

The Irish Catholic

MARY KENNY

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Take sacraments out of schools Dublin priests advise

EXCLUSIVE
Chai Brady

Preparing children for Communion and Confirmation will no longer be part of the role of a Catholic school if radical new plans proposed by Dublin priests are acted upon *The Irish Catholic* can reveal.

Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, who will make the ultimate decision on whether to implement the parish-based programme, has received the recommendation by the Council of Priests and has now asked that discussions begin at parish level this week *The Irish Catholic* understands. It would see parishes take on the leadership role and remove sacramental preparation from the schools.

Pressure

Chairperson of the council, Fr John Gilligan told *The Irish Catholic* that parishes are concerned that "there's that kind of pressure put on children, and their parents, as it becomes a school event and everyone in the school wants to do the same thing".

Under the recommendations the number of lay volunteers and catechists in parishes would be increased, as Fr Gilligan says they must be developed into "centres of learning and faith development".

He added that this would take "some of the burden from the schools in the preparation for the sacraments, and will hopefully lead to a more balanced educational approach to religious education in every class from junior infants to sixth class".

Not working

Secretary of the Council of Priests Fr Donal Roche of Wicklow parish admitted "we have a system at the moment that isn't really working".

"We're preparing children for sacraments, for a day, for an event, and parents aren't really part of that process, we've left them aside whereas schools have been doing a wonderful job, but they're preparing the children almost in isolation."

The move was welcomed by faith development spe-

» Continued on Page 2

Christmas comes early to Glenamaddy



While congregations are just getting ready to light the second Advent candle this weekend, a Co. Galway parish is getting in the festive mood early determined to put Christ back into Christmas. People from near and far are invited to come to St Patrick's Church, Glenamaddy on Sunday, December 15 after 10.30am Mass to experience the 'live crib'. Locals will re-enact the journey to Bethlehem and the manger scene with costumed characters, live animals and Christmas carols.

MICHAEL KELLY

Aontú has proved the doubters wrong

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BAIRBRE CAHILL

Parents see clear role for Faith in their child's life

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DAVID QUINN

Church has a vital voice in debate about immigration

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Preparing for the sacraments should be a serious commitment

The Council of Priests of the Dublin Diocese has recommended a bold move that – if adopted – will see sacramental preparation move from the schools to a parish-based programme.

This is how Catholic children are prepared for First Confession and First Holy Communion in most other parts of the world. The historic dominance of Catholicism in Irish culture has meant that it has gone hand-in-hand between parishes, families and schools.

That made perfect sense when the culture was homogeneously Catholic and most people shared a common set of values and worldview. In the past, one could be relatively well assured that Catholicism in Ireland could be picked up by osmosis. The reference points were the same and, even if parents were not strong believers, the community would carry one through.

That hasn't been the case for quite some time now and priests and parish councils have been grappling with questions around sacramental preparation for years.

Default

We often look to the model in the US where the parish is at the centre of things precisely because many Catholic children do not attend Catholic schools. That is not the case here, and the Catholic sector remains strong. But, the Catholic school is not what it once was. Many teachers find themselves teaching there by default. Even if they share the Faith, they often feel

inadequate to so do even though they try their best.

Teachers who are committed to sacramental preparation are often met with parents who are enthusiastic to be part of the 'big day' but haven't felt inclined to teach their child basic prayers.

“If Faith – however fragile – is important they must be met with open arms”

The Church needs to find a balance in the approach. The sacraments are not rewards for the best boys and girls in their classes or the ones who can recite the most prayers. They come to help us in the midst of our weakness, helplessness, doubt and fragility of faith. This is as true for parents as it is for children.

‘Take sacraments out of schools’

» Continued from Page 1

cialist and columnist for this newspaper, Bairbre Cahill who described the decision as “courageous”, especially as it would receive a backlash as “some people have an allergic reaction to change”.

“But I think it's where we need to move. I definitely

The model we need to find is one where parents sincere desire to have their child raised in the Faith is met with generosity rather than a litmus test of religiosity.

At the same time, they must be brought to a place where they understand that what they are asking of the Christian community in the sacraments requires a ‘buy in’ and they should want their child to be part of a family of Faith.

Asking people to pause to reflect on why they want their children raised in the Faith and why being part of the Christian community is important can only be a good thing.

It's not about being stingy with the sacraments – it's about asking people to be grown up about the decision they have made for their children. If Faith – however fragile – is important they must be

met with open arms. But, if people have in reality decided that Faith is not part of their lives, they must seriously engage with the paradox of wanting to pass something on that has no value to them.

“They must be brought to a place where they understand that what they are asking of the Christian community”

No one wants to build a Church that is only for the pure few, but, at the same time, I think most priests and parishioners would welcome fewer children presenting for the sacraments if the trade-off was families who take Faith seriously.

What do you think?

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think it's where the Holy Spirit is pushing us, we need to look at the integrity of the sacramental preparation.

“This is a really important move and hopefully it will encourage other dioceses to have that conversation, to move forward,” she said.

See Page 8.



Missionaries

As many fellow Irish might relate, for my whole life my faith has been there, but it was just something that I could list off rather than something I was passionate about, like I would say I was Catholic the same way I would say I have black hair. Then through a family friend I was invited to do NET. I can honestly say now after finishing my year that it was the best year of my life. NET helped me make my faith SO much stronger than it's ever been, and it's really helped me improve as a man of God.

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College Court, Ballybofey, Co. Donegal

Combat racist politicians with dialogue and generosity says bishop

Chai Brady

Understanding the “desperate” situations refugees flee from will help communities combat fear and influence from racist ideologies and

politicians, according to the Bishop of Ferns.

Returning from a conference about migration in Greece, which is on the front-line of the refugee crisis in Europe, Bishop Denis Brennan

said there’s “always a possibility” that politicians will try to use migration issues to bolster their popularity when people feel threatened.

“Most people are pretty generous and decent about

these things, but there’s always a danger and that’s why I suppose we have to be careful and we have to emphasise the positive and the Gospel side of it too – to welcome the stranger,” he

told this paper.

The conference was held in Athens on the topic Conference on the Pastoral and Social Care of Migrants and Refugees, organised by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.

So far Greece has received 1.5 million migrants and refugees, and many delegates highlighted the issues southern European countries are facing for residents and refugees – with dialogue and understanding being key for avoiding negative feeling.

Dialogue

Bishop Brennan praised some residents of the Leitrim town of Ballinamore, who, through dialogue with the Government, came to a favourable solution about the number of asylum seekers going to the town and welcomed them.

“It was lovely to see Ballinamore on the news, that gives you hope because you see the community and authorities coming in, they could sit down and talk about it and people were involved

in it.”

There has been several incidences around Ireland this year in which communities have protested outside sites earmarked for direct provision centres.

Two of these are Oughterard and Achill Island, where the communities felt there was a lack of consultation and thought put into where the Department of Justice decided to open direct provision centres.

Bishop Brennan added: “These people are fleeing from really desperate situation, life threatening situations and the Holy Father always asks people in the destination countries, the receiving countries, to be as generous as they can and I think that’s the best way of putting it, nobody wants to tell people or should tell people what to do or how much to do, but I think when we ask people to be as generous as they can and understand the need, I think people will respond.”

Three-way effort lights up Advent in Tagoat



Triplets Abigail, Alison and Leah are the youngest pupils in St Mary’s National School, Tagoat. They lit the first candle on the advent wreath at the beginning of Mass with Fr James Murphy PP of Rosslare (Tagoat), Co. Wexford.

London cleric proves hit with 60-second sermons

Staff reporter

A young London-based cleric has proved to be an internet hit by reminding young people of a simple Gospel truth: they are loved by God.

Rev. Chris Lee (36), the Church of England vicar of St Saviour’s in west London, has garnered more than 100,000 Instagram followers with his 60-second sermons.

His videos on YouTube regularly clock up eight million views, particularly amongst time-poor millennials.

Rev. Lee believes that many younger people are struggling under the pressure of the world. “In a world where [people are] told constantly they have to be sexual or they have to be popular, I’m just trying to tell people you’re loved as you are.”

“My content is not like theologically massive depth. I’m saying a Good News message I’m trying to give a little bit of hope, a little bit of encouragement and some kind of Christian teaching,” he says and is determined to reach out to younger people. “We have what I would call probably a missing generation in church. My major following is that exact bracket.

“To help young people reconnect with their faith, to see people informed that they are of value, and that they are loved – that is my hope for Instagram,” Rev. Lee insists.



Rev. Chris Lee.

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Presbyterian church to re-open as Latin Mass centre

Chai Brady

A historic Presbyterian Church in Belfast is to re-open next week as a new centre for the celebration of the traditional Mass in Latin.

Bishop of Down and Connor Noel Treanor will preside at Solemn Vespers in the former Fortwilliam and Macrory Presbyterian Church this coming Tuesday with the Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest who will be responsible for the liturgical life of the new community.

The following day, Bishop Treanor will also be present when the Eucharist is celebrated in the building for the first time.

While Presbyterians decided to sell the building due to dwindling congregations, it marks quite the shift since that community traditionally subscribes to the 1646 Westminster Confession of Faith which is highly critical of Catholic worship and

teaching.

The document describes "the Popish sacrifice of the Mass" as "most abominably injurious to Christ's one only sacrifice". It also rejects Catholic theology around transubstantiation.

In a statement this week, the Institute of Christ the King said it is "very grateful to the elders and community of the Fortwilliam and Macrory Presbyterian Church for the opportunity to continue to offer Christian worship in this sacred building".

Salvation

Wallace Thompson, Secretary of the Evangelical Protestant Society, said he was "saddened" by the news.

He told *The Irish Catholic* that "while the sale of its properties is a matter for the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, I'd be saddened that the building will no longer be used for the proclamation of salvation by Faith alone in

Christ alone".

The cost of purchasing the church has been met by an interest free loan which the institute will reimburse over

the next five years.

The building will reopen on Tuesday, December 10 at 6 pm with vespers. The first Solemn High Mass in the church

will take place the following evening at 6pm celebrated by Msgr Gilles Wach, Prior General of the institute.

Trócaire marks 50 years of 'peace campaign'



Mia Flynn (9), left, and Abbie Dolan (9y) and the Music Generation Choir from Holy Rosary National School Wicklow town helping Trócaire reimagine the 50th anniversary of an iconic peace campaign. This December marks the 50th anniversary of John Lennon and Yoko Ono's iconic War is Over 'peace campaign'. Photo: Mark Stedman

Wexford parishioners to put Christ central

Staff reporter

Young parishioners in Co. Wexford will be given a unique Christmas gift at Masses on Sunday December 15 in Glynn and Barntown.

Each child will receive an olive wood Christmas decoration for their Christmas tree at home – a decoration from Bethlehem, the birthplace of Christ which was blessed at the original manger in early October.

It marks Baminelli Sunday – a Sunday where the children of the parish are invited to bring along the baby Jesus from their homes for a special blessing at the 10am Glynn or the 11.15am Barntown Masses. Local parish priest Fr John Carroll said that "this annual event is one that children readily understand and appreciate, a gathering that has great following among children and adults alike."

Manger scene

He said that "the manger scene has all the key elements of life – the darkness of the sky which signifies



Fr Carroll preaching at Mass in St Catherine's Church in Bethlehem, the site of the manger where Christ was born. The visit was part of a Christian solidarity pilgrimage organised by *The Irish Catholic*. See pages 18-21.

human suffering and pain; the manger house itself which is in need of repair as is fallen humanity and a broken world; the straw and the animals, a humble abode where the poor feel at home and at ease; loving parents – the

bedrock of all family life; the child Jesus Himself – the God of surprises who lives among us humbly and who begins his earthly life as we do -- with milk from his mother, with sleep and with smiles, with cries and with play".

Archbishop renews appeal for stolen statue head in Thurles

The Archbishop of Cashel and Emly has appealed for the return of the head of a statue outside the cathedral in Thurles that was decapitated recently.

The motive for the vandalism of the 14-foot statue of Archbishop Patrick Leahy, which was placed there in tribute in 1911, has not been established. Archbishop Leahy was responsible for the building of the Cathedral of Assumption and no trace of his head has been found.

Five months after the decapitation, Archbishop Kieran O'Reilly said over the weekend that it has "upset the people of the archdiocese and, in particular, the people of the town of Thurles".

"I appeal today to any person who may be able to provide information about the incident or the whereabouts of the damaged piece of the statue to come forward," he said, asking anyone with information to contact the gardaí investigating the case at Thurles Garda station.

"A committee of the parish is offering a reward for information leading to the recovery of the head of the statue of Archbishop Patrick Leahy," he added.

Col praised for hosting churchless parishioners

The Diocese of Clogher honoured the Church of Ireland (Col) community who "generously and willingly" accommodated Catholics whose church was being renovated, but will now open this Sunday.

The renovation of St Mary's Church in Castleblaney, Co Monaghan cost €2.1m, with it opening this Sunday and will be rededicated by Bishop Larry Duffy.

While the works were underway Catholics from Mukno parish were accommodated in the Col's St Maeldoid's Church.

St Mary's Church was constructed in the 1850s on the site of an earlier church and was first dedicated by Bishop Charles McNally in 1861.



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Who to believe – Prince Andrew or Virginia Guiffre?

Who do you believe – Prince Andrew or Virginia Roberts? In the midst of a general election in Britain, as many people were discussing this as the state of the political parties.

Virginia Roberts – now using her married name of Guiffre – appeared on a special BBC *Panorama* programme on Monday night, which made some very serious allegations about Andrew, Queen Elizabeth's second son.

He was a friend of the convicted paedophile, the late Jeffrey Epstein, and Virginia claims that she was trafficked by Epstein, and forced into a sexual encounter with Andrew when she was 17.

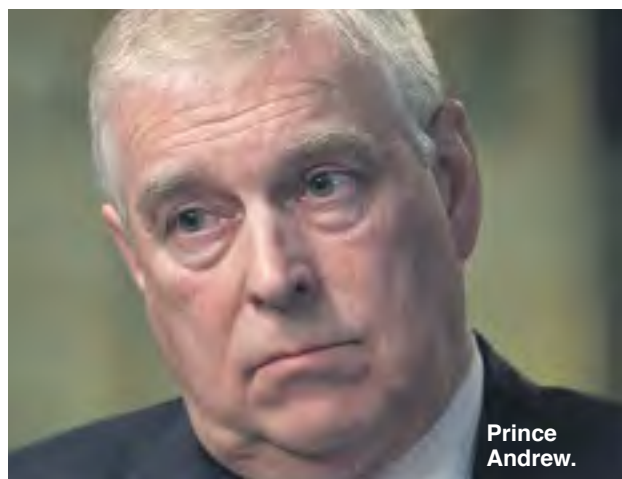
Photo

There is a famous photo of the Prince with his arm around the young Virginia, in the London house owned by his long-time pal Ghislaine Maxwell, who allegedly persuaded Virginia to submit to the Prince. Andrew, though admitting to being Epstein's associate, denies that he ever had sexual relations with Virginia, and doesn't recall meeting her.

Who to believe? There are, apparently, factual errors in both accounts. Ms Roberts-Guiffre mixes up some places and dates. Andrew's claim that he didn't know the lady is belied by the photograph, which forensic experts say is authentic.



Mary Kenny



Prince Andrew.

There is a lot more to unravel in this unedifying story, and we would need to see all the evidence before deciding whose version is true.

“Not a word, from the medical authorities, about the fact that 15 is under the age of sexual consent”

It sometimes happens, in any 'he-said, she said' dispute, that there is some factual truth on both sides, because episodes are remembered, forgotten, or experienced differently.

The wider truth that is so blatantly overlooked is that young girls, often under the

age of consent, have been allowed – even encouraged – by a sexualised culture to participate in full sexual activities when parents, guardians and society should be protecting them.

In Britain, where the alleged encounter took place, the age of consent is 16. In the US, it is 18. In Ireland it is 17. These laws have been flagrantly flouted for at least 25 years.

Agencies like the Family Planning Association fought hard to administer the contraceptive Pill to girls as young as 13, thus facilitating under-age sexual activity.

Just last month, in Ireland, there was a report in the *Irish Independent* about the alarming increase in sexually transmitted disease among teenagers as young as 15.

The teenagers were urged



Virginia Guiffre.

to seek medical check-ups. Not a word, from the medical authorities, about the fact that 15 is under the age of sexual consent: these youngsters should be warned that they should not be sexually active at all.

As for Andrew versus

Virginia: my own reaction is to feel sorry for both. She was evidently abused as a vulnerable teenager. But Andrew is suffering a Biblical punishment from which we would all shrink, his sins being shouted from the rooftops.

A movie well worth watching...

I enjoyed Fernando Meirelles film of *The Two Popes*, although, like most modern movies it's too long, at 126 minutes. But it's a riveting glimpse inside the Vatican – and a revisiting of events since the death of John Paul II.

Latinists will be pleased to hear conversations held in Latin (at Benedict's behest – subtly played by Sir Anthony Hopkins). And there's a jolly scene where the German pope and the Argentine pontiff (Jonathan Pryce, the spitting image of Francis) together watch a world cup football match – Germany versus Argentina.

And yet, there is an understated, poignant contrast between the young athletes on the field in superb sporting form, and the two old men who have known the burdens of responsibility in life's journey.

A scary story which also shows the safety of home

One of the children's books – and subsequently theatrical performances – that my grandchildren loved when they were little was Judith Kerr's *The Tiger Who Came to Tea*.

And now Channel 4 plans to produce a star-studded animated production of this charming fable over Christmas, with the voices of David Walliams, Tamsin Greig and David Oyelowo.

I am sure it will appeal to

The Tiger Who Came to Tea



home, is distinctly conservative: Sophie is seen happily with her stay-at-home mother, as they bake and organise the kitchen together, in very traditional female roles. Dad goes off to work in his office suit in the morning, and returns home in the evening.

Frisson

The element of the tiger adds a frisson of pretend scariness, but kids know the big cat is only make-believe, while mum and dad are altogether real, and represent the safety of the home nest.

young children everywhere.

Although sometimes I'm surprised that it's permitted to be produced at all, in these 'woke' times.

The storyline, based on a droll fantasy about a tiger visiting a little girl's

“We all sleep together on the floor to keep warm...”

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Photo: Gavin Douglas, Lebanon, 2019

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RTÉ apologises for slur on Kevin Myers

Staff reporter

RTÉ has “unreservedly” apologised to writer and broadcaster Kevin Myers after the station wrongly accused him of being a Holocaust denier.

The false claim was aired in 2017 after Mr Myers was dismissed as a columnist with the *Sunday Times* newspaper after an online campaign accusing him of anti-Semitism – despite the fact that he has been one of the most prominent voices against anti-Semitism for decades.

At the time, the chair of the Jewish Representative Council in Ireland Maurice Cohen defended Mr Myers insisting that “branding Kevin Myers as either an anti-Semite or a Holocaust denies is an absolute distortion of the facts”.

In a statement read out

on air late last week, RTÉ admitted it had been wrong. “On July 31, 2017, *Morning Ireland* introduced an item that suggested that Kevin Myers was a Holocaust denier. This was untrue, and defamatory of Mr Myers’ character”.

Scale

The statement added that: “*Morning Ireland* acknowledges that Mr Myers has, for over three decades, repeatedly testified to the scale and wickedness of Hitler’s ‘final solution’.

“*Morning Ireland* acknowledges the damage done to Mr Myers reputation. We regret this, and unreservedly apologise”.

The Irish Catholic understands that Mr Myers has received substantial damages from the national broadcaster.

€500,000 in failed homelessness house is ‘a mess’ – Fr McVerry

Chai Brady

A leading social justice campaigner has described the failure to use an historic building in Dublin for homeless accommodation that is costing taxpayers almost €200,000 a year as “a mess”.

Dublin City Council are paying €16,250 a month for a property on 21 Aungier Street in the city centre despite not being able to convert it into accommodation for 25 homeless people.

In 2017 the Dublin Civic Trust objected to the devel-

opment on the grounds it could compromise the structure which holds historic relevance. It is one of the oldest buildings in the city centre and dates back to 1667.

The Dublin Civic Trust restored the building about 30 years ago.

It was leased by the Peter McVerry Trust with the council agreeing to pay the rent. As the building is a registered historic monument permission for any work needed consent from the Minister of Heritage Josepha Madigan. Neither the council nor char-

ity had received consent.

Founder of the charity Fr Peter McVerry said: “It’s a mess, this should have been sorted out before. The heritage group, that appealed it, that wasn’t expected. It’s half a million euro over two and a half years, that’s a lot of money.”

Proposal

Speaking about proposed homeless accommodation nearby that was rejected he said: “Given the fact that there was a proposal for the other hostel, 150 beds, and

the locals objected, if that had gone ahead you wouldn’t have needed this one for 25. There’s disappointment all right, it’s a lot of money.”

After the Dublin Civic Trust intervened, the Department of Heritage blocked work on the site. The site has since remained vacant. It was originally leased in late 2016.

