

# The Irish Catholic

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## Evangelised African women can 'change the tide' for faith in Ireland

Ruadhán Jones

African women evangelised and educated by Irish missionaries can "change the tide" for faith in Ireland, says an Irish missionary who dedicated her life to educating women in Cameroon.

Sr Mary Neville (89) of the Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary, who worked as a missionary in Nigeria and Cameroon for almost 50 years, said that it is "sad to see" people lose the Faith in Ireland.

But her students, a group of whom came to Ireland from around the world to thank the sisters for dedicating their lives to educating them, can demonstrate Christ's love to the world, she believes.

"You have done that in Ireland today – you have changed the tide in Ireland," said Sr Neville at a celebration on April 28 in the Holy Rosary sisters' Artane convent.

"Thank you for being instruments in showing God's love to me," she continued. "People say, do you have children – I say, I have many hundreds of them!"

Sr Nora McNamara, leader of the Artane community, also encouraged the women to "continue to be the change, by your leadership, companionship and thoughtfulness".

Her comments came as a group

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Spread the joy...



Irish missionary Sr Nuala Lahert MSHR, past principal of Our Lady of Lourdes secondary school in Bemenda, Cameroon, shares a joke with one of her former students Nagella Nwana Nukuna on Friday, April 28. Photo: John McElroy.

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Michael Kelly's Editor's Comment will return next week

## Alarm over 'huge pressure' on Mountjoy prison

Jason Osborne

Overcrowding, the ongoing struggle to rehabilitate prisoners and abundant access to drugs are some of the key issues flagged by Bishop of Kilmore Martin Hayes following a recent visit to Mountjoy Prison in Dublin.

Liaison with the country's prison chaplains, Bishop Hayes travelled there to support to the work of the prison's chaplains and expressed his concerns following the visit.

Commending the work of the chaplains and commiserating with the victims of crime, Bishop Hayes said in a statement that "people are sent to prison in the hope that they will mend their ways; that they will be rehabilitated".

"However, our prison system, despite the best of intentions, is struggling to achieve rehabilitation for those in custody. It is in this context that we cannot forget about those who are sent to prison, the men and women who are serving time for crimes that they committed."

Describing the prison system at Mountjoy as being under "huge pressure" to cope with the demands being made of it, Dr Hayes said that the "key message" for him was that while the population of Ireland has increased, the total number of available prison cells has not.

"It means that our prisons are becoming overcrowded resulting in instances of two prisoners occupying one cell, with one prisoner lying on the floor on a thin mattress, as I witnessed myself in Mountjoy," he said.

The design of the Victorian premises places limits on the improvements that can be made to the site, Bishop Hayes said, and while facilities for prisoners have been improved with the installation of hand-basins and televisions, "further progress is being hampered by overcrowding".

Bishop Hayes pointed to difficulties with rehabilitation as another key struggle for the prison system.

"The prison system is under real pressure to provide rehabilitation. My conversations revealed that, despite the best efforts of management and education personnel involved, the prison system is unable to rehabilitate prisoners and prepare them for re-entry to the world.

"Prisoners spoke to me of finding it hard putting in time as they cannot avail of education classes. In speaking with an 'enhanced' prisoner – who has been afforded more work duties for good behaviour – he stated that the chaotic nature of prison life does not enable rehabilitation or promote a respect for the law, in preparation for life outside prison," Dr Hayes said.

The "ease" with which drugs can be made available in the prison is another issue the bishop noted during his visit,

as he said that drugs can "literally be catapulted into the grounds thus increasing their 'market' value".

"While the role of prison is to punish those who commit crime, I feel strongly that we have a responsibility to uphold the human dignity of those held in our prisons. It is absolutely in the interest of the common good that we do what we can for prison-

ers so as to help them return to society as a neighbour who, thereby, can make a positive contribution to our communities. If a person sent to prison feels forgotten and abandoned by society, the likelihood is that she or he will return to society angry and liable to return to a life of crime," Bishop Hayes concluded.

## Concern Debates finalists go head to head

Ruadhán Jones

Two school debating teams go head-to-head this week in the All-Ireland final of Concern Debates, after over 175 school teams participated this year.

Students from Largy College, Monaghan and The High School, Dublin, will contest the final, chaired by RTÉ presenter and sustainability expert Fionnuala Moran.

Largy college will oppose the motion, 'For the Global South, the international community is a mirage' while The High School will propose it.

The winner of the competition will receive a trophy from Concern and travel to the United Nation's headquarters in New York while the runners-up will travel to Brussels and The Hague.

Concern's head of active citizenship Michael Doorly praised the finalists and hundreds of other students who took part this year.

"It is our hope that Concern debaters become life-long advocates on behalf of the most disadvantaged people in the world," Mr Doorly said.

This year's final will be broadcast live from The Helix in Dublin on Concern's YouTube channel from 7.30pm on Thursday, May 4.

# Evangelised African women can 'change the tide' for faith in Ireland

» Continued from Page 1

of 21 students from Our Lady of Lourdes secondary school in Bemenda, Cameroon, travelled from across the world to show their appreciation for the education the Holy Rosary missionaries gave them.

One of the students, Sr Angèle Nkamsi MSHR, is now on the Holy Rosary sister's leadership team and an Irish citizen, having lived here since 2013.

She praised the "really deep" influence the sisters had on her and the love they showed.

"I felt I would really like to transmit that to others," Sr Angèle told *The Irish Catholic*.

"While I was at the school,

I felt drawn to the sisters because of the values they were instilling in us. Because of that, I felt called to serve in religious life.

"I'm an Irish citizen, I'm proud to say that," she added.

Meanwhile, Dr Claire Che Minang, a former student who is now a pharmacist based in the United States, told the sisters: "Thank you for the love".

"We promise you that the name you have made in Ireland, we will make sure is known in the world," Dr Minang continued.

"We saw our mothers in you because you gave us that home away from our home," she told retired principals Sr Mary Neville, Sr Nuala Lahert

and art teacher Sr Marie O'Shea.

"You went above and beyond, showing that if you teach the child, especially a girl child, the curriculums, they will be successful – but if you give them love, self-confidence and self-discipline, they will excel."

Sr Kathleen Scullion, representing the order's superior, told this paper that the visit has "raised the profile of the Holy Rosary sisters", with the news of their visit stretching across the globe.

The students arrived in Ireland on Wednesday, April 26, and held a day of celebration in the convent in Artane on Friday, April 28.

## Fighting for life...



Theo Kearns (2) from Meath checks out balloons carried in the March for Life in Dublin on Monday, May 1, which saw thousands march from St Stephen's Green to Leinster House. Photo: John McElroy.

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# Ireland must not forget 'suffering' of persecuted Nigerian Catholics

**Chai Brady**

Christians in north-east Nigeria are living a "tortured" existence due to continued attacks by Islamist terrorists, an African priest based in Athlone has warned.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Fr Innocent Sunu who is now a curate in St Peter and Paul church, told of the "dehumanisation" of Christians in his Diocese of Maiduguri, and particularly in the parish he was based – Madagali.

He said Ireland is recognised for bringing the Gospel to Nigeria, and Irish people must not forget those who were evangelised and now violently persecuted in the country.

Fr Innocent said: "The hatred for Christianity has always been there in

northern Nigeria but now it has become so intense that it is all over Nigeria. Priests are victims because they are easily noticed – it's not like here in Ireland, you don't see priests wearing the cassock – but in Nigeria we wear the white cassock."

Fr Innocent said it is important for the people of Ireland to know what is happening in Africa and particularly in Nigeria.

"For us in Nigeria, we know that Rome is where our leader, His Holiness Pope Francis, is. But in Nigeria, we cherish Ireland, we give Ireland the honour and the respect, and our Catholic life is connected to Ireland. So the Irish people need to know the extent at which they are revered, they are respected, and then the

extent at which the people whom they are taking the Gospel to are now suffering," he said.

Many times, Fr Innocent has had to flee into the mountains near his town with other parishioners, surviving there for several days without proper food and water supplies, until things quieten down.

The Islamist terrorist group Boko Haram have and continue to attack parishes like Fr Innocent's in the northeast. They are a Salafi-jihadist group fighting to replace the Nigerian state with an Islamic one based on a strict compliance to Sharia law. According to the European Union Agency for Asylum, the Boko Haram insurgency has adversely affected some 15 million people, displaced more than two

million people and caused an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 deaths.

The group are known to target young, uneducated Muslim young men and boys to join their 'holy war'. Fr Innocent explained: "It's hypnosis. They imbue and implant a jihad mentality into the minds of these young boys, they tell them they are fighting jihad, they are fighting for God, and anything that is not Islam is a taboo – to be destroyed. Sometimes they do a voodoo kind of practice. They give them some liquid to drink and once they drink that liquid their mind is already turned, it is changed towards killing Christians."

[See pages 12-14](#)

# Pope encourages Derry Catholics to be peacemakers in the North

**Ruadhán Jones**

Pope Francis encouraged Derry Catholics to be peacemakers for the sake of the North's present and future, as the diocese celebrates the 150th anniversary of St Eugene's Cathedral.

The Pope said it is his hope that the diocesan family will be "ever radiant with the beatitudes", in a message read out by Ireland's new papal nuncio Archbishop Luis Mariano Montemayor on Sunday, April 30.

He hopes especially that they will be "peacemakers for the sake of the present and future life of the local community", Archbishop Montemayor said.

Pope Francis prayed that the people of Derry "will be drawn ever more deeply

into a loving relationship with Jesus Christ" and imparted his blessing as "a pledge of peace and joy in the risen Lord".

Priests, religious and laity from across the diocese were represented at the Mass in St Eugene's Cathedral to mark the 150th anniversary of the first Mass celebrated there in 1873.

Mass was celebrated by Bishop of Derry Donal McKeown, who wore a chasuble specially made for the occasion by Marie Horton, a former shirt factory worker.

The name of every shirt factory in Derry as well as an image of the Rosemount Factory, in the Cathedral parish, was embroidered onto the vestment.

[See page 15](#)

# Mattel launches Barbie doll with Down's Syndrome



The new Barbie Doll with Down's Syndrome is seen third from right.

**Jason Osborne**

Created to allow "even more children to see themselves in Barbie," toy company Mattel has launched its first ever doll with Down's Syndrome.

The toy-giant is partnering with the US's National Down Syndrome Society (NDSS) to bring the doll to market.

In consultation with the NDSS and medical professionals, Mattel incorporated a

number of elements into the design to be more illustrative of women with Down's Syndrome, including a shorter frame and longer torso.

Executive Vice President and Global Head of Barbie and Dolls Lisa McKnight said that as the "most diverse doll line on the market, Barbie plays an important role in a child's early experiences, and we are dedicated to doing our part to counter social stigma through play".



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– Bishop Fulton J. Sheen

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# Freedom of conscience protections mustn't be eroded after abortion review, says Irish doctor

**Ruadhán Jones**

Freedom of conscience protections need to be strengthened, not further eroded, an Irish doctor has claimed, after a review into Ireland's abortion law attacked conscientious objection.

"Freedom of conscience is the defining civil rights issue of our day," Dr Kirsten Fuller, a GP based in Tipperary, told the March for Life on May 1.

Her comments come after the three-year review into the Health

(Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 called for a statutory obligation on healthcare workers to refrain from providing 'misinformation' to women accessing abortion.

"It's very clear from the wording of the recommendation that the statutory obligation would only apply to pro-life healthcare workers," Dr Fuller said.

It is "an outrageous form of discrimination and prejudice" to single out a particular group of healthcare

professionals and propose a "statutory obligation to control how they care for and communicate with their patients", she added.

Dr Fuller called on the Government to immediately clarify that no such obligation would be introduced.

"They should immediately apologise to pro-life doctors for the despicable and targeted slur on the honesty and integrity of pro-life doctors that is contained in the set of recommendations," Dr Fuller said.

Another speaker at the March, Aontú leader Peadar Tóibín criticised proposals that "dismantle what few protections and safeguards" included in the abortion law.

"The number of abortions jumped a devastating 25%, just in the last year. In the four years that the law has been in place nearly 28,500 babies have been aborted," Mr Tóibín told the crowd.

Media commentator Wendy Grace was highly critical of the independent review, saying that in the entire report

"there's not a single mention of the dignity and value of the unborn child, or a solitary reference about the need to explore ways to reduce Ireland's soaring abortion rate."

"Government policy is directly responsible for nearly 30,000 abortions being carried over the past four years. One baby is now being aborted in Ireland for every seven babies born – a truly shocking statistic," Ms Grace said.

See page 10.

## Irish Govt 'gravely concerned' for jailed Nicaraguan bishop

**Chai Brady**

The Irish Government has said it remains "gravely concerned" regarding the situation of a bishop jailed by Nicaraguan authorities.

In response to a parliamentary question from Carol Nolan TD, Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs Micheál Martin said the detention of Bishop Rolando José Álvarez Lagos of Matagalpa diocese

was "unacceptable".

The dictatorship of President Daniel Ortega and his wife, Vice President Rosario Murillo, has cracked down on the Catholic Church in the country, expelling religious orders and all who speak out against the regime. Bishop Álvarez was sentenced to 26 years' imprisonment after refusing to be exiled from the country, insisting he wanted to be with his people.

Before his imprisonment, Bishop Álvarez was outspoken in calling on the regime of Mr Ortega to release political prisoners and for democracy to be restored in the country. He was initially arrested on August 19 last year by police who burst into his Matagalpa diocesan headquarters in a pre-dawn raid.

The Tánaiste said: "I remain gravely concerned by the situation in Nicaragua,

particularly the continued human rights violations, and the crackdowns on opposition voices, on civil society and on independent media, together with backsliding on democratic norms.

"I would like to assure the deputy that my department, together with our EU partners, and other international and civil society partners, continue to closely monitor the unacceptable detention

of the individual referred to in her correspondence [Bishop Álvarez]. We will continue to call for his immediate and unconditional release, as well as that of all other remaining political prisoners."

The charges against Bishop Álvarez were treason, undermining national integrity and spreading false news, among others. The prelate was also stripped of his Nicaraguan citizenship.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### New record high for homelessness

Latest figures from the Department of Housing show 11,988 recorded were homeless in March, which represents a 2.1% increase on previous month.

The figures show that 8,516 adults and 3,472 children were homeless in March, which compares to 8,369 adults and 3,373 children in February.

The statistic cover the four weeks before the winter eviction ban was lifted by the Government.

In January this year, the number of people recorded as homeless was 11,754.

That figure fell by 12 in February to 11,742.

It was the first drop since December 2021, when the number of people in emergency accommodation stood at almost 9,000.

## Tyrone community 'numb' after siblings' death

**Staff reporter**

A Co. Tyrone community has been left "numb" by the crash which claimed the lives of three members of the same family, Fr Declan Boland said at the funeral for two siblings.

Dan and Christine McKane and their aunt Julia McSorley were killed when the minibus they were travelling in was in a collision with a lorry last week.

"We're stunned, we're numb and speechless at what happened," Fr Boland told mourners in the Church

of the Immaculate Conception in Strabane on Monday, May 1. "Our grief is total, our wound is open," he continued.

Fr Boland thanked the incredible support of the local community for the McKane family through the "awful pain and unspeakable horror" that

"came so unexpectedly".

The mourners included Sinn Féin Stormont leader Michelle O'Neill and a representative of President Michael D. Higgins.

A funeral was held for Mrs McSorley at St Eugene's Church in Glenock on Sunday, April 30.

## 'Gathered round the gable wall...'



Rihanna McDonnell, Molly Joyce, Julie Anna Collins, Rebecca Collins, Rachel Collins and Rebecca Collins are pictured in Knock on Saturday, April 29, during Dublin diocese's annual pilgrimage, which saw more than 2,000 people travel to the Marian shrine. Photo: John McElroy.

### Mary's Meals launches May prayer campaign

Irish charity Mary's Meals is encouraging parishes to hold holy hours or start prayer groups as they launched their annual 'Pray in May' campaign on April 27.

The charity, which feeds more than 2.4 million children around the world, said that its mission is "built on the foundation of prayer and the many little acts of love from those who believe in our mission".

"Throughout the month of May we are inviting individuals, churches, schools and faith groups to pray with us – that our work continues to flourish and grow, and that more children and communities will see their lives transformed through the provision of a daily meal in a place of education," a spokesperson said.

Visit [www.marysmeals.ie](http://www.marysmeals.ie) for more information.



# The sin or the sinner – a knotty question

**T**he legendary French feminist Simone de Beauvoir has been removed from a list of female candidates to be honoured in sculpture at Trinity College Dublin's Old Library. When it emerged that De Beauvoir, who died in 1986, was accused of grooming young female students as lovers – whom she apparently passed on to her veteran male lover, Jean-Paul Sartre – her candidature was dropped. This aspect of her life was disclosed in a biography by Carole Seymour-Jones, *A Dangerous Liaison*.

**“Christianity’s guidance in these matters is complex, since it emphasises that we are all sinners, but it’s the sin and not the person that should be judged”**

Trinity’s decision raises the question of whether an artist or writer’s work should be reviled when it emerges that their life was far from exemplary, or even, sometimes, profoundly wrong. Many personalities from history fall into this category, from Caravaggio, who was a murderer, to Eric Gill, the



**Mary Kenny**

sculptor, who abused his daughters and even his dog.

Bishop Berkeley, the Anglican philosopher, and the physicist Erwin Schrödinger have had buildings de-named by TCD because of a personal track-record: in Berkeley’s case, an association with slavery, and in the case of Schrödinger – an Austrian-born Irish citizen – because he is now described as “a serial abuser” with a paedophile profile.

Christianity’s guidance in these matters is complex, since it emphasises that we are all sinners, but it’s the sin and not the person that should be judged.

## Personalities

In any case, universities – as well as other authorities – often like to associate with named personalities simply because they are a “celebrity brand” (often the reason for the of Honorary PhDs too). Samuel Beckett has a Dublin bridge – and a national ship-ping liner – named after him just because he is a global literary name.

I hardly know anyone who has read his most acclaimed novels, *Murphy*, and *Watt*, and he had no interest in Ireland or Irish-

ness (and regarded the Irish language as a complete waste of time). But his name was selected by the powers that be because Beckett is a ‘brand’, and *Waiting for Godot* – a play in which nothing happens – defines post-modern drama.

**“You don’t have to be a fanatical nationalist to suggest that Ireland’s oldest university could occasionally feature a personality from a native Irish tradition”**

TCD’s other women candidates for distinction are now Rosalind Franklin, scientist, the mathematician Ada Lovelace, feminist Mary Wollstonecraft and Abbey theatre patron Augusta Gregory. Except for Lady Gregory, none had any connection with Ireland. You don’t have to be a fanatical nationalist to suggest that Ireland’s oldest university could occasionally feature a personality from a native Irish tradition – and they don’t always have to be a celebrity ‘brand’, either.



Simone de Beauvoir and Jean Paul Sartre pictured in Beijing in 1955.

## The tradition of the throne

**T**he coronation of Charles III – and Queen Camilla (once described by Diana, Princess of Wales, as “the third person” in her marriage) – has prompted a certain amount of debate about the relevance of the British monarchy today. Opinion polls in the UK indicate a decline of support for the institution, especially among younger people.

In an age which extols equality, a hereditary ruler strikes many as irrational. King Charles’s immense wealth and his exemption from inheritance tax is a sore point for those struggling with the cost of living. The enthusiasm for the monarchy is certainly not what it was at Elizabeth’s coronation in 1953.

Yet a monarchy which has lasted 1,000 years – with an unhappy intermission under Oliver Cromwell – represents a sense of history, and transmits a feeling of continuity. Any nation-state which survives needs a definition of identity, and it is the monarchy which still holds an increasingly diverse UK more or less together.

‘Throne and altar’ went in tandem, historically, and the televised Coronation ceremonial is probably one of the few occasions now in which the public is exposed to a profoundly religious rite.

I love the beauty of religious rite. Although to be honest, I also enjoy looking at a tiara or two!

● One of the most consistently absorbing programmes on BBC radio is Melvyn Bragg’s *In Our Time*: it can be about anything from megaliths to the Statutes of Kilkenny (1366), discussed by experts in their fields.

Bragg is an admired author, TV and radio presenter who has done much for the advancement of literature and culture in the public sphere. His daughter Maria-Elsa is ordained in the Church of England and in demand for marriages and funerals. The late publisher Carmen Callil (she launched Virago Books), although an atheist, requested Rev. Bragg to conduct her funeral.

Melvyn has recently spoken to Peter Stanford of *The Tablet* about how deep his own faith roots go. In Wigton, his Lake District home town, faith was “central to the culture. In fact, it was the culture”.

Christianity has had a “powerful influence” in his own life, and Melvyn has made many religious TV documentaries and series. He thinks it deplorable that religion has too often been replaced by “cod psychology” in so much of media and broadcasting.

There were several Christian denominations in Wigton’s social life, but “Catholic nuns from Ireland had the best dances”!



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Full details relating to the vacancy can be found on the Diocesan Website at: [www.dioceseofmeath.ie](http://www.dioceseofmeath.ie) clicking on the tab [job vacancy](#) where terms and conditions and application form relating to the role can also be accessed.

Applications are welcome from anyone who feels they meet the criteria as presented and are interested in playing an active role in faith development in the Diocese of Meath.

**Closing date for applications will be 5pm on Friday 26<sup>th</sup> May 2023**

The Diocese of Meath is a registered charity CHY 7230



# Controversial hate crime legislation condemned as being ‘open to abuse’

**Jason Osborne**

Clare TD Michael McNamara has said that he sees how Ireland’s proposed hate speech laws “could be open to abuse”.

The controversial new laws are currently making their way through the Dáil, and would make it an offence for a person to “prepare or possess” material on their computer that could

incite hatred against a person of protected characteristics.

The Criminal Justice Bill approved last Wednesday was opposed by just 14 TDs, from across the political spectrum.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper, Mr McNamara said that while he doesn’t believe the Government intends to abuse the hate crime legislation, it’s “open to abuse” as we don’t make legislation “for the here

and now, we make it for the future”.

