquiry submitted by Social Democrats TD Holly Cairns, which saw Ms Cairns asking for the minister’s views on whether the final report of the Mother and Baby Homes Commission of Investigation would

be submitted to the Holy See for an official response, Mr Coveney reiterated the Government’s apology to those who ended up in the mother and baby homes.

He added that the Government has already raised the Commission’s work with the Vatican.

He continued by saying that the Irish Ambassador to the Holy See has been asked to bring the “important” report to the attention of the Vatican.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Irish ‘Introduction to the Bible’ course to be aired online

Beginning this week, Fr John Byrne of Kells parish in Co. Meath is set to continue his ‘Introduction to the Bible’ online over the parish’s webcam.

Fr John taught Scripture in Dalgan Park, the home of the Missionary Society of St Columban in Ireland, and other centres.

This year will see Fr John work through the Gospel according to St Mark. There will be two sessions a week: Monday and Thursday at 12 noon, with each session scheduled to last between 20 to 25 minutes.

The talks can be accessed on Kells parish website at [www.kellsparish.ie](http://www.kellsparish.ie).

### Baroness O’Loan – UK government should fund NI Victims Payment Scheme

Baroness Nuala O’Loan has urged the UK government to “accept its responsibilities” by “carrying the burden of the essential legacy costs” of the Victims Payment Scheme.

In a statement issued, she said that it “is deeply unfair to the surviving victims of the troubles for whom a pension has been legislated” that a stalemate exists between Northern Ireland Executive and the UK government.

“It is ludicrous and deeply immoral to think of placing the resource burden of legacy solutions on a small devolved region,” the statement read.

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## The woman at the well



Fr Kevin Heery and Fr Derek Darby lead a blessing at St Brigid’s well Mullingar, February 1 2021.



## Exploring the Word of God through Prayer

**A series of online Scripture Reflections at 9pm each Tuesday night**

Knock Shrine will show a series of online night prayer with reflections on Scripture. Students from St Louis Community School Kiltimagh, Co. Mayo will deliver this series of talks inspired by Scripture.



Young people will take their favourite passage of Scripture, something that speaks to them and reflect on it through video, providing their own written narrative and imagery.

**You can join us online for this new series at [www.knockshrine.ie/watch-live](http://www.knockshrine.ie/watch-live) every Tuesday at 9pm**

## 'Awaiting a New Dawn'

**A series of online Vigils this February**



Join us online each Friday evening during the month of February as we come together virtually for a period of extended prayer and reflection.

A vigil is a powerful way for people to come together in community prayer.

The first days of Spring will soon be upon us, a welcome lengthening of days and the arrival of new growth in nature. We will come

together online from our own homes to support each other, prayer for one another and keep hope alive in our hearts that we will soon overcome these very challenging times.

The first Vigil will take place on Friday 5 February.

**Join us live online from 7pm for Rosary, Mass and Holy Hour. See [www.knockshrine.ie/watch-live](http://www.knockshrine.ie/watch-live) or our Facebook page.**



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## LIVING CHRISTIAN FAITH

### Lenten Conversations

Knock Shrine are launching a new online series to engage you each Thursday at 8.30pm during Lent.

- + What nurtures our faith and what challenges it today?
- + Where do we find hope and joy in our lives?
- + How can our faith build mental strength, wellbeing and resilience?
- + How has the Covid pandemic impacted upon our faith?

These are just some of the questions that will be explored over the 6 weeks of Lent during a new series of online discussions on the topic of 'Living Christian Faith'. As part of Faith Renewal at Knock Shrine, this will open a conversation on contemporary issues of faith and church life.

Chaired by **Fr Eamonn Conway DD**, Priest in Tuam diocese and Professor of Theology at Mary Immaculate College, the conversations will explore a different theme each week and guest speakers will discuss some of the important questions we all face in living out our faith.



#### Feb. 18: 'Living Christian Faith in the Family'

St John Paul spoke about how the future of humanity passes by way of the family. **Patrick and Linda Treacy**, who have four children and run a centre for domestic spirituality called *Integritas* from their home, will speak about the joys and challenges of living Christian Faith as a family today.

#### Feb. 25: 'Living Christian Faith as Young Adults'

A number of young Irish adults, for whom Christian Faith is of great importance, will discuss the strength it gives them and how we can better communicate the joy of the Gospel today.

#### Mar. 4: 'Living Christian Faith in the Classroom as Young Teachers'

Three recently qualified primary teachers explain how their religious faith is important to them and how it influences their work as teachers in the classroom.

#### Mar. 11: 'Living Christian Faith in Public Life'

**Baroness Nuala O'Loan and Senator Ronan Mullen** discuss their own faith, how it informs their public service and the challenges people of faith encounter in the public sphere today.

#### Mar. 18: 'Proclaiming Christian Faith as a priest or religious today'

**Sr Ursula Lawler**, who lectures in Christian Ethics at Mary Immaculate College, returned missionary and editor of the *Africa Magazine*, **Fr Sean Deegan SPS**, Ballyhaunis Parish Priest **Fr Stephen Farragher** and **Fr Eamonn Conway** will discuss living priesthood and religious life today in conversation with young Irish Catholic journalist **Jason Osbourne**.

#### Mar. 25: 'Studying Christian Faith'

**Dr Máire Campbell** is assistant Principal of a primary school in North Dublin. **Judith King** is an internationally recognised psychotherapist and **Margaret Naughton** is a busy hospital chaplain. Yet they have all found time to fulfil their passion of doing a PhD in theological studies. They share with us how their theological studies enriches their faith and their work.

**Join us at [www.knockshrine.ie/watch-live](http://www.knockshrine.ie/watch-live) or on Facebook@knockshrine**

# Prayer for the hard times

## The Sunday Gospel

Fr Silvester O'Flynn  
OFM Cap.



A song that comes down to us from the days of slavery in USA is the voice of a suffering people. "Hard times, hard times come again no more." It's a sentiment many of us can relate to in this difficult period. It's hard to keep going. People are lonely and live with fear of contracting the virus. Many miss the therapy of shopping, going to the hairdresser, going out for a nice meal, a few jars with the lads, a match at the weekend. Contact with people on social media is not quite the same as the real thing. Children miss school and their friends. Some really miss going to church. Around here, some tragic deaths have caused a cloud of gloom.

### Job, Paul and Jesus

Let us try to draw some light and strength from the Mass readings for the Fifth Sunday of the Year. It rarely happens that all three readings touch on the same theme. Today, they come together in the experience of stress in the lives of Job, Paul and Jesus. It's a different stress in each story.

**“People who are normally very active are frustrated by regulations closing sporting activities and limiting travel”**

Poor Job has seen his world collapse around him. Time is no better than drudgery.

"Lying on my bed I wonder when will it be day. Risen, I think how slowly evening falls. Restlessly I fret till evening falls." Can you relate to that sort of stress and fretting?

The second reading is about a totally different stress in the life of St Paul. His stress is the pressure of the compulsive activist. He cannot find time to do all he feels he has a duty to do in preaching the word worldwide. We know from the Acts of the Apostles that some of his co-workers, Barnabas and Mark, had to withdraw from accompanying him. People who are normally very active

are frustrated by regulations closing sporting activities and limiting travel.

The stress on Jesus (Mark 1:29-39) is different to the other two. The word has gone around that Jesus has healed people. It is not surprising that the whole town came crowding around the door. The pressure that he felt came from the huge demand on his service. The frontline carers will recognise this.

### Activity and restfulness

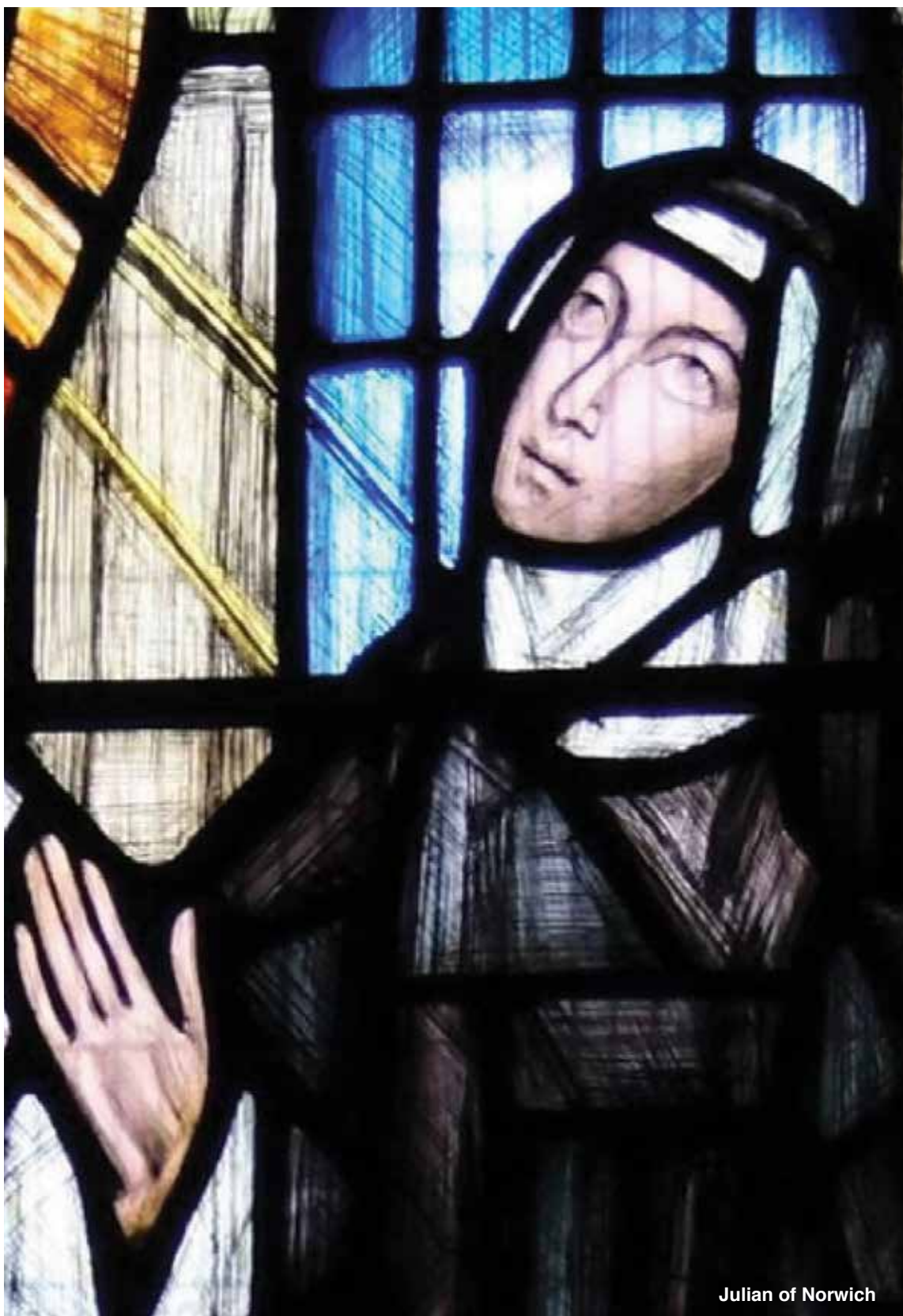
In the morning, long before dawn, Jesus got up and left the house. From the experience of many years preaching retreats, I know how much it drains one's energy.

**“Staying in the one place had its attractions but Jesus needed to move on as he had a wider picture in mind”**

In addition to preaching, Jesus was involved in healing. Since this is far more intense than preaching, I suspect that it is even more draining. Even Jesus felt the need to get the balance right between activity and restfulness so he slipped away to a quiet place to pray. The following morning people missed him. Simon, whose mother-in-law he had cured, and his companions searched until they found him. Simon, the total extrovert who wore his heart on his sleeve, announced, "Everybody is looking for you." Staying in the one place had its attractions but Jesus needed to move on as he had a wider picture in mind.

### The Black Death

Pandemics are not new. The most notorious pandemic was the Black Death in the Fourteenth Century, sweeping rapidly from Asia, through Europe and North Africa. In places more than half the population died. Lesser plagues continued to occur. There were revolts and wars everywhere. I want to tell you of one shining



Julian of Norwich

light of hope who came through that dreadful experience.

### Julian of Norwich

Julian of Norwich was about six years old when the Black Death occurred in England. Little is known of her early life before she dedicated her life to prayer, living in a little cell attached to the local church. Around the age of 30 she had a serious illness that brought her to the verge of death. In this condition she received 16 visions of the passion of Jesus. She came to see the passion as the manifestation of the unconditional love of God for us

sinner. She recovered from her illness and pondered on these visions for several years before she put them in a book known to us as *Revelations of Divine Love*. Although she has not been officially canonised, Pope Benedict XVI drew attention to her message of trusting in the love of God as the sure guide through hard times. Total trust in God can transfigure our crosses and lead us to peace and joy.

In one vision Julian saw something like a hazelnut in the hand of God. "What can this be", she asked. God replied, "It is all that is made". As the song puts

it, "He's got the whole world in his hand." In this difficult time let us draw strength and hope from Julian's words of total trust. "All will be well, all manner of things will be well."

### Prayer

I often draw peace and strength from a little prayer she repeated: God is my Maker, my Upholder and my Lover. I link it up with my morning prayer to the Blessed Trinity. O God, the Father of Life, the Word of Light and the Breath of Love, thank you for the gift of this new day. You are my Maker, my Upholder and my Lover.

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# We have to re-build parishes marked by welcome and forgiveness – Archbishop Farrell

New Archbishop of Dublin Dermot Farrell taking time for some quiet prayer before his installation ceremony in St Mary's Pro-Cathedral on Tuesday. Photos: John Mc Elroy



Dublin's new leader has insisted that how we rise to challenges and opportunities defines who we are as people of faith, writes **Michael Kelly**

**A**rchbishop Dermot Farrell has said he is filled with hope as he takes up his new appointment as archbishop of the country's largest diocese. Dr Farrell was installed in St Mary's Pro-Cathedral on Tuesday morning at a Mass without a congregation.

## Conviction

He said that his conviction "is not a naive hope that everything will be better tomorrow, but a hope born of a conviction that transcends these difficult days through which we are living, and a hope that transcends the limits our own capabilities.

"This time – both in the crisis that is the global pandemic, and in the many crises confronting the Church – this very time, with all its frustration and fear, is rich with possibilities.

"What we do in the coming months and years, how we live out of these challenges and opportunities, will define who we really are as a people of faith," he said at the Mass which was livestreamed online.

Dr Farrell described the challenges facing the Church as "formidable". He warned that preparing the Church for future generations "will not happen unless people of faith are capable of dialogue with

society and culture".

Dr Farrell insisted that "the only viable pastoral plan for the future will be the plan which comes from a genuine dialogue and discernment between the people, clergy and religious. That will involve not only working together in new ways, but getting to know each other anew".

**“Without their service, without the presence of their communities, our Church would be a very different Church”**

While the archbishop said "there is no pre-packaged plan to address the reality in which we find ourselves" he said "There is a direction; there are way markers, we know them well: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control...They

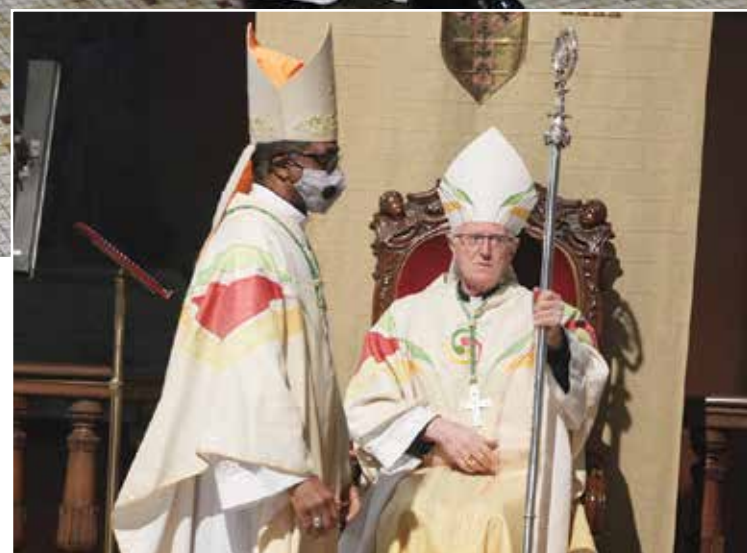
call us to build, or to re-build parishes marked by welcome, openness, forgiveness, resilience, and courage."

Noting that his installation fell on World Day of Consecrated Life, Dr Farrell said that "the women and men who dedicate their lives to the call of the Gospel are at the heart of life of our Church. Without their service, without the presence of their communities, our Church would be a very different Church.

"They have been at the forefront of renewal in the Church, taking bold initiatives, and making significant sacrifices, putting flesh on the hope that was within them."

## Prophetic ministry

"This is not a mission that belongs to the past," he said. "In another age, they were at the forefront of addressing the educational, social, and health of those who risked being left behind. Today they continue their prophetic ministry in the service of those whom our society might prefer not to see: those who suffer from addiction, those who struggle to put food on the table, women trafficked, those without a roof over their heads, or a front door of their own."



The new archbishop taking his seat on the cathedra as he is handed the crosier by Apostolic Nuncio to Ireland Archbishop Jude Thaddeus Okolo.



Archbishop Farrell chatting with his predecessor Archbishop Diarmuid Martin after the ceremony.



Archbishop Farrell during the ceremony.

# If Britain offers us vaccines, we should accept



We look to our own Government to protect us, and if they fail, then we understandably turn on them, writes **David Quinn**

**I**t is not at all clear at this stage when those who want to receive a Covid-19 vaccination will get their wish. It is to be hoped that everyone over the age of 70 will have received at least one of their two doses by the end of March, but we can't be sure about that.

It was hoped that by September, 70% of the adult population across the European Union (EU) would be vaccinated, but we don't know if that target will be met. At the current rate, it won't, but perhaps vaccine production and roll-out will step up enormously in the months ahead.

**“It may only be the case that you won't develop symptoms if you do get sick, not that you won't be infectious”**

Even if it is does, there will be people who won't want to be vaccinated. Some individuals are basically against all vaccinations in principle, while others will be concerned that the new Covid-19 vaccines are too unproven. They are worried that normal safety checks have not taken place.

Speaking personally, I will take the vaccine when my turn comes. I am not in a high-risk category, fortunately, but I don't want to be a burden on the system if I end up in hospital with a bad dose of coronavirus and I don't want to pass it on to anyone else, even though it is

not yet completely clear that being vaccinated means you can't infect someone else.

It may only be the case that you won't develop symptoms if you do get sick, not that you won't be infectious.

We'll find out soon enough what the truth of the matter is as more and more people receive their vaccinations. Hopefully, it will protect us against symptoms, and protect everyone around us from getting sick even if we are asymptomatic.

## Side-effects

Again, speaking personally, I believe those experts who say the vaccines are safe. All vaccines carry a risk of side-effects, but the ones arising from Covid-19, such as a few aches and pains afterwards, seem minor and passing in the vast majority of cases.

Therefore, I think the benefits of being vaccinated outweigh the risks, especially if you are in a vulnerable group.

If you are young, then you might, of course, come to a different risk-benefit conclusion.

In early December, the hierarchy issued a statement on the vaccines. It said in part: “The Catholic Church recognises that safe and effective vaccination is an essential aspect of the prevention of disease. We are encouraging Catholics to support a programme of vaccination, not only for their own good, but for the protection of life and the health of those who are vulnerable and for the common good of humanity.”

In other words, our bishops do

not believe that a decision to take a vaccine is a purely individual one because anything we do, or fail to do, has societal implications as well. We are to love our neighbours as well as ourselves. What is our obligation to our neighbours under these circumstances?

**“The EU did, and the EU was also much slower than those other countries to approve the vaccine or sign contracts with the vaccine companies”**

Asserting such an obligation, or at least consideration, is emphatically not the same, however, as saying we should be legally compelled to be vaccinated. That would be an unacceptable imposition on our freedom of conscience and not justified by arguments about public health or the common good.

