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Call for parishes to seize Christmas moment to invite people back to Mass

Ruadhán Jones

As parishes struggle to re-engage communities after the forced closure of churches during Covid-19 lockdowns, Bishop Tom Deenihan has said Christmas is a time to invite people who may have stopped coming back to the weekly worship.

His comments come as Church leaders are increasingly concerned with a drop of as much as 50% in some parishes in the number of people attending Mass compared with pre-pandemic times.

"I'm hopeful that the Christmas liturgies and carol services will entice people and give them some courage to venture out," he told *The Irish Catholic*, while acknowledging that there are some housebound by illness or injury who won't be able to.

There is an opportunity for people to encounter Christ "in the Eucharist, in the church, in the community, as well as on the computer screen" this Christmas, the Bishop of Meath said this week.

Bishop Deenihan pleaded with those who haven't returned to Mass to not "let yourself be cut off from the Faith community".

Although pandemic restrictions have ended and cases are low, people are being "held captive by their fears," Bishop Deenihan said, adding it's not good for them mentally,

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'Remembering the poor of the Earth'



Dublin football star and Trócaire ambassador, Noelle Healy is pictured with Syrian journalist Razan Ibraheem as they launch Trócaire's Christmas appeal at the Irish Famine Memorial Statues, Custom House Quay, Dublin. Photo: Mark Stedman

People struggle to eat, but Tories push abortion

Jason Osborne

At a time when people struggle to feed their children and heat their homes, Westminster seems determined to impose "the undermining of the right to life of unborn children" Archbishop of Armagh Eamon Martin has said.

Criticising Britain's secretary of state for the North, Chris Heaton-Harris' demand that officials fast-track the funding of abortion, the Primate of All-Ireland insisted that the decision was "against the clear will of a majority of people here".

"This urgency to push through abortion while the Northern Ireland Assembly is down, continues as Christmas approaches, while little is seemingly being done to ensure the urgent provision of Westminster support for the most vulnerable, including children, impacted by the cost of living crisis," Archbishop Martin insisted.

"The abortion regulations being introduced by Westminster are predicated on the assumption that the unborn child in the womb has no right to love, care and protection from society, unless the child is wanted," Dr Martin said, adding, "Nothing could be further from the truth".

LINDSEY WEISHAR

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DAVID QUINN

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Synod process will require patience...and honest listening

Advent is so often a missed season. In the rush to Christmas, we can forget the centrality of anticipation as well as patient and attentive waiting.

In the marketplace, Christmas lights are erected from early November and there is talk of Christmas everywhere. It means that Advent gets lost, but it is an important season to underscore that we believe in a God who keeps his promises.

The history of the ancient Israelites is one of a people who lost contact with God leading to a loss of confidence in the promises that God had made to the Jewish people. And yet, in every generation, these promises were renewed through the actions of judges, priests, patriarchs, prophets and kings who taught the people to renew their hope in the promise of salvation.

Pleading

On almost every page of the Old Testament, we read God pleading with the Israelites to keep faith even when it seemed that the promises made to them were far off.

Even valiant Moses the lawgiver and deliverer had to content himself with a glimpse of the promised land from atop Mount Nebo in the knowledge that he would

not himself set foot in the promised land, even though he knew that the people would.

It fell to Joshua to lead the Israelites across the Jordan River to the promised land knowing that God is always faithful.

Advent is above all a season about trust, trusting that what God said will come to pass.

I don't think trust comes easily to any of us. There is often the fear of betrayal or being let down, the danger of being made a fool of because we trusted in something that didn't happen.

Even valiant Moses the lawgiver and deliverer had to content himself with a glimpse of the promised land

We don't live in a world that prioritises the importance of trust – the free market too often encourages people to get ahead by whatever means necessary. In such a culture, trust becomes almost impossible – we live in constant fear that if we don't seize the moment to get ahead, someone else will and we will be left behind.

Fear is a paralysing emotion – people who are frightened can't and don't do anything. In the Bible, the phrase "don't be afraid" appears 365 times – almost like a daily reminder not to allow ourselves to be crippled by fear and a lack of imagination.

Mission

This is also true of the Church when it comes to getting our parishes and communities fit for mission. The challenge is to overcome bureaucracy and polarisation and agree that if we're followers of Jesus Christ, our primary mission is to help people come to know and love Jesus Christ. The Church exists for no other reason.

Late last week, Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, the synod on synodality's general rapporteur, gave a brief address highlighting what he described

as "some temptations on this road".

One temptation, he said, was that "of 'politicisation' in and of the Church, that is, living and thinking the Church with the logic of politics.

"Some have an agenda for the reform of the Church; they know very well what needs to be done and they want to use the synod for that purpose: this is instrumentalising the synod. This is politicising," he said. "On the opposite side are...the 'indietrists' who do not understand that a true Catholic tradition evolves while remaining a tradition in its time. They too would like to put the brakes on the synod process."

Patience

Synodality requires a lot of patience and it requires a commitment to discernment – which means truly listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit in the Church rather than trying to impose one's own narrow ideological or political position on the Church.

There is often the fear of betrayal or being let down, the danger of being made a fool of because we trusted in something that didn't happen

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Call for parishes to seize Christmas moment to invite people back to Mass

» **Continued from Page 1** physically and spiritually to isolate themselves.

Meanwhile, parishes are keen to welcome back those who haven't returned to Mass due to the forced closure of churches.

As fear of the virus eases and with Christmas oncoming, Fr Billy Swan of Wexford parish said it's a case of "If not now, then when"?

"Advent is a good time to reissue the invite to families to walk this journey as a parish family as we prepare for Christmas," Fr Swan told *The Irish Catholic*.

His parish have already held a mission to encourage

people to return and "re-establish the habit and the discipline of weekly worship".

Following the restrictions on churches over the past two Christmases, Fr Joe Gormley of Creggan in Derry, said they "definitely" want to welcome people who have been away back.

The use of webcams, while good in many ways, tended to "privatise the Faith", Fr Gormley said. "But at the end of the day, there's nothing like the connection with people."

He added that going to Mass means you're in the "real presence" of God, not his "virtual presence".

"God wants us to gather together. One of the big challenges of our age is individualism, but our faith has never been individualistic. It's part of a parish or community," the parish priest of Creggan said.

Fr Brendan Walsh said that for families who fell out of the habit of attending during the Covid-19 lockdowns, Christmas is "absolutely" a "good time to encourage them back".

Fr Walsh's parish of Causeway and Ballyduff, Co. Kerry, has seen a "steady increase" since the end of the pandemic. He is hopeful that Christmas will provide another boost.

Report critical of Catholic schools branded 'insulting'

Jason Osborne

A report by a group of Irish NGOs that identifies Catholic patronage of schools as a barrier to topics such as abortion and gender identity being discussed in schools has been criticised by the Catholic Education Partnership.

The report, which was submitted to the Council of Europe, was published on Friday by the Irish Observatory on Violence Against Women, and says that the lack of State control over school curriculums reinforces gender stereotypes

and gender inequality.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper, CEO of the Catholic Education Partnership Alan Hynes said that the accusation of contributing to inequality is "insulting given the long history of Catholic involvement, and leadership, in seeking to advance the education of girls, in Ireland and abroad".

The report says that with 90% of national schools under Catholic patronage, the State doesn't have "full control" when it comes to the implementation of the national curriculum, which means "some schools may be excluding topics

such as abortion, same sex relationships and gender identity".

Mr Hynes said that that it would have been better if the Irish Observatory on Violence Against Women sought to meet the Catholic Education Partnership in order to understand Catholic ethos before completing their report.

"If they had, they would have realised that we are currently engaged in consultation with the NCCA on achieving a renewed approach to SPHE. The NCCA recently published a proposed short-course structure for SPHE for junior cycle, one that we broadly

welcomed," while seeking to ensure the ability of Catholic schools to teach in accordance with their ethos, Mr Hynes said.

"Part of that ethos, in line with general Church thinking on education for well over a decade now, has been to promote dialogue and encounter with different cultures and with different points of view.

"Our schools need to be free to give a confident expression of their ethos, then presenting that in dialogue with other beliefs, including various secular view points," Mr Hynes said.

Boston Celtics coach pays tribute to Holy Family

Staff reporter

A Catholic basketball coach in the US has said the Holy Family is the only royal family he recognises during a recent press conference that has gone viral on social media.

In Boston to attend the 2022 Earthshot Prize Awards, Prince and Princess of Wales William and Kate attended the Boston Celtics' game against the Miami Heat November 30.

Asked whether he had a chance to meet members of the 'royal family' during their visit, Boston Celtics head coach Joe Mazzulla asked in response, "Jesus, Mary and Joseph?"

When the reporter clarified with a laugh that she meant the British royal family, Mr Mazzulla said, "Oh, no, I did not. I'm only familiar with one royal family. I don't know too much about that one".

Dublin diocese reveals new parish partnerships

Ruadhán Jones

Ireland's largest diocese is the latest to announce a new partnership model for its 197 parishes to realign "efforts and energies to suit the times", Archbishop Dermot Farrell said.

Parishes will now share

resources and co-ordinate Mass schedules with designated partners, having been informed of the arrangements last week following months of consultation.

Parish pastoral teams are to meet this month to determine how to appoint and convene the new 'Partnership Council'.

The first meeting of the new council is to take place in January or February, with a "sustainable schedule of Masses" as their first priority.

The proposed Mass schedule must be shared by parishes by April 1 next year, and brought into effect on May 1.

Other key issues to be addressed by Parish Pastoral

Councils include the development of funeral ministries and the sharing of voluntary ministries with partner parishes.

In his Advent letter, Archbishop Farrell asked parishes to use the partnerships to "realign your efforts and energies to suit the times in which we live".

"Within each partnership

of parishes, Parish Pastoral Councils, all active parishioners, priests, deacons, parish pastoral workers and voluntary parish leaders, including catechists into the future, are encouraged to renew the missionary aspect of parish life and contribute energetically towards the partnership of local parishes," Dr Farrell said.

'O Holy Night'



Members of newly formed Kerry Concert Choir together with St Mary's Cathedral Choir perform 'Carols from the Cathedral' in St Mary's Cathedral, Killarney. The charity concert in aid of Down Syndrome Kerry, included some of the world's most beautiful traditional Christmas Carols, while Ukrainian Violinist, Kseniia Yershova (soloist) played a very poignant composition by Ukrainian Composer Myroslava Skoryk. Photo: Valerie O'Sullivan

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100 homes for Cabra thanks to 'generous' Dominican Sisters

Ruadhán Jones

A "generous" donation of land by the Dominican Sisters, Cabra, will be developed by Focus Housing to deliver 95 public homes in the North Dublin community.

The development wouldn't have been possible without the "considerable" size of the order's donation, over 7,300 meters squared of public space for community use just off Rathoat Road.

The houses will provide homes for families and individuals, "many of whom have been

stuck on Dublin City Council's social waiting list for many years," said Focus Ireland CEO Pat Dennigan.

Earlier this month, Government figures revealed a 29% rise of the number of people homeless in 12 months to over 11,000.

The homes to be built will comprise 14 one-bedroom, 67 two-bedroom, 13 three-bedroom and 1 four-bedroom dwellings across 5 three-storey blocks.

They will be the first State-funded public homes to be built in Cabra in more than 10 years.

The flagship project is the latest in a long

line of housing developments built on land donated by religious orders to Focus.

"Focus has a really strong with different religious orders," said Darragh Moriarty of Focus. "We have been able to use those relationships and received a number of generous donations over the years.

"This is the latest one, and it's the largest one we've developed."

Other developments facilitated by religious orders include Stanhope Green and George's Hill in Dublin, which opened in 1992 and 1997; Grange Cohan in Waterford which opened in 2000; and the development of 28 homes in

Harold's Cross, Dublin, which opened in 2017.

All came through the repurposing of religious buildings or on former religious land, Focus said.

Earlier this year housing charity Sophia told this paper that congregations are quietly housing hundreds of people who would otherwise be homeless.

Tony O'Riordan, chief executive of Sophia Housing told *The Irish Catholic* that religious congregations "don't get anywhere near the credit they deserve" for giving families and individuals across the country access to homes.

Cavan priest target of threats after condemning gang violence

Jason Osborne

Fr Oliver O'Reilly has revealed that he received a phone call warning him of a threat he faced after he spoke out about the attack on former Quinn Industrial Holdings director Kevin Lunney.

Fr O'Reilly condemned the kidnapping and torture of Mr Lunney in September 2019 and criticised those responsible for it in a homily at Mass shortly after the attack took place.

In an interview with the *Irish Mail on Sunday*, Fr O'Reilly shared that after denouncing those responsible for the attack on Mr Lunney, he received a phone call advising him about a threat he faced as a result of what he'd said.

Fr O'Reilly said in the same interview that the person on the phone told him that he should "modify the comments" during his next Sunday Mass, and told him which "clarifications" he should make.

"I got a sort of tip-off. Cars were being burned and I was told my car was going to be next. I took it seriously, so I put in security cameras at the house," he told the newspaper.

"The tip came from someone I wouldn't know very well. This person would be in the know. They wouldn't be my friend or an enemy of mine. They had got a tip that my car would be next...it was just advice and I would have regard for their advice because they knew there was a threat."

Despite refusing to be intimidated, Fr O'Reilly admitted to feeling "nervous in my own home".

Irish College artist has ministry restricted

Staff reporter

A prominent Jesuit priest-artist who completed the iconic mosaics at Rome's Irish College has had his ministry restricted, reportedly after an investigation by his religious order into allegations of abuse against religious sisters in Slovenia.

The Jesuits said in a statement this week that the order has barred

68-year-old Fr Marko Ivan Rupnik, SJ, from hearing confessions or conducting spiritual direction since the Vatican received a complaint against him in 2021.

The Vatican declined in October to carry out a canonical process due to the statute of limitations, the order said. The complaint did not include minors.

The Jesuit order said the restric-

tions on Fr Rupnik's ministry were still in effect and included a ban on leading the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. The priest is also prohibited from engaging in public activities without the permission of his superior.

The chapel of the Pontifical Irish College is dedicated to All the Saints of Ireland and was reordered by Fr Rupnik, reopening after extensive renovations in 2010.

Guarding the law of the Lord...



Garda turned Capuchin Fr Flan Lynch OFM Cap., badge number 14353, Mountjoy, who attended the Macushla revolt in 1961 received his medal marking the centenary of An Garda Síochána's founding by current GRA president Brendan O'Connor.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Retain 3-day wait, Doctors for Life urge minister

Over 100 doctors, nurses and healthcare professionals have urged the Minister for Health to retain the 3-day wait before abortion, saying "women deserve time to think".

In an open letter, Doctors for Life say there "is no medical basis" for scrapping the 3-day wait.

"The 3-day wait helps women, it gives them time to think, and the figures strongly suggest it reduces the number of abortions," Dr Ronan Cleary of Doctors for Life said.

According to HSE figures, "1,601 women did not return for an abortion after the 3-day wait", Dr Cleary continued.

Few abortions is an outcome "most reasonable people would welcome".

Many of those signing the letter work directly with pregnant women and they said they rejected claims that the 3-day wait is "paternalistic". Women deserve better than being "deprived of the time to think," they wrote.

GPs paid almost €10m to carry out abortions

GPs were paid fees totalling more than €9.5 million for providing abortions in the first three years of the State's termination of pregnancy service, new figures show.

The fees relate to almost 24,000 initial consultations with women about abortions and about 19,500 abortions completed in the community between 2019 and last year.

The total cost of claims made by doctors providing terminations in the community has remained relatively constant since the service was introduced in 2019 - €3 million in 2019 and €3.26 million in 2020 and 2021, according to HSE figures.

Under the termination of pregnancy scheme, GPs are paid a €150 fee for a first consultation with a woman seeking a termination.

The hospital system was allocated €7 million in recurring funding in 2019 to support the roll-out of termination services, the HSE also told TD Seán Canney.

A reprimand that had an impact...

I'm rather ashamed of an episode of my life that has recently come to mind, but I think it's instructive.

I was in my early twenties, and, in an effort to break into journalism, I was working as a secretary for *The Guardian* in London, previously called the *Manchester Guardian*.

“Society today has more sympathy and understanding for young people going through challenging times and mental health struggles”

My boss was an editor and a broadcaster called Brian Redhead. Brian was a cheery, ebullient and highly effective Geordie from Newcastle, of moderate left-wing views and an encyclopaedic knowledge of politics and current affairs. He always replied to letters briefly, which I liked, since my shorthand was wobbly; and he was humorously forgiving if I made mistakes.

But I became unhappy because of a romance that was going badly wrong, so I felt dejected and rejected. I also thought I was making no progress in my ambition to become a professional journalist.

Feeling depressed, one day I said to Brian: “What



Mary Kenny

would you say about me if I committed suicide?”

Brian gave me a hard-eyed look. “I’d say you were a silly cow and a complete nincompoop. Who throws away the privilege of being alive?”

I was taken aback. I thought he would respond with something like – “poor girl, she met with sadness and disappointment in life.” But no: he gave me a bracing reply to the effect that he’d judge me harshly.

Religious

He wasn’t then notably religious, although, later, after the death of a son in a car accident, he became a more serious Christian and might even have entered church ministry.

His reaction shook me, and I resolved to stop such talk. People do get over broken hearts – and I did; soon afterwards, I become a journalist, too.

Society today has more sympathy and understanding for young people going through challenging times and mental health struggles. But suicide, and suicidal thoughts, certainly haven’t gone away.

It’s distressing to read of the latest survey by Healthy Ireland, which claims that 10% of those under 35 have

attempted to take their own lives (in contrast to just one per cent among the over-65s). The Chief Medical Officer, Prof. Breda Smyth, said she was “very concerned” at the findings.

“The late Brian Redhead’s reprimand might be considered too robust today, but it had a lifelong impact on me”

A significant effort has been made to increase funding and support for mental health services dealing with suicide, but there were still problems, and much room for improvement.

But there are websites on the Internet which encourage suicide and suggest ways of carrying it out; while assisted suicide is a measure which is advancing in many societies.

The late Brian Redhead’s reprimand might be considered too robust today, but it had a lifelong impact on me.

We certainly need to be caring towards those who are afflicted with thoughts of taking their own lives; but prevention should also mean deterrence and discouraging suicide ideation.

● In the 18th Century, there were fewer than 400 Catholics living in Belfast, and there was no Catholic place of worship at all. But according to Finola Kennedy’s fascinating new book about the history of the parish in Ireland, “Presbyterian and Church of Ireland communities took up a special collection at their services and donated it towards building the first Catholic church in Belfast – St Mary’s.”

In the early 19th Century, too, many wealthy Protestants made financial contributions to the building of Catholic churches. So there are traditions of ecumenism in our historic past.

Finola’s book *Local Matters* traces the story of parish life, a seedbed of community, identity and local government, as well as the heart of the neighbourhood church. And, sadly, the decline of the parish today is accompanied by the decline of local government in Ireland – voter apathy towards local elections is dismaying.

In an era of social atomisation, the parish is needed more than ever. Community matters.

Wearing for the climate

I have a great idea for a charity which would benefit the needy, help the planet and combat energy bills.

I met a lady last week wearing a stunning mink fur coat – and few garments are as toasty. She disclosed that she obtained it for nothing several decades ago when women were discarding their furs, now out of fashion, (and disparaged by ani-

mal rights activists.)

There must be hundreds of fur coats, unworn and stored at the back of people’s wardrobes. Why not form a charity to collect them, and distribute them to those who would make good use of them? Think of the freezing cold weather in Ukraine – vintage fur would certainly help keep people warm. And real fur doesn’t

damage the environment – as ‘faux’ fur does.