The legislation “creates more problems than it solves,” Deputy McNamara said.

“If it was just a diary, or you’re noting down your own thoughts, if they are directed at one of the groups that are protected by this act, it could be considered hate speech and then you could be prosecuted under it.

“I have a problem with that...I don’t necessarily agree with the views that

people might have, but I think prosecuting them for merely having the views is a step that I would be uncomfortable with and it seems to me from having listened to the debate that that is a possibility, albeit perhaps an unintended possibility, but nevertheless a possibility and that’s indicative to me of how broadly drafted it is and that’s why I’m concerned,” he said.

Addressing a suggestion from People Before Profit TD Paul Murphy that

a genuine contribution to religious discussion be removed from protected behaviours under the Bill, Deputy McNamara said that he wouldn’t support that amendment.

“I wouldn’t support that amendment, and I’m not entirely sure that it would either be constitutional or that it would be compatible with our international obligations under the European Convention,” he said.

## ‘Either-or’ mentality in vocations fatal says Archbishop Farrell

**Ruadhán Jones**

A mentality of seeking “either priests or laity” is a fatal logic for the life of the Church, Archbishop Dermot Farrell warned on Vocations Sunday, April 30.

Reflecting that most reflection on the scarcity of vocations has been “either-or”, the archbishop of Dublin said Christ’s way is “both-and”.

“We pray for servants of the Gospel – both lay and ordained, both women and men, young

and old,” he said in his message for Vocations Sunday.

Let us pray that the Lord sends us people with “generous, warm and courageous hearts, women and men, young and old, who together have come to know his son”,

Archbishop Farrell finished.

Meanwhile, Vocations Ireland launched their ‘Year of Vocation’ with a gathering in Whitefriar St, Dublin, on Saturday, April 29.

Speaking at the gathering, Archbishop of Cashel Kieran

O’Reilly SMA, said we must “Never underestimate the power of inviting people to priesthood, religious life”.

Referencing the beginning of his own vocation, when a local priest invited him to consider the priesthood, he said

that “Never underestimate the importance of tapping a person on the shoulder”.

“This is something that we can all do,” Archbishop O’Reilly said. “We need to create communities of faith to nurture the vocational call we all have.”

## ‘Lord Jesus, give me your love’



Students from Holy Family NS are pictured with Fr Pat O’Donnell and their teachers after their first Holy Communion in Rathmore, Co. Kerry on Saturday, April 29. Photo: Seamus Healy.

## Paul Murphy requests removing religious discourse protections on hate crime bill

**Staff reporter**

During a Dáil debate, TD Paul Murphy requested an amendment to the controversial hate crime bill that would have weakened protection for religious discourse.

The amendment, which Mr Murphy said would remove “as a defence for hate speech material that something is a reasonable and genuine contribution to religious discourse”, was turned down during the April 26 debate.

“A certain portion of hate speech, particularly homophobic, transphobic or sexist hate speech, in society is sometimes put forward under the guise of being a contribution to religious discourse,” Mr Murphy claimed.

“Fundamentally, that should not be a defence.”

Freedom to express and practice religion is protected under the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR), said Fianna Fáil TD James Browne in response, adding that it merited similar protections to political or academic discourse.

Mr Murphy was one of 14 TDs who voted against the ‘Criminal Justice (Incitement to Violence or Hatred and Hate Offences) Bill 2022: Report and Final Stage’.



## Breda O'Brien

### The View



# Legal abortion will be looked on in horror in future

In barrister Marie O'Shea's independent review of the abortion legislation, abortion is taken as an unqualified good. Therefore, anything standing in the way has to be removed.

The three-day waiting period is framed as dispensable. And yet the review acknowledges elsewhere in a section on consent, that "there are risks that women may regret their decision, and this may potentially have a lasting impact on them".

### Dispassionate

The dispassionate tone makes the review all the more disquieting. I searched in vain for any acknowledgement that the current measures had been so contentious that politicians had to build in safeguards to persuade voters to vote in favour.

Simon Coveney, who changed from opposing the abortion legislation to an influential, allegedly reluctant supporter, was quoted in *The Irish Independent* before the Referendum:

"Mr Coveney said late-term abortions will be prohibited, private abortion clinics will not be allowed, abortion on the grounds of disability will not be permitted, strict medical guidelines must be followed, women seeking a termination must also consider other alternatives, secondary scans will be required, counselling supports will be provided and any prescription will only be issued with a 72-hour pause period."

Yet late-term abortions on the grounds of life-limiting conditions are happening. Babies are being born alive after them.

The report recommends the establishment of "comprehensive women's healthcare clinics" led by an obstetrician, which will provide abortion. These are not private in that they are not part of a chain of private providers as they are in Britain, but they are well remunerated – far better than doctors are paid for the full-time care of a pregnant mother.

As for "women seeking a termination must consider other alternatives", the independent review quotes one doctor who suggested that MyOptions, the State-run counselling service, should have the word abortion in its title.

The independent review suggests this might interfere with the idea that it is meant to be non-directive. How

non-directive is it, anyway? An American study called 'Abortion policy implementation in Ireland: Lessons from the community model of care' states: "From the perspectives of [abortion-providing] doctors, MyOptions is a well-functioning, core service." It increases "patient flow" and "ensures privacy".

**“Freedom of conscience must also take second place to the provision of abortion. The review suggests that where there are not enough abortion providers, all recruitment must discriminate in favour of those willing to provide abortion”**

Students for Life posed as women seeking abortion and alleged that MyOptions is anything but non-directive. While not condoning the deception involved, given the paucity of research on abortion, it is understandable why they felt driven to such actions.



The report suggests that there should be "legal recognition of controlling conduct intended to force a woman to continue a pregnancy". Although it acknowledges that it could happen, there is no mention of legal recognition of forcing someone to terminate a pregnancy.

Everything in the review pushes for more abortion. For example, it is unhappy that 'manual vacuum aspiration', a surgical method of abortion, is not routinely available in early pregnancy given that women may prefer it.

### Foeticide

The review recommends 'upskilling' in foeticide, that is, the practice of injecting a lethal substance into the baby's heart before an abortion. It admits that healthcare professionals may find this "psychologically uncomfortable".

ally", which the review says is not a medical term. Remember how pro-lifers were excoriated for saying that it is not? It also says there is no definitive way to establish how long a baby with a life-limiting condition will live. This is not a reason for exercising caution but instead, a reason for looking again at the current limit, because it may limit access to abortion.

**“No pro-life doctors will want to qualify as an obstetrician, because they will never get a job in Ireland”**

Freedom of conscience must also take second place to the provision of abortion. The review suggests that where there are not enough abortion providers, all recruitment must discriminate in favour of those will-

ing to provide abortion.

No pro-life doctors will want to qualify as an obstetrician, because they will never get a job in Ireland.

Yet there is still cause for hope. Members of the younger generation who are pro-life and involved in organisations like the Pro-life Campaign and Life Institute are articulate, well-informed and passionate.

I also believe the Minimise Project website should be mandatory reading for anyone interested in this topic and not just because I know almost all of the young people involved, including our son, Ben Conroy.

The Minimise Project focuses on having better conversations about abortion. I truly believe that in the future, this era of widely legal abortion will be seen with horror as a misguided legal aberration. Until then, we need to work hard and hold fast.

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# The papal AI imagery gripping imaginations



Artists have always made use of the latest technology to produce popular images but recent months have put the Pope at the centre of it, hears **Jason Osborne**

**D**id you see the images circulating social media of the Pope wearing an elegant, white puffer jacket? Were you surprised to see the Holy Father garbed so finely? If so, chances are you were fooled into believing it to be a real image. Generated using the artificial intelligence (AI) programme 'Midjourney', hundreds of thousands – if not millions at this stage – of people were fooled into thinking that the Pope was strutting about Rome wearing a designer coat.

This deceptive trend is sweeping the internet – in the weeks before the papal picture, AI-generated images of Donald Trump being arrested in New York went viral, in what some commentators referred to as the first known case of widespread AI-generated misinformation. Many other celebrities and cultural figures have become the subject matter too in this cutting-edge, hyper-modern visual artistry.

## Focal point

However, Pope Francis has become something of a focal point in the world of AI artwork, and his popularity isn't limited to the Catholic corners of this emerging practice. Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper, Dr Paul Caffrey of the National College of Art and Design (NCAD)

ascribed the phenomenon to Pope Francis's status as a "secular hero", a Pope whose popularity extends beyond the bounds of the Church.

"I think it's that Pope Francis is so easily recognisable. He's recognisable, and he's enormously prevalent in popular culture. I mean, he's a popular culture hero because he's seen as 'anti-establishment' and going against the grain, and I think it's his recognisability among non-Catholics... it's his popularity in the secular world that makes him such a popular figure in popular culture," Dr Caffrey explains.

"I think he's seen as this anti-establishment kind of figure in popular culture, he appears in caricature and cartoons in that sort of way too. His individuality more than the fact that he's the Pope. I don't think it's making a Catholic comment – I think it's him, I think it's the cult of Francis as this really popular figure in popular culture."

The origins of the image in question would certainly support this thesis. Created by 31-year-old construction worker in Chicago, Pablo Xavier, it wasn't out of any sort of Catholic sentiment that the idea for the papal image emerged.

**“His predecessor Pope Benedict did wear very beautiful jackets that were commercially produced – apart from the shoes and everything else, so we do expect that, but not maybe with Pope Francis”**

"I'm trying to figure out ways to make something funny because that's what I usually try to do," he told *BuzzFeed News*.

"I try to do funny stuff or trippy art – psychedelic stuff. It just dawned on me: I should do the Pope. Then it was just coming like water: 'The Pope in Balenciaga puffy coat, Moncler, walking the streets of Rome, Paris,' stuff like that," he said. Clearly then, the image or idea of Pope Francis has spread far beyond those who subscribe to the Church or its teachings. Mr Xavier himself says

later in the same interview that he grew up Catholic but doesn't feel part of the religion today, and that the idea came to him as he just thought it would be "funny to see the Pope in a funny jacket".

Whatever the intentions behind the image, Dr Caffrey said that a number of elements gave the image a real "authenticity" that helped it to fool so many people.

"His predecessor Pope Benedict did wear very beautiful jackets that were commercially produced – apart from the shoes and everything else, so we do expect that, but not maybe with Pope Francis," he said.

"You see, it was papal white, and they included a fascia across his middle, and that gave it a sort of authenticity and the cross, too. A fascia is obviously not included in the commercial one – well, I don't know, maybe it is – so it was adapted for the Pope, with this fascia coming across the middle and the cross. I thought the cross gave it a real authenticity, I mean it looked cool and possible."

## Futuristic

The notion of art created by artificial intelligence might seem outlandishly futuristic and, perhaps to many, undesirable, but Dr Caffrey says that it's an extension of the way in which artists have always co-opted the latest technologies.

"Well, I think art has always been led by innovation and technology and changes in technology. Artists have always responded to new materials and new techniques. You know, in the Renaissance, the development of fresco painting and new ways of doing things and new ways of painting and new materials. Artists have always been on the cutting edge of using new technology and new materials and these are things that are available.

"Of course, when photography was introduced, artists started using photography and collage and cutting out images and then moving images. This is part of that whole trajectory, from photography, through the moving image, to video to digital images to now very high quality AI images, so it's going to be something that's going to be embraced by artists," he explained.

However, there's a commercial edge to the papal image that exploded onto the viral stage, even if that wasn't necessarily the creator's intention, with Dr Caffrey describing it as "an advertisement, a commercial for a luxury goods company".

"The barriers between advertising and art, you know, once you're dealing with creating images and visual culture, all those barriers are broken down and artists will use it in a different way. Not in this obvious way of maybe making that, which was very much advertising a luxury brand, but artists have always cut out photographs and incorporated them in collages and works of art."

One way or another, it seems that the image of Pope Francis has taken root in the "collective consciousness" of the western world, and AI-generated artwork is giving us a clearer glimpse at just what it is that people think of him.



Another AI-generated take on Pope Francis in a designer, puffer jacket.



The image that fooled social media, designed by 31-year-old Pablo Xavier using AI programme 'Midjourney'.

**“His individuality more than the fact that he's the Pope. I don't think it's making a Catholic comment – I think it's him, I think it's the cult of Francis as this really popular figure in popular culture”**



# The paradoxes of King Charles III's ecumenism



**Charles III must manage a 'balancing act' to keep up warm relationship with other faiths, Ruadhán Jones hears**

**W**hen Charles III enters Westminster Abbey on Saturday, May 6, he will do so behind a cross that has relics from the true cross embedded in it, a gift from the Pope. Sending the relic was a "great moment for ecumenism", according to Catherine Pepinster, journalist and author of the book *Defenders of the Faith: The British Monarchy, Religion and the Coronation*.

"It's a really significant ecumenical gesture and one that surprised people," Ms Pepinster tells me. But, she adds, she also finds it perplexing, because having walked up the aisle behind this relic, Charles III is going to swear an oath to be Defender of the Faith, specifically the Protestant reformed religion.

"One of the things they wanted to reform was this kind of veneration of relics," says Ms Pepinster. "We all know what happened during the Reformation, when they had bonfires and destroyed shrines and the relics within them."

## 39 articles

"The Church of England still has its 39 articles which say that relics are repugnant to the Word of God. So I don't fully understand how they square this. But at the same time, as I'm a Catholic, I welcome what this signifies, which is clearly a warm relationship between this country and the papacy."

This warm relationship between the Supreme Governor of the Church of England and the Pope is just one example of Charles' ecumenical outreach. In fact, the Prince of Wales, Charles III suggested he would alter his title 'Defender of the Faith' to become 'Defender of Faith', meaning all faiths.

"It caused great consternation among senior Anglican clergy at the time and it's something people have really remembered about Charles," Ms Pepinster says. "In fact a few

years ago, he did kind of retract and said he'd take the title... that issue has been put to bed."

However, Charles hasn't quite given up on his desire to be a more ecumenical leader. He held a reception for faith leaders at Buckingham Palace recently, with different faiths and Christian denominations as well.

"At that reception, he did say that he was a committed Anglican said himself," Ms Pepinster explains. "But he said it was a little known or understood duty of the monarch to protect faith. He's found a way of having it both ways – he's defender of the faith and protector of faith. This interpretation, that it's the duty of the king or the monarch, is a fairly modern invention."

The duty was first noted by Charles' mother Queen Elizabeth II in 2012 when in a speech, she gave as a responsibility of the Church of England, which Charles is to be supreme governor, to ensure the wellbeing of other faiths. "It's a modern notion, but it's one they take seriously," Ms Pepinster.

Charles III's own faith is complex, as he draws inspiration from a wide variety of faith traditions. He has engaged extensively with Islam and Judaism, as well as Catholicism. He attended the Vatican's canonisation ceremony for St John Henry Newman and in an article for *L'Osservatore Romano* acknowledged the influence Newman had on his understanding of conscience.

**“The oil that will be used for the anointing, that's been made using olives from a grove at the cemetery where his grandmother Princess Alice is buried on the Mount of Olives on Jerusalem”**

However, the faith tradition that Ms Pepinster believes really resonates with the new king is Orthodoxy. It's partly a personal connection – his father Prince Philip converted from Greek Orthodoxy when he married into the royal family, while Charles' grandmother converted to Orthodoxy and is buried on the Mount of Olives.

"There's that personal connection," Ms Pepinster says. "But I think there's something about it that resonates with him – an Orthodox service appeals to the senses, it's very visual, there's chanting. It's a very full-on experience, it's quite mystical. All that seems to appeal to him."

"The Greek Orthodox Church was quite ahead of the game when it came to concerns around the environment, that resonated with him too. Greek Orthodoxy in particular



King Charles III – then Prince Charles – visits Irina Bradley's 'Metamorphosis' icon exhibition at the Church of the Immaculate Conception in London February 1, 2022. Photo: CNS/Reuters.

has a special place in his life.

"We're going to see that reflected in the coronation. There's going to be some Greek Orthodox chant and the oil that will be used for the anointing, that's been made using olives from a grove at the cemetery where his grandmother Princess Alice is buried on the Mount of Olives on Jerusalem."

## Defender of Faith

While he stated as Prince Wales that his desire was to be 'Defender of Faith', now Charles III has acknowledged that things are going to be different as king.

"Perhaps he won't be as outspoken as in the past," says Ms Pepinster. "But the work he's done developing relations with these different faiths will stand him in good stead. There seems to be a warmth towards him from the leaders of those different Churches and faiths."

"It's a bit of a balancing act, it's quite delicate. When he had that reception with the different faiths, he did stress that he has this role in the Church of England – it doesn't look like that's changing anytime soon. But at the same time, he does want to have this relationship with other faiths. In a country that he's acknowledged is so diverse, I think that makes sense," she finishes.

**i** Catherine Pepinster is author of *Defenders of the Faith: The British Monarchy, Religion and the Coronation*, published by Hodder and Stoughton April 13 for £12.99.



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### Prof. Myriam Wijlens

Professor of Canon Law Erfurt Germany. She is a member of The Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, an advisor to ARCIC III and a Co-Moderator of the Peter and Paul Seminar.

### Prof. Eamonn Conway

Is a priest of Tuam archdiocese and Professor of Integral Human Development in the School of Philosophy & Theology, University of Notre Dame Australia.

### Mr. Christopher Lamb

Is a British journalist who is the Rome correspondent for *The Tablet*. He is a contributor to the Vatican Insider page of *La Stampa* and a regular commentator for the BBC on Vatican and religious affairs.

### Dr Gemma Simmonds CJ

Is a sister of the Congregation of Jesus, director of the Religious Life Institute and senior lecturer in pastoral theology at the Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology, Cambridge. She teaches Christian spirituality at the Cambridge Theological Federation.

### Prof. Maria Cimperman RSCJ

Is the Associate Professor of Catholic Theological Ethics. Founding Director, Center for the Study of Consecrated Life (2014-2022) and Associate Professor of Consecrated Life Catholic Theological Union (Chicago, USA).

### Prof. Vimal Tirimanna CSsR

Is Professor of Moral Theology at the National Seminary of Our Lady of Lanka, Kandy, Sri Lanka and the Pontifical Alphonsian Academy, Rome.



# Thousands protest against 'extreme' abortion review

**Ruadhán Jones**

Thousands took to the streets in Dublin to protest against the "extreme" recommendations in the review of Ireland's abortion law on Monday, May 1.

The marchers walked from St Stephen's Green to Leinster House, where speakers including Aontú leader Peadar Tóibín TD, Dr Kirsten Fuller and Wendy Grace, criticised the review, which was released last week.

"The recommendation to scrap the life-saving three-day reflection period before an abortion hap-

pens is reckless and the proposal to decriminalise abortion entirely, would, if given effect, clear the way for abortion on request up to birth," said Pro Life Campaign spokesperson Eilis Mulroy at the March.

She called the report a "travesty and betrayal of women and unborn babies" and criticised the way it "undermines freedom of conscience protections for healthcare workers".

As a result of its extreme recommendations, pro-life voters could be "the deciding call in many constituencies on who gets elected and who doesn't", said Ms Mulroy.



Aontú leader Peadar Toibin TD addresses the large crowd that gathered in Dublin on May 1 for the March for Life.



Verity Patrick, Judy Nwokolo and Sylvia Nwokolo at the March for Life.



Theo Kearns (2) from Meath checks out balloons carried in the March for Life in Dublin on Monday, May 1.



Mairead Fleming, Kolbe Grant and Bella Grant at the March for Life in Dublin on Monday.



Michelle Madden, Lea Kosec, Tina Tankovic and Daniel Rochfort turn out in support of the March for Life in Dublin.



Thousands attended the March for Life in Dublin on Monday, May 1, walking from St Stephen's Green to Leinster House to oppose "extreme" recommendations in the abortion review. Photos: John McElroy.



# The Irish Government can't pretend gender ideology is not controversial



Parents will have to fight back if gender ideology is imposed on schools, writes **David Quinn**

A major review into how Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is taught in the country's schools has been underway for some time now with demands that it be brought 'up to date'. This is often code for ditching from RSE classes the last vestiges of traditional sexual morality.

The first product of the review could be taught to Junior Certificate pupils from this September, covering pupils from the age of 12 or 13 to 15 or 16. The new RSE programme (which is part of the Social, Personal and Health Education syllabus) has been before Education Minister, Norma Foley, for the last few weeks, and according to a leaked version of it sent to *The Irish Times*, it will include teaching on pornography, consent, sexual orientation and 'gender identity'.

None of this is necessarily a problem in itself for Catholic schools. It all depends very much on how they are taught.

## Consent

Let's start with the topic of consent. For as long as it has existed, the Catholic Church has believed in sexual consent. Many societies did not. The ancient Greeks and Romans, for example, believed that slaves could be used by their masters as they pleased, but Christians taught that all sex outside marriage is wrong, and that both parties to a marriage must consent to it.

Therefore, the Catholic Church would be the last organisation to oppose consent education. The problem would arise if Catholic schools were told to teach that consent alone is enough, and pupils could



not be taught that sex should take place inside marriage, or failing that, inside a loving relationship.

Consent-alone-is-enough sex education would teach pupils that they need not even know the person they are sleeping with, so long as both parties have consented fully and freely to sex. Do parents really want their children taught this?

## Pornography

Teaching about pornography is also not a problem in itself. The fact is that most pupils, especially boys, watch porn because it is so easily accessible online, and it is often very extreme and violent in content. It goes far beyond the relatively tame fare *Playboy* magazine offered.

If pupils were taught that pornography is totally unrealistic in its depictions of sex and told boys not to disrespect and objectify women the way porn does, that would be one thing. But there are sex educationalists who also want pupils taught that porn can be 'positive'.

For example, a few weeks ago on RTÉ's 'Upfront' programme, sex educationalist, Dr Kate Dawson, was asked by presenter, Katie Hannon, if she believed that porn can be "good, positive, a source for good", she responded, "Yes, I do".