Fortunately, there are very few suggestions that it be made compulsory, although it could still happen by the backdoor, for instance if enough companies, such as airlines, deny you access to their services without proof you have been vaccinated. In other words, you might not be allowed to board a plane without a ‘Vaccination Passport’, so to speak.

At present, some countries are far ahead of us, or any other EU member-state, in vaccinating their populations. As at a few days ago, the EU average was about 3%. Ireland was on about 3.5%. But America had reached around 10%, Britain 14%, and the world-leader, Israel, had vaccinated about half its population, an amazing achievement.

## Vaccine companies

How have they managed to do that? In the case of Israel, they didn't haggle over price. It was the same in Britain and America. The EU did, and the EU was also much slower than those other countries to approve the vaccine or sign contracts with the vaccine companies. The result is that they dropped down the queue, which is very serious when supplies are currently limited.

There is another way to look at this, of course.

Should there be competition for vaccines at all?

Perhaps the likes of the World Health Organisation (WHO) should purchase them on behalf of the whole planet and then release them as they become available in proportion to each country's population size?

That would mean Europeans or Americans would not receive more per head of population than the likes of Nigeria or India. If that meant 20% of the whole world's population is vaccinated by next autumn, rather than 70% in the West, but only 10% elsewhere, then so be it. Fairness would demand such a result. Or would it?

It's a complex question. We would almost all readily accept that a parent's duty to look after their own children is greater than their duty (although it exists) to look after other children. If vital medicines were in short supply, and your children were sick, how would they feel if you give those supplies to the house next door? Or how would your wife (or husband) feel if they were ill, but you gave the medicines to the adults next door?

**“If it offers us some of its surplus vaccines, should we accept them, or have we a greater duty to maintain solidarity with the rest of the EU? I believe firmly that we should accept them”**

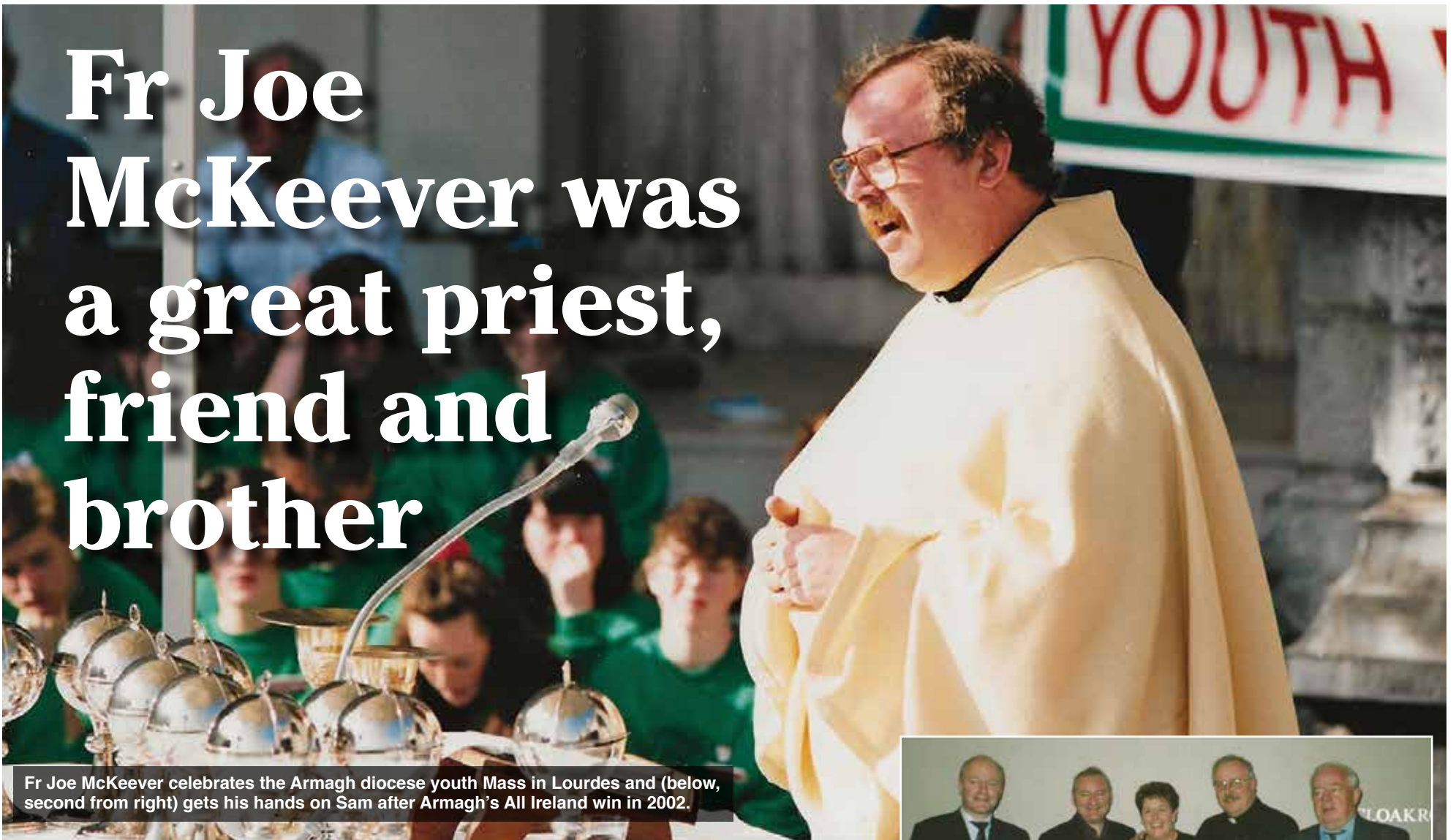
They would almost certainly believe you had failed in their duty to protect them. Similarly, we look to our own Governments to protect us, and if they fail, then we understandably turn on them.

At the same time, the West has a duty to use its abundant resources to buy as many vaccines as soon as it can and supply them for free to poorer nations as early as possible, while not neglecting their duties to their own people.

A final question; Britain has ordered more vaccines than it needs. If it offers us some of its surplus vaccines, should we accept them, or have we a greater duty to maintain solidarity with the rest of the EU? I believe firmly that we should accept them.



# Fr Joe McKeever was a great priest, friend and brother



Fr Joe McKeever celebrates the Armagh diocese youth Mass in Lourdes and (below, second from right) gets his hands on Sam after Armagh's All Ireland win in 2002.



**Friends and family of the popular Armagh priest tell Ruadhán Jones about Fr McKeever's remarkable character**

**T**here's one thing that everyone who met him agrees on; Fr Joe McKeever was a remarkable man and a great character. Colm O'Farrell, a pupil and later close friend of Fr McKeever, says that "if you'd have been with him for five minutes, he'd probably have had you crying laughing".

"He would have had you in fits, he was the most dangerous man to sit in a quiet room with because you would never know what he would have come out with next. And he would have said it for badness for a reaction and a laugh – you'd be sitting looking at the floor saying I can't believe you just said that," Colm tells *The Irish Catholic*.

"Just incredible is all I can say, I don't have words to explain how incredible he was," says Brendan McCann, another close friend of Fr McKeever through the Catholic men's group, the Knights of Columbanus.

"He was super, super intelligent and he could read a room very well. He knew who to poke fun at, and I say that in the nicest possible way. He would have worked out your weaknesses very quick! Myself and Joe were best of buddies. But I would have gone to his house for two hours and we would have fought for two hours. Then, whenever I left, he would say, 'I really enjoyed that, don't be long 'til you're back'."

## Fr Joe McKeever

Fr Joe McKeever died of Covid-19 on 23 January 2021, just shy of 70 years old. He was a latecomer to the priesthood, discovering his vocation in his 30s and being ordained in his 40s. But he had always been an active and committed Catholic, heavily involved in the Knights of Columbanus. He was in the midst of a meteoric rise through the Knights' ranks when he determined to enter the seminary.

"Joe would have been in the order over 30 years and he rose to what we would call deputy Supreme Knight, which is essentially second in command," Brendan McCann explains. "He was 37 at that stage which was unheard of either before or since. Generally speaking if you're deputy Supreme Knight, you're as close to 60 that it makes no difference. But he was only 37, 20 years below that. And it was then that he said he wanted to go into seminary. He was such a high achiever and no doubt would have been number one in the order in his forties."

Fr McKeever had a great love of the fraternity and later became Supreme Chaplain to the order. But he had gravitated towards the priesthood for some time, explains Collette McKeever, Fr McKeever's sister.

"He toyed with that for many years," Collette McKeever says. "Defi-

nately he had talked about it and talked to his parents about it and then put it on the back-burner for a while and then obviously it was something he couldn't shake off. He led a good lay person's life before that and was a teacher for about 14-15 years."

Brendan McCann tells the story of what finally confirmed to Joe that the priesthood was for him: "A friend of mine was in the seminary for four years and he took a bit of a sabbatical out of it. Fr Joe was his schoolteacher and mentor and Fr Joe – he was Joe at this stage – he called him up saying, you know, could I help you spiritually, give you some guidance about going forward."

**“A naturally gregarious man, he loved to meet people and work in the parish”**

"So these two guys engaged in summer walking and they would have walked for four or five miles talking about the seminary and what it was, the sacrifice and stuff like that. This was over a summer period and at the end of the summer the guy says to Joe – look, this isn't for me and at the end of the summer Joe said, you know what, I'm going to join! He kind of talked himself into it."

Once he began his priestly ministry, Fr McKeever was in his element. A naturally gregarious man, he loved to meet people and work in the parish. He worked in three parishes during his career; Dundalk, Dungannon and Crossmaglen. He was very sensitive to the needs of others, Collette McKeever explains.



"He was sharp, witty and enjoyed a good debate or an argument, liked to wind you up and get your opinion out of you whether you liked to give it or not," she says. "He did seem to have good means of communicating with people from all walks of life, all past pupils and things, who he would have been sarcastic to – they thought the world of him and in his own way, he thought the whole world of them, they really respected him. He did seem to cross a whole lot of different divides."

Colm O'Farrell also remembers Fr McKeever as being "a great man for advice, great spiritual advice, explaining theological things in a way that made sense".

"Joe was great craic in one minute, but if you said you needed to talk to him about something, it would've been come with me, into a room, close the door and you could have poured your heart out to him," he says. "I always found that whatever advice I got from him was 100% and that's a big thing. He understood society, he understood the way of the world and he was able to relate very, very well to people who had problems. But very well respected in Crossmaglen."

Fr McKeever's friends and family held an online rosary and gathering in his honour. It was intended to be a small one held for locals who knew him – but it attracted attention from

all across the island of Ireland, and from Britain.

"We had about 90 people turn up which was quite high," Brendan McCann says. "We had dignitaries from across the water. We had the supreme knight of the Knights of Columba, his deputy and the president of the International Alliance of Catholic Knights. They all knew Joe over the years and they all turned up for his rosary. It's testimony that those big hitters from across the waves turned up for that event."

## A battle

In his later years, Fr McKeever had to overcome a battle with cancer which his sister believes left him vulnerable and "shattered his confidence". Colm O'Farrell also noticed a loneliness that came into his life after Fr McKeever retired from the parish.

"He loved the parish so much and once you're taken out of that life where you're meeting people every day, saying Mass every day – to all of a sudden find yourself sitting at home, that's a massive shock to the system. But the fact that he was asked to come back and be the Supreme Chaplain to the order for the third time, just really lifted his spirits unbelievably," Colm says. "Joe had a love for the order because he could see the good that came out of the order. He will be sorely, sorely missed by us and myself in particular."

# Vocations' music competition hopes to hit the high notes

Contestants Manuel Sandesh [left] and Judith Gfrerer [below] perform during the 2019 Vocations Music Award held in Austria. 2021 is the first year the competition will be international.



Director of Vocations Ireland Margaret Cartwright tells Ruadhán Jones about an exciting initiative to highlight vocations

In January 2017, Pope Francis told a vocations conference in Italy that the Church urgently needs to “bring into the Christian community a new ‘vocational culture’”. The Pope closed his speech that day by praying that those present would feel pushed by the Holy Spirit to “courageously identify new ways of announcing the Gospel of vocation”.

## Vocational culture

Through the recently announced ‘Vocations Music Award’, vocation offices in Ireland, the UK, Germany, Austria and Switzerland hope to create just such a ‘vocational culture’. “We hope to open people’s minds and hearts and thoughts to what vocation means and what the culture of vocation means,” says Margaret Cartwright, director of Vocations Ireland.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* before the launch of the awards, Ms Cartwright emphasises the importance of getting young people “to look at their own vocation in life, whether it be to religious life, priesthood, marriage, single life, to help them to write and express that through music. The theme is vocation, and the song or piece of music has to have that theme in it.”

The award is an initiative in its infancy, but the organisers have high hopes that it will be a means to reach out to young people during the pandemic. The brainchild of an Austrian seminarian, the competition was initially only run in Austria. Despite this, it was still very success-

ful, far beyond the expectations of the organisers.

“It’s the first year that we’re involved, the Austrians have run this competition before but not with the theme of vocations,” Ms Cartwright explains. “It’s the first time that it’s been opened out to a wider audience in Europe, so it’s our first-time being part of it. They had a lot of entries (last year) and actually they produced a CD of the 12 winners. They got millions of likes and votes through Facebook. They got a really far reach, they were staggered, they didn’t expect such a response.

**“And a lot of them are expressing their own prayer life and spirituality in music, so we thought yeah, we’ll go for it”**

“I would hope for such a similar response, especially in the light of Covid, where people are struggling with what to do with their time. This will give people an opportunity to tap into their creative energy and talents. It’s also an opportunity for young people to showcase what they can do. Those opportunities aren’t very wide at the moment.”

In previous years, the competition ended with a full-blown concert or competition and there was

plenty of live music. This year, due to Covid-19, the competition will be run virtually through YouTube, Facebook and other such social media, Ms Cartwright says.

“Before Covid-19, the plan was that we’ll take part and our winner may have gone to Austria to take part in the final show,” Ms Cartwright continues. “But Covid kicked in in the meantime. We’ve pursued it further, we’ve had lots of conversations and we felt this was a good time to actually run with it because young people are turning to music during Covid and it’s something that they’d be able to write and get great relief from. And a lot of them are expressing their own prayer life and spirituality in music, so we thought yeah, we’ll go for it.

## Original piece

“The participants have to write a piece of music or song, it has to be an original piece which they will then put on YouTube. And then, we’ll be asking people to like it and vote for it. After a certain length of time, we’ll collate the likes and the votes and they’ll throw that together. The results from that will then go to a judging panel and we have for Ireland four judges at the moment. We have Joe Boyce from CJM Music; Brendan O’Regan, journalist with *The Irish Catholic*; Fr Willie Purcell, diocesan vocation director; and we’re hoping we’ll have Sr Gabriel from the Poor Clares in Arundel.

“We’re just finalising the issues around the prizes. It would normally be live productions and stuff like that, so we’re in discussions with a few producers to see if we might streamline and put it through streaming to make it easier to handle rather than making a CD,” Ms Cartwright says.

When asked if the competition was a big departure from Vocations Ireland’s usual approach, Ms Cartwright answers with a quali-

**“While the organisation and delivery of the competition are reaching the final stages, Ms Cartwright says they are still looking for partners and sponsors in order to make the endeavour a special one”**

fied yes. The line of work is still the same – promoting vocations – but the format is different to accommodate the changed times of the Covid-19 pandemic.

“I would have been involved in career fairs and youth gatherings,” Ms Cartwright explains. “We’d have taken a stand at those places and offered assistance to people who might be considering vocation, a religious vocation. I would have been involved in that and the Explore a Way program which would again have been a program for those who want to reflect and explore their feelings about vocations. Obviously because of Covid we can’t do that at the moment. So this is an opportunity to do something for young people. It is about vocation awareness, it’s helping people to be aware of what a vocation is and where their vocation might be, their calling from God.”

While the organisation and delivery of the competition are reaching the final stages, Ms Cartwright says they are still looking for

partners and sponsors in order to make the endeavour a special one.

“We’re looking for people to support the project,” she says.

“Obviously, we have to find money for prizes and things like that so if there’s countries who might be interested in sponsoring for a prize or a musical instrument – or a recording studio who would be willing to give a couple of hours free as a prize. Those are the kind of things that we’re looking for at the moment.

Some people have already offered and some congregations are supporting us. The main expense would be the website and the prizes for the six winners. We’re looking for people to support in anyway they can, through prizes, money and prayers”

## Submission

The opening date for submission of entries is February 2021, while submissions close on June 30, 2021. Professional judging will take place in August 2021, while the CD or streaming release will take place in Autumn 2022 at the latest. For more information.



# Big tech is now the power that be



The power tech corporations wield over expression ought to inspire debate, writes **Jason Osborne**

**T**he beginning of 2021 has seen a number of unprecedented events: the storming of the US capitol, and the banning of then-US president Donald Trump from all social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram and TikTok foremost among them.

Both are worthy of consideration, but the largest debate has since centred around the seemingly permanent suspension of the former US president from what has effectively become the public square, and whether or not the tech giants were right to do so. Questions have naturally been raised as to whether this constitutes an assault on freedom of expression, and just how much power these organisations ought to hold over their users.

## Conspiracy theory

Aside from Mr Trump's suspension, tens of thousands of mainly conservative accounts have also been closed under the same justification, with tech leaders pointing to these accounts as proliferators of unfounded conspiracy theory. It has not been limited to conservative profiles however, with 'Antifa'-linked, or radical left-wing, accounts suffering suspension in recent days too.

Taking to his own platform to share his reasoning, Facebook's CEO Mark Zuckerberg said that they had allowed the outgoing president to use their platform consistent with their rules, removing his posts when they violated their policies. They did this, Mr Zuckerberg claims, because they believe at Facebook that "the public has a right to the broadest possible access to political speech, even controversial speech". However, they now deem that the current context is different, claiming their platform was used to "incite violent insurrection" against a rightfully installed government.

"We believe the risks of allowing the President to continue to use our service during this period are simply too great. Therefore, we



are extending the block we have placed on his Facebook and Instagram accounts indefinitely and for at least the next two weeks until the peaceful transition of power is complete," Mr Zuckerberg's post concluded.

**“He suggested users who do not agree with their rules and enforcement avail of another internet service”**

Similarly, CEO of Twitter, Jack Dorsey aired the thinking behind his platform's decision in a series of tweets, saying he does not celebrate or feel pride in having to ban Mr Trump from their platform, but said that they stood by their decision as it was based off the best information they had "based on threats to physical safety both on and off Twitter".

In the same thread, Mr Dorsey admitted that while he stood by the decision, it still "sets a precedent I feel is dangerous: the power an individual or corporation has over a part of the global public

conversation". He suggested users who do not agree with their rules and enforcement avail of another internet service.

Many users did just that, retreating to an app, Parler, that was subsequently shut down and blocked off by the dominant tech companies such as Amazon, Apple and Google, and has seen its requests for reinstatement stymied.

It is not just politics that has seen bans and suspensions applied; the London-based *talkRADIO* was removed from YouTube because some of its hosts and guests "explicitly contradict expert consensus from local health authorities or the World Health Organization".

## Google

Most recently, Google threatened to block Australians from using the search engine and its features unless the Australian government reversed its legislation that would see Google forced to pay news outlets for their content. While it is a different kind of issue to that which saw the former US president and many of his followers banned, it's still a clear picture of the kind of power the so-called 'silicon valley' organisations hold.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison has so far refused to yield to "threats" from the tech com-

pany, telling reporters "Australia makes our rules for things you can do in Australia. That's done in our parliament".

**“However, society needs to be ready to have the debate about how much power it's willing to afford tech companies”**

A month into 2021, many suggest that these events have cast a light onto the fact that much of today's discourse and online engagement is entirely dependent upon the goodwill of a handful of extraordinarily powerful companies.

Author and journalist Douglas Murray pointed out in an article for the online publication *UnHerd* that the key tech giants – Google, Facebook, Twitter, Amazon and Apple – now have more control over information "than any group of people in history, and by some distance", presiding over an "information explosion that makes Gutenberg look like a mundanity".