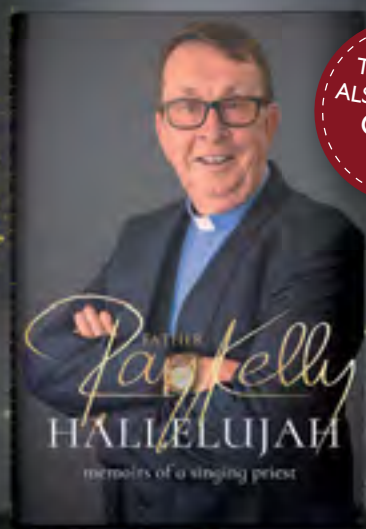
According to news reports the council is working with the Peter McVerry Trust to market the building, and they hope their commitment to the property will cease in 2020.

Queen’s students take up knightly challenge



Fourteen young men from Queen’s University Belfast along with chaplain Fr Dominic McGrattan were inducted as members of the Order of Knights of St Columbanus in a ceremony at the chaplaincy. Through prayer and apostolic service, the order seeks to defend and promote the Catholic faith, foster fraternity among members and reach out to those in need. The ceremony took place in the presence of family, friends and senior members of the order.


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Sr Consilio honoured by Oireachtas award

Staff reporter

Sr Consilio Fitzgerald, the founder of Cuan Mhuire, was this week presented with the Oireachtas Human Dignity Award at a ceremony in Leinster House.

It comes 53 years after she began work from a small room in the Convent of Mercy in Athy, Co. Kildare with people experiencing addiction. Today, there are five treatment centres around Ireland, including a woman-only-facility in Cork, as well as seven transition facilities throughout the country.

The award is presented

annually by the Oireachtas Human Dignity Group to a person or group committed to the promotion of human dignity.

Tribute

Paying tribute to her work, Senator Rónán Mullen of the Human Dignity Group said: “addiction is a huge cause of suffering and injustice at individual, family and community level.

“Sr Consilio’s work stresses that the solution begins with respecting the individual person and building up their capacity to change and become whole again,” he said.

NI voters urged to vote for pro-life politicians

A pro-life group have launched the ‘Repeal Section 9’ Campaign, which urges people in Northern Ireland to vote only for pro-life candidates in the upcoming Westminster Election.

Precious Life launched their campaign this week, which aims to put pressure on political representatives in Northern Ireland to state their commitment to repealing the Westminster-imposed abortion law before the elections on December 12.

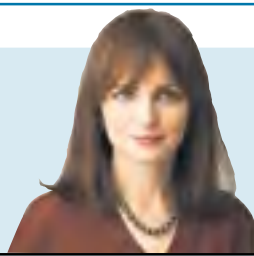
Director of Precious Life, Bernadette Smyth said: “Overnight, on October 22, 2019, Northern Ireland went from the safest place in Europe for unborn babies, to the most dangerous place in Europe for unborn babies. Section 9 of the Northern Ireland Executive Formation Act 2019 allows killing unborn babies, for any reason, up to the seventh month of pregnancy and killing unborn babies, with disabilities, up to the moment of birth.”



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Maria Steen

The View



Hope requires that we place our trust in God's promises to us

While at Mass on the first Sunday in Advent, I was momentarily struck by the beauty of the sanctuary, and the vestments worn by the priest and deacons. The chasuble, a heavy silk damask with a background of indigo, was exquisitely embroidered with clouds of gold and silver thread. All around, my eyes feasted on the majesty and beauty of the carvings and painting on the sanctuary walls, the golden vessels, the tabernacle door.

My gaze rose with the incense to the stained glass window above the high altar, and stopped at the depiction of the crucifixion. For a moment, I tried to imagine what that sacrifice on Calvary looked like: the cold, the pain, the cruelty, the indignity, the darkness of that moment. I looked back toward the altar, where once again, Calvary was being made present and thought how utterly different to that first Calvary Christ's sacrifice is for the onlooker now, compared to then.

Those who watched in horror at what unfolded before their eyes did not yet know, perhaps could not conceive of Christ's triumph over death. But we can, and for that reason, the sacrifice on Calvary as re-presented in each and every Mass, is glorious too.

It is right and fitting that the outward signs at Mass are glorious: all that depiction of beauty and majesty fit for a king, the excelling of human skills in building and making, painting and sculpting, all point towards a glory known, in the person of the risen Christ, and a hope of a glory yet to come. And there is no better time than Advent to contemplate this mystery.

Violence

If Christ's death was appalling in its violence and suffering, His birth was far from salubrious. No crib for a bed, without the comfort of a home and familiar surroundings, the King of Kings was born in a stable and laid in a lowly



manger. Yet we celebrate with feasting, and gifts, and decorations and lavish displays.

While the non-believer does this in a quasi-pagan fashion, without regard for or even interest in the reason behind the celebration, the Christian celebrates a glorious mystery: our freedom and salvation. Christ humbled himself by taking human form and coming into the world as a tiny infant, in order that in time he might pay the ransom for our sin and open the gates of heaven for us.

“Hope then is an act of will: a humble surrender to God's parental authority”

In recalling the anticipation of that first Christmas night during Advent, we look forward in like anticipation to Christ's second coming. Advent is a season filled with hope and joyful expectation. We join with the Blessed Virgin Mary as she waits to bring forth the saviour of the world. We join with the prophets Isaiah and Micah, and all God's people who looked forward to the coming of the Messiah.

For us though, we have tasted his glory, we have seen God's promise to his people fulfilled in Christ's first coming. We know that God keeps his promises, and so it is with joyful hope and expectation that we look forward to his second coming.

Advent then is the time of year when we might best meditate on the theological

virtue of hope. Hope is not a feeling, as the world might have us believe. It is a positive act of the will. The theological virtue of hope responds to the aspiration to happiness which God has placed in the heart of every man, as the Catechism tells us.

Hope is something that comes to children easily. Hope requires that we place our trust in God's promises to us – it is in this way that we become like little children who trust so completely.

Christ warned us explicitly: “Truly I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” This exhortation to become like little children was emphasised by Christ not only in his words but even more so in the manner of his incarnation: being conceived in his Mother's womb, born as a tiny infant and growing through all the normal developmental stages of childhood.

The Christ-child, although God, completely placed his trust in his earthly parents to protect him and keep him safe. Though limited by their humanity and having nothing to compare with his omnipotence, the Word entrusted the care of his flesh to Mary and Joseph. In doing this, he showed us how we must be with his Father. Hope then is an act of will: a humble surrender to God's parental authority, a child-like trust in his providence.

This Advent, I have resolved to try to recapture a child-like sense of wonder

and awe at the Saviour's birth. When a child is enraptured in that way, nothing can distract him from the wondrous thing he contemplates.

There are so many distractions in the run up to Christmas that it can be difficult to take the time to stop and wonder, yet that indeed is what is required: stopping.

Living Christmas all during Advent takes from the celebration of the joyful event of Christ's birth. For many, Christmas is over after December 25 passes. Delaying putting up the Christmas decorations, and holding off on the Christmas songs can help us to really

experience the season of Advent.

There are 12 days of Christmas, from December 25 to January 6, when we celebrate another glorious feast: the Epiphany.

“Advent is the time to retreat and contemplate the mysteries we are about to experience”

The visit of the Magi showed that God's promises to the chosen people were now open to all. Christ, though born into the Jewish people, came that all might be saved. That

first Christmas foretold our own salvation. Advent then is the time to retreat and contemplate the mysteries we are about to experience and celebrate during the Christmas season.

Simply lighting a candle on a wreath in an 'Advent-darkened room' is enough to induce some wonder, or contemplating Christ's lineage in a Jesse tree, or the miracle of Christmas night in the figurines of the crib.

A few minutes of quiet, even in a busy family home, help recall the mysteries we await, while the words of the Advent hymn describe our hope: O Come Emmanuel.

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That Ireland is becoming less religious – at least in terms of the regular practice of the Faith – is self-evident. What is less clear is how to handle sacramental preparation, particularly since things like First Holy Communion and Confirmation remain hugely popular rites of passage for many people who are not religious.

The Council of Priests in the sprawling Dublin Diocese is now proposing a radical break with the past that would see preparation from the sacraments be taken out of schools and put in the hands of parish communities. It will be welcomed by many, dismissed by others.

The Council of Priests recommendation to Archbishop Diarmuid Martin was made as they felt the current system “isn’t working”, according to Fr John Gilligan – chair of the body.

He said that in some instances, the initial moves could come into effect as soon as September next year.

At one level, the move is pre-emptive as fewer schools being built are under Catholic patronage and the push for divestment is, at least in part, gaining momentum.

The emphasis, Fr Gilligan insists, will be put on parishes

Grasping the nettle of preparation for the Sacraments

There are few more hotly-debated issues in Church circles than what to do about getting children ready for First Holy Communion, writes **Chai Brady**



to deliver sacramental preparation. The recommendation has already been forwarded to the archbishop and consultation will now take place with parishes to get feedback.

Fr Gilligan told *The Irish Catholic* that “while religious education will continue in the schools teaching the children, parishes have a responsibility to support their parents.

“The recommendation suggests new relationships between parishes and schools and between parishes and parents,” he said.

Many priests say they feel disheartened by the lack of serious preparation evident in many people who present their children for the sacraments. Fr Gilligan says that “for many people who haven’t been in the Church, they want their child to receive the First Penance and the First Communion, but when you check to see if they’ve been baptised, they haven’t”.

“There’s that kind of pressure put on children, and their parents, as it becomes a school event and everyone

in the school wants to do the same thing,” he said. It’s a scenario played out in parishes across the country.

Under the recommendations the number of lay volunteers and catechists in parishes would be increased, as Fr Gilligan says they must be developed into “centres of learning and faith development”.

He added that this would take “some of the burden from the schools in the preparation for the sacraments, and will hopefully lead to a more balanced educational approach to religious education in every class from junior infants to sixth class”.

‘Courageous’

The move was welcomed by faith development specialist and columnist for *The Irish Catholic*, Bairbre Cahill described the decision as “courageous”, especially as it would receive a backlash as “some people have an allergic reaction to change”.

“But I think it’s where we need to move. I definitely think it’s where the Holy Spirit is pushing us, we need to look at the integrity of Sacramental preparation. This is a really important move and hopefully it will encourage other dioceses to have that conversation, to move forward.

“I think at the moment we’re in a situation where there is a conflict within some parishes where there are children coming from schools that aren’t Catholic schools and there’s a bit of an attitude that it’s not their issue and the bottom line is if we have respect for the Sacraments then it is our issue. And we need to look at the quality and robustness of that preparation.”

“They promise to bring the children up in the Faith, and the schools have almost taken that role away from them”

She added that it’s not just about involving people three months in advance of Holy Communion or Confirmation, it’s about building a relationship right from Baptism.

The new initiative proposed by the council aims to get parents more involved with their child’s faith development and be proactive in preparing

them and bringing them to get the Sacraments.

Secretary of the council Fr Donal Roche of Wicklow parish admitted “we have a system at the moment that isn’t really working”.

“We’re preparing children for sacraments, for a day, for an event, and parents aren’t really part of that process, we’ve left them aside whereas schools have been doing a wonderful job, but they’re preparing the children almost in isolation.”

“Like at Baptism they promise to bring the children up in the Faith, and the schools have almost taken that role away from them,” he said.

Currently there are many Catholic children attending non-Catholic Schools, Fr Roche said, and go to parishes for the Sacraments. “But that will become more and more of an issue where you have religion under pressure. It’s not about giving into pressure, this is something we’ve been thinking about for a long time. But it’s possible that it will come to that where the sacraments will not be happening in the schools anyway, we’re trying to pre-empt that.”

He added: “It’s not that we’re cutting schools out of it, I mean absolutely the Catholic schools will lead the Catholic programme, the ‘Grow in Love’ programme, and we hope to support that, but this is just to shift the emphasis from the school event to a parish event.”

Asked whether this may reduce the numbers of children coming forward to receive the sacraments both priests admitted this would probably be the case.

Not all senior figures in the

archdiocese will be enthusiastic about the proposal. During a session of *The Irish Catholic* national education conference in October Msgr Dan O’Connor, Vicar for Education in the Archdiocese of Dublin, said that principals tell him moving the sacraments out of schools would “take away a part of the school that’s important”.

“Schools have been doing a wonderful job, but they’re preparing the children almost in isolation”

“What happened, they say to me, to the triangle of handing on the Faith? The home the school and the parish,” said Msgr O’Connor. “Is the school now going to be like the home, a place where there will be no involvement with Sacramental preparation?”

Speaking about divestment of patronage of Catholic schools to other educational bodies, he said he asked eight schools in Malahide in Dublin whether any of them would divest.

He said: “Not one of the schools was prepared to stand up and say ‘we will go’, and there’s 1,900 people in Malahide in the census who said they had no faith – they became very Catholic, and I was accused of being Oliver Cromwell.”

Whatever decision is ultimately reached, it will remain contentious. Many Irish parents are not so religious that they want to take the faith formation of their children seriously, but nor are they non-religious enough to set it aside completely.



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Church has a vital voice in getting asylum policy right



The only appropriate response to refugees and asylum seekers is one of charity, writes **David Quinn**

In his new book, *Dominion*, historian Tom Holland discusses the radical and transformative effect Christianity had upon the ancient world, seeding it



with new ideas that shape our thinking to this day in ways we barely even acknowledge.

It's a theme developed by other authors, but Mr Holland does it with particular verve. The single most transforming idea

is that we are all made in the image and likeness of God and therefore we are all of infinite and equal moral worth. The king and the peasant might be very different in the eyes of society, but in the eyes of God, they are the same.

The ancient Greeks and Romans had no such notion. For them, might was right. The first shall be first, and the last shall be last. Christianity as an idea turned this upside down, even if the Church itself in practice sometimes went along with the ways of the world, still treating the first as first and the last as last.

Credit

St Paul, to whom Mr Holland gives huge credit, taught that in Christ: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female."

In him, we are all one.

The logical extension of this is that in Christ, there are no races either. All races are the same and equal, and this is why racism ought to be morally abhorrent to all Christians.

At the weekend in his homily to mark the beginning of Advent, Archbishop Diarmuid Martin quoted Pope Benedict who said: "[Humans] are not some casual and meaningless product of evolution. Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary". This is much the same point Mr Holland draws out in his book.

Archbishop Martin also told Massgoers: "I am horrified to find traces of such racism among believers. The terms 'refugee' and 'asylum seeker' should only arouse heartfelt concern in the Christian heart."

He is correct, of course. The only appropriate response is one of charity. This is why the Church itself has programmes that reach out to refugees.

There are many ways to

help refugees, some better than others. In 2015, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, responding to the war in Syria and the millions of refugees it created, decided to open her country's borders to anyone who wanted to come. In a short time, over a million had arrived.

Many were not Syrian, and the majority were young men, capable of making the arduous journey to Germany. Questions began to be asked. For example, was the German policy indirectly discriminating against women, children, the old and the infirm?

Maybe a better policy, and a better use of resources, was to help the refugees directly in their camps either in Syria or in nearby countries. Or perhaps rather than inviting refugees to make the long trek to Germany, it would have been better to go into the camps and ask people to apply for refugee-status from there and then fly them directly to Germany.

Britain under David Cameron was sending more aid to the refugee camps than any other EU country. Was this the way to go?

Ireland is on the edge of Europe and it is hard for refugees to get here. Under EU law, they are also supposed to claim asylum in the first EU country they arrive in, and there are very few direct flights from the world's trouble spots to Ireland.

“What happens to asylum-seekers once their country of origin is at peace again?”

What we have mainly done instead is to fly Syrians directly from their camps to Ireland, which is surely the best approach.

There is also a clear need to distinguish between genuine asylum-seekers and those who are really economic migrants. If you don't do this, then the system becomes wide open to abuse. If asylum is given to everyone who asks for it without proper checks being conducted, then would-be economic migrants who are trying to come to Ireland legally, are effectively encouraged to take advantage of the system and claim refugee status

instead.

Irish people are also affected. The social housing waiting lists become longer, for instance, as asylum-claims are processed. Is that fair if not all claims to asylum are genuine?

“Why are more people arriving from these countries than from genuine trouble-spots? The question should at least be asked, and adequately answered”

This is why Leo Varadkar recently drew attention to the fact that many recent asylum-seekers arriving in Ireland are from countries like Albania or Georgia. Neither of these places is considered by the EU to be a trouble-spot, so why are more people arriving from these countries than from genuine trouble-spots? The question should at least be asked, and adequately answered.

As World War II broke out, my grand-aunt, Alice Ward, was working in France as a governess. When the Germans invaded France, she was living with a Jewish family. Eventually they were rounded up, Aunt Alice along with them. She was sent to Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. Fortunately, she survived the war and the Red Cross repatriated her to France. She lived to the ripe old age of 95, dying in 1982.

This gives rise to another question. What happens to asylum-seekers once their country of origin is at peace again? Traditionally a refugee seeks safety for a period of time, when they are fleeing war, for instance. When the war is over, should they return home?

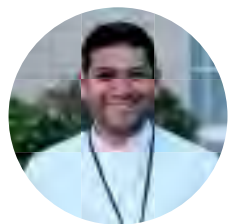
Also, where are they best accommodated while their asylum-claims are being processed, in cities or small towns?

These are the questions we must ask when considering asylum policy. The bishops are not there to lay down precise policy prescriptions, but they must lay out broad principles that are fair to considerations of both charity and justice to all parties, national and non-national alike.

Fr Eduardo Nuñez-Yepes OMI

“The Lord calls us and then sends us. I must say that my call to missionary life took me by surprise. Now, I realise that it has been the best thing that has happened to me in life.”

—Fr Eduardo, Darndale-Belcamp



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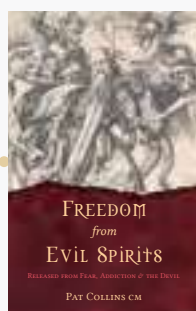
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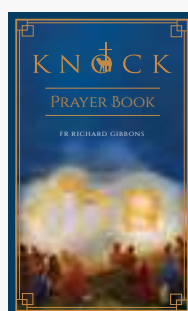
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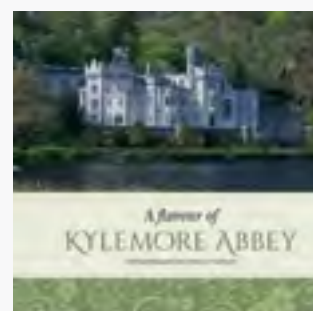
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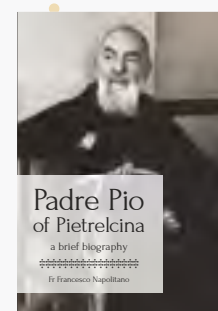
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Aontú can be proud of outpolling well-funded establishment parties

To describe the campaign for the Dáil byelections as underwhelming would be kind. In reality, the whole thing was painfully dull and the only interesting moments were the revelation of anti-immigrant outbursts from the Fianna Fáil candidate in Dublin Fingal Lorraine Clifford-Lee and the bizarre warning about ISIS children from her Fine Gael counterpart in Wexford Verona Murphy.

A lot of the commentary since the results came in has inevitably focused on the victors. Sinn Féin's success in Dublin Mid-West (not Dublin North West as claimed by the party's hapless northern leader Michelle O'Neill on Twitter) is being seen as a shot in the arm for the party.

There have been rumblings about the leadership of Mary Lou McDonald and Ms O'Neill after the party suffered a number of embarrassing

While media commentators are trying to ignore the relative success of Peadar Tóibín's movement, he deserves much credit for what he has achieved so far, writes **Michael Kelly**



electoral humiliations earlier this year, the byelections will quell that for how.

The election of the Green Party candidate in Dublin Fingal Joe O'Brien is not exactly the 'wave' that party's relatively modest success was hailed as in the local elections. But, it is a sign that the Greens will be a force to be reckoned with in the general election – at least in urban areas.

Support

Fianna Fáil taking the seats in both Wexford and Cork North Central will be seen as an endorsement of sorts

of party leader Micheál Martin and his support for Fine Gael. Though, it should also be noted that both of the party's successful candidates were formidable local representatives before the poll.

One might easily conclude now to the victor go the spoils. But, in Ireland's system of multi-seat constituencies with proportional representation, the results of the other parties in a byelection do matter. Now, there's a major health warning about extrapolating anything too much given the pathetic



Peadar Tóibín.

turnout, but it's hard to see the polls as anything other than a satisfying day for pro-life republican party Aontú.

It is the party's first outing in a constituency-wide poll in the South, and the results show that it has achieved what many fledgling political movements have not: it has survived and lived to put up a credible flight in the general election.

“Aontú is the only party in the Dáil which does not receive a single red cent from the establishment”

In Wexford, Cllr Jim Codd achieved a respectable 5.2%. Both Fine Gael TDs from Wexford secured their seats in the last general election by polling just over 10% each. That would mean that Cllr Codd would have to double his vote to win a seat, but it's nowhere near an impossibility.

In Cork North Central the Aontú candidate – Finian Toomey – polled 3.9% of the first preferences. In the local elections held earlier this year, the Green Party polled 5.5% and this translated into a seat count of 49 across all local authorities.