Dr Dawson was also very reluctant to accept a link between violent behaviour and watching porn. She was matched in this by two other sex educationalists who spoke from the audience and refused to say that porn is bad, in itself.

If Catholic schools are made to teach that there is bad porn, but also so-called 'positive' porn, they will have to resist.

## Gender identity

The third possible source of friction is what Catholic schools might be made to teach about 'gender identity'.

According to the version of the junior cycle RSE programme leaked to *The Irish Times*, pupils will be required to appreciate how "sexual orientation and gender identity are experienced and expressed in diverse ways".

Those words 'require' and 'appreciate' (if they really are in the curriculum) are interesting. The word 'require' implies compulsion, while the word 'appreciate' means pupils will have to think in a certain way about the topic under examination.

Again, Catholic schools will have no problem teaching that all pupils, regardless of ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or gender must be treated with full respect. But if they are forced to teach that biological sex and gender are two entirely different things, as though this is a simple matter of fact, then that is a different thing entirely.

It would mean inviting pupils to doubt that they are the same sex as their bodies.

It would teach them that just because they have a male body, it does not follow they are actually male, or if they have a female body, it does not necessarily mean they are female.

They would be taught that a 'boy' might have a female body, or a 'girl' a male body. This is an incredibly controversial theory to be teaching children.

It invites them to doubt whether they are really boys or girls at all, and to question the natural development of their own bodies, especially as they enter puberty. In some cases, teenagers, and especially girls, end up reacting against what is happening to their bodies so strongly that they demand puberty blockers, or even operations to remove female body parts like breasts.

## Controversial

The Government should not pretend that none of this is very controversial. It is just about the most contentious theory you can teach to children, and parents in every school, Catholic or otherwise, will need to be fully and honestly informed of what the Department of

Education wants to teach their children before a single move is made.

They cannot simply be dismissed as 'bigots' for not wanting their children being encouraged by teachers to doubt whether they are really boys or girls at all.

It is also extremely unfair to expect teachers to teach something so controversial and contested.

*The Irish Times* reports that schools will have to teach this proposed RSE syllabus, regardless of ethos. It is not clear whether such a move would even be legal, and it would certainly be against the Education Act (see section 9(d)) to do so without properly consulting parents.

Alan Whelan, of the Catholic Secondary Schools Parents Association, told Newstalk Breakfast last week that Catholic parents "expect the ethos of our schools to be recognised and accepted".

He said: "We also find it frightening that ... this Education Department under Norma Foley has not engaged with parents as partners – we find this absolutely frightening."

He added: "We don't know what is coming and how whatever is coming, is coming in September. Teachers have not been trained."

What we do know is that when the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment was redesigning the RSE programme for junior cycle pupils, it received several thousand submissions from parents concerned about some of the proposed changes, especially around gender ideology.

If the Government really is intent on forcing this ideology on schools, then parents will have to fight back, and Catholic schools will need to support them to the hilt.

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# Persecuted Nigerian Christians face a 'tortured' existence

Graphic content of Christian persecution, reader discretion is advised



Decapitation, mutilated bodies and gunfire haunt a Nigerian priest now based in Ireland, but adoration always helps, Chai Brady hears

**R**eports of the tens of thousands of Christians killed in Nigeria by Islamist extremists over the last decade do not reflect the true horror faced by individuals on a daily basis. A father watching his 13-year-old son's throat slit by a machete, parishioners hiding in mountains for days without food or shelter, corpses littering blood-soaked streets after an attack, are just some of the stories that only touch the surface of the brutal religious persecution unimaginable to westerners.

A report released in April called 'Martyred Christians in Nigeria' issued by Nige-

rian NGO 'Intersociety' documented the killing of at least 52,250 Christians at the hands of Islamist militants in the last 14 years. The attacks relate to the outbreak of the Islamist terrorist group Boko Haram in 2009. The report also found that in the same period 2,200 Christian schools and 18,000 Christian churches were set aflame.

The report documented 30,000 Christians murdered during the eight-year presidency of Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari, who has often been criticised for not doing enough to tackle the persecution of Christians.

Since July of last year Fr Innocent Sunu, from the Diocese of Maiduguri, Nigeria, became the new curate in Ss Peter and Paul's church in Athlone. His home diocese has been one of the hardest hit by Islamist terrorists, and the parish in which he was based is well known for the plethora of vicious attacks it has endured.

## Lawlessness

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Fr Innocent said the situation has developed due to "lawlessness, carelessness of government, and an insensitivity towards people's lives and property".

He described President Muhammadu Buhari's administration as being "pro-Islamic".

"The issue is that most people are scared of speaking, because if you speak, you will be in for it. If you speak, the government will come with all



Fr Innocent brings food to the internally displaced parishioners who fled to the mountains following an attack by Boko Haram in April 2020.

the arms and forces to make sure you are dealt with, you are arrested or made to keep quiet by force," said Fr Innocent.

"Since the inception of this administration from 2014, religious killings, particularly killings of Christians by Muslims or by Fulani militia, and Boko Haram, that has become almost part of our lives now," he said. "Unfortunately it has been given the go ahead by the government because there is an undertone for Islam to take control of Nigeria, particularly in the northeast where Christianity is growing and the Faith has increased and people are happy to be Christians."

**"We had people who died on the road, we had women who gave birth on the road, old men who just collapsed and died, we had women who threw little children into the river simply because they had to escape for their lives"**

"But from nowhere there is this education for the promotion of Islam and the dehumanisation of people who are Christians. A lot of Christians would not have access to practice their religion properly, you've heard of so many people who are killing churches, so many of our churches are being burnt down – so many of our schools, convents – priests are

being killed and kidnapped all over northern Nigeria, particularly in Kaduna, Minna in Niger State and the worst hit in terms of physical destruction and mental and psychological torture will be for those of us who are from Maiduguri diocese," he said.

Describing the situations in which Christians in the diocese have been forced to flee due to attacks, Fr Innocent said: "We have witnessed clearly and openly how thousands of our people had to run, had to flee on foot. We had many men and women who walked for over 100 miles, crossing over to Cameroon. We had people who died on the road, we had women who gave birth on the road, old men who just collapsed and died, we had women who threw little children into the river simply because they had to escape for their lives. In all of this, people received little government attention."

Fr Innocent said Fulani militia or Boko Haram will "openly come and bomb churches and target primarily Christians and kidnap Christian girls, women, boys and men".

## Surrender

Since 2014, when President Buhari came to power, Fr Innocent says the situation has continued to deteriorate and at this point "people are tired, they have no options, they have just surrendered their lives to God because no government will do anything".

In his parish of Madagali

in Maiduguri diocese, there is a curfew for the protection of locals and armed soldiers patrol the town. However, Fr Innocent said the soldiers are ill-equipped and are using guns manufactured more than 50 years ago.

"You will see the soldiers mounting checkpoints, but what are the checkpoints for? The checkpoints are useless, the soldiers know where these terrorists are, so the checkpoints are just intimidating innocent civilians. It's not effective at all and I am saying 100% of the soldiers are willing to work, to protect, but the government, those who are in charge, the military hierarchy, are not supporting the soldiers on the ground," he claimed.

**"They imbue and implant a jihad mentality into the minds of these young boys, they tell them they are fighting jihad, they are fighting for God, and anything that is not Islam is a taboo – to be destroyed"**

"If you go to Nigeria and see the condition of soldiers, you will pity them. The soldiers look unfed, unkept, they are just on the road and are frustrated. Meanwhile, the soldiers know the terrorists are in the bush."

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, with almost 220 million people.

While the number of Christians and Muslims are roughly the same throughout the country – they are the main religions – there is a bigger majority of Muslims in the north while there are more Christians in the south.

## Suffering

Boko Haram continue to attack parishes like Fr Innocent's in the northeast. They are a Salafi-jihadist group fighting to replace the Nigerian state with an Islamic one based on a strict compliance to the Sharia law. According to the European Union Agency for Asylum, the Boko Haram insurgency has adversely affected some 15 million people, displaced over two million people and caused an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 deaths.

The group are known to target young, uneducated Muslim men and boys to join their 'holy war'. Fr Innocent explained: "It's hypnosis. They imbue and implant a jihad mentality into the minds of these young boys, they tell them they are fighting jihad, they are fighting for God, and anything that is not Islam is a taboo – to be destroyed. Sometimes they do a voodoo kind of practice. They give them some liquid to drink and once they drink that liquid their mind is already turned, it is changed towards killing Christians," he said.

"It's a weird, strange ritual that they do, there is no alcohol at all, alcohol is a taboo in Islam, but they do a lot of drugs, cocaine, weed and whatever. I have met a lot of repentant Boko Haram who came to me confidentially. They have come to my parish, some of them have repented, some of them have even converted to Christianity, but we will hardly mention that back home because if we do, they will come for us."

Fr Innocent's Parish of Madagali, he said, has been "attacked severely" by Boko Haram which has specifically targeted Christians. Personally, he witnessed and escaped more than 10 attacks between 2015-2022.

"Shortly before I came to Ireland we were attacked, I'm used to sleeping with my shoes on my feet, so if there is any sound of guns you just escape, you just run," he said, and while he has escaped physical injury, he suffers "psychological injuries".

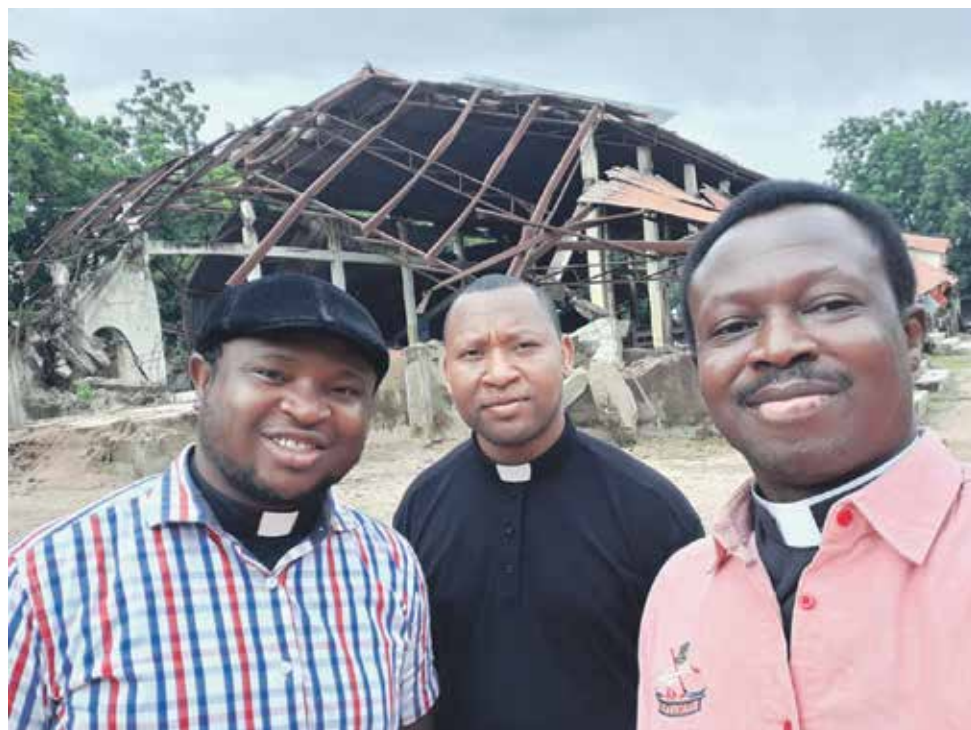
He said many of the attacks start the same, "They come and they are shouting 'Allahu Akbar'. The first place they go to is the church, they target the church."

On one occasion, the son of



Fr Innocent is pictured with a soldier who was responsible for his security.





Fr Joseph Bature and Fr Jerome Odineze visit Fr Innocent Sunu in solidarity after his parish church was destroyed by Boko Haram in 2017.

a catechist in the parish was brutally killed.

Fr Innocent told the story: "The Boko Haram came to the village, and they [parishioners] had all escaped, but the catechist's son forgot his Bible at home and his son said, 'Daddy I have to go pick my Bible' and his father said 'No, don't go back, don't go back'. This little boy ran back, he's about 13 years old, lo and behold the Boko Haram were there in their house and they caught him.

"They told him to kneel down and then he knelt down, I wouldn't know what conversation they had now. The Father was watching when they slit his throat, he couldn't come out, he couldn't shout, he couldn't do anything or he too would be killed.

"He joined the local vigilante group and every day they go into the bush, he comes back to tell me 'father, I have killed two, I have killed three'. Can you imagine that kind of life? I would say to him, 'Allow God to take control we can't continue this way'. Then he will tell me he has to take revenge for his son," Fr Innocent said.

"From that day up to today I don't know if he has headed my advice. Up to today he goes into the bush together with some of the soldiers who are serious, they go for ambush – they call it ambush."

### Mountains

Many times, Fr Innocent has had to flee into the mountains near his town with other parishioners, surviving there for several days without proper food and water supplies, until things quieten down.

He was extremely grateful for the assistance of Donegal-born Kiltegan priest Fr Kevin O'Hara, a well-known peacebuilder in Nigeria.

2020 he received the Presidential Distinguished Services Award for his human rights work. Fr O'Hara founded the Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Centre in Eastern Nigeria.

**“He has arranged for my trauma counselling many times and he paid for them. I needed that, I needed to have my head back. I have seen dead bodies like the way I am seeing milk in Ireland”**

Fr Innocent said: "Fr Kevin came to my rescue because he knows of my story. The story of my parish is all over Nigeria, everyone knows in Nigeria the persecution that we face directly, the diocese and particularly my parish of Madagali. I used to run to Fr Kevin, he would be the one to call me and ask, 'Where are you?' I would tell him 'I

have escaped'. He would tell me to come to Lagos, come to his house immediately.

"I would go to his home and I would cry, and we would cry together, he would console me. In fact he has arranged for my trauma counselling many times and he paid for them. I needed that, I needed to have my head back. I have seen dead bodies like the way I am seeing milk in Ireland," he said.

"I have buried people and their blood is dripping in the church, I have buried people without heads, legs, and arms – just remnants of their bodies. I have seen soldiers whose legs were just pulled out because they stepped on an IED (Improvised Explosive Device). I have seen soldiers whose stomach was open because of bullet shots and I've had to take them to the nearest hospital in my car. I have driven soldiers to the hospital because their vehicles wouldn't even work. I have taken a soldier whose intestines he was holding in his hands, and I was driving



Fr Paul Hardy SPS from Belfast, who was responsible for supplying all the sacramentals to Madagali parish, Fr Innocent and Fr Kevin O'Hara SPS, who helped maintain Fr Innocent's daily expenses.

him, and he was telling me 'Thank you Father, thank you for saving my life'."

### Kidnapping

Nigeria can be a particularly dangerous place to follow a priestly vocation. According to information collected by *Aid to the Church in Need* (ACN), Nigeria was the country with the highest number of priests murdered in 2022 – four in total.

**“Priests are victims because they are easily noticed – it's not like here in Ireland you don't see priests wearing the cassock – but in Nigeria we wear the white cassock”**

Kidnapping is also a very real threat as more priests were kidnapped in Nigeria than anywhere else the same year, 28 altogether.

Fr Innocent said: "The

hatred for Christianity has always been there in northern Nigeria but now it has become so intense that it is all over Nigeria. Priests are victims because they are easily noticed – it's not like here in Ireland you don't see priests wearing the cassock – but in Nigeria we wear the white cassock."

### Ireland

Fr Innocent said it is important for the people of Ireland to know what is happening in Africa and particularly in Nigeria as it was Irish missionaries who brought the Gospel to the country.

"For us in Nigeria, we know that Rome is where our leader, His Holiness Pope Francis, is. But in Nigeria, we cherish Ireland, we give Ireland the honour and the respect, and our Catholic life is connected to Ireland. So the Irish people need to know the extent at which they are revered, they are respected, and then the extent at which the people whom they are taking the Gospel to are now suffering," he said.

Asked how he has been able to get through the many horrors he has experienced and witnessed, Fr Innocent

said that whenever he begins to feel discouraged, he takes solace in the Blessed Sacrament which he has in a small monstrance.

When in Nigeria, he said he would "expose the Blessed Sacrament, and I will lie down on the bare cement floor in one of the rooms and I will begin sporadic prayer, sometimes the rosary, the Divine office, any prayer, but I will lie down prostrate, flat, and before I know it I will have good sleep. When I get up from the good sleep I will have energy to carry on for the next week".

Nowadays he faces a very different reality in his presbytery in Athlone.

"Now in the house we have a chapel, every day I have the Blessed Sacrament exposed in the chapel and if I want to have the best moment of my life I just sit down in a very comfortable chair – this is heaven now for me not like where I was in Nigeria – and I am now with Jesus. I sit down, very comfortable and I listen to Jesus. Sometimes I imagine myself back at home, but I am now in the heaven of Athlone," he said.

» Continued on Page 14



Josephine Aube, who was born with a physical disability, receives a donation from Fr Innocent of about €200. They also funded her wheelchair. Her whole family were killed by Boko Haram.

## Marian Movement of Priests

Regional Cenacle in Franciscan Friary, Rosnowlagh, Co Donegal

**On 13th May 2023**

'Feast day of Our Lady of Fatima' commencing at **11.00 am**

The day will consist of **Rosaries, Mass, Adoration & Confessions**

Led by **Fr. Rory Brady**

(Bring a packed lunch  
tea will be provided)





# 'Tell everyone I have died for the sake of Christ'



## Madagali: An account of a parish surrounded by terrorists, Chai Brady writes

**F**or Fr Innocent Sunu, who was the parish priest of embattled Madagali parish in the Diocese of Maiduguri in northeast Nigeria, the attack by the terrorist group Boko Haram on the evening of February 19, 2020 will stay with him more than the multitude of other attacks his parish has endured.

The priest was having a meeting with the parish council at 4pm and there was tea and coffee at about 5pm. Afterwards everyone returned home, due to the night-time curfew put in place by the government, and enforced by soldiers, because of terrorist activities in the area.

Due to this, no one in the town goes out again until 7am the next day, according to Fr Innocent. If someone is seen travelling in the town outside of the hours of curfew, the soldiers may assume the individual is a member of Boko Haram.

**“I know almost every sound of a gun. If you shoot an AK-47, I’ll know the name of the gun, I have the sound of every gun in my head because of the kind of life I have lived”**

Fr Innocent explained: “Here we have lived a very terrible and tortured life. On February 19, 2020, we had finished the meeting, everyone went home, and then all of a sudden we heard a bang. It was a bomb, a big bomb exploded, so all of a sudden there was this unusual silence. I was in my house, just a one-room apartment. It’s a basic facility.

“All of a sudden we started hearing the sounds of guns, I know almost every sound of a gun. If you shoot an AK-47, I’ll know the name of the gun, I have the sound of every gun in my head because of the kind of life I have lived. We now heard the sound of guns and normally if we hear the gunshots of soldiers, we know that these are soldiers, if we hear gunshots of Boko Haram we know they are Boko Haram,” he said.

“Members of Boko Haram cut the mouth of their guns, the sound becomes different so they will be able to identify the sounds of their guns from that of the soldiers. The soldiers too have AK-47s, but Boko Haram, unfortunately for the soldiers, are better equipped than the soldiers. They have more sophisticated guns.”

Fr Innocent alleges they are spon-

sored by politicians within Nigeria’s own government as well as Islamic nations in the Middle East.

Continuing his story, Fr Innocent said that after parishioners heard the bomb, there was the sound of gunshots and at this time people still were unsure exactly what was happening.

One of the men in the parish ran to the priest’s house and said, “they are here!” Fr Innocent asked him who he was talking about, he replied “Boko Haram”.

“I now said, Jesus Christ, what will we do,” Fr Innocent told *The Irish Catholic*, “But before I even made any move, the whole town was surrounded by Boko Haram, I mean it from my heart, the whole town. I climbed a tree in the parish, and I could see them, they were already at the entrance of the town, they had about six Helix Toyota trucks – it’s a pickup truck, it’s very strong, durable.

“There was over 100 of them on motorcycles. They were shooting sporadically; the soldiers came out and it was a battle between soldiers and Boko Haram. I came down from this tree and I was hearing bullet shots pass through my ear, like it was a song I was hearing, like music,” he said, and demonstrated the different noises he had heard on the night.

### Attack

This particular attack, Fr Innocent said, he remembers better than others because in this instance there was no way of getting out. He said: “They had taken over the town, there was no means of escape. I was in my house, there was nowhere to hide. I went into my wardrobe, there was no space to hide, I went into my bathroom, and I locked myself in. A priest called me and said that Boko Haram are attacking my parish, ‘Where are you?’ I said, ‘I’m in the parish’, and they said ‘Come out! Come out!’ I said to them I could not come out because the road is taken over by the Boko Haram, I was telling them ‘Please pray for us, just in case I die tell my mother that I love her, and tell everyone I have died for the sake of Christ’.

“The priests were pitying me and telling me to find a way of escaping, to do my best to escape,” he said.

Whenever there is an attack, Fr Innocent explains, information regarding the incident is spread immediately and his family, and his bishop, will call and ask him of his circumstances.

**“All the pictures on the walls of my house, they all fell down because of the bombs, they were shaking the whole house”**

This time, Fr Innocent admits: “I told myself that was my last day, I took my alb, I put it on, I put on one of the stoles in my room, I carried one of the chasubles and put it on and I sat in my living room and I said to myself now they can come and kill me because I am fully dressed as a priest. I am prepared just in case they come to my house.

“So that if they kill me, people will be able to identify that this is a priest.



Fr Innocent sits with children whose parents were killed by Boko Haram. Up to today the children are relying on the charitable efforts of Catholics around the world through the diocese.



Women whose husbands were killed by Boko Haram receive donations from Lifesitenews.ie in January, 2022.

I was fully ready,” he said.