Much of the justification given, as with CEOs Mark Zuckerberg

and Jack Dorsey, is based upon the threat of real-world violence or harm as a result of the speech and ideas shared on their platforms. Arguments such as these are used to justify the notion of 'de-platforming', which sees people's access to megaphones for their ideas, such as Facebook and Twitter, restricted because of their perceived controversial or harmful views. Evidence in favour of this strategy is to be seen in the 2016 study that showed de-platforming Islamic extremists from Twitter made it harder for them to radicalise and recruit for their cause.

## Society

However, society needs to be ready to have the debate about how much power it's willing to afford tech companies. The reduction of violence and unfounded conspiracy theory is a right and just goal to aim towards, but little conversation has thus far been had around the hands that wield the power. The power to ban and suspend human voices at will rests in human hands as never before, and while the powers that be may be aimed in the right direction at any given time, they need not always be. Humans are fallible and changeable creatures, and there's no guarantee our actions or their justifications will always be righteous.

# Ireland needs courageous young men to answer the call

Fr Philip Mulryne and Fr Jesse Maingot at the Dominican summer camp, Knockadoon, Co Cork.



Discerning a life in the priesthood or religious life is a win-win whether they work out or not, **Chai Brady** hears

**A** lot of young men in Ireland are afraid to put themselves forward for the priesthood or religious life and it may come from a fear of commitment or failure, according to the vocations director of the Dominicans, but the courage needed to step into a difficult culture and transform it is sorely needed.

Fr Colm Mannion OP tells *The Irish Catholic* that when people speak about vocations they focus on the numbers of men putting themselves for-

ward to the priesthood, but really there should be more of a focus on quality rather than quantity.

## Dramatic increase

The vocation director said: "I would say that I wouldn't be primarily concerned with numbers which I suppose is the obvious reaction people would say when asked that question, they would like to see a dramatic increase in numbers.

"We would be more concerned with quality not quantity, I think we need to see men who really love the Church committing their lives to serving as priests. I think it's the sincerity of that love and commitment to the Church is what matters more than a big number.

"Obviously the more the better but the Church began small," Fr Mannion explains, "I think we need to remind ourselves of the role of the priests in the world and the joy of being a priest especially with all the negativity in the Church out there at the moment, we've forgotten what a joy it is to be a priest and to bring the sacraments to people and to place ourselves at the service of the Lord, it's a great joy and I think that's what we need to go back to."

One of the Dominicans mottos is *veritas*, or 'truth'. Fr Mannion says that this is needed more than ever in an era in which misinformation and disinformation is rampant, particularly in the online world.

**“Fr Mannion says there's a need for dialogue more than ever in society, particularly as it's at the heart of evangelisation”**

"I think that's really what we have to offer, the ability to stand back and look at what's going on in the world and to evaluate what's taking place in our culture and to allow the beauty of the Gospel to shine through that, to try and draw people back through the truth of the teachings of Christ by seeing the beauty of the Church in action," he says.

"I think the lie of the culture at the moment is not just that it undermines truth but it says the truth is irrelevant, it's not just saying that we don't know the truth but saying that truth doesn't mat-



Bro. Chris Gault and Bro. Anthony Kavanagh (two student brothers) at St Saviours Priory, Dublin.

ter. What we would say as Dominicans is that truth does matter, not to prove yourself right or to feel self-righteousness about that but it matters that the truth will set us free. Following the truth of the Gospel, it brings happiness, it brings fulfilment, I think that's what is missing in the social media culture and all this cancel culture that it dismisses any concept of knowing what will make us happy, of what will bring fulfilment in life and it undermines the life of virtue."

'Cancel culture' can be described as a form of ostracisation and public shaming.

It has happened to several notable people in the online world in recent times after they expressed views which a large cohort of people disagreed with.

## Culture shows

"I think cancel culture shows people are not willing to listen and people can be very dismissive of what we actually believe as Catholics without really understanding it," says Fr Mannion. "People can be very quick to undermine what the Church teaches when in actual fact if you scratch the surface, their understanding of what we believe can be

very weak at times and I think that's a source of encouragement for us as Dominicans, that really a lot of problems people have with the Church can be easily unravelled so long as they're prepared to be open and hear what we have to say."

Fr Mannion says there's a need for dialogue more than ever in society, particularly as it's at the heart of evangelisation. However, he adds that nowadays the Church can "lack the conviction to present the truth".

"We can be good at listening, understanding, having compassion for the culture

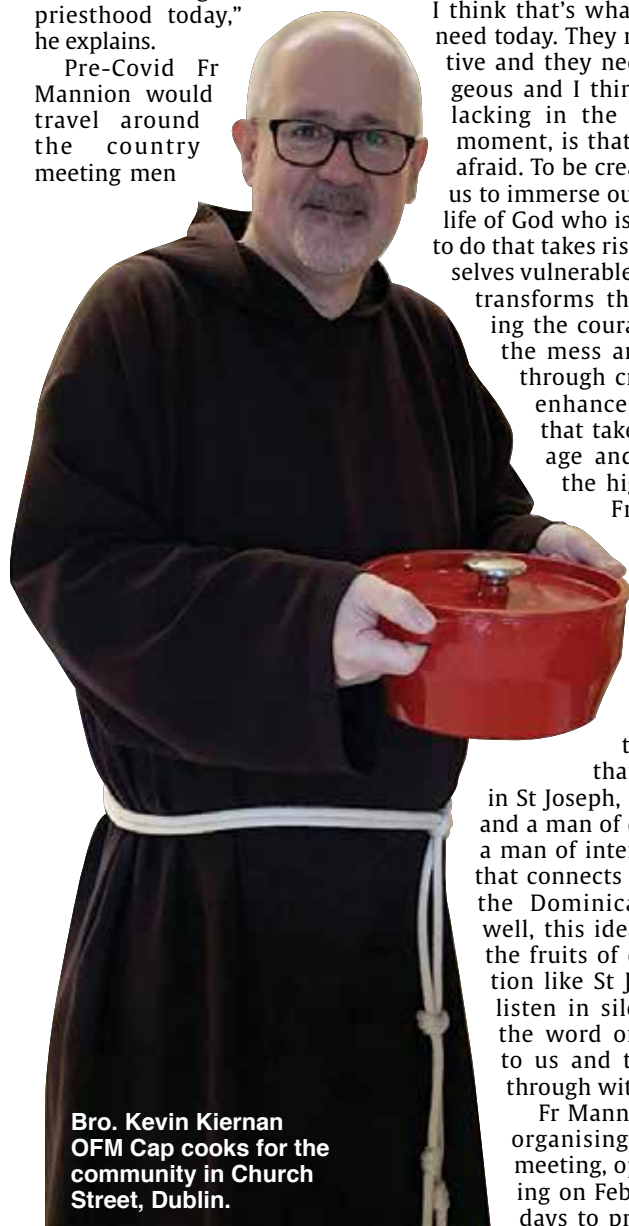
and you can see the difficulties and where people are going astray, but I think sometimes we lack that creative courage to stand forth and present the truth of the Gospel and to offer it to them. It's not that we give it to them or we hit them over the head with it, we offer them the truth of the Gospel and I think we're very good at the first step of listening and having compassion but I think we lack the courage to make the offering."

Working as the vocations director for his order in the Irish province for the last three years, Fr Mannion has been surprised at the interest in vocations and has always highlighted this fact to people because "people get this sense that vocations are dead and there's nobody discerning priesthood anymore".

## “Pre-Covid Fr Mannion would travel around the country meeting men who expressed an interest in the Dominicans and encouraging people to pray for vocations”

"I've been blown away by the interest that's out there. That's of course not say we're going to have massive numbers, like there was in the past, but there are very, very good solid young men out there who are thinking of the priesthood today," he explains.

Pre-Covid Fr Mannion would travel around the country meeting men



Bro. Kevin Kiernan OFM Cap cooks for the community in Church Street, Dublin.

who expressed an interest in the Dominicans and encouraging people to pray for vocations. Every Thursday evening at 8pm he now meets those discerning a vocation in the priesthood on Zoom, a virtual gathering that he says is open to everyone who might be interested.

"I think a lot of young men today are afraid to put themselves forward. I think there's a fear that it might not work out, there's a fear of commitment. I always try to encourage guys to at least give it a go and put yourself forward for a religious vocation, it's a win-win situation because if you try it and it doesn't work out the Lord will still bless you for your efforts, for having the courage to take this step of faith and if it does work out well then you'll find fulfilment and happiness in your vocation so I don't think anyone who tries it ever regrets it," Fr Mannion says.

### Self-gift

"But unfortunately a lot of fellas today, they're afraid to take the step and I try and remind them they're not making any lifelong commitment by trying it, it takes many years of formation and training before you take any steps for solemn vows or anything like that so there's nothing to be lost by trying it, it's all an act of self-gift to the Lord, for the Church and it'll only bring positive fruits."

He says there's a lot of wisdom in Pope Francis' apostolic letter on St Joseph entitled *Patris Corde*, delivered on December 8, 2020, mentioning in particular the Pope's message regarding 'creative courage'.

"I think it is a great phrase and I think that's what young people need today. They need to be creative and they need to be courageous and I think that's what's lacking in the culture at the moment, is that people are too afraid. To be creative challenges us to immerse ourselves into the life of God who is the creator but to do that takes risk, we make ourselves vulnerable but that's what transforms the culture, having the courage to step into the mess and transform it through creativity and to enhance it but I think that takes a lot of courage and I think that's the highlight of Pope Francis' letter,"

Fr Mannion explains.

"I think it's attractive for young people, the call to go and to do something, to act, that's what we see

in St Joseph, a man of action and a man of courage and yet a man of interior silence and that connects very much into the Dominican charism as well, this idea of passing on the fruits of our contemplation like St Joseph, that we listen in silence, we allow the word of God to speak to us and then we follow through with action."

Fr Mannion is currently organising a daily Zoom meeting, open to all, starting on February 15 for 33 days to pray to St Joseph



Dominican Brothers ordained to the priesthood at St Saviours Church, Dublin

and to ask for his intercession while also praying for vocations. It will end on the feast day of St Joseph on March 19. It comes off the back of the Pope's apostolic letter signalling a 'Year of St Joseph', which runs until December 8, 2021. The Zoom meeting details are: Zoom ID: 986 4005 1501 Passcode: 122013.

Those wishing to contact Fr Colm Mannion regarding the 33-day St Joseph Zoom meeting, or if they are interested in discerning a vocation with the Dominicans, can email him at [colm.mannion@dominicans.ie](mailto:colm.mannion@dominicans.ie)

### Journey

Our relationship with people is a reflection of our relationship with God, according to one Capuchin Franciscan who says the journey towards religious life is like falling in love.

Bro. Kevin Kiernan OFM Cap, who recently moved back to Church Street in Dublin after a seven-year stint as hospital chaplain in St Finbar's Hospital in Cork, said people can never know what the religious life is like if they don't take the first step.

## “Here's generations of non-practicing Catholics and it's about trying to touch people's lives in some way”

"Loads of people have joined religious life and I'd like to think they're better people because of it. One of our friars, when someone would leave, he'd say 'I hope he sees his time with us as an extended retreat', really it's about

your journey – this is where I fit best. It's the same with marriage, you grow in the marriage, you grow in the relationship, you grow in your relationship with God, in religious life and it just doesn't happen overnight, the initial call does, and it is actually like falling in love – that's my experience," Bro. Kevin says.

Although his order pray for vocations, Bro. Kevin says the reason they are not getting them is that the people he went to school with aren't practicing and some of them are grandparents, which trickles down through their children and their children's children.

He says: "Here's generations of non-practicing Catholics and it's about trying to touch people's lives in some way. It takes one word to turn people off the Church, but it also takes one word to bring people back and that might just be a kind

## “Fr Mannion is currently organising a daily Zoom meeting, open to all, starting on February 15 for 33 days to pray to St Joseph and to ask for his intercession while also praying for vocations”



word. It's about working with people at that human level and actually that human level I believe moves on to a spiritual level in the sense that we grow together, we talk. We have to go back to Jesus in the Gospel, he sat down doing ordinary things with people.

**“Really we’re all the same inside, some are old, some are young, some are whatever but it’s about accepting the other person and that we’re not perfect”**

“There’s lots of factors for people not practicing but I think touching people’s lives in some way, like Pope Francis says the name of God is mercy how can we show mercy to people, how can we show that to ourselves first

of all? Mercy and love are inseparable, so how can we share that?”

Asked what he found difficult when he was entering his order, Bro. Kevin says he found the studying and exams challenging as he preferred to be out meeting people, community life also takes a bit of getting used to but is also an opportunity for personal growth.

He says: “Community life can be difficult because we’re all different individuals but you’re called to love the brothers even though we’re all different, that’s the call and it’s OK to be different and allowing people to be different because we’re not made all the same. When you allow people to be different and allow yourself to be different then that’s what community is about, you grow together.

“We’re all made up in society of all different ages, races, whatever it is, I used to work with refugees and asylum seekers for years down in Cork and one of our mottos, we had a big poster, was: ‘Everyone smiles in the

same language’. Really we’re all the same inside, some are old, some are young, some are whatever but it’s about accepting the other person and that we’re not perfect.”

For those interested in discerning a life with the Capuchin Franciscans Bro. Kevin refers them to the order’s website: [www.capuchin-franciscans.ie/friary/church-street/](http://www.capuchin-franciscans.ie/friary/church-street/), adding that they also have a Facebook page.

### God

“You won’t know unless you try. When I was student one of our older friars, he said what’s most important for you as a friar is your relationship with God and focusing on your prayer life. The best part of the day for me is early in morning when we’re in for meditation because it’s just total silence. It’s about growing in that relationship with God and I think our relationship with people is a reflection of how we relate to God. If I have a deep relationship with God, I’ll find that will trickle out into my life,” he says.

# 33 Days for St Joseph

In response to Pope Francis declaring the Year of St Joseph, the Irish Dominicans are inviting you to join us online as we make a collective consecration to St Joseph, while also asking his intercession for vocations to the Priesthood and Religious Life.

**8PM DAILY**

33 Days Beginning

**15th February**

To the Feast of St Joseph

**19th March**



Zoom ID:  
**986 4005 1501**

Passcode:  
**122013**

**Join us as we:**

- \* Pray the Holy Father's Prayer for the Year of St Joseph
- \* Recite the Daily Reading in Preparation for the Consecration to St. Joseph
- \* Invoke the Prayer for Vocations

**All are Welcome!**

All prayers and readings will be displayed on screen.  
For more information contact:

Fr Colm Mannion OP [colm.mannion@dominicans.ie](mailto:colm.mannion@dominicans.ie)  
[www.irishdominicanvocations.com](http://www.irishdominicanvocations.com)



**W**ho are the Capuchins? As Franciscans we are part of a larger family of Catholic friars, sisters and dedicated laypeople founded by St. Francis and Clare of Assisi in the 1200's.

The Capuchins came about when in the 1500's a group of those friars decided to seek a more radical following of the Gospel according to the original spirit of St. Francis. Becoming known for their distinctive hooded habit, rough cord and bare feet, they chose a life based on contemplative prayer, gospel poverty lived in simple brotherhood, care for the poor and respect for all creation.

We still choose that life today. Could you?

### The Capuchins in Ireland:

Since our arrival in 1616 we have served the Irish people during some of the most difficult times in their history. To this day the Irish Capuchins are working as "brothers of the people" by living the good news of the Gospel, reaching out to those on the margins who are in need and by extending the gift of peace to one and all. Today we are present in Dublin, Cork, Kilkenny, Carlow and Donegal, with missions in Zambia, South Africa and South Korea.

### Any famous Capuchins I would know?

Perhaps the most famous of our saintly brothers is St. Pio of Pietrelcina in Italy. Padre Pio as he was known became renowned for the many miracles and healings that took place through his prayers and for the hospital he founded for the relief of the sick and poor. He



# Rebuilding the Church, Serving those in need, Brothers to all

was the first priest to receive the Stigmata, (the visible wounds of Christ's passion), which he bore for 50 years as a witness to Christ's love for all of us. Many Irish people still seek his prayers and intercession with the Lord.

**“Two periods of silent meditation, the Divine Office, the Rosary, Lectio Divina and time in adoration are always part of the prayer schedule of the friary”**

As well as St. Pio we have been gifted with many saintly and good brothers down through the years. In Ireland the most famous of these was the "Apostle of Temperance" Fr. Theobald Mathew, who did so much for the relief of the poor. His statue can be seen in both Cork and Dublin city centre.

### What work do you do?

While according to the vision of St. Francis our primary work is the simple living out of Gospel brotherhood together we also have many and varied apostolates. Preaching, teaching, chaplaincies to hospitals and hospices, parish work, working with young people, leading prayer groups, ministry to immigrants, online ministry, guiding prayer and retreats and working with the homeless are all part of our Capuchin way of reaching out to our brothers and sisters and building the Kingdom with them.

### What's your prayer life like?

Our day, like our life as friars, begins and ends with prayer.

Two periods of silent meditation, the Divine Office, the Rosary, Lectio Divina and time in adoration are



always part of the prayer schedule of the friary, the crowning moment of which is the celebration of the Mass together each day. It is there we meet our Eucharistic Lord and from there that we draw the grace and help necessary for our life as brothers and our ministry to the people. It was said of St. Francis that he did not so much pray as become prayer. That is what every friar aspires to, while being invited and supported to journey ever more deeply into the way of prayer by the fraternity.

Regular times of retreat are also encouraged and made available to all the brothers.

### You're all "brothers" but some of you say Mass, how does that work?

The Capuchins returned to the original vision of St. Francis that the Order would be a "fraternity" a group of brothers living as equals and sharing Gospel life together. Francis, while ordained a Deacon, was never a priest himself. While many of the friars are ordained

priests all the friars are equal by profession of the three vows we take to become Capuchins; namely Chastity, Poverty and Obedience. It is this profession that makes you a Capuchin. After that you may feel called to priesthood or to non-ordained ministry. This will be discerned with the community during formation.

### What is Formation?

Formation is that period of time spent training as a friar and "discerning" or seeking out as to whether this way of life is for you or not. During this time you will have the experience of living and working with the friars and growing in commitment to the Capuchin Franciscan way while being guided by brothers specially trained to help you make your decision. From Postulancy, (the first stage of formation) to taking perpetual vows usually takes about 8 years.

### Making Contact...

A vocation is a mysterious thing! It needs to be discerned carefully and



with an open heart. If any of the above has caught your interest or even just your curiosity take some time to read over it, to pray, and research a bit more. You can find out all about the Irish Capuchins at [www.capuchinfranciscans.ie](http://www.capuchinfranciscans.ie) and then get in touch by dropping an email to Br Richard on [capuchininvocation@gmail.com](mailto:capuchininvocation@gmail.com)

**“Whatever else may come of that first step you can be sure you will meet a brother”**

# Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles

## *A Choice to Live a Unique Life*

Michelle Robertson

### A nudge...a call...

**T**o enter into religious life is to answer a call, a call that God has made on your life. There are various ways that each of us is called to follow in God's service, and each person's vocation is unique. The discernment of that vocation is also unique.

Sr Eithna Synnott first felt the nudge of that calling very early on in her life. She was just a child when she found refuge in the images of the saints printed on prayer cards. She spent hours with her pencils, meticulously drawing the images and speaking to the figures that brought her so much comfort. Of course, the child that she was did not articulate this as a calling to Religious Life, and perhaps it wasn't yet, she knew only that this was the space in which she found safety in a world that had thrust her into the role of adult before her sixth birthday.

It is often like that, a little nudge here and there, a series of coincidences, a meeting with a stranger, a passage in a book, a silent voice...

When the calling comes, and you are open to hearing it, you may still experience doubt, you may push it aside, ignore it, try to convince yourself of all the reasons it isn't so; but there comes a moment when your perspective changes and you feel that you have come home. For Eithna, this happened when she caught a glimpse into the imperfections behind the veil, in the form of a young novice leaning on a broom, crying. Seeing that small moment of vulnerability, quickly over, changed everything for her. It was in that split second that she truly understood that God loves us in all our imperfection and humanity, and that she had found her place in the world with the Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles.