Interestingly, both Aontú candidates in the byelections also picked up some transfers from those who polled below them when they were eliminated. Transfers are key to winning seats and pushing candidates closer to the quota, so while first preferences are vital to staying in the race, second

and third preferences are the stuff of electoral gains.

The achievements of Aontú in Friday's election is all the more remarkable when one considers that the party receives absolutely no State funding.

The party – led by Peadar Tóibín – outpolled Independents for Change, People Before Profit and the Social Democrats.

Last year, Independents for Change got €257,472 in funds from the taxpayer, People Before Profit drew down €386,208 and the Social Democrats received €193,104 from the State.

Aontú is the only party in the Dáil which does not receive a single red cent from the establishment. Mr Tóibín put it well this week when he described the byelection as “a David versus Goliath result for Aontú. We did not exist last year, we are the only Dáil party with no funding, we get the scraps off the table as far as media coverage goes and yet we are challenging the establishment parties and have a real chance of a seat in Wexford in the next general election.”

In that light it is impressive, and Mr Tóibín will be hoping that the weekend results are replicated in the Westminster elections in the North due to be held later this month.

“Mr Tóibín and the Aontú team he has built deserve much credit for doing as well as they've done. And he deserves to be talked about in the media more than he is”

The party is very much in building mode, and no one thinks they have even a fighting chance of taking one of the region's 18 seats in the UK Parliament. But, that's to see the contest in a one-dimensional way: the real test for Aontú in the North is how many votes it can shave off both the SDLP and Sinn Féin.

Values

The traditional parties of nationalism have abandoned many of the values that were key to a largely Catholic electorate in the North. Aontú will want to capitalise on this and put themselves in pole position to make further gains at local level in the North and be in serious contention for seats in the power-sharing Assembly (if it ever gets up and running again).

Mr Tóibín and the Aontú team he has built deserve much credit for doing as well as they've done. And he deserves to be talked about in the media more than he is.

The fact that the relative impact the movement is having is being largely ignored in the media is proof positive that the establishment plan is to try to starve the nascent organisation of oxygen at birth. You'd nearly think they were nervous of permitting diverse opinions in politics.

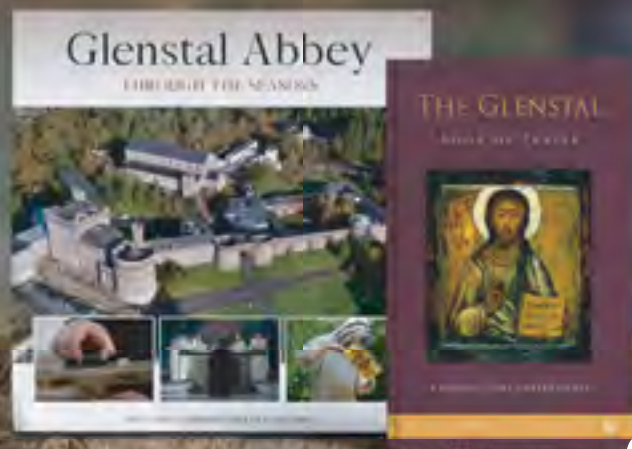
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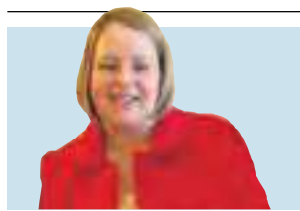
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GIFT

Moving from parochialism into genuine relational ministry with young people



Gathering together to share ideas, recharge and build creativity is invaluable, writes **Paula McKeown**

On Saturday November 16, more than 40 young adults actively involved in Catholic Youth Ministry gathered in Sacred Heart Parish in North Belfast, in the Diocese of Down and Connor, for the Fifth Encounter Network Conference.

Encounter is a grassroots Catholic youth ministry leader's network that was established in 2016 after World Youth Day in Krakow. This initiative has been developed in response to a lack in collaboration, connection and creativity across the Church in relation to youth ministry.

The primary aim of the Encounter Network is to develop a relational, collaboration and missional approach to youth ministry that is Christ-centred. It is a space for those involved in youth ministry to come together to recharge the batteries, reflect and spend some time with like-minded people to renew their vocation.

Such a network may not seem like a revolutionary idea of gathering those involved in youth ministry, but many of those engaged in pastoral ministry work in isolation with little support from those around them. Pope Francis highlights "We can learn from one another, warm hearts, inspire minds with the light of the Gospel" (CV, 199). This is exactly what we are about as a group of youth ministers.

"The methodology is simple, we have nice coffee, enriching conversations, a tasty lunch and inspiring workshops in which we encourage and learn from each other. Each gathering is centred on Christ with prayer,



Participants at the Fifth Encounter Network Conference.

parise and worship and many clergy and religious have been joining us at Encounter.

At our recent gathering Tony Silcock reflected on 'Gods Call in our life', reminding us that "relationships are key with young people and between different youth ministers".

"We need to move away from parochialism into genuine relational youth ministry so we can share in our collective responsibility to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ," he said.

Niall McNally (Cast Ireland) creatively explored 'Dreams & Dream killers', Fr Conor McGrath and Fr James O'Reilly (Lourdes Youth Co-ordinators) led a teaching

on 'greatness in the small things' and Dierdre McNally finished proceedings with a challenging call moving us from 'Maintenance to Mission'. Overall, the day was a huge success with many youth ministers involved commenting on what they enjoyed about the day.

Volunteers

Those engaged in the Encounter Network are representative of those engaged at youth ministry at the grassroots.

They include parish volunteers, retreat teams, teachers/chaplains, youth movements/organisations and diocesan youth directors. We also have several religious and clergy

that join us in our common mission with and for young people. Please join us for the next gathering.

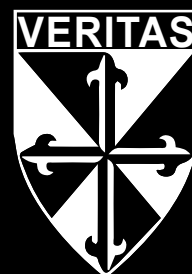
Paula McKeown is the Director of the Living Church Office in Down and Connor. The next Encounter Network

gathering will be on May 16, 2020 and the theme is creativity.

We will explore several areas including: being architects of new cathedrals, making information beautiful, Creating environments that

minister to the head and the heart, working more creatively with young people and music – the quickening art.

For more information, see www.encounternetwork.com or email admin@encounternetwork.com



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Voices from Encounter

"Today has really helped me to discern my call to the priesthood and the first talk struck me" – (Damian, St Louis House)

* * * * *

"As I travel back to Ohio, USA; one of my highlights is the craic and conversation at encounter" – (Eddie Cotter, Dead Theologians Society)

* * * * *

"This is my first time at an Encounter Gathering and I have really been inspired and encouraged in my role in at ADYC" – (Anne-Marie, Armagh Diocese Youth Commission)

* * * * *

"This is my fifth time at the gathering and I enjoy the relationship building and learning" – (Noel, Youth 2000)



The spectacle of a senior politician only noticing the crisis in hospitals because her own child got sick is hard to stomach, writes **John McGuirk**

The old American adage that there are only two things certain in life: death, and taxes, is only partially true. There is, of course, another certainty, and that is that at some point in your life, you will become sick

The Irish health service is not somewhere you should ever want to go

and need medical treatment. For those of us who are blessed with good health, the prospect might be years away; for others, especially the old, and the very poor, illness is a fact of life.

Because of this, the Government spends around €17 billion of our money every year on the health service. To put that in context, because human beings find it very difficult to understand the sheer scale of large numbers, or the difference between millions and billions, a person earning €100,000 every year would have to work for ten years to earn a million. To earn €17 billion, they would have to work for 170,000 years.

It is a staggering sum. We spend it all because looking after each other when we are sick is the

basic measure of a civilised, and Christian, society. It shouldn't matter who you are, or what you are worth, or what you have done in your life. When you are sick, we come together, as a people, and make sure you are looked after. Done properly, state funded healthcare is something that we should all be proud of.

Vast sums

To manage the health system, we elect politicians and put them in charge of it. We give them these vast sums of money, even though they're just ordinary people like you and me and ask them to put it to use in a way that makes sure that everyone gets the treatment they need, when they need it.

Because the budget is so huge, and politicians are

human, a degree of waste and mismanagement is inevitable. As you might expect, most of the money goes on salaries. A surprising amount goes on drugs and medicines, which are very expensive. And annually, tens of millions are spent on consultants reports and the like to try and get the whole thing to run better.

And yet, in University Hospital Limerick last week, a 90-year-old woman was left for two full days without basic pain medication. Imagine that – two days to get a painkiller, because of overcrowding, awful management, and, you can bet, the politeness of an old woman who suffered the indignity of lying on a trolley in crippling pain rather than complain about people who she probably assumed were just doing their best.

The woman's story is not an unusual one. The fact is that for most people who have ever experienced it up close, the Irish health service is not somewhere you should ever want to go. Overcrowding, delays, endless waiting, and the very real chance that you could leave a hospital sicker than when you went into it because of a hospital bug – that's the real experience of many of us.

“Every single one of them should have to spend at least one night a year in a busy A&E”

All of this we bear, when we have to bear it, because awful treatment is much better, unless you're doomed to death anyway, than no treatment at all. But it's not good enough.

Last week, in another hospital, in another part of the country, another patient was having a terrible experience. Early in the week, a 39-year-old mother of two found that one of her children was sick. Like any good mother, she took the child to Crumlin Children's hospital. Afterwards, she said the following about her experience:

“I paid a visit to Crumlin A&E myself on Sunday evening with a child. It's wholly unacceptable to my mind that a waiting room



would have vomiting babies, breastfeeding mothers, head injury children, broken arm children, all in the one mix. In terms of provision of healthcare it's really not acceptable in a country like this”

The woman concerned, of course, was Fine Gael TD Kate O'Connell. Deputy O'Connell is not only a Government TD, she is also a long-standing member of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on health. In other words, she's been one of the most senior politicians responsible for the health service for years. Yet this was, apparently, the very first time she had visited a hospital emergency room in that time. Isn't that extraordinary?

Imagine a cattle farmer who went three years without looking at a field, or inside a calving shed. What state would his farm be in if he just left it to others?

We give politicians more money than most people can imagine and ask them to run a health service for us. What

we have gotten in return looks, on many nights, in many hospitals, like a scene from the Bosnian wars. And now we have the spectacle of a senior politician, in charge of the whole thing, only realising the disaster that it is because her own child got sick and she had to visit a hospital.

Frankly, every single one of them should have to spend at least one night a year in a busy A&E department, talking to the nurses and the patients. How can you understand a problem, if you never see it?

And how, on earth, did the country elect, and put in charge of so much money, politicians who never think to look at how it's being spent until they, themselves, get sick? Much like the cattle of a farmer who didn't look at them for three years, the sick people of Ireland are not in safe hands with this Government.

As Ms. O'Connell has just found out, to her everlasting shame.

“Imagine a cattle farmer who went three years without looking at a field, or inside a calving shed. What state would his farm be in if he just left it to others?”

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Chai Brady speaks to an Irish priest who combats human trafficking in Vietnam

Understanding why people risk their lives and pay extortionate amounts of money to be taken on perilous journeys across Europe is confounding for many people far removed from the causal factors behind the decision, but one priest who works on the front line in Vietnam says the young people are seen as heroes by their families for their sacrifice.

Fr Seán Cassin OFM (70), the CEO and founder of anti-trafficking NGO Dasatt who operate in Ireland and Vietnam, works with families in desperate situations to stop them having to resort to human traffickers in the hopes of a better life.

Speaking to village leaders in Mui Ne, a beach town in Southeast Vietnam, Fr Cassin asked why people from the area endeavour to reach Europe by such risky means. "Destitution" in a family's situation was the response.

Fr Cassin told *The Irish Catholic*: "They could have gone without rice even, the basic staple of rice for one or two days – we've done research on that."

Survival

"The village leaders said that if you look at the alternative, going in search of work, risking trafficking is preferable than what's facing the people at home, because they're not going to survive."

"Very often the young person of 15, or 16 or 18 or whatever, is treated by the family as a hero, who are heading off to try and save the family, so it's seen as a kind of a heroism."

Fr Cassin says that young people can think two things before making the decision, that "one, if they leave, the family won't have to support them and keep them, and two, there's always the promise or the hope that they make enough money to send it home to rescue the family from destitution".

Although families in dire circumstances will hon-



Understanding trafficking tragedy and suffering in Vietnam

our young people willing to travel to greener pastures and do what they can to pull them out of poverty, many times they are unaware of the extent of the risks their loved ones are about to take.

There was a large amount of news coverage of the tragedy in Essex, London, last month on October 23, when 31 men and eight women were found dead in a refrigerated container. All the bodies have since been identified and the families informed – every one of them was from Vietnam and are suspected of being trafficked. At the time of print Vietnamese authorities had arrested eight people in connection with the case and two people were arrested

in the UK. There appears to be a strong Irish connection with the tragedy on the European end.

A 22-year-old from Newry is facing multiple counts of manslaughter for the deaths of the 39 migrants after UK authorities alleged he delivered the trailer to Zeebrugge Port in Belgium. Another Northern Irish man, aged 25, from Craigavon was charged with manslaughter – he was the driver of the lorry that arrived in Essex – and was arrested at the scene.

UK authorities were still asking for brothers Ronan (40) and Christopher (34) Hughes from Armagh at the time of print to hand themselves in, they have links with the road

haulage and shipping industries. They are both wanted on suspicion of manslaughter and human trafficking.

This comes as an Irish man in his 50s was arrested in England on suspicion of assisting 15 people with illegal entry to the country when they were found in the back of the lorry he was driving, which is owned by a company in Cork. This is believed to be a separate incident which happened this month.

After the devastating discovery in Essex, the Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All-Ireland Eamon Martin warned Irish people that human trafficking is not some distant phenomenon, but could be happening "right

in front of us – in our own parish, in our own town".

For many people in Europe who heard about the incident in the news or from word of mouth, it was shocking, but Fr Cassin saw the first-hand effects of a discovery of this nature as Dasatt's phone lines were "inundated" with calls from families in Vietnam who feared their loved one may be among the dead.

“It exposes the considerable numbers that aren't recorded that are being trafficked”

Many Vietnamese families, Fr Cassin says, believe when they pay human traffickers tens of thousands of dollars that the person being trafficked will arrive in the country by a normal means of transportation, unaware that

the conditions are far more precarious.

The discovery in Essex, he says, "they would find very frightening and very horrific".

"Most of them would have believed that their kids – they're paying something like 30,000 to a trafficker to get their son or daughter into the UK – are being flown in or they're going by bus or coach or by ship. This notion of the container is quite a horrific spectacle for families."

"It has exposed the levels of organisation that are going on, it exposes the considerable numbers that aren't recorded that are being trafficked."

"Some interesting stuff that is emerging recently from a study done from 2008-2016, found that out of 8,000 Vietnamese victims, who were trafficked over that period, 75% of those were 15 years of age or under," Fr Cassin says.

Looking at the Essex dis-



Fr Anthony Dang Huu Nam leads a prayer at a church in My Khanh, Vietnam, for those found dead in the Essex tragedy; inset, forensic experts examine the vehicle.

amounts of people to lose their jobs. Fr Cassin says that he warned the Home Office in the UK at the time that the area would soon become a "hot bed of human trafficking" after what he describes as the "big fish kill".

"During a power outage they leaked chemicals like cyanide, bromide and other chemicals – huge quantities – into the sea so that for 200km up and down the coast you had dead fish being washed up and there was a 20-nautical-mile ban on either fishing or profiting on fish," he says.

"This decimated those people, and they paid something like 760 dollars to each fisherman who lost their living and even now they're still suffering from that and that's three years ago.

"The lives of these people have been devastated by this kind of exploitation, this thoughtless economic development that are based entirely on profiteering. It took three months for Fomosa to admit that the poisoning of the sea was their doing."

Fr Cassin disagrees with the term 'push-factors' to describe why some migrants leave their country and put themselves at the hands of traffickers.

"I think they're causal factors. Which are the structured economic policies and the poverty that actually generates this kind of risky migratory labour," he said.

Most of the Vietnamese people found dead came from three known people-smuggling areas in Vietnam

His anti-human trafficking charity has been trying to mitigate against the need for people to leave Vietnam to attain better job prospects and raise themselves and their families above the poverty line.

"Dasatt have pioneered a model here that reaches out to the poorest villages, we do an assessment of the families that are most at risk," he says.

"We would ask them things like, 'how many days in the past month did you have no rice?' We would use this as a measure in order to establish the risk of trafficking due to poverty, because as soon as families become that poor they pull their kids out of school, sometimes as young as eight years of age.

"It's quite normal to have 12-year-olds up the highlands who are working in the villages or are working growing cassava, or in the coffee farms – because they can't afford to keep them at school. If they can sell a fish a day in Mui Ne in the fishing villages it feeds



Altar servers hold candles at a church in My Khanh, Vietnam on October 26 at a service for the 39 people found dead in a trailer in Essex.

the family for that day.

"The local government can supply me with lists of families who are living below the poverty line, we know where those families are, we know what the risks are and that if nothing is being done about their poverty they are going to engage in risky migration."

Before a young person is taken out of school to work, Dasatt identifies what children might be at risk of having to work, and they train them.

"They can't work until they're 15 here, so we would take a 14 and a half year old who dropped out of school, we would train them for 6 months in speaking English for tourism, we would train them in cooking and restaurant skills so they would easily get jobs in tourism.

"But we also tell the families that learning English is probably one of the greatest antidotes to being trafficked. No trafficker wants somebody who speaks English, who can read road signs, who can ask for help, who can expose them."

The charity now have a "big uptake" in the number of people taking their English classes in the poorer regions of Mui Ne. Except for the Church in Ireland, Fr Cassin says, "we'd be out of business". They also get funds from barristers which helps them raise enough money to train 10 children for six months.

Teaching means that if they are to migrate when they're 19, 20 or 21, they're migrating with a skill

"You can train them for six months for about \$1,200. That means they get their keep, travel, experts teaching them and as soon as they get jobs locally it changes the entire position of the family, because not only are they still able to stay at home – and they're really family based people you wouldn't believe the primacy they give to family, it comes before the

individual, and some of the trafficking heroism is coming out of that ethos of wanting to save, serve, rescue the family.

"It's totally different from our Western kind of independence, when you turn 18 or 19 you're expected to get out and do your own thing, it's a complete kind of reverse of that.

"When they begin to make some money it changes the entire need to migrate, it means that if they are to migrate when they're 19, 20 or 21, they're migrating with

a skill set that makes more things possible."

* * * * *

Despite there being a relatively small number of Catholics in the country, it currently stands at about 7% (6.7 million), there are growing faith communities with "packed churches" and seminaries "bursting at the seams" says Fr Cassin, "mostly because I think that the Catholic Church is offering an alternative and a somewhat kinder system than the current communist government".

"It's interesting after the Fomosa disaster it was actually a Catholic priest who led a lot of the protests after that. You see again now there was a Mass offered in Nghe An for the people and there was a big crowd at that, so there would be strong Catholic affiliations."

For those whose children have made or are on a perilous journey to Europe, they find great comfort in their Catholic faith, according to Fr Cassin.

There are Masses organised particularly for poorer families who have young people abroad that would be "discreet".

Fr Cassin says: "They take a lot of solace and consolation from being able to pray and being able to trust in God, so their faith is a boost to them."

Overall, Dasatt are trying to help families survive and stay together in Vietnam, but the economic policies of the government are one of the main factors causing people to be trapped in poverty – with no other option but to leave or struggle to survive in some of the poorest areas in the country.

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aster and other cases, he says many people begin their trafficking at a young age and may have been out of Vietnam for a long period of time before reaching the UK.

Speaking about why families would call the charity, Fr Cassin said: "Very often they haven't heard from their kid who is maybe in Prague, a lot of the young people are actually working their way from Russia across to France in the hopes of getting into the UK, so often they're working and being exploited on building sites in Russia, Romania, Prague and places like that.

"Part of what we say to the families is, 'how long has it been since you've heard from them?' 'How were they when you were last talking to them?' A lot of reassurances that they're just panicking and it's just kind of reassuring them that if the last time you heard from your kids and they were doing ok, it's no time to panic."

* * * * *

Most of the Vietnamese people found dead came from three known people-smuggling areas in Vietnam: Ha Tinh, Nghe An and Quang Binh. Ha Tinh province was the site of a chemical spill from a steel factory in 2016 that poisoned up to 125 miles of the northern coastline and devastated the fishing industry.

This disaster caused huge

Irish Catholic pilgrims on trip



More than 100 Irish pilgrims recently completed a spiritual journey to the Holy Land organised by *The Irish Catholic*. The special Christian Solidarity Pilgrimage saw people from all over Ireland make their way to the Holy Land to walk in the footsteps of Christ. Both groups, one led by Bishop of Derry Donal McKeown and the other by Wexford-based Fr John Carroll, visited Nazareth, Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

Many pilgrims described the trip – which was also accompanied by Managing Editor of *The Irish Catholic*, Michael Kelly – as unforgettable. Pilgrims outlined different highlights of the pilgrimage; for many it was the Way of the Cross in Jerusalem while others said it was the boat trip on the Sea of Galilee that brought the scriptures alive for them.

The pilgrimage puts special focus on solidarity with the tiny Christian community that call the Holy Land home. Pilgrims were able to meet with local Christians in Bethlehem and in Taybeh, the last all-Christian village in the West Bank.