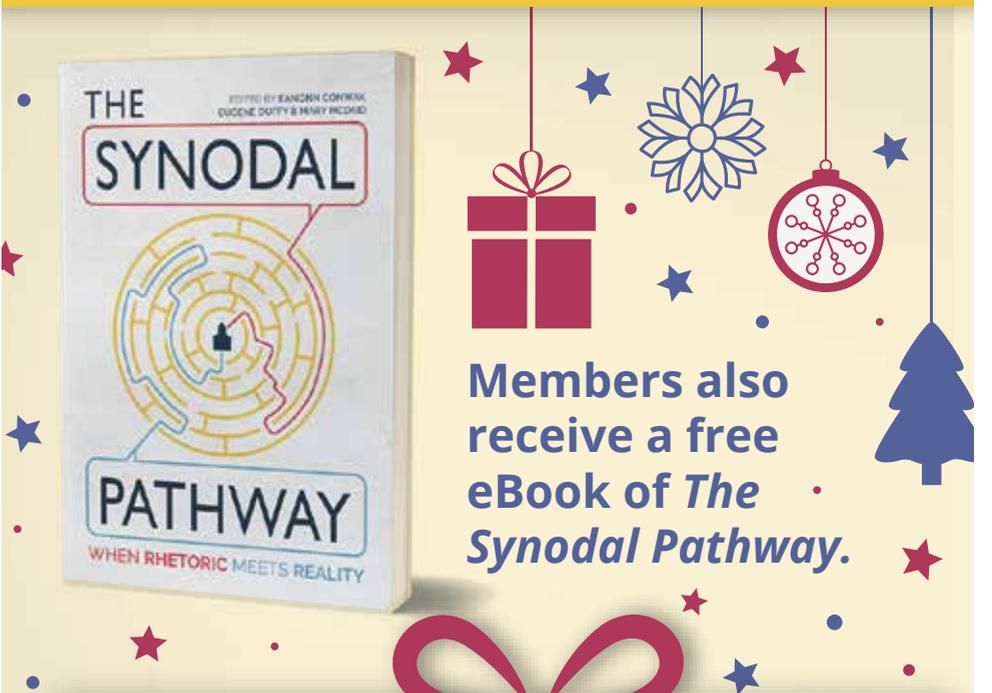
I have a couple of old furs myself – one ancient musquash is virtually in tatters, but it’s still amazingly warm.

Hopefully, someone might start a charity which would put to good use a resource that’s available and would help those feeling the bitterness of winter chill.

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‘Delight’ as Jesuit agricultural project in Africa wins award



During a three-day training workshop in the villages of Akol Jal and Cueicok in South Sudan, 172 women farmers were trained on crop spacing, pest and disease control, harvesting techniques and marketing.

Chai Brady

There is “delight” after an agricultural project funded by the Irish Jesuits won the 2022 Climate Action Awards, run by Misesan Cara.

The Multi-educational and Agricultural Jesuit Institute of South Sudan (MAJIS) Rumbek, South Sudan took home the prize in the ‘project-based’ section.

Its focus is on the empowerment of women farmers, transferring knowledge to strengthen sustainable farming and agricultural practice and appropriate land use.

Caroline Sanga, the South Sudan programme officer for the Jesuits East Africa Province Development Office, described the win as “mind-blowing” for them.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Ms Sanga said the Jesuits came to South Sudan when the majority of people were pastoralists, which can be a precarious way of life due to dangers such as cattle raids, but also due to the impacts of climate change which can wipe out herds.

Practices

She said: “Once women are trained and implement practices, even outside the MAJIS compound, they’ve been able to increase yield at home and sell

their yield in markets, which supports their families.

“It has created an alternative means for farmers to support their livelihoods but also to find other ways apart from pastoralism, it is a key way to support them. Our hope for the future is that we are able to equip these women with these skills so they can not only be proactive in the [Jesuit] farms but outside the farms,” Ms Sanga said.

“It has created an alternative means for farmers to support their livelihoods but also to find other ways apart from pastoralism”

Misesan Cara, who hold the awards, stated that the weather in Rumbek is becoming increasingly erratic and unpredictable, with harvest yields dropping by at least a quarter in the past 3 years. Traditional rainy seasons are coming later and later, and farmers are now facing prolonged periods of drought, followed later by flooding rains that ruin their crops. Vulnerable communities, already struggling to meet basic needs, are facing the most devastating effects of the climate crisis.

The idea of MAJIS also is, with the help of their field officers, once

farmers have been trained they will no longer be dependent. They are also being given seeds and equipment to support them with their farming. Working with MAJIS demonstrates to other farmers that the project “can generate big yields and outside Rumbek other farmers can replicate what they are doing,” Ms Sanga added.

Mr Balasubramanian, a farmer in Athivetti Village and a partner with Salesian Sisters Development Project, Tamil Nadu in India,

won the individual climate award category.

Sustainable

He has worked since 2018 to train local farmers in sustainable land management and farming methods, as part of a Misesan Cara-funded project with an aim to restore sustainable livelihoods, food security, and wellbeing for vulnerable small-scale farmers affected by Gaja Cyclone in Tamil Nadu.

Mr Balasubramanian, who has completed a twelfth-grade education and a diploma course in agriculture, volunteered himself to conduct outreach to local farmers and coordinate them in initiatives to restore water harvesting structures as a means to revive the affected farmlands.

Currently there is now a team of 200 farmers involved in the farming and soil and water management techniques who are benefitting through the project.



James Majang, a MAJIS field officer has been working in Akol Jal since 2016, supporting women farmers with training and knowledge.

Niamh Uí Bhriain

The View



Deep down most people feel a strong pull towards the message of Bethlehem

It's become a recurring theme, as inevitable now as the manufactured row about the Angelus on the radio or a Crucifix being displayed in a hospital. Every year, along with the resurrection of the dreary fuss about Christmas songs, we are subjected to an annual dose of whinging about ditching the word Christmas because it, eh, has the word Christ right there in the name.

It's offensive, the kill-joys claim, to call this 2,000 year old celebration by its actual name because not everyone is Christian and every event and every holiday must be totally inclusive and diverse and woke. What a load of nonsense. (I could use a different word but I'm not inclined to add to the unfestive feelings). Yet the nonsense continues unabated.

This year, there was a national outcry after the Green Party Lord Mayor of Dublin, Caroline Conroy, led a bid to ban the traditional, and much-loved, live Christmas crib at the Mansion House.

But it was interesting that even in shiny new secular Ireland there was a backlash to attempts to ride roughshod over traditions that are meaningful and have huge appeal.

In fact, such was the chorus of protests, that the live crib eventually went ahead in St Stephen's Green, and the Green Party was left wondering if the actions of their mayor had proved to be a massive own goal.

Messages

Leaked messages from a Green Party WhatsApp group showed that some of the party's TDs and councillors believed that the ban on the live crib would lose them a huge number of votes, while one TD described the controversy as "shooting ourselves in the foot".

We can only guess at the motivations behind banning the live crib, but it seems to be part of a global trend to downplay or eliminate the Christian element of one of the world's most significant religious feasts.

And it's worth noting that it is not generally Muslims or Jews or Sikhs or adherents to other religions who object to the word Christmas. Instead, it's the usual suspects who seem to have a pathological dislike of anything that retains even the vestiges of Catholicism who are complaining. They love nothing more than being offended on behalf of minorities.

“There was a national outcry after the Green Party Lord Mayor of Dublin, Caroline Conroy, led a bid to ban the traditional, and much-loved, live Christmas crib at the Mansion House”

Saqib Bhatti, a British MP who is a Muslim, said last year that the abandonment of the word 'Christmas' in pursuit of greater 'inclusivity' was "ridiculous". "As a Muslim, I find it ridiculous we can't enjoy this special time of year. I look forward to showing my new son his first Christmas tree. The idea you can't mention Christmas is completely ridiculous," he said.

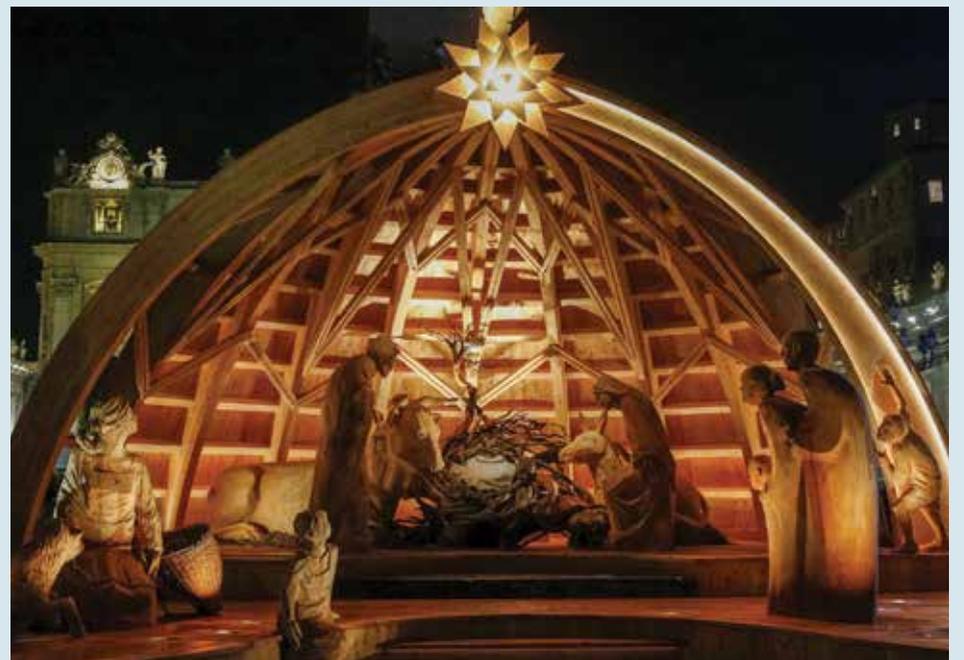
He also called for the establishment to "stop waging war on Christmas". "Waging war" might seem like a strong word until you consider that the EU Commission, a hugely powerful body whose decisions have considerable impact, proposed guidelines at that time which sought to advise officials to ditch the word "Christmas" in a bid to "avoid assuming that everyone is Christian". It encouraged staff to refrain from using phrases such as "Christmas time can be stressful" and to plump for the banal and utterly lame "Holiday times" instead. It seems extraordinary that this needs to be explained to anyone older than a toddler but Christmas is explicitly a Christian holiday, one loved and cherished because it celebrates such a beautiful, powerful story – of God being born to us as a helpless child

in a manger in Bethlehem. Other religions also have significant feasts: Hindu people celebrate Diwali, Muslims have Eid, Jews the Passover – and people of faith celebrate important dates and events which are often peculiar to a region or a tribe. Why would any reasonable person try to diminish or interfere with that? In fact, most of the people complaining about the use of the word Christmas would likely have a fit at any criticism of other religious feasts.

There's a perfectly fair criticism to be made of the crass commercialisation that has almost overtaken the spirit of Christmas. The endless advertising which seeks to make the jingle all about the cash register. The conspicuous consumption that is very far removed from the humble stable where a child who changed the world was born. But one of the reasons Mass attendance is highest at Christmas is because, deep down, most people in this country feel a strong pull towards the message of Bethlehem: one of love and sacrifice and courage and hope.

Tradition

And they recognise that the message, as well as the tradition, is worth holding onto. It's not just another made-up celebration used to sell cards and gifts. Christmas has meaning. The things we actually love at Christmas cannot be bought and sold. Making Christmas cake with Mamó, and stirring the pudding. Walking home from Midnight Mass under the shining stars. Hot port and the warmth of friends. Angels being heard on high. So for all the complainers, here's a suggestion. Ditch the 'happy holiday' cards and the 'Winterval' stuff, and let people enjoy Christmas for what it is. A time for family and feasting, and glitter and joy, but also of reflection and of learning to celebrate, as Kavanagh said, life pouring ordinary plenty. If you are so desperate to have a winter festival without Christ, then set up your own, something new and suitably commercial, and fill it with tinsel and spending and politically-correct celebration. The rest of us will stick with Christmas.



The Nativity scene is pictured in St Peter's Square after a lighting ceremony at the Vatican on December 3. Photo: CNS

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John Paul II Award participants rightfully rewarded

Jason Osborne

St Muredach's Cathedral in Ballina, Co. Mayo welcomed 71 recipients of the John Paul II Award, Friday December 2.

Bishop John Fleming of Killala Diocese was present to see the awards that enable participants to "take an active part in the life of their Church, in the life of their community and society" granted to their worthy recipients.

Present were students from Our Lady's Secondary School, Belmullet, Gortnor

Abbey Secondary School, Crossmolina, Gaelcholáiste Chomáin, Ros Dumhach, St Mary's Secondary School, Ballina and Jesus and Mary Secondary School Enniscrone.

Diocesan coordinator Fr Joseph Hogan expressed thanks to teachers, parish council members, parish priests and all in the parishes "that helped young people to be involved, empower them and recognise their gifts and activities in the Parish and Church community".



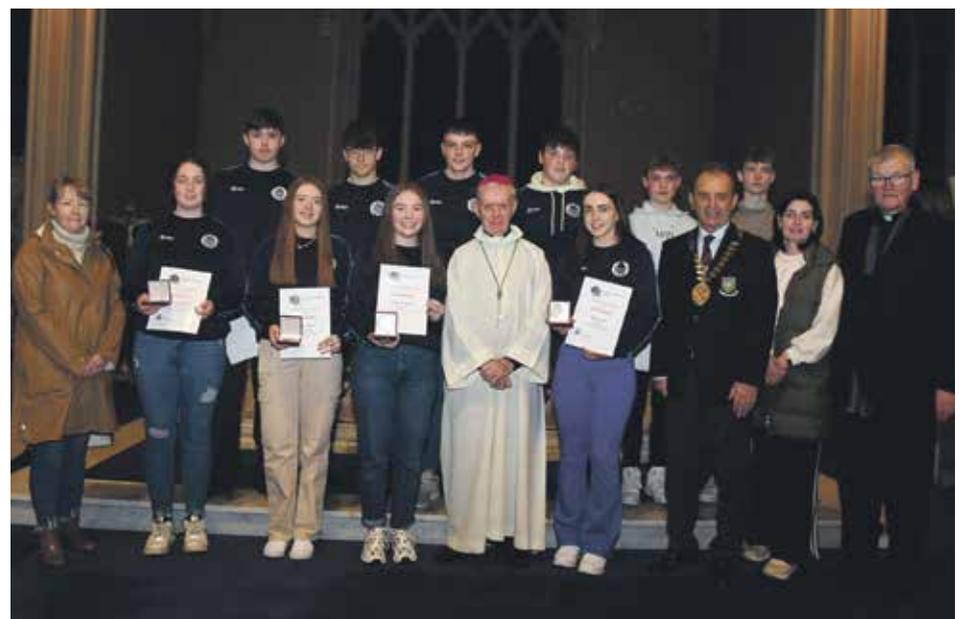
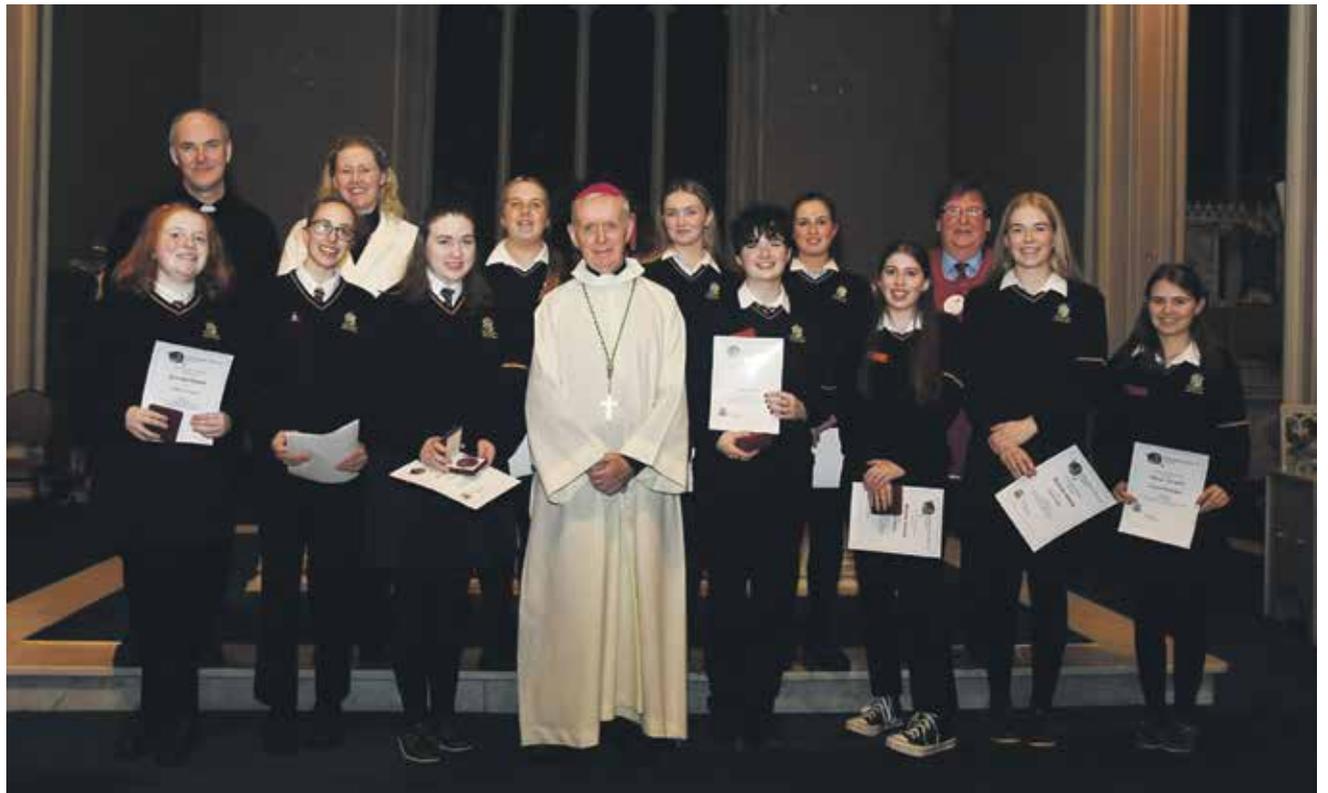
Bishop of Killala John Fleming is pictured alongside with students representing a number of local schools receiving their John Paul II Awards.



Pictured are Paul Philbin of Colaiste Chomain Rosport and Shauna Rafter, alongside Bishop Fleming and Fr Joseph Hogan.



Pictured left to right are Michael McKeigue, Grand Knight of St Columbanus Ballina branch, Dolores Nevin, Anna Estler, Bishop Fleming, Tommy Estler, Fr Joseph Hogan and Brian McCann, Supreme Knight of St Columbanus.





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Original Sin and the Immaculate Conception



The mystery of sin rests, not on questions of moral right and wrong, but in faith that God can put all things right, writes **Fr Philip Endean SJ**

Shortly before the Council of Ephesus (431), and independently, St Augustine was reflecting on the scope of Christ's saving work, and its relationship to our good behaviour. Starting from the practice of infant Baptism, he developed a theology of original sin. This was a matter of logic: Baptism is for the forgiveness of sins; we baptise babies; babies cannot actually sin; therefore babies — however much we want to coo at them — must be tainted by an inherited sin.

For Augustine, and many figures subsequently, original sin affected Mary like everyone else. Perhaps because the Augustinian teaching was so pessimistic about the general human condition without Christ's grace, a counter-balancing impulse about goodness focused strongly on Mary. At any rate, officialdom only intervened when the tensions started causing problems.

Minimalist

Initially, these interventions were minimalist. In 1483, Pope Sixtus IV noted that certain Dominicans, while accepting a liturgy centred on Mary's conception, were claiming that it was heretical or sinful to claim that this conception was "without the stain of original sin". Sixtus condemned this negative teaching, and encouraged belief in the Immaculate Conception. But significantly, he stopped short of a positive affirmation; the critics of the doctrine were merely showing "irresponsible boldness" rather than being wrong. Sixtus was simply keeping options open: the matter had "not yet been decided by the Roman Church and the Apostolic See". For its part, the Council of Trent, while reaffirming the effect of Adam's sin on all humanity, declared "that it is not its intention to include in this decree dealing with original sin the Blessed and Immaculate Virgin Mary, Mother of God". On both these occasions, the Church's teaching office was recognising a logical problem and steering round it.

And when Pius IX in 1854 finally declared the doctrine to be revealed by God, his fulsome rhetoric avoided being explicit on how the problem



Flowers surround an image of Mary at the base of a tall Marian statue overlooking the Spanish Steps in Rome. Photo: CNS

could be resolved. Such official codedness is an important skill of Church government.