“I sat there listening to all the gunshots and the bombs, now I tell you all the pictures on the walls of my house, they all fell down because of the bombs, they were shaking the whole house,” Fr Innocent said. He mentions pictures of the Pope, his bishop and his late father which fell from the walls due to the tremors.

“The gunshots continued, and I heard movement within my compound, so I peeked through the window and I saw soldiers, but you see you don’t know who is the real soldier and who is the fake soldier because Boko Haram also dress like soldiers.

“I just kept quiet, the only thing I had on me was my clerical dress, my phone and my rosary on my neck. So immediately I removed my rosary and began to pray. While I was still hearing gunshots, I saw one of the boys that used to hang around the parish, I saw him together with the soldiers so I now said, ‘Could it be that they have captured this boy?’

“But despite my tension, and my anxiety at that time, I was able to recognise one of the soldiers – one of the soldiers that comes to church, even though he is not a Catholic he comes to our Masses, so I began to have hope,” he said.

“Immediately I heard them saying ‘Where is the priest?’ So the boy came and he shouted ‘Father!’ through the window and I said ‘Yes, Dennis’ – the name of the boy is Dennis – and he

said to the soldiers ‘Father is inside’. So the soldiers came and they said ‘Father are you OK?’

I said ‘Yes, I am OK’.

Fr Innocent continued: “This is what the soldiers said to me, ‘Father, wherever you are, just lie down flat on the floor, don’t stand up. Don’t do anything just lie down flat on the ground because the battle has just started, if you stand up you might be hit by a stray bullet or by a bomb.’”

### Smoke

At this point Fr Innocent said the whole town was in smoke, and that was when he remembered his dog, and began to search for him.

“I crawled outside, and I saw my dog had hidden under my car. I crawled using my hands and my knees, I crawled, I told him – the name of my dog is Billy – I said ‘Billy, come out! Come out! (the dog was whimpering). Then I dragged him out, I went into my sitting room. He didn’t enter my sitting room he was lying out on the veranda.”

The gunshots continued until about 10pm that night, but as Fr Innocent says sometimes the attacks last the whole night. He did not sleep, except for a “power nap” at 5am.

At 6am, the soldiers returned and told him they were going to escort him out of the parish in his car, explaining that Boko Haram said they would come back again within 24 hours. The soldiers informed Fr Innocent he



Fr Innocent stands with a Catholic government soldier and his wife after their wedding in April 2020.

should not return until he heard from them again – he did not return for two weeks.

**“In that situation you will have people who tell you ‘Father please don’t come back, we love you we don’t want you to die, just stay’”**

After that, Fr Innocent said: “The soldiers rang me and said: ‘Father you can come back now, we have taken control no problem, we are missing you.’”

He explained: “In that situation you will have people who tell you ‘Father please don’t come back, we love you we don’t want you to die, just stay’. But then we have some people who tell you ‘Oh Father please we need you, please come back we are missing your Mass’.

“Most of the time if they attack us like that and I have to escape, I usually escape to Fr Kevin O’Hara [Kiltegan], he is my saviour, apart from Jesus Christ and my parents there is no saviour in the world like Fr Kevin.”

Fr Innocent has returned to the parish many times and endured persecution with his flock but is now based in Athlone which he describes as “heaven” compared to the “tortured” existence he faced in northeast Nigeria.



# Honesty needed about pain of North's past – Bishop McKeown

Ruadhán Jones

**T**he pain of the North's past must be processed through the lens of truth and not in manner politically expedient for the strong, Bishop of Derry Donal McKeown has said.

To build a future for people, the North needs an "honest story about the past with its highs and lows", said Bishop McKeown at a Mass celebrating the 150th anniversary of St Eugene's Cathedral, Derry.

"When history is written by the strong, the little ones who suffered are easily forgotten about," he said in his homily on

Sunday, April 30.

"Honesty about the past has to be a central plank for both Church and politicians.

"The pain of the past has to be processed through the lens of truth, not merely through what is politically expedient for the strong."

St Eugene's Cathedral is the mother church of the Diocese of Derry, which stretches from Malin head to Omagh, and from Killygordon to Bellaghy. It was opened and dedicated on May 4, 1873. The foundation stone of the Cathedral had been laid in 1851. It took 22 years to build.

At the end of this Mass every parish in the diocese of Derry was presented with two oak trees.





# THE SYNODAL TIMES



**MAY  
2023 ISSUE**

One year on from the Synodal Listening process, Editor Garry O'Sullivan pleads with Irish Archbishop Eamonn Martin as Chair of the Irish Bishops Conference to try unite the Irish bishops and their priests if the national synod in Ireland is to have a chance. He calls for professional change managers to be employed and for resources to be deployed for any chance of a synodal success story. New wine for new wine skins he says.

We have full reports of the Latin American Continental Stage and North American Continental Stage.

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# Out&About

## The best of the best...



**GALWAY:** Staff and sisters from Kylemore Abbey are pictured with the employer excellence award which they won at the Failte Ireland Employer Excellence awards 2023.



**TYRONE:** St Eugene's Primary School Tircur are pictured with a cheque for £460 for Trócaire raised over Lent, holding an Easter Egg raffle, a 'guess the number of sweets in the jar' competition, a bake sale and much more to raise the funds.



**DUBLIN:** Cathal Burke, Eoin Burke, Joe Gifford, Seán Rowden and Jamie McDonnell from Ardscoil Rís are pictured with Senator Rónán Mullen and Fr Tony O'Riordan SJ, who is coordinating the Jesuits' response to the crisis in Syria, at the breakfast for Aleppo Senator Mullen organised in Leinster House to raise funds for his cause, on April 20.

### INSHORT

#### Dublin archbishop hopes Stardust inquest brings closure

The archbishop of Dublin has said he hopes the inquest into the deaths of 48 people in the Stardust fire will reveal the truth about the disaster.

The blaze at the Stardust Ballroom in Artane in the north of Dublin city occurred in the early hours of Valentine's Day 1981.

It was the worst fire disaster in the history of the Irish State. A long-awaited inquest opened April 25 and could last up to six months.

Archbishop Dermot Farrell welcomed the news, saying that "A whole community was traumatised in the horror of that dreadful night".

"So many families have endured enormous suffering, and in these days are re-living the horror of that night, which is seared into the hearts and memories of two generations," he said, April 26.

Their "grievous loss" has been compounded by a long quest for a full and transparent account of the tragedy that satisfies their need for truth and justice, Archbishop Farrell continued.

"I pray that the inquest now under way will be the beginning and the end of their quest for the truth to be revealed," he finished.

#### Catholic schools victorious at Dublin film festival

Two Catholic schools were among the three winners at Dublin City's first 'Rubbish Film

Festival' announced on April 24.

Students from Loreto College, St Stephen's Green beat off 27 other contenders for best film with their entry, *The Bottle*, while St Mary's Holy Faith Secondary School Glasnevin won best poster.

The festival was held on a pilot basis this year with entries from 15 participating schools across the city producing 28 short films.

The festival challenged students to create a one-minute short film focusing on the topics of litter, waste prevention and responsible consumption, with participating schools receiving onsite learning and support to help students produce their entries.

Lord Mayor of Dublin Caroline Conroy said, she is "delighted with the success of the 'Rubbish Film Festival'.

"The students have shown great creativity,

and their enthusiasm for environmental issues has been inspiring. We hope that the festival will encourage others to take action and promote sustainability in the city."

#### Station Mass tradition going strong in Roscrea

The tradition of hosting house Station Masses is going strong in Roscrea, with 42 people attending a recent Mass in the Ballycleary, Ballybrack and Glasscloon area.

The celebration is held twice yearly in Spring and October and nine families take it in turn to host the mass.

On April 13, the Browne family opened their home to the 42 people assembled for the event.





**DOWN:** Confirmation students from Cooley Parish, Co. Louth, take part in a day retreat on St Patrick's Way on April 20. The 52 students are pictured outside the St Patrick's Centre with Fr Malachy Conlon PP and their teachers, as well as Elaine Kelly and Martina Purdy as their St Patrick's Way pilgrim guides. The children are making their Confirmation on May 13 with Bishop Michael Router at St James Church Grange, Co. Louth.



**DOWN:** The Cooley Parish students enjoy a canoe trip up to and back from the monastic site of Inch Abbey, inspired by the footprints of Patrick's time in Downpatrick.



**DUBLIN:** Dr David Kennedy launches his 'Conversations from the Classroom' podcast with special guest Dr Raymond Friel in Dublin City University on April 24.



**BRAZIL:** While passing through Sao Paulo, Bishop of Elphin Kevin Doran is warmly welcomed at lunch by the four Kiltegan Missionaries based there. Pictured are (from left) Fr Eddie (Gorteen), Fr Aidan (Kiltoom), Fr Dermot (Ennis), and Fr Neil (Scotland). They are pictured here with Fr Tony Conry (Elphin) and Bishop Doran (seated) on April 19.



**LIMERICK:** Minister for Education and Skills, Norma Foley and Joe Lyons, retired school principal of St Joseph's NS, Ballybrown, Limerick and current national chairperson of Cumann na mBunscol are pictured with All Ireland Hurling trophy, the Liam McCarthy Cup, at the Catholic Primary School Managers Association (CPSMA) annual congress, held in Limerick on April 24-25.



**KILDARE:** Archbishop Rino Fisichella (second from left), Pro-Prefect of the Vatican Dicastery for Evangelisation is pictured with Primate of All Ireland Archbishop Eamon Martin, Spirit Radio presenter Wendy Grace and Archbishop of Dublin Dermot Farrell during a break in the vocations conference in Maynooth on April 25. Photo: John McElroy.



Edited by Ruadhán Jones  
Ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie

Events deadline is a week in  
advance of publication



**TIPPERARY:** The Brown family open their home for the 42 people assembled for the station Mass in the parish of Roscrea under the stewardship of Fr John Molloy PP on April 13.



**ARMAGH:** Archbishop of Armagh Eamon Martin joins family and friends after the 11am Mass in St Patrick's Cathedral, as he celebrates the 10th anniversary of his Episcopal Ordination, on Sunday April 23.



**DOWN:** Workmen remove the cross on the roof of the chancel of Newry cathedral so that it can be restored, on April 26.



**DUBLIN:** Students from Loreto College, St Stephen's Green, winners of the Dublin City 'Rubbish Film Festival', are pictured with Lord Mayor of Dublin Caroline Conroy (front, centre). Pictured in the front row (from left) are: Ava Roche, Maebh O'Donovan, Lord Mayor of Dublin Caroline Conroy, Talulla D'Arcy, Grace Saville; middle row Muireann Emerson, Jeules Elliott; back row Audrey Duff (DCC), Sarah Fynes (Loreto College), Peter Baxter (CreateSchool). Photo: Peter Houlihan.

## ANTRIM

Novena to Our Lady takes place in St Patrick's Church, Crebilly, finishing May 9, every evening at 7.30pm. The theme is 'Sharing Christ's dream for the Church today'.

## ARMAGH

As part of St Patrick's Cathedral's 150 anniversary celebrations, all religious of the Archdiocese of Armagh are invited to 12 noon Midday Prayer followed by a presentation on the history of St Patrick's Cathedral on May 12. Refreshments to follow in the Synod Hall.

## CAVAN

Christian meditation takes place every Thursday evening at 7pm in the Conference Room at the back of Cavan Cathedral.

## CORK

Cobh Darkness into Light takes place on May 6 at 4.15am. St Colman's Cathedral and Christ Church will open its doors to everyone to light a candle or say a prayer.

Monastic vocations weekend hosted by St Benedict's Priory, Cobh, to take place May 6-7. An opportunity to discern alongside the community. Contact 021 4811 354 or cobhtyburnconvent@gmail.com for more information.

## DERRY

The Little Way Novena in honour of St Thérèse of Lisieux to take place at St Eugene's Cathedral from Saturday May 6 until Sunday May 14. The Novena begins with a Mass with the Anointing of the sick at 7.30pm on Saturday May 6.

## DONEGAL

Healing service to take place in Rossnowlagh Franciscan friary on Sunday, May 7, starting with the rosary at 2.45pm and followed by Mass and healing service at 3pm. Confessions before and after Mass.

## DUBLIN

The Carmelite Third Order/Lay Carmel meet on the third Saturday of every month in the Oratory of Whitefriar street church at 3pm. New members welcome.

'Life in the Spirit' seminars take place in the Ignatian chapel at Gardiner Street Church every Monday from 7-9.30pm until May 15. Next talk May 8.

## GALWAY

Eucharistic adoration takes place in Galway cathedral from Monday to Friday from 11.30am-6pm and on Sunday from 1.15-6pm.

## KILDARE

Naas parish to pray the rosary at the grotto outside Our Lady and St David's Church at 8pm each evening in May, culminating with the Prayer for Life Novena for the last nine days of May.

## KILKENNY

Conversations with women in the Bible, a day to explore insights from their stories and God's transforming presence in their lives takes place in Pembroke Hotel on Saturday, May 13. Speaker is Sr Therese Fitzgerald SND.

## LEITRIM

Daily Rosary at 6pm in St Joseph's Church, Leitrim Village.

Ballinamore Parish Pastoral Council and community to host a Padre Pio healing Mass in St Patrick's Church, Ballinamore, on Thursday May 25 at 7pm. Fr Bryan Shortall, National Director of Padre Pio Ministry, and Bro. James Connolly in attendance. There will be individual blessings after the Mass with Relics of St Pio.

Life in the Spirit seminars take place on Wednesdays at 8pm in Aras Pádraig, Drumshanbo.

## LOUTH

Bethany house to host a time of peace and silent prayer in candlelight, with the music of Taize on Friday, May 5 from 8-9pm followed by tea/coffee in "Bethany" 34 Point Road, Dundalk A91 WOC 9. Contact: 042-9331602.

During the month of May the rosary will be prayed at Our Lady's Grotto St Oliver Plunkett Church, Blackrock, every evening at 7pm.

A Novena to St Gerard takes place every Wednesday at 9.30am and 7.30pm in

St Joseph's Redemptorist Church, Dundalk.

## MEATH

Vigil takes place in Knock parish church on Friday May 5, commencing with Confessions from 8-9pm and Vigil from 9pm until midnight including rosary, holy hour and Mass.

Youth 2000's Leinster retreat takes place May 5-7 in Ashbourne Community School for ages 16-35. More information on www.youth2000.ie

## SLIGO

A Youth 2000 prayer gathering for young adults aged 18-35 takes place in the side chapel of St Anne's Church, Cranmore Road on the first Monday of every month at 8pm.

## TIPPERARY

Evening of prayer and fellowship for women on the first Monday of every month at Holy Family Mission, Glencomeragh. Begins with rosary at 7.30pm, Mass at 8pm followed by tea/coffee and lots of chat.

## TYRONE

The Seven Joys of Our Lady fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order meets each second Tuesday of the month in St Brigid's chapel, Brocagh, Clonoe Parish, at 7pm followed by exposition of the Blessed Sacrament from 8-9pm.

## WATERFORD

Encounter experience for young adults 18-35 takes place Friday May 12 at 8pm in St John's Church, Parnell Street. Inspiring talk, followed by a short time of prayer, music then refreshments and fellowship.

## WESTMEATH

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place in the Cathedral of Christ the King, Mullingar, Monday to Friday from 2-7pm.

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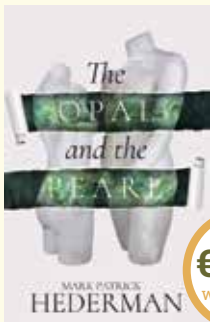
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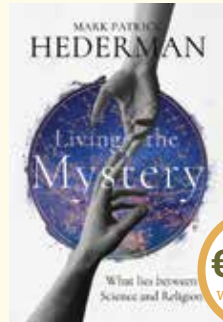
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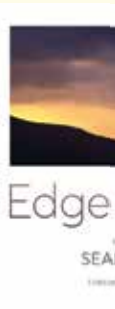
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# Spring

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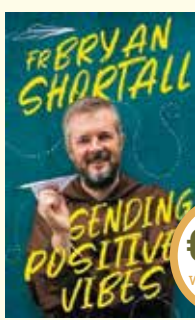
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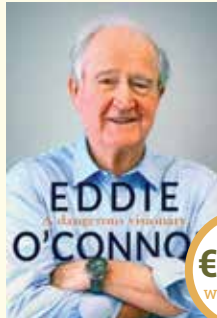
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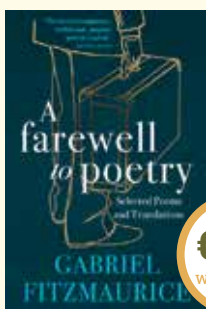
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Cindy Wooden

**Budapest, Hungary** – Paying homage to Hungary's history, culture and location in the heart of Europe, Pope Francis pushed against the notion that the country needed to insulate itself to protect its identity.

As expected, in his first speech in Hungary – to government and civic leaders and diplomats serving in Budapest – the Pope acknowledged efforts to protect traditional values, but insisted those values include supporting European unity, welcoming migrants and working to end the war in neighbouring Ukraine.

The “passionate quest of a politics of community and the strengthening of multilateral relations seems a wistful memory from a distant past,” he said April 28 in his speech at the former Carmelite monastery that now houses the office of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.

“More and more,” the Pope said, “enthusiasm for building a peaceful and stable community of nations seems to be cooling, as zones of influence are marked out, differences accentuated, nationalism is on the rise and ever harsher judgments and language are used in confronting others.”

The 86-year-old Pope, who was released from the hospital April 1 after what the Vatican said was a bout of bronchitis and who frequently has been using a wheelchair or walker because of knee problems, simply used a cane when he walked the length of the ITA Airways plane to greet journalists during the two-hour

# Pope Francis speaks to



Hungarian children in traditional dress present Pope Francis with salt and bread, a customary welcome for honoured guests, as he arrives at the international airport in Budapest, Hungary, April 28. The Pope was beginning a three-day trip to Hungary's capital. Photos: CNS/Vatican Media

flight from Rome.

He joked about his health – “weeds never die” – and, in response to a Polish journalist who thanked him for defending St John Paul II, the Pope described as “foolishness” rumours that the Polish pope was somehow involved in the disappearance in 1983 of Emanuela Orlandi, a 15-year-old Vatican resident.

Pope Francis continued using the cane instead of a wheelchair as he walked down the red carpet at the Budapest airport and around the presidential Sándor Palace where he met privately for 25 minutes with Hungarian President Katalin Novák and then for 20 minutes

with Mr Orbán.

Ms Novák, welcoming Pope Francis to the meeting with government and civic representatives, told him Hungarians expected to receive encouragement from him in their quest to help make Europe “more peaceful, more democratic and stronger”.

“Over the past 30 years,” she told him, Hungarian Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants have joined forces in “the ecumenism of the preservation of Christian values,” specifically regarding marriage, family life and abortion.

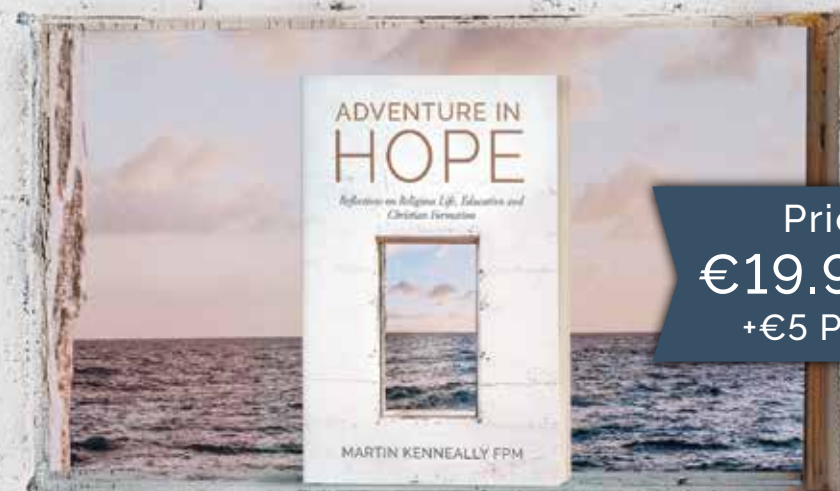
In his speech, Pope Francis told those gathered that around the globe politics is



Pope Francis sits with Hungarian President Katalin Novák during a courtesy visit at Sándor Palace in Budapest, Hungary, April 28.

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# the heart of Europe in Hungary

showing signs of an “adolescent belligerence” that seems more about stirring up emotions than resolving problems.

“Peace will never come as the result of the pursuit of individual strategic interests, but only from policies capable of looking to the bigger picture, to the development of everyone: policies that are attentive to individuals, to the poor and to the future, and not merely to power, profit and present prospects,” Pope Francis said.

That attention, he said, must allow room for the different countries of the European Union and the different communities within each nation to assert their own identities but not at the cost of denigrating or denying the rights of others.

Mentioning some areas of common ground with Orbán’s government, Pope Francis described as “ideological colonisation” efforts to promote acceptance across Europe of “so-called gender theory,” which sees gender as a social construct rather than a biological fact, and “reductive concepts of freedom, for example by vaunting as progress a senseless ‘right to abortion,’ which is always a tragic defeat”.

“How much better it would be to build a Europe centred on the human person and on its peoples,” he said, pointing positively to Hungary’s pro-family policies that encourage married couples to have children.

But Pope Francis also used the words of St Stephen, the 11 Century king of Hungary, to draw attention to the theme of migration, a major area of difference with Mr Orbán who, since 2015, has promoted a “no migrants” policy.

Pope Francis attends a welcoming ceremony at Sándor Palace in Budapest, Hungary, April 28.



## Hungarian clergy told to recognise God at work in the world

Fear, anger and rigidity will do nothing to reverse the growth of secularism and a decline in the number of Catholics attending Mass, Pope Francis said; the only effective response is to give a living example of faith.

“The Church to which we must aspire,” he said, is “a Church capable of mutual listening, dialogue and care for the most vulnerable, a Church welcoming to all and courageous in bringing the prophetic message of the Gospel to everyone”.