🔔 If you would like to participate in next year's pilgrimage see pages 20 and 21 for more information.



of a lifetime in Holy Land



MAKE 2020 A YEAR TO GO TO THE HOLY LAND

Next September and October will see two groups of pilgrims depart on an unforgettable trip to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. In recent years, these trips have become an integral part of The Irish Catholic year with hundreds of pilgrims making the journey from every corner of Ireland to take part in a unique opportunity to visit the sites associated with the earthly life of Christ. The pilgrimage also helps the Bible come alive for people as they visit Nazareth, Bethlehem and Jerusalem. Here are some highlights of this year's itinerary:



The Sea of Galilee.

Day One: Ireland to the Holy Land

Depart Dublin Airport in the evening for an overnight flight direct to Tel Aviv on El Al.

Day Two: Nazareth

Upon arrival in Ben-Gurion Airport, pilgrims will be met by a Marian Pilgrimages representative and guide before boarding our tour coach to Nazareth. En route we will see stunning views of the sun rising over the Galilee region – site of much of the ministry of Jesus. After breakfast, check-in to the four-star Legacy Hotel for five nights with dinner and breakfast.

After time to rest and freshen up, we will walk the short distance to the nearby Basilica of the Annunciation to celebrate Mass. On the lower level of the basilica we see the remains of Mary's house and where the Archangel Gabriel visited her.

Adjacent to the basilica is St Joseph's Church, where we will visit the site of Joseph's workshop and the house of the Holy Family. A short walk from the basilica is Mary's Well here you have the opportunity to draw water from the same well as the Virgin Mary followed by free time in Nazareth before dinner at the hotel.

Day Three: Mount Tabor and Cana in Galilee

After breakfast, we have a short drive to Mount Tabor to ascend by taxi for Mass at the Church of the Transfiguration where Jesus is transfigured and speaks to Moses and Elijah. There is time to enjoy the view of the Valley of Armageddon and the Jezreel Valley – bread basket of the Holy Land.

After time for lunch we take the short coach journey to Cana in Galilee. Here we visit the Wedding Church, the site of the first miracle of Jesus. Couples on the pilgrimage can take part in the special ceremony to renew their wedding vows and there is also prayers and blessings for spouses at home and deceased husbands and wives. In the lower level of the church, we will see artifacts from the site before having an opportunity to taste and purchase some of the famous wine from this sacred site before returning to Nazareth for dinner in the hotel.

Optional Eucharistic Adoration at the Basilica of the Annunciation at 8.30pm.

Day Four: The Sea of Galilee

This morning we make our way to the Mount of Beatitudes overlooking the Sea of Galilee where Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount, Capernaum and Tabgha. Visit the site of the multiplication of the Loaves and Fish at Tabgha, and the Church of the Primacy of St Peter.

After lunch on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, continue to Capernaum and see the old synagogue and the excavations of St Peter's house before taking a boat trip on the lake, with relevant Bible readings. Before returning to the hotel we visit Magdala, the home of Mary Magdalene, a prosperous fishing village at the time of Jesus.

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

Day Five: Acre – the Crusader capital

We take the short coach ride to the coastal city of Akko, famed throughout history as the Crusader capital of the Holy Land. After Mass, we return to Nazareth for free time in the town of the Holy Family before dinner at the hotel.

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

Day Six: Jericho and Bethany

We leave Nazareth and drive south along the Jordan Valley into Jericho. Here we can see the Mount of Temptation and the Sycamore tree of Zachaeus. Continue to the Dead Sea and enjoy a 'dip' near Qumran, where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. Drive by the Inn of the Good Samaritan, to Bethany to celebrate Mass at 16.00 and visit the Tomb of Lazarus. Continue to Qasr el Yahud, the baptismal site of Jesus on the River Jordan, here we can renew our baptismal vows.

After we drive to Bethlehem and check-in to the four-star Manger Square Hotel, located just a stone's throw from the Church of the Nativity for four nights, with breakfast and dinner.

Day Seven: Jerusalem

We drive to Jerusalem and enter the Old City to the Church of St Anne and nearby, see the Pool of Bethesda. Close by we begin the Via Dolorosa and follow the stations of the cross through the markets and narrow streets of the Old City to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the site of

Calvary where Jesus was crucified and His tomb. Here we will celebrate Mass at 11.00 and take some time to reflect at this sacred site. Enjoy some free time in Jerusalem for lunch before visiting the Western Wall.

We will then drive to Taybeh – a town where Jesus stayed before going to Jerusalem to endure the Passion. It is the last all-Christian town in the West Bank and here we will hear about efforts to keep the local Christian community vibrant, including local wine-making before returning to the hotel in Bethlehem for dinner.

Day Eight: Mount of Olives

Drive to the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem where we take our group photo and enjoy the view of the Old City below. We make our way to the highest point on the Mount of Olives to the Ascension Dome. Continue to visit the Pater Noster Church, Dominus Flevit, the Church of the Assumption and grotto and the Garden of Gethsemane.

In the afternoon we celebrate Mass at 15.00 in the Church of St Peter in Gallicantu or 'cock's crow', where St Peter denied Jesus

three times and see the dungeon where Jesus was held the night of Holy Thursday. We walk around Mount Zion and visit the church of the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Tomb of King David and the Room of the Last Supper. Return to the hotel for dinner.

Day Nine: Bethlehem

After breakfast we take the short walk to the Church of the Nativity and celebrate Mass at 10.00. Here you can visit the birthplace of Jesus, and the Holy Manger as well as the chapels of St Joseph, St Jerome, the Holy Innocents and the Church of St Catherine.

Visit the Milk Grotto before lunch and meeting with members of the local Christian community in Bethlehem. Afterwards, we take the short drive to the Shepherds' Field and Ein Karem to the Church of the Visitation before returning to the hotel for dinner.

Day Ten: Emmaus

After breakfast at the hotel, we have some free time in Bethlehem before boarding the coach for the journey to Emmaus where we will have Mass and lunch before proceeding to the airport for the direct flight back to Dublin.

PRICING NOTES FOR THE PILGRIMAGE

The package on offer is all inclusive of the following:

Travel and accommodation

- Flight from Dublin to Tel Aviv;
- Transfer on arrival from Tel Aviv airport to the hotel in Nazareth with guide assistance;
- Five nights in the four-star Legacy Hotel in Nazareth
- Four nights in the four-star Manger Square Hotel in Bethlehem;
- Breakfast and evening meal served each day at hotels;

- Transfer to Tel Aviv airport for return flight;
- Flight from Tel Aviv to Dublin;
- Luxury air-conditioned coach throughout the itinerary;
- Guiding audio system (earphones for listening to the guide).

Tours and religious programme

- Full religious programme with a spiritual director including daily Mass;
- Services of Marian Pilgrimages representative.

- English-speaking guides throughout the pilgrimage;
- Full day guided tour of Jerusalem including visits to the Western Wall, Dome of the Rock, Church of St Anne, Via Dolorosa, Holy Sepulchre and Shrine of the Book;
- Complete programme of sightseeing and visits to sites of interest in the Holy Land;
- Boat ride on Sea of Galilee;
- Return taxi transfers to Mount Tabor.

Entrance fees included

- Dominus Flevit;
- Capernaum;
- Mount of Beatitudes;
- Muhrakha;
- Qumran.

Optional

- Travel insurance €25 for passengers up to 85 years. Please note that an additional insurance premium of €25 is charged for persons aged 86 to 94 years;

passengers 95 years and over should secure private travel insurance.

- Price per person sharing twin/double/treble rooms with private facilities. Passengers are entitled to check in one standard piece of luggage subject to airline's conditions. Single rooms are subject to availability at a supplement.
- Taxes, charges and government levies are included.
- Porterage at hotels are included in the package price.
- All tips and gratuities everywhere are included.

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Out&About

New Youth Ministers for Killaloe



CLARE: Bishop Fintan Monahan blesses and commissions new Youth Ministers for Killaloe Diocese.



ANTRIM: Sr Eileen OP (Member of the Queen's University Catholic Chaplaincy Pastoral Team, Belfast) with Fr Dominic McGrattan (QUB chaplain) and Tyrone Gaelic Football Manager Mickey Harte, who addressed the chaplaincy about his Faith.



KILDARE: Pupils of Patrician Secondary School receive their Gold Medal/Papal Cross award at a Kildare and Leighlin diocesan ceremony in Cill Mhuire.



MEATH: Former Spiritual Director and editor of Pioneer magazine, Fr Bernard McGuckian SJ, Pioneer Total Abstinence Association (PTAA) President Matt Boylan and former chairperson of the Board of Management Fr Michael McGréil, launching the PTAA 120 anniversary medallion, at a conference held in St Columban College, Dalgan Park.



USA: Irish author Paraic Maher with Scott and Kimberly Hahn of the Franciscan University of Steubenville, Ohio, during his US talk tour on 'The Mysteries of Mary'.

Edited by Colm Fitzpatrick
colm@irishcatholic.ie



Events deadline is a week in advance of publication



▲ **CORK:** Eighty-seven young people across the Diocese of Cloyne and neighbouring diocese attend the Pope John Paul II Award Ceremony in Mallow Community Youth Centre.

◀ **DUBLIN:** Sr Máire Kealy launches her new book *Dominican Education in Ballyfermot: The Early Days in St Dominic's College*. Front Row: (l-r) Former Principals Srs Patrice, Máire, Eleanor. Back Row (l-r) Sr Bríd (Former Principal) Sarah Green (Principal), Sr Liz, Mary Daly (Former Principal), Mary Hanafin (Chairperson BOM). Photo: Ken Larkin

◀ **CARLOW:** Kildare and Leighlin's Bishop Denis Nulty celebrates Mass and spends time with the Poor Clare Sisters of Carlow.

IN SHORT

Archbishop launches 2019 Advent Calendar

Archbishop Eamon Martin has launched the 2019 online Advent Calendar, which offers resources for the parish, school and home. Now in its sixth year, it was launched on December 1 and can be accessed on www.catholicbishops.ie.

The content is aimed at assisting people to pray and to reflect on how best we can keep Christ at the centre of our Christmas preparations during this special liturgical season.

The interactive calendar has family prayers and suggestions for #LivingAdvent – acts of kindness or charity that all of us are encouraged to undertake during the month of December. The calendar also shares tips

on how families can care for creation, our common home, by having a more sustainable Christmas.

Welcoming this year's Advent Calendar Archbishop Martin said, "The season of Advent marks the beginning of the Catholic new year and the time of spiritual preparation for the Lord's coming at Christmas.

"It is a time of waiting, conversion and hope. Advent also prepares us for the second coming of Christ at the end of time. As Christians, we must always be prepared for the coming of the Lord – 'You must stand ready because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect' [Mt 24:37-44].

"Preparation does not happen at once but over time and so each day of Advent allows us to reflect on the joy of the Gospel.

"Our online calendar is a helpful resource on this journey."

By clicking on the virtual doors each of the days of Advent, people are invited to find moments of peace and reflection on the meaning of Advent and Christmas.

"I particularly welcome the inclusion on this year's calendar of some of the inspirational messages that Pope Francis gave to us this year in *Christus vivit* (Christ is alive), his post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation to young people. The message of Christ is alive is that Jesus is our hope and that he lives within us," Archbishop Martin said.

"The seasons of Advent and Christmas occur in the depth of winter reminding us that Christ was born to bring hope to a darkened world."

ARMAGH

An evening of Advent Meditation in music, prose, poetry and prayer will take place in The Market Place Theatre on Tuesday, December 10, at 7.30pm.

FERMANAGH

A Mass to St Peregrine for all the sick is prayed each Tuesday evening in St Patrick's Church, Derrygonnelly, at 7.30pm: www.churchservices.tv/derrygonnelly. There is also a St Peregrine Novena Mass in Holy Cross Church, Lisnaskea on Tuesday nights at 7pm. www.churchservices.tv/lisnaskea

CLARE

Cloughleigh Oratory will continue to pray the Novena Prayer to St Anthony every Tuesday morning at the 9.30am Mass.

A welcome to Taizé Prayer: Church of Our Lady, Roslevan on Thursday, December 5 from 7.45-8.30pm.

CORK

Medjugorje prayer meeting in the Presence of the Blessed Sacrament every Wednesday night at 8pm in Holy Trinity Church, Fr Matthew Quay, Cork. Prayers for healing first Wednesday of every month.

A Pro-Life Mass is held on the last Friday of every month (except December) at the Poor Clares Monastery, College Road, Cork at 7.30pm.

DERRY

Dungiven Parish: Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Monday to Friday, 8-12pm and 3-9pm.

St Maria Goretti Prayer Movement: Prayer for healing for victims of abuse and reparation for the Church. First Holy Hour of prayer in the Immaculate Conception Church, Trench Road Derry at 8.15pm led by Fr Sean O'Donnell, on the third Tuesday of every month.

DUBLIN

Our Lady of Knock prayer meetings take place on the last Thursday of every month in St Gabriel's Nursing Home, Glenayle Road, Ratheny, Dublin 5, from 8-9pm.

Ewe Thina: We Walk God's Way. Join other young adults (20's & 30's) for reflective hikes around Dublin Area. Monthly event. Contact st.pauls@dublindiocese.ie

GALWAY

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament at St Croan's Church, Ballymoe, every Monday, 10-11am and Thursday, 8-10pm.

KERRY

Weekly Monday prayer meetings led by Ben Perkins, from 8-9.30pm in the Ardferret Retreat Centre.

KILDARE

Praying, reading and sharing the following Sunday's Gospel in Resurrexit, Kilmeague, every Wednesday from 8-9.30pm. See www.resurrexit.ie for details, or ring 087-6825407.

KILKENNY

Traditional Latin Mass every Sunday at 5pm in St Patrick's Church, College Road, Kilkenny (opposite St Kieran's College).

LIMERICK

Eucharistic Adoration takes place each Friday in Raheen church following 10am Mass until 10pm, Crecora on Thursdays, following morning Mass until 12pm and from 6-10pm, and in Mungrat Church on Wednesdays, from 10-12pm.

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Adult Formation Course Level 1 Part 1 offered at St Saviour's Dominican Church from February 28 – March 3 2020. For more information email: limerick@op-tn.org.

LOUTH

Mass in reparation to the Immaculate Heart of Mary will take place at 10.30am every first Saturday of the month in St Malachy's Church, Anne Street, Dundalk. Organised by the Legion of Mary, Presidium of Our Lady of the Listening Heart. Spiritual Director Fr Bede McGregor OP.

A Centre Prayer Meeting is held at Mount Oliver (near Ballymascanlon, Dundalk) every Wednesday evening at 7.30pm. Contact 00353 863623361 from the North of Ireland or 0863623361 from the Republic of Ireland.

A Holy Hour with music and reflections to be held in St Mary's Church, James Street, Drogheda, on Wednesday, December 11, at 8pm.

MAYO

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place in the Church of St Joseph and the Immaculate Conception Bohola every Wednesday from 10am until 10pm.

49th Annual Eucharistic All Night Vigil takes place on Saturday, December 7, in Knock Basilica. Chief Celebrant: Archbishop Okolo, with Fr Brendan Walsh, SAC, and Fr John Regan, SAC. Commencing at 10pm, with Confessions. Phone 094 93 8810.

The next Latin Mass in the Extraordinary Form (Tridentine) will take place in the Parish Church Knock, on Sunday, December 8, at 5.30pm.

MEATH

Enfield Prayer Group meets every Monday afternoon at 3pm in the parish centre; on the 2nd Monday of each month, the group meets on Mondays at 7.30pm for its Lay Apostle meeting.

Adoration in St Patrick's Church, Stamullen, after 10am Mass every Thursday until 5pm, and in St Mary's Church, Juliastown, on Wednesdays from 9am and after 10am Mass.

ROSCOMMON

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament at St Bride's Church, Ballintubber, every Wednesday, 7.30-8.30pm.

WEXFORD

Taizé prayer services every first and third Friday at 8pm in Good Counsel College Chapel, New Ross.

WICKLOW

The Glencree Parish Group hold a special Mass for healing in St Kevin's Church, Glencree on the first Saturday of the month.

St Patrick's Prayer Group, Wicklow town, meet on Thursdays at 7.30pm in the De La Salle Pastoral Care Centre.



World Report

IN BRIEF

Priest defends decision to deny judge Holy Communion

● The Church in western Michigan is defending a priest's decision to deny Holy Communion to a judge in a same-sex marriage.

Judge Sara Smolenski says Fr Scott Nolan privately informed her on about a week after receiving Communion from him at St Stephen Church in East Grand Rapids. She says she hadn't been regularly attending the Church for months.

Fr Nolan says the teachings of the Catholic faith aren't flexible. The Church recognises marriage as between a man and a woman.

In a statement, the Grand Rapids Diocese says: "No community of faith can sustain the public contradiction of its beliefs by its own members."

Pope appoints new head to Vatican watchdog agency

● Pope Francis has appointed a seasoned Italian finance inspector to lead the Vatican's financial watchdog agency following the resignation of its president.

The Vatican said in a statement that the Pope named Carmelo Barbagallo as the new head of the Financial Intelligence Authority, known by the Italian acronym AIF.

In an interview with Vatican News published shortly after the announcement, Barbagallo said he was honoured by the appointment and "aware of the full weight of the moral and professional responsibility it carries".

US bills on child sex abuse signed into law

● Pennsylvania governor Tom Wolf signed into law three bills on child sex abuse, which were recommended by the state's 2018 grand jury report on allegations of clerical sexual abuse of minors.

"These bills will today become law, and victims of one of the most unimaginable forms of abuse

will receive the support and rights they deserve," Wolf said. "And while we celebrate the monumental victory of many survivors of childhood sexual abuse finally receiving their opportunity for justice, we must continue pushing forward until every survivor, of every age, has the chance to tell his or her story."

Catholics can't be complacent on UK general election

● Catholics can't "watch from the balcony" during the UK's December 12 general election, according to the bishops of England and Wales.

The election was called by Prime Minister Boris Johnson after he failed to push through his Brexit deal in Parliament and comes just 2 1/2 years after the last vote. It's the first December election in the UK since 1923.

"Conscious of the common good of every person and our society as a whole, we ask everyone to engage with the election and vote," the bishops said.

"Honest political activity depends upon integrity. We urge all in public life to recognise that telling the truth, not making vindictive and abusive comments or unattainable promises, are essential," the bishops continued.

Pope prays for victims of Albania earthquake

● Pope Francis has led prayers for the people of Albania after the country was struck by a magnitude 6.4 earthquake.

"I would like to send my greetings and my closeness to the dear people of Albania who have suffered so much in these days," the Pope said before concluding his weekly general audience.

"Albania was the first country in Europe I wanted to visit. I am close to the victims. I pray for the dead, for the wounded, for the families. May the Lord bless this country that I love so much," he said.

The earthquake struck in the early hours of the morning November 26 and was felt as far away as Serbia.

British bishops make 'right to life' priority for general election

British bishops have made the right to life a priority for Catholics ahead of a general election in which two major political parties have promised to liberalise abortion laws.

A statement from the bishops of England and Wales put the right to life at the top of a list of key issues they want Catholic voters to raise with parliamentary candidates ahead of the December 12 election.

The bishops of Scotland also made abortion and euthanasia their primary concerns in a letter issued to voters on November 19.

Their statements came as the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats, in their pre-election manifestoes, promised to reform abortion laws.

Labour has pledged to remove all criminal restrictions from the law, meaning abortion would be available on demand and up to the point of birth, a policy pro-life groups say would create one of the most extreme abortion regimes in the world.

The Liberal Democrats have said they would decriminalise abortion within the first 24 weeks of pregnancy and enforce exclusion zones



A demonstrator against assisted suicide joins a protest outside Parliament in London in 2015.

around every abortion clinic to stop pro-life counselling and prayer vigils.

The ruling Conservative Party was silent about abortion in its election manifesto.

Protection

The Scottish bishops said Catholics "should urge candidates to recognise human life from the moment of conception until natural death and to legislate for its protection at every stage, including

protecting the unborn child, ensuring that both mother and child are accepted and loved".

"We should remind our politicians that abortion, assisted suicide and euthanasia are, as the Church has consistently taught, always morally unacceptable," they said. "Decriminalisation of abortion unhappily paves the way toward a legal basis for abortion on demand, for any reason, up to birth, and politicians should be

urged to resist it."

The English and Welsh bishops also asked Catholics to find out how candidates stood on the legalisation of assisted suicide and euthanasia and how they would respond to the needs of people "who are frequently neglected or discarded by society such as people with disabilities, Travellers, older people, those who are homeless, those in prison and those trapped in modern slavery".

Life in prison trumps death penalty – US opinion poll

Most Americans support life imprisonment over the death penalty, according to a Gallup poll, revealing a shift in the majority opinion on this issue for the first time in 34 years.

The poll, based on results from telephone interviews conducted in October with a random sample of 1,526 adults in the US, showed 60% prefer that convicted murders receive a sentence of life imprisonment, while 36% said capital punishment would be better.