Often we, as lay people, think of Religious Life as two dimensional, we see only the surface. For many of us, our experiences of nuns and priests are memories of figures from our childhood, encountered in classrooms and churches, and sometimes on formal occasions or during a crisis, in our homes. We rarely, if ever, see the women and men behind the designation. Yet they are fully human, just as we are, in all their hopes and dreams, their fears and their imperfections.

### Seasons of Life

It is clear, speaking with Sr Eithna, that she is an extraordinary and gifted woman. A woman of deep thought and deeper compassion. She also has a wonderful sense of humour. When asked which calling came first, Religious Life or Medicine, she replies with laughter, "Oh, it was the nun bit." She is equally upfront about her mediocre

grades in school, and the "usual dysfunctions of family life". She speaks with candour and delighted amusement about her childhood dreams of being a ballerina, or maybe a cowherd, chuckling at the memories.

As a woman, she has experienced all that we as women collectively experience as we move through the different seasons of our lives. She has struggled with her self-image, and with the insecurity of others' perceptions of her. She wanted people to like and accept her. She explains that it took time and learning, and a lot of inner work and growth, for her reach a point where she was comfortable with her own identity as a woman, and finally accept that it was perfectly fine that not everyone liked her.

"We get wiser as we get older, but it takes so long to get to the point of realisation that how I live today is **my** choice," she says, agreeing that life is a continuous journey of healing.

When sharing about her calling to medicine she explains how so many things aligned in order to make it happen. Originally, the plan was for her to go to college to study languages. This was not something she felt she could do. She had confided her dreams of studying medicine to one of her fellow sisters, Maureen, who over the years had become a close friend. Maureen happened to be a nurse. Deep inside, Eithna wanted more, felt certain that there was more. That little quiet voice...

...so despite her bad grades, and with her friend's encouragement she requested permission to study medicine. Up until that point she had been seen as the artist and musician, certainly not someone who would study sciences; and there were those bad grades...

The decision was taken to send her for evaluation to a psychologist in the hopes that this would provide further clarity on which direction she was to follow. The evaluation returned, "Whatever this girl takes on she will do well." There being no reason to discourage her, she studied to achieve the matriculation grades required so that she could apply to study medicine.

### It's not about uniformity

Sr Eithna qualified as a medical doctor in 1979 and went on to practice medicine in Africa for many years. Today she is also a Master Practitioner in Neuro Linguistic Programming, hypnosis and Time Line Therapy.

Today, the question is often raised whether Consecrated Life still has relevance. This woman, Eithna Synnott, who is a Religious Sister and a healer, is also a musician, an artist, a preacher and a poet. Her life is testimony

that Consecrated Life is not about uniformity. It is a way of expressing yourself as an individual.

In this world of instant gratification, where consumerism and secularisation prevails, we find ourselves, due to the global pandemic, physically separated from one another. Unable to hold our loved ones close and faced with so much loss and suffering, the search for spiritual connection and authenticity is brought to the forefront.

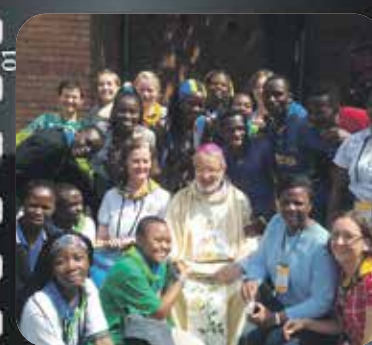
In the quiet, with materialism pushed to the background, the whispered and desperate prayers of those who have not prayed in too long, or not ever, are palpable. There is a yearning below the surface. If we quiet our minds to match the quiet of the world around us, perhaps we can open ourselves to the voice of God.

**"It is often like that, a little nudge here and there, a series of coincidences, a meeting with a stranger, a passage in a book, a silent voice..."**

Sr Eithna hears that voice, and heeds it, in all that she does. God is very much alive in her life, she sees the Divine Physician in all of creation. She searches God out in all that she does, seeking guidance through prayer, through music, through poetry and through her encounters with each person she meets.

Like any other woman, she questions her life from time to time. Like any other woman there have been times when she felt she was losing herself to the life she had chosen and she paused to examine her heart and adjust her course, knowing that God's call is for our unique spirit to shine and that it is never meant to be subdued. Taking a personal inventory, she concludes that Consecrated Life has been, and remains for her, a journey of spiritual and personal growth.

She places her trust in the Divine Physician, knowing without doubt that she is loved for all her imperfections. She has a deep certainty that this is the life that was meant for her, so that she could grow to be the woman she is meant to be. Her life provides an affirmation to those who encounter her, that Consecrated Life remains a valid choice, one in which we can achieve fulfilment, express our individualism and find happiness and purpose.



### Sharing in Our Mission

Interested in volunteering overseas?

Email: [volunteering@olaireland.ie](mailto:volunteering@olaireland.ie)

Interested in joining our Lay Mission Movement?

Email: [Imm@olaireland.ie](mailto:Imm@olaireland.ie)

Do you feel God is calling you to be an OLA sister

Email: [vocations@olaireland.ie](mailto:vocations@olaireland.ie)

[www.olaireland.ie](http://www.olaireland.ie)  
[info@olaireland.ie](mailto:info@olaireland.ie)

Ardfoyle Convent, Ballintemple, Cork

Facebook: OLAsisters | Twitter: @OLAireland | Instagram: OLAsistersireland

# Out&About

## Rosaries for reunion



**GALWAY:** A woman participating in a rosary rally carries a sign near a statue of Mary on New Year's Day outside the cathedral in Galway, January 1. She was seeking the return of public Mass during the Covid-19 pandemic. Photos: CNS.



**GALWAY:** People gather to pray the rosary near a statue of Mary on New Year's Day outside the cathedral in Galway, January 1. They were asking for the return of public Mass during the Covid-19 pandemic.

### IN SHORT

#### 'Government should offer free DNA testing kit to survivors of mother and baby homes', says Tóibín

Aontú leader Peadar Tóibín TD has called on the Government to offer all survivors of mother and baby homes a free DNA testing kit. Mr Tóibín said in a statement that, from engaging with survivors, he understood "that many of them still have questions about their biological families".

"It appears Tusla (the Child and Family Agency) are depriving many of them of their most basic records," the statement continues. "Unfor-

tunately, the Government have voted to seal these records. There should be no question, when it comes to law and rights, that the right to one's birth cert is of utmost importance."

"I'm calling on the Government to ensure that Tusla exercise some common sense and compassion towards the survivors they are dealing with. Many people in this country will be familiar with the website ancestry.com where people can take a DNA test and their results are uploaded to the website.

"This asset is of huge value to survivors many of whom still know nothing of their relatives and genes. I am today calling on the Government to offer all survivors of mother and baby homes a free DNA testing kit, to aid their efforts

in researching and discovering more about their family and birth," concluded Mr Tóibín.

#### Education Committee may quiz colleges on links with Chinese universities

The Oireachtas Education Committee may invite Irish university heads to explain their developing links with Chinese universities in light of human rights concerns for Chinese academic staff and students in Ireland, and for Irish staff and students based in China.

At a meeting Thursday January 14, the Committee agreed to a proposal from Senator Rónán

Mullen that Irish university links with China be added to the Committee's work programme. Senator Mullen was particularly concerned about the situation in University College Cork (UCC), which has been developing a partnership with Minzu University in China, fearing that Chinese students in UCC may face sanctions for speaking up.

"Given how carefully students and faculty are monitored in Chinese universities can any Irish university with absolute certainty say that nothing similar could happen to Chinese students here taking a dual degree programme?" Senator Mullen asked.

Edited by Ruadhán Jones  
Ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie



Events deadline is a week in  
advance of publication



**TYRONE:** Pictured presenting a cheque for £15,000 to Sheena Havlin of Marie Curie are Michael Kelly and Michael Kelly Junior – husband and son of the late Ann Kelly. The Kelly family raised the money for the charity in honour of Mrs Kelly by a sponsored cycle from Galway to Omagh and a 'Walk with Ann' fun walk and run in Strathroy, in September. Photo: Pat McSorley.



**LOUTH:** The Drogheda Augustinians take some time off to enjoy a game of cards.



**CORK:** Dominican novice Brother Philip takes down the Christmas decorations in St Mary's Dominican Priory.



**WEXFORD:** Nurse Bronagh Murphy administers the Covid vaccine to Fr John Carroll at Knockeen Nursing Home.

## 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

### Cathedral soup kitchen feeds Seoul's homeless

● The Seoul archdiocese is helping homeless people with a soup kitchen run out of Myongdong Cathedral. The energy and chemicals division of SK Group, the third-largest conglomerate in South Korea, is sponsoring the programme by supporting 1,400 packed lunches each week. Lunches are served to homeless people every Wednesday, Friday and Sunday, reported *ucanews.com*. "I hope that the soup kitchen will be a small yeast that changes the Church and the world into a world of warm love beyond Myongdong and the archdiocese," said Fr Francis Kim Jeong-hwan, executive director of the archdiocese's One Body One Spirit movement.

### Quebec archdiocese reorganises 75% of parishes

● The Archdiocese of Quebec announced its intention to reorganise its parishes to focus on local missionary activities. This move comes as human and material resources continue to diminish. At least 75% of the parishes will be affected by this change, in both urban and rural areas.

But, he said, it is now clear that the parish system that had a strong impact on French Canadian society is not sustainable and needs to evolve. "We can no longer be satisfied with giving good pastoral services to the people who faithfully participate in our assemblies and movements," said Cardinal Lacroix.

### US bishops welcome census policy reversal

● The leaders of two US bishops' committees applauded President Joe Biden's executive order reversing a policy of the previous administration that excluded unauthorised immigrants from the census count. "We welcome this return to more than a century of American precedent that ensures all residents will be counted," said Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, chairman of the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, and Auxiliary Bishop Mario Dorsonville of Washington, chairman of the Committee on Migration. "This return to our previous policy reflects the inalienable truth that all people matter," they said in a joint statement January 22.

### Polish Catholic patient at centre of UK court battle dies

● A Polish Catholic patient at the centre of a UK court battle died last Tuesday despite last-minute efforts by bishops and government officials to bring him to Poland for treatment. The Polish Press Agency reported that family members had confirmed that the middle-aged man, identified only as RS, died on January 26, after a hospital withdrew assisted

nutrition and hydration for a final time following a series of legal challenges. RS, a Polish citizen with strong pro-life views who lived for years in the UK, was hospitalised on Nov. 6, 2020, following a cardiac arrest during which his brain was deprived of oxygen for at least 45 minutes.

### Green New Deals must respect diverse cultures, Vatican official says

● With a number of nations considering some form of a "Green New Deal" for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, it is important that these efforts respect diverse cultures and economic policies, and avoid imposing a "uniform" model that ends up causing division, said Archbishop Paul Gallagher, the Vatican's foreign minister. Current political debates about the issue seem, on the one hand, "to lead to a discordance of opinions and, on the other, favour imposing that singular cultural model" that "unifies the world, but divides persons and nations," he said January 23. It is important that promoting human and social development and well-being also includes "the defence and care of culture," he said.

## Landmark abortion court ruling published in Poland

Poland's constitutional court published January 21 the rationale for its declaration that abortion for foetal abnormalities is unconstitutional three months after it made the ruling.

In the highly anticipated ruling on October 22, the Constitutional Tribunal in Warsaw said that the law introduced in 1993 was incompatible with Poland's constitution.

But the law did not come into effect until the ruling was published in the country's Journal of Laws on January 27.

The 154-page ruling said: "In the opinion of the Tribunal, an unborn child is, as a human being – a person who enjoys innate and inalienable dignity, a subject who has the right to life; and the legal system must, according to Article 38 of the Constitution, guarantee due protection for this central good, without which this subjectivity would be deleted."

The court's verdict prompted a wave of demonstrations across Poland. Protesters directed their anger at the ruling Law and Justice party (PiS), but also at the Catholic Church, which welcomed the decision.

Demonstrators disrupted Masses while holding signs supporting abortion, left graffiti on Church property, vandalized statues of St John Paul II, and chanted slogans at clergy.

The ruling, which cannot be appealed, could lead to a signif-



Demonstrators protest October 25, 2020, in front of the Cathedral of Christ the King in Katowice, Poland, against the ruling by Poland's Constitutional Tribunal that imposes a near-total ban on abortion. Photo: CNS.

icant reduction in the number of abortions in the country.

Until now, Polish law permitted abortion only in cases of rape or incest, a risk to the mother's life, or foetal abnormality.

Approximately 1,000 legal abortions take place in Poland each year. The majority are carried out in cases where the unborn child has a severe and irreversible disability or a life-threatening incurable disease.

### Eugenic

Polish pro-life campaigners describe the legal provision as "eugenic". Data from the Ministry of Health shows that in

2019, the likelihood of Down syndrome accounted for 40% of abortions.

Jerzy Kwasniewski, president of the Ordo Iuris Institute, said: "The justification of the judgment strongly emphasises that, if the mother's life and health are not endangered, the legal protection of the child's life is complete. This is a step forward, firmly removing purely eugenic abortion from Polish law."

Bartłomiej Wróblewski, a Law and Justice MP who was among those who asked the tribunal to review the law, wrote on Twitter: "Selecting people based on illness and

disability is unconstitutional. I am glad that the justification for the court's judgment in this case has been published."

The constitutional court was asked to examine the law in 2019 by a group of 119 MPs belonging to the Law and Justice party, as well as the smaller parties Konfederacja and PSL-Kukiz'15.

Oct. 22 – the day the court made the ruling – is the feast day of the Polish Pope St John Paul II, who led the Church from 1978 to 2005 and galvanised the pro-life movement in Poland and around the world.

## Bishops decry Biden ending 'Mexico City policy'

The chairman of the US bishops' pro-life and international policy committees said President Joe Biden's memo rescinding the so-called 'Mexico City policy' January 28 is a "grievous" action that "actively promotes the destruction of human lives in developing nations".

"It is antithetical to reason, violates human dignity, and is incompatible with Catholic teaching. We and our brother bishops strongly oppose this action. We urge the president to use his office for good, prioritising the most

vulnerable, including unborn children," the prelates said.

The statement was issued by Archbishop Joseph Naumann of Kansas City, Kansas, and chairman of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities, and Bishop David Malloy of Rockford, Illinois, chairman of the Committee on International Justice and Peace.

"As the largest nongovernment health care provider in the world, the Catholic Church stands ready to work with him and his administration to promote

global women's health in a manner that furthers integral human development, safeguarding innate human rights and the dignity of every human life, beginning in the womb," Archbishop Naumann and Bishop Malloy said.

"To serve our brothers and sisters with respect, it is imperative that care begin with ensuring that the unborn are free from violence, recognising every person as a child of God," they said. "We hope the new administration will work with us to meet these significant needs."

## Emotional farewell Mass for Belarusian archbishop

Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz said at a farewell Mass January 24 that the Church would remain a source of strength for Catholics in Belarus despite a change in leadership.

The departing archbishop of Minsk-Mohilev also promised that he would remain an active

bishop at the Cathedral of the Holy Name of Mary in the capital, Minsk.

Pope Francis accepted Archbishop Kondrusiewicz's resignation on January 3, his 75 birthday, shortly after the archbishop was permitted to return to Belarus after a four-month enforced exile.

"Changing a bishop after he reaches the age of 75 is a normal thing," Archbishop Kondrusiewicz said, according to *Catholic.by*, the website of the Catholic Church in Belarus. "I leave as a ruling bishop, but as a bishop I remain."

"It is important that, despite the change of bishops, the

Church remains, operates and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

On the same day that he accepted the archbishop's resignation, the Pope named Bishop Kazimierz Wielikosi-elec as apostolic administrator of Minsk-Mohilev archdiocese.



Edited by Ruadhán Jones  
Ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie

## Feeding the flock



Pope Francis meets with David Beasley, executive director of the World Food Programme, at the Vatican January 28. On the same day, the WFP issued a joint press release with UNICEF warning that millions of children have missed meals since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Photo: CNS.

# Religious leaders want Brazilian president impeached over Covid-19

Stating that Brazil's federal government displayed contempt for protecting the health of the population and showed criminal conduct, 380 Brazilian Christian religious leaders filed an impeachment request against President Jair Bolsonaro for the crime of shirking his responsibilities.

"Faced with the most serious public health crisis in the history of the country and the planet, the president of the republic, irresponsibly, oscillated between denialism, contempt and assumed sabotage of the prevention and health care policies of Brazilian citizens," read part of the document presented to

Brazil's Chamber of Deputies January 26.

According to the document, since the beginning of the pandemic, Bolsonaro has sought to discredit renowned national scientific institutions, held back resources meant to fight the virus, and encouraged the population to use medication, such as chloroquine, which has no proven efficacy to cope with the disease.

The president, say religious leaders, has also mocked basic health recommendations to fight Covid-19.

"There is a contempt for the use of masks and social distancing and, until recently, a disregard for vaccines,"

Bishop Jose Santos Mendes of Brejo, president of the Brazilian bishops' social action commission, told *Catholic News Service*.

Bishop Mendes was one of four bishops who signed the petition.

"We signed the request in view of the situation we are currently living, under a pandemic, with the inertia and the denialism sentiment of the (federal) government," he said.

Bishop Mendes said authority figures have a certain weight in society and, when they disrespect rules and recommendations and discourage such things as wearing masks and social

distancing, it has an effect on the population.

"What we do and say is followed and copied. If we don't put forth clear messages, it hurts society as a whole," he added.

Although Bishop Mendes said Christian groups and leaders have been discussing the pandemic crisis, it was the recent deaths in the Amazon city of Manaus, due to lack of oxygen canisters in hospitals, that led religious leaders to decide to speak out.

"There comes a time when we must do something concrete; we need to do something to defend and preserve life," he said.

## Jailed Indian Jesuit pens letter on prisoners' plight

Indian Jesuit Fr Stan Swamy marked 100 days in prison with a letter highlighting the cases of poor people languishing in jail who begin their trials without even knowing their criminal charges.

*Ucanews.com* reported on January 25 that in his letter to Jesuit colleagues, the 84-year-old priest also expressed gratitude for the "overwhelming" solidarity of his supporters as he completed 100 days in prison.

Fr Swamy has been detained in Talaja Central Prison in Mumbai since October 9. The human rights activist priest is charged with sedition and having links with outlawed Maoist rebels.

Along with Fr Swamy, 15 other activists were arrested and jailed at different times for their alleged involvement in a violent incident in Bhima Koregaon January 1, 2018. One person died and five were injured in the incident.

"First of all, I deeply appreciate the

overwhelming solidarity expressed by many during these past 100 days behind bars," the priest's letter said.

Fr Swamy's letter referred to the "undertrials" – a term used in India to denote people in custody waiting for their trials to begin.

"Many such poor undertrials don't know what charges have been put on them, have not seen their charge sheet and just remain in prison for years without any legal or other assistance," he wrote.

## Vatican roundup

### Pontifical Academy for Life say no to 'vaccine nationalism'

● The Pontifical Academy for Life has stressed the importance of overcoming "vaccine nationalism" so that everyone can have the opportunity of being vaccinated and nobody is left behind in the fight against Covid-19. A statement from the Academy warns that "faced with the very serious problems that are arising in relation to the production and distribution of the vaccine for Covid-19", identifying suitable systems for transparency and collaboration has become "urgent". "There is too much antagonism and competition and the risk of severe injustices", reads the statement. The statement goes on to recall a joint document, released on December 29 by the Dicastery for Integral Human Development and the Pontifical Academy for Life. The document stresses the importance of vaccination and "the modalities that can make the vaccine a common good for everybody". The statement stresses that "this is an extraordinary opportunity for a new, more supportive future". A series of tools must be specified and implemented in order to achieve "universal accessibility". In this way, concludes the statement, "the Pope's appeal can be made concrete: 'everyone, brothers and sisters!'"