Pope Francis met with 1,100 bishops, priests, seminarians, religious and catechists in the Basilica of St Stephen in Budapest April 28, the first day of his three-day trip to the Hungarian capital. Another 4,000 churchworkers were seated in the square in front of the basilica, watching on video screens.

Dominican Sr Krisztina Hernády, who works with six other sisters in southeastern Hungary, told Pope Francis that decades of hardship and of communism left most people in the region with no idea that there is “a God who loves us personally and cares for us”.

**“His most important prayer intentions, he said, are for ‘good Christian families and good priestly vocations’”**

“We are confronted with people’s physical and, especially, spiritual poverty every day,” she said. “My sisters and I are working to be instruments of God through which we can show those who live there the joy of the Gospel.”

Fr József Brenner, the 88-year-old brother of martyred Blessed János Brenner, told Pope Francis that,

“blessed by two parents who lived a holy life,” he and both his brothers became priests.

His most important prayer intentions, he said, are for “good Christian families and good priestly vocations”.

Playing on the image of the Catholic family as a “domestic Church,” Fr Sándor Kondás, a married Eastern Catholic priest, told Pope Francis he and his wife were intent on building a cathedral through their marriage and family life. Now, after years of marriage and with five children, including one with Down syndrome, they may not have built a cathedral, but “we at least have constructed an ‘emergency chapel’ where anyone can enter at any time”.

And that kind of openness is one of the prescriptions Pope Francis had for the Catholic Church in Hungary, and elsewhere. The Vatican’s English translation of his text used the phrase “prophetic receptivity,” while his original Italian also could be translated as “prophetic welcome”.

“Prophetic receptivity is



Above: Pope Francis meets with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán at Sándor Palace in Budapest, Hungary, April 28. Below: Pope Francis is accompanied by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and President Katalin Novák to see a view of the city of Budapest and the Danube River from the terrace at the former Carmelite monastery that now houses the office of the prime minister April 28. He had just given his first speech in Hungary to government and civic leaders and diplomats serving in Budapest.

about learning how to recognise the signs of God in the world around us, including places and situations that, while not explicitly Christian, challenge us and call for a response,” the Pope said.

Even in Hungary, “with its solid tradition of faith,” he said, “we witness the spread of secularism and its effects, which often threaten the integrity and beauty of the family, expose young people to lifestyles marked by materialism and hedonism and lead to polarisation regarding new issues and challenges”.

## Church must be ‘fluent’ in ‘language of charity’

The vestibule of the Church of St Elizabeth of Hungary was decorated with children’s drawings for Pope Francis – many of them depicting him with a Ukrainian flag, praying for peace.

There also were several that showed the Pope wearing his zucchetto and a soccer jersey with the colours of Argentina’s flag, but that was beside the point April



Pope Francis bows in his head in prayer at the Basilica of St Stephen in Budapest, Hungary, April 28, as he holds a reliquary containing the hand of St Stephen, the king of Hungary who died in 1038.



Pope Francis gives thumbs up to a group of seminarians during a meeting April 28, in the Basilica of St Stephen in Budapest, Hungary.





Pope Francis blesses children at the Blessed László Batthyány-Strattmann Institute in Budapest April 29. Since 1982, the institute serves children with limited vision, mobility issues and other special needs.



Csaba Kovesi holds the pilgrim's crucifix he drives around to Roma communities in Hungary during a meeting with Pope Francis in St Elizabeth of Hungary Church in Budapest April 29.



Pope Francis applauds as dancers perform during a meeting with youth at the László Papp Sport Arena during his apostolic journey in Budapest, Hungary, April 29, 2023. Photo: OSV News/Bernadett Szabo, Reuters.

29 as Pope Francis met in the Budapest church with Roma, refugees, the poor and the many Catholics from all over Hungary who assist them.

Before arriving at the Church, he visited a Catholic institute for children with limited vision, mobility issues and other special needs.

The meeting at the Blessed László Batthyány-Strattmann Institute mostly involved music and prayer – no speeches were planned. The director of the institute, though, recited the familiar “Prayer of St Francis,” which includes the series of petitions: “Where there is hatred let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith. ...”

Thanking him for choosing that prayer, the Pope described it as “pure Gospel” because it looks at reality, sees what is missing and asks God to give the believer the strength to make a difference.

While the Pope was at the institute, some 600 people were waiting for him inside the Church of St Elizabeth, named for the 13 Century Hungarian princess who used all her money to build a hospital where she herself cared for the sick and poor.

Among those waiting was Olesia Misiats, a Ukrainian nurse and mother of three, who fled Kyiv 14 months ago when Russia started bombing her country. She went to Holland first, but said it was

too expensive, so now she is in Budapest.

Her oldest daughter is now in Poland with her husband, who is Polish. Mila was born six months ago in Budapest, and “my daughter Anna, who is six, is studying in kindergarten and already speaks Hungarian,” Ms Misiats said. “We feel safe here. Many people help us.”

**“Charity is much more than material and social assistance. It has to do with the whole person; it strives to put people back on their feet with the love of Jesus”**

Oleg Yakovlev told Pope Francis about the help he and his wife Lyudmila and their five children – Daniel, Maria, Alexandra, Iliya and Elizaveta – received when they fled the war in Ukraine. And he thanked the Pope for his constant prayers for peace in Ukraine and “for standing up for the victims of the war”.

The variety of needs people have and the way Catholics in Hungary are meeting them is an example of a living faith, Pope Francis said.

“We need a Church that is fluent in the language of char-

ity, that universal language which everyone can hear and understand, even those farthest from us, even those who are not believers,” the Pope said.

Csaba Kovesi and his 15-year-old daughter Napsugár were talking about a similar idea before the Pope arrived. The 50-year-old Roma man has carried a crucifix around Hungary and to other parts of Europe for 20 years, praying for peace between the Roma communities and their neighbours, he said.

“It’s just love that it gives me,” said Napsugár when asked about her dad’s project. “We try to give love to everyone. When you believe in God, you have found the way to be happy.”

“It is not enough to provide bread to fill stomachs; we need to fill people’s hearts,” the Pope said in his speech. “Charity is much more than material and social assistance. It has to do with the whole person; it strives to put people back on their feet with the love of Jesus: a love that helps them to recover their beauty and their dignity.”

“Engaging in charity means having the courage to look into the other person’s eyes – it’s not charity when you look the other way. To engage in charity, you must have the courage to touch the person,” the Pope said, departing from his prepared text.

Building a real relationship with the poor, he added, “makes you realise how much you are in need, in need of the gaze and the touch of the Lord”.

The theme of the morning turned back to peace when the Pope went across the street to the Eastern Catholic’s Protection of the Mother of God Church. About 500 people gathered there chanted an *ektenia* or litany of peace for the Pope.

And, returning to the nunciature where he is staying, Pope Francis spent about 20 minutes meeting with Russian Orthodox Metropolitan Hilarion of Budapest and Hungary, formerly head of external relations for the Moscow Patriarchate.

The Vatican press office said the meeting was “cordial” but provided no other details.

**‘Jesus is the best life coach’, Hungarian youths told**

The life of faith is not a game, but it does require commitment and training, Pope Francis told thousands of Hungarian young people gathered in a sports arena in Budapest.

“How do we win in life?” the Pope asked the young people gathered in the capital’s László Papp Budapest Sports Arena April 29. Success has two basic steps, he said, “First, aim high, then train.”

Everyone has a talent, the Pope said, but using it just to earn money or have fun will not bring happiness.

“Put your talents to good use,” he said. “Don’t be afraid.”

Listening to the deepest desires of one’s heart may reveal a longing to have a large family or to serve others and the Church through priesthood or religious life. Even if society seems to treat those vocations as unreasonable, he said, they are not unattainable desires.

The first step in training for a full and happy life, he told more than 10,000 young people, is “dialogue with Jesus, who is the best of coaches. He listens to you, encourages you, believes in you and is

able to bring out the best in you”.

“He constantly invites you to be a team player, never alone but with others: in the Church, in the community, sharing your experiences with others” – in person, the Pope said. Spending all of one’s time on the phone, interacting only with virtual friends, “is not good or healthy”.

A bit of silence each day also is needed, he said.

“Nowadays, we are bombarded with the message that we have to be fast, efficient and practically perfect, like machines,” he said. “Then we often find that we run out of gas and are at a loss for what to do. We have to learn how to stop and fill our tanks, to recharge our batteries.”

Prayer, reading the Bible, reading a book, enjoying nature – those are all things that are better with silence, he said.

Silence, the Pope said, “is the door to prayer, and prayer is the door to love”.

Two young women and two young men briefly shared stories of their faith journeys with Pope Francis and with their peers.

**Pope exhorts borders as ‘points of contact’ rather than isolation**

To be Christian is to be open and welcoming to others, Pope Francis said as he celebrated Mass outside Hungary’s parliament building.

“We, like Jesus, must become open doors. How sad and painful it is to see closed doors,” especially the “closed doors of our selfishness,” isolationism and indifference to the poor and the sick, he said at the Mass April 30 in Budapest’s Kossuth Lajos Square.

In a country that has assisted hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians fleeing war but otherwise maintains a “no migrants” policy, the Pope decried “the doors we close toward those who are foreign or unlike us, toward migrants or the poor”.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and President Katalin Novák, who have promoted the migration restrictions, were among

the estimated 50,000 people attending the Mass.

Akos Ugron, wearing his Malteser International jacket over his Scout leader’s uniform, said the Mass was exactly what he had hoped for from Pope Francis’ visit – “that we would be all together. Many have come from the far parts of the country”.

Like his fellow Hungarian volunteers with the Knights of Malta’s humanitarian organisation, he has assisted Ukrainians crossing the border. He said, though, he agrees with the government that migrants must enter the country only legally.

Pope Francis returned to the topic of borders and welcome at the end of Mass before leading the recitation of the “Regina Coeli” prayer.

Cardinal Peter Erdo of Esztergom-Budapest had described Hungary as being “the eastern border of Western Christianity for a thousand years”.

**“Jesus is an open door, the Pope said, welcoming people into the community and sending them out again in his name”**

Pope Francis commented, “It is a beautiful thing when borders do not represent boundaries that separate, but points of contact, and when believers in Christ emphasise first the charity that unites us, rather than the historical, cultural and religious differences that divide us.”

Before leading the Marian prayer, he told people in the square he wanted to entrust to Mary “the Faith and the future of the entire continent of Europe, which has been on my mind in these days and, in particular, the cause of peace”.

“Blessed Virgin,” he prayed, “watch over the people who suffer so greatly. In a special way, watch over the neighbouring, beleaguered Ukrainian people and the Russian people, both



Pope Francis kisses the encolpion of Russian Orthodox Metropolitan Hilarion of Budapest and Hungary, the former head of external relations for the Moscow Patriarchate, in the Vatican nunciature in Budapest April 29.





Pope Francis, riding in an electric cart, arrives at László Papp Budapest Sports Arena in Budapest, Hungary, for a meeting with Hungarian young people April 29.

consecrated to you”.

“Instil in the hearts of peoples and their leaders the desire to build peace and to give the younger generations a future of hope, not war,” the Pope prayed, “a future full of cradles not tombs, a world of brothers and sisters, not walls and barricades”.

**“The key to accessing this truth is a form of knowledge that is never detached from love, a knowledge that is relational, humble and open, concrete and communal, courageous and constructive”**

In his homily at the Mass, Pope Francis focused on the Gospel reading, John 10:1-10, where Jesus describes himself as a shepherd who calls his sheep by name and as the gate for the sheep.

Jesus brings people into the fold, the community, the Church, the Pope said, and then he sends them out.

“We too were first gathered into God’s family to become his people,” he said, “then we too were sent out

into the world so that, courageously and fearlessly, we might become heralds of the good news, witnesses of the love that has given us new birth”.

Jesus is an open door, the Pope said, welcoming people into the community and sending them out again in his name.

Pope Francis said he is saddened to see “closed doors also within our ecclesial communities: doors closed to other people, closed to those who are ‘irregular,’ closed to those who long for God’s forgiveness”.

“Please,” he told Hungarian Catholics, “let us open those doors! Let us try to be – in our words, deeds and daily activities – like Jesus, an open door: a door that is never shut in anyone’s face, a door that enables everyone to enter and experience the beauty of the Lord’s love and forgiveness”.

### Pope meets with leading Hungarian minds

Meeting leading Hungarian academics, researchers and inventors, Pope Francis said humility and humanity are the keys to creativity and to ensuring that technology serves people and not the other way around.

The last event of Pope Francis’ visit to Hungary April 28-30 was a stop at the

Information Technology and Bionics Department of Péter Pázmány Catholic University in Budapest. The department brings together engineers, computer programmers, biologists, neurologists and physicians to create devices that assist people with a variety of physical limitations.

With representatives of other Hungarian universities and from the “world of culture” present, the Pope asked them to consider the meaning of the maxim, “Know thyself”.

The first step of knowing oneself, he said, is to recognise “our limitations and, consequently, to curb the presumption of self-sufficiency”.

“This proves beneficial precisely because, once we realise that we are creatures, we become creative,” he said. “We learn to immerse ourselves in the world instead of attempting to dominate it.”

Too often, the Pope said, the modern world acts like technology has no limits, but it ignores the fact that people do.

“Flesh and blood human beings are fragile, and it is precisely by experiencing this, that they come to realise their dependence on God and their connectedness to others and to creation,” he said.

The “amazing potential” of human ingenuity, he said, is not what one person can achieve alone, but what individuals can achieve when

they work with others, combining areas of expertise, challenging and supporting one another.

Freedom and truth are essential as well, the Pope said.

Hungary’s experience of communism, which claimed to offer truth, severely restricted people’s freedom, he said. And now, “consumerism promises a hedonistic, conformist, libertine ‘freedom’ that enslaves people to consumption and to material objects.”

**“Asked about his health, Pope Francis said that when he got sick in late March, he did not lose consciousness, as some media reported, but he was in such pain that he skipped lunch and went to take a nap”**

“How easy it is to pass from limits imposed on thinking, as in communism, to the belief that there are no limits, as in consumerism,” the Pope said, and “to pass

from a blinkered freedom to an unbridled freedom.”

The truth Jesus offers, he said, expands freedom because it expands connections.

“The key to accessing this truth is a form of knowledge that is never detached from love, a knowledge that is relational, humble and open, concrete and communal, courageous and constructive,” Pope Francis said.

### Return flight sees talk turn to Ukraine-Russia ‘project’

The Holy See has a project underway related to peace between Russia and Ukraine, but Pope Francis told reporters he could not talk about it yet.

“There is a mission underway that is not public yet; when it is public, I will tell you about it,” Pope Francis told reporters traveling with him from Budapest, Hungary, back to Rome April 30.

He also said discussions already were underway with indigenous communities in Canada for the repatriation of cultural artifacts held in the Vatican Museums.

Pope Francis had been asked whether, after giving three fragments of the Parthenon marbles to the Orthodox Church of Greece in March, he was planning to do the same with artifacts that have been traced to the Inuit, Métis and First Nations communities of Canada.

“This is the Seventh Commandment: if you have stolen something, you must give it back,” he said.

“The restitution of indigenous articles is underway with Canada – at least we had agreed to do it,” the Pope said.

What can be returned to its rightful owners should be, the Pope said. “Sometimes you can’t, there isn’t a political or real, concrete possibility to do it, but to the extent that you can return something, you should. This is good for everyone, so no one gets used to putting their hands in someone else’s pocket.”

On his two-hour flight back to Rome from Budapest, Pope Francis spent about 20

minutes answering five questions from reporters traveling with him. Other topics included his health, his travel plans and about his discussions in Budapest with Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and with Russia Orthodox Metropolitan Hilarion of Budapest and Hungary.

Asked if he had spoken about peace in Ukraine or sought contacts with Moscow during in his meetings Orbán, a friend of Russian President Vladimir Putin, and with Metropolitan Hilarion, the Pope responded that “peace is made by opening channels. You cannot create peace with closure. I invite everyone to open doors, channels of friendship”.

As for his conversation with Metropolitan Hilarion, the Pope said, “well, we weren’t talking about Little Red Riding Hood”.

“I am willing to do anything that must be done” to promote peace, he said.

Asked about his health, Pope Francis said that when he got sick in late March, he did not lose consciousness, as some media reported, but he was in such pain that he skipped lunch and went to take a nap.

“I did not lose consciousness but, yes, I had a high fever, and at 3 in the afternoon the doctor had me immediately taken to the hospital,” he said. “It was a strong case of pneumonia in the lower part of the lungs.”

He spent three nights March 29-April 1 in Rome’s Gemelli hospital. The Vatican press office had said his doctors diagnosed bronchitis.

The day before the trip to Hungary, Pope Francis, he had seen his doctor, “who came to look at things a bit,” and they spoke about his travel plans, which include Lisbon, Portugal, in early August for World Youth Day.

“You all can see for yourselves that things are not the same as they were two years ago,” but “with the cane, I’m doing better. For now, the trip (to Lisbon) is not cancelled,” the Pope said. “Then there is the trip to Marseille (France), a trip to Mongolia and there’s another one that I don’t remember.”



Pope Francis holds up a Rubik’s Cube, a puzzle invented by a Hungarian architect, during a meeting with young people in László Papp Budapest Sports Arena in Budapest, Hungary, April 29.



Pope Francis waves after celebrating Mass with about 50,000 people in Budapest’s Kossuth Lajos Square, with the Hungarian Parliament building in the background, April 30.



Pope Francis speaks with Hungarian President Katalin Novák during a farewell ceremony in Budapest, Hungary, April 30. The Pontiff concluded his three-day visit to the country.





# World Report

## IN BRIEF

### Japanese government panel backs abortion pill amid pro-life protest

● Japan is now one step closer to legalising an abortion pill despite some pushback from a small but dedicated pro-life movement protesting the government's efforts.

A panel from Japan's Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare voted to approve a pill that would allow mothers to kill their preborn children up to the ninth week of gestation. Currently, chemical abortions are not legally available in Japan. The pill now awaits final approval from the country's health minister, who is expected to sign off on it.

### Cuba: Church in position to aid transition from communism to free society

● Only the Catholic Church in Cuba is in the position to lead a dialogue and propose a transition from communism to a free society, Fr Alberto Reyes of the Archdiocese of Camagüey recently told the Spanish newspaper *El Debate*.

In recent months, the economic and social

situation has worsened in Cuba, where according to an October 2022 report from the Cuban Observatory for Human Rights (OCDH), 72% of the inhabitants "live below the poverty line and only 14% expect their personal situation to improve in the near future".

### Survey reveals faith background of new priests

● More than 450 men are set to be ordained priests this year in the US, and the survey of their ordination class shows that the overwhelming majority of priests-to-be were raised Catholic in intact families and individually showed habits of frequent Church service and regular prayer life.

"On this day, let us thank God for continuing to call men and women to serve him and his Church as priests, religious, and consecrated persons," Bishop Earl Boyea of Lansing, Michigan, said April 25. "We pray that all families, teachers, and priests will continue their essential work of instilling the faith and love of Jesus in our children."

Bishop Boyea chairs the US bishops' Committee on Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations. The committee released the "Ordination Class of 2023 Study" from the Georgetown University-based Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA).

### 100,000 turn out for pro-life parade in Peru

● More than 100,000 people participated April 15 in the Parade for Life and Family, according to the event's organisers. The event is put on by the Regional Coordinator for Life (CORVIDA) in the city of Arequipa, Peru.

"For the most valuable thing we have: life and family; we give our all!" was the theme of this new edition of the parade that has been held since 2006 on the date closest to the Day of the Unborn Child, which in Peru is celebrated March 25, the feast of the Annunciation.

Guadalupe Valdez, president of CORVIDA, stressed in a statement that the parade "is not against anyone" but is "a celebration that seeks to affirm, promote, and protect the value of every person and every human life".

"The crises that we have gone through in recent years have shown us that the institution in which we find the greatest support in times of difficulty is the family," she noted.

## Rupnik superior: 'illegal' for priest to own business

Fr Johan Verschuere, the superior of Fr Marko Rupnik, a Jesuit priest and artist accused of sexually abusing numerous nuns, explained that from an ecclesial point of view it is "illegal" for Fr Rupnik to be the owner of a company.

On April 22, Fr Verschuere, the Jesuit superior in Rome, told ACI Prensa that "the unhappy thing" is that Fr Rupnik owns 90% of a commercial company.

"From an ecclesial point of view it is illegal, unless it is proven that the right Church authorities gave permission for an exception. So far this proof has not been given," the superior said.

The Code of Canon Law, which governs the Church throughout the world, establishes in Canon 286: "Clerics are prohibited from conducting business or trade personally or through others, for their own advantage or that of others, except with the permission of legitimate ecclesiastical authority."

In addition, Canon 668 states: "Before first profession, members are to cede the administration of their goods to whomever they prefer and, unless the constitutions state otherwise, are to make disposition freely for their use and revenue."

The text adds: "To change these dispositions for a just



Façade of the lower basilica, also called the Rosary Basilica, at the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes in south-western France. The facade showcases the artwork of Marko Rupnik SJ, a priest who is currently under investigation after accusations of spiritual, psychological or sexual abuse by multiple adult women. Photo: OSV News/courtesy Greg Erlandson

cause and to place any act regarding temporal goods, they need the permission of the superior competent according to the norm of proper law."

Canon 668 also stipulates: "Whatever a religious acquires through personal effort or by reason of the institute, the religious acquires for the institute. Whatever accrues to a religious in any way by reason of pension, subsidy, or insurance is acquired for the institute unless proper law states otherwise."

According to an investigation published by the Italian media *Domani*, Fr Rupnik owns 90% of the company

Rossoroblu, a limited liability company (or srl in Italian) founded in 2007 with capital of €10,000.