This view marks a shift in

Americans' opinion over the past two decades. In the 1980s and 1990s, the majority opinion leaned toward the death penalty.

The survey also is just the second time more people said they thought life in prison was a better punishment than the death penalty; in 2007 they did so by one percentage point, with 48% favouring life in prison and 47% favouring the death penalty.

The current poll, with a margin of sampling error of plus or minus three percentage points, breaks down

respondents by age, sex and party affiliation. Within these groups there were differing opinions: Women showed stronger support for life in prison (66%) than men (53%). Younger people also were more likely to show support for life in prison (68%) than older people (57%). Along party lines, 58% of Republicans supported the death penalty over 38% who said life in prison was the better option, and 79% of Democrats preferred life in prison while 19% preferred the death penalty be administered.

Concerns raised after Christian activist arrested

Human rights groups have voiced concern over the arrest of a Coptic Christian activist in Egypt, on terrorism-related charges. Critics argue the arrest is an attempt to silence those who disagree with the government.

Ramy Kamel, founder of the human rights organisation Maspero Youth Union,

was arrested on Saturday by seven police officers.

He faced charges of joining a terrorist group, publishing false news, and receiving foreign funding, AFP has reported.

Last Monday, the prosecution issued an order for a 15-day-long provisional detention while the investi-

gation is pending.

Kamel had shared footage on Facebook of alleged sectarian violence in Southern Egypt, depicting Coptic Christians being forced out by local Muslims, suggesting that local authorities had turned a blind eye to the violence. Kamel's Facebook page was deactivated after his arrest.

Human rights activists in recent years have warned repeatedly that Christians are enduring persecution and violence from Muslim groups, and the government has neglected to act. Coptic Christians make up about 10% of Egypt's Muslim-majority population.



Edited by Colm Fitzpatrick
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Celebrations for Francis' 50 years in the priesthood



Argentine Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio holds the hands of a woman and girl during Holy Thursday Mass in 2008 at a church in a poor section of Buenos Aires, Argentina. Pope Francis will celebrate the 50th anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood on December 13. Photo: CNS

Vietnamese village buries victims of trafficking tragedy

The village of Dien Thinh bid farewell last week to two of its sons, victims of a human trafficking tragedy unveiled last month when the bodies of 39 Vietnamese were discovered in a truck in England.

Coffins with the bodies of cousins Nguyen Van Hung and Hoang Van Tiep were carried to the village's Trung Song church for a funeral attended by about 300 people.

"Nguyen Van Hung and Hoang Van Tiep left their hometown to find a better future for themselves and for their families," Fr Pham Tri Phuong said. "But the tragedy happened that brought grave pain to the family and for all of us."

The 31 men and eight women, aged

between 15 and 44, are believed to have paid human traffickers to smuggle them to England. Their bodies were found east of London on October 23, and while no cause of death has been officially established, the circumstances suggested asphyxiation.

Funerals

The bodies of 16 of the victims, including Hung and Tiep, arrived in Vietnam last Wednesday and were sent on to their families. At least four funerals were held Thursday.

In Dien Thinh, a rural village of about 300 households on the coast of north-central Vietnam, they mourned not just the deaths, but also the circumstances.

"How can we not be in great pain

when seeing their aging parents have to bid farewell to their young children," Fr Phuong told mourners. "How can we be not in great pain to see our brothers who had to suffer such a way of dying in a place so far from home."

Dien Thinh, like many villages in Vietnam, have largely been left out of the economic development that has turned urban centers like Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi into boom towns.

Many people in this largely Catholic village survive on small-scale farming of crops such as peanuts and sesame, supplemented by seasonal fishing. But there are others who have taken the chance and moved abroad in the hopes of bettering the lives of themselves and their families.

Argentine priests convicted of abusing deaf children

Two Catholic priests have been convicted of sexually abusing students at an institute that cared for deaf children. The priests have been sentenced to more than 40 years in an Argentine prison. Their victims say one abuser should have been stopped seven years before his arrest, when he was accused of abusing children at a school in Italy.

Fr Nicola Corradi, an

83-year-old Italian, sat in a wheelchair while he was sentenced to 42 years in prison last week, alongside Fr Horacio Corbacho, 59, sentenced to 45 years. A lay employee, gardener Armando Gomez, was sentenced to 18 years in prison.

The abuse took place at the now-closed Antonio Provolo Institute for Deaf and Hearing Impaired children in Argentina's Mendoza province. The

trial concerned more than 20 instances of abuse in all, including charges of rape, sexual touching, and corruption of minors. The students were reportedly forced to watch pornography or perform sex acts among themselves.

The cases involve 10 students, though about 20 have made abuse accusations. The abusers especially targeted children who spent the night

in the institute's shelters, and the victims said they were afraid to report for fear of living in poverty after being expelled or for fear their parents would be punished.

The students were typically from poor families and had communication limitations. The crimes took place from 2004 to 2016, when Fr Corradi, Fr Corbacho, and others were arrested and the school shut down.

Vatican roundup

Pope advances sainthood cause of Canadian bishop

● Pope Francis has advanced the sainthood cause of Bishop Ovide Charlebois – a Canadian Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate who ministered to First Nations peoples and migrant workers scattered throughout the vast, lake-covered province of Manitoba.

The Pope recognized the Quebec native, who lived from 1862 to 1933, as having lived the Christian virtues in a heroic way.

The Pope also recognised the martyrdom of Fr Jan Franciszek Macha, a Polish priest who began his parish ministry when the Nazis invaded Poland and was imprisoned and murdered by its elite force, the SS, despite his mother's efforts to secure a pardon from Adolf Hitler.

The Pope also formally recognised the martyrdom of 16 victims of the Spanish Civil War and advanced the causes of eight other men and women.

During a meeting last week with Cardinal Angelo Becciu, prefect of the Congregation for Saints' Causes, the Pope signed the decree approving the heroic virtues of Bishop Charlebois, making him 'venerable'. Before he can be beatified, the Vatican must recognize that a miracle has occurred through his intercession.

Pope speaks with bishops about Pennsylvania abuse report

● "Happy Thanksgiving," Pope Francis said in English at the beginning of a two-and-a-half-hour meeting with the bishops of New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

The meeting, a central part of the bishops' *ad limina* visit, featured a wide-ranging conversation that, of course, included talk about the clerical sexual abuse scandal, Bishop Lawrence Persico of Erie, Pennsylvania, said.

The bishop said the Pope himself mentioned the 2018 Pennsylvania grand jury report on abuse in six dioceses over the previous 70 years; "he

was aware of it and he understood it," the bishop said.

Especially considering that the Pope had just returned from a weeklong trip to Thailand and Japan, giving the bishops more than two hours of his time "was really extraordinary", Cardinal Joseph Tobin said.

"Without going into detail because I want to respect the familiarity and confidentiality that the Holy Father asked for, you wouldn't have to be a rocket scientist to figure out what we talked about," the cardinal said.

Explore theology but don't confuse the faithful – Francis

● Theologians must explore and debate disputed questions, at times even taking "risks" with what they propose, but those discussions should take place within the academy so as not to confuse the faithful, Pope Francis has said.

"Theology must move forward," the Pope told members of the International Theological Commission. "It must face things that are not clear and take risks in discussion. However, this is among theologians."

"You must give the solid food of faith to the people of God, not feed the people of God disputed questions," because that could confuse them and cause them to lose their faith, the Pope told the group last Friday during a meeting celebrating the commission's 50th anniversary.

St Paul VI established the commission to continue the collaboration between theologians and the teaching authority of the Church experienced at the Second Vatican Council, the Pope said. And he wanted to ensure that the doctrinal congregation would benefit from the contributions of theologians reflecting on questions of faith in different parts of the world and in different cultural contexts.



Letter from America



Elise Harris

At the close of their annual general assembly, the Central American bishops rose to Pope Francis's defence amid what they said have been false and hostile attacks following the Synod of Bishops on the Amazon in October.

They also advocated for better care of migrants and refugees, criticising new immigration laws adopted by the Mexican government influenced by US President Donald Trump, who has demanded harsh anti-immigration policies.

In their statement, signed at the end of last month, the bishops thanked Francis for the Amazon synod, calling it "an ecclesial event that has placed the world's eyes on this vast area, which needs a massive evangelistic effort and colossal strength to be able to implement the many needs of an integral ecology".

Pointing to numerous indigenous communities that live in the Amazon, the bishops insisted that they "have the right to receive the announcement of Jesus Christ and his kingdom by taking new paths".

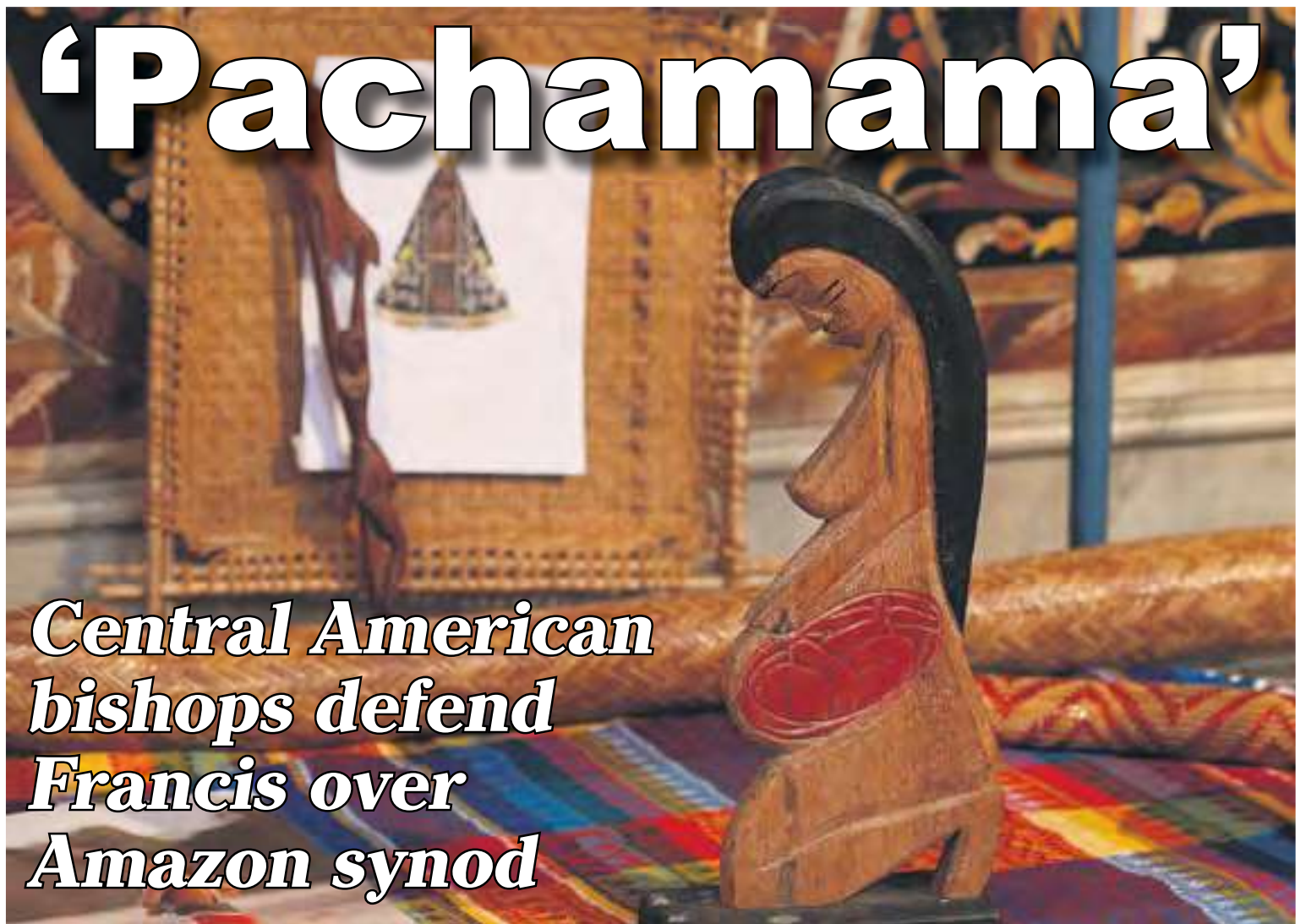
Because of the attention dedicated to these communities and the "new paths" for their evangelisation, "it is not surprising that the Holy Father has been an object of virulent and insulting attacks, plagued by lies and calumny", the bishops said.

Solidarity

Made at the end of the November 25-29 assembly of the Episcopal Secretariat of Central America and Panama (SEDAC) in Heredia, Costa Rica, the notable public show of solidarity with the Pope comes in the aftermath of harsh criticism he received in the wake of the October 6-27 Synod of Bishops on the Amazon.

During the gathering, Francis was accused by many conservative Catholics of fostering idol worship, specifically of the 'Pachamama'.

A female fertility figure representing Mother Earth, the Pachamama is venerated by indigenous communities in the Andes and portions of the Amazon. During the synod, the term was used in reference to small figurines of a naked pregnant woman that appeared during an October 4 indigenous prayer service in the Vatican gardens attended by Francis, and which were later put



Central American bishops defend Francis over Amazon synod

A wooden statue of a pregnant woman is pictured in the Church of St Mary in Traspontina as part of exhibits on the Amazon region during the Synod of Bishops for the Amazon in Rome.

on display in Rome's Church of Santa Maria in Traspontina near the Vatican.

From the beginning traditionalist and conservative Catholics argued that the symbols amounted to pagan idolatry, while Francis enthusiasts insisted the statues amounted to an enculturated faith, using local symbols to reflect gospel realities.

On October 21, the figurines were stolen from the Church of Traspontina and tossed into the Tiber River. The figurines were later retrieved by Italian police and the Pope issued a public apology for their theft, however, the polemics the situation created are far from over.

In their statement, the bishops sent the Pope a "warm expression of our solidarity and the promise of our prayer, that the Holy Spirit illuminate and sustain you in your ministry".

They also flagged several urgent concerns for Catholicism in Central America, such as the protection of minors and the various conflicts

plaguing the Latin American continent.

"We have found with concern that our continent is burning. Various countries in Latin America are passing through painful situations bursting with violence and different forms of intolerance," they said, and made special mention of the deteriorating situation in Nicaragua, saying they are "exceedingly" worried about ongoing violence in the nation.

Migrants

They also raised the issue of forced migration as a major challenge to be addressed, noting that there are currently hundreds of migrants stranded at the Mexico-Guatemala border who are unable to enter Mexico due to a set of strict new immigration laws.

"We lament the attitude of the Mexican government, which has changed its policy of open doors into an anti-migrant, anti-refugee policy like the current North American government," the bishops said, criticising what they said is

"disrespect for the principle of non-refoulement in the case of asylum applicants who have fled their home countries".

“So far, more than 40,000 migrants seeking asylum in the US have been sent back to Mexico to wait as the process moves forward”

Largely due to pressure from the US government over the immigration issue, Mexico has adjusted its policy on the matter, shifting from an approach promising to help migrants to one threatening militarised action against violators.

When Trump in May threatened crippling tariffs on all Mexican imports, the country's government stepped up efforts to dissuade migrants, often fleeing violence and poverty, from crossing its border. A new National Guard was deployed to oversee highway checkpoints

on common migrant routes, and bus companies were told not to sell tickets to passengers without documents.

So far, more than 40,000 migrants seeking asylum in the US have been sent back to Mexico to wait as the process moves forward. In the meantime, the Associated Press reports that state offices in Mexico's immigration agency have been given quotas for the number of migrant detentions they are required to make.

The change in Mexico's policies has aroused fear in some that the stricter laws will lead to an increased number of migrants who are stuck in dangerous border cities, meaning they might fall prey more easily to criminal outfits and opt to pay smugglers to get across the border illegally.

Faced with this situation, "we must emphatically reaffirm that migrants and refugees are our brothers who deserve help, because they have the right to respect, care protection and safety", the bishops said, adding that they will continue to defend, protect and provide for the basic needs of migrants.

They urged all Catholic faithful "to overcome the temptation of indifference, of discrimination and xenophobia. Every migrant is our brother".

“From the beginning traditionalist and conservative Catholics argued that the symbols amounted to pagan idolatry, while Francis enthusiasts insisted the statues amounted to an enculturated faith, using local symbols to reflect gospel realities”

Elise Harris is Senior Correspondent of Cruxnow.com



Mourners in Gaza City carry the body of Palestinian Islamic Jihad field commander Bahaa Abu el-Atta during his funeral last month. Photo: CNS

Is it time for the Vatican to rethink its line on a 'two-state solution'?

Normally speaking, when a Pope hits the road, all other Vatican operations enter a state of suspended animation. Appointments, documents and statements are held up awaiting his return, because nobody's supposed to distract from the message he's travelling to deliver.

The fact the Vatican made an exception during Pope Francis's November 19-26 trip to Thailand and Japan demonstrates precisely how high they think the stakes are.

On November 20, as the Pontiff was arriving in Thailand, the Vatican issued a statement reiterating its support for a "two-state solution" to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, apparently in reaction to the recent announcement by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo that the US no longer regards Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank as a violation of international law. Many analysts believe that decision makes the prospects for a two-state solution more remote.

"In the context of recent decisions that risk undermining further the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and the already fragile regional stability, the Holy See reiterates its position of a two-



John L. Allen Jr

state solution for two peoples, as the only way to reach a complete solution to this age-old conflict," the statement said.

Efforts

Presumably now that Francis is back in the Vatican, his diplomatic team will ratchet up its efforts to make that statement stick.

In itself, there's nothing novel in the Vatican's advocacy of statehood for both Israelis and Palestinians, since it's the position it's held since partition in 1948. Normally, the Vatican adds recommendations for a special status for Jerusalem and protection of sacred sites in the Holy Land.

In part, that reflects the Vatican's belief that since the active UN resolutions on the issue envision both a two-state solution and a 'special status' for Jerusalem, it's important to preserve those as

starting points in any negotiations toward the aim of achieving international protections for the holy sites recognized by Israel.

What's interesting is that the Vatican is holding fast at a time when many voices on both sides of the Israeli/Palestinian divide are declaring the idea of a two-state solution off the table, saying it's time to move on.

A Haaretz poll in May found that only 34% of Israelis now support a two-state solution

Just as the Vatican statement was making the rounds, for instance, the new issue of Foreign Affairs was hitting newsstands, featuring an essay by Yousef Munayyer, the executive director of the US Campaign for Palestinian Rights. Its title is, 'There Will Be a One-State Solution, But What Kind of State Will It Be?'

"The two-state solution is dead," Munayyer writes. "And good riddance: it never offered a realistic path forward."

A 2017 poll by the Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research found that two out of three Palestinians were opposed

to the two-state solution. One resident of a refugee camp in Ramallah named Nashat Salhieh, quoted in the Christian Science Monitor, seemed to sum up much of the sentiment.

"I want to go back to my country," he said. "I don't care who will rule me."

For Palestinians, weariness with the idea of a two-state solution is driven both by the sense that any state Israel would realistically accept probably wouldn't be viable, and also frustration with their own leadership in the Palestinian Authority.

As Munayyer put it, the quest for sovereignty by the successor to the PLO is "driven less by the needs of Palestinian nationalism than the personal interests of Palestinian leaders".

* * * * *

Meanwhile, a Haaretz poll in May found that only 34% of Israelis now support a two-state solution, and all the parties currently vying for the country's leadership support some form of the annexation plan.

For a strong majority of Israelis, rule over an undivided Jerusalem and at least some share of the West Bank is axiomatic, meaning 'statehood' as the Palestinians have envisioned it just isn't in the cards.

Further, Israelis fear the consequences of Palestinian statehood. Here's how Israeli academic and journalist Moshe Dann put it in 2017: "Establishing a second Palestinian state, or third if one includes 'Hamastan' in the Gaza Strip, would lead to destabilisation and increase the chances for violence between competing entities, gangs and militias which could spill over into Israel," he wrote.

"With Islamist forces waiting to take advantage of any power vacuum, the area would plunge into Somalia-like chaos."

The diagnosis put forward by Munayyer, Dann and others is that what's at issue now isn't whether there will be one or two states between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea; that question, they say, has been answered in favour of "one". The issue is the nature of that state – whether it will be a de facto apartheid system, or a genuine democracy in which Arabs and non-Arabs are both full citizens.

“The Vatican appears stubbornly wedded to one specific way of achieving the values involved, which pivot on doing justice to both sides in the conflict”

If that analysis is correct, the risk for the Vatican arguably is fighting the last war, missing the chance to play a constructive role in a new situation because it's stuck in an old paradigm.

It's an especially striking question, because as a rule the Vatican tries to make a distinction between principle and policy. The Church's role, it says, is to propound eternal values, regarding policy choices about how to implement those values as a matter for prudential judgment. Yet in this case, the Vatican appears stubbornly wedded to one specific way of achieving the values involved, which pivot on doing justice to both sides in the conflict.

In all honesty, the Vatican's potential contribution to any peace process between the Israelis and Palestinians may be limited. Perhaps the best it can hope for is raising the profile of the small Christian minority in the region, thereby offering it some insulation from whatever comes next.

On the other hand, Francis repeatedly has demonstrated a capacity to make himself relevant in global affairs, including his high-profile denunciations of nuclear weapons while he was in Japan.