Accepted

Be all that as it may, Pius' decision has been received and accepted, at least within Catholicism. It seems somehow right that the early part of Advent should include a feast honouring Mary — even if journalists and some church-goers become confused and think we are celebrating Jesus' conception. The doctrine of original sin has become difficult, not just because of the contradictions between its main thrust and Mary's freedom from it (to say nothing of Jesus'), but also because of evolutionary theories, and a heightened sense of individual moral responsibility. Moreover, ecumenical and feminist concerns have tempered ultramontane Marian enthusiasms. Nevertheless, mainstream Catholics seem broadly comfortable with celebrating Mary's creation. We look at the beautiful pictures; we hear the Gospel of Mary's receiving the angel's message; and we quietly ignore the nagging questions arising about genetics. We light the candles anyway, and set the theology aside.

“For Augustine, and many figures subsequently, original sin affected Mary like everyone else”

Maybe all we can say is that celebrating Mary's Immaculate Conception is a matter of collective instinct that we do not fully understand. Equally, however, we should

not be content with such a complacent strategy unless we really have no alternative. As far as possible, we should be able to give an account of our hope, both to our own integrity and to those who ask us. So let us try.

What do we in fact mean by 'original sin'? Chesterton in his *Orthodoxy* famously and waggishly claimed original sin to be "the only part of Christian theology which can really be proved". Sin was a fact, "a fact as practical as potatoes." What needed argument was whether or not we could be "washed in miraculous waters", whether we could move beyond the Christian denial of "the present union between God and man". There was no doubt that humanity "wanted washing".

Risky

Confronting Chesterton is a risky, indeed churlish business. But, he is stating as an obvious fact something which is far from being so. For the fact which really is "as plain as potatoes" is simply that life is often unsatisfactory. But self-evident mess falls far short of the Christian mystery of sin. By calling the mess 'sin', we are making a statement of faith and hope: a statement that the mess, all too real though it is, does not thwart God's purpose. God can deal with it. And this means we can let go of other ways of coping with the mess: blaming ourselves, scapegoating others, compulsive virtue, cynicism, or whatever.

When most of us cradle Christians first learnt the word 'sin', it was probably in the context of our being naughty children. Not only had we done something wrong, done damage, upset Mum; we had committed a sin, we had offended God,

and we needed to put things right with him. For all the familiarity here, nothing particularly Christian is yet being said. Human cultures typically use God-language as a sanction mechanism, an emotional blackmail making us feel awful when we do not conform. Very easily the guilt feeling lose contact with objective right and wrong.

“Why has God not just given up or junked us into Hell already? Christianity does not answer these questions”

The Christian mystery of sin centres, not on questions of moral right and wrong, but on something else: the outrageous faith and hope that God can somehow put the mess right. Thus, any theologically proper move from mess to sin opens up a perspective of hope. We cannot sensibly talk about original sin at all unless we are prepared to imagine life without it. And it is that reality, at least in its beginnings, which the Gospel sets before us. 'Original sin' makes no sense unless there is a yet more original grace.

Our standard formula, 'Mary conceived without original sin' presents Mary in logically negative terms, as someone without a problem. It starts from our difficulties, and takes them as a fixed basis from which we can explore holiness as an exceptional absence. There is, of course, a place for such thinking. Equally, Christianity has

gone wrong if such thinking is all we have. For Christianity is about nothing if it is not about our problematic selves being changed; as we explore the reality of holiness, it makes a difference to us. The real conundrum is not one about how God can create a Jesus and Mary who do not share our problematic state, but rather about how God's goodness can co-exist with a problematic creation, one in which the good is lacking.

There is no theological answer to that question. Some theologians have talked about 'God respecting creaturely freedom', but not in any way that really works. St Ignatius' presentation of sin in *Spiritual Exercises* centres, not on a good confession, or an experience of forgiveness — still less on any sort of explanation. Instead, he tries to lead to a place where we cry out in wonder. How can it be that the world has carried on when there has been so much resistance to God? Why has God not just given up or junked us into Hell already? Christianity does not answer these questions. Instead, it attests to a revelation: a revelation of divine goodness keeping these unanswerable questions open, a goodness promising hope, a goodness inviting us not really to understand but rather to join in. The light shines in the darkness, a light which the darkness cannot overpower, a light made manifest in Jesus and Mary without sin. Theologies about how and the why fail, but the light remain, beckoningly.

Fr Philip Endean SJ is Professor of Spirituality at Centre Sèvres, Paris.

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Suicide continues to be



On the cusp of celebrations to mark the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, the number of people taking their own life is on the rise, writes Michael Kelly

It's a startling and sobering fact that since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, more people in the North have died at their own hands than were killed during the 30 years of civil conflict euphemistically known as 'the Troubles'.

Mercifully, people are no longer dying at the hands of paramilitaries, but they're still dying, too young and too soon.

Latest figures published this week by the Northern Ireland Research and Statistics Agency (NISRA) show that there were 237 suicide deaths in 2021 - the highest number since 2015.

The 2021 figures for the region represent an increase of 18 lives, more crudely representing an increase of 8.2% from the 219 suicide deaths registered in 2020.

Definition

Officials use a definition of suicide generally agreed by healthcare and support services to be the more accurate. The figures encompass deaths due to external causes relating to intentional self-harm and of undetermined intent.

The figures do not include deaths where the outcome was deemed accidental, such as an unintentional drugs overdose or someone falling into a river while under the influence of alcohol or an illegal substance.

The latest stark figures conclude a government-ordered review of overall statistics, and thus - according to statisticians - provide a consistent time series for the period 2015-2021.

Consistent with patterns elsewhere, younger men are most likely to die by suicide.

In 2021, 176 (74.3%) of deaths by suicide were males and 61 (25.7%) were females.

The suicide death rate, standardised for age, for both males and females has been on a general upward trajectory since 2019. The rate for males increased from 19.1 per 100,000 males in 2019 to 21.5 in 2021, while for females, the equivalent rate increased from 6.0 per 100,000 females in 2019 to 7.3 in 2021.

“The 2021 figures for the region represent an increase of 18 lives”

Suicide deaths were highest for men between the ages of 25 and 29 and 45 and 49, while for women the highest number of suicide deaths were between the ages of 20 and 24. Overall in 2021, one in every three suicide deaths was someone under the age of 30.

The North had an age-standardised rate of 14.3 suicides per 100,000 population in 2021. This is slightly higher than the 14.0 suicides per 100,000 population for Scotland but notably above the

“More than 5,000 people have died by suicide in the North since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement”

rate for England and Wales at 10.5 suicides per 100,000. It is also considerably higher than the most recent rate of 8.3 per 100,000 recorded for the Republic.

Comparisons

However, officials at the NISRA warn that comparisons between different jurisdictions are difficult because of differences in data collection and collation processes in the separate jurisdictions.

The greater Belfast area had the highest suicide rate at 17.9 deaths per 100,000 in 2021, followed by the western area (16.0 deaths per 100,000). The northern area of the region had the lowest suicide rate in 2021 at 10.4 deaths per 100,000.

Overall, more than 5,000 people have died by suicide in the North since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement - eclipsing the estimated 3,200 people who were killed during the conflict from 1969 to the signing of the historic

peace accord in 1998.

Suicidologists - those who pioneer the scientific study of suicidal behaviour, the causes of suicidality and suicide prevention - are at pains to point out that there is never one single or simple explanation for why someone decides to take their own life.

“The North had an age-standardised rate of 14.3 suicides per 100,000 population in 2021”

Every year, about one million people globally die by suicide, which is about one death every 40 seconds. However, the figure is likely to be higher since there remains a huge taboo around suicide and in some cultures even shame.

Suicidologists argue that suicide is largely preventable with the right actions,

knowledge about suicide, and a change in society's view of suicide to make it more acceptable to talk about suicidal ideation.

Statistics

The statistics show that deprivation and social exclusion are major risk factors for suicide. The North's most deprived areas had a suicide rate that was almost twice that of the least deprived areas (19.7 deaths per 100,000 in the most deprived areas, 10.8 per 100,000 in the least deprived). Add to that the fact that the North is consistently the most deprived region in these islands, and the risks are compounded.

As well as the avoidable deaths, the high rate of suicide in the North also means that several hundred thousand people in a small region have been affected through bereavement and the consequences are even more devastating.

There has been considerable research on the factors that can contribute to people

a major killer in North



Debris burns as riot police clash with protesters in Belfast in 2021. The legacy of the conflict casts a long shadow. Photo: CNS

having suicidal thoughts. Some of the most recent relevant research is out of Scotland and can be summarised as:

- Risks and pressures within society, including poverty and inequalities, access to methods of suicide, prevalence of alcohol problems and substance misuse, and changing trends in society such as marital breakdown;
- Risks and pressures within communities, including neighbourhood deprivation, social exclusion, isolation, and inadequate access to local services;
- Risks and pressures for individuals, including socio-demographic characteristics, previous deliberate self-harm, lack of care, treatment and support towards recovery from serious mental illness, loss (e.g. bereavement or divorce), and experience of abuse;
- Quality of response from services, including insufficient identification of those at risk.

Of course, in the context of a post-conflict environment there is also the ever-present spectre of the traumatic impact of the Troubles, whether experienced directly or inter-generationally.

Paramilitary

Another factor is the ongoing activity of paramilitary organisations and the effects this has on communities, particularly on children and young people who are subject to vigilante attacks from these same paramilitaries.

Fr Martin Magill is a priest based in West Belfast who has worked to challenge para-

militaries who are abusing the human rights of children and young people by subjecting them to beatings and even shootings. He refuses to use the media's preferred term 'punishment attack' for what he points out are human rights abuses.

He has been to the forefront in warning that the link between people living under threat from paramilitary groups and high levels of suicide, among already vulnerable groups, must be addressed.

“The mothers of those targeted often suffer from mental health problems”

Fr Magill is part of the 'Stop Attacks' campaign group, calling for an end to paramilitary style shootings and assaults.

Recent statistics show that from February 1 2019 until January 31 2020, there were 19 casualties of paramilitary style shootings, compared to 13 in the previous year. There were also 63 casualties of assaults, compared to 53 in the previous 12 months.

Fr Magill, parish priest of St John's in west Belfast, said he has “no doubt whatsoever” that there is a link between young people living under fear of attack and suicide rates in areas where paramilitaries still hold sway.

“I was talking to a man recently who was attacked last year and that has had a huge impact on his mental health, anxiety, fear, not knowing if he was safe to go outside,” he told *The Irish News*.

More than £80m has been spent on suicide prevention in Northern Ireland since 2006 yet rates remain the highest in these islands.

“The other thing I would say is that there is often delayed trauma, someone from a previous parish was doing well, got a good job and then the wheels came off - and this was years after he had been shot.

“It can be like a wall falling on someone and this was 15-years after he was beaten and shot.”

Trauma

Fr Magill said the trauma caused by ongoing high numbers of paramilitary style assaults and shootings also has an impact on the mental health of the families of victims.

“Particularly the mothers of those targeted often suffer from mental health problems,” he said.

“We know of the links between drugs and suicide and we often hear of people either under threat or who have been attacked in the past self-medicating as a result of the trauma.

“I'd go as far as to say families have broken up over this. In pretty much all the cases you will have people who have vulnerabilities and this exacerbates the problem,” Fr Magill said.

Fr Magill revealed that in more than 30 years as a priest, the rise in suicide-related funerals he has personally had to officiate at has been gradual - “in my first year or two there would not have been any”.

“I would certainly now have a number every year who have died by suicide, in other parishes that would be higher.

“The fact that we are talking about it is a good thing, there is so much emphasis on talking and seeking help and that is a positive step,” he added.

“It can be like a wall falling on someone and this was 15-years after he was beaten and shot”

The cost of living crisis understandably exacerbates the situation. Just last week in this newspaper, the Society of St Vincent de Paul warned about the unprecedented calls for help they are receiving in the North. They also insisted that the absence of a functioning government is having a hugely damaging effect

on people who are struggling given that vital cash payments cannot be released to help vulnerable families.

Just this week, the North's mental health champion pleaded with the Westminster government to release a long-promised payment of £600 to help households with their fuel bills before Christmas.

Siobhan O'Neill was speaking after it emerged Westminster is looking at ways to allow people in the North to spend a £600 energy credit on things other than energy.

Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK where households have not yet received financial payments for energy bills.

It was initially presented as a £400 energy support discount, and £100 for oil heating, the latter later doubled and given to all households.

But with the Government still considering how to get the money into people's hands, more delay is likely.

Warning of the link between poverty and suicide, Ms O'Neill said it is essential the London government provides clarity on when people in the region can expect to receive the energy support payment.

Financial difficulties

However, it is understood it may be next year before the payments are made to people. “Financial difficulties do cause distress and levels of stress that can even lead to suicide,” said Ms O'Neill.

“There is distinct evidence that the last recession resulted in an increase in suicides, so it's absolutely crucial this issue is addressed as soon as possible.

“We know that people living in deprived areas are more likely to suffer from poor mental health and the idea that this payment could be pushed back will create stress for people and affect mental health,” she warned.

Experts continue to underline the point that there is no simple or single explanation as to why someone takes the heart-breaking decision to take their own life. What is clear, however, is that this decision has the most profound and devastating consequences on the people that they leave behind - this is compounded by the fact that healthcare professionals insist that suicide is preventable.

“It is essential the London government provides clarity on when people in the region can expect to receive the energy support payment”

One of the most compelling books about the conflict - in the North is simply titled *Lost Lives* - it tells the story of every single person who was killed during 'the Troubles' and contains recollections from family members and serves as a memory that they are never forgotten.

As we continue to struggle to come to terms with the legacy of the civil conflict, conscious that the past is remembered different ways by different people - many of those of the post-Good Friday Agreement generation who died by their own hand are remembered and mourned by no-one except their own families and friends at lonely graveyards.

If dealing with the legacy of the past is part of the unfinished business of the peace process, giving hope and support to those who are struggling now is surely the real work of building a new Northern Ireland and indeed a brighter Ireland.



A silhouette of the Derry peace statue, 'Hands Across the Divide'. Building a brighter future remains the unfinished work of the peace process. Photo: CNS



Newly independent Ireland needed the Catholic Church

Criticisms of the over-dominance of the Church are valid, but they are also simplistic, writes **David Quinn**

What was to become the Irish Republic marked its 100th birthday on Tuesday, but it has not been marked by big celebrations and perhaps that is partly because it wasn't at the time either. The nascent Free State was already in a civil war. Many people were unhappy that our independence had come about as a result of what they believed was an unacceptable compromise with Britain, namely the Anglo Irish Treaty.

All around Europe, other countries had recently gained their independence, mainly as a result of the break-up of empires following the end of World War I. Those countries were born in much greater bloodshed than Ireland. Unfortunately, it is fact of history that independence often comes amid violence and controversy and division.

When India gained its independence from Britain in 1947, it was partitioned and millions died in ethnic violence. It is hard to celebrate independence under such circumstances unreservedly, and we seem to be suffering from a bit of that here. We never have Fourth of July-style fireworks each year as they have in America.

Another reason for the muted celebrations is that many people regard the period from 1922 until the 1980s, or perhaps even the 1990s as the 'lost decades', during which we were inward-looking and Catholic dominated. We were also anti-British and huge numbers left in search of work.

According to this line of thinking, opportunities were missed to grow the economy because our economic policy was protectionist, we were too obsessed with settling scores with Britain to our detriment (see the trade war), and the Church became too authoritarian and repressive.

Criticisms

These criticisms are true, to a certain extent, but they are also simplistic. One reason our economy was protectionist and wary about free trade is because the few industries we had were very fragile and could easily have been destroyed by foreign competition.

The War of Independence and the Civil War had very badly damaged our economy and then the Great Depression arrived in 1929 followed by World War II a decade later. It was very hard to prosper under those circumstances.

And if we were often very anti-British, that was understandable given the British record here. I write that as someone raised in a Fine Gael household that was not anti-British



Archbishop John Charles McQuaid of Dublin is seen blessing people outside the city's pro-cathedral in the 1960s. Photo: CNS

(although my father loved to see British teams beaten at sport!)

Why was the Church powerful? It's because we wanted it to be. We wanted a moral policeman and were happy to hand the role to the Church, which was happy to assume it. Mary Kenny brings this out very well in her latest book, *The Way We Were*.

“When India gained its independence from Britain in 1947, it was partitioned and millions died in ethnic violence”

Poor societies tend to be extremely strict and very harsh on anything that seems to threaten people's precarious livelihoods. If the Church did not exist, something else would have been appointed our moral policeman. It is simply a fact that poor societies tend to police people's behaviour, their sexual behaviour especially, very harshly and often cruelly. Unmarried mothers and their children, in particular, felt the brunt.

Lately, the religious orders have been in the firing line again. Stories of sexual abuse in religious-run schools like Blackrock College have re-emerged and horrified people once more. The abuses mostly took place in the 1970s and 1980s, good child

protection systems are in place and have been for over 20 years, but some victims are telling their stories for the first time now. Sometimes it can take victims decades before they are ready to discuss their ordeal.

Temptation

The temptation in some quarters when we hear these stories is to think we would have been better off if the religious orders had never existed.

Former Labour party advisor, Fergus Finlay, in a recent column in *The Irish Examiner*, called for nothing less than the full suppression of the country's religious congregations.

Perhaps there are some who regret the fact that the lifting of the penal laws allowed the religious orders to re-establish themselves in Ireland and ended up running so much, especially the country's schools, hospitals and other institutions, many of which they founded.

The historical counter-factual question is, of course, what might have happened if the religious orders had not been re-established?

Some imagine that hospitals and schools would have been built anyway, and that there would have been no institutions such as the industrial schools, mother and baby homes or Magdalen laundries.

But it is not close to certain that so wide a network of schools would have been founded. And they certainly would not have been staffed by such

a cheap supply of labour in the form of the priests and nuns. The same applies to the hospitals.

Industrial schools and so on existed anyway and were founded under British rule. They originate in Britain where they were usually run by Protestant organisations.

“The historical counter-factual question is, of course, what might have happened if the religious orders had not been re-established?”

The first Magdalen home in Ireland was founded by a Church of Ireland woman, Lady Arabella Denny, at the end of the 18th Century, when penal laws still existed. She did it with the best of intentions, namely to lift 'fallen women' out of prostitution.

The official inquiry into the mother and baby and county homes (the latter were run by the State) said that the county homes were worse.

The realistic alternative to the institutions was often either the poor house (later the county homes), or the street (think of the street children of Charles Dickens' novels). This is in no way to excuse the abuses that

took place in many of the institutions, but to assume they would not have existed were it not for the religious orders belongs in the realm of fantasy.

If the Church had not existed here in a significant way in the 19th and 20th centuries, organisations like Barnardos (Protestant-founded) might well have been bigger instead, but abuses took place in their homes as well, unfortunately.

Role

The State would have played a larger role, but how big, given that it had so little money, and as mentioned, the county homes were terrible places, as were the State-run mental hospitals.

Fr Seamus Murphy SJ, writing this week about the centenary of Irish independence, rightly says that two factors helped to stabilise the new State, namely the tradition of British parliamentary democracy – which helped prevent us going down the communist or fascist paths followed by other countries in Europe at the time – plus the Church.

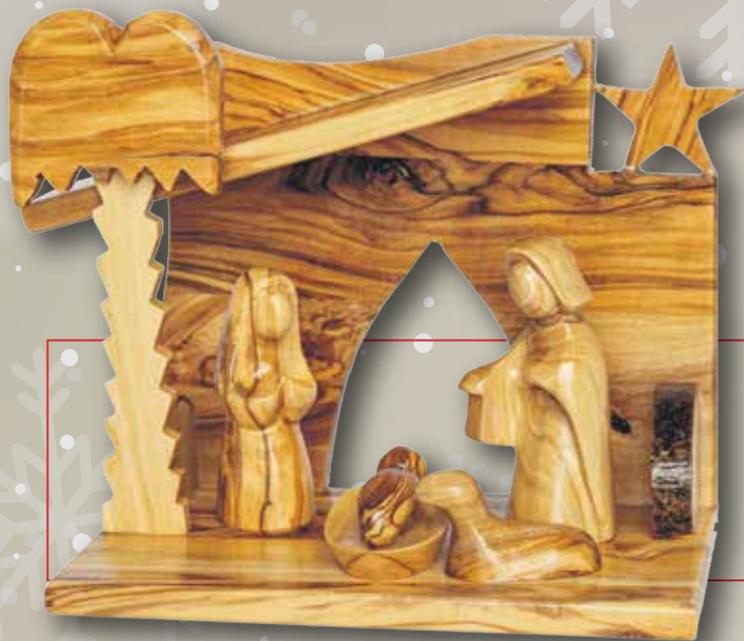
The Church was the only big unifying force in the country at the time, the one thing that gave the overwhelming majority of us moral guidance that transcended the civil war divisions.