### Pope: Failure to remember Holocaust will lead world down same path

● At his General Audience on Wednesday, Pope Francis marked International Holocaust Remembrance Day, observed on the anniversary of the liberation of Nazi concentration and extermination camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau. "Today we commemorate the victims of the Holocaust and all those persecuted and deported by the Nazi regime," Pope Francis said at his weekly General Audience. "Remembering is an expression of humanity. Remembering is a sign of civilization," the Pope said. "Remembering is a condition for a better future of peace and fraternity."

Pope Francis continued, saying, "remembering also means being careful because these things could happen again, beginning with ideological proposals intended to save a people and ending by destroying a people and humanity". He warned that we must be attentive "to how this path of death, of extermination, and brutality begin". Pope Francis himself visited the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, on the site of the infamous Nazi death camp, during his visit to Poland in 2016. He became the third Pope to visit the site, following Pope St John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

### Vatican officials hold funeral for man who used to live on streets nearby

● Two cardinals, an archbishop and a dozen priests concelebrated a funeral Mass January 25 for Roberto Molinari, a soccer player decades ago, who spent much of the past few years living on the streets near the Vatican. According to *Vatican News*, the many people whom Mr Molinari befriended and who tried to help him, recently convinced him to move into a homeless shelter after he'd had numerous bouts of pneumonia. The 64-year-old died in a shelter by Rome's main train station. Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, the papal almoner, presided over the funeral Mass at the Rome parish of St Pius X; Cardinal George Pell, who lives near where Molinari would sleep, concelebrated, as did Archbishop Arthur Roche, secretary of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments. Also in attendance were: volunteers from Natale 365, which runs the shelter where he was staying; Italian state police from the station on the square where Molinari often slept; and members of the Community of Sant'Egidio, who run the Vatican's newest homeless shelter and coordinate the distribution of food to the homeless in many areas of the city.



# Letter from Rome



John L. Allen Jr

## By meeting Cupich, Pope Francis masters speaking without words

St Francis of Assisi supposedly said, “Preach always, and, when necessary, use words”. In all honesty, there’s no evidence St Francis ever said anything like that – but even so, it’s a piece of advice Popes long have taken to heart.

Over the centuries, Popes have always found plenty of ways to speak without using words, especially when words might be inconvenient or hard to take back. Popes speak by gestures, by whom they name to key jobs, by where they put their money and where they chose to travel.

Even a Pope’s appointment calendar can be a way of getting a message across, which was certainly the case for St Francis’s namesake, Pope Francis, yesterday.

Every day the Vatican Press Office sends journalists a list of who’s on the Pope’s schedule that day, and rarely does the list make headlines. Mostly it’s people we already knew were coming, or Vatican officials with an obvious reason for seeing the boss.

Yesterday, however, was the list that launched a thousand tweets, because it contained the unexpected name of Cardinal Blase Cupich of Chicago.

**“Keeping some capacity for ambiguity in reserve is a necessary tool for the leader of a wildly complicated global institution of more than a billion people”**

In the abstract, there’s nothing terribly unusual about a Pope meeting a cardinal, and Cupich is a member of both the Vatican’s Congregation for Catholic Education and its all-important Congregation for Bishops, so in theory there could have been housekeeping involving one or both of those departments that required some face time with Francis.

### Meeting

However, this meeting came just ten days after Cardinal Cupich publicly upbraided Archbishop Jose Gomez of Los Angeles, president of the US bishops’ conference, for a statement on the inauguration of President Joe Biden warning that the new administration “would advance moral evils and threaten human life and dignity”. He called that statement “ill-considered” and insisted it did



Pope Francis talks with Cardinal Blase Cupich of Chicago during a meeting with US bishops from Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin making their *ad limina* visits to the Vatican December 12, 2019. Photo: CNS.

not go through the usual collegial vetting process, implying it was overly confrontation vis-à-vis the new administration.

In that context, it’s been difficult for most observers not to interpret the meeting with the Pope as a show of support by Francis for Cupich in the dispute with Archbishop Gomez, and thus, more broadly, for a more positive approach to the new Biden administration.

That interpretation is all the more seductive given that neither the Vatican nor Cardinal Cupich have offered any explanation of the nature of the meeting, at least so far – leaving the clear impression that they’re content with the gloss pretty much everyone has given it, i.e., as a thumbs-up for the Cupich line.

It won’t do simply to say that Francis wanted to be briefed on the situation in the States. Were that all, there are plenty of other people who could have brought the pontiff up to speed who weren’t themselves a party to the dispute beginning with his own envoy in

America, French Archbishop Christophe Pierre.

Nor will it quite fly to say that the Pope wanted to promote reconciliation, or to avoid public conflict among bishops. Were that the agenda, the logical move would have been to speak to both Cardinal Cupich and Archbishop Gomez together. (Back in 2010, after Cardinal Christoph Schönborn of Vienna publicly accused Italian Cardinal Angelo Sodano, the former Secretary of State under St John Paul II, of blocking a sex abuse investigation, the two prelates were summoned to Rome for a kiss-and-make-up session under Pope Benedict XVI.)

### Conflict

By meeting just one of the protagonists to the conflict without the other, the inevitable take-away is that the pontiff wanted to send a signal about where his sympathies lie.

That’s the case, by the way, regardless of who actually initiated the meeting. Even if it was Cardinal Cupich who requested a spot on

the calendar, the Pope was under no obligation to grant it. When retired Cardinal Joseph Zen of Hong Kong recently came to Rome looking for papal support for his hawkish line on China, for example, he went home without having seen the boss.

**“It won’t do simply to say that Francis wanted to be briefed on the situation in the States”**

The genius of this mode of speech, however, lies precisely in its flexibility – right now its meaning may seem crystal clear, but some ambiguity could always be injected later should it prove necessary.

To take an historical example, under John Paul II the pontiff was in the habit of giving visiting Anglican bishops a pectoral cross, the same gift he would bestow on visiting Catholic bishops. In ecumenical

circles, that gesture was taken as an implicit repeal of an 1896 decree by Pope Leo XIII that Anglican ordinations are invalid.

Should anyone ever have made a federal case out of it, however, the Vatican always could have issued a statement to the effect that it was simply a fraternal gesture by the Pope devoid of any doctrinal significance.

Similarly here, should the apparent papal involvement in an internal dispute among the American bishops become problematic, a statement could be issued saying the pontiff simply wanted to consult Cardinal Cupich on Vatican business and that other matters are for the Americans themselves to resolve.

All that may seem a bit Machiavellian, or cynical. Yet in reality, keeping some capacity for ambiguity in reserve is a necessary tool for the leader of a wildly complicated global institution of more than a billion people, where no one can predict with certainty all the consequences of a particular statement. That’s why words sometimes aren’t the best vehicle for papal messages, especially on sensitive and rapidly evolving issues, since it’s much harder to walk back words than gestures.

In other words, speaking without using words is sometimes the smartest thing for any Pope to do, and the Cupich meeting suggests it’s a lesson Francis too has mastered.

**“It’s been difficult for most observers not to interpret the meeting with the Pope as a show of support by Francis for Cardinal Cupich in the dispute with Archbishop Gomez”**

# Iraq warns of new coronavirus wave as Vatican aide doubles down on papal trip



A priest celebrates Mass December 25, 2019, at St George Chaldean Church in Baghdad. Photo CNS.



Elise Ann Allen

**O**n the same day a top Vatican official insisted that Pope Francis's upcoming visit to Iraq is still on the books, and that the pontiff is determined to go, the country's health ministry issued a statement warning of a possible second wave of the Covid-19 coronavirus, which, they said, could be deadlier than the first.

In a January 29 statement, Iraq's Ministry of Health and Environment noted that many countries throughout the world are currently seeing "a serious increase" in both infections and deaths related to the coronavirus pandemic, despite the rollout of vaccines.

This second wave, they said, "has been proven to be harsher and deadlier than the first wave" due to the emergence of dangerous new strains more lethal than the original coronavirus, including new strains coming out of South Africa and the UK.

The ministry lamented that its numerous warnings against non-compliance with health and safety norms have gone unheeded by the general population.

## Improvement

Although there was a clear improvement in infection rates in Iraq shortly after the holidays, attributed to increased clinical, therapeutical, and diagnostic capacity, the ministry

warned that the situation has deteriorated in the past two weeks, with infection rates continuing to rise.

This trend, they said, could be indicative of "a second wave of the pandemic, and God forbid, it might be worse than the first due to the absence of compliance with preventive measures ... from most citizens".

Should Iraqis continue to shrug off safety protocols such as social distancing and mask-wearing, the ministry said it could be forced "to take more severe decisions and actions, such as partial lockdown and closure of vital facilities with human gatherings" in order to stop the spread and "protect citizens from the catastrophic effects of the next wave".

**“Media were also asked to “intensify” their efforts to encourage citizens to adhere to preventative norms”**

The ministry's statement adds to growing doubt that Pope Francis's scheduled March 5-8 trip to Iraq will be able to take place. Concerns over security in the wake of recent terrorist attacks, the increase in Covid cases, and the Pope's health after two serious bouts of sciatica this month have all led observers to question the feasibility of the trip.

In an interview that aired January 19 on French Catholic television channel *KTOTV*, Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin said the Pope would still like to go, despite the obstacles.

"We've seen it in recent encounters with him: He's very interested in the trip to Iraq, regardless of the

**“The ministry lamented that its numerous warnings against non-compliance with health and safety norms have gone unheeded by the general population”**

complications it might have," Cardinal Parolin said. While there are some challenges with security, "the Pope wants to go to encourage Christians".

"In these past years we've seen a haemorrhage of Christians from this country, mostly as a result of the war situation. The Christian community is greatly reduced, and the Pope feels the need to go to encourage these Christians to give witness in an environment that is in no way easy," he said.

## Schedule

Should the Pope go as planned, he is scheduled to visit the cities of Baghdad, Erbil, Qaraqosh, and Mosul, as well as the Plain of Ur, the birthplace of Abraham.

He is also expected to make a brief stop in the city of Najaf for a meeting with Grand Ayatollah Al-Sistani, one of the most senior clerics in Shia Islam and one of the Shiite's most influential leaders, to advance his pursuit of interfaith dialogue.

Like Francis, Al-Sistani is an advocate of taking the coronavirus vaccines.

"In such circumstances, it is appropriate to rely on the advice given by experienced medical experts," Ayatollah Sistani said in response to questions submitted to him by a Muslim body. "As per Shari'ah, it is mandatory to use an approved vaccine in a situation when the probability of suffering from the Coronavirus

infection, with its potentially life threatening and/or serious untreatable complications, far outweigh the probable serious side effects of getting vaccinated."

The visit would also likely provide an opportunity for Francis to warn against the dangers of corruption as Iraq works to reform a government accused of rampant corruption at the highest levels. The country is expected to hold parliamentary elections in October, which were postponed from their original date in June due to the pandemic.

However, given the Iraqi health ministry's warning, the situation with the coronavirus could get worse before it gets better. If a second, more deadly wave of the virus should break out in Iraq, the likelihood that the papal visit will happen is limited.

Iraq, as of Saturday, had recorded some 618,922 cases and 13,041 deaths. In the country's Kurdish region, there have been at least 105,912 confirmed cases and 3,466 deaths.

Pope Francis has already received the Pfizer anti-Covid vaccine, but Iraq has not yet had its first vaccine delivery, which is expected to arrive sometime in February.

In the statement, the ministry urged Iraqi citizens to take preventative measures seriously, such as wearing masks, social distancing, frequent use of hand sanitiser, and to

refrain from practices such as handshakes, hugging, organizing large gatherings, and giving the traditional kiss on the cheek as a greeting.

They also urged all other ministries, government institutions, and those in the private sector to comply with preventative measures, requiring employees wear masks, keep a safe distance, and refrain from holding gatherings.

**“He's very interested in the trip to Iraq, regardless of the complications it might have”**

Media were also asked to "intensify" their efforts to encourage citizens to adhere to preventative norms.

The ministry asked the government to provide "all necessary medical supplies, preventive, diagnostic, and curative, and to expand clinical capacity to accommodate the expected increase in the number of infections and to prepare plans to deal with the upcoming health challenges".

"May Allah protect Iraq and its people from all harm," they said, thanking all those caring for Covid patients and those who work to prevent the spread of the virus.

By Elise Ann Allen, senior correspondent for Cruxnow.com

# Letters

## Letter of the week

### Books to counter Ireland's crisis of faith

**Dear Editor,** I am writing to respond to Jason Osborne's article, Church leadership has to change to be seen [IC 14/01/2021]. He did provide helpful suggestions from people who have studied this crisis of faith we are facing e.g., Prof. Tom Inglis and Fr Eugene Duffy. Fr Duffy was right to emphasise the importance of a new evangelisation and faith formation programmes. However, I believe that no renewal is possible without a new Pentecost described by the late Cardinal Suenens in his classic *A New Pentecost?*, published in 1977. On page 1, the cardinal said that in spite of all the problems the European churches were facing: "I am a man of hope because I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life." Like him,

I see the present crisis of faith in Ireland, not as a problem, but as a great opportunity for renewal in our church.

Faith results from an encounter with Christ and the person who facilitates this encounter is the Holy Spirit. Anyone who experiences the love of Christ, perhaps from prayerfully reading the Gospels, will then make a decision whether or not to believe in Jesus and become his disciple. The late Fr Michael Paul Gallagher SJ, in his seminal work *Help My Unbelief*, wrote that the greatest weakness of traditional Irish Catholicism was that most Catholics had never made a free decision to believe in Jesus and enjoy a personal relationship with him. Today Fr Gallagher's wisdom is better

appreciated and many are following his lead. In Dublin, we see Fr Pat Collins CM, designing online programmes for a new evangelisation, and writing very helpful books like *Basic Evangelisation* and *Encountering Jesus* which describe a way forward from the decline we are experiencing. Also, Fr Michael Hurley PP, who completed a doctorate at All Hallows on Cell Evangelisation in 2010, and last year published *Inspiring Faith Communities*, essential reading for anyone interested in the renewal of the Catholic Faith in Ireland today.

Yours etc.,  
**Peter Boucher**  
Co. Derry

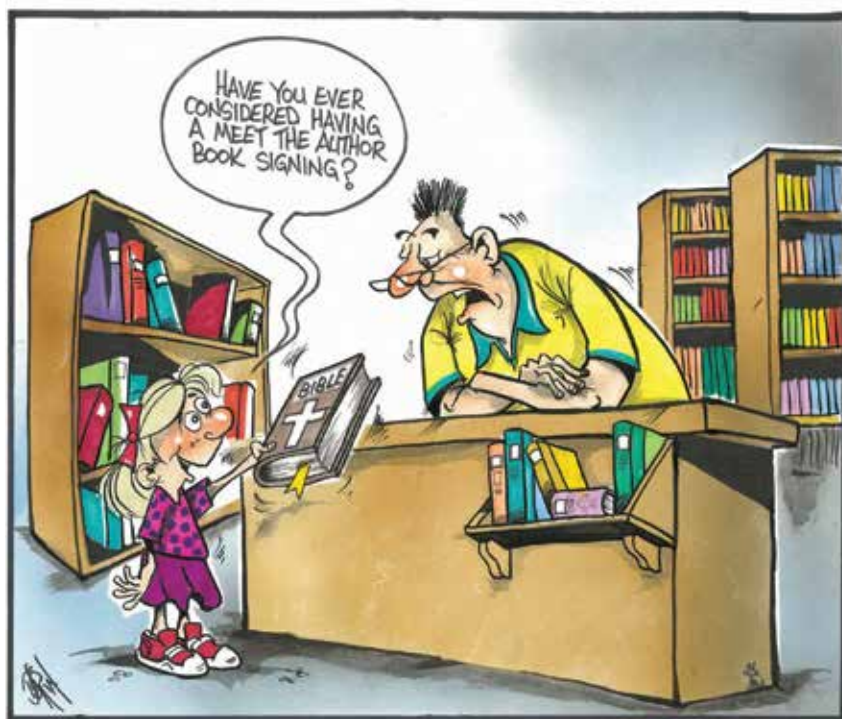
### RTÉ should show picture of Annunciation during Angelus

**Dear Editor,** The news that RTÉ is to retain the broadcast of the Angelus on radio and television is to be welcomed by all Catholic people and those of other faiths. In his interview with Chai Brady [IC 22/01/21] Roger Childs, head of religious content in RTÉ, mentioned that the Angelus is "not specifically Catholic but the angelus prayer is, which RTÉ has never broadcast".

The Angelus has its origins in the early Church when it was customary to say three Hail Marys at dawn, noon and in the evening. It was formulated over time into the Angelus as we know it today. It is a prayer of reflection on the incarnation and to secularise it does not do justice to it.

In light of the polls held on the subject I suggest that RTÉ return to showing a picture of the Annunciation to accompany the ringing of the Angelus bells.

Yours etc.,  
**Herbert Eyre**  
East Wall, Dublin



### Questioning public Mass risks and restrictions

**Dear Editor,** There are often benign reasons why individuals fail to observe the mask and social distancing rules such as simple forgetfulness. Timely reminders fix the problem. Contrary to the Epictetus assertion, people often have to relearn what they already know. One has to be wary of claims by non-scientists put in the form of "the scientific data shows". Whereas in fact its application may be accurate in one instance, the data can be used to uphold a particular bogus point of view relating to a different issue. This is particularly so in the context of attendance at the sacrifice of

the Mass during the Covid-19 pandemic. Priests and laity have created distancing structures within churches which facilitate observance of the prescribed social interaction at the sacrifice of the Mass. People do need to be reminded about the structures and do adhere to them. The numbers attending were small when attendance was permitted. Exit procedures were in place. Most would have observed social distancing or dispersed on exit as they had been reminded to do so. In such circumstances and if the NPHET directive is accurate then the scientific data would hardly show a cause and effect link between Sun-

day attendance and the spread of the virus. There should be no onus on laity or priests to attend the public celebration of the Sacrifice of the Mass during the pandemic. But those who wish to attend and who observe the rules should be facilitated. Reminders from the altar regarding essential behaviour should be the norm, as indeed should constant reminders in normal times to observe silence in the presence of Christ in the tabernacle.

Yours etc.,  
**Neil Bray**  
Cappamore, Co. Limerick

### What will people of the future say of us?

**Dear Editor,** We are, I'm sad to say, such a self-righteous society looking back at a time in Ireland when the people were much poorer than we are now. In the 76 years in which the commission investigated the mother and baby homes, according to official figures 9,000 babies died. We point our finger at the nuns, Garda,

Government officials and parents of that time and yet we have just done away with 6,600 babies in a year, legally, for reasons that are hard to understand at a time when we live in a very rich society. What will people of the future say of us?

Yours etc.,  
**John Sheridan**  
North Wall, Dublin

### Passing the baton of cruelty to politicians

**Dear Editor,** The baton of cruelty and injustice now must pass from the mothers and baby homes to our modern politicians and commentators who supported the deliberate killing of unborn children and condone the practice of disposing of their bodies, without any due recognition or proper burial. The hypocrisy of these people is stunning whenever I hear or read their pious utterances.