Perhaps his Vatican team could help move the needle on the world's most chronic conflict too – even if the price of admission turns out to be a willingness to maintain its principles, but rethink its policy.

John L. Allen Jr is Editor of cruxnow.com

Letters

Letter of the week

Trump is not 'least religious president'

Dear Editor, Might I refer to 'The View' written by Breda O'Brien (21/11/19) in which she states that "Donald Trump is the least religious president ever" and goes on to laud the faith of the Democrat hopefuls seeking the nomination for the 2020 election and especially one particular individual whose lifestyle would not be in keeping with the Christian faith.

Surely Ms O'Brien must be aware that all those candidates are totally committed pro-choice and supportive of the abortion industry. The Democratic Party has shifted its position on abortion from 'safe, legal and rare' to 'on demand and without restriction'.

To say that President Trump "is the

least religious president ever" is not in keeping with the facts and can be construed as 'fake news'.

One of his first actions after his election was to withdraw federal funding from Planned Parenthood, the principal abortion provider in the US, an organisation which was the subject of the recent film *Unplanned*.

He continues to nominate conservative pro-life judges to the Federal, Appeals and Supreme Courts of the US.

He strongly supports the first amendment to the Constitution which guarantees freedom of religion.

Both himself and his Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, regularly speak internationally on the need

for religious freedom in all parts of the world and he addressed the UN General Assembly on the subject in New York last September.

His government is now actively considering the question of withholding overseas development aid to countries with excessive restrictions on religious freedom.

His Attorney General, William Barr, a devout Catholic, in a recent address at Notre Dame University, spoke at length on religious values and faith. He assured his audience that the Trump administration firmly supports freedom of religion.

Yours etc.,

Michael Donnellan,
Ballymote, Co. Sligo.

Sad to see columnist sign up 'hate Trump' brigade

Dear Editor, It's difficult to know where to start with a critique of Breda O'Brien's column (IC 21/11/19).

The shared headline and her column headline is all about Donald Trump whereas the entire piece is about a little known Democrat, someone called Pete Buttigieg who is, she tells us, a cradle Catholic who abandoned his faith in favour of Anglicanism ostensibly because that Church looked benignly on his homosexuality, also probably on the fact that he has a 'husband'!

This guy's CV is 'enhanced' by his support for abortion up to birth.

Interesting that Breda lauds Pete for his 'Christian Faith' despite his very non-Christian baggage yet vilified Trump, an avowed Presbyterian, and the most pro-life president since Ronald Reagan.

He is a man who, most unpolitically, actually fulfils his pre-election promises much to the chagrin of those who have hated him since 2015 when his campaign kicked off and have gone into overdrive since his unexpected election win.

I just love Breda's line "keeping Hillary Clinton out does not mean endorsing everything Donald Trump does while in office".

Democracy requires of its adherents the ability, the common sense to criticise even those one has voted for when one feels the elected one is doing something one doesn't like – happens all the time Breda!

The reader might gather

that I admire Trump – and the reader would be right, which means Breda, that while I don't approve of everything he does, he has presided over an unprecedented economic revival and given thousands of Americans back the dignity of having a job again.

The majority of journalists, to put it mildly, do not like Trump for many

reasons but mainly because he has confounded their predictions, laughed at their lying vitriol and please God, he'll continue doing so until 2024.

Sad to see Breda O'Brien rowing in with the 'hate Trump' brigade majority in her trade.

Yours etc.,

Liam Hayden,
Dublin 9.



A handshake or hug still has a special place

Dear Editor, On reading Fr Bernard Cotter's article, 'When prayers can replace on-the-run handshakes' (IC 14/11/19), I was surprised that he seemed to place equal or more value on various ways of expressing sympathy to a bereaved family over attendance at a Funeral Mass.

I always understood that participating in a Funeral Mass far exceeded all other forms of sympathy. The Funeral Mass is the final great prayer of entrusting a loved one to God's mercy. A lot of preparation goes into the choosing of readings, music and prayers of the faithful, all of which involve the

bereaved family in a special way.

All other gestures of sympathy are indeed greatly appreciated, attendance at wake, phone-calls and Mass/ sympathy cards as well as practical support and offers of help and of course, it is not always possible or convenient to attend a Funeral Mass.

I disagree with Fr Cotter's statement expressing fear that attendance at funerals boils down to: "A fleeting moment, without a prayer or hardly a thought for the person who had died."

From my observation the opposite is the case. I see sincere Catholics making

a great effort to attend funerals, offering the Mass for deceased person's soul while supporting the bereaved by their very presence. In fact the handshake or hug at the graveside, though brief, conveys genuine sympathy and goodwill.

May Irish funerals continue to reflect the reverent and dignified way of honouring the dead which has been upheld throughout the centuries.

Yours etc.,

Noreen Maguire,
Monea,
Enniskillen.

facebook community

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

Pope considering adding 'sin against ecology' to Church's catechism

You cannot commit sin against the Earth. We can only sin against God. No one can suddenly create ecology sins. The Pope is wrong on this just as he is by saying we must obey the United Nations. – **Peter Killeen**

I think God already covered it when he told us to be good stewards of creation. – **Rebecca Clemenz**

Thank God my ancestors left the Pope and followed Christ. Poor Roman Catholics do not stand a chance with this Curia. – **Kathy Conway**

Creating a Church open to change

The biggest problem in Ireland is the prominent bishops and priests have lost touch with the people and are following wealth and populism instead of been shepherds for the people. – **John Jeffers**

The real difference is that Catholics in the third world are fertile and faithful to the teachings of the Church. Catholics here, led by the example of our progressive clergy, don't actually believe in the true presence, virgin birth, resurrection and certainly not Jesus being the Saviour and Son of God. – **Will Lynch**

Donald Trump is the least religious president ever

Any pro-lifer in the US that doesn't vote Trump first is actively harming the cause. – **Patrick Martin**

He may be, but at least he gives us Catholics freedom to practice our Faith. – **Regina Mahon**

Not true! Donald Trump passed the Religious Freedom Bill. He also elected conservative, pro life judges to the Supreme Court. All the Democrats are for abortion, gay marriage and complete separation of church from state (no prayers of any kind). That doesn't sound very religious to me. – **Margaret Rascoe**

Donald Trump is not Catholic, but he is more Catholic than a lot of Catholic bishops and journalists...he has protected life, property and religious rights. Good for him. – **Marc Aupiais**

He is not a religious person. He says anything he thinks people want to hear. – **Lea Black**

Trump is not pro-life. He is pro- Trump. I can't believe you can look at the cages he's put asylum seekers in and call him pro-life. – **Missy Bartlett**

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

Letters to the Editor

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

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

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

Around the world



▲ **NICARAGUA:** A masked student near the Central American University in Managua holds a banner that reads 'The Church is respected' during a protest against Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega's government.

◀ **ITALY:** Pope Francis greets people after a visit to the Nativity scene of Greccio. The first Nativity scene was assembled in Greccio by St Francis of Assisi in 1223. Photos: CNS



ARGENTINA: Activists in Mendoza embrace in a courthouse after two priests were sentenced to more than 40 years in prison for abusing children at a school for the deaf.



ALBANIA: Emergency personnel carry the body of a victim from rubble in Thumane, the day after a magnitude 6.4 earthquake.



USA: A woman holds a child as they pose for a photo with a man dressed as a toy soldier outside a toy store in New York City.



VATICAN: A worker places a decorative ball as another snaps a photo during the decoration of the Christmas tree.



Anchoring ourselves within God's goodness



Fr Rolheiser

What would Jesus do? For some Christians, that's the easy answer to every question. In every situation all we need to ask is: what would Jesus do?

At a deep level, that's actually true, Jesus is the ultimate criterion. He is the way, the truth, and the life and anything that contradicts him is not a way to God. Yet, I suspect, many of us find ourselves irritated in how that expression is often used in simplistic ways, as a fundamentalism difficult to digest.

Sometimes, in our irritation at this, we spontaneously want to say: Jesus has nothing to do with this! But, of course, as soon as those words escape our mouths we realise how bad that sounds! Jesus has a lot to do with every theological, ecclesial or liturgical question, no matter its complexity. Granted, there's the danger of fundamentalism here; but it's equally as dangerous to answer theological, ecclesial, and liturgical questions without considering what Jesus might do. He's still, and forever, a non-negotiable criterion.

But while Jesus is a non-negotiable criterion, he's not a simplistic one. What did Jesus do? Well, the answer isn't simple. Looking at his life we see that sometimes he did things one way, sometimes another way and sometimes he started out doing something one way and ended up changing his mind and doing it in a different way, as we see in his interaction with the Syro-Phoenician woman.

Worship

That's why, I suspect, within Christianity there are so many different denominations, spiritualities,

and ways of worship, each with its own interpretation of Jesus. Jesus is complex.

Given Jesus' complexity, it's no accident then that theologians, preachers and spiritualities often find in his person and his teachings ways that reflect more how they would handle a situation than how he would. We see this in our Churches and spiritualities everywhere, and I say this with sympathy, not with judgment. None of us gets Jesus fully right.

“The fear that God is not good disguises itself in subtle ways...”

So where does this leave us? Do we simply rely on our private interpretation of Jesus? Do we give ourselves over uncritically to some ecclesial or academic authority and trust that it will tell us what Jesus would do in every situation? Is there a 'third' way?

Well, there's a 'third' way, the way of most Christian denominations, wherein we submit our private interpretation to the canonical ('dogmatic') tradition of our particular Church and accept, though not in blind, uncritical obedience, the interpretation of that larger community, its longer history, and its wider experience, humbly accepting that it can be naïve (and arrogant) to bracket

2,000 years of Christian experience so as to believe that our insight into Jesus is a needed corrective to a vision that has inspired so many millions of people through so many centuries.

Still, we're not meant to park the dictates of our private conscience, our critical questions, our unease with certain things and the wounds we carry, at our church door either. In the end, we all must be true to our own consciences, faithful to the particular insights that God graces us with, and mindful of the wounds we carry. Both our graces and our wounds are meant to be listened to and they, along with the deepest voices within our conscience, need to be taken into account when we ask ourselves: what would Jesus do?

We need to answer that for ourselves by faithfully holding and carrying within us the tension between being obedient to our churches and not betraying the critical voices within our own conscience. If we do that honestly, one thing will eventually constellate inside us as an absolute: God is good!

Everything Jesus taught and incarnated was predicated on that truth. Anything that jeopardises or belies that, be it a Church, a theology, a liturgical practice or a spirituality is wrong. And any voice within dogma or private conscience that betrays that is also wrong.

How we conceive of

God colours for good or for bad everything within our religious practice. And above all else, Jesus revealed this about God: God is good.

“Sometimes we spontaneously want to say: Jesus has nothing to do with this!”

That truth needs to ground everything else, our churches, our theologies, our spiritualities, our liturgies, and our understanding of everyone else. Sadly, often it doesn't.

The fear that God is not good disguises itself in subtle ways but is always manifest whenever our religious teachings or practices somehow make God in heaven not as understanding, merciful, and indiscriminate and unconditional in love as Jesus was on earth. It's also manifest whenever we fear that we're dispensing grace too cheaply and making God too accessible.

Sadly, the God who is met in our Churches today is often too-narrow, too-merciless, too-tribal, too-petty, and too-untrustworthy to be worthy of Jesus...or the surrender of our soul.

What would Jesus do? Admittedly the question is complex.

However we know we have the wrong answer whenever we make God anything less than fully good, whenever we set conditions for unconditional love, and whenever, however subtly, we block access to God and God's mercy.

QUESTIONS of faith

Each week Colm Fitzpatrick looks at interesting and sometimes controversial questions people have about Catholicism...



Should Catholics care about the planet?

In the last two decades or so, there has been a powerful worldwide focus on the impact of global warming. It's widely accepted that if this problem is not tackled, it will detrimentally affect future generations. Climate activists have shaken up the consumerist *status quo*, challenging all of us to live in a more eco-friendly manner. But are there any biblical or theological principles which support this belief or should we embrace planetary degradation?

There is a strong historical and religious current that rejects the notion that Christians should be interested in preserving the environment. Often viewed through the lens of the 'end times', there are plenty who believe that if there is a new world to come established by God, we shouldn't care about the longevity of the earth.

This 'escapist' theology has promoted the message that another more lasting home awaits the saved, often to the detriment of our present world. Indeed, some Christian denominations interpret planetary destruction as a sign of the end times and so welcome it enthusiastically.

Heaven

While it's true Catholics place their hope in the world to come (Heaven), the notion that there will be a radical discontinuity between it and our present world does not have scriptural warrant. Just as there was an intricate relationship between Jesus pre- and post-resurrected body, so too will there be a link between the old and new creation. In this vein, it's important that we treat our present world with care and respect.

Of course, if you delve into the Bible, this principle of protecting creation can be found quite quickly. The Book of Genesis tells us that humanity is to have

"dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (Gen 1:26). Although the word dominion has connotations of power, authority or coercion, most biblical scholars have interpreted this word to mean stewardship. If this is correct, humans are instructed to be ecologically conscious and treat properly all of a creation that God has deemed "very good" (Gen 1:31).

“The poverty and austerity of St Francis were no mere veneer of asceticism...”

The idea that Christians should be eco-friendly isn't a particularly new idea. St Francis of Assisi – the patron saint of animals and ecology – preached avidly about the sacredness of creation and the preciousness of animals.

Another Francis – our current Pontiff – reminds us 800 years later that this is an issue that still pertains to all Christians.

"If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs.

"By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously. The poverty and austerity of St Francis were no mere veneer of asceticism, but something much more radical: a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled" (*Laudato Si'*, 11).

Got a question or comment?
Email colm@irishcatholic.ie

Family & Lifestyle

The Irish Catholic, December 5, 2019

Personal Profile

A university chaplain
on a mission

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A merry green Christmas

The environment has a litany of enemies who are all determined to suffocate and destroy it. The list is almost endless; carbon emissions, deforestation, plastic pollution and oil spills all contribute to ensuring the planet will not be in a fit state for future generations. Everyday is a battle for the environment and very few periods in the year make it wince more than the Christmas holidays.

In between shopping frenzies, plastic consumption and reams of un-recycled waste, the planet barely finds time to breathe. With Christmas in some places reduced down to rampant consumerism, it can be difficult to take a step back and think about the environmental impact of the festive season.



You should try out an eco-friendly Christmas this year, writes Colm Fitzpatrick

It's easy to resign to the notion that needless waste is just part and parcel of these winter holidays, but there are plenty of ways you can make your Christmas greener without surrendering the luxury.

The gift of giving

Everybody loves nothing more than giving and receiving gifts

– but they often come with a hefty environmental price tag. If you're used to purchasing all your presents online, try to shop local instead. The amount of emissions produced from a plane or boat carrying the product you've ordered from the other side of the world is substantial. Aviation contributes about 2% of the planet's carbon

emissions so avoiding ordering items from around the world is worth considering. By shopping local, you'll significantly reduce your carbon footprint and also support a small business.

Likewise, purchasing items at charity shops are an excellent way to reuse old items. As the old adage goes, one man's trash is another man's treasure. You might be squeamish about giving somebody a present you bought in a charity shop, but there are plenty of high quality items that have often never been worn or used in these shops.

When it comes to buying products that require batteries, make sure you buy a packet of rechargeable ones. Billions – literally billions – of batteries

are thrown away each year, so buying ones that can be reused year in year out is a great environmental choice.

It's also beneficial to buy gifts you know the receiver will use. There's no point buying another novelty mug or pair of cheap socks that are going to be stashed at the back of the wardrobe. Instead, purchase items with utility like a good quality item of clothing or equipment related to their favourite hobby.

It's also important to remember that a gift isn't just physical; you can also buy an experience. Rather than buying countless gifts wrapped in plastic, you can book a romantic dinner or tickets to a concert.

» Continued on Page 33

Family News

AND EVENTS

ROBIN HOOD PANTO

He steals from the rich and gives to the poor – the famous story of Robin Hood will be performed this December in Liberty Hall Theatre Dublin. The whole family will get to watch the legendary outlaw, along with Maid Marion, Nursie Nellie Nu Nu and the Merry Men as they try to defeat the wicked Sheriff of Snottingham in this traditional pantomime. The show features singing, dancing, fun and laughter and as Robin Hood is recruiting his Merry Men, you could even be picked for a walk in part of this year's show. There will also be an opportunity to meet the cast afterwards for photos. The performance runs from December 19-31 for 19 shows only and tickets can be purchased at <https://www.libertypanto.com/>. This could be a great Christmas treat both parents and children would enjoy.

IT'S MORE THAN JUST A GAME

Board games aren't as popular as they used to be; at one time they were the highlight for a family on a Friday night, now most of them remain in the back of a cupboard untouched for years on end. However, it might be time to resurrect some old favourites as a new study suggests that playing analog games can reduce cognitive decline. The research, carried out by Drew Altschul from the University of Edinburgh and Prof. Ian Deary of the Edinburgh Lothian Birth Cohorts, shows that people who played more games in their 70s were more likely to maintain healthy cognitive function in their older years. Those who reported playing more analog games in their 70s experienced less relative cognitive decline from the age of 11 until 70, and less cognitive decline between 70 and 79. "These latest findings add to evidence that being more engaged in activities during the life course might be associated with better thinking skills in later life," Altschul said.

PLATE UP

There are a few delicacies in life more appetising than Christmas dinner, but when there are so many mouths to feed it can be hard to juggle all the cooking at one time. Without preparation, the festive feast can become disaster. One problem that arises in small domestic ovens across the country is the sheer lack of space to warm your plates when it's already filled with a turkey and roast potatoes. In order to avoid a cold meal, microwave plate warmers are a clever and handy solution. Simply heat these plate warmers in a microwave for two minutes, then place on your plates to keep them hot for up to 45 minutes. Alternatively, you can place a plate warmer in a bread basket to keep rolls warm. This nifty gadget will allow you to heat plates and bowls with no fuss, leaving your oven clutter-free and your Christmas dinner piping hot!

The birth of Christ within



Since Advent began, we have been waiting for Christmas. For most children, since they returned to school after Halloween, they have been inundated with messages about Christmas. Between targeted ads on television and social media and huge displays on the streets and in the shops, the overriding message has been about wanting more. This makes it difficult for parents and grandparents to communicate the real joy of Christmas.

Over 2000 years ago, Jesus came into the world to change how we think about God. But we can make the mistake of thinking about Christmas merely as a historical event that happened a long time ago. However, one of the main reasons we celebrate Christmas every year is to remind ourselves that if we are to bring about the kind of world that Jesus envisioned, then each one of us must give renewed birth to Christ within our heart.

Christ resides in every living thing, and in each of us. But it is up to us to become Christ-like in our behaviour, in how we live our lives. What does it mean to become Christ-like? It means to love God and love your neighbour who is, ultimately, yourself. In other words, to recognise that we are all children of God and nothing fundamental separates any one of us from the other. Instead, what is fundamental unites us. Meditation helps us to appreciate this, to apprehend this deeply, to appropriate its truth for ourselves.

ME, reflected in the deep waters of meditation, becomes WE. Meditation changes how we see the world. Children have described to me how meditation helps them "to feel the goodness inside" and to

Mindful living

Dr Noel Keating



discover the freedom "to be themselves". Meditation made them deeply aware of their innate goodness as children of God, their original blessing. Children come to appreciate at a very deep level – experientially rather than cognitively – that this goodness is who they really are. They appreciate too that this same goodness resides in every other person and, indeed, in every living thing. They apprehend at some level of their being that they are intimately connected to God and to every other person and this changes their way of seeing and being in the world. And they become kinder persons as they begin to live more deeply out of that understanding.

They come to appreciate that everything isn't about 'me', but that 'we' are all in this together. As John Main expressed it: "When [people] have been meditating for a period of six months or so they begin to look at their lives by a different set of values."

Their mind-set alters from one of scarcity to one of abundance, from a way of being that protects 'me' and 'mine' to a deepening world-view that fosters instead the common good of 'we' and 'ours'.

The love we encounter in meditation transfigures us –

it dissolves the boundaries between oneself and others. Meditation helps us to reframe our experience of everyday life in light of our personal spiritual experience. We come to appreciate that we don't have to live out of our own limited resources but out of the infinite energy of God within us; and this gives rise to a more compassionate way of being in the world. In short, we become more Christ-like.

But this doesn't happen overnight. Waiting for Christmas can seem negative and boring – we just want it to arrive. What makes waiting so difficult is that we try to have one foot in the present moment and the other in the future. But life can



only be lived in the present moment, so we need to have both feet firmly planted in the here and now. That's one of the reasons posture is important in meditation. The simple act of placing our feet firmly on the floor helps to ground us psychologically and spiritually. It anchors us to the present moment, so that we are not waiting for anything. We simply allow ourselves to be in the moment; just to be. Not doing, just being.