Were it not for these two factors, we really might have been a 'failed State'. It is entirely simplistic to say we would have been better off without the Catholic Church.

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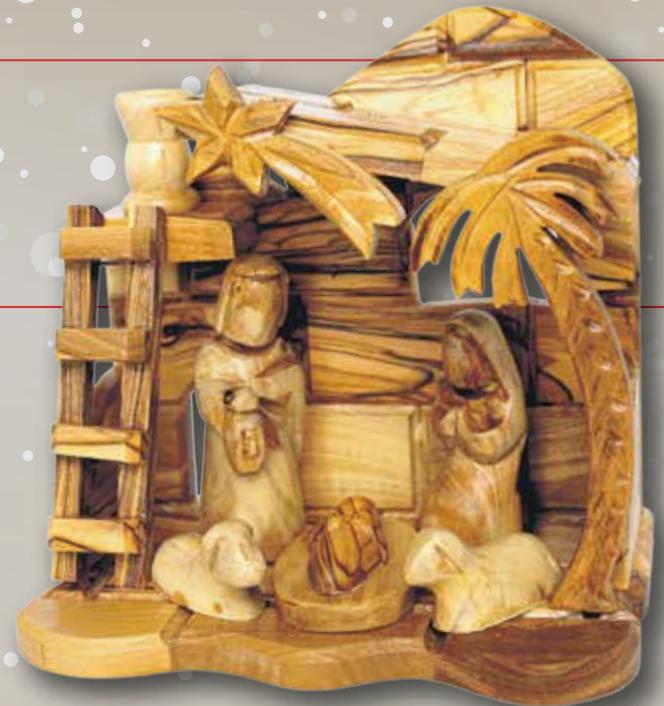
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Parents deserve Church's full



Catholic parents are very concerned about amoral sexual teaching, Fr Chris Hayden tells **Ruadhán Jones**

How can Catholics talk about the Church's teachings on sex and sexuality? The answer seems to be, with difficulty. Fr Sean Sheehy's sermon little more than a month ago brought those teachings into focus and stirred up a great deal of controversy.

Some, including his own bishop, questioned the accuracy of his representation of Catholic morality; others questioned the timing. It showed how difficult it is to speak up on the 'hot button' issues like contraception, abortion and homosexuality.

There can be a temptation to step away from the battle. But, according to the author of a new book on the Church's sexual morality, that's simply a choice we don't have. "The only topic I've ever been asked to cover in a homily by parents is the area of sex education. It's an area that is of concern to more than a few," Fr Chris Hayden tells me.

Ever since revelations around sexual abuse scandals, the Church's moral authority has been questioned. But despite this, parents still "look to the Church and they look to their priests to do something about it", he continues.

Concerned

Parents who are concerned about what their children are being taught about sex or sexuality, or who fear what they might pick up from the culture generally, are "entitled to the full support of their clergy, of their dioceses", Fr Hayden declares. They shouldn't be made to feel "painted into some right-wing corner simply by raising these issues".

"Catholics have an innate sense that there's a lot of truth in what the Church teaches," the author of *A Better Vision: Understanding, Living and Sharing the Catholic Vision for Human Sexuality* continues. "We're talking about a lot of parents who have grown up and tried to live by the truths of Catholic teaching. They have found that has been a blessing for them.

"I remember one lady saying to me, 'Father, I'm going to try and get



my kids to Mass on Sunday. Can you say a few words on sex related matters.' And she said, in her own words, she said 'it's a predatory world for them'. Things aren't all rosy in the garden. We may delude ourselves that we are living in free and easy times, but it is not so."

Sexuality

Later in our conversation, Fr Hayden notes that while many people talk of "the Church" when it comes to sexuality, meaning bishops and clergy, these are not the people most concerned about sexual morality. Those most concerned "are Catholic parents who have, as it were, gone into the matter and become convinced that the Church's sexual teaching in the area of sexuality is what will bless their children".

“They shouldn't be made to feel 'painted into some right-wing corner simply by raising these issues'”

"Probably as well many such parents feel they are receiving precious little support from the official Church," Fr Hayden admits. "And I think their feelings are not imaginary, they have some reason for that. So there's a great challenge for the likes of myself, for those of us who have the challenge of preaching and teaching the Faith.

"There is a really great challenge there. Writing this book has been my own tinpot attempt to rise to that challenge. It's lovely to be able to help parents in some way. Certainly it's a challenge, but it's also a joyous blessing."

Fr Hayden's book was inspired by the sermons he gave in response parents' repeated requests. He begins it, not with the Church's teaching, however, but with its anthropology. He outlines what it means to be a human person, according to the Church, as it's on this that the sexual ethic is based.

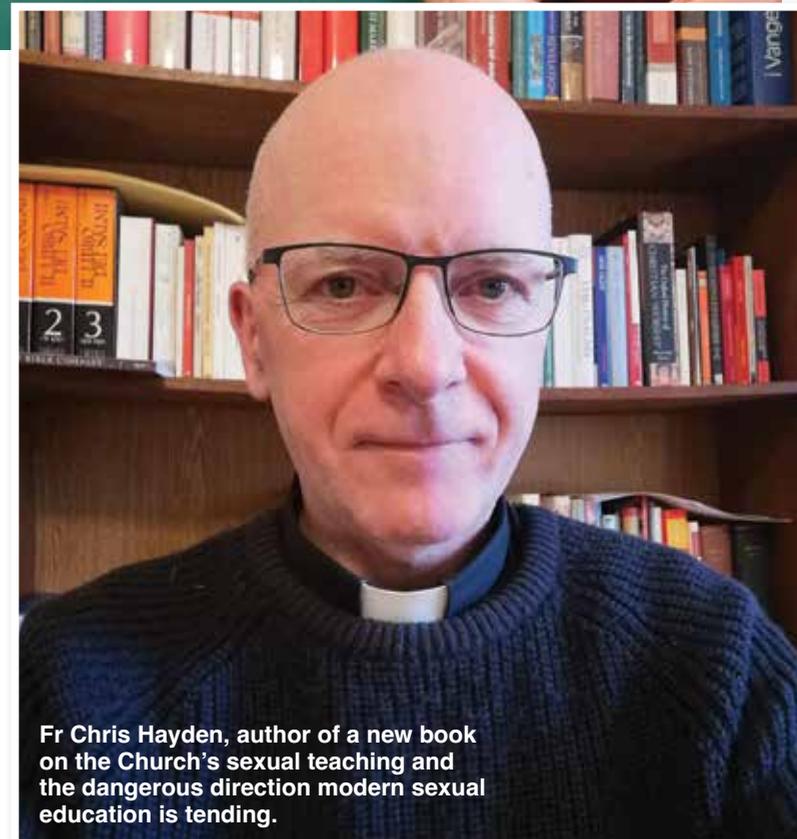
"A very fundamental part of the Church's understanding is that to be a human being is to be designed for self-gift," Fr Hayden says. "We are made to give ourselves to others in love. We are made to love and love is about self-gift. Crucially, sexuality is then a vehicle for self-gift. It's not simply a vehicle for pleasure, simply a vehicle for self-expression."

The Church's sexual teaching "actually safeguards and promotes" this understanding of men and women, and how they express their love physically. "The Catholic sexual ethics is about human flourishing, it's not about restricting freedom – it's about promoting it," Fr Hayden explains.

Freedom

In an age where freedom is the be-and-end-all, it can look like the Church is 'oppressive' or 'repressive'. Fr Hayden flips this on its head, arguing that the fault lies in our culture. One of its "founding myths" is that "we are happiest when we are doing our own thing".

"The wisdom our Faith gives us is that we do need to stand our ground, we do need to resist temptation, we need to possess ourselves," the Dublin diocese priest says. "And that really ties into a basic part of Christian anthropology. If I am designed to give myself to others in love, well, I can only do that if I possess myself. Nobody



Fr Chris Hayden, author of a new book on the Church's sexual teaching and the dangerous direction modern sexual education is tending.

gives what he hasn't got."

While our present culture prioritises self-expression, the Faith prioritises self-possession. "It's not that it doesn't want us to express ourselves, but who is the self that is being expressed anyway? Self-possession has priority over self-expression."

But what does sex actually mean within a Christian anthropology? It turns out it plays a very important role: "Sex is a vehicle for self-giving and for self-gift," Fr Hayden explains. That definition doesn't exclude pleasure and romance, but it does point to the deep roots of sexuality in our God-given natures.

"That's the core, to remember that sex is a means of giving ourselves."

However, when the Church makes this point, people are quick to respond that it sounds "idealistic" and "at a remove from where real life is". Fr Hayden takes those points in his stride, noting that "very often on account of human brokenness and sinfulness, people can easily slip in to using and being used rather than giving and receiving".

Church's teachings

But recent history highlights the importance of the Church's teachings, he argues: "Consider what

teaching on sexual morality

has been happening in terms of sexuality from the late 1960s, since the sexual revolution really took off with the availability of the pill and changing attitudes and all these things.

The hard facts, the data from the social sciences don't paint a particularly pretty picture. For example, look at the rate of marital break-up, the rate of divorce, the number of abortions – all of these things are in tandem with greater liberalisation in the area of human sexuality.

“So for people to say to the Church, it's not liveable, it's not practical, we must ask the hard questions on the basis of hard statistical information. It's not about prudism... No, this is about human flourishing.”

“We're being coached increasingly in the belief that it's important simply not to disagree with someone else's cherished beliefs”

Given what is at stake, it would appear to be imperative that the Church get its teaching out to a wider public. However, there's a subtle balance to be struck, as Fr Sheehy's sermon proved. We need tact and sensitivity if we're not to be immediately shut out, nor should we “ride roughshod” over the experience of people who, for example, suffer gender dysphoria, Fr Hayden says. But on the other hand, holding fruitful conversations cannot mean compromising on central teachings.

“The Church, because it is proclaiming a body of wisdom, is not going to negotiate away any fundamental principles. I mean the issue of what it is fundamentally to be a man or woman, the Church is not going to negotiate that away,” he explains.

“But that doesn't stop the Church, the clergy, compassionate human beings from sitting down with people who see things differently and having a conversation, asking is there any way we can handle or express ourselves with greater sensitivity or compassion. Is there anything we're missing out here?”

Disagreement

Disagreement doesn't preclude a conversation, Fr Hayden argues. But he's also aware that the cultural mood doesn't favour such a claim. One of the “deep ironies” of our age is that for the Church simply to hold certain positions “is in itself deemed to be an attack”, he says.

“We're being coached increasingly in the belief that it's important simply not to disagree with someone else's cherished beliefs. That's a societal and cultural impossibility. Because some people believe 'a', some people believe not 'a'. Those two



CEO of Women's Aid Sarah Benson (left) recently launched a report which shows that most Irish people believe pornography negatively affects gender inequality and leads to coercion and sexual violence against women and girls. Photo: Paul Sharp

people don't need to go to war, that would be the end of society. But to pretend then that we agree about everything would be wrong.”

One of the main areas of concern for Catholic parents today is the type of sexual education their children receive in schools. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is currently reviewing the relationship sexual education (RSE) curriculum. Attendant to this has been controversial political debates attacking Catholic schools for using ethos-based RSE. Parties like the Social Democrats have called for “value-free” sexual education to be used instead.

Baloney

“That's complete and utter baloney,” says Fr Hayden, adding later: “For any public representative to stand up in the Dáil and repeat this nonsense that the Church is only interested in arcane little areas of doctrine and trying to impose it's values - that should be unveiled for the nonsense that it is because you cannot prescind from values.”

Such claims involve a “sleight of hand”, Fr Hayden continues. It's not a case of fact-based versus faith-based; it's a question of

having values or being unprincipled. “Those who are coming out with this stuff, they are trying to present an unprincipled approach to sexuality.”

To support his case, Fr Hayden turns to Women's Aid, a charity who, as he delicately puts it, wouldn't be known for “walking in lockstep with Catholic sexual ethics”.

“He points out that the same politicians are in conflict with the NCCA's own view as well”

In their submission on the new RSE and social, personal and health education (SPHE) curriculum, they said: “The SPHE curriculum should also address the impact of pornography on children and young people. Pornography harms both girls and boys by influencing expectations, normalising disrespectful sexual behaviour and promoting a misogynistic and often abusive and violent model of sexual expectation.”

Last week, Women's Aid further rammed home Fr Hayden's point with a survey that

showed the majority of people are concerned about the harm pornography does to men and women. “Harms is a value word,” Fr Hayden says. “If you're saying someone is being harmed you mean they are being disvalued.”

“There is a clear overlap of concern between the Catechism and Women's Aid and that's worth pondering long and hard. It makes it clear that Church concerns regarding pornography are not narrowly religious or based solely on religious ethos, they are instead secular concerns for the good of children.”

Challenged

Fr Hayden challenged any politician who wants to “get up in the Dáil and say it's all value free, to also have a word with the people in Women's Aid. That's a very densely, value-driven statement. That language there I have quoted to you, it would be pretty at home in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.”

He points out that the same politicians are in conflict with the NCCA's own view as well: “The NCCA state explicitly – explicitly! – that SPHE cannot be value free.”

Although Fr Hayden commends the NCCA for that, his appreciation for their draft SPHE

curriculum is not uncritical. He quotes from NCCA documentation, which says that “The learning outcomes that relate directly to RSE should make explicit the topics that teachers are to address”. These topics include “contraception, consent, pornography, the impact of social media in self-esteem and relationships and sexual and gender-based violence”.

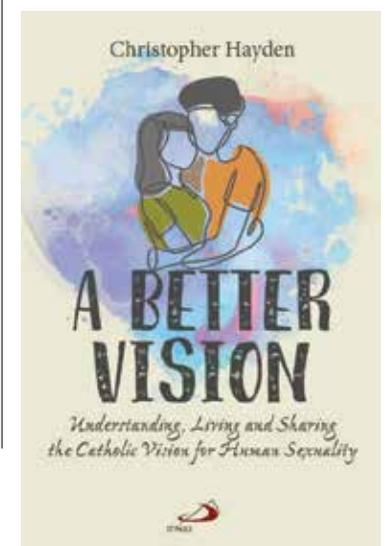
“Fr Hayden challenged any politician who wants to 'get up in the Dáil and say it's all value free'”

While commending the learning outcomes, he adds that it's “not good enough for parents” to simply list the topics for teachers. Parents want to know “what values, what understanding of the human person, what fundamental understandings will underpin how these topics are handled,” Fr Hayden says.

“For instance, the NCCA draft Junior Certificate SPHE says that students should be able to ‘investigate the influence of digital media, in particular the influence of pornography on young people's understanding, expectations and social norms in relation to self-expression’.

“To a certain extent, I would say – three cheers for that. But what will the content be? What underlying values? If they turn around and say to parents, we don't have any underlying values or principles, the other language for that is ‘we are unprincipled’.

“Now, I don't know many parents who would want to be educated in the area of sex above all in an unprincipled way. So, what are those principles, those fundamental understandings of the human persons based on? We need to be digging deep to lay a good foundation,” says Fr Hayden.



Fr Chris Hayden is author of *A Better Vision: Understanding, Living and Sharing the Catholic Vision for Human Sexuality*, published by St Paul's Publishing. It is available online and in stores nationwide.

“One of the main areas of concern for Catholic parents today is the type of sexual education their children receive in schools”

EU project: grown from 'ashes and destruction'



While the European Union is not perfect, we must recognise its achievements, the new Irish EU nuncio tells Chai Brady

There are matters of “serious concern” for the Church regarding certain manoeuvres within the European Union, but there are Catholic organisations and people working to make sure they are challenged, according to the new Apostolic Nuncio to the European Union.

The recently appointed representative of the Pope to the EU Bishop Noel Treanor, bishop of the Diocese of Down and Connor, told *The Irish Catholic* he will continue to make the Church's voice heard in his new role. This comes after 14 years serving his diocese in the North of Ireland.

Bishop Treanor will continue to govern as apostolic administrator until he takes up appointment in Brussels in mid to late January, 2023. His successor has not yet been announced.

Sorely sorry

While he is “sorely sorry” to leave his diocese, his new position reflects his ongoing work at a Euro-

pean level. As the nuncio, he will be the part of the diplomatic corp, which has relations with more than 160 countries.

“His new position reflects his ongoing work at a European level”

The nuncio to the EU also has links with the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE) with which Bishop Treanor has a lot of experience, due to his work with that same organisation.

In 1993 he was appointed Secretary General of COMECE, a post he continued to hold until his appointment by Pope Ben-

edict XVI as Bishop of Down and Connor.

At the March 2018 plenary meeting of COMECE he was elected one of its Vice-Presidents and since October 2018 he has served as President of Justice and Peace Europe.

Dialogue

Bishop Treanor told *The Irish Catholic* that the nunciature of the EU maintains dialogue with a plethora of Catholic organisations that satellite the EU institutions attempting to build a world based on justice and peace, of which there are several, including Caritas Europe – which is involved in giving funds to help Ukraine due to Russia's invasion.

Bishop Noel Treanor explains: “The core function of the Apostolic Nunciature and nuncio is obviously to represent the Holy Father and the Holy See to the institutions of the European Union, as nuncio your Church link is with COMECE and obviously you have relations with all these other organisations and one is also aware of the offices of other Churches there as well. So you relate to that

wide family of Catholic Church organisations and of other Churches.”

Regarding his belief in the project that is the EU, Bishop Treanor said: “It is evident to all concerned that the European project grew out of the ashes and the destruction of the two major world wars in the 20th Century, particularly the second one and it is a project rooted in a desire to avoid war forever in Europe.

“The nunciature of the EU maintains dialogue with a plethora of Catholic organisations that satellite the EU institutions attempting to build a world based on justice and peace”

“It is a value-based project. Allied with that I think it is important that we all recognise that the European project is a new project in political history, it is attempting something and has achieved some-

thing with its institutional architecture that is new and that is permeated with value aspiration and value realisation. Like all human projects it is not perfect but we must be careful not to slaughter the good on the aspiration to perfection, we need to recognise that good has been achieved,” he said.

Objectives

Bishop Treanor added that it is clear that the architects of the EU set themselves “ethical, moral, objectives for the good of society and to build up society and to build up the member states and that in great part has been achieved”.

However, there are still certain beliefs that are not in keeping with the Church's vision that a lot of member states espouse and advocate, such as abortion and embryonic stem cell research.

Speaking on this, Bishop Treanor said: “It is without dispute that there are matters of serious concern, as there always will be in the pursuit and realisation of these values. Through COMECE, with its working commissions on various

issues – legal affairs, social affairs, migration, its working group on ethical issues – the Church is dealing with these questions and is in conversation with and in dialogue with and in debate with the institutions of the European Union: analysing draft policy, making proposals, making amendments, engaging in discussions and conversations with those who draft these policies, who process them and ultimately make decisions about them.