The other 10% is owned by Manuela Viezzoli, a former nun who belonged to the Loyola Community, the institute founded by Fr Rupnik in Slovenia and the same community the more than 20 nuns Fr Rupnik is accused of sexually abusing were members of.

"In 2007 Marko Rupnik founded the Rossoroblu company 'for the creation and installation, in the workshop and on site, of mosaics, stained-glass windows, frescoes, murals, sculptures, paintings in all the various

techniques and arts,'" *Domani* reported.

According to Italian media, Rossoroblu invoiced in 2022 the sum of €1,176,500 and at the time had 15 workers.

Fr Rupnik's superior explained to *ACI Prensa* that "it is quite logical and completely legal" that "the Aletti Center [the art school founded by the priest] houses a commercial vehicle of this nature".

"The opposite would be very worrisome, for tax reasons" since "producing and selling a work of art is a commercial activity. It would be illegal not to pay taxes in a transparent way," he added.

## Outcry after prelate's comments on assisted suicide

The Pontifical Academy for Life said its president is against assisted suicide but thinks it is possible to have a "legal initiative" that would allow it to be decriminalised in Italy under "specific and particular conditions".

The April 24 statement was issued following an outcry over a speech in which Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia defended legalising medically assisted suicide in Italy. The archbishop called it a "feasible" approach to the issue in Italian society, despite the Catholic Church's clear teachings against it.

"Personally, I would not practice suicide assistance, but I understand that

legal mediation may be the greatest common good concretely possible under the conditions we find ourselves in," Archbishop Paglia said in a speech April 19 during the International Journalism Festival in Perugia, Italy.

The Italian news outlet *Il Riformista* published the text of Archbishop Paglia's speech on April 22.

The statement by the Vatican academy said Archbishop Paglia "reiterates his 'no' towards euthanasia and assisted suicide, in full adherence to the magisterium".

The academy added that the president's comments were about a ruling in

the Italian Constitutional Court and "the specific Italian situation".

The archbishop gave his opinion, the statement said, that a "legal mediation" but "certainly not a moral one" is possible in order to keep assisted suicide a crime in some cases, while decriminalising it under certain conditions.

"On a scientific and cultural level, Archbishop Paglia has always advocated the need for accompaniment towards the sick in the terminal phase of life, based on palliative care and proximity, so that no one is left alone in the face of illness and suffering, in the difficult decisions they entail," the statement said.

## Africans reject Archbishop Welby for supporting same-sex blessings

The Church of England's decision to bless same-sex couples continues to reverberate throughout the global Anglican Communion as a global meeting of Anglican leaders in Rwanda deemed the move "pastorally deceptive and blasphemous".

The meeting voiced no

confidence in Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby and called on him and the Church of England to repent of their decision.

"Despite 25 years of persistent warnings by most Anglican primates, repeated departures from the authority of God's Word have torn

the fabric of the Communion. These warnings were blatantly and deliberately disregarded and now without repentance this tear cannot be mended," said the Global Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans' fourth Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) in an April 21 statement.

In February the Church of England's general synod voted to approve blessing same-sex couples in civil marriages. The GAFCON statement characterised the move as "another departure" from scriptural authority that damages the Anglican Communion.





Edited by Jason Osborne  
Jason@irishcatholic.ie

## Cult tragedy in Kenya



Kenyan authorities continue to retrieve bodies from shallow graves in the 800-acre ranch in Kilifi County near the town of Malindi. Photo: OSV News/Moses Mpuria, courtesy Sheshi Visual Arts

# Vatican announces laypeople will vote in Synod on Synodality assembly

The Vatican announced on April 26 that there will be laypeople participating as voting members in the Synod on Synodality's October assembly, a break with past custom, which allowed laypeople to participate without the right to vote.

Pope Francis will also approve every member in advance.

The general assembly of the Synod on Synodality will take place in two sessions, in October 2023 and October 2024.

After the vote on a final document for the assembly, the Pope alone decides whether to take any actions based on the recommendations in the final text or

whether to adopt it as an official Church document.

The leadership of the synod released information in a FAQ sheet on April 26 about who will attend the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October and how they will be chosen.

The biggest change announced was the removal of the "auditor" role. In past synods, auditors included priests, religious, and laypeople, who did not have the right to vote in synod deliberations.

Now, these 70 members, who may be priests, consecrated women, deacons, and laypeople, will be able to vote. They will be chosen

by the Pope from among a list of 140 people selected by the leadership of this year's continental synod meetings.

According to the synod leadership, it is requested that "50% of [the selected people] be women and that the presence of young people also be emphasised".

"In selecting them, account is taken not only of their general culture and prudence but also of their knowledge, both theoretical and practical, as well as their participation in various capacities in the synod process," the FAQ sheet says.

A second change states that five women religious and five men religious will be elected to represent their

institutes of consecrated life rather than 10 religious priests as in the past.

The last modification is that Pope Francis will personally choose the representatives of the Vatican dicasteries who participate in the assembly.

"It's a change, but it's not a revolution," Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, relator general of the Synod on Synodality, told journalists during a meeting to explain the changes April 26. "Change is normal in life, in history," he added.

Approximately 21% of the total participation, expected to be 370 people, will be non-bishops, Cardinal Hollerich explained.

# Kenyan cult starvation massacre leaves 95 dead and hundreds missing

Catholic bishops in Kenya have expressed shock and strongly condemned the mass "starvation suicide" in Shakahola, a remote forest-ranch area in eastern Kenya, where a pastor led congregants to fast to death.

Kenyan authorities still continue to retrieve bodies from shallow graves in the 800-acre ranch in Kilifi County near the town of Malindi.

On April 27 the official death toll was

95. All victims were followers of the Good News International Church Pastor Paul Mackenzie.

He told his followers to pray and fast to meet Jesus and that the world would end on April 15.

As families arrived in the town of Malindi in search of their relatives following the Shakahola tragedy, the Kenyan Red Cross Society in Kilifi County said on April 26 that officials had

recorded 322 missing persons. Some of the devastated families that arrived in Malindi had lost several relatives to the cult.

"We condemn in the strongest terms possible, the cultic preaching orchestrated by [the] pastor ... which induced his followers to fast to death," said Archbishop Martin Kivuva Musonde of Mombasa, president of the Kenyan bishops' conference, in a statement April 24.

## Vatican roundup

### Vatican reportedly preparing text for divorced and remarried couples

● The Vatican's Dicastery for the Laity, Family, and Life is preparing a document that will address divorced and remarried couples at the request of Pope Francis, according to the dicastery's prefect, Cardinal Kevin Farrell.

Cardinal Farrell mentioned the in-progress document in a speech delivered in Italian on April 22 that opened a meeting of the dicastery, which promotes the pastoral care of the family and the mission of the lay Faithful. He spoke about the importance of providing help and guidance to "those experiencing marital crises of all kinds".

"On this front, the dicastery is also working on the preparation of a text that will specifically concern — as you wished, Your Holiness — men and women who, having a failed marriage behind them, live in new unions," Cardinal Farrell said in his opening address.

The cardinal did not say when the document will be released.

The Church teaches that Catholics who are divorced and remarried without an annulment are not to take holy Communion, a teaching reaffirmed by St John Paul II in the 2005 apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*.

Pope Francis has said during his pontificate that there may be case-by-case situations where divorced and remarried Catholics can access the Eucharist, including situations where the spouses practice continence within their marriage.

### Pope: Lay ministry must not become 'self-referential'

● Pope Francis discussed his vision for lay ministry in the Church in an April 22 speech, noting that all baptised people are called to take part in the mission of the Church regardless of whether or not they hold a formal lay ministry title such as lector or catechist.

He also emphasised the importance of lay ministers working in service to others rather than as a way to inflate their egos.

"I get angry when I see

lay ministers who — pardon the expression — are 'puffed up' by this ministry. This is ministerial, but it is not Christian. They are pagan ministers, full of themselves, aren't they? Beware of this: They must never become self-referential. Service is one-directional, it is not a round trip: That will never do," the Pope said, speaking to the plenary assembly of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family, and Life.

### Ukrainian prime minister visits Vatican

● After a half-hour private meeting in the library of the Apostolic Palace, Pope Francis gave the prime minister of Ukraine a bronze plaque featuring a bird and a flower alongside the inscription, "Peace is a fragile flower".

In return, Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal gave Pope Francis a book of photographs documenting the damage inflicted by Russian bombings of his country in a war that has lasted 14 months already. After speaking with the Pope, Mr Shmyhal also met on April 27 with Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, and with Archbishop Paul Gallagher, the Vatican foreign minister.

"During the cordial discussions, which took place in the Secretariat of State, various matters connected to the war in Ukraine were highlighted, with particular attention to the humanitarian aspects and efforts to restore peace," the Vatican press office said in a communiqué.

In addition, the statement said, "several issues regarding the life and activity of the Church in the country were raised".

After his meeting with the Pope, Mr Shmyhal told reporters at the Foreign Press Association that he had asked for the Vatican's assistance in returning to Ukraine children taken by force to Russia.



# Letters

## Letter of the week

### 'Disingenuous' politicians push easier abortions

**Dear Editor,** It is wonderful to have people like Niamh Uí Bhriain call pro-abortion politicians out for their hypocrisy and undemocratic agendas [*The Irish Catholic* – April 27, 2022].

Some 400,000 people voted 'No' in the 2018 abortion referendum because they believed an unborn child deserves the right to life. That figure would have been much bigger if the safeguards and other measures promised to the Irish public in the abortion legislation were not there.

People who were on the fence were convinced by the three-day waiting period for women who are considering an abortion, allowing them some time to consider the enormity and finality of

the decision. The protection of conscientious objection was also guaranteed as there was of course concerns that doctors might be forced to 'get with the programme' regarding abortion provision. Medical practitioners have been fired in Britain for their stance on abortion.

And now we have Taoiseach Leo Varadkar – previously staunchly pro-life – give in to pressure and now says the Government will implement the recommendations in the abortion review (he previously voiced concern about changing the law so quickly). Those who compiled the report were, of course, very much pro-abortion and seemed only to care about making abortion faster and

easier to obtain. They are trying to turn abortion clinics into something similar to fast food outlets.

TDs, even those who are 'pro-choice', must respect the voice of the people who voted on certain legislation which was implemented only two years ago. To start getting rid of the safeguards that made those who were on the fence change their mind is a travesty and hugely disingenuous. They must be held to account.

The slippery slope argument, lambasted by 'pro-choice' activists, was undeniably accurate.

*Yours etc.,  
John Kieran  
Swords, Dublin*

### Biden's visit to Knock should have been kept private

**Dear Editor,** In a recent editorial you wrote, "Mr Biden says that he started out as a pro-lifer, then came to reluctantly accept that abortion was the law of the land, even if he was not supportive of it, in recent years he has become a trenchant supporter of abortion" [*The Irish Catholic* – April 20, 2023].

You also asked: "What to do with a problem like Joe...".

While President Biden was very welcome to visit the Shrine of Knock, one thing that should have been done was to keep the president's private visit to the holy shrine private.

The pictures and reports of what was said and done have presented an opportunity for inappropriate publicity. Even the rector of Knock is reported as saying: "It is incredible in terms of the attention that it brought to the Shrine itself."

*Yours etc.,  
Daithí O'Muirneachain,  
Drumcondra, Dublin 9.*



### Directing Joe Biden to the confession box in Knock

**Dear Editor,** David Quinn claims that "No reasonable objection can be made to Joe Biden's Knock visit" [*The Irish Catholic* – April 20, 2023].

I contend that most reasonable people had a very strong objection to that visit. Knock, where Our Lady, Patroness of the Unborn, appeared with St Joseph and St John and the Lamb of God, Knock is not only a shrine to Our Lady but is a Eucharistic shrine. It is the most important apparition in history as it has the Mass, the

holy family and the scriptures and will, indeed, become one of the most visited apparition sites in the world.

This will come about without the influence of a visit from President Joe Biden, who continually insults Our Lady with his forcing and funding abortion worldwide, but also insults the Lamb of God with his partaking of the Eucharist while acting publicly against the most basic human right, the right to life, without which no other right can exist, and claim-

ing to be a practising Catholic as he defies its teaching regarding abortion, all of which demonstrates his hypocrisy on this issue.

Most commentators agreed that the Irish visit was to bolster his chances of re-election as president and, as Michael Kelly pointed out [*The Irish Catholic* – April 20, 2023], "the crowds he attracted in Ireland were bigger than those he regularly attracts on his home turf".

Of course that is where people are aware of his poli-

cies, whereas here in Ireland the media will not have one bad word said against Joe. How many know of his, as David Quinn pointed out, "appalling stance on abortion"? It will never be known the number of lives that President Joe Biden is responsible for snuffing out in abortion. If he had been directed to the confessional box in Knock that may have been a good start.

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

### Christ declined to recruit women at the last supper

**Dear Editor,** Referring to women in the diaconate, Dr Phyllis Zagano said there "is not now and never has been any doctrinal finding that women cannot be ordained to the diaconate".

Pope Francis "after intense prayer and mature reflection" has opened the door to the possibility of ordained female deacons for the first time in centuries, potentially signalling a historic shift for the role of women in a male-dominated ministry of the Catholic Church. Theologians have agonised over the questions surrounding female deacons for decades. A 2002 Vatican commission called for a "ministry of discernment" within

the Church to clarify what female deacons did heretofore and how that relates to the present. Until the fifth Century, both male and female deacons flourished in the Western Church, but the role of deacons declined over several centuries, surviving only as an intermediate stage for male candidates preparing for priestly ordination. After the Second Vatican Council, the Church restored the role of permanent deacons, open to single and married men.

Pope Francis has called for a commission to review the history and scope of female deacons who served the Church in ancient times, but stopped short of saying whether

he would ultimately support the readmission of women as deacons, vested with a range of priest-like powers including Baptism, officiating at weddings, distributing Holy Communion and preaching at Mass.

Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican's secretary of state and close confidant of Pope Francis said theoretically, there is no reason why a female could not one day fill a male job. If Christ wanted to recruit women to be among apostles at the last supper he would have done so. But he declined.

*Yours etc.,  
Gerry Coughlan  
Kilnamanagh, Dublin 24*

## facebook community

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

### Church 'wobbling' over women deacons a scandal, theologian tells TCD gathering

Women cannot be ordained full stop. There is more of an argument for women cardinals, than deaconesses. – **Maria McCluskey**

And yet every time the Church looks at this, the answer is always (thankfully) no. – **Gaz Mc**

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

## After listening, instruction must take place

**Dear Editor,** 'Accompaniment' does not mean walking all over the place with someone, or going wherever they want to go.

Bishop Robert Barron gives the event of the two disciples on their way to Emmaus, as the example of what accompaniment should be.

After preliminaries and listening, a moment must be reached when instruction takes place. Scripture, the teaching of Christ and sacraments must be brought into the equation.

*Yours etc.,  
Judith Leonard,  
Raheny, Dublin 5*

## An influential 'cheerleader' for abortion

**Dear Editor,** I am confused!

US President Joe Biden is, in my opinion, one of the most influential, if not the most influential, cheerleader for abortion in the world. Yet he was feted in Knock Shrine and presented with a stone from the original apparition gable. It seems to me that his treatment was such as to portray him as a Roman Catholic in good standing. I am confused! Can someone enlighten me please?

*Yours etc.,  
Pádraig Ó Ruanaí,  
Letterkenny, Co. Donegal*

## 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.



# Your Faith

## Faith in Film

A great director searches for mercy in despair

Page 31

The Irish Catholic, May 4, 2023



# Cultivating a Catholic imagination

**P**arenting a toddler involves allowing them to transport you into their world of adventure and imagination. Passing along faith to our toddler has involved introducing our child to a Catholic imagination for the world around us.

Like a growing gallery wall, each year my wife and I add new traditions and practices to our family spirituality. Here are four ways we have passed on our Catholic faith to our toddler.

### Create a spiritual calendar

Our daughter has never been a good sleeper. This required very early on that we maintain consistent schedules and routines to



**Cultivating the imagination of a toddler is the best way to pass along the Faith, writes Jonathan Lewis**

help her cue into bedtime.

In a similar way, the Church gives us the Liturgy of the Hours and a liturgical calendar to form spiritual rhythms in our day and year. Families too can develop a spiritual calendar. Our calendar includes special anniversaries, family saint days, liturgical seasons and Baptism anniversaries.

On a daily basis our best family prayer time is at night. Our bedtime routine includes

thanking God for what happened during the day and praying for friends, family members and anything else that pops into the mind of a two-year-old.

One simple structure to family prayer is to use these common relationship phrases as prompts: "Jesus, I love you. Thank you for ... I'm sorry for... and please help ... ." As we lay our daughter in her crib we sing a hymn and add in classics like "Salve Regina,"

"Amazing Grace" or simple chants from the Taizé community.

### Sit up front

Sunday Mass can be a particularly meaningful yet exasperating time to parent a toddler. We have been successful at focusing during Mass by sitting close enough to the front for our daughter to see the action taking place on the altar.

She enjoys following along the parts of the Mass in a children's Mass book, and I regularly whisper in her ear describing the action that is taking place during Mass ("Now the priest is reading a story about Jesus" or "The sign of peace is coming up.").

I knew our participation at Mass was bearing fruit when she

turned to me during the psalm and asked, "Is it the alleluia time now Daddy?" She may be too young to understand the meaning of the Sunday liturgy but she is beginning to learn the rhythm of liturgical prayer that will bear fruit in years to come.

### Find God in all things

While initiating specific spiritual practices is an essential way we pass along faith to our children, it is important to recall that "nothing is far from God" as St. Monica said, or in the words of St. Thomas Aquinas, that "grace builds on nature".

Whenever we practice being kind, patient or saying "I'm sorry," we are passing on faith to our children. Sometimes a sense of fervour or a limited imagi-



The daughter of Santiago Pérez de Camino Gaisse, a staff member at the Dicastery for Laity, the Family and Life, points at the camera during an audience with Pope Francis and participants in the dicastery's plenary assembly at the Vatican April 22. Photo: CNS/Vatican Media



nation leads us to think that the only way we share our faith is by spending time in religious buildings or talking about religious things. It's important to remember that everything that is good, true and beautiful directs the heart toward God.

**“The most important thing that we can do to pass along our Catholic faith is the same, whether we are parenting toddlers or teenagers: recommit to our own relationship with Jesus Christ and his church”**

Unfortunately our religious iconography rarely reminds us of this. Too often we see saccharine images of the child Jesus that rarely reflect our reality. I would love to see an image of Our Lady of Potty Training or St Mary of the Meltdown.

While not discouraging us from a living and explicit practice of faith, finding God in all things

encourages us to remember that the messy and ordinary work of family life – dishes, walks, laughter and story time – are privileged moments of grace that allow us to participate in God's goodness.

#### Lead by example

As I genuflected and walked into the pew one Sunday holding my daughter's hand, I felt her pull instead of quickly following me in. I looked back to find her also genuflecting, something I had not yet taught her to do.

As parents of a toddler we learned very quickly just how spongelike our daughter was. In his historic study on youth and religion, sociologist Christian Smith notes that when it comes to passing on faith to children, parents tend to “get what you are,” that is, young people are most likely to stay engaged with religious practice if their parents do also.

The most important thing that we can do to pass along our Catholic faith is the same, whether we are parenting toddlers or teenagers: recommit to our own relationship with Jesus Christ and his Church.

This also means showing our

children how we are practicing our faith by stopping into the adoration chapel, listening to a morning meditation together and committing to going to Mass each Sunday. For toddlers, more than any prayer we teach, the example we lead helps build a lasting moral imagination.

As a parent of a toddler and newborn, our family's practice of faith includes different rhythms and calendars that shape a Catholic imagination. Like the monks of a monastery, our family also gets up at all hours of day and night to call on God's help. Our chapel is our home, our pews are rocking chairs, our breviaries are children's books.

Each messy or mundane act of parenting can become a doorway into spiritual practice, for us and our children, living each moment of family life intentionally as an offering instead of an obligation.

**📌** Jonathan Lewis is vice president of customer operations at Catholic Faith Technologies. He has worked in parish and diocesan ministry for over 15 years and currently lives in Washington with his wife and two children.

**“Our chapel is our home, our pews are rocking chairs, our breviaries are children's books”**





# A great director searches for mercy in despair

## Faith in film



### Ruadhán Jones

**T**he Vatican film list from 1995 contains two films that Pope Francis declares to be his favourites. The first I've reviewed, *Babette's Feast*; the second is an Italian film famed Italian director, Federico Fellini, his 1954 Oscar winner *La Strada*.

'Fellini-esque' is an important descriptor in film criticism these days. It denotes something whimsical, comic and fantastical, in a manner akin to dreams, where reality becomes porous, vivid and – in my view – deeply self-indulgent.

*La Strada* comes at the end of Fellini's 'neorealist' period and the beginning of a great shift in his style that occurred around the late 50s. It has some neorealist trappings – filming on location, a focus on lower-class characters, a certain bitter or tragic air. But then, it also appeals to the more archetypal or symbolic storytelling that was to become Fellini's style later.

The film tells the story of Zampano, an itinerant strongman who travels Italy snapping a chain by expanding his chest, prefacing it with the same patter over and over. He buys Gelsomina as his companion and support act, kept mostly in the background.

### Carnal

He's a carnal man, feeding his senses, and he treats the simple Gelsomina cruelly. He sees her as an object, purchased for his use, while she on the other hand



Anthony Quinn and Giulietta Masina star in *La Strada* (1954), a film that struggles to find mercy in a harsh world.

falls in love with him, a childish, captive love. They work briefly at a circus where the Fool taunts Zampano, who chases him with a knife and is arrested.

**“The motivations of the characters don't make sense; they make decisions that drive the plot forward but seem to contradict their own impulses and beliefs”**

There's a long dialogue between the Fool and Gelsomina, who admits to feeling purposeless and alone. The Fool advises her that she has a purpose, for even the smallest stone has one. Her's is to be with the brutish Zampano. But a chance encounter between Zampano and the Fool ends in tragedy – and from there the film

slides into grim despair.