If we have the patience and discipline to simply be and to set aside time for that every day, we find after a time that we are mysteriously changed. A seedling doesn't have to do anything to be changed into a scented blossom. If it is planted in good soil and well rooted, it becomes a beautiful flower simply by being. Meditation creates such an environment for the human being. It creates an opportunity for Christ to be born anew within us. The daily practice of meditation grounds us in God and we become transfigured – when Christ takes root in our hearts we find ourselves figuring things out from a new perspective. And that is our intention in meditation – allow ourselves to be changed by grace; we cannot will it but we can learn to wait, not in expectation, but in hope.

Every mother is changed by the birth of a child – every good father too. The prayer of the heart, meditation, leads us into the true experience and meaning of Christmas. Every time we meditate we turn wholeheartedly to God and assent, as Mary did, to the birth of Christ within us.

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

» Continued from Page 31



Food for thought

The amount of food we waste at Christmas is extremely excessive. The festive period is usually an excuse for overeating but this usually results in stacks of rubbish bags being sent to the tip. By reducing the amount of food you buy, you'll reduce your carbon footprint and save some money along the way.

To achieve this goal, plan what meals you intend on making over the holidays with an estimation of how many mouths you'll be feeding. With a better idea of the amount of people who will be sitting around the dinner table, you can estimate the quantity of food needed. Even if you do end up with extra food, don't just bin it. You can put food in the freezer to save for another day, or use leftovers to make a new dish.

To lessen plastic consumption, buy loose items or products that have minimal packaging. This food is usually high-quality anyways, and so will be much tastier.

Perhaps the best way you can reduce your carbon footprint when it comes to food is by reducing your meat intake. This doesn't mean sacrificing the traditional turkey and ham roast dinner, but maybe you could opt for a meat-free alternative. Given how popular vegetarianism has become in the last few years, there are plenty food items on the market that are almost identical substitutes for the real thing. It's worth trying out and if you don't like it, at least you can say you gave it a shot.

Eco-travelling

As we get older, families and friends tend to drift to different parts of the world for work or other commitments. Christmas is a time where they can reconnect but this usually requires a long journey home. When it comes to living in an eco-friendly way, sacrifices and compromises need to be made. If you

live in Australia but are returning home to the UK, then jumping on a flight is the most practical option. However, if it's possible and easy for you to hop on a train or ferry to get to your desired destination, then that's an option worth considering. Trains generally produce 50% less emissions than planes for the same trip. If you also know a group of people headed the same direction, carpooling is also a viable option.

Be paper-wise

You might love decking your presents with all the trimmings like bows and ribbons. However, there are concerns that these add-ons have a negative environmental impact. Likewise, the shiny, glitter-coated rolls of wrapping paper bought each year aren't recyclable. To combat this problem, try covering your gifts in easily recyclable materials like brown paper or reusable items like a scarf. This option might seem boring, but add a sprig of holly and a natural fibre like twine to make it look traditional. If you want a more personal flair to



the wrapping paper, why not get the kids to draw pictures on the brown paper. For the receiver, the wrapping paper will be a present in itself.

You can also be more environmentally conscious by purchasing crackers that don't have small, plastic toys in them. Indeed, Waitrose and John Lewis have just announced that their toys will be made from recyclable materials and will not use plastic glitter by 2020. If these aren't available, buy crackers that have paper jokes in them or you could even make your own reusable crackers. You can fill these with your own gifts, making it a nice surprise for someone when it goes pop.

Paper waste can also be reduced at the dinner table. There's no need to buy paper napkins, cloth ones are more environmentally friendly and add a more luxurious touch to your table setting.

Tree turmoil

The position on buying natural trees to be more environmentally friendly is complicated – millions of trees are bought in December alone, which involves a lot of carbon production. Fake plastic trees also take a lot of time to produce and add a lot of synthetic waste to landfills sites when they're binned. The best advice is to keep using your artificial tree rather than acquiring a new one. If you do intend on buying a natural tree, some councils might offering recycling services where you can leave it after the Christmas holidays.

If you adopt these eco-friendly tips, you'll be playing your part in keeping your impact low during one of the most wasteful and damaging seasons in the calendar. And remember, you can apply most of this advice to your life throughout the whole year – being eco-conscious isn't a mindset just for Christmas!

Faith — IN THE — family

Bairbre Cahill



Advent feels like a good time to be thinking about parenting. We are conscious of Mary and Joseph – parents to be – their expectation, their anxiety, the advice coming from all sides, the whispers in the background about Mary's pregnancy, the prospect of a long journey with Mary heavily pregnant.

As well as being a parent, my work life also revolves around parenting. I am the coordinator of a community-based hub which offers parents information on the supports, services and events for families. I also coordinate parenting programmes around the county and deal with parents on a one to one basis when they get in touch looking for advice, information or simply a listening ear. Unfortunately, the funding for my role runs out at the end of this month and at this point in time there is no certainly that a solution is going to be found. It is a situation being replicated around the country, people involved in what is called 'Early Intervention and Prevention' work live precarious lives, unsure whether their job will exist in six months' time.

Early Intervention and Prevention is about helping parents to be equipped with the skills they need to parent in a positive and confident way so that challenges are dealt with early on and don't evolve into more complex crisis situations. Sometimes when I am talking about the work I do, including the parenting programmes, people say: "Why is any of that needed? Sure, didn't we all just get on with parenting without courses and programmes? What is wrong with parents now?" I understand the question but I also understand that the parenting landscape has become more complicated.

One of the biggest struggles parents have – and I have seen this in parenting programmes I have facilitated – is to put consistent boundaries on children. We live in a society where choice is everything, where we expect to be able to do what we want to do. That can leave parents very conflicted about saying "no", to their children. We are also excessively busy. Both parents are under pressure to be out at work. The expectations we have for our lifestyle

often cannot be funded on just one wage. Our children are over scheduled with after school activities. Indeed, I have seen many a query on Facebook for 'activities' for 3 and 4-year-olds. Free play has become a rarity, with children expecting to be entertained but this is robbing them of opportunities to develop their own imaginations, try things out, take measured risks,



learn from experience and grow in resilience.

Social media – and children in national school have access to smart phones – is linked to rising levels of anxiety in children. There is a world open to them which they do not have the emotional maturity to deal with but this is an area where parents feel most powerless to say "No, you aren't having a phone yet" or to put strict limits on what children and teenagers can do online and how much time they can spend online. Consistent, nurturing, assertive parenting is a skill which often needs to be developed.

I've been involved again recently in parish meetings for parents whose children are preparing for sacraments and again I am impressed and encouraged by the feedback from parents. They see a clear role for faith in giving their child a sense of direction in life and the importance of Jesus and his message as a role model for that. I certainly believe that faith has been a solid foundation for Danny and I, in raising our own children. That line from the prophet Micah, resonates: "This is what God asks of you, only this, that you act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with your God."

I do not think our society values parenting enough. Whatever we do in life, there is little that has more impact on society than the nature of the children we raise.

A university chaplain on a mission

Personal Profile



Students can be a source of hope and encouragement, Colm Fitzpatrick learns

It's tough being a chaplain, especially when it involves providing pastoral support to students in one of Northern Ireland's most popular universities.

Fr Dominic McGrattan has recently been appointed as chaplain in Queen's University, Belfast, replacing Fr Gerard Magee. He describes it as a "new and exciting chapter" and although still has a lot to learn about student life, he's eager to offer them a space where they can deepen their faith.

Belfast isn't a wholly new area to Fr Dominic – his home town is just an hour's drive away in the small seaside village of Portaferry. Born in the 1980's, it common to associate this time period in the North with political and religious upheaval. However, Fr Dominic explains that's not how he remembers his childhood.

"My growing up was happy and secure. Although the Troubles were still raging in Northern Ireland, Portaferry was the kind of place people escaped to. It was a close-knit community where people looked out for each other," he says.

"Thankfully it was preserved from the worst of the violence and relations between Catholics and

Protestants were, and remain, very neighbourly."

Fr Dominic is the last of seven children, and his mother was a seamstress before she married and his father was an engineer with the Merchant Navy. His career was cut short when Fr Dominic's sister was born with Down syndrome and he was needed at home.

Describing his family as "quite ordinary", Fr Dominic says that faith played a big part in his upbringing.

"We went to Mass every Sunday, and sometimes weekday Mass and devotions too. Mum knelt and prayed with us before she put us to bed at night. My illustrated Bible was among my favourite story books.

"We visited the local Passionist Monastery in Crossgar every month for Confessions, which

was followed by a treat from the chip shop or bakery. Faith always had positive associations for me growing up," he says.

The notion of becoming a priest was present with Fr Dominic from a young age, but intensified when he was making the transition from second level education to university. It was a "big" step to make as a teenager, so he decided to get a degree first. No doubt his desire to make this vocational leap was formed during his childhood.

"Our parish was blessed with good priests. They were each very different characters but common to them was strong faith, dedication to service and love for people. Those values carried through to our local schools, staffed by women and men who

had a real sense of their vocation as Christian educators," he explains.

"Looking back, my relationship with Jesus and my love for the Church and desire to serve were nurtured in the context of that traditional home-school-parish partnership."

He pursued undergraduate studies in Law at Trinity College, Dublin, followed by postgraduate studies specialising with a Masters in Commercial Law at St Edmund's College, Cambridge. After formation in St Malachy's seminary, Fr Dominic was ordained in 2014 in St Patrick's Church where he was baptised.

Five years on, he is now Queen's chaplain and also assists nearby in St Brigid's Parish.

"I am learning on the job and trying to profile what the typical student is these days so that hopefully I can serve them better. I am beginning to wonder if there is such a thing as a typical student though!" he says.

At a time in Ireland where young people seem to be apathetic and even hostile to the faith, Fr Dominic explains that there are many young, inspiring students who share their convictions proudly with others. Although not everyone who enters the chaplaincy is a devout Christian, at the very least it offers them a place where they can reflect on the deeper questions of life.

"Whilst it has been a steep learning curve since taking up post this autumn, already I am encouraged and energised by our students. Many are committed to their faith and enthusiastic about sharing it with their peers. Others are not necessarily 'Gospel greedy' but they are asking the big questions in life and they know the chaplaincy is a safe space for them to do that. They give me great hope."

It's unclear what the future holds for Fr Dominic, but with no regrets about his decision to become a priest and a strong support network around him, it wouldn't take a clairvoyant to know that the students are in safe and knowledgeable hands.

"I am into my sixth year of priesthood now. I am sustained by the friendship and support of brother priests, colleagues and parishioners, as well as my old university friends.

"I am blessed too that Mum and Dad are still around, keeping me in check. Whilst there have been ups and downs, I have loved every minute and couldn't imagine being anything other than a priest, thank God."



Children's Corner

Colm Fitzpatrick

Amaze your family at Christmas...with just a toothpick!

If you're a natural performer or just want to move out of your comfort zone, why not try entertaining your family and friends over Christmas with some magic? This is a time of year when all of your family are together under one roof, making it the perfect opportunity to show off all the tricks you've been learning during the last 12 months.

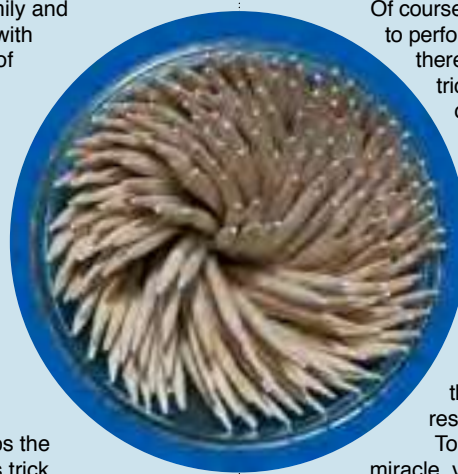
One popular type of effect is making an object repair itself after you've destroyed it. For example, you might rip up some money and then with a magical wave of the hand completely restore it. Perhaps the most famous example of this trick is with a person, not an object: sawing someone in half. Traditionally the magician would

put his assistant in a box, saw her in two, and then put her back together.

Of course, you probably won't be able to perform this effect at home but there are smaller versions of the trick which will work around the dinner table...all you need is a toothpick and a napkin/handkerchief.

The effect is very simple, but powerful. You lay the napkin out flat and place the toothpick in the centre. You fold up the napkin and ask the spectator to break the toothpick. However, when you unfold the napkin, the toothpick has completely restored.

To perform this miniature miracle, you have to prepare by inserting an extra toothpick into the seam of the napkin. That way, it will be hidden from sight.



Now you are ready to start the trick.

Place the napkin out flat and put the toothpick in the centre. It's important to remember what seam the extra toothpick is hidden in. Fold all four corners of the napkin towards the centre. Once folded, grab the seam which hides the extra toothpick and ask the spectator to break it in two. This is incredibly convincing because your volunteer can hear the toothpick snap and feel that it really is in two pieces. During this process make sure an audience member doesn't try to open up the napkin as this will ruin the trick. Be very clear with your instructions.

Once broken, unfold the napkin and your spectators will be amazed that the toothpick has completely restored. While they're inspecting the toothpick you can swap the napkin for a normal one so they won't find anything if they suspect it had something to do with the trick.

This effect is a mind-boggler and will have your family and friends wondering how performed such an incredible feat especially because they were holding the napkin!

TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



Hard questioning sets an interesting tone

Last week I heard and saw quite a few interesting items, most of which can be listened back to on the various web players.

I relied on **EWTN News Nightly** for keeping in touch with the visit of Pope Francis to Japan and Thailand. On Monday of last week they reported his inspirational words at the sites of the atomic explosions calling for an end to the use and possession of nuclear weapons and the diversion of funds used for the arms races to care for the poor. His last Mass at a Tokyo stadium attracted around 50,000 Japanese Catholics and seemed a very joyful and enthusiastic event.

Newsnight (BBC2, Tuesday) took a critical look at the transgender phenomenon, in particular highlighting the stories of those wanting to de-transition. Sometimes people chose to change gender because of unhappiness with some aspect of their lives but find that transitioning doesn't solve the problem.

We heard that those who supported such people were sometimes seen as traitors to the transgender cause.

I was surprised by the hard questioning presenter Emily Matlis gave to a representative from a gender clinic. She was challenging the idea of putting people on the path to gender change



BBC presenter Emily Matlis.

without enough research into the long term consequences.

On Tuesday's **Hard Shoulder** (Newstalk) presenter Ivan Yates had quite an interesting interview with journalist Niamh Horan on the topic of forgiveness. The context was the unforgiving nature of social media with pile-ons showing no mercy as the online mob bring their pitchforks and flaming torches to current debates and past misdemeanors. Horan was strongly in favour of forgiveness, especially when people were sorry.

Tuesday night's **Sky News** highlighted the case of the three African Americans released from prison (thanks to the efforts of the Innocence Project) after spending 36

years there, arrested as teens for a murder they didn't commit.

Their relief and even sense of wonder as they looked up to open skies in the presence of their loved ones was quite moving, as was their dignity, their measured statements, and in the case of at least two of them their expression of religious faith.

On Wednesday's **Pat Kenny Show** (Newstalk) drugs awareness advocate Marie Byrne spoke a lot of sense about suggestions of legalising drugs.

She thought it was a bad move, with people profiting from the misery of others. Some texters suggested there would be a huge tax take from a legalised drugs market,

money that could go to the health services. They didn't mention the increased health issues that would inevitably follow greater drug use.

Byrne thought it would be a "tax on misery", and was critical of the concept of "recreational" drug use. She pointed out that some in authority were having second thoughts in Portugal, fearing that legalisation was normalising drug use and further, that, despite legalisation, there was still a thriving black market in drugs in Colorado as the legal drugs were taxed and therefore more expensive.

On LBC Radio in the UK the presenters are generally too opinionated for my liking, but at least there's some diversity of viewpoint on political matters, e.g. some Brexiteers, some Remainers. Last Thursday morning I was listening to the **Nick Ferrari Show**



RTÉ's Mary Wilson.

PICK OF THE WEEK

THE SIMPSONS

Channel 4, Saturday, December 7, 10am

Bart Sells His Soul: Bart casually sells his soul to Milhouse and finds something vital missing.

MASS

RTÉ1, RTÉ Radio 1 Extra and Long Wave 252, Sunday, December 8, 11am

Mass with a gathered congregation and choir from Clogher don Oíge the Youth Ministry organisation of the Diocese of Clogher with music led by Catherine McLoughlin. The celebrant is Fr Leo Creelman.

Lucy Worsley's Christmas Carol Odyssey

BBC4, Monday, December 9, 9pm also 2am

Lucy Worsley reveals the surprising stories behind our favourite Christmas carols – from pagan rituals to religious conflicts, French dances and World War I.

(LBC Radio in the UK) and there was a telling exchange at the end – a caller gently accused him of bias and he was courteous to the caller, accepted that if bias was unconscious then by definition he wouldn't be aware of it, and finished by saying that he would take the comments on board. It was refreshing – on our own media I find presenters get cranky and defensive if accused of bias, which is revealing in itself.

The transgender issue resurfaced on last Friday evening's **Drivetime** (RTÉ Radio 1) when Mary Wilson interviewed Minister Regina Doherty about proposed changes to the legislation. You'll be interested to know that they have for now stopped short of recognising a third gender!

Also of interest, considering what I wrote earlier, is that she proposes to streamline the process for those who wish to de-transition.

A spokesperson for a trans advocacy group was also interviewed, a person who thought that parental permission should be needed for young people.

Of course there was no-one on the programme challenging the whole idea or even airing the many reservations that are out there about the ongoing implications of these developments.

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Pat O'Kelly

Music

Camerata Ireland showcases magnificent young talent



Barry Douglas.

A fortnight ago I wrote about some of our young musicians and their competition successes. This week I am mentioning another group who are further advanced in their respective careers. An opportunity of hearing five of them arose at the NCH's recent Friends' Gala with Camerata Ireland under its founder/director Barry Douglas. The orchestra is currently enjoying residency at the Hall.

The already well-experienced young soloists involved were violinist Mairéad Hickey, a former pupil of Adrian Petcu in Cork; violist Ed Creedon, who studied with Constantin Zanidache, also in Cork, and Killian White, the first cellist to be awarded the RDS Music Bursary. Before moving to the Barenboim-Said Academy in Berlin, Killian studied with NSO cellist Martin Johnson and Christopher Marwood at the RIAM.

Hailing from Co Down, clarinetist

Tom Myles received the Flax Trust Arts Bursary courtesy of Camerata Ireland's Academy. Tom has been a member of the Youth Orchestra of Great Britain and thereby appeared at four BBC Proms in London. Last year he was a finalist in the woodwind section of the BBC's *Young Musician* programme.

The last, but by no means least, of the five was another Corkonian – pianist Kevin Jansson. From the age of six, his teacher was Mary Beattie in the Munster capital's School of Music. Moving to New York's Julliard School, he made his Carnegie Weiss Hall debut in 2017, the year he cut his first CD for the Swiss Claves label. Kevin took first prize at the Jeune Chopin Competition in Marigny in 2018 and received this year's RDS €15,000 Bursary.

But there is another dimension to young Jansson. When 13, he was an

all-Ireland winner on the fiddle at Fleadh Ceoil na hÉireann and away from music he received the gold medal at the Irish National Physics Olympiad 2016 and, representing his country, took a silver medal at the European Union Science Olympiad in Copenhagen in 2017.

Gala opening

The NCH gala opened with Killian White playing Haydn's 1st Cello Concerto and producing magically mellow tone. His soothingly etched central *Adagio* had an ethereal quality and the outer movements also conveyed his innate musical insights.

The rest of the gala hung on Mozart. Mairéad Hickey and Ed Creedon joined forces for the *E flat Sinfonia Concertante* where their sensitive rapport was ideal. Their distinct instrumental voices rightly came to the fore but this never inter-

fered with the intense musical bond between them.

Tom Myles took us on a deeply expressive journey through the *Clarinet Concerto*. Every phrase was beautifully spun with his unbroken and graceful lines in the *Adagio* befitting Mozart's creative genius in this movement.

The final work was the *Double Piano Concerto* with Barry Douglas and Kevin Jansson. Their interpretation had flowing engagement that meant Mozart's answering, and amusing, exchanges emerging marvellously unimpeded. The 'bouncy castle' effects in the concluding Rondeau happily remained within the borders of classical elegance.

With Camerata Ireland offering splendid support, I found this concert highly satisfying as it portrayed unusual artistic depths in these exceptionally gifted young people.



BookReviews

Peter Costello



Stephen Bradley and his wife on location.

Seizing hold of life

Shooting and Cutting: A survivors guide to film-making and other diseases
by Stephen Bradley
(Mercier Press, €14.99)

Peter Costello

Film maker Stephen Bradley is the creator of *Noble*, the 2014 drama about the true life story of Christina Noble, the children's rights campaigner and charity worker in Vietnam, who founded the Christina Noble Children's Foundation.

Some years ago Bradley was asked in an interview with a magazine at Trinity College, where he had taken his law degree: "What is the most useful piece of advice you've ever received?"

His answer was forthright.

"It wasn't directed at me specifically but the great Spanish film-maker Pedro Almodóvar said 'if you want to be successful in the film business never give up!'"

This memoir deals with both film making and with never giving up, both on film making or life. Having worked in England for some years, and achieving a fair level of success, Stephen Bradley and his actress wife returned to Ireland. But this move home coincided with a diagnosis of stage four cancer – as he says himself there is no stage five. His life was turned upside-down and inside out.