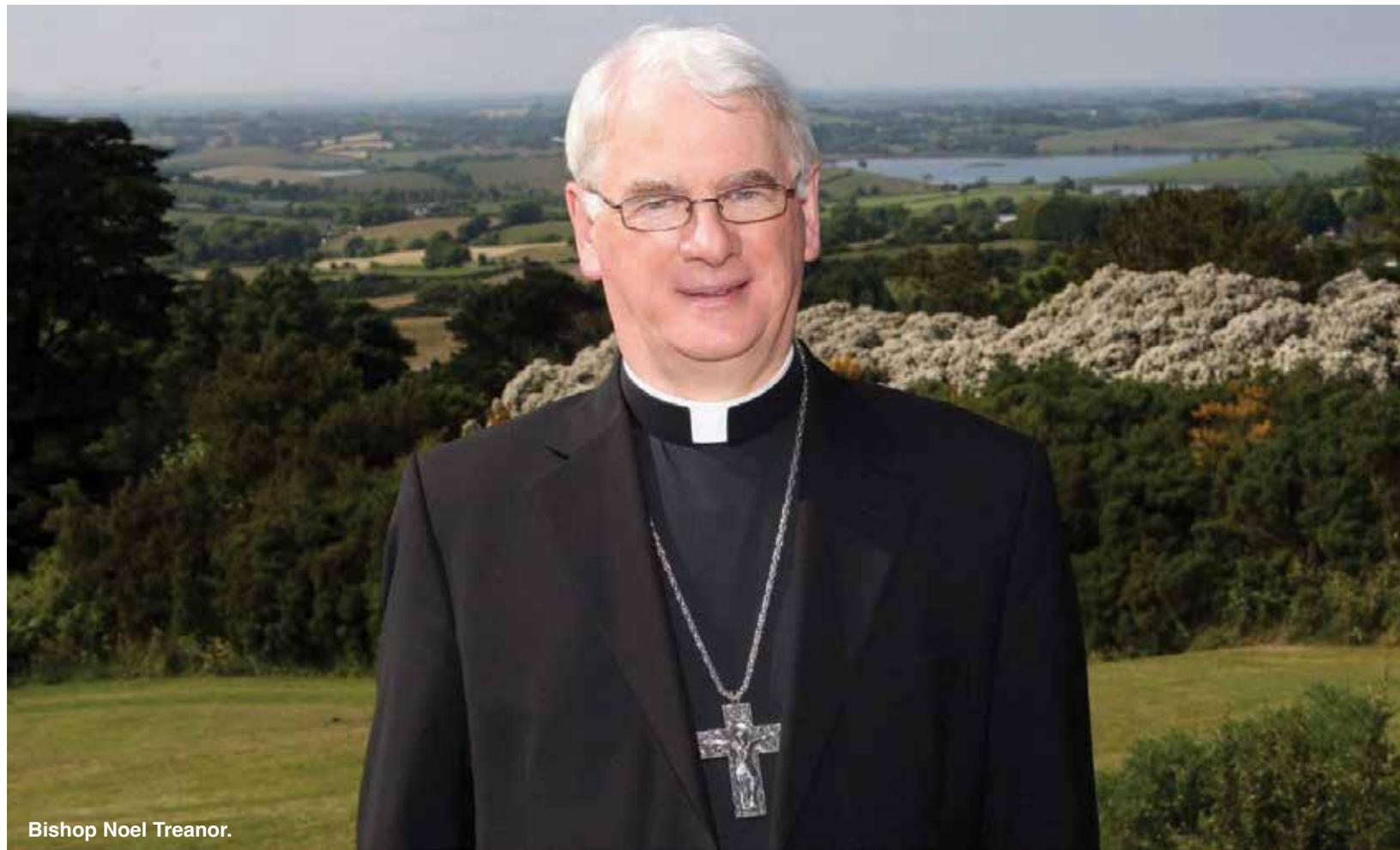
“It is without dispute that there are matters of serious concern, as there always will be in the pursuit and realisation of these values”

“One of the key things about this European project is that we have buried the footgear of battle. It has identified debate, discussion and reason as the instruments of making policy and those processes, notwithstanding the difficulties and the differences that arise, is part of the community method that has to be pursued,” he said.

The EU, as per Article 17 of the Lisbon Treaty, is legally bound to engage with religious institutions.

In three parts it states: “The Union respects

“The core function of the Apostolic Nunciature and nuncio is obviously to represent the Holy Father and the Holy See to the institutions of the European Union”



Bishop Noel Treanor.

and does not prejudice the status under national law of churches and religious associations or communities in the Member States.

The Union equally respects the status under national law of philosophical and non-confessional organisations.

Recognising their identity and their specific contribution, the Union shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with these churches and organisations."

Put forward

For Bishop Treanor, he believes in putting forward the position of the Church in a reasonable way with people of diverse and opposed opinion, "with the hope of trying to explain the Faith that is within us and that's at the core, as in the letter of Peter".

He also wishes to present the joy of that Faith and the elucidation that that Faith brings to the promotion and the achievement of true human dignity in his EU role.

Bishop Treanor said: "One is part of the agora, as St Paul was – the public space for debate and discussion – and obviously all of this has to be pursued on the basis of respectful human relations: All those who oppose and those who are of similar opinion or of mitigated opinion. The work of the nuncio is of course to support these different Catholic organisations that specialise in one area or another."

He further explained that another area would be

“Clearly the voice that has arisen in recent times to present abortion as a fundamental right – that is a matter of particular concern”

the promotion of human rights, including religious freedom as a right for all faiths both within and outside the EU.

“One is part of the agora, as St Paul was – the public space for debate and discussion – and obviously all of this has to be pursued on the basis of respectful human relations”

Regarding abortion, he said: "Clearly the voice that has arisen in recent times to present abortion as a fundamental right – that is a matter of particular concern and already Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich [SJ], president of COMECE, has expressed the COMECE view on that and the concern that gives rise to for COMECE, also to many Catholics and many Christians and people of goodwill throughout the union. That is a seminal issue that we will continue to discuss."

He also cautioned, saying: "It's very important that when dealing with these issues, before one starts, one needs to be clear as to whether or not the EU has competence in these matters. That's a precondition of all this work because sometimes fissures arise. Now were it [abortion] to be included as a fundamental right in the charter of fundamental rights of the European Union that would be something that for many, many people would be unacceptable."

Supporter

The Church has long been a supporter of the idea of the European project, with Pope Pius XII supporting the Schuman Declaration, which set in motion the founding of the EU. It was presented by French foreign minister Robert Schuman in 1950 and proposed the creation of a European Coal and Steel Community, whose members would pool coal and steel production.

This came following the devastation of World War II in which countless atrocities occurred.

Twenty years later, formal diplomatic rela-

tions between the Holy See and the 'European Communities' – formerly called the European Economic Community (EEC) which eventually became the EU – were initiated in 1970 and they were maintained as a separate accreditation by the nuncio to Belgium and Luxemburg, Archbishop Iginio Eugenio Cardinale. He was simultaneously given the position of nuncio to the European Community and Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the Council of Europe.

“It's very important that when dealing with these issues, before one starts, one needs to be clear as to whether or not the EU has competence in these matters”

The EU has progressed in many ways since then, and Bishop Treanor joins a long line of nuncios – despite not being specifically trained as a diplomat – to take up the role.

Euroscepticism

Since the foundation of the EU, and while it was at its infant stages, there has been a style of scepticism – now dubbed 'Euroscepticism' – which ranges from a political position criticising the EU to fundamentally opposing the EU project.

Regarding this, Bishop Treanor said: "One needs to differentiate and to be very clear about the many issues which are extant when you talk about this kind of Euroscepticism.

"There is no doubt that Euroscepticism has been long since an element in public opinion in many member states, one has to then ask: 'OK, what are the sources what are the triggers for this scepticism?'"

"Is it rooted in informed grounds? Or is it rooted in misunderstanding that is spread in various ways? There are problems of presentation of the European project, the working of its institutions. It is often referred to as a massive bureaucracy, whereas in fact in these institutions the parliament is elected and the commission is made up of fellow citizens who are highly trained specialists in all kinds of areas. The council

is made up of people whom we elect in our national governments. It is in relative terms an institutional architecture that is quite transparent and accountable, there are checks and balances within it. I do think that it has, for all sorts of reasons, at times been given a very unfair and bad press – that's not to say there are not problems," he said.

Regarding the UK's exit of the EU, and the standards the EU has regarding trade, he said: "This is the thing again about Brexit, people talk about these [EU] standards, about this that and the other thing. But these standards in terms of products are there to ensure the safety of health, to respect citizens. It's not as if, for example, when they talk here in the United Kingdom about whether or not the European court of justice should be involved in arbitration, the European court of justice is not there to whip its member states or statesmen of treaty alliances, it's there to protect standards, yes, which are high: Commerce in the markets and all the rest of it.

“There are problems of presentation of the European project, the working of its institutions”

"Those standards are high to ensure that your children, and you and I, have good food, have reliable products that we can trust, that our cars are safe, the environment... all this kind of thing," he said.

"I'm not a starry eyed apologist for the European Union, far from it but... the Union is a project and an aspiration that is unique, that has excised war from a certain part of Europe. It has failed – it's not the only actor – with the Balkans and now Ukraine, but you know it has given people a zone where, even in this country, the standards of living have been lifted, where poorer regions have been developed by solidarity, where immense advances have been made – of course you can say in the material sector – but it has also enhanced the spiritual quality of life. But we are living in a valley of tears, and so we will ever live in a valley of tears."

Bishop Treanor added: "Notwithstanding my experience it will be a learning curve. I certainly am sorely sorry to leave Down and Connor, I have the fantastic support here of the Faithful and of people of other Churches and traditions in doing all kinds of work."

Lough Derg plays host to Faithful youth of Ulster

Jason Osborne

The tranquil setting of Lough Derg, Co. Donegal saw the return of Youth 2000's recent Ulster regional retreat, with Ulster regional retreat leader Lisa Russell saying everyone was "taken aback by the beauty of the island".

"It was our first Ulster [regional] retreat back in three years and we were blessed to be back on the picturesque island of Lough Derg. Over the weekend we had amazing talks, workshops, testimonies, fellowship, food and also some music and dancing in the evening times in Davog House," Ms Russell explained.

The highlight of the retreat, as with most Youth 2000 retreats, was the healing service,

which saw "almost 150 young people receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation".

Fr James O'Reilly, the Youth 2000 Ulster provincial spiritual director, gave a talk on the importance of reconciliation, and "we thank him for his generous 'yes' and his continued support of Youth 2000," Ms Russell said.

"There's a real positivity regarding Youth 2000 at the moment because we were away I suppose for so long with Covid. Numbers have been really up on regional retreats compared to pre-Covid, so we would like to think that we'll have possibly 1000 people in New-bridge now the 9th-11th of December, where young people will continue to lead young people to the heart of the Church."



Youth 2000 leaders and volunteers at the Ulster regional retreat at Lough Derg. Photos: Joshua Waldorf



Fr Luke DeMasi of the Servants of the Home of the Mother holds the Eucharist aloft during Mass.



Youth 2000 Ulster regional leaders Lisa Russell (left) and Hannah Montgomery (right) are pictured with National Leader Helena O'Shea (centre).



Davog House is packed to capacity for the final Mass on Sunday.



A Youth 2000 volunteer leads the rosary.



Those in attendance enjoy music and fun over the weekend.



Youth 2000 National Spiritual Director, Fr Luuk Jansen OP.



Dearcan and Mairéad act as MCs over the weekend.



The picturesque setting of Lough Derg at sunset during the retreat.

Out&About

Speaking up...



CORK: The First Year public speaking team from Le Chéile Secondary School Ballincollig who took part in the local 'Speak Up' competition recently relax after the competition.



LIMERICK: Students from Doon Convent NS lay the Advent wreath, as the school asked God to bless them as they prepare for the coming of Christ, November 28.



TYRONE: Pictured are parishioners from Newtownstewart and friends who trod the Barnes area of the Sperrin Mountains with Fr Roland Colhoun, embarking from Plumbridge Church, on Sunday, November 6. The walk raised £4300 for the renovation of St Eugene's Church, Glenock.

INSHORT

8 out of 10 Irish adults to give to charity at Christmas

More than 8 out of 10 Irish adults plan on making a donation to charity over the Christmas period, a new survey has shown.

Some 86% of Irish adults will definitely or probably make a charitable donation of money, time or goods during December, the survey undertaken on behalf of the Charities Regulator shows.

"The good news for Irish charities is that despite increasing financial pressures in the wider economy, Irish people have a strong desire to make a charitable donation over the Christmas period," according to Helen Martin, CEO of the Charities Regulator.

"It is hugely heartening to see people's generosity reflected in the results of this survey and that they intend to give to good causes in such large numbers," Ms Martin said.

The survey found that the key factors in deciding which charity to support were knowing that donations would be

put to good use (82%), that the charity in question is clear and transparent (80%) and that the charity is registered (74%).

NI Catholic school body criticise budget

An advocate for Catholic maintained schools in the North of Ireland has criticised proposed funding cuts by the Secretary of State Chris Heaton-Harris in budget announcements in late November.

Following the announcement, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) called for a review of the current funding formula.

CCMS Chief Executive Gerry Campbell said the council has "significant concerns in relation to the proposed cuts made by Secretary of State Chris Heaton-Harris in the recent budget statement".

He said: "Funding for education has fallen steadily over the past decade, the impact of this has been catastrophic for

schools, staff and ultimately the long-term outcomes of our children and young people."

December deadline announced for synod responses

Irish delegates' responses to the working document on the Continental Stage of the Universal Synod must be submitted by December 22.

The Task Group of the Irish Synodal Pathway issued resources for meetings between delegates and representatives of dioceses, groups and associations which are to take place over the coming month.

The resources included a 'Reflection Guide' for the Continental Stage. Responses to the questions included in the guide must be submitted to the general secretary of the Synodal Pathway in Ireland, Ms Julieann Moran, at info@synod.ie.

The European assembly for the Continental Stage of the synod takes place February 5-12, 2023, in Prague.



SLIGO: Pictured is Anna Rainey of St Anne's Parish who recently received the Gold John Paul II award for her commitment to her parish, school, local community and Mary's Meals Charity.



FERMANAGH: Canon Jimmy McPhillips PP Holy Cross Church Lisnaskea presents Tommy McDermot with a Papal Blessing to acknowledge his 90th birthday and his 65 years in singing in the Church – and still going.



DUBLIN: Transition Year students at St Mary's Secondary School Baldoyle, Ava Kenny, Abigail Rafter and Jodie Gibney show off the wares of their mini company, Spray Away Mists, ahead of the school's December 13 Christmas market.



WEXFORD: Bantown parishioners Nick and Kathleen Kinsella with Dana Rosemary Scallan and Fr John Carroll PP after a thanksgiving concert held in Bantown Church, November 27.



SLIGO: Bishop of Achonry Paul Dempsey is pictured with parishioners from Collooney and Ballincarrow, who hosted a coffee morning for North West Hospice on November 27.



SLIGO: Marian McGowan has been honoured by Pope Francis with the Benemerenti Gold Medal for her many years of devoted and faithful service to St Anne's Parish. Bishop of Elphin Kevin Doran and the parish gathered to offer warmest congratulations and wish her many years to enjoy it.



Edited by Ruadhán Jones
Ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie



Events deadline is a week in advance of publication



KERRY: Listowel Parish Council, Fr O'Connor and Sr Consolata.



KERRY: Sr Consolata with her grandniece Dr Muireann Keating, her sister Sr Theresa Bracken and niece Therese Keating.



KERRY: Provincial Leader of the Presentation Sisters Sr Grace McKernan and Sr Consolata.



KERRY: Bishop of Kerry Ray Browne right along with Fr Declan O'Connor PP present Sr Consolata IBVM with the Benemerenti medal in recognition of lifelong service to music ministry in Listowel Parish since she made her profession in August 1965.

ANTRIM

A Christmas table arrangement workshop by Nua Flowers takes place in St Joseph's Hall Monday, December 12, 7-9pm. Cost is £30 per head (includes all sundries and fresh materials) Proceeds in aid of Parish Funds. Tea/Coffee and festive snacks provided. Please leave your name with Nuala 07742788940.

ARMAGH

Armagh cathedrals partnership Advent celebration will take place in the Market Place Theatre on December 13 at 7.30pm. The guest speaker will be Dr Heather Morris, General Secretary of the Methodist Church in Ireland, recently appointed an Ecumenical Canon in St Patrick's Church of Ireland Cathedral.

CARLOW

A novena takes place every Saturday at 10am in Carlow Cathedral to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, followed by Confession.

CAVAN

Lectio Divina, a prayerful reading of the Sunday gospel, has resumed each Tuesday after 10am Mass in Cavan Cathedral in the Conference room behind the altar.

CORK

First Saturday devotions take place in the Church of the Ascension, Guranabraher with Fr Marius O'Reilly. Begins at 9.30am with the rosary, Mass, meditation for 15mins and Confession.

Sisters of the Bon Secours, College Road, are hosting a weekly night of prayer and reflection for young adults throughout Advent, December 1 to December 22 at 7pm. Contact eavopost@gmail.com to register.

DERRY

A holy hour for the unborn and expectant mothers takes place on Thursdays in Our Lady's Chapel, with St Joseph's Church, Galliagh, from 7pm.

DUBLIN

The greater Finglas area will celebrate the 100th

anniversary since the building of St Canice's Church on December 11 with 11.30am Mass celebrated by Archbishop Dermott Farrell.

Radio Maria Ireland are hosting a Christmas Party fundraiser, December 14, in the Red Cow Inn. The evening includes a four-course meal, live music and meeting with the staff. Cost is €59, to book tickets call 01 4 123456

KERRY

Mass will be offered for all loved ones remembered on Holy Cross Mercy school's 'memory tree' on Wednesday, December 16, in St Mary's Cathedral at 12 noon.

KILDARE

Youth 2000 national Christmas retreat takes place December 9-11 in Newbridge College. Visit youth2000.ie for more information.

KILKENNY

Eucharistic adoration takes place every Wednesday morning in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel Ferrybank Church from 10.30am to 12 noon and in Slieverue Church from 2.30-3.30pm.

LIMERICK

Glenstal Abbey is hosting a series of Advent talks, 'Beginning Anew', every Sunday of Advent. Next talk takes place December 11, 'Coming to Zion: Shouting for Joy' by Bro. Henry O'Shea. The talks begin at 4.30pm in the Abbey Library and are followed by refreshments and sung evening prayer. Suggested donation €20.

LEITRIM

Ballinamore carol service takes place in St Patrick's Church, Ballinamore on Wednesday December 14 at 7:30pm. There will be six choirs, three national school groups, Foroige group, community school TY group and more. Bishop Martin Hayes will attend.

MAYO

The next Latin Mass in the Extraordinary Form will take place at Our Lady's Shrine, Knock, on Sunday, December 11, at 5:30pm.

Nightfever takes place in St Mary's Church, West-

port, on December 17. Mass at 6:30 followed by adoration, music, outreach and confessions.

OFFALY

A Christmas Carol Service will take place on Sunday December 11 at 7pm in the Church of the Assumption. It will feature the Meath Diocesan Choir directed by Jim Walsh, along with local choirs from Durrow NS, Ballinamere NS, Sacred Heart School and Children's Mass Group. Admission is free but donations for nominated charities will be collected.

ROSCOMMON

Legion of Mary – Our Lady of Aparecida Praesidium meet on Saturdays from 4-5pm in St Coman's Club, Roscommon Parish.

SLIGO

A Youth 2000 prayer meeting for 16-35-year-olds takes place the first Monday of every month in the side chapel of St Anne's Church at 8pm. Adoration followed by chat.

TIPPERARY

Night vigil for Our Lady's intentions takes place first Monday of each month at Glencomeragh House. Rosary at 7.30pm, Mass at 8pm. Vigil begins after Mass and ends after 3am, the Hour of Mercy, with prayers of Our Lord's Passion. For further information: Imelda (085) 8509715.

WATERFORD

A Christmas craft sale hosted by the Sisters of Mary Morning Star takes place in the Friary, Lady Lane, on December 10-11 from 10am to 5pm.

WEXFORD

A reconciliation service for the pastoral care of Wexford, Clonard and Barntown takes place Sunday, December 11 at 7pm in Bride St Church.

WICKLOW

Lectio Divina takes place on Monday's during Advent following 9.30am, facilitated by Sr Patricia, in St Fergal's, Bray.



World Report

IN BRIEF

German Synodal Way designed to create 'pressure'

● The German Synodal Way was designed from the outset to avoid legal sanctions while simultaneously creating "pressure" on the Church to change Catholic teaching, one of the founders of the process told German media Friday.

Thomas Sternberg, former president of the Central Committee of German Catholics (ZdK), said the controversial process wanted to achieve changes to the Church's teaching on homosexuality, the ordination of women, and other topics, reported CNA Deutsch.

Speaking to German diocesan broadcaster Domradio on December 2, Mr Sternberg said the Synodal Way was proceeding "much more successfully than I had thought".

Bishop warns of new wave of Ukrainian refugees

● A Ukrainian bishop warned huge numbers of citizens could flee to Western countries during winter, and he appealed for continued international support in the face of a threatened "humanitarian catastrophe".

"When Moscow began this war last February, millions headed for the borders – if it now destroys our energy

supplies, there'll be a similar wave of refugees," said Auxiliary Bishop Jan Sobilo of Kharkiv-Zaporizhzhia.