Yours etc.,  
**David Ryan**  
Castleknock, Co. Dublin

## facebook community

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

### The perils of when 'what will the neighbours think' becomes our moral standard

Perhaps we are too harsh with our forebears. Certainly in Victorian times, loss of respectability was a milestone on the road to destitution which usually meant an early death. The levels of social and financial anxiety they lived with should not be underestimated. It was a horribly Darwinian age. — **Charles Glenn**

Sadly this also happened in religious practices. How many went to church for fear of what the neighbours might think. The evidence for this could be seen in the numbers of emigrants who gave up attending church after they moved away. — **John Gillen**

This could equally be applied to the times we're currently living through. Churches shutting their doors for Mass because the bishops seem to be so fearful at what the secular media will say if we practice and celebrate our faith. We need to stand up and stop censoring our faith out of fear of causing offence or drawing criticism. We need to attend Mass! — **Máire Ní Éineacháin**

We are no different today, just look at how we are terrified to step out of line — we follow what others do and say and political correctness is just a new name for conforming except we are much more regimental in 'playing the game' and 'toeing the line' than our parents ever were. It is worse in the country than in towns and cities; there is a certain anonymity in living in an urban area, especially a city. — **Sheelagh Hanly**

### 107-year-old Nancy Stewart and her Mass mission

A lady in a million, teaching the world please turn to God and our Mass. — **Nunu Glass**

God bless lovely Nancy and all her lovely family and friends. Great woman to live to that age and very good to be tuning in to Mass each day. God bless, love from Therese. — **Therese Cahill**

We all could learn something from Nancy. — **Patricia Brady**

Well done Nancy keep praying for us all. — **Mary Gallagher**

That's brilliant and there is no better joy than to watch Mass all day, I love online Masses plenty more on YouTube as little churches turn on the camera and WiFi and go live. Check out our Masses in England too. — **Andrea Farrell**

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

### Answers to prayer

**Dear Editor,** "He who seeks the Lord lacks no blessing", "The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want", "He who asks, always receives". These words from the Bible may prompt some

readers to pray. I look forward to their telling us about the answers to their prayer.

Yours etc.,  
**Fr Noel Mc Keown OP**  
Newry, Co. Down

### 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

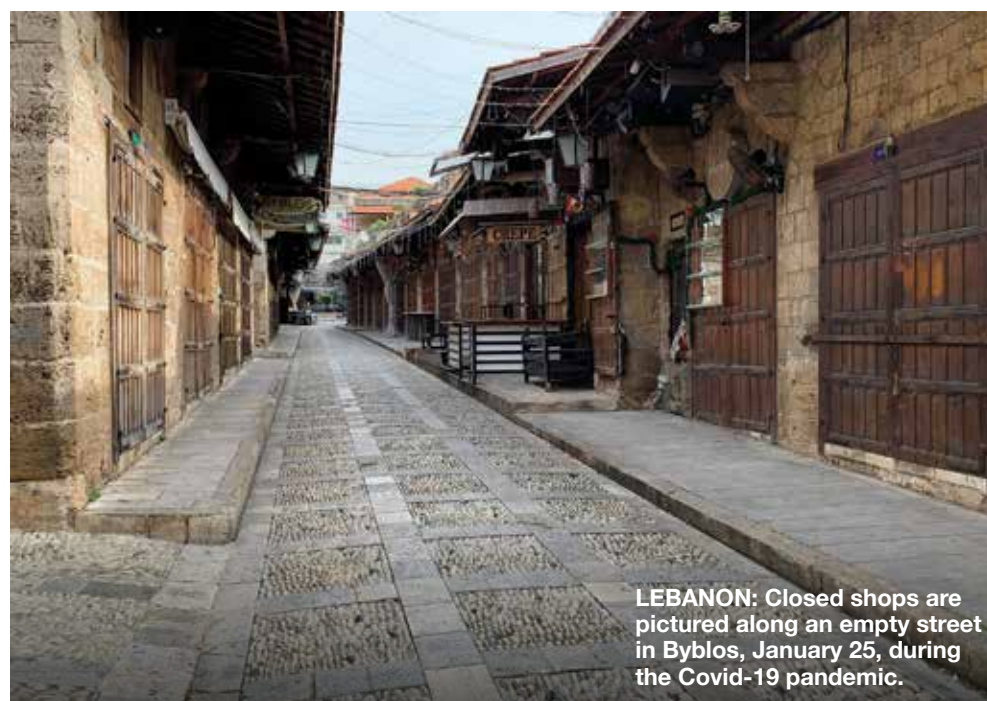
merits of letters. We do not publish pseudonyms or other formulae to conceal the writer's identity, such as "name and address with editor". We do not print letters addressed to someone else, open letters, or verse. Letters to the Editor should only be sent to *The Irish Catholic*, and not other publications.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

# Around the world



▲ **MALAYSIA:** A family member of a relative who died after contracting Covid-19 prays after the burial at a cemetery in Batu Caves, January 27. Photos: CNS.

◀ **USA:** March for Life participants make their way to the US Supreme Court building in Washington January 29, amid the coronavirus pandemic.



**LEBANON:** Closed shops are pictured along an empty street in Byblos, January 25, during the Covid-19 pandemic.



**BRAZIL:** Demonstrators take part in a protest against Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro and his handling of the Covid-19 pandemic in Brasília, January 24.



**POLAND:** Demonstrators confront law enforcement officers during a protest in Warsaw, January 28, against the verdict restricting abortion rights.



**GERMANY:** Homeless people wearing protective masks look for clothing donations at Hofbraeuhaus, a Berlin beer hall and restaurant.



# Our unconscious search for God

**H**ow do we search for God?

It is easy to misunderstand what that means. We are forever searching for God, though mostly without knowing it. Usually, we think of our search for God as a conscious religious search, as something we do out of a spiritual side of ourselves. We tend to think of things this way: I have my normal life and its pursuits and, if I am so inclined, on the side, I might have a spiritual or religious pursuit wherein I try through prayer, reflection, and religious practices to get to know God. This is an unfortunate misunderstanding. Our normal search for meaning, fulfillment, and even for pleasure, is in fact our search for God.

## Nature

What do we naturally search for in life? By nature, we search for meaning, love, a soulmate, friendship, emotional connection, sexual fulfillment, significance, recognition, knowledge, creativity, play, humour, and pleasure. However, we tend not to see these pursuits as searching for God. In pursuing these things, we rarely, if ever, see them in any conscious way as our way of searching for God. In our minds, we are simply looking for happiness, meaning, fulfillment, and pleasure, and our search for God is something we need to do in another way, more consciously through some explicit religious practices.



**Fr Rolheiser**

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

Well, we are not the first persons to think like that. It has always been this way. For instance, St Augustine struggled with exactly this, until one day he realised something. A searcher by temperament, Augustine spent the first 34 years of his life pursuing the things of this world: learning, meaning, love, sex, and a prestigious career. However, even before his conversion, there was a desire in him for God and the spiritual. However, like us, he saw that as a separate desire from what he was yearning for in the world. Only after his conversion did he realise something. Here is how he famously expressed it:

“Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you! You were within me, but

I was outside, and it was there that I searched for you. In my unloveliness I plunged into the lovely things which you created. You were with me, but I was not with you. ... You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness.”

## Admission

This is an honest admission that he lived a good number of years not loving God; but it is also an admission that, during those years, he had massively misunderstood something and that misunderstanding lay at the root of his failure. What was that misunderstanding? Reading his confession we tend to focus on the first part

of it, namely, on his realisation that God was inside of him all the while, but that he was not inside of himself. This is a perennial struggle for us too. Less obvious in this confession and something that is also a perennial struggle for us, is his recognition that for all those years while he was searching for life in the world, a search he generally understood as having nothing to do with God, he was actually searching for God. What he was looking for in all those worldly things and pleasures was in fact the person of God. Indeed, his confession might be recast this way:

**“All these years, I never connected my restlessness, my seemingly selfish and lustful pursuit of things, with you”**

“Late, late, have I loved you because I was outside of myself while all the while you were inside me, but I wasn’t home, and I had no idea it was you I was actually looking for in the world. I never connected that search to you. In my mind, I was not looking for you; I was looking for what would bring

me meaning, love, significance, sexual fulfillment, knowledge, pleasure, and a prestigious career. Never did I connect my longing for these things with my longing for you. I had no idea that everything I was chasing, all those things I was lonely for, were already inside me, in you. Late, late, have I understood that. Late, late, have I learned that what I am so deeply hungry and lonely for is contained inside of you. All these years, I never connected my restlessness, my seemingly selfish and lustful pursuit of things, with you. Everything I am lonely for is inside of you and you are inside of me. Late, late, have I realised this.”

## Divine madness

We are fired into life with a madness that comes from the gods. So say the Greek Stoics. They are right. Our whole life is simply a search to respond to that divine madness inside us, a madness Christians identify with infinite yearnings of the soul. Given those yearnings, like Augustine, we plunge into the world searching for meaning, love, a soulmate, friendship, emotional connection, sexual fulfillment, significance, recognition, knowledge, creativity, and pleasure, and that earthly pursuit, perhaps more than our explicit religious pursuits, is in fact our search for God.

Best to realise this early, so we do not have to write: “Late, late, have I loved you!”

**“A searcher by temperament, Augustine spent the first 34 years of his life pursuing the things of this world: learning, meaning, love, sex, and a prestigious career”**

# Family & Lifestyle

The Irish Catholic, February 4, 2021

## Personal Profile

Forming faith through the new media

Page 34



# Stoking the flame of Faith with the internet



**W**ith the latest announcement from the Government confirming total lockdown until at least March 5 it is finally setting in, at least for me, that we're not getting back to normal any time soon. That fact probably evokes a range of emotions in us, but our Faith forbids us from condemning this time as hopeless, much as we might like to. As is the way with God, what often appears bleak and colourless is actually full of potential for moving closer to him. The present situation is no different, with God offering each of us endless paths toward himself.

Much the same as everyone



**Our physical isolation is no excuse for failing to grow in faith, writes Jason Osborne**

else, I quickly tired of the online world to which we've been relegated. Despite that, I've been realising afresh lately just how important exposure to good, healthy content is. I generally prefer reading to watching videos or listening to podcasts, but sometimes the simple fact is I'm too tired to do anything other than

press play and listen to something interesting.

The news cycle and the world of current affairs are particularly wearing these days, and so I've been increasingly drawn to the world of 'online ministry', if it could be called that. As Catholics, we're sitting upon a treasure trove of informative, insightful and edi-

fying resources. We have more access today to the extensive and varied teachings of the Church than ever before. As such, if you find the mood at home to constantly be dipping lately, whether it be the adults or the children, I recommend some of these aids to you on your walk with God.

### Mass

As we are currently deprived of the public celebration of the sacraments, an obvious first stop is the exemplary Mass-streaming services that have provided many people around Ireland a haven over the tumultuous months of 2020 and 2021. While online attendance at Mass cannot ulti-

mately compare to or replace physical attendance, it is a service to be grateful for as it has allowed the most vulnerable among us to maintain a link to one of the key pillars in their lives. In Ireland, MCN Media and Church Services TV are the go-to streamers of Mass, offered in and streamed from churches all over the island.

### Scripture

Many of the online resources I've been referencing come in the form of podcasts and videos and they deal with every aspect of our Faith, both Scripture and Tradition. Beginning with Scripture, I think

» Continued on Page 33

## Family News



### AND EVENTS

#### 'TIME IS RUNNING OUT' TO SAVE SHARKS AND RAYS

The BBC reported that sharks and rays are disappearing from the world's oceans at an "alarming rate".

A new study suggests that the number of sharks found in open ocean has dropped by up to 71% over 50 years, with three quarters of the species studied now threatened with extinction.

Researchers have said that immediate action is necessary to secure a more optimistic future for the "extraordinary, irreplaceable animals".

Speaking to the BBC, one of the study's researchers Dr Richard Sherley of the University of Exeter, said the decline appears to have been driven by pressure from fishing.

"That's the driver for the 70% reduction in the last 50 years. For every 10 sharks you had in the open ocean in the 1970s, you would have three today, across these species, on average," Dr Sherley said.

Sharks and rays are usually fished for their fins, meat and liver oil.

#### ONE IN FIVE ADULTS AGED OVER 60 DEPRESSED DURING PANDEMIC

At least one in five adults aged over 60 have reported symptoms of depression during the Covid-19 pandemic, which is twice the level seen previously, according to a study.

The latest publication from the Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (Tilda) states that older people who lived alone and those with low levels of physical activity were the most likely to report experiencing symptoms of depression during the pandemic.

The Irish Times reported that the study, which is carried out by Trinity College Dublin researchers, observed around 4,000 people aged 60 and over about their lives during the pandemic.

Around 80% of those surveyed said they had not travelled to visit friends since last spring, while 62% had not travelled to see family members.

There was a high level of compliance among respondents, with four out of five responding that they adhered to social-distancing and other requirements.

#### GROWING EVIDENCE THAT EXERCISE IMPROVES HEALTH BY TRANSFORMING CELLS

A new study which examines the molecular effects of being active has suggested that we raise and lower the levels of hundreds of molecules in our blood that are related to our metabolic health, even if the work out only lasts for a few minutes.

The study involved over 1,000 men and women, and added to an increasing body of evidence which suggests that one of the primary ways exercise improves our health is by transforming the number and type of cells inside us.

Many studies have concluded at this stage that those who take part in even moderate exercise are less likely to suffer from a range of health ailments, including obesity, diabetes, heart issues and cancer.

The study's authors suggest that this research provides future pathways for study into the "beneficial cardiometabolic effects of exercise".

# A love revealed to all who call



**P**rior to Advent we had been exploring the depth of meaning in the John Main prayer which we say before meditation. The second sentence of the prayer asks God to: 'Lead us into that mysterious silence where your love is revealed to all who call.' In this article I want to reflect on the phrase 'to all who call'.

Some meditators add the word 'Maranatha' at the end of the prayer, but many prefer not to do so in case the prayer is interpreted to mean that God's love is revealed only to those who call 'Maranatha'.

**“At different stages of our lives, we all experience a mysterious call to begin a journey of discovery into the depths of our being, to discover our true-self”**

It is surprising sometimes to realise how many meanings a single word can have. We say things like "I called around to my friend's house last night" when we mean we visited them in their home. Or, "I must give Mary a call tomorrow", when we mean we will talk with her by phone. Or, "When my granddaughter got lost in the shopping centre, I heard her call out and ran to get her". These are just three variations on the way we use the word 'call' and all three of them apply to this prayer.

When we sit in meditation, we can see it as if we are dropping by to visit a close friend. The more accustomed we become to meditation, the more it can feel like that. The more you know someone, the deeper the relationship, the easier it is to sit with someone in silence; not speaking but mysteri-

## Mindful living

Dr Noel Keating



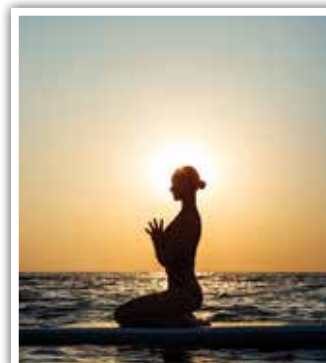
ously in communion with one another nonetheless. The second example, to give someone a call, meaning to speak by phone, replicates the fact that while on a phone call we can speak with the other person, we can't see them. Silence on a phone call can be very awkward and when we first start meditation, we can experience that awkwardness too – we can feel an urgent desire to fill the silence with our own thoughts.

The third use of call, where I heard my granddaughter anxiously call out when she got lost in the shopping centre also applies to meditation. Speaking to God, St Augustine once wrote: "You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless, until they rest in you."

### Human desire

He was writing about the human desire to discover meaning in life, that impulse we all feel to live life with authenticity and, for him, that meant discovering the depth of his relationship with God. At different stages of our lives, we all experience a mysterious call to begin a journey of discovery into the depths of our being, to discover our true-self. And I think that is the kind of 'call' that John Main had in mind when he wrote this prayer; when he wrote: "Your love is revealed to all who call."

But the word 'all' is also very significant. Even though we have learned about meditation from our Christian tradition, we acknowledge that all the major religious traditions – and many in secular society – practice meditation. And while all who meditate will experience something of the mystery of being in the silence, each tradition has its own unique way of describing it and assigning meaning to it. But ultimately the words we use to describe what we experience are just words, they are not the experience itself. While words may help us to understand it better, ultimately words can only point towards the truth. Our experience of God – even as it happens at a level of consciousness deeper than ordinary self-consciousness – transcends the capacity of language. So the language in which we call out to God, the language of the tradition into which we were born, is not the only valid



language. God's love is revealed to all who call.

As John Main observed: We have to be able ourselves to recognise the life of God in all situations and peoples, to identify it for a sceptical generation looking for signs elsewhere, and then to place it in the context of that ultimate revelation of God's life which Jesus brought to us all in his own person. To

see God in the world, in other faiths, in our lonely cities and dismal suburbs, we have first to have found the image of God in ourselves. And, having found it alive within we know for certain the same is true for all. The language of meditation is silence, which makes meditation a universal practice. That is why Christian meditation groups are open to all.

**“While our experience of God is always personal, it is never individual but universal”**

Meditation is not just for your benefit but for the benefit of all. It is not about you but about the grace your daily practice generates in the world around you. Likewise, meditation is not just about the time you sit in meditation, but it generates a grace-filled energy that informs how you live in the world in every aspect of your life. While our experience of God is always personal, it is never individual but universal. Meditation is not a practice for personal salvation, but for awakening fully to the present moment and responding with compassionate action in the world, in our daily lives.

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

» Continued from Page 31



it's fair to say that this has not been the Faithful's strong suit for much of the Church's history – in many cases through no fault of their own. Access to the Bible has been limited in many times and places for one reason or another: not least because there was no printing press for much of the Church's history.

**“At 20-25 minutes per session, this podcast is a manageable, necessary piece of prayer and context in your daily routine”**

However, there is now no excuse for remaining in ignorance of one of the Church's pillars with so much free content to be found online. To begin with, American priest Fr Mike Schmitz recently launched *The Bible in a Year* podcast, which to the surprise of many, soared to the top of the Apple charts and remained there for a number of weeks following its release. As of the writing of this, it remains in the top five.

Fr Schmitz walks listeners through, as the name suggests, the entire Bible in 365 days, in a series replete with commentary and prayer. He's a very likeable presenter and breaks down the complex symbolism of the Bible in a way accessible to anyone – although the podcast's website suggests that some of the more “adult themes” to be found in the Bible may not be suitable for children just yet, recommending parental discretion.

His Bible breakdown is inspired by scriptural scholar Jeff Cavins' new timeline and approach which sees salvation history broken down into distinct segments. At 20-25 minutes per session, this podcast is a manageable, necessary piece of prayer and context in your daily routine.

### Ascension Presents

In keeping with Fr Mike Schmitz, the channel that he produces content for on YouTube, Ascension Presents, produces highly informative videos on a range of topics that contemporary Catholics have to grapple with.

The main contributors are Fr Schmitz, Fr Mark-Mary, a Franciscan Friar of the Renewal, and Jackie and Bobby Angel, a married couple heavily engaged in sharing God's plan for

marriage and family life. There are others, such as the aforementioned biblical scholar Jeff Cavins, but the above provide the bulk of the video content on the channel.

As an example of some of the topics dealt in their videos, titles include 'How to practice the presence of God', 'How to pray for your future spouse' and 'How to deal with ruined plans'. The topics are dealt with in a manner completely formed by the Catholic worldview and teachings, which make them ideal for communicating the true essence of the Faith to young people, whether you intend to invite your children to watch them, or whether you simply want to brush up on Catholic apologetics yourself.

### BibleProject

The BibleProject is a non-profit “ed-tech organisation and animation studio” which produces videos, blogs, podcasts, classes and other Bible resources for a range of platforms, including YouTube and Spotify.

While it is not a Catholic organisation, the main hosts of the channel, Tim Mackie and Jonathan Collins, do a fantastic job of elucidating the Bible without getting into denominational disputes. They explain the origins of words and concepts that we take for granted these days such as ‘sin’ and ‘grace’ by placing them in their original context, describing what these words would have meant to those who were both hearing and using them thousands of years ago in their original Hebrew.

Merely understanding a little more about the language that underpins the Scriptures does wonders for our understanding of the world we live in.



Not limited to explanations of words and concepts, they also provide extensive analysis of the different books and themes found in the Bible, such as the ‘Apocalyptic’ literature. The original sense of the “apocalypse” is a little different to the Hollywood ideas we've been filled with, we come to see.

### Matt Fradd/ Pints with Aquinas

Another slick production, Matt Fradd is a prominent Catholic youtuber who produces apologetic content. He frequently hosts debates on his channel on a range of topics, be they lofty philosophical discussions about the existence of God with atheists, or more practical arguments about the dangers of pornography.