“Creativity, and what it can achieve under pressure, is a strange thing”

This book recounts the path that he and his wife and their cohort travelled over afterwards. The long courses of surgery and medical treatment were difficult. But today he is now cancer free.

The sheer determination – originating perhaps in the determination of every artist to achieve what they need to achieve, which is a special kind of success, an integral success, quite alien to that which bankers and business men achieve – played a strong role in the process. Creativity, and what it can achieve under pressure, is a strange thing.

Shooting and Cutting is remarkable story, and a cheering one, in that sometimes it seems that with pain and anguished things turn out better than we might have hoped.

As Stephen Bradley tells us at the very end, in the last lines of the book: "As for the here and now, I have two revelations that surprise me: I am without a sense of melancholy for the first time in three years. I am anxious no more."

Soul refreshing scenes across Ireland

Wild Stories from the Irish Uplands
by John G. O'Dwyer
(Currach Books, €14.99)

J. Anthony Gaughan

The author is a veteran hiker with over thirty years experience of leading walking and mountaineering groups through the Irish countryside. In this collection of essays he visits a number of well-known uplands across the country and recalls their association with historical figures and events.

Beginning with St Patrick, he surveys Slemish in Co. Antrim. Here the kidnapped youth was employed as a shepherd on its slopes by Milchu, a slave owner. O'Dwyer next ascends the Hill of Slane, where St Patrick with his Paschal Fire posed an unmistakable challenge to the pagan Irish High King on the nearby Hill of Tara.

Next he traces the saint's footsteps to Croagh Patrick, on the summit of which St Patrick reputedly fasted for forty days. The author provides a detailed account of the ascent and notes that, despite the hardship involved, the pilgrimage mountain is climbed about one hundred thousand times annually, with the last Sunday in July the most popular day on which to 'Climb the Reek'.

Footsteps

The author does not restrict his retracing of the footsteps of St Patrick to high ground and includes in his itinerary Station Island in Lough Derg, the Rock of Cashel and Ardpatrick in Co. Lim-

erick, where according to tradition, St Patrick established his first monastic settlement.

Mount Brandon in the Dingle peninsula is named after St Brendan. He is also known as the 'Navigator' and the author visits Brandon Creek, whence, according to legend, the saint successfully crossed the North Atlantic.

Tim Sevrin will forever be associated with St Brendan and his search for the 'Island promised to the saints'.

Convinced that St Brendan's voyage was based on fact, he built a replica of St Brendan's currach, using the materials and techniques of the period.

After a hazardous journey which involved serial island hopping and landfall in a number of other places Sevrin and his four companions reached Newfoundland.

However, notwithstanding Sevrin's remarkable achievement, Dwyer rejects his claim to have proved that St Brendan was the first European to reach America.

The Wicklow mountains provide O'Dwyer with the location for more of his 'wild stories'. The Ulster princes Red Hugh O'Donnell and Art O'Neill escaped from Dublin Castle on the night of January 6, 1592. They reached the Dublin mountains and thence were led



by a guide in inclement weather conditions through the Wicklow Gap to the safety of Fiach McHugh O'Byrnes' Ballinacor Castle in Glenmalure.

Two hundred years later these Wicklow hills were the stronghold of Michael O'Dwyer. Following the suppression of the 1798 rebellion, he refused to surrender to the authorities and continued to harass the crown forces, earning the soubriquet the 'Outlaw of Glenmalure'.

Although none of his attacks on the 'Red Coats' were militarily significant, he was a huge irritant to the administrators of English rule in Ireland.

Construction

To cope with him and other rebels in the area they constructed the Military Road across the Wicklow Hills, with barracks at Glencree, Glendalough, Glenmalure (Drumgoff) and Aughavannagh. By the time the construction of the road was completed in 1809 the entire project had become obsolete.

The threat of a French invasion had receded and O'Dwyer had negotiated

terms with the authorities and eventually had been banished to New South Wales in Australia.

The author recalls a significant historical event which occurred on the slopes of the Knockmealdown Mountains on April 10, 1923. While General Liam Lynch and other leaders of the Anti-Treaty movement were fleeing encirclement by the Irish Free State army, Lynch was fatally wounded during an exchange of fire. Within days the Civil War ended.

“This book is very much in tune with the zeitgeist of our time, with its responsible obsession with ecology”

From first-hand experience the author discusses various ways in which Carruntuohill could and should be climbed. In so doing he describes some of the heroic rescues conducted on it by Con Moriarty and the Kerry Mountain Rescue Team – wonderful people.

This book is very much in tune with the zeitgeist of our time, with its responsible obsession with ecology. Written with the same fervour with which Pope Francis drafted *Laudato Si'*, it is replete with information useful to hill-walkers and mountaineers and it is a very interesting read.



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.



Croagh Patrick painting.

Renovating your spiritual home

Under Construction: Working with the Architect
by Neil O'Boyle
(SPCK, £8.99)

Peter Costello

The literary conceit behind this book is an original one. Author O'Boyle takes the idea of revamping your home, from the garden and front hall up to the bedroom, and gives it a spiritual twist.

Most of us will have worked with either a builder or an architect on such a domestic scheme. We may even be still waiting to get into one before Christmas. Well, you know what architects are like. But O'Boyle suggests that working with the, so to speak, divine architect of all things is both the same and quite different, and presents problems we may not want to face.

Written from an evangelical point of view some of O'Boyle remarks may make one wonder. He writes: "In the west we do not face torture or imprisonment for our beliefs. The likelihood is that you will never face any external problems as a result of being a Christian."



Where has he been living? Many people and not just religious people find that if they hold any views which seem contrary to those most widely held "in the West" find themselves abused, and indeed imprisoned.

But no-one reads a book of this kind to agree with everything the author says. But reading what we don't agree with should not hone our dislike of someone's ideas, but make us think about what we believe, not just about 'the state of house', or what we should believe, but perhaps why we should disbelieve other things. For many of us the state of our disbelief seems as much in need of examination as the state of our beliefs.

Rome: the city to which all roads lead

Rome: A Pilgrim Guide
by Michael Rear,
illustrated by Hilary Griffiths
(Gracewing, £14.99)

Peter Costello

Quite by chance the day before this book arrived on my desk I had been looking into the generally excellent Michelin Green Guide series *Guide to Rome*. This covers a great deal of ground, but for what I was looking for it was a disappointment.

Rome is a difficult city to write about, for the interests of visitors are so varied, ancient Rome, Imperial Rome, medieval Rome, Rome and the creation of modern Italy, Rome as the symbol of the corruption that infects so much of modern life in Italy.

This new book by Fr Michael Rear, as its title indicates, is intended specifically for the pilgrims, and they are countless every year, who see Rome in a Christian perspective. Every holiday season, such as Easter and Christmas, sees the Christian sites and monuments choked with people: one certainly needs a good guide, or one would be simply overwhelmed.

“There are drawings instead of photographs, but this is reflected in the price”

Fr Rear, a retired priest of the Diocese of East Anglia, is also the author of *Walsingham: Pilgrims and Pilgrimage* (also published by Gracewing). Now that village, just across the water from us, is a truly interesting place.

His book on Rome is to be highly recommended.

The dome of St Peter's as seen from the Vatican Gardens.



other quick. So if you are thinking of a Roman holiday, this is a book to take with you.

One caveat: nothing beats having a good large map in a city like Rome. There are times when the sat-nav on your phone just will not do the trick. The maps in the books are indicative, but only cover small areas.

Humane man

It is to be hoped though that readers might also read some older books. I am thinking of H. V. Morton's *A Traveller in Rome*, out of date in the eyes of many people, but so well written and evocative, by an observant and humane man, sensitive to religious matters.

Then there is the very personal, much civilised, but enchanting *A Time in Rome* by Elizabeth Bowen. These books serve to remind us that for every new book we are persuaded to read by the power of publicity, we should also read an old book too.

And the best hint of all about the city to which all roads are said to lead: never go to Rome in August.

Not only does he cover all the history at exactly the right level of detail that a pilgrim needs, but he also provides a wealth of practical information of the kind I am afraid that the snazzier *Rough Guides* and others simply don't bother with. He even helps you locate the bus stops.

There are drawings instead of photographs, but this is reflected in the price. The drawings also give the book a more personal atmosphere.

This book is intended for Christian pilgrims, so the details about what they might like to see are well laid out.

But more than that he does not neglect the other museums and sights, with details of opening times (ever-changing and confusing he confesses).

But in catering to spiritual and cultural needs he does not neglect where to stay and where to eat – invaluable information for as strangers in any city. The reader can trust his judgement, which is more than can be said for

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— Pope St Pius X, June 4, 1912



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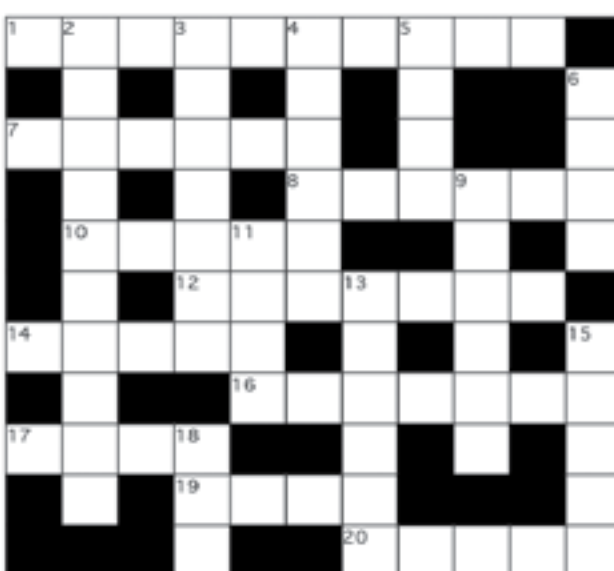
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Crossword Junior

Gordius 311



ACROSS

1. This person will bring you in their cab for a fare. (4,6)
7. Yell with fear. (6)
8. Jesse James or Robin Hood, for example. (6)
10. I don't think so, in fact, I _____ it. (5)
12. A home for honey-making insects. (7)
14. These joints are halfway up your legs. (5)
16. Fishing-boat. (7)
17. This pours out of a volcano. (4)
19. You get a whipped ice-cream in one. (4)
20. The opposite of South. (5)

DOWN

2. Not on purpose. (10)
3. A frozen block you might put in a drink. (3,4)
4. You might change TV channels with the _____ control. (6)
5. Piece of underwear. (4)
6. Grassy part of the garden. (4)
9. Delightful. (6)
11. Finest. (4)
13. God and the angels are here. (6)
15. The opposite of stale. (5)
18. It's usually the best card. (3) (4)

SOLUTIONS, NOVEMBER 28

GORDIUS No. 431

Across — 1 Bear with me 6 Font 10 Satyr 11 Laudato Si 12 Distant 15 Merit 17 Hero 18 Luke 19 Towel 21 Cheetah 23 Caste 24 Stet 25 Idle 26 Ravel 28 Sorcery 33 Chain gang 34 Atone 35 List 36 Giant panda

Down — 1 Bush 2 As thick as thieves 3 Worst 4 Talon 5 Maud 7 Odour 8 Triathlete 9 Mammoth 13 Arch 16 Electrical 20 Water down 21 Ceiling 22 Acer 27 Vials 29 Organ 30 Cramp 31 Dali 32 Feta

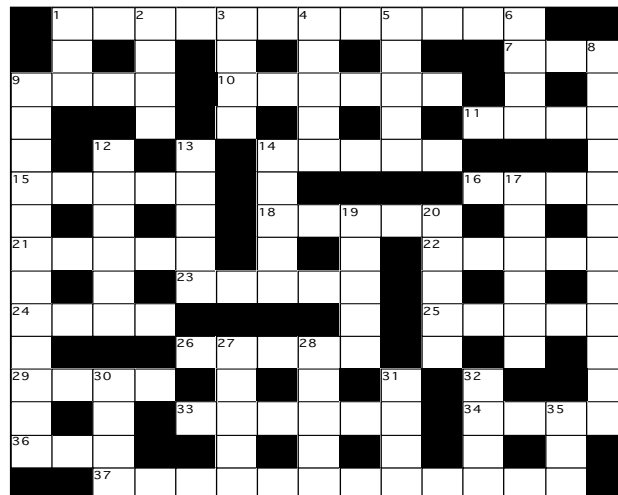
CHILDREN'S No. 310

Across — 1 Toothbrush 7 Windy 9 Ballet 11 Lying 13 Archer 15 Rulers 16 Legend 19 Ignore 20 Disappear

Down — 1 Towel 2 Own 3 Hay 4 Repair 5 Sail 6 Pet 8 Dangerous 10 Ewe 12 Young 13 Asleep 14 Hoe 17 Game 18 Near

Crossword

Gordius 432



ACROSS

- 1 Sporting event with cyclical appeal! (4,2,6)
- 7, 10a & 25a The bloke left hooks around a priceless Irish manuscript (3,4,2,5)
- 9 Covered a cake (4)
- 10 See 7 across
- 11 Metal used in galvanisation (4)
- 14 It's involved in the Highland Fling (5)
- 15 Back? Grand, supply more weapons (5)
- 16 Woodwind instrument (4)
- 18 The sailor, a sheepish male, can supply Isaac's father's original name (5)
- 21 Paul wrote 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice' doing up kedgeree and sausage starters (5)
- 22 Proof of absence from the scene of a crime (5)
- 23 Go away - make like a rabbit! (3,2)
- 24 Visit; telephone conversation (4)
- 25 See 7 across
- 26 Cigarette butts (5)
- 29 Solemn vow (4)
- 33 Largo I composed; the angels sang it (6)
- 34 The sound of a snake or a sound of disapproval (4)
- 36 Pronoun - the second person, singular or plural (3)
- 37 One who pays agricultural rent because there are barely double figures in the

formicary? (6,6)

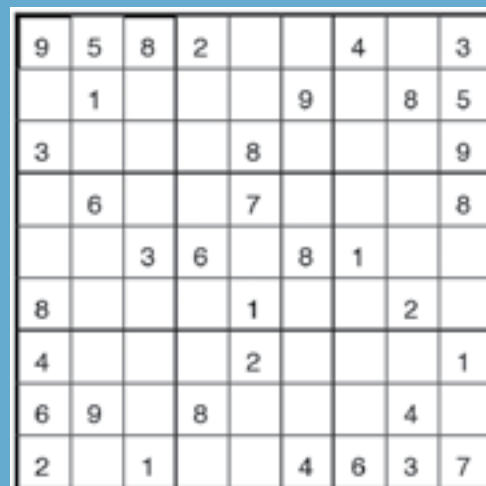
DOWN

- 1 Involuntary movement seen as tongue in cheek, initially (3)
- 2 Open the United Nations party (4)
- 3 Obligation to pay (4)
- 4 Perhaps Ms Bruce starts flying intermittently over North America (5)
- 5 Dwelling (5)
- 6 A small case, suitable for holding needles, etc (4)
- 8 Book of the Bible that allows some elites access (12)
- 9 & 19d Section of the mass one finds in discount territory, literally! (12,5)
- 12 This wild dog has had its day, according to Frederick Forsyth (6)
- 13 Pennsylvania mennonites find French pals hot (5)
- 14 Catch many a snake (5)
- 17 It's put on a horse (6)
- 19 See 9 down
- 20 Evangelist's exam scores? (5)
- 27 Somewhere in Oklahoma, this unspoilt location serves appetising starters (5)
- 28 Traditional French headgear (5)
- 30 Greatly tightened; tense (4)
- 31 Many get Ms Gardner a sparkling wine (4)
- 32 Caprice (4)
- 35 Military term of address to a superior (3)

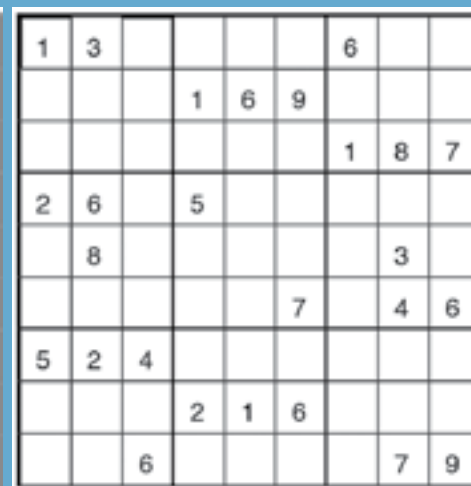
Sudoku Corner

311

Easy



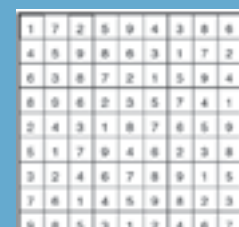
Hard



Last week's Easy 310



Last week's Hard 310



Notebook

Fr Martin Delaney



The travails of Elizabeth gives us hope for Advent

SOMETIME EARLY in November one of my friends sent me the following bumper-sticker 'Note to all premature Christmas decorators: Calm down, Mary hasn't even told Joseph she's pregnant yet!'

A few days after the bumper sticker arrived I read an essay entitled 'Advent RIP'. Basically the writer articulates what we all know to be true and that is Advent has been swallowed up by commercial Christmas.

Indeed the secular world has actually unashamedly robbed the concept of Advent and so every chocolate manufacturer now has an advent calendar of surprises behind every one of the twenty four windows. The perfume and toiletries industry are also in on the act and this week I even saw an advent calendar of 24 different cheeses!

Preparation

Advent as a season of spiritual preparation for the birth of Christ is consigned to the short time we spend in church on the four Sundays and even if we light a wreath at home or try to read a daily meditation it can be difficult not to get pulled



into the commercial Christmas atmosphere. Sometimes our churches are not even safe. A few years ago I was invited to a parish to celebrate Mass on the First weekend of Advent. I was shocked when the choir sang a final hymn, *Silent Night!* I foolishly said at the end of mass that the choir

was obviously anxious to get to Christmas and the choir leader told me he was hugely insulted by my comment.

So is there anything we can do to bring Advent off life support and give it back meaning as a season of waiting with great anticipation and expectation for something wonderful to happen?

“It is difficult being the outsider, the one who is ‘different’ ‘folding dishtowels when others are folding nappies’”

I'm not sure there is but this year I have decided to make a new effort by reflecting more deeply with some of the characters who were unwittingly so significant in that drama leading up to the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

People like Mary who must have been scared out of her wits by what God was asking of her. Joseph who always seems to have

● **A HIGHER CALLING!** At school two little girls were talking about their roles in the nativity play. "I'm going to be the virgin" one announced smugly. "That's nothing" replied the other, "I'm going to be an angel." "Well my mammy says it's much harder to be a virgin," retorted the first.

A thought for the new Church year

"A fire does not burn by itself; it has to be fed or else it dies; it turns into ashes. If everything continues as it was, if we spend our days content that 'this is the way things have always been done', then the gift vanishes, smothered by the ashes of fear and concern for defending the *status quo*." Pope Francis.

been left out and yet was expected to cooperate with what was going on around him.

Anna, the old lady who went to the Temple every day hoping to meet the Messiah, a woman of faith who had been tested by so many human blows and losses. And yet she remained faithful despite the losses and the doubts. She becomes a role model for all who are plagued by doubts and losses especially at Christmastime.

Another figure is Elizabeth. In a very real sense Elizabeth was marginalised. In a society that valued children and saw a woman's principal role as being a child-bearer God had closed her womb. Being childless meant that she would be ostracised among the

women of her village.

It is difficult being the outsider, the one who is 'different' 'folding dishtowels when others are folding nappies'. Elizabeth was on the margins and she had to live with it. Had God abandoned her?

Then one day late in her life, she felt a stirring in her body and then her young cousin Mary comes to visit and these two women celebrate God breaking into their lives. Elizabeth speaks to all of us who at times feel we are on the margins.

No matter what others think we are noticed by the *one* who counts. Elizabeth gives me Advent Hope. Herself and the other characters in this Advent drama will be my companions this year and I can only hope they will focus me daily in the midst of all the enticing distraction!



YOUR CHRISTMAS GIFT COULD SAVE A CHILD'S LIFE



Across the globe untold numbers of children are orphaned or alone with no one to care for them. Street children, totally abandoned, scavenge on rubbish tips for anything edible, or labour for long hours for a few euros. Each day children die of hunger and disease.

The Little Way Association receives numerous requests from missionaries throughout the world asking for help to feed, support and educate needy, deprived children. The whole future of these children often depends upon whether a missionary can find sufficient funds to care for them.

Your donation today will help a missionary to relieve a child's suffering. IT COULD SAVE A LIFE.

As we prepare to welcome the Christ child at Christmas, please consider making a gift to The Little Way Association's fund for children.

Every euro you send will be gratefully received and sent **without deduction** to enable a missionary priest or sister to carry the love, care and compassion of Christ to a deprived, abandoned or orphaned child. Thank you, and may God reward your generosity.



"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 Him from our heart, and the very least trifle is precious in His sight."
- St Therese

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We humbly ask that you allocate some of your Christmas giving to our chapels fund. By ensuring that these small but dignified churches are in good repair, you help to make possible the offering of Holy Mass in needy Catholic communities.

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