"If everyone leaves, our own soldiers will ask who they're supposed to be defending. That's why we're requesting continued help.

This is a war not just for Ukraine's independence, but to hold back a whole civilization of evil."

Former Colombian guerrilla sentenced in murder of archbishop

● The Criminal Chamber of the Colombian Supreme Court of Justice sentenced *in absentia* former FARC leader Luciano Marín Arango, alias Iván Márquez, to 25 years in prison as the orchestrator of the 2002 assassination of Archbishop Isaias Duarte Cancino.

Márquez is at large and must be captured in order to serve the sentence.

The prelate was archbishop of Cali when he was murdered on March 16, 2002, by two hitmen on a motorcycle as he left Good Shepherd parish after celebrating en masse the weddings of 105 couples. The hitmen were later found to have been paid by FARC's Joint Central Command of the West.

US diocese mourns murdered priest and parish worker

● The second victim in a Louisiana double homicide that also claimed the life of a local Catholic priest, Fr Otis Young, has been identified.

Ruth Prats, a 73-year-old former staff member who worked for Fr Young when he was pastor at St Peter Catholic Church in Covington, was identified as the second victim, St Tammany Parish Coroner Dr Charles Preston announced

Thursday in a press conference.

Fr Young's death, which was confirmed November 29, was caused by "sharp and blunt-force trauma," the coroner's office said.

The homicides both occurred either Sunday night or Monday morning, the coroner's office said. It was reported that both Fr Young and Ms Prats were reported missing on Sunday.

Pro-life Colombian lawmakers oppose euthanasia for children

● The Pro-Life Caucus of Colombia's Congress expressed its opposition to a bill that would extend euthanasia to children six and older, calling it "a new attack against the Colombian family".

Debate began November 29 on a new euthanasia bill introduced in the House of Representatives by Liberal Party congressman Juan Carlos Losada.

The bill proposes that a minor who has "a serious and incurable illness or bodily injury that causes intense physical or mental suffering" can receive "medically assisted death".

The text adds that "it's not necessary nor will it be required to prove the existence of a terminal illness or a medical prognosis of imminent death".

Ukrainian government says it will investigate Orthodox linked to Moscow

The Ukrainian government said it would sanction members of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church affiliated with the Moscow Patriarchate.

After a December 1 meeting of the National Security and Defence Council, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the government also would review if the Church met the legal criteria for use of one of the main shrines of Ukraine, the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, or Kyiv Monastery of the Caves.

"Unfortunately, even Russian terror and full-scale war did not convince some figures that it is worth overcoming the temptation of evil. Well, we have to create conditions where no actors dependent on the aggressor state will have an opportunity to manipulate Ukrainians and weaken Ukraine from within," President Zelenskyy said.

The security council instructed the Ukrainian parliament to draft a law making it impossible for religious organisations affiliated with centres of influence in Russia to operate in Ukraine, reported Religious Information Service of Ukraine.

In addition, the State Service for Ethnopolitics and Freedom of Conscience was told to ensure the religious examination of the management statute of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church for the presence of a Church-canonical connection with the Moscow Patriarchate and, if necessary, to take measures provided for by law.



A Ukrainian serviceman holds an Orthodox icon inside a church near the town of Lyman, Ukraine. Photo: CNS

"We need to raise the status and strengthen the capabilities of the State Service for Ethnopolitics and Freedom of Conscience," Mr Zelenskyy said.

In early 2019, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople formally signed a "tomos" recognising the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, which was formed by members of three separate Orthodox communities, including one formally tied to the Russian Orthodox Church for more than 300 years.

However, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, head of the Russian Orthodox Church, which oversaw the largest branch of Orthodox faithful in Ukraine, strongly objected to the move

"I would like to emphasise: In 1991, our state embarked on the legal and democratic path. We will continue this path. Only legal

steps. Balanced decisions. And national interests," Mr Zelenskyy said.

"This structure will be reformed, which will enable it to really protect the rights and legitimate interests of the Ukrainians and the state.

"With these and other decisions, we guarantee Ukraine's spiritual independence," he added.

"I would like to emphasise: In 1991, our state embarked on the legal and democratic path. We will continue this path. Only legal

and announced later that year that his Church was breaking its Eucharistic communion with Constantinople.

As the war began and, especially, as it progressed and evidence of war crimes grew, Metropolitan Onufry of Kyiv, head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church tied to the Moscow Patriarchate, increasingly distanced himself from Moscow and assured his Ukrainian faithful that the Church was with them. But questions remain about how committed Metropolitan Onufry's clergy are to defending Ukraine's right to exist.

Asia Bibi advocates for Pakistanis accused of blasphemy

Asia Bibi, a Pakistani Catholic woman who escaped death for alleged blasphemy and who now lives in Canada, has appealed for the protection of victims of blasphemy laws in her home country.

She also said her family is struggling in Canada, because the government only supported them for one year, reported ucanews.com.

In her first on-camera interview since she was acquitted by the Supreme Court of Pakistan in 2018 and left the country, Ms Bibi urged government agencies to "thoroughly" investigate blasphemy-related offenses.

"Protect the innocent instead of beating them in police stations. The innocent must be freed. Long sentences for something without proof are a great injustice in our country," she said in her December 1 online interview.

"The clerics don't understand (the) Bible and Quran despite studying them. For God's sake, have mercy in your hearts. Pakistan is not for Muslims alone. I feel angry when good Muslims are targeted for sympathising with poor religious minorities," Ms Bibi added.

She also referred to some high-profile cases of blasphemy killings,

including the assassination of Punjab Governor Salman Taseer in 2011 for calling the blasphemy law a "black law".

Ucanews.com reported Ms Bibi said that since she has no formal education, she is doing a menial job for survival. She also lamented that she faces many problems, including the language barrier in her adoptive country. She lives in a rented house and regretted that she did not receive the royalties for her autobiography, *Free at Last*, by French writer Anne-Isabelle Tollet.

More clergy accused of child sexual abuse in California as deadline nears

As California's three-year window to file child sex abuse lawsuits past the statute of limitations nears its conclusion, 66 Catholic clergy and religious have been named in 116 lawsuits in Alameda County, which covers the area between San

Francisco and San Jose.

Additionally, 14 of the clergy members and religious identified in the lawsuits are named for the first time, the law firm of Jeff Anderson & Associates announced November 28.

The law firm said that the

116 lawsuits may be a small percentage of the total number of suits filed under the California Child Victims Act, which was passed in 2019.

The legislation allowed a three-year period in which victims of child sex abuse could come forward with

claims that would have expired under the previous statute of limitations. The window began January 1, 2020, and will expire in less than a month. The bill was signed by Democrat Governor Gavin Newsom.



Edited by Jason Osborne
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'O come, all ye faithful...'



The Nativity scene and Christmas tree decorate St Peter's Square after a lighting ceremony at the Vatican December 3, 2022. Photo: CNS/Paul Haring

Pope to travel to Congo and South Sudan

After postponing his trip last July, Pope Francis has rescheduled for January 31-February 5 his trip to Congo and his ecumenical visit to South Sudan, the Vatican announced.

With the Pope's mobility still impaired, the new schedule for the trip has been trimmed slightly from what was planned in July, according to the scheduled released by the Vatican December 1.

The main event missing from the schedule is a visit to Congo's North Kivu province to celebrate Mass near the site of the former Kibumba refugee camp, which is where, in February 2021, Italy's

43-year-old ambassador to Congo, Luca Attanasio, and two others were killed in an ambush while traveling in a UN convoy. Also missing is a meeting in Goma with the victims of violence.

Instead, the Pope will remain in Kinshasa from his arrival in Congo January 31 until his departure for South Sudan early February 3.

As planned for years, the Pope will travel to South Sudan with Anglican Archbishop Justin Welby of Canterbury and with the Rev. Iain Greenshields, moderator of the general assembly of the Church of Scotland, in a further attempt to encourage

warring leaders to live up to the commitments they have made in a series of accords and finally offer their people peace.

The three leaders had been trying to schedule the visit since 2016, when South Sudanese Catholic, Anglican and Presbyterian leaders visited the Pope and archbishop and asked them to go to encourage the peace process. At least 60% of South Sudan's population, including its political leaders, are Christian.

A statement from Rev. Greenshields' office said, "The purpose of the visit is to renew a commitment to

peace and reconciliation and stand in solidarity with millions of ordinary people who are suffering profoundly from continued armed conflict, violence, floods and famine."

Peace, unity and reconciliation also are the themes Pope Francis is expected to focus on in Congo, a nation rich in natural resources but torn apart by ongoing violence. The theme for the Congo visit is "All Reconciled in Jesus Christ," which emphasises how more than 95% of the nation's people are Christian, yet sporadic fighting continues, especially in the eastern and northeastern parts of the country.

Pope to EU: Migration must be managed, not stopped

Migration across the Mediterranean Sea is as old as humanity, and while some governments say they want to stop that movement of people, it will not and should not happen, Pope Francis said.

"Migration is essential to the well-being of this area and cannot be stopped. Therefore, it is in the interest of all parties to find a solution that is inclusive of the various aspects and just demands, beneficial to all and ensures both human dignity and shared pros-

perity," Pope Francis wrote in a message to participants in the Italian foreign ministry's annual Rome MED Dialogues.

The lack of coordinated solutions to help potential migrants thrive in their home countries and to welcome those who set off for Europe "continues to result in unacceptable and almost always avoidable loss of life, especially in the Mediterranean," the Pope wrote.

The meeting December 1-3 brought

together representatives of the European Union and European countries on the Mediterranean with representatives from the Middle Eastern and North African nations that face the sea and that often are crossed by migrants and refugees seeking a better life in Europe.

For millennia, the Mediterranean was a crossroads of civilisations and cultures and a place of encounter that benefited all humanity, the Pope said.



Prefect of Vatican economy office steps down

● Three years after Pope Francis appointed him to speed up financial reforms, transparency and budget controls at the Vatican, Jesuit Fr Juan Antonio Guerrero Alves has resigned for health reasons.

The Vatican announced November 30 that Fr Guerrero was stepping down as prefect of the Secretariat for the Economy and Pope Francis had named Maximino Caballero Ledo, the secretariat's general secretary, to succeed him.

Unusually, the announcement included "deep thanks" to Fr Guerrero "for the dedication he has shown in serving the Holy See" and for succeeding with "a strong and challenging work that bore much fruit".

In a letter to staff of the secretariat, Fr Guerrero said he had undergone surgery and was continuing medical treatment, which is "producing certain side effects that make it particularly difficult for me to fulfil such a demanding task" and that "requires better physical efficiency and mental concentration than I have at the moment".

While he said he was sad to be leaving, the Jesuit told staff that over the past three years they had "made a contribution to the economic reform called for by the Holy Father himself".

Pope: Keep the crib in Christmas

● Stopping to gaze at and perhaps pray before a Nativity scene is one of the best ways to remember the real meaning of Christmas, Pope Francis said.

"In its genuine poverty," the Pope said, "the creche helps us to rediscover the true richness of Christmas and to purify ourselves of so many aspects that pollute the Christmas landscape."

Pope Francis met December 3 with the artisans who carved the 18-piece Nativity scene in St Peter's Square; the donors of the white pine Christmas tree; the residents of a

psychiatric rehabilitation centre who, along with a group of students and grandparents, created the ornaments; and with representatives of the government of Guatemala, which set up another Nativity scene in the Vatican audience hall.

"Simple and familiar, the Nativity scene recalls a Christmas that is different from the consumerist and commercial Christmas. It is something else. It reminds us how good it is for us to cherish moments of silence and prayer in our days, often overwhelmed by frenzy," Pope Francis told them during a midday gathering.

Ratzinger Prize winners honoured

● Presenting the Ratzinger Prize to a French Jesuit theologian and a Jewish law professor, Pope Francis paid tribute to his predecessor and his theological work.

"I have many opportunities for a personal, fraternal and affectionate encounter with the Pope emeritus," retired Pope Benedict XVI, Pope Francis told those gathered at the Vatican December 1 to honour Jesuit Fr Michel Fédou, professor of dogmatic theology and patristics at the Centre Sèvres of Paris, and Joseph H. H. Weiler, a professor of law at New York University School of Law.

"All of us sense his spiritual presence, his accompaniment in prayer for the whole Church and his constant contemplative gaze," Pope Francis said of the 95-year-old retired Pope, who did not attend the ceremony.

The Ratzinger Prize, a sort of "Nobel Prize in Theology," honours two scholars each year. Pope Francis chooses them from among candidates recommended by a committee of the Joseph Ratzinger-Benedict XVI Foundation, which supports theological research and promotes studies on the theology and teaching of the retired Pope.

Pope Francis said the conferral of the awards is an important opportunity to reaffirm that the retired Pope's "theological work and, more generally, his thinking and insights, continue to be fruitful and effective".

Letter from Rome



John L. Allen Jr

Russia blocks roads to the Vatican, both literally and diplomatically

Just a stone's throw from St Peter's Square lies the Via delle Fornaci, a major Roman artery that leads from the Vatican all the way up the Janiculum hill. Much of the traffic that flows in and out of the Pope's domain travels the street, and businesses in the vicinity of the Vatican depend on it for their livelihoods.

That reality makes the closure of a section of the Via delle Fornaci, about a mile from the Vatican, ever since late October a major local headache.

That stretch is dominated by the Villa Abamelek, home of the Russian ambassadors in Italy as well as the Russian Orthodox Church of St Catherine of Alexandria. Roman officials have deemed a massive stone wall around the Russian estate in danger of collapse, and at least so far, the Russians have declined to carry out the required repairs.

“From the beginning of the war in Ukraine, Pope Francis and his Vatican team have volunteered their services as mediators”

Already one local bar has closed due to the resulting lack of traffic, and several restaurants say they're on the brink of following suit.

Perhaps nothing better illustrates the current state of affairs between the Vatican and the Kremlin than the fact that even in Rome itself, Russia effectively has shut down a line of communication and exchange.

From the beginning of the war in Ukraine, Pope Francis and his Vatican team have volunteered their services as mediators. Towards that end, Francis largely has refrained from naming Russia or President Vladimir Putin as the aggressors in the conflict, attempting to project an air of being *super partes*.

Honestly, most observers have considered the idea of the Vatican as a mediator a longshot from the beginning, due to a long history of mistrust and antagonism between Moscow and Rome. That's especially true of the most nationalist and traditionalist elements in the Russian Orthodox fold, who also happen to be an important element of Putin's political base.

However, the possibility of the Vatican as a go-between now seems all but extinct in light of Russian reaction to Francis's recent interview with the Jesuit-sponsored journal *America*, in which, among other things, the Pontiff commented on the Ukraine conflict.



Russian recruits called up for military service amid their invasion of Ukraine, walk along a platform before boarding a train in Omsk, Russia, November 27. Photo: CNS/Alexey Malgavko, Reuters

“That reality makes the closure of a section of the Via delle Fornaci, about a mile from the Vatican, ever since late October a major local headache”

“I have much information about the cruelty of the troops that come in,” the Pope said. “Generally, the cruellest are perhaps those who are of Russia but are not of the Russian tradition, such as the Chechens, the Buryati and so on,” referring to two ethnic minorities in the Russian Federation.

Ever since, spokespersons for Russia, not to mention for the Chechens and Buryati, have been tripping over one another to see who can be most vocal in the condemnation of the Pope's rhetoric.

The latest to join the fray is Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, who accused Francis of using rhetoric that's “not Christian.”

“He makes appeals, but his incomprehensible declarations, not at all Christian, call out two nationalities in Russia, as if to say one should expect atrocities from them in military combat,” Mr Lavrov said.

“Look, this doesn't help the authority of the Holy See,” he said,

in what the Italian paper *Il Messaggero* called a “cold shower” for the Pope about the idea of acting as a mediator.

Perversion of the truth

Mr Lavrov's comments came after a spokesperson for Russia's Foreign Ministry, Maria Zakharov, had already taken her own shot at the Pope.

“This is no longer Russophobia, it's a perversion of the truth on a level I can't even name,” Ms Zakharova told the Russian news agency TASS.

A Chechen commander named Ramzan Kadyrov also joined the chorus.

“The Pope, the spiritual guide of millions of Catholics, should have used more peaceful rhetoric instead of spreading hatred and inter-ethnic discord among peoples,” Mr Kadyrov said.

“Before NATO's intervention in the internal affairs of Ukraine, we didn't have any problems with the Ukrainian people,” he said. “The same cannot be said of the pastoral actions of the Pope

and the instructors of NATO, who are trying to transform the largest possible number of Ukrainian soldiers into cannon fodder.”

To say the least, ouch.

Francis and his Vatican team had been trying to promote the idea of a Christmas truce in Ukraine, taking advantage of the fact that most Orthodox churches in the country have given permission this year for faithful to celebrate Christmas on December 25, the traditional date for the Western Church, rather than January 7, the date of Christmas on the Eastern calendar.

Observers say that move is one part ecumenical, one part about de-Russification, and one part practical, in that presenting just one target to extremists rather than two over the holidays is probably a tactically wise move.

In light of the recent contretemps with Rome, Moscow may now be less receptive to the idea of a truce – a stance also likely to be bolstered by the fact that Ukraine just announced a crackdown on Orthodox churches in the country that still profess loyalty to the Patriarch of Moscow and Russian Orthodoxy.

For part, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow wasn't sounding especially conciliatory in his most recent comments.

“Today, Donbas is the front line of

defence of the Russian world,” he said in a session on Friday in Moscow with children from the occupied Donbas region.

“Pope Francis undoubtedly will keep trying to play the part of peacemaker in Ukraine, and, of course, Christmas miracles are always possible”

“And the Russian world is not only Russia – it is everywhere where people who were brought up in the traditions of Orthodoxy and in the traditions of Russian morality live,” he said. “For us, people who live in the Russian world, the sources of support are faith and love for the Homeland.”

Pope Francis undoubtedly will keep trying to play the part of peacemaker in Ukraine, and, of course, Christmas miracles are always possible. Right now, however, it seems that's precisely what it would take for the Pope's effort to succeed – a miracle.

John L. Allen Jr is Editor of *CruXNow.com*

USCCB committee decries rising antisemitism in US



An instance of an antisemitic vandalism attack from 2017, which saw more than 170 toppled Jewish headstones February 21 in Chesed Shel Emeth Cemetery near St Louis, Missouri. Photo: CNS/Tom Gannam, Reuters



Dennis Sadowski

Saying they are outraged by growing “antisemitic rhetoric” across the country, members of the US bishops’ Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs urged Christians to decry hate-filled statements and violence aimed at Jewish individuals, homes and institutions.

Committee members also denounced “any rhetoric which seeks to demonise or dehumanise the Jewish people or Judaism as a religious tradition,” in a statement released November 28 by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops.

“In unequivocal terms, we condemn any and all violence directed at the Jewish people, whether motivated by religious, racial, or political grievances,” said the committee, chaired by Bishop David Talley of Memphis, Tennessee, and has eight other members.

“The rising trend of antisemitic incidents has become even more painful in light of the Church’s relationship to the Jewish tradition and

our connections to the Jewish people in dialogue and friendship,” the committee said.

The Anti-Defamation League, which tracks incidents of antisemitism, reported 2,717 cases of harassment, vandalism and assault in 2021, an increase of 34% from a year earlier. The number of incidents is the highest on record since the group began tracking them in 1979.

Two rabbis involved in ecumenical dialogue with the committee praised the statement for the resilient solidarity it signifies to the Jewish community.

“Reminds the Jewish community that we are not alone, that US Catholic leadership understands resurgent antisemitism as a threat to Jews”

“The main emotion with the statement is gratitude,” said Rabbi Allyson Zacharoff, representative of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association in the National Council of Synagogues.

“Knowing that the bishops, that the Church, is so willing to speak in such a strong way against antisemitism is incredibly fulfilling, incredibly gratifying,” Rabbi Zacharoff told *Catholic News Service*.

Rabbi Noam Marans, director of

interreligious and intergroup relations at the American Jewish Committee, wrote in an email that the statement “reminds the Jewish community that we are not alone, that US Catholic leadership understands resurgent antisemitism as a threat to Jews”.

He also said that antisemitism must be addressed by “all peoples, including, perhaps especially, the faith community”.