He is often joined by a range of religious, laity and people of different faiths (or none at all). Actor Jonathan Roumie, who played Jesus in the online series *The Chosen* even joined him for an at-length and in-depth discussion about what it was like to play the Son of God and the effect that it had on his spirituality, so a wide variety of content is guaranteed.

### Bishop Robert Barron

Bishop Barron has shot to stardom over the past couple of years, but his base remains on YouTube. Most well-known for his *Catholicism* series, the auxiliary bishop of Los Angeles continues to produce perfectly discerned content with a more intellectual edge, although that is not to say that he is not accessible.

The prominent youtuber posts homilies, reflections on movies, books and different cultural and political happenings. As mentioned, his reflections are steeped in the rich, intellectual tradition of the Church, with St Thomas Aquinas, St Augustine and the Church Fathers getting frequent mentions, as well as modern theologians like Pope Benedict XVI and Hans Urs von Balthasar.

The common thread throughout all of these resources is that they are realistic about the trials and challenges people and the world currently face without compromising on a solid, Catholic foundation. If you find yourself despairing as lockdown rolls on, you could do worse than turn to these companions along the road.

## Faith — IN THE — family



Bairbre Cahill

“Cuir tús leis an chomhrá i nGaeilge”, that is the statement on one of the large posters I have just designed to go up around Letterkenny, “Start the conversation in Irish”. Before Christmas I began in my new role as Comhordaitheoir Pleanála Teanga or Irish Language Development Coordinator for Letterkenny. Apart from the fact that I have a deep love for the Irish language I am also energised by the fact that this is very much a community development job. It is all about building relationships, engaging with people young and old, with families and with the business community.

Yesterday however was not one of the better days in the job. It was unbelievably quiet. I sent out emails, I posted information on Facebook and Twitter about courses and events we have coming up – and none of it generated any response at all! There was certainly no tús getting put to any comhrá and so the day was long and frustrating and felt unsatisfying. In contrast today my phone and laptop have outdone themselves pinging with updates and messages. I've had good conversations, explored exciting possibilities for the months ahead and the day has flown in.

We all need ‘comhrá’, conversation, connection. It is harder these days and many feel isolated. It seems even more important to me than that we would actively seek out and create opportunities for conversation. So I was delighted when Bishop Alan McGuckian phoned to congratulate me on the new job and, in the course of the conversation, agreed to be involved in a book club during Lent. In 2009 Bishop Alan translated into Irish the book “Story of a Pilgrim: Ignatius Loyola in his own words”. It is a beautiful wee book, well crafted and easy to read. I am confident that it will create the opportunity for an engaging book club. I am always challenged by the way Ignatius learned so much through paying attention to his own experience. God used the deepest desires of his heart to teach and shape Ignatius.

Now some may wonder what I am doing, inviting a Bishop to run a book club and

talk about a saint. They may be quick to remind me that I'm not working for the diocese now. True, I'm not, but I believe that if we consider ourselves to be Irish speakers then we need to develop the capacity to speak about whatever is deepest within us. For some this will be faith, for others it may be a passion for sport or a love of travel. Whatever it is, I believe we need opportunities to talk about our passion.



What makes you tick? What is that spark of energy at the core of you? Can you put it into words? Or do you just know what it is when you encounter it? I am currently involved in another wonderful online series with Donal Dorr organised by Nóirín Lynch in the Margaret Aylward Centre for Faith and Dialogue. Donal makes fabulous use of poetry and I have found that so many of the poems he uses to enrich his input speak right to the core of me. It is that profound sense of “Yes, this is who we are, this is what matters.” I have the same feeling when I am out walking on the hills and I return nurtured and strengthened.

I think we are all finding this lockdown harder than those which came before. We are tired and frustrated – up here in Donegal we would say we are ‘scunnered’ and it sums it up well. Perhaps then, as we begin to think about Lent, we could consider what would nurture us heart and soul. Maybe this Lent is not the time for giving up but for taking up, whether that is a book of poetry or a book of prayer, a daily time of quiet and / or a commitment to phone our loved ones for a chat, a walk in nature watching spring unfurl or sitting at the kitchen table, a cup of tea in hand. Let us touch into what gives us joy, what reminds us who we are – and find strength in God's gentle presence.

# Forming faith through the new media

## Personal Profile



**Ruadhán Jones**

**T**he pandemic and lockdown have brought out many skills in lay volunteers and religious previously dormant. For some, however, it was an opportunity to build on skills they already used. Fr Eamon Roche, a former computer programmer and one of the developers of Cloyne Diocese Bl. Carlo Acutis online project, fits into the second category.

### Vocation

Fr Roche was a late vocation – born in 1970, he was ordained in 2015 after six years in the seminary. His family were practising Catholics who took the Faith quite seriously and Fr Roche says there was never a time that he stopped believing. His faith flourished when he went to University College Cork (UCC) to study engineering. The work was hard and this drew him closer to the faith of his childhood.

**“It was in that period in my early 20s, Faith pulled me through my degree course”**

“To be honest, I think my faith grew enormously when I went to college. I studied electrical engineering at UCC,” Fr Roche explains. “I found college quite hard, the studies were hard, the

Fr Eamon Roche.



engineering course was quite intense. I felt I needed support basically to get me through it. It took me a while to get through, there were a number of failed exams and that, I found it difficult. It was in that period in my early 20s, faith pulled me through my degree course. I met a lot of good people in UCC at that time, the Chaplaincy was going quite well.”

After college, Fr Roche moved away from the engineering field, completing a one year diploma in higher education. He started work as a teacher of maths and English at the Christian Brothers school in Cork in the mid-1990s. Though he enjoyed the jobs he

did, he never settled long in any of them. By the end of the 1990s, he was on the move again, entering the IT field. After the IT industry, Fr Roche’s life slowly began to turn more directly to the works of the Faith. In his mid-30s, he connected with Youth 2000 and became a leader in Munster for them.

### Faith matters

“At that stage, I had another increase in interest in Faith matters and that grew in me,” says Fr Roche. “After two years of being leader in Youth 2000, being responsible to start up retreats and prayer meetings, at that stage I heard the call to priesthood. What happened then was that I’d start

waking up every morning and the thought of priesthood would be in my mind, as if it was waiting there as a kind of a new idea every morning.

“At that stage, because I was of a certain age, I didn’t get too excited one way or the other – I didn’t fight it, I just let it grow and see if it continued to grow. And that was what happened, it just grew and it was very easy to make the call to the diocesan office for vocations. The process was quite easy after that. It seemed very natural and right, right the way through even in seminary.”

Fr Roche now works in a parish as a curate and, five years in, continues to love the work. It has given him an opportunity to combine the skills he learned in his previous jobs with his new vocation as a priest.

**“The area of youth catechesis is one which Fr Roche is especially drawn to and one he believes is of vital importance”**

“I’m loving it, every day is wonderful. I suppose the fact that I’d been adapting to the various roles I’d played all my life, it didn’t faze me at all to adapt to parish life. With the background I’ve had, I’ve learned different things, different skills which I’ve brought to my new role.

“I have used my IT skills quite a bit. I support the IT side of the diocese, the diocesan website and the website in my last parish. Whenever there’s a project, it’s very easy for me to build a website for it. I suppose in 2020 with Covid-19, the IT skills have certainly been very useful.

“One of the highlights of my

ministry would be Camp Creideamh. It means ‘Faith Camp’ or ‘Belief Camp’, so every summer for two months I run these camps for teenagers. They’re residential camps basically, we normally go to Knockadoon in East Cork. And I would run one or two of those year, in wintertime and one day meet-ups as well. That’s something I would have an interest in then, catechetics and youth faith development.”

The area of youth catechesis one which Fr Roche is especially drawn to and one he believes is of vital importance.

“I would identify youth catechesis as being especially important, youth ministry is a kind of general term, it’s bringing young people into the Church,” Roche explains. “That is important, but I’d be more specific – I do have an attraction to youth catechesis which is a specific area in youth ministry, which I think is lacking, is needed basically to give the youth an opportunity to discover what’s in their faith.”

The new Bl. Carlo Acutis project he has undertaken with the diocese of Cloyne is an online course which fulfils both his passion and his skills.

### Church life

“The idea here is to engage teenagers and their families in Church life and activity in pandemic times,” Fr Roche explains. “The focus of it is for the teenagers to get an appreciation for the life and spirituality of blessed Carlo, especially his love of the Eucharist. Every Catholic needs to develop in their faith, to learn in their faith so there’s a catechesis component for this project. For someone who’s only partially practising the Faith, it’s a chance for them to know more.”

## Sweet Treats

**Laura Anderson**



## Romantic red velvet St Valentine’s day macarons

**M**acarons have a reputation for being tricky but don’t fear! If you follow the recipe carefully these red velvet flavoured versions will make an impressive gift this Valentine’s day. A top tip is throughout the recipe, make sure that all the ingredients are at room temperature.

### Ingredients

Makes about 12 filled macarons  
For the macarons:

- 2 large egg whites
- 35g granulated sugar
- 150g icing sugar
- 2 tsp cocoa powder
- 70g almond flour/finely ground almonds
- ½ tsp red gel food colouring

For the cream cheese filling:

- 40g cream cheese softened
- 20g unsalted butter softened

- 90g icing sugar
- ¼ tsp vanilla extract

To begin, line two large baking trays with parchment paper. Sift the almond flour, icing sugar and cocoa powder into a bowl, removing any large almond pieces. Then in a separate bowl beat the egg whites with a whisk attachment on high speed until foamy. Slowly add the sugar and beat until stiff peaks form. Add red food colouring and beat for one more minute on medium speed. Using a spatula gently fold the almond flour and icing sugar mixture into the egg whites. This is the most difficult step, getting the consistency of the batter right. It should be thick but able to flow, like lava. The more you mix the runnier it gets so be careful.

Fill a piping bag with the batter and using a round nozzle ½ inch in diameter pipe rounds about

1.5 inches in diameter onto the lined baking trays. Next, take the trays and bang them hard on your worktop a few times to eliminate any air bubbles. Leave the macarons to rest at room temperature. This can take 20-50 mins depending on how humid your kitchen is. You should be able to see they have formed a ‘skin’ and they shouldn’t be very sticky to the touch. While they are resting preheat the oven to 150°C/140°F/Fan/Gas Mark 2. Macarons bake better in a conventional oven without a fan otherwise, your cooking time may vary. Bake the macarons one tray at a time for about 18 mins. The second tray, the one that will have rested for a longer period of time may take slightly less time to cook. Transfer the macarons still on the paper to a wire rack to cool for 15 minutes before removing from the paper. Finally for the cream cheese filling beat the cheese and butter together until fluffy. Add the icing sugar and vanilla and beat until well combined. Chill the mixture for 15 minutes then transfer to a piping bag and carefully fill each macaron. They will keep in an airtight container in the fridge for up to 5 days.



# TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



## Media bias is an ever-present problem in Ireland

**W**hen I criticise media bias I often find myself tempted to distance myself from some person or cause lest people miss my point and assume I'm supporting them, whereas I'm just looking for more objectivity.

Last Friday I listened to yet another soft and palsy interview with Alistair Campbell, former press secretary to Tony Blair, on the **Pat Kenny Show** (Newstalk). I agreed with much of what Mr Campbell said, especially about the need for cross party co-operation across Britain in the fight against Covid-19, and the often-uninspiring leadership of Boris Johnson. Yet there was an inherent unfairness about it. It would have been more interesting if he had debated with someone who disagreed with him or if Mr Kenny had asked some challenging questions, even as devil's advocate. They even managed to get in a few tired digs at Donald Trump (no I'm not a supporter of Mr Trump etc., etc.) There was one pertinent question but it was put by a texter, not by Mr Kenny, suggesting that Mr Campbell was the Dominic Cummings of his day - the bogeymen were really out to play.

Mr Campbell accused Boris Johnson of telling lies and the presenter did not demur.



Alistair Campbell went largely unchallenged on Newstalk.

Normally in these cases the interviewer will say something like 'You can't say that, he's not here to defend himself', or 'I'm sure he wouldn't accept that'. Is it ok to libel someone from outside the State or are figures that media folks find distasteful fair game? Or would Mr Campbell welcome a court case where Mr Johnson had to defend himself against the charge? Now that would be interesting.

On the subject of media bias, RTÉ and BBC are still

tagging Mr Trump with the 'without evidence' label, thus giving him the fuel of special attention when in other respects he's now yesterday's man. So, for example, last Sunday morning on the **News** on RTÉ Radio One there was reference to his "unsubstantiated claims" about the US election. This was RTÉ not just reporting the news but adding in their own spin (curiously BBC continues to do the same). Whether the claims are unsubstantiated or

not is not the point - it's an interpretation, so it should be left to the commentators, not the newsreaders. By contrast, last Monday morning, also on the **RTÉ Radio One News**, this time during Morning Ireland there was a report on the coup in Myanmar (now there's an actual coup, not like the despicable fracas in the US Capitol last month). The report included a reference to the military's claims of "alleged flaws" in their recent elections. That was fair enough as, factually, flaws have been alleged. Significantly RTÉ did not pass any judgement on the quality of these claims. So, the military dictators who have effectively overruled the democratic election in Myanmar get better treatment from RTÉ than the democratically-elected president of the USA.

Away from this aggravating stuff, **Nationwide** (RTÉ One) is usually a tonic. Last Wednesday's episode marked the Holocaust Remembrance Day in Ireland, when the annual ceremony had to take place online. We met Dublin-based art dealer Oliver Sears whose grandfather was murdered by the Nazis and whose mother, Monica, was a Polish Holocaust survivor. A child at the time of the war she hadn't spoken of the family story until she was in her fifties, a common reticence among survivors. Mr Sears and

### PICK OF THE WEEK

#### RISEN

**RTÉ One Saturday February 6, 3.45pm**

(2016) With Joseph Fiennes and Peter Firth in 33AD, a Roman Tribune in Judea is tasked to find the missing body of Jesus Christ, who his followers said rose from the dead.

#### WHERE GOD WEEPS

**EWTN Saturday February 6, 5.30pm**

Ruled by Hamas and blockaded by Israel and Egypt, the Gaza Strip is sometimes called the largest prison in the world. Sr Bridget Tighe talks about the issues of ministering to the 1.9 million residents there.

#### MASS

**RTÉ One Sunday February 7, 11.00am**

Fr Eamonn Bourke leads today's Mass from the RTÉ studios, with a congregation from Music Ministry Ireland. Today's musical director is Ian Callanan with Ciaran Coll on piano and Andrew Clayton on guitar.

his Irish wife Catherine Punch are now active in promoting Holocaust awareness. Part of his motivation for keeping the family story alive is his concern about the instability in the world today and the fragility of democracy.

The second half of the programme was a fascinating exploration, with presenter Anne Cassin and guide Marnino Winkler of University College Cork (UCC), of the Jewish heritage of Cork city. A frequent visitor to that wonderful city I was struck by how much I hadn't known about the many landmarks linked to that heritage - like 'Shalom Park' or the new pedestrian bridge dedicated to

Mary Elms, known as the 'Irish Schindler', who had helped so many Jewish children to escape the Nazis in occupied France. We were reminded of former Lord Mayor Gerard Goldberg from the 1970's who spoke in an archive interview of being educated in Catholic schools in the city and never found a problem fitting in - no difference felt between himself and the other students - never occurred to them.

It was a timely lesson for our divisive and divided times.

[boregan@hotmail.com](mailto:boregan@hotmail.com),  
[@boreganmedia](https://www.facebook.com/boreganmedia)

# Music

Pat O'Kelly



## Opera's bright 20th Century in Dublin

A good friend of mine, opera buff extraordinaire Paddy Brennan, recently sent me an email with an attachment - [www.operainireland.wordpress.com/](http://www.operainireland.wordpress.com/). It came with a 'work in progress' warning but, even so, the file contains a vast amount of information relating to opera in Dublin from 1928 to virtually the present day.

The content is absolutely fascinating. Its various sections show amazing details of performances by Dublin Operatic Society (DOS), Dublin Grand Opera Society (DGOS), Opera Ireland and Irish National Opera with dates, productions, casts and, in some instances, reviews. The treasure trove covers almost ninety years of



opera in Dublin and, occasionally, elsewhere in the country.

My own first operatic experience was in Dublin's Gaiety Theatre for a production of Gounod's *Faust* with Veronica Dunne as Marguerite, Howell Glynne as Méphistophélès and James Johnston in the title

role. Queuing from late afternoon, once the doors opened I galloped up the stairs to the gallery's wooden bench-like seating. By the end of the evening the art of opera was firmly implanted in my brain.

As the DOS was coming to the end of its life before my

opera-going began in earnest I decided to check out the society's history. Before its 1928 inauguration, opera in Dublin had been presented by visiting English groups, principally the Carl Rosa and Moody-Manners companies.

However, Adelio Viani, professor of singing at the RIAM, decided the time was ripe for Dublin to have a company of its own. Backed by like-minded opera lovers, not least jeweller George Sleator, who would later input considerable sums of his own money into the venture, Dublin Operatic Society was established.

Under Maestro Viani's baton, DOS's first production - Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* - had three performances at

the Rathmines Town Hall on November 6, 7 and 8, 1928. Well received, one reviewer considered the Society 'had more than justified its existence'.

The singers were particularly praised with Leo Bryll's Figaro described as having "wonderful stage presence" with his *Largo al factotum* aria being "masterly and would have won for him a place on any stage". As Count Almaviva, Henry Thornton was noted for "his fine fresh voice being always well under control".

Soprano Mamie Dingle's Rosina proved another "great success". In her Act II music lesson she inserted the Mad Scene aria from Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*. The reviewer wrote, "It was a big undertaking but the performance justified the effort... The trying cadenzas were

taken with great delicacy and confident touch and the dialogue with the flautist was beautifully balanced".

Spurred on by its success, the *Barber* was repeated the following year when DOS moved into the Olympia Theatre and added Bellini's *La Sonnambula* to its repertoire. Mamie Dingle repeated her Rosina returning as Lucia in 1930 and 1931. Her Adina in Donizetti's *L'Elisir d'amore* included performances during the 1932 Eucharist Congress.

In the course of its existence, which lasted until 1954, DOS brought over 30 operas to Dublin audiences. *Madame Butterfly* topped the popularity charts closely followed by *La traviata*, *Faust*, *Rigoletto* and *Maritana*. More anon.



# BookReviews

Peter Costello



## Recent books in brief

### Living Words: A booklet for renewal of the Holy Spirit

by Michael Hurley  
(Messenger Publications, €4.95)

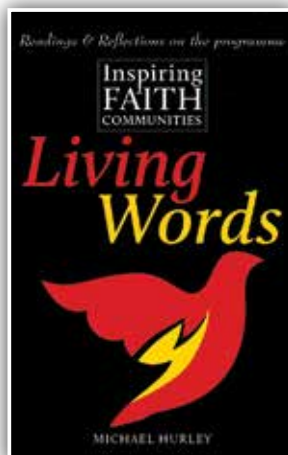
This booklet is the accompaniment as a sort of 'workbook' to Michael Hurley's *Inspiring Faith Communities*.

### A programme of Evangelisation

(Messenger Publications, €12.95/£11.95)

This, in essence, is a prayer book for daily use. It consists of a collection of scripture passages and reflections for each day of the duration of the programme.

It is, however, composed within the present conditions of life and faith in Ireland in these dark days of Covid-19. The pandemic will undoubtedly leave a mark on how people live their faith lives. The inspiration of the parish cell movement in the Church inspires Fr Hurley's work. One can see this as being of increasing interest in the days to come.



### A Calvary Covenant: The Stations of the Cross

by John Cullen  
(Messenger Publications, €4.95/£4.50)

This Easter time, preceded by a season of Lent, will be very different. In this little booklet Fr John Cullen reflects on the significance of the Stations of the Cross, a devotion dating from the Fourth Century, a time when the Christian faith was beginning to penetrate Ireland, moving a whole people it seemed in a new direction.

Fr Cullen begins by reminding his readers that: "The fourteen stations are in the present tense. What they say is happening now in your life or someones life, somewhere in the world."