It's a strange one for Pope Francis to choose as his favourite film for a few reasons, the main one being that it seems ultimately to be about despair and meaninglessness. Having read around a little, but others disagree, arguing it's a film about mercy, a moral awakening and similar.

It's this second interpretation of the film that would appeal to Pope Francis, whose great emphasis is the mercy of God. He's also attracted to 'the little people' and in Zampano and particularly Gelsomina, you have two dismal put-upon's.

### Interpretation

The generous interpretation of the story is that it's about the simple and direct love of Gelsomina colliding with Zampano's impoverished emotional, moral and spiritual life. Some claim he keeps her around because he's in love with her without being

able to admit it to himself. It's only later, when he loses her, that he finds himself suddenly alone in the world. The brute has developed a heart, apparently, from Gelsomina's lonely witness of love and mercy.

I don't buy that interpretation. *La Strada* is edging towards the theme that Fellini was to deal with much better in *La Dolce Vita*, that is the meaningless of life, balanced as it is between comedy and tragedy.

He's searching for that theme here, but it's a blind groping. Gelsomina hints at the comedic element, but not in any complete way. Her character is a type adverted to by some clever men, who think that a kind of stupidity is akin to purity and simplicity. It can work, but her innocence comes across as put on, taken up when needed and dropped when not.

Meanwhile, the Fool character could be the flighty symbol hanging between heaven and earth, as critic Roger Ebert puts it, that

would later haunt Fellini. But he is irritating and sadistic, taunting Zampano like a schoolyard bully. The Fool draws him on, so that the events that follow don't rise to the level of tragedy.

Finally, Zampano's psychology is very unclear. We are given no evidence for this claim that he loves Gelsomina, until perhaps the final 10-15 minutes of a 100-minute-long film. It appears as though from nowhere. Why? It's not clear.

The motivations of the characters don't make sense; they make decisions that drive the plot forward but seem to contradict their own impulses and beliefs. It's hard to wrest any meaning from the film, other than confusion, despair and meaninglessness.

### Powerful

Still, though confused it's actually quite a powerful film, with an excellent score and strong performances. Anthony Quinn as the muscular but shallow strongman evokes pathos in his final moments of confusion and loneliness, as though a man who has never once reflected on his life, finds himself confronted by his own existence.

And although Giulietta Masina's performance as Gelsomina is too self-conscious, any comedy that comes emerges from the carry of her shoulders or her expressions, which have the childlike charm of Charlie Chaplain. She is almost – almost – a tragic character.

In addition, there are moments of visual beauty so typical of Fellini, with the final shot a reminder of all he can do: Zampano finds himself alone on a beach at night, the black water and white-tipped waves taking on a dreamlike quality and the sound ebbing away, except the heavy breathing of the confused man as he looks upward and sideways and then grips the ground, finding no solace in the world. It is almost – almost! – heartrending.

## Saint — of the — week

By Jason Osborne



Blessed Edmund Rice

## An 'outstanding model' of lay apostolate

**M**ay 5 the Church celebrates a man who has indirectly affected the lives of a great many people on our shores, even today: Blessed Edmund Rice, the founder of the Presentation Brothers. As many readers will be aware, the Presentation Brothers are an order dedicated to helping and “forming Christ in the young,” particularly through schooling, which they did for generations in Ireland before spreading around the world.

Born in Callan, Co. Kilkenny, in 1762, Edmund moved at a young age to Waterford, to be apprenticed to his uncle, Michael Rice, in Waterford city. His uncle's business was in shipping, and together they supplied sailors criss-crossing the Atlantic. This line of work made Edmund wealthy, providing him with more than enough to look after a family, and when his uncle died, he took over as the head of the company.

Unfortunately, Edmund's marriage was tragically short-lived, and after just three years with his wife, Mary Elliot, she died following the birth of their daughter. Naturally devastated, Edmund undertook some time of reflection, during which

time he reportedly contemplated joining a monastery. However, becoming aware of the responsibility that came with the wealth he'd amassed, and equally becoming conscious of the plight and hardship suffered by the poor he was surrounded by, he changed course.

Edmund realised his vocation was to cater to the poor – especially children – to uphold their dignity. Education was to be his primary avenue for doing this.

To make this happen, he sold off his business and in 1802 founded his first school for poor boys in a converted stable, with the intention of helping the boys to become “good Catholics and good citizens”. Edmund and his assistants lived in rooms above the makeshift classrooms and later that year, he was joined by two companions, with whom he began to live a form of community life.

This was the seed of the order that was to come, with Edmund and his companions taking vows of poverty, chastity and obedience in 1808, devoting themselves entirely to their mission. The rule of the community was approved in 1821 by the pope, and by 1825, Edmund and his 30

Christian Brothers were providing free education, clothing, and food to about 5,500 boys in 12 different towns.

At the centre of Edmund's efforts was, of course, his relationship with God. As with so many of the saints, Edmund lived out an intense devotion to the Eucharist, and attended Mass daily. He got his strength from God to serve those largely forgotten about by society, and he was to do this for the rest of his days.

Edmund served as the superior general of his community from its inception until 1838, when he retired at the age of 76. Returning to Waterford from Dublin and suffering from arthritis by this time, he spent much of the remainder of his life confined to his room, reading the Bible and praying in his more lucid moments.

He died in 1844, and was buried at Mount Sion Hill in Waterford. Edmund was beatified in 1996 by Pope John Paul II, who called him “an outstanding model of a true lay apostle”. His mission continues to be lived out today in many countries around the world.



# How to live through change in your parish

## OSV News

**W**hether we want to admit it or not, life is full of changes. Some changes are easy, fun, and helpful: trying a different hairstyle, buying a new car, learning a new skill, landing a new job. Some changes challenge us – losing weight or quitting smoking – or transform us, like letting go of a grudge or adjusting our attitudes from negative to positive.

But one kind of change that many people can find difficult to accept is change in their parish. Large or small, changes in a parish can upset our spiritual and emotional equilibrium.

Maybe the current pastor is leaving. Maybe the church is undergoing renovations. Maybe Mass times are changing. Maybe the new music director is introducing new hymns. Maybe someone made a new rule or set up a different way of doing things. Maybe your parish is linking or clustering. Or, maybe you've received the heartbreaking news that your parish will close – probably the hardest change of all to comprehend.

We normally 'roll with the punches' when life sends us change, but changes in our parish affect us more deeply. We turn to the church for comfort and stability when our lives are in turmoil, so when the turmoil happens within our church family, we can feel as if we've lost an 'anchor'. None of us wants to lose the familiar. We fear the unknown, the areas outside of our spiritual and emotional comfort zone.

Often, we realise after the fact that change – as much as we may dislike it – can actually lead to spiritual growth. The question is how to work through the change to find that spiritual benefit.

## Understanding change

Change involves letting go, moving through a transition, and eventually adjusting to some new reality – emotional steps that are not unlike the grieving process.

Our initial reaction to a proposed change can be sharply negative, wondering how something like this could happen or thinking the worst. As planning for the change begins, we begin to wonder how we might be affected by the change, we may feel angry or betrayed, or we may try to think of ways to stop the change from happening. When the change occurs, our emotions shift again. We may have a sense of loss, experience a crisis of faith or lose heart.

## Dealing with change

While it is important to recognise the emotions associated with change, no matter what we say or do, we're not likely to be able to stop it. So, rather than walk away from, fight, or complain about the change, we might want to take a different approach: asking questions and listening to the answers with an open mind. Why is the change necessary? When will it happen? How will it be implemented? What good things are expected from it? What new opportunities might it bring?

The answers to these questions might, in turn, bring about a shift in our perspective. What if I believed this change was good? How would a positive attitude affect my behaviour? What can I do that's positive?

Change for the better: How to take positive action

- Get involved. When it became clear that a change in Mass schedule was needed, one parish asked everyone to vote on several options. The change was made in favour of the majority.

- Incorporate the past into the present. When a music minister

found out that people were upset about the new music, he agreed to include an old favourite in every Mass.

- Let go of the old. Whether it's a change in pastor, a church remodelling, or a parish closing, many parishes plan a final Mass with a coffee social or reception to mark the passing from the old to the new. It allows people to talk about the past and how they plan to adjust in the future.

- Preserve the past. It's not uncommon when closing, merging, remodelling or constructing a new church for parishes to incorporate statues, stained glass and other reminders of the past into future plans.

- Make memories. Create a memory book with photos and stories. The book can be kept in the parish library, posted on the parish website, reproduced so families can have a copy or given as a gift to the former pastor.

## The spiritual side of change

Change awakens our trust in divine providence. St. Paul assures us that "all things work for good for those who love God" (Rom 8:28). Can we trust that God will make everything right? Can we believe that something good can come from this?

In times of change, we need to remember to ask not what we want, but what God wants. Like Jesus, we may ask God to stop this from happening (Mt 26:39). But we must finish the prayer as Jesus did, by saying, "My Father, if it is not possible that this cup pass without my drinking it, your will be done" (Mt 26:42).

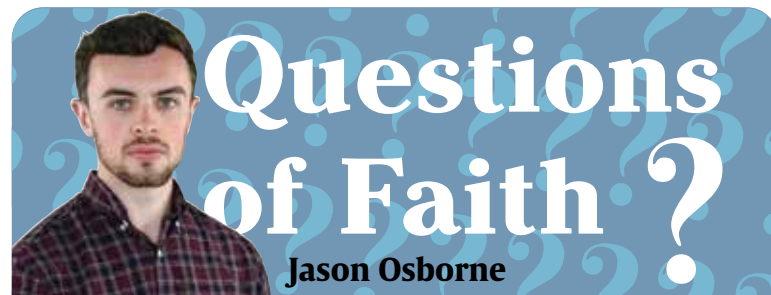
The fascinating thing about being open to God's will is that it allows the Holy Spirit to lead us in directions we would never have chosen for ourselves. We meet new people, learn something new, or experience something unexpected. Thus, change becomes our personal re-enactment of the paschal mystery; the hard reality is that, like Jesus, we must die to our former life before we can be raised to new life.

## Praying through change

Prayer is the key that unlocks our resistance to change. Prayer shifts the burden of change into God's hands. It eases discomfort, erases fears and helps us see from a different perspective.

Prayer opens our minds, hearts and souls. Prayer gives God the opportunity to fill us with deep inner peace. It is a gift of grace from a loving God.

Through the miracle of grace, prayer changes our lives and touches the lives of people around us. Prayer instils in us an appreciation for the good things change brings and gratitude for the good things God continues to do for us.



## Questions of Faith?

Jason Osborne



## Can Catholics support 'assisted dying'?

**O**ur paper's headline last week, "Euthanasia committee promises fair hearing for concerned voices," will have come as welcome news to many pro-lifers in Ireland who are tired and disheartened by the cold shoulder we've received from Government on the abortion front.

Perhaps a few people read it, though, and wondered why there would be concerned voices? Even if none of our readers thought that, many in wider society wonder how "dying with dignity" could possibly be perceived as a bad thing – especially when Ireland wouldn't be alone in it, were we to legalise it. Canada, Belgium, New Zealand and a few more have legalised euthanasia and/or assisted suicide, and the numbers availing of it grow inexorably.

To clarify from the off, 'euthanasia' is the act of deliberately ending a person's life with the intent of 'relieving' suffering, whereas 'assisted suicide' is the act of deliberately assisting another person to take their own life. Both come under the umbrella of 'assisted dying', and are increasingly seen as compassionate measures that allow those who are suffering to end their lives on their own terms – hence the phrase, and the name of People Before Profit TD Gino Kenny's bill, *Dying with Dignity*.

Suffering can reach pitches the likes of which few of us, thankfully, can imagine. So how is it our place to tell others that they can't end that suffering? As with so much of what the Church teaches, it comes from a place of understanding life, and the world, very differently. The bottom line being that we're stewards, rather than owners, of the life God has entrusted to us.

The Church teaches that without a shadow of a doubt, euthanasia is "morally unacceptable," while "voluntary co-operation" in suicide is noted as being "contrary to the moral law".

The catechism says that "an act or omission which, of itself or by intention, causes death in order

to eliminate suffering constitutes a murder gravely contrary to the dignity of the human person and to the respect due to the living God, his creator".

"The error of judgment into which one can fall in good faith does not change the nature of this murderous act, which must always be forbidden and excluded" (CCC 2277).

It's all well and good that the catechism says these things, but how is it that these practices run contrary to the "dignity of the human person"? At least part of the reason is that, if we consider human life to have run its fruitful course once we encounter suffering and intense difficulty, we're saying that those who choose to continue to endure are ultimately making a meaningless choice, as there is no value to be found in wasting away. Rather, they argue, the value is to be found in choosing when and where to die – in becoming master of your destiny, rather than in allowing yourself to become stooped by ill-fate.

If this is truly the case, it is a repudiation of Christ's suffering. Jesus showed us the extent of his love by his suffering, and in doing so identified himself with all those who are crushed beneath the heel of the world, whether by oppression, ill-treatment, sickness, violence or otherwise. The logic of euthanasia and assisted suicide argues that the meaningful response to suffering is to end it, which further argues that life is mainly worth living when the going is good.

This, the Church holds, couldn't be further from the truth. Life is certainly more enjoyable when the going is good, but nobody is ever reduced in value or rendered worthless by their suffering. Far from it. In sickness and in suffering, as in health, God loves us and is near to us, even if it doesn't feel like it. It's for these reasons, and more that can't be covered satisfactorily here, that Catholics cannot in good conscience support the legalisation of euthanasia and assisted suicide.





# Of innocence, purity and chastity



Inside the rite for Christian Baptism there's a little ritual that is at once both touching and unrealistic. At one point in the baptismal rite the child is clothed in a white garment symbolising innocence and purity. The priest or minister officiating says these words: "Receive this baptismal garment and bring it unstained to the judgment seat of our Lord Jesus Christ."

As touching as it is to say those words to an innocent baby, one cannot help but think that unless this child dies in childhood, this is an impossible task. Our baptismal robes inevitably take some stains. Adult life sees to that. No one goes through life without losing the innocence of a baby.

## Innocence

But, that being admitted, innocence still remains an ideal to be fostered and continually recovered. And that needs some defence today because innocence and its attendants, purity and chastity, have fallen on hard times in a world that tends to value sophistication above all else and which generally sees innocence as naivete and prudery.

There's a long history to this. For centuries, the Churches held up innocence, purity, and chastity as salient virtues within Christian discipleship and within life in general. However, from the 17th Century, right down to our own time, major thinkers have tried to turn this on its head, suggesting that these (so-called) virtues are in fact the antithesis of virtue. For them, innocence and its counterparts, purity and chastity, are fraudulent ideals,



Fr Rolheiser

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

fantasies of the timid, symptoms of an unconscious hostility towards life.

## Great thinkers

Nietzsche, for example, once wrote: "The Church combats the passions with excision, in every sense of the word: its practice, its cure, is castration." Freud suggested that in the ideals of innocence, purity, and chastity there is more than a trace of narcissism, frigid arrogance, and a fantasy of invulnerability. According to these (Enlightenment) thinkers, in idealising innocence, purity, and chastity, humankind has agreed to make itself unhappy in that the medicine we take to purify our souls lets in the moral toxins of self-righteousness, arrogance, and insensitivity, a mischief that makes lust look benign.

Our culture, minus some of the

harsh rhetoric, essentially buys in to this. There are of course a few salient exceptions within some of our Churches, but our cultural ethos pretty much identifies innocence, purity, and chastity with timidity, naivete, and fundamentalism.

Where to go with all of this? Well, one isn't quite sure where to look.

## Conservatives

Conservatives, in their very makeup, tend to fear the breaking of taboos, not least those surrounding innocence, purity, and chastity. This has a healthy intent. This is J. D. Salinger (*The Catcher in the Rye*) looking at innocent young children playing and wishing they would never grow up but could always remain this innocent and joyful. Conservatives fear any kind

of sophistication that destroys innocence. That's well intended but unrealistic. We need to grow up and with that comes complexity, sophistication, mess, and stains on the purity of our baptismal robes. God did not intend for us to be children forever playing in innocence in a rye field.

## Liberals

Liberals have a different genetic make-up, but struggle equally (just differently) with innocence, purity, and chastity. They are less fearful about breaking taboos. For them, boundaries are meant to be stretched and most times broken, and innocence is a phase you pass through and outgrow (like belief in Santa and the Easter bunny). Indeed, for liberals, real self-actualisation begins with owning your complexity, recognising its goodness, and accepting that complexity and lost innocence is in fact what opens us up for deeper meaning. Experience brings knowledge. When Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, their eyes were opened, not closed. To the liberal eye, naivete is not a virtue, sophis-

tication is. Innocence is judged as unrealistic, purity as sexual timidity and chastity as religious fundamentalism.

## Warning flags

Both these views, conservative and liberal, wave some healthy warning flags. The conservative flag of caution can help save us from many self-destructive behaviours, while the liberal flag inviting us to more fearlessness can help save us from much unhealthy timidity and naivete. However, each needs to learn from the other. Conservatives need to learn that God did not intend for us to make an idol out of the innocence and the naivete of a child. We are meant to learn, to grow, and to become sophisticated beyond first naivete. But, liberals need to learn that sophistication, like innocence itself, is not an end in itself, but a phase through which one grows.

The renowned contemporary philosopher Paul Ricoeur hints at something beyond both. He asserts that growth to final maturity goes through stages. We are meant to move from the naivete of a child, through the lost innocence, messy and often cynical sophistication of adulthood, towards a "second naivete", a post-sophistication, a second innocence, a childlikeness which is not childish, a simplicity that is not simplistic.

In this second naivete, our baptismal robes will emerge again unstained – washed clean in the blood of a new innocence.

**“Innocence and its attendants, purity and chastity, have fallen on hard times in a world that tends to value sophistication above all else and which generally sees innocence as naivete and prudery”**



# Seeing and serving the Lord in the poor



May 7, 2023  
Fifth Sunday of Easter  
Acts 6:1-7  
Ps 33:1-2, 4-5, 18-19  
1 Pt 2:4-9  
Jn 14:1-12

In those early days of the global pandemic in spring 2020, our parish food pantry saw an unexpected and dramatic increase in the number of families in need of food assistance. The pandemic lockdown had resulted in loss of employment for many people who worked for local businesses that were forced to close.

Our parish food pantry coordinator, Doug, is “a saint next door”. He dedicates hours to ensuring that the pantry is well stocked, clean and organised. He is helped by a dedicated core of volunteers, from the parish and beyond, who lovingly serve those who come for food assistance. By



## The Sunday Gospel

Jem Sullivan

Christmas 2020, the parish was serving close to five hundred needy families each week, a 100% increase from pre-pandemic days.

### Face of Jesus

Each Sunday our pastor, Fr Roberto Cortes-Campos, would remind the community to see the face of Jesus Christ in these brothers and sisters in need, and parishioners responded generously with weekly donations of food, clothing, and volunteer hours. Yet as the pandemic lingered on, the needs of the poor far exceeded the abilities of even the generous giving of the parishioners.

As we journey through the Easter season, we follow the growth of the early

Christian community, built on the faith and preaching of the apostles. We read of how the needs of the poor and the widows outpaced the ability of the apostles to care for them. They had to prioritise prayer and the preaching of the word of God.

**“We read of how the needs of the poor and the widows outpaced the ability of the apostles to care for them”**

St Luke tells us that the Twelve apostles said to the assembled community, “It is not right for us to neglect the word of God to serve at table. Brothers, select from among you seven reputable men, filled with the Spirit and wisdom, whom we shall appoint to this task.” Thus, the first deacons were selected, and the apostles



prayed and laid hands on them. Their service enabled the word of God to spread like wildfire as the community of disciples of Jesus increased greatly.

### Living stones

The apostle Peter, in the second reading, reminds the first Christians (and us), to draw near to Jesus, “a living stone, rejected by human beings but chosen and precious in the sight of God”.

Peter urges the first disciples to be “like living stone”, building up the community with acts of faith and good works. He says, “let yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

How do we exercise our baptismal priesthood as “living stones,” who build up the community of believers, the spiritual

house of the Church today? Jesus shows the path as he responds to Thomas’ question, “Master...how can we know the way?” He responds to Thomas with these powerful words, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”.

### Word of God

In the power of the resurrection, we too can offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ as we draw close to the Word of God, live our faith, and serve the poor among us. Then we can pray with confident Easter faith, “speak to me, Lord”.

Question: How are you called to follow Jesus who is “the way, and the truth, and the life”?

**❗ Jem Sullivan holds a doctorate in religious education and is an associate professor of Catechetics in the School of Theology and Religious Studies at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.**



# TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



## Reporting on the abortion review goes from bad to worse

Recently, 25 years of relative peace were celebrated in Northern Ireland, but recent events also show that it's fragile, and there are legacies that linger and threaten to disturb it. A minority won't let go of a Troubles frame of mind, but I'd suspect most want to move on to a time when sectarianism fades away, and political divisions become what you'd expect in a normal functioning democracy.

These thoughts were prompted by drama series **Blue Lights** (BBC One, Mondays). It was a police drama set in Belfast and was of a high standard, though it avoided for the most part any treatment or exploration of sectarianism or even of political differences.

The series ended last Monday night, and throughout it offered a tense and emotional treatment of PSNI officers responding to various crises on the streets. There were gang activities, domestic disputes, racism, complicated romantic relationships, collusion between elements in the police, security agents and the gangsters.

Sometimes plot threads were teased out to a point when another crisis interrupted, and some threads were left without closure, sometimes left hanging, but



Police recruit Grace (Siân Brooke) in *Blue Lights* on BBC One. Photo: BBC/Gallagher Films/Two Cities Television

this was to a great extent a slice-of-life approach, and closure can be elusive in real life.

Considering the setting, I thought it was unwise and unrealistic to avoid religious themes – no sign of clergy, or anyone praying or going to church. There were plenty of moral dilemmas, even police cutting corners and taking shortcuts when the long way round would have been the way to integrity.