Inspiration

The bishops’ statement draws its inspiration from *Nostra Aetate* (“In Our Time”), the Second Vatican Council’s 1965 declaration on the relationship between the Catholic Church and non-Catholic faiths. It explains that over six decades the committee has built partnerships with the National Council of Synagogues, the Orthodox Union and the newly established Modern Orthodox group.

“In each of these exchanges, leaders in the Catholic and Jewish faiths have learned to encounter each other in a spirit of good will and a sincere desire to encourage our respective faithful to live together in a society increasingly diverse in its racial, ethnic, religious and political makeup,” the committee said.

However, the statement continued, such lessons “are being challenged by the re-emergence of antisemitism in new forms” in online and in-person settings.

Quoting Pope Francis’s 2013

address to the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations, where he said, “a true Christian cannot be an antisemite,” the nine bishops cautioned that Christians “must be ever vigilant of the various ways” in which hatred and violence arise.

The committee members said that Jewish and Christian religious traditions have a “shared spiritual patrimony” that provides the foundation for the strong relations existing among the two communities.

“Rabbi Zacharoff agreed, telling CNS that she viewed the Vatican Council document as the foundation to continue bolstering Jewish-Catholic relations”

Again citing *Nostra Aetate*, the committee explained that the Catholic Church always must work to protect the root from which the two religions grew and from which the Church “continues to draw sustenance as all await in varied ways the coming of the Messiah”.

Further, the committee said: “We affirm that the Jewish people cannot be held responsible for the death of Christ or be depicted as rejected or accursed in theological discourse. It must always be remembered that Jesus, Mary, and the apostles were

all Jewish,” the committee said.

In addition, the panel reiterated its long-held stance of supporting a “just political solution” that recognises “Israel living in peace alongside a viable and independent Palestine.”

The committee added that it continues to seek ways to “foster bonds of friendship between members of the Body of Christ and the Jewish people” and remains recommitted to broadening the implementation and teaching found within *Nostra Aetate*.

Rabbi Marans credited the years of effort among Catholics to live out the values expressed in *Nostra Aetate* for leading to the committee’s “powerful call” against antisemitism.

“Without this half century of Catholic-Jewish progress post *Nostra Aetate*, we would be stuck in millennia-long enmity,” Rabbi Marans wrote.

Rabbi Zacharoff agreed, telling CNS that she viewed the Vatican Council document as the foundation to continue bolstering Jewish-Catholic relations.

Both rabbis also called for continued efforts to share the message of *Nostra Aetate* in churches and synagogues as well as in political, educational and corporate settings.

“We have a tremendous ally in Pope Francis, who has been consistently and forcefully outspoken in the battle against antisemitism,” Rabbi Marans said. “Pope Francis’ example in this is emulated by the USCCB in their new statement and beyond.”

Letters

Letter of the week

Christmas is about Christ, end of story

Dear Editor, The whitewashing of even the word Christmas from events organised by some Government bodies – despite clearly being Christmas festivals/markets – is deeply concerning. Well done for highlighting it on your front page [*The Irish Catholic* – December 1, 2022].

It is sad to see the values on which Ireland as we know it was built, the values of the founders of the Republic, are being run roughshod over in such a way. Attempts to airbrush Christ out of Christmas, and also the rebranding of Christmas events as 'winter' events will continue to increase and must be publicly denounced and opposed at every turn. Now is not the time for

complacency or before anyone knows it Ireland's growing secularisation will continue to envelop Christmas, pushing its true meaning further from people's minds.

Already the rampant materialism during Christmas and a huge focus on Santa has meant fewer young people are hearing the story of Christ's humble birth in a manger so long ago. This is what Christmas is about, not the latest gaming console or new smartphone.

The celebration means so much more when the focus is on Christ, being close to him and to family. When this is put at the forefront the presents stop being the main focus of the day.

This is what secularist politicians are taking from people. The likes of People Before Profit seem determined to remove the Catholic Church from the public sphere, from any public forum in which it can express the Church's message. They do not know the joy of which they are depriving people.

While the Church has a difficult history in Ireland, the attempts to totally demonise the Church and those who stand for Christ is abhorrent.

Christmas is about Christ, end of story.

*Yours etc.,
Pat Kelly
Drogheda, Co. Meath*

Let young people enjoy their childhood

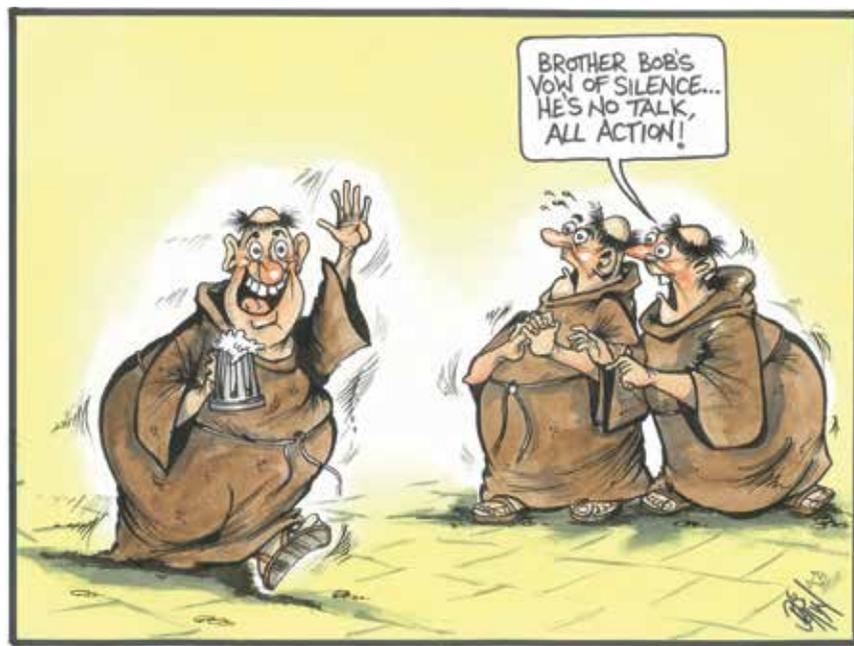
Dear Editor, I wish to admonish RTÉ for its excessive, over the top coverage of the crimes committed by Spiritan priests.

Joe Duffy has spent a full hour over successive days, highlighting these crimes.

It is very unfair to children attending these schools today, hearing horrible stories about their own schools and undermining their confidence. Older people shouldn't put their problems onto young children.

Let them enjoy their childhood and their youthful idealism and enthusiasm without being burdened with our generation's problems.

RTÉ is also bringing much pain and hurt on ordinary Catholics who have to hear it non-stop on every news programme for the last two weeks. We recognise and condemn the past generation's sins but we don't recognise



and condemn our own sins.

Mr Duffy never reports on crimes committed today, the killing of unborn babies. Why does Joe not try to find out where these babies' bodies are buried?

Mr Duffy does not investigate the surrogacy slave trade in babies.

*Yours etc.,
John F. Hyland
Killiney, Co. Dublin*

Struggle to find substitute teachers

Dear Editor, It seems to be a continuing issue that schools, particularly in Dublin, are struggling to find substitute teachers [*The Irish Catholic* – December 1, 2022]. This puts huge strain on the teachers in the schools who have to then cover for colleagues when they are on annual leave.

The seriousness of the situation was of course highlighted in your paper by the Catholic Primary Schools

Management Association, who said there will need to be a marketing and communication campaign to attract more teachers, even saying they will need to ask retired teachers if they are able to return.

The problem will not even be close to being solved until the housing crisis is alleviated. Extortionate rents continue to have ripple effects across all society, with the lack of substi-

tute teachers being one.

It makes sense that young teachers may instead opt to stay in rural areas where they can afford rents and even save up for a mortgage. It seems Dublin is only hospitable to the very high-earners, such as those in tech or finance jobs who are able to rake in bucket-loads of cash. A teacher, who moulds young minds and prepares the young people of today

for the world, is every bit as important and this must be recognised – they have just as much of a right to be able to afford to live in Dublin on their salaries. A lack of substitutes has further ripple effects and may even affect the quality of education a school is able to deliver, this is not healthy.

*Yours etc.,
Tony O'Farrell
Swords, Dublin 15*

Britain ignoring wishes of Troubles victims

Dear Editor, The British Government is once again cruelly ignoring the wishes of people effected by the Troubles, as highlighted by Baroness Nuala O'Loan [*The Irish Catholic* – December 1].

The Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill is a farce and serves only those who do not wish to be prosecuted for their crimes. As Baroness O'Loan states so well, it is not supported

in the North and fundamentally lets down victims and strips them of their legal rights.

It is incredible there is a determination in Westminster to further the legislation despite political parties in Stormont rejecting it. Devolution can not work when there is no Executive and one must be established as soon as possible or Westminster will continue making laws for the North above the heads of voters, just like they did

with their abortion law.

The bill will not bring justice and victims deserve a whole lot better than what they are getting. Currently the British government continues to show little interest in the hopes and wishes of the people in the North.

*Yours etc.,
John Duffy
Newtownabbey, Co. Antrim*

facebook community

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

Why anti-Catholicism seems to be on the rise

This needs to be challenged. Mainstream media promotes this. Stop buying their narrative. – **Marcus O'Mochain**

Anti-Catholicism is being driven by mainstream media all the time. – **Mary Duggan Murphy**

People looking for an excuse not to practice. – **Edel Jones**

Family delight as 'extraordinary' Fr Willie Doyle cause is opened

Get his book and read it what an extraordinary man, if he was anything other than a priest he would be a national hero. – **Bill Houlihan**

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

Communion on tongue: a hygiene vs reverence conflict

Dear Editor, Last Saturday, I visited a well-known Irish place of pilgrimage for Mass. I saw an elderly lady using two crutches and supporting herself using both hands and arms being refused Holy Communion on the tongue.

I am conscious that some would prefer communion to be given exclusively on the tongue, and some, exclusively on the hand, but, while Church teaching prefers the former, both are ordinarily permitted.

I observe an apparent conflict between hygiene and reverence, or, as in the case above, between hygiene and charitable common sense. However surely both can in theory as well as in practice be alleviated with good catechesis regarding the true and real presence in Blessed Sacrament and good training regarding the manual dexterity required in its distribution while respecting both Church teaching and the preferences of communicants. There are reasons why everyone should hesitate before presenting for Communion: being on crutches or holding a sleeping baby in one's arms should not be amongst them.

*Yours etc.,
Diarmaid Ó Conghaile
Headford, Co. Galway*

Letters to the Editor

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

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

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

Your Faith

The Irish Catholic, December 8, 2022

Lindsey Weishar

Advent: Allowing ourselves to be bathed in the light of heaven

Page 32



Inviting God into our children's play



How many Catholic parents over the years have longed to see their children engage with the Faith with the same degree of enthusiasm as they engage with their play? While I don't have the answer to that, it's probably a fair guess to say that many, many parents and guardians have struggled to find ways to introduce the children in their charge to the Faith in an age-appropriate way.

Spirituality and play need not be opposed, though, as 'Godly Play' is seeking to demonstrate. Developed in close relationship with the 'Catechesis of the Good Shepherd' method of nourishing childhood spirituality, Godly Play was founded by an Episco-



Godly Play seeks to help children explore their innate spirituality in a Scripture-centric way, writes Jason Osborne

palian priest, Jerome Berryman, a renowned Christian education specialist.

Godly Play

To explain more about the history, nature and results of Godly Play, Director of the Mater Dei Centre for Catholic Education at DCU and keen proponent of Godly Play, Professor Cora O'Farrell spoke to *The Irish*

Catholic.

"It's rooted in Montessori principles," Prof. O'Farrell begins, continuing, "it comes from the Montessori tradition. [Maria] Montessori was actually a very keen religious educator – that's not something that she's renowned for, but she was, in her early school, she had a chapel and she wrote about religious education and she wrote

about the child and the Church.

"It was she who had scaled down furniture for children. She'd have the children working at an altar, using Eucharistic materials, liturgical materials – she was a very keen religious educator. That got lost when her message spread throughout the world into lots of different contexts."

Moving on to Rome in the 1950s, another woman is key in the landscape of childhood religious education, and that's Hebrew Scripture scholar Sofia Cavaletti.

"She was asked to prepare, some relation of her's, or a neighbour's, child, to prepare them for First Communion and she wasn't a teacher but what

she did with the child was she sat down and read the Bible with them. She was so bowled over by the capacity of the child to engage with Scripture that she wanted to do more with this. So she collaborated with a woman called Gianna Gobbi and together they developed a curriculum called 'Catechesis of the Good Shepherd'," Prof. O'Farrell explains.

Montessori

Gianna Gobbi was a practitioner of Montessori's style of education, and with Ms Cavaletti's academic/Scripture background, they collaborated.

"Move on to a little bit later then and you have an Episcopalian priest called Jerome

» Continued from Page 29

Berryman from Denver, Colorado. He travelled to Bergamo in Italy to study the Montessori approach to education and while he's there, he encounters Sofia Cavaletti and the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and he's bowled over by it. He comes home and he adapts the methodology and – they're very subtle differences between them – and he adapts it and it grew into his curriculum called 'Godly Play'."

Because of the common links between the development of these programmes, Maria Montessori's notion of the child as "spiritual embryo" is to be found right at the centre of both Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and Godly Play. "Montessori's legacy is amazing because she had such an elevated view of the child and the capacity of the child," as Prof. O'Farrell says, adding that she had a sense of the childhood spiritual capacity long before later studies confirmed as much.

“The first would be ‘Sacred Stories’, and that encompasses Old Testament, New Testament, and then he has a specific genre, ‘Parables’”

To allow children that space and opportunity to explore their spiritual side, both Sofia Cavaletti and Jerome Berryman unpacked that idea further and developed "actual curricula" based off of it.

"Godly Play's [curriculum] is what's called the four genres. Jerome Berryman says the primary purpose of Godly Play is to make meaning, and he talks about learning the art of Christian language. For him it's language learning as well. So he has these four genres. The first would be 'Sacred Stories', and that encompasses Old Testament, New Testament, and then he has a specific genre, 'Parables'. His third genre then is 'Liturgical Resources' and then finally, the fourth genre is 'Silence'....that's a huge, important part of it," Prof. O'Farrell says.

"The materials are a very important part of Godly Play, as they are with all of Montessori, so order, and beautiful materials that are made from natural materials... wood, felt. Very attractive, very durable, that the children can work with. So nothing is out of reach for the children, it's all children's materials as well."

The methodology of an ideal Godly Play session is where the children go into a "special space" and Scripture is played out with Godly Play materials and they're all in their particular order, Prof. O'Farrell tells me.

"It's the notion of 'crossing the threshold'. So it's crossing a threshold into a different space. As you cross that threshold, you're met at the door by somebody who



An example of potential Godly Play figures.

has the role of 'doorperson' – a very clunky title, but that's what it is. So the doorperson greets each child at the door and asks them the question, 'Are you ready for Godly Play?' Which seems, kind of, a trite question, but actually children come to know what it means in terms of coming into a special space, I'm going to hear a story, I'm going to listen respectfully and allow other people to listen as well, to honour silence and all that."

Storyteller

"So they come into the room and as they come into the room, the storyteller is already seated on the ground and the children are then formed into a circle, so they find a space and they sit in a circle and the next part of the Godly Play session then is called 'building the circle', so it's connecting with children, checking in," with them through questions such as 'how are you doing, how are you?', Prof. O'Farrell explains.

"Then the story is told. There's a sense of curiosity as to which story is going to be told, so the storyteller gets up and walks around the room. The tagline for Godly Play is, 'I wonder?' The storyteller will start out, 'I wonder which story we're going to tell today?' and will go around the room and pick out which story is going to be told, then come back, and then there's a very specific methodology around how the story is told. Berryman has written scripts for each of the stories,

and this is where it's a deviation from Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. So these scripts are readily available. The storyteller will have learnt script by heart and there are specific gestures and movements of materials that are given, and you tell the story using that."

“She says that she's truly seen the ‘Spirit at work’ in the use of Godly Play, and that while its practice in Ireland is currently scattered, it's solid, and growing all of the time”

Here Prof. O'Farrell suggests checking out the official Godly Play Youtube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/@TheGodlyPlayFoundation>), to see recordings of Godly Play sessions, admitting that they're very difficult to convey through words alone.

The key being to draw children into the sacred story being told, storytellers keep their eyes on the story, which is being played out using the child-friendly materials,



Professor Cora O'Farrell.

which encourages the children to do the same.

"It's so invitational. After the story is presented to the children, they're asked 'wondering questions'. So for example, for the Sacred Stories, the wondering questions are: 'I wonder which part of the story is your favourite?', 'I wonder which part of the story is most important?' As opposed to the normal questions we ask, like 'What's the most important part of the story?' where I have an answer in mind and you have to supply

me with the answer....there's a real playfulness with it," Professor O'Farrell says.

She says that she's truly seen the "Spirit at work" in the use of Godly Play, and that while its practice in Ireland is currently scattered, it's solid, and growing all of the time.

i For more information about Godly Play, visit www.godlyplayireland.com or email godlyplayireland@gmail.com

A charming and moral tale of true love

Faith in film



Ruadhán Jones

Last week, I wrote about how great art can turn our eyes to God to appreciate his beauty. But not everything has to be deep and serious to warrant our attention. Light, sincere films can be just as effective, and that includes the humble rom-com (romantic comedy) genre.

“It’s a light, funny rom-com with good performances, a witty script and a morality more substantial than most”

Now, this genre often encourages behaviours quite contrary to the virtues needed for a good relationship. There is a long list of partners and spouses jilted as the man or woman discovers ‘true love’ with the exciting and physically attractive love interest. ‘Romance’ becomes about physical excitement, more so than a lasting commitment that flourishes over time.

But there are rom-coms out there that offer something more robust, while still being the entertaining, pleasant films we go to see. One such example is *Just Like Heaven* from 2005, starring Mark Ruffalo and Reese Witherspoon.

Ruffalo plays a washed up 30-something-year-old dealing with a past trauma who is shocked to find that the new apartment he is renting already has a resident, of a seemingly ghostly nature. When it turns out that Reese Witherspoon’s exacting, but sweet, ghost is actually the spirit of a woman in a coma, the two have to bang heads together to figure out how to wake her up.

Reese Witherspoon and Mark Ruffalo star in the subtle rom-com *Just Like Heaven*.



It’s a light, funny rom-com with good performances, a witty script and a morality more substantial than most. *Just Like Heaven* is actually about forming a strong emotional and, it definitely could be argued, spiritual connection with a person before you begin a physical relationship.

Clever hook
That’s down to the clever hook, which I’ve already described. They can’t get involved physically because one’s a ghost and the other’s a man; but they can fall in love.

And so you get a strange rom-com that’s about the chastening of desire. It’s about the fateful connection that brought two people together, and about the discipline

it takes to make that relationship work. The carnal or sexual element is addressed, but more obliquely, in a clever sequence where a sensual young woman tempts Ruffalo’s character, David Abbott.

She is the antithesis of Witherspoon’s character, Dr Liz Masterson. While Liz is intelligent and reserved, this fairly predatory young woman is forthright about her interest in David.

“She’s there as a temptation for David, the warmth of her presence and her physicality”

At first she’s a silly, shallow woman, the butt of some rebarbative humour and doesn’t interest David at all. But then there’s a twist – she knows she’s forthright, but she likes Ruffalo’s character and she’s lonely.

She’s there as a temptation for David, the warmth of her presence and her physicality. Even Liz says he should go with her. It’s an important moment where either David resists and commits to Liz, or gives in to his desire. His decision is a reminder of the film’s moral stance on relationships.

As well as having a strong moral chore, *Just Like Heaven* is funny and touching. It will have you laughing – not boisterously, but consistently – from the first few minutes. It’s a very well-paced film as well, dealing with a fairly serious topic – a life-altering tragedy – with a gentleness that wins you over.

For the first two-thirds of the film, you have the mystery of is Liz a ghost, or isn’t she. You have the humour of a somewhat depressive, slovenly man getting an apartment with a neat, exacting spirit. Then there is the usual clash of character for the first half, while the second is about their working together.

But either way, exposition is often done through humour, making sure the unnatural situation is rendered natural, a job aided in particular by the excellent Jon Heder. His ‘righteous’ performance (you will know what I mean after you watch the film) as a stoner-type who has the gift of sensing an otherworldly presence is pitch-perfect. He makes what could have been a wobbly plot line into the most natural, human thing.