However if the pamphlet is re-printed it might be a notion to add an insert with images of the individual stations. These days it is not so easy to find a church open, and the pictures would add to the effectiveness of Fr Cullen's book for home devotion. I have in mind the Ignatian idea of *viendo le lugar*, 'seeing the place' as an important initial step in contemplation of the mysteries of religion.

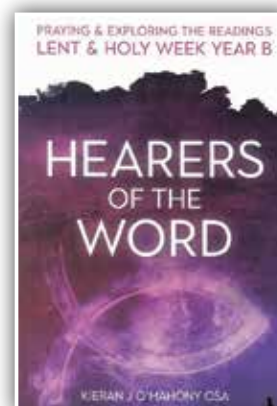
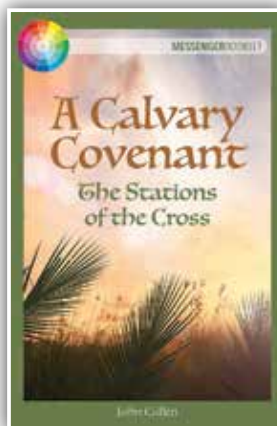
They are certainly words that provide a context that will reach everyone - as they reflect on suffering and salvation - that in the despair of darkness, there is also the promise of a new dawn.

### Hearers of the Word. Praying and Exploring the Readings Lent & Holy Week Year B

by Kieran J. O'Mahony OSA  
(Messenger Publications, €14.95/£12.95)

This book is the fourth in the series *Hearers of the Word*. It provides a commentary and guidance on prayer, but essentially leads the reader back into the scriptures, in this instance the Gospel of St John, which is so different from the other three gospels. The pointers for prayer have been prepared by another Augustinian Fr John Byrne.

But this is a resource that needs to be approached with patience and daily application that I suspect is now difficult for many. And yet a great deal of pastoral thought and scriptural scholarship and desire to reach out and enlighten people goes into the series. With churches closed and worship taking on new appearance readers must take the words of scripture into their minds in new conditions.



# 'When one door closes, another will open...': the road to Damascus will take a new way, a new shape

## Faith after Doubts: Why your beliefs stopped working and what to do about it

by Brian McLaren  
(Hodder and Stoughton, £14.99/€19.50)

Peter Costello

I was greatly impressed by this book, and at the start of my review I would like to make quite clear that this is a book that anyone who wishes to understand the nature of faith, doubt and spiritual growth ought to read - no - will want to read.

The author Brian McLaren has had a difficult journey of faith, as he explains at the beginning of the book, and returns to again and again as he progresses. But it has brought him to a place of peace.

## Doubts

Having myself harboured doubts about aspects of religion since the age of seven, I have experienced or witnessed or been told about many of the crises of conscience which he relates in the first part of this book. Indeed I had to pause there: the stories he had to tell of the damage and division that 'true faith' has caused so affected me - tales of

individuals expelled not only from their churches, but from their families and communities. But let Mr McLaren himself explain what he is trying to do and why he came to write it:

"I've organised *Faith After Doubt* in three movements," he writes. "In Part One, *Your Descent into Doubt*, I try to help you understand why your doubts can be so scary and painful.

"In Part Two, *All in Doubt*, I present doubt not simply as a deterioration process but as a growth process that provides you with an opportunity to mature intellectually, spiritually, morally and relationally.

## “The explanation of the role of doubt in matters of belief goes to the heart of the matter”

"I base this section on a four-stage theory of faith development that integrates the insights of many major theorists in the fields of human, moral, intellectual and spiritual development.

"In Part Three, *Life After (and with) Doubt*, I turn to the future, exploring how to live with doubt as a companion rather," he writes.

I found the stories of loss of faith in the first part of the book so affecting that for a couple of days I had to put aside the book. These anecdotes of destiny were too familiar, so haunting, so true to one's own life and experience that it was impossible to go on.

But as the developments were so relevant so convincing that one saw

## “The author Brian McLaren has had a difficult journey of faith, as he explains at the beginning of the book, and returns to again and again as he progresses”



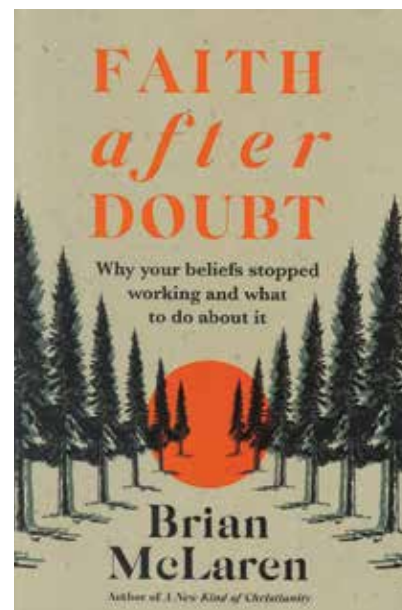
that this book, while it may disturb some of 'solid faith', it will enable others to move forward. Not to abandon what they had, but to keep it, to grow out of it, in some cases like the butterfly breaking through the hard shell of the past, releasing itself into another kind of life. But the life of a butterfly is momentary.

Here the author wishes to enable a life of a new kind to emerge from the old, while keeping the old, but shedding the strictness that prevented growth, to find in his own structures, and the way to live more fully the truth they had once held.

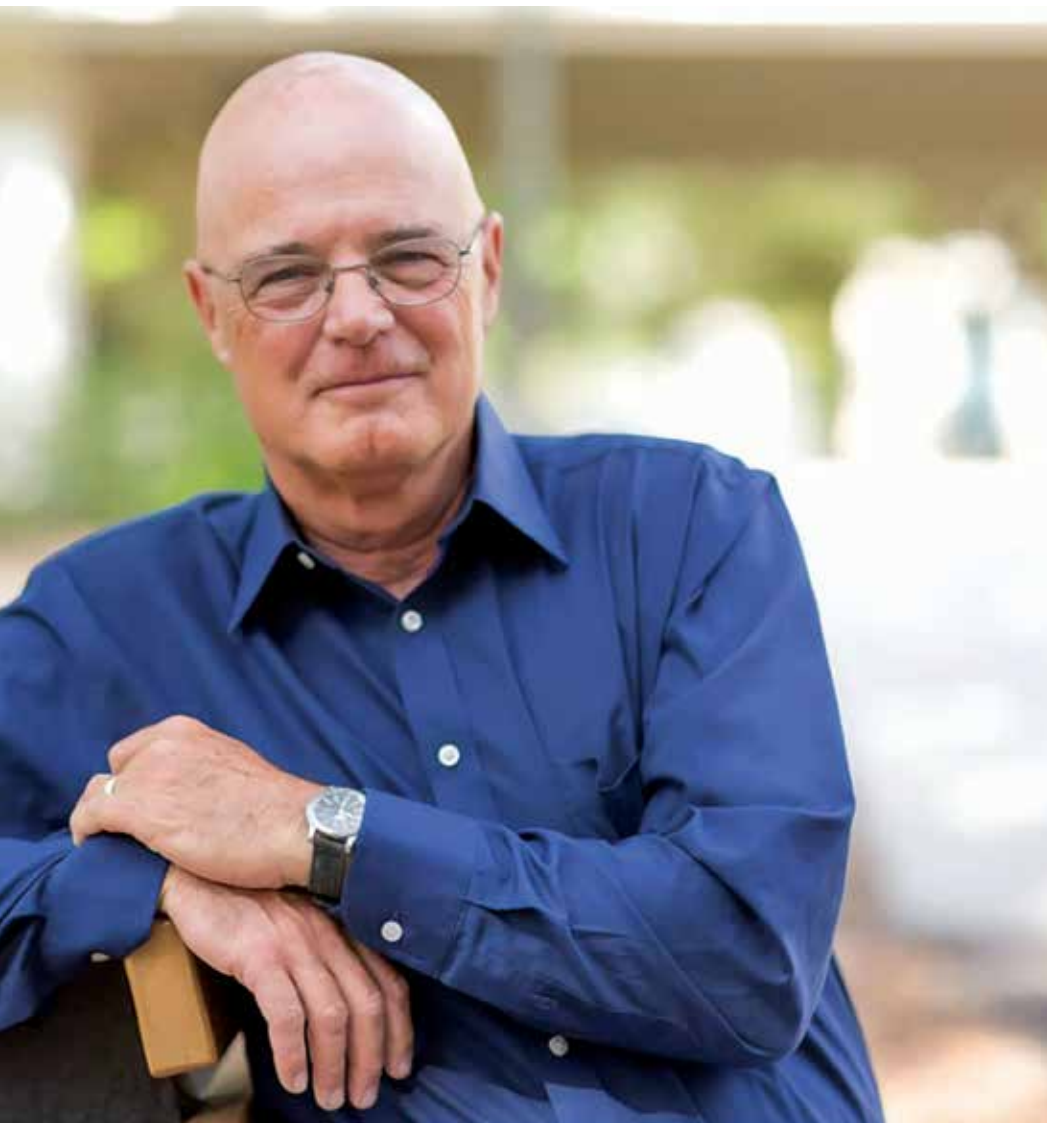
## Struggle

Again, in explanation of his book Brian McLaren writes: "This book distils 40-plus years of personal struggle, heart-to-heart conversations and cross-disciplinary research about doubt: why it's unavoidable; why, in fact, it's necessary and valuable; and how to live with it and learn from it."

The explanation of the role of doubt in matters of belief goes to the heart of the matter. It will enable many Christians to find a way to a



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.



fuller Christian maturity. It will also enable others to find that the very things they felt undermined those beliefs as a child, will enable them to live beyond and to put away childish things.

### Stories

The extraordinary stories of faith and doubt in the first part are brought into context by the other part, as he explains: "The research component is significant, because insights from psychologists, neurologists, evolutionary biologists, sociologists, anthropologists and even political scientists can help us understand the many inter-related dimensions of our doubt. When we bring their research into conversation with theologians and other scholars of religion, everyone has something to learn."

**"I found the stories of loss of faith in the first part of the book so affecting that for a couple of days I had to put aside the book"**

The final aim and ambition of the book is summarised by the author in this way: "But of course, all this scholarly insight must be put into conversation with down-to-earth stories. Then, we need to translate our best insights into practical guidance that is accessible to normal people who are simply trying to make it through another week without losing faith, without falling into despair, paralysis, complacency or dishonesty."

That appeal to the needs of normal people comes from his own experience, which he writes about in so revealing and heartening a way. He may have left the pastoral life in an evangelical church; but the inner drive to experience and to know the truths of religion has not deserted him.

He has sought 'the way', his way, and wishes to share with others, not just with his fellow evangelicals, his Catholic friends and teachers such as the Franciscan Fr Richard Rohr, with Muslims, Buddhists and others.

A mere review or notice cannot do full justice to this book. Only reading it can. This is very certainly a book that many will mark a moment of real change.

## The World of Books

By the books editor

# Courtesy and the Grace of God

Any one of my generation who was taught from an early age by the good nuns will have somewhere tucked away in the back attic of their memories Hilaire Belloc's poem *Courtesy*.

Those ineffable lines:

*Of Courtesy it is much less  
Than Courage of Heart or Holiness.  
Yet in my Walks it seems to me  
That the Grace of God is in Courtesy.*

Later, a Jesuit in an early English class enlarged on the true nature of Christian courtesy and chivalry.

The particular walk that inspired this poem took the poet into the little Sussex village of Storrington, where the Priory of Our Lady of England had recently been consecrated. This was on a day in Our Lady's month, May 17, 1908.

The priory was a new institution built on land donated by the Duke of Norfolk. The place also played a role in the tormented life of the poet Francis Thompson, and provided a refuge for priests exiled under the anti-clerical laws of the II French Republic (1848-51).

I mention the Duke of Norfolk, for when we first learnt the poem I was puzzled by the fact the duke the – primary Catholic peer in England; also in his role as Earl Marshall, had played an important role in the recent coronation of Elizabeth II (1953).

But that was a point. He had two roles, which were played well. He was conscious of the courtesy he owed his sovereign.

### Poem

This poem has been going through my head for the last month, culminating in the attack on the Capitol in Washington DC.

Now Mr Belloc was not always a kindly-spoken critic. But in those famous debates he and G.K. Chesterton would argue with George Bernard Shaw with commendable courtesy.

Over those last weeks the outgoing president of the United States of American, a person in whom so many were accustomed to see 'the leader of the free world', forgot he was the president of all Americans and not just an angry minority, he forgot the acts of courtesy which his state role called for.

On January 6, in the halls of the American republic it seemed courtesy was not always present. (There was an echo of ancient Rome that day: for it was on the Capitoline Hill of Rome that the senate and people of Rome retreated to find refuge from the marauding barbarian Gauls, our Celtic cousins.)



Belloc in earlier years.

But over these last weeks, seeing the havoc being played in the traditions of the United State have led me to wonder where had courtesy gone. The petty snubs of the Mr and Mrs Trump in those last days: firing the White House butler, arranging that there was no one, so to speak, to open the door of the White House to Joe Biden and his wife, the refusal of Mrs Trump to invite Mrs Biden to customary afternoon tea and walk round the residence which would be her new home, the refusals of Mr Trump to concede...One could go on: the lies, the bitter and brutal language, and all of this supported raucously by so many Catholics and fervent Christians, saddened one.

But the decline overall of courtesy is sadder still. Where has the 'Grace of God' that is in courtesy gone? We all need to look to our own consciences to see that we too have lost what those quiet nuns of mine would have called "custody of speech" and have let this happen here too.

## A Thought for the Season



These days we hear a great deal about the decline of the classics, especially from those of a traditionalist and conservative outlook. And certainly the literature of the Greeks and Romans provided for centuries models of all kinds: of nobility, and authoritarian rule, of lyric poetry and epic, of morality and courage.

In the last four years we have heard much of Donald Trump with the golden touch. This was certainly true for gold in one way or another seemed symbolic of his life. People would carelessly talk of him as a business man with 'the golden touch'.

This alluded to the legend of Midas, who sought from the gods the request that everything he touched would turn to gold.

But now that an ingrained knowledge

of the classics was gone, nobody seemed to recognise the significance of the Midas legend. Everything turned to gold for Midas, even the food he wanted and needed to consume. That too turned to gold, and so Midas was brought to ruin by his own greed, until the god that had granted his wish helped him remove it.

It is certainly a frightening tale. Yet we go on admiring the rich with the Midas touch, our newspapers telling us last week that Irish billionaires have grown richer still after the terrible year the rest of have passed through.

Ancient folklore, pagan philosophers, Jewish prophets, learned moralists of Christianity: all have said the same: gold maims the soul. But it seems to do little to change the mental habits of many. **P.C.**





Notebook

Fr Bernard Cotter

# A retirement system that benefits the whole parish

ONCE UPON A TIME in the Diocese of Cork, before retirement became a ‘thing’ for Church leaders, a parish priest went to his heavenly reward, aged well over 90. The bishop prevailed upon another parish priest to take over as pastor, even though this man was in his mid-seventies. And the people of the parish said, employing magnificent Cork irony: “We’re getting a ‘fine young man’ as our new PP!”

That was many years ago, and times have changed much in the meantime, in two contrasting ways. On the one hand, the Church’s 1983 Code of Canon Law introduced a procedure which means that priests now submit a letter of resignation from the office of parish priest at the age of 75 (and bishops too). So a priest remaining as parish priest till his nineties now would be a rare occurrence.

## Challenging

On the other hand, old age is not as challenging as it used to be. The new squeaky-clean President of the United States, Joe Biden, is a youthful 78 years. And Pope Francis, at 84, shows no sign of slowing down and putting his feet up. Extended life expectancy and enormous improvements in healthcare



mean that people can expect to live engaged, productive lives well into their eighties.

So does this mean the Church should ease or modify its retirement suggestions to its pastors? I don’t think so.

In implementing a 75-years-of-age retirement age for parish priests, the Church has freed pastors in good health to live active pastoral lives, bringing their years of experience with them, while leaving the pain of administration behind them. The country is full of priests with suffixes like PE (Pastor Emeritus) or AP (Assistant Priest), who reside in parishes and help out, but have none of the worries that attach to being the actual pastor.

## Benefits

This system benefits both the PP and the retired. The PP has a back-up who can stand in during days off and annual holidays, someone who can bring a variety of homilies to the regular Masses for parishioners too. The present PP will keep an eye on the older man

and ensure his health and other needs are taken care of.

The retired priest has the security and friendship of being part of a community, with none of the administrative worries than can plague current PPs. He need not concern himself with GDPR, safeguarding challenges or maintaining parish finances, the trinity of administrative woes of parish life today. But he brings to his task the learnings of his years, which may well show in the wisdom and compassion of his preaching and his care for those who approach him. His prayers can support the mission of the parish and can carry along members of the community who are sick or troubled (including sometimes the pastor). And all the while, he knows that if an issue that comes to him is too heavy to bear, he can call in the current parish priest, whose responsibility the parish ultimately is.

## A daily lockdown schedule

We’re all supposed to follow a daily schedule in lockdown. Here’s mine: Morning prayer and readings precede breakfast. Mass is concelebrated with the RTÉ News Now Mass at 10.30am, followed by quiet prayer and ‘Prayer During the Day’.

There follows a few hours administration (letters and emails), a half hours walk, an hour’s reading and two hours preparing and eating dinner. Evening prayer and TV follow, and then – eventually – bed!

On Sundays and on my day off, there’s no administration and more time for everything else, not forgetting Democritus’ saying that “a life without celebration is a long road without an inn!”

## Receiving the perfect letter

● I got a letter once from a person who attended a funeral I presided over. It was one of those perfect letters you come across a few times in a lifetime. It captured the essence of what a priest can do and showed appreciation of my efforts. The writer, who was unknown to me, introduced herself a good while later. It turned out I was not the only recipient of her kindness: she wrote and posted a letter of appreciation every single day. I can only imagine the good this person has done. I can only try to imitate it.



One of the Sisters of Charity and grateful patients at St Vincent Health Centre, north-eastern India. .

## YOUR GIFT CAN HELP BRING MEDICINE TO SOME OF INDIA’S POOREST PEOPLE

### Children under the age of five are dying from malnutrition and vitamin deficiency

The pandemic is stretching the already-limited resources of missionaries working with the poor. The Sisters of Charity of St Vincent De Paul write to The Little Way Association from north-eastern India: “Covid means that people are completely depending on the St Vincent Health Centre which we established in 2015 in Darenchigre. Patients are suffering from anaemia, jaundice, typhoid, diarrhoea, malnutrition, calcium and iron deficiency, and many children below the age of five are dying. We are unable to provide better medical care and treatment due to the lack of finance and the other issues like lack of medical equipment and oxygen supply monitors in emergency situations.”

### “Please can you help us?”

The sisters work in one of India’s poorest regions, where the people scrape a living from subsistence-agriculture. The health centre was intended just to provide first aid but people from 20 villages have come to use it as their principal medical facility. The sisters urgently ask for funds for vitamins, diagnostic equipment and treatment for those suffering from various dietary deficiencies. The sisters conclude their letter: “We earnestly ask you to participate in this humble effort to offer our medical support to the people in need. With a prayer that God will bless all your endeavours and bring to fruition all your charitable works.”

### Your donation to the Little Way Association’s fund for the sick, hungry and deprived will go, without deduction, to help hard-pressed establishments such as the St Vincent Health Centre.

“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**  
**(Registered Charity No. 235703) Tel 0044 20 76 22 0466**  
**www.littlewayassociation.com**

I enclose €..... to be allocated to:

€..... **HUNGRY, SICK AND DEPRIVED**

€..... **NEEDS OF MISSIONARIES**

€..... **MASS OFFERINGS**  
(Please state no. of Masses \_\_\_\_\_)

€..... **LITTLE WAY ADMIN EXPENSES**

☐ Please tick if you would like an acknowledgement

Name (Rev. Mr. Mrs. Miss) \_\_\_\_\_ (Block letters please)

Address \_\_\_\_\_

To donate online go to [www.littlewayassociation.com](http://www.littlewayassociation.com)

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

IC/02/04