The language was consistently foul, and there was a relatively discreet sexual encounter, but the

best thing about it was the humanity – I felt the writers actually like humanity, and so many scenes captured genuine emotion and compassion among the colourful characters. The acting was consistently fine, particularly for the multi-layered female characters.

If there were no clergy in that show, there were a few in a very positive item on the **Nine News** (RTÉ One, Sunday) marking the launch of the Year of Vocations. Ailbhe Conneely's report included Fr Vincent Stapleton, a young priest in the Diocese of Cashel and

Emily, two young seminarians in Maynooth – Stephen Sherry and Anthony Hartnett, along with Bishop Alphonsus Cullinan. The theme of this initiative, we were told, is 'take the risk for Christ'.

Meanwhile, for the second week in a row, the abortion issue surfaced in the media – this time in relation to the official publication of the three-year review into our abortion legislation. It was all pretty predictable, with some balanced items, some bias, lots of unchallenged talk about 'abortion care' (as if ending an innocent and vulnerable life could be 'care'), politicians not being asked the hard questions – eg about the lives that will be lost if safeguards are loosened.

There was much wringing of hands about abortion 'services' being 'patchy' (thankfully – lives saved). It didn't seem to strike most politicians and commentators that doctors are primarily in the business of saving lives and using their pressurised time and resources to treat people who are actually ill.

As usual, the Friday morning programmes looked back on the week, but on this issue, nobody opposing the suggested liberalisation was included. On **The Pat Kenny Show** (Newstalk), we heard from

### PICK OF THE WEEK

#### SONGS OF PRAISE

**BBC One Sunday, May 7, 12pm**

Katherine Jenkins celebrates the coronation of King Charles III in the magnificent surroundings of Hampton Court Palace and explores how his faith and spirituality will shape his reign.

#### PILGRIMAGE: ROAD TO PORTUGAL

**BBC Two Tuesday (night), May 9 12.55am**

Another chance to see the final episode. The group finally reaches the famous Sanctuary of Fatima.

#### NEW! NATIONAL MARCH FOR LIFE, OTTAWA, CANADA

**EWTN Thursday, May 11, 4.30pm**

Direct from Ottawa's Parliament Hill, EWTN provides complete coverage of the annual National March for Life, Canada's most significant pro-life event.

Roisin Shortall TD (Social Democrats) who was in favour of the proposed changes, Senator Fiona O'Loughlin (Fianna Fáil) who was non-committal though asked for her own view, journalist Danny McConnell (*Sunday Business Post*) who referred to the report saying that some healthcare workers were "abusing their right to conscientiously object to abortion" by, allegedly, misleading "women seeking care". This should not be happening, he said, and he suggested that the State had failed to have structures sufficiently put in place to get ready for the change in the law.

Over on **Today with Claire Byrne** (RTÉ Radio 1), it was just as bad if not

worse. Journalist Alison O'Connor was obviously in favour of the review's liberalising proposals, as was Ged Nash TD (Labour) and Senator Róisín Garvey (Green Party). Kevin Doyle of *The Irish Independent* was neutral and thought the Oireachtas Health Committee was where the report would go to die (hopefully), especially with an election not that far away.

Broadcasters will defend such imbalance by saying it wasn't the only issue being discussed in these slots, but it is telling nevertheless. Imagine if all contributors were horrified by the review and wanted restrictions increased!

# Film

Aubrey Malone



## Humdrum lives of rural Cavan finely modulated

Somebody once described art as "Life with the dull bits cut out". But sometimes the dull bits can be just as artistic – or more so.

That's the case with *Lakelands* (15), a beautifully modulated evocation of rural life in Cavan, what Eamon Dunphy likes to refer to as 'unofficial Ireland'.

It's a part of our heartland which is so richly drawn in the novels of Dermot Healy. A world where activities like drinking and sport are as much part of the fabric of people's days as birth and death. Or love...

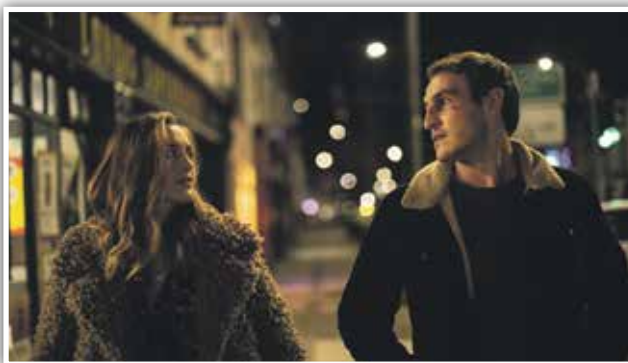
Cian (Eanna Hardwicke) lives with his widowed father (Lorcan Cranitch) on their small freehold. He's a wound-

up young man, like an Irish Brando in ways, a coiled spring waiting to explode. He has his wings clipped at a dance one night when he's beaten up by some local 'hards'. The injury – and threatened concussion – makes his troubled life even more troubled.

Will it put an end to his football career? Will he seek revenge on his attackers?

Before we get the answer to these questions, a young woman enters his life. Grace (Danielle Galligan) grew up in the area. She's now nursing in London and dating a doctor over there but has come home to take care of her ailing father.

One senses she and Cian have had a 'previous' from



Danielle Galligan and Éanna Hardwicke in *Lakelands* (2022).

the pregnant pauses in their conversations. We're halfway through the film before this is confirmed. That's one of the things I loved about it. Most things are left up to our imagination. When people

speak it's as if there are three dots after what they say. We have to fill in the blanks.

*Lakelands* was worth ten *Banshees of Inisherin* to me. There's no 'stage-Irishry' in it as there was in that film.

People speak to one another as they do in real life, with naturalness, authenticity, monosyllabic catchphrases, and nudge-wink innuendoes.

Hardwicke and Galligan play off one another with empathetic chemistry. The film's co-directors (and co-writers) Robert Higgins and Patrick McGivney, as well as providing some wonderful cinematography, etc. in the wider community with telling thumbnail sketches: Cian's laddish friends, his hard-driving football manager, his doctor, the local Garda. All these people look out for him. They know he's a 'sound soul' under that volcanic temper.

The film, like Cian himself, is a slow burner. Everything is nuanced to within an inch of its life. The exchanges between Cian and Grace are so softly delivered you often have to strain your ears to hear what they're saying.

Maybe we don't have to. Hardwicke is such a believable actor and Galligan has such expressive features, this is more than enough to convey the ache of longing between them, an ache that threatens not to be consummated, like so much more in this mutedly mesmerising work.

They reminded me of Paul Mescal and Daisy Edgar Jones from *Normal People* – but they outdo them. I can think of no higher praise.



# BookReviews

Peter Costello



## Ireland and the Coronation: from Palestine to Tara, and on to Westminster

Peter Costello

**W**hen Elizabeth II passed away at Balmoral, her beloved Scottish home, in September last, my first thought on her son's coming Coronation, was "What are they going to do about the Stone of Scone?"

This was the ancient inauguration stone of the Scottish nation. Having been removed from the royal site at the Moot Hill at Scone Palace in Perth, it was carried away by Edward I of England to London, where it was installed in the specially made Coronation Chair in Westminster Abbey. This was not a matter of loyal tribute from Scotland, but England wishing to humiliate a defeated nation.

### Scotland

The last time I saw the stone was after it was returned to Scotland. Rather than being installed in some suitable church, as it had been in London, it was locked up in a steel room in Edinburgh Castle and left to the less than tender mercies of tour guides. It looks a rather sad and shabby object, all its ancient renown and luminousness quite vanished. A once sacred object had become merely a stage property in an intercultural drama.

Before it was brought to Scone in 843 by Kenneth Macalpine, it had been in the highlands of west Scotland. There it was surrounded by legends, or rather myths. It was installed at Dunadd,

the capital of Dál Riada, the expanding kingdom of the invasive Irish, to whom Columcille came on a mission to spread Christianity.

In tradition the stone has become identified with the stone on which Jacob laid his head in sleep and dreamed of the angels coming and going between heaven and earth (Genesis, 28: 11-22). This was at Bethel, usually identified these days with Beitin on the West Bank.

**“It was claimed in Irish tradition that the stone was brought from Ireland by one of the leaders of the invasion of Scotland”**

However, the stone is of Old Red Sandstone, and an academic commission in recent years claimed that the stone is identifiable with all that underlies the Scone district.

In any case the stone was never claimed in legend to be of Scottish origin at all. Though said to have originated at Bethel, the geology around Bethel is limestone.

It was claimed in Irish tradition that the stone was brought from Ireland by one of the leaders of the invasion of Scotland (which eventually wiped out the Picts).

It was then identified with the Lia Fáil, the Stone of Destiny, which I discussed here a few weeks



Saul anoints the boy David.

ago. Irish archaeologists and historian, needless to say, have no patience at all with this “farrago of nonsense”. For them since the days of George Petrie in the

1830s the Lia Fáil remained at Tara.

But what did become of the Lia Fáil, which at one time it is accepted by all was indeed at Tara. A stone presently called the Lia Fáil on the Hill of Tara is no such thing, as I discussed recently in these pages.

**“It is so long since the last coronation, of Elizabeth II back in 1953, that what will be displayed will be a rite strange to most of the viewers”**

But an Irish tradition of an acceptable kind, in a passage of an ancient text, the *Acallam na Senórach*, that the Lia Fáil “was carried away by a hero”, and

taken out of Ireland into Scotland by the invaders spreading new rule over the new conquest. Irish tradition claimed it had been brought into Ireland itself by Princess Scotia, who landed in Kerry from Egypt, but whose name survives in the medieval name of Ireland and Scotland.

This is the legend, and it would take far more than a brief article to expound it. It would take a book. But readers will have to wait for that...

### Special occasion

The Coronation on Saturday May 6, will be a special occasion, for several reasons. It is so long since the last coronation, of Elizabeth II back in 1953, that what will be displayed will be a rite strange to most of the viewers.

But the Coronation has several important aspects.

The ceremony is basically a ritual of inauguration, certainly of some antiquity, inserted into an Anglican Communion service, basically into a form of the medieval communion service which those of the Catholic tradition will recognise.

### Archbishop

From the point of view of the Archbishop of Canterbury, who seems to have been slightly at odds with King Charles over his innovations to the established service, the most important part of the service lies, not in the use of an ancient chair, or even in the use of the Stone of Scone, or even placing the crowns on the heads of the King and Queen.

No: the religious heart of the coronation for Christians, lies in the anointing of the King and his spouse



A replica of the Stone of Scone at Moot Hill, Scone, Scotland.



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



The Coronation Chair in Victorian times

## “To devout Anglicans and some other Christians the ceremony on Saturday partakes of a divine injunction certified by the Bible”

with holy oil, acts that take place now shrouded in privacy.

This act can be traced back over some 3,000 years through the anointing by Columcille of Aidan King of Argyll supposedly seated on the Coronation Stone, circa 574. Behind this lay the use of holy oil in the coronation of the fourth Merovingian king Clovis I in 465. But the origin of this rite, which consecrates the king as one of God's anointed, is the selection in secret of David, then a mere shepherd boy, by Saul, who poured oil out on his head. This was about 1000BC (see I Samuel 16: 12-13).

To devout Anglicans and some other Christians the ceremony on Saturday partakes of a divine injunction certified by the Bible. But in the complicated religious life of modern Britain the acceptance of this presents a challenge to many.

### Ideals

The best current account of the ideals of the British coronation remains *Coronation: A History of Kingship and the British Monarchy* (Harper Collins, £25.00/€29.00) by Roy Strong, the distinguished art historian. This truly magnificent volume replaces a much earlier book of quality, *Monarchy* by Sir Harold Nicolson, the diplomat and litterateur, which was more political than cultural.

Roy Strong in fact was the High Bailiff of Westminster Abbey and Searcher of the Sanctuary down to 2019, so he had devoted much research to all aspects of the ceremony and the history of its venue over the centuries. He creates a rich tapestry of facts, with little speculation. It is altogether a wonderful book; but then not everyone these days is interested in monarchy today.

# Where to find a better politics in our troubled world

**Recovering Politics, Civilisation, and the Soul: Essays on Pierre Manent and Roger Scruton,**  
Daniel J. Mahoney  
(St Augustine's Press, paperback US\$20.00; ebook)

Frank Litton

**T**he Good Friday Agreement whose 25th anniversary we celebrate, or at the very least, acknowledge the enormous sigh of relief it occasioned, is taken as an example of politics at its finest.

It was politics as the clash of interests, the struggle for domination. Passions were more in evidence than reason, compromises reluctantly accepted, more than consensus. It was politics as Machiavelli prescribed.

Politics, he instructs us is not about doing good or being good; its goal is peace and security, won by whatever means are available. Thanks to the base motives of fallen humanity, the best means often include deceit, violence, injustice.

We should not expect our politicians to be virtuous. We should expect them to be courageous players in the games of power, adept at manoeuvring fortune to their advantage. Such virtue was much in evidence in Belfast; so today many are happy to applaud as 'peacemakers' those who connived in the murder of innocents. This is politics.

### Challenge

Few question Machiavelli's realism, most challenge that he has said all that can be said of politics. Certainly, we want peace and security but we also want justice. How can this demand be reconciled with the grim reality, the irrefutable lessons of history that teach how the will to power dominates and devastates? This question gives



British philosopher Roger Scruton.

political philosophy its interest and importance.

The question is particularly troublesome for the progressive liberals that dominate our politics. Of course, they want justice. Indeed, they are highly moralistic, ready to judge and condemn the character and motives of those who would disagree with them. The problem is that they lack a plausible basis for their positions. They know this, if only subliminally. This, I suggest, explains the declining standard of public debates, as reasons quickly give away to insults, and adjectives masquerade as arguments.

Daniel J. Mahoney's essays are especially welcome in this context. He introduces the work of two political philosophers, one Roger Scruton (1944-2022), English, the other Pierre Manent (1949-), French. Both respect religion: Scruton attended Anglican worship and Manent, whose parents were active communists, converted to Catholicism as a student.

Both are conservatives but not in the manner of the 'New Right' that puts politics in the service of economic doctrine. They are best described as

liberal conservatives, committed to the western democratic tradition. They defend that tradition, threatened as it is by the weaknesses of progressive liberal politics.

Progressive liberals start with the individual and conduct a cost-benefit analysis to find the minimum cost that must be paid to enjoy the benefits of society. The conservative liberals start from the obvious fact that we are born into a network of relationships in which we are shaped as we grow into a sense of ourselves as individuals, responsible for ourselves and to others.

What we find in society, and can only be found in society, are the situations that provide us with the resources to act as autonomous agents in pursuit of human flourishing with our fellows. This is no easy task. There is always room for improvement. We find this improvement in acknowledging the achievements of our society, working with the grain of what has been accomplished, learning from tradition.

### Problem

The problem, we could say, is to find a balance between our two basic needs for belonging and freedom. Belonging without freedom is misery; freedom without belonging is pointless. Marx, whose examination of the tensions between them is among the most famous, and certainly the most disastrous, proposed that communism would, eventually, deliver the perfect balance. It delivered only a coerced belonging under the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'.

Roger Scruton, motivated by his political philosophy, worked with considerable bravery to support the dis-

sidents striving to undo communist tyranny in Eastern Europe. He organised supplies and lecturers for the 'underground universities' in Czechoslovakia that developed and communicated the understandings that informed and encouraged the resistance.

The liberal progressives with their focus on individuals as the atoms out of which society is constructed, fail to account for our need to belong. Manent explores this failure. He exposes the limitations of the form of reason deployed by the progressive liberals. This 'instrumental reason' instructs us in the means we can pursue towards ends it cannot justify. Manent counters this failure in a profound study of the western political tradition, informed by history and clarified by acute philosophical analysis.

I think that Manent provides a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of politics than Scruton. This is not to diminish Scruton's contribution. His philosophical credentials are well established. His range is wider than Manent's. He has made, for example, substantial contributions to the philosophy of aesthetics. He has written an opera and a novel reflecting his experience in Eastern Europe. His critiques of prominent left-wing theorists are polemics at their best, his defence of conservatism, cogent.

These well-written accessible essays will help you make up your own mind. The convergences and divergences in their thought open up a political landscape that offers the possibility of a more humane politics than the Machiavelli-style offering of the progressive liberals.



French philosopher Pierre Manent.



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Notebook

Fr Martin Delaney

# Significant gestures to help cope with loss

Kieran O'Sullivan died on Saturday 16, April 2023. He was the local undertaker in Rathdowney, Co. Laois.

Dear Kieran,

I write this letter to you just two weeks after you have gone to the Father's house where no doubt you have had a wonderful reunion with your parents Michael and Mai. Mind you, I presume they were not planning to see you up there so soon just as we, your family and friends, were not expecting to let you go. Your death has left a huge void in our lives, but also in this community which you have served as an undertaker for so many years.

Kieran, just 55 years old, you first helped your dad with a funeral when you were 11 and in the 44 years since, you have journeyed with countless families when they were heartbroken and at their most vulnerable. Yes, you were a professional to your fingertips but the impact of your care of people went far beyond the professional and that is why so many people remember you with such affection and why our sense of loss is so great.

Kieran, your life and your untimely death has brought me to reflect on the profession which

you represented with such excellence over the years. The role of the undertaker in all of our communities is a unique one and in many ways parallels that of the local priest. We work together to help families at the most difficult and vulnerable times in their lives. During the days of a funeral, our roles diverge but also dovetail in a shared desire to help families carry their heavy burden. What we do and say in those days can have a lasting effect in people's lives and can help in no small way as they navigate their grief and begin to pick up the pieces of their lives. Beyond our words and actions, I think of the American poet Maya Angelo when she said "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel".

Covid-19 was a particular challenge for all involved in funerals. In Ireland we have many age-old customs which have served us so well particularly at the time of a death. For the most part we took these for granted, being able to sit at a bedside, to hold a hand, to kiss a loved one goodbye, to have a wake in the presence and face of the loved one



who has died, to embrace or at least shake hands with the bereaved, to turn up in droves at the funeral, to gather afterwards to break bread, to reminisce and share the familiar stories. We all know how important and how powerful those simple gestures are in helping us to cope with the loss of our loved ones. But for more than two years those significant gestures of healing were absent from all of our lives. As undertakers and priests, it was often left to us to steer people

through those restrictions as they said farewell. Kieran, thank you and all your colleagues in the undertaker profession for helping us through those difficult times.

Kieran, in a text you sent me a few weeks before you died, and you knew your time was short you quoted these beautiful lines from Psalm 23:

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no harm, for you are with me; with your crook and your staff, you will give me comfort."

It was a psalm you had heard at countless funerals. Now you were making those words your own. Today, the Good Shepherd has welcomed you to paradise. May you enjoy the peace of his home forever.

Fr Martin.

**The Undertaker**


The midnight hour, the darkest hour  
that only human grief may know,  
sends forth its hurried summons –  
asks me to come – I go!  
I know not when the bell may toll,  
I know not where the blow may fall,  
I only know that I must go,  
in answer to the call.  
Perhaps a friend, perhaps unknown,  
it's faith that turns the wheel –  
the tangled skin of human life,  
winds slowly on a reel.  
And I? I'm the undertaker.  
"Cold blooded" you'll hear them say,  
"Trained to the shock and chill of death,  
with a heart that's cold and grey".  
Trained – that's what they call it,  
how little they know the rest –  
I'm human, and know the sorrow  
that throbs in an aching breast.  
(author unknown)

**Value for money**

● Mary's husband dies and she decides to put an announcement in the newspaper. However, not having a lot of money, she tells the paper she wants to keep it as short as possible. "Just put 'Joe Hanly dead'."

"Actually madam, you can have up to six words for the same price," the newspaper tells her. "Is there anything you would like to add?" Mary thinks for a few moments and then says, "Can you add 'Mazda for sale'?"





## A PLEA FROM HONDURAS:

PLEASE HELP PROVIDE FOOD FOR FAMILIES AND THE ABANDONED LIVING IN EXTREME POVERTY

The Missionary Sisters of Christ the Master in Comayaguela, Honduras are counting on our help to bring vital food, medicine and other assistance to more than 800 people. Sister Alba Moreles Galvez has written to THE LITTLE WAY ASSOCIATION: "We have been working in this extremely impoverished area for ten years, where families live in wooden shacks in very basic conditions. I hope that the Little Way will assist us with five programs. These are: 1) Comprehensive Nutrition. We need to provide food to three groups, as well as training in gospel values and the development of agricultural projects. 2) A group of girls live and are educated at a Home run by our Sisters. They have nowhere else to go. 3) We wish to provide food and medical aid to older adults, who are often abandoned. 4) Provisions are needed by extremely poor families, as well as training in literacy, to give the young especially a better chance in life. 5) At San Isidro Farm we hope to expand self-sustaining agricultural projects, such as egg production."

Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez recommends that we help the Sisters, whom he knows well. He asks for as much as we can send these communities living in extreme poverty.

**This Lent, we urge you to give alms to our fund for the hungry, sick and deprived.**

**Without any kind of deduction for administration, this fund is used to support missionaries providing life-sustaining assistance to destitute families and individuals.**

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- St Therese

**LENT WITH ST THERESE**


In 1893, St Therese of Lisieux wrote to her sister Celine: "Jesus wills that we give alms to him as to one poor and needy. He puts Himself as it were at our mercy; He will take nothing but what we give to Him from our heart, and the very least trifle is precious in His sight."

The three pillars of Lent are prayer, fasting and almsgiving. The Catechism says: "Giving alms to the poor is a witness to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God."

**WELLS NEEDED**

Missionaries repeatedly appeal to The Little Way for funds to sink wells in order to provide clean, safe water, the lack of which causes much illness and many medical needs. On average, women in Africa and Asia walk around three hours every day to fetch water, often in scorching heat.

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**Little Way benefactors will be glad to know that a Mass is offered each day for their intentions in the Missions.**