Thankfully the film steers clear of both the crude physical humour and the mawkish sentimentality typical of most romantic comedies. That’s not to say it isn’t moving, however. For the last third, the laughs are not as frequent. Having had the humour, now we have the drama and it is touching.

“It’s film ultimately about the reality of fate, of an unseen hand guiding our encounters”

Will Ruffalo be able to save Witherspoon? Or does she simply have to accept her fate? This tension is worked out in the last third, with both finding a resolution. The love that blossoms is tender and with a small gesture – the two lovers almost-touching palms – there is a hint of a spiritual connection, of the fullest kind of love.

I don’t want to overstate the case too much, but as the title hints, there are some metaphysical themes at work here. It’s a film ultimately about the reality of fate, of an unseen hand guiding our encounters. Either we relent and give ourselves over to our guide or else we resist. And as the film brings out in its clever hook, this is a matter of life or death.

Saint — of the — week

By Jason Osborne



A statue depicting Mary, the Mother of God.

The Mother of God: Queen of saints

It wouldn’t have been proper to focus on anyone else this week other than Mary, the Mother of God. The Church celebrates on December 8 the Solemnity of her Immaculate Conception, which is such a momentous occasion that it’s a holy day of obligation – meaning that Catholics must attend Mass that day. Standing head and shoulders above the saints, as Queen of Heaven and Mother of God, Mary occupies a unique place in the life of the Church.

The Latin terms, *latria*, *dulia* and *hyperdulia* indicate the proper regard Christians give to God, the saints and Mary respectively. The fact that Mary has a category of her own is a sign of the privileged place she occupies for the Faithful. *Latria* refers to “worship”, which of course we as Catholics direct solely towards God. *Dulia* is a term signifying the honour and respect we pay to the saints, while *hyperdulia* speaks of the exceeding veneration we offer to Mary.

Why does Mary deserve such love, devotion and attention? The reasons for this are too many to fit into one column, but the Church raises our minds

to at least one of these mysterious reasons with the Feast of the Immaculate Conception – Mary was preserved from original sin from the moment of her conception by a miraculous work of God.

Unlike every other person who’s ever lived (other than Christ), including all of the other saints, to become the Mother of God, Mary was granted an unprecedented gift from God that she might be up to the task. By virtue of her absolutely unique relationship with Christ, God the Father granted from the moment of her conception that she wouldn’t labour under original sin, and continued to provide her with the grace she needed to ensure she’d continue through life without personal sin, either.

While some have argued that the Immaculate Conception makes Mary remote, untouchable and unrelatable, Pope Francis has said quite the opposite in relation to this miraculous development in salvation history

“But we have all been predestined, we have all been filled with every blessing, we have all been chosen to be holy and immaculate. We do not only ‘admire’ the Virgin Mary, therefore, with tender-

ness and awe. We are also asked to ‘imitate’ her so that God’s beauty might shine on the earth thanks to the many ‘yesses’ that men and women continue to say today after the example and intercession of Mary, the Immaculate One.”

Mary was a young woman thrust into what was undoubtedly an overwhelming, awe-inspiring, scary, confusing and uncertain situation when the archangel Gabriel asked her to bear God’s Son. It’s no wonder she had to be prepared in advance by an outpouring of God’s goodness and grace so that she could give her “yes” to her unique place in his plan.

While there is much, much more to be said about God’s mother, and our mother, as the Church teaches, there are many more occasions throughout the liturgical calendar to say it. At this time of year, though, we celebrate Mary’s faithful use of God’s miraculous gifts to her, and we ask for her intercession, that we might say “yes” after her example to allowing Christ be born in all of our lives.

Advent: Allowing ourselves to be bathed in the light of heaven



Lindsey Weishar

I love the hymns that accompany us through the Advent season. A term I sometimes hear used for them is 'haunting.'

Some are played in minor keys, which fills them with a special mystery, a particular kind of longing. I think haunting is such an appropriate word as the earliest usage of the word haunt meant 'place frequently visited' in the noun form and 'to practice habitually...take part in.'

“The hymn focuses on the Annunciation, the moment Gabriel greets Mary and invites her to become the mother of God”

There's a sense of returning home, to the origins of our faith, to ourselves.

One song that particularly

speaks to the origins of our story as Christians is adapted from an old Basque hymn, *The Angel Gabriel From Heaven Came*.

I remember first hearing this song during an Advent concert in our church as a child, and it was indeed haunting, a place I wanted to inhabit, a place I still sometimes return to in memory.

In *The Angel Gabriel From Heaven Came*, poetry, like a gilded thread, is interwoven with longing for Christ's coming.

The hymn focuses on the Annunciation, the moment Gabriel greets Mary and invites her to become the mother of God. In the first verse, he is presented in mysterious, yet vivid terms:

"The angel Gabriel from heaven came, / His wings as drifted snow, his eyes as flame; / 'All hail,' said he, 'Thou lowly maiden Mary, / Most highly favored lady,' Gloria!"

Hearing his wings described as 'drifted snow' makes me think of a creature larger than life, incredibly glorious, but also one that is not "tame" in the most Narnian sense of the word.

Cold and heat

The juxtaposition of cold and heat, and the intensity of light that emanates from both snow and flame highlights the difference between Gabriel and the 'lowly maiden Mary,' who is, by the mystery of God, the favoured one.

'Most highly favoured lady' is repeated as the last line in all four verses of this song, which takes us through Gabriel's message, Mary's fiat and then into our own time. Mary's 'yes' to God's vision for carrying and bearing the One who has come to redeem all mankind is worth pondering over:

"Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head, / 'To me be as it pleaseth God,' she said, / 'My soul shall laud and magnify his holy name.' / Most highly favoured lady, Gloria!"

Mary's fiat offers us a spiritual light by which we can see the glory of preparing his room. At this moment, she agrees to carry "the light (that) shines in the darkness," the One of whom we can say "and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5).

Bathed in the heavenly light of Gabriel's presence, Mary makes her Magnificat, a promise to make ever larger for us "the true light, which...was coming into the world" (John 1:9).

From this haunting hymn comes the greatest truth - God makes a home in Mary, and she in turn intimately takes part in his life in her.

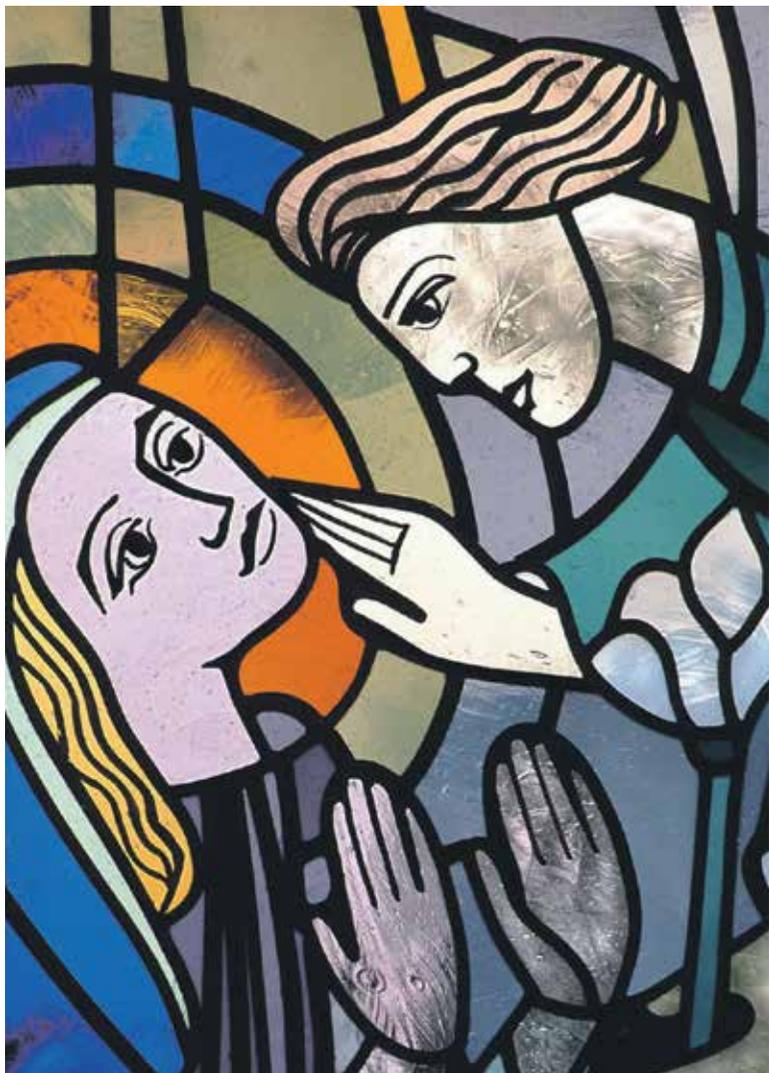
“We honour the 'most highly favoured lady' who desires to lead us into the brilliant light of Christmas by carrying Christ our light into the world”

As we continue this Advent season, we are called to rediscover our truest home - in Christ, the one who wishes to make his home in each of our hearts. In a world where hope is often a precious light to which we must accustom our eyes, the truth contained in the final verse of this hymn burns as brightly as an ancient star:

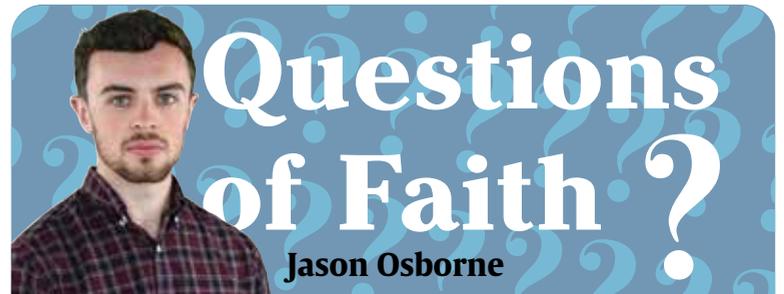
"Of her, Emmanuel, the Christ, was born / In Bethlehem, all on a Christmas morn, / And Christian folk throughout the world will ever say / 'Most highly favoured lady,' Gloria!"

Perhaps we cannot quite grasp the immense illumination the Annunciation contained - the almost blinding brilliance of Gabriel and the deeply enkindled heart of the Virgin, but this hymn bears witness to the fact that we are all called, like Mary to "laud and magnify his holy name."

We honour the "most highly favoured lady" who desires to lead us into the brilliant light of Christmas by carrying Christ our light into the world.



In this church window depicting the Annunciation, the angel Gabriel appears before Mary to proclaim that she is to be the mother of Jesus. Photo: CNS



Jason Osborne

Does God hear our prayers?

Faith in the power of prayer has been shaken in recent years. Unanswered prayers have left many wondering if there's anyone listening to them at all, and if not, what's the point in maintaining the practice? If we ask for things - good things - and God doesn't grant them, what does that say of him?

In order to answer whether God hears our prayers, it's important to first understand what prayer is, and the key to that is the sense of prayer as a "gift" from God. This may seem a little counterintuitive - after all, don't we pray in order to receive gifts from God? While that's certainly the widespread understanding of prayer, it's also unfortunately the widespread misunderstanding of it.

Prayer is a gift from God in that it's the 'place' God has given us to encounter him and be drawn into his life - which is ultimately what the entirety of the Christian endeavour is about. St Therese of Lisieux said that for her, "prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy".

This might sound a little different from the simple petitions that most of us associate with prayer. While those are certainly an important element of prayer, St Therese's definition gets closer to the heart of what it's about. Prayer is most fundamentally about our relationship with God; it's about living more in Christ, and realising our primary identities as sons and daughters of our heavenly Father.

The Catechism tells us that "prayer is the living relationship of the children of God with their Father who is good beyond measure, with his Son Jesus Christ and with the Holy Spirit...Thus, the life of prayer is the habit of being in the presence of the thrice-holy God and in communion with him" (CCC 2565).

If this sounds a little bit like the definition of heaven I offered in this column two weeks ago, you'd be correct in thinking so. The purpose of the gift of prayer is to bring us into relationship with our Creator, which is what we desperately need as created beings. Not only do we desperately need that relationship, it is also our fulfilment and our greatest happiness.

If the purpose and fulfilment of our existence is to be "conformed to the image of" Christ, prayer is the bridge God establishes between us and him in order to make it happen. St Paul says in his letter to the Romans that "the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us". This is simply another way of say-



ing that left to our own devices, we wouldn't be able to reach out to God.

Fortunately, though, "prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours" (CCC 2560). We pray, because God urges us to do so, supplementing our blind seeking for him and his good things with his Holy Spirit. C.S. Lewis paints a beautiful picture of the Trinity at work in prayer when he says that we strive towards the Father, with the God-man Jesus Christ as our bridge, and the Holy Spirit as the wind in our sails, powering us on our way home.

With that understanding of prayer, it's easier to see that asking our Father for things is certainly an important part of prayer, but that it isn't the entirety of it. As with any relationship, prayer as our relationship with God takes different forms. Just as we request, thank, spend time with and do things with others, so too do we do so with God in prayer. Petitionary prayer, prayers of thanksgiving, prayers of praise, devotional prayer (such as the rosary or Divine Mercy chaplet), adoration, meditative prayer, contemplative prayer and the Mass are just some of the many ways we offer God our minds and hearts, our time and attention.

Prayer is most fundamentally about our relationship with God, and our relationship with God is most fundamentally about two things: giving God our hearts, minds and bodies as he deserves, and allowing him to transform us into the saints he created us to be. Once prayer is understood this way, it at least becomes a little easier to see why some 'requests' are answered and others aren't. God hears and sees every moment of our lives, and loves to reach out to us in every moment of prayer, but he isn't, as some spiritual authors have put it, a 'cosmic slot machine'.

He grants that which is truly good for us and for those we pray for, even if his divine logic can be very difficult and painful to follow sometimes. But even when he denies us or seems absent, he's surely present, loving and transforming us by the very same prayer that rises from our hearts.

Jesus' dysfunctional ancestry

The rose window in the Basilica of Saint-Denis, Paris, depicting the ancestors of Jesus from Jesse onwards. Photo: David Iliff.

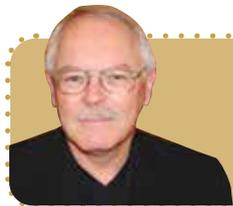
The full story of how Jesus Christ came to be born includes elements that we do not easily imagine when we sing our Christmas hymns. Jesus' family tree and bloodline were far from perfect and this, according to the renowned biblical scholar, Raymond Brown, needs to be kept in mind whenever we are tempted to believe in Jesus, but want to reject the Church because of its imperfections, scandals, and bad history.

“We see, for example, in Jesus' genealogy a number of men who didn't exactly incarnate the love, justice, and purity of Jesus”

Jesus may have been miraculously conceived. However, as the gospels make clear, there is much in his origins that is as jolting as any contemporary Church scandal.

For example, in giving us the origins of Jesus, the gospels point to as many sinners, liars, and schemers in his genetic and historical lineage as they do to saints, honest people, and men and women of faith.

We see, for example, in Jesus' genealogy a number of men who didn't exactly incarnate the love, justice, and purity of Jesus. Abraham unfairly banished Ishmael and his mother, Hagar, rationalising that God favours some people over



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

others; Jacob, by scheming and dishonesty, stole his brother Esau's birthright; and David, to whom Jesus explicitly connects himself, committed adultery and then had the husband of his mistress murdered to cover-up an unwanted pregnancy and in order to marry her.

Moreover, the women mentioned in Jesus' background don't fare much better. It is interesting to note, as Raymond Brown does, which women don't get mentioned in reference to Jesus' origins. The gospels don't mention Sarah, Rebekah, or Rachel, all of whom were regarded as holy women. Whom do they mention?

They mention Tamar, a Canaanite woman, someone outside the Jewish faith, who seduces her father-in-law, Judah, so that she can have a child. They mention Rahab, also a Canaanite woman, and an

outsider, who is in fact a prostitute. Next, they mention Ruth, a Moabite woman who is also outside the official religion of the time. Then they mention Bathsheba, a Hittite woman, an outsider who commits adultery with David and then schemes to make sure one of her own offspring inherits the throne.

Scandalous

All of these women found themselves in a situation of marriage or pregnancy that was either strange or scandalous, yet each was an important divine instrument in preserving the religious heritage that gave us Jesus. It is no accident that the gospels link these women to Mary, Jesus' mother, since she too found herself in a ritually taboo pregnancy and in a marital situation that was peculiar.

Further still, beyond these less-than-saintly characters in Jesus'

lineage, we see as well that some of the institutions that shaped the Jewish faith were also less than saintly. Institutionalised religion back then suffered from many of the same problems it has today, including the corrupt use of power. Indeed, Israel itself (perhaps justifying the deed by referring to what Jacob had done to Esau) seized the land of Canaan from those who had a prior claim to it, claiming ownership by divine privilege.

Finally, and not insignificantly, we see too that the lineage that gave us Jesus built itself up not just on the great and the talented, but equally on the poor and insignificant. In the list of names that makes up the ancestors of Jesus, we see some that are famous but also others who can make no claim to specialness or significance. Jesus' human blood, scripture tells us, was produced equally by the great and the small, the talented and the talentless.

What's to be learned for all of this? Perhaps Raymond Brown captures it best. What all this tells us, he says, is that God writes straight with crooked lines, that we shouldn't accept an overly idealised

Christ, and that our own lives, even if they are marked by weakness and insignificance, are important too in continuing the story of the incarnation.

As Brown puts it: “The God who wrote the beginnings with crooked lines also writes the sequence with crooked lines, and some of those lines are our own lives and witness. A God who did not hesitate to use the scheming as well as the noble, the impure as well as the pure, men to whom the world harkened and women upon whom the world frowned – this God continues to work through the same mélange. If it is a challenge to recognise in the last part of Matthew's genealogy that totally unknown people were part of the story of Jesus Christ, it may be a greater challenge to recognise that the unknown characters of today are an essential part of the sequence.”

The humble

Christianity isn't just for the pure, the talented, the good, the humble, and the honest. The story of Jesus Christ was also written and keeps being written by the impure, by sinners, by calculating schemers, by the proud, by the dishonest, and by those without worldly talents. Nobody is so bad, so insignificant, so devoid of talent, or so outside the circle of faith, that he or she is outside the story of Christ.

“Institutionalised religion back then suffered from many of the same problems it has today, including the corrupt use of power”

Rejoice, the Lord is near

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice.

Indeed, the Lord is near.”

This is the entrance antiphon for the Third Sunday of Advent, known as Gaudete Sunday, a day to rejoice.

I am intrigued by the prominence of the letter ‘w’ in Advent...winter, wonder, wilderness, waiting and the womb of Mary.

As we come closer to Christmas we are waiting. Mary too was waiting while the child in her womb was growing. Waiting can be experienced as time stolen or time given. Time stolen can make us impatient, anxious, fearful, agitated or angry as in road-rage.

“God is coming to us each day, reaching out to us with life, light and love”

Time given is an opportunity for excitement to grow as the song popularised by Mario Lanza put it, “like a child when a birthday is near”. Patience does not come easily to us today, spoiled as we are by instant light or heat at the flick of a switch, instant communication with a faraway continent, instant tablets for the relief of pain. St James, in today’s second reading tells us to be patient until the Lord’s coming. Think how the farmer has to wait patiently for the seeds he has sown to produce fruit.

Carlo Carretto wrote a book entitled *The God Who Comes*. God is coming to us each day, reaching out to us with life, light and love. Our Advent prophets, Isaiah and John the Baptist, reminded the people of their day that God had not deserted them. Isaiah kept hope alive for a nation in forced exile. “Strengthen all weary hands, steady all trembling knees and say to all faint hearts, ‘Courage! Do not be afraid’. Look your God is coming, vengeance is coming, the retribution of God: he is coming to save you.”

Retribution and vengeance: these are dirty words. There are two ways of facing the evils of the world, the apocalyptic approach or the prophetic attitude. The apocalyptic voice says that things are so bad that God will wreak vengeance and people will pay for it (retribution). But what is Isaiah’s idea of

The Sunday Gospel

Fr Silvester O’Flynn OFM Cap.



retribution? “He is coming to save you.” God’s way of retribution is to destroy sin by the conversion of the sinner. The task of the prophet is to unveil the presence of God even in the difficult time when it seems that evil has conquered.

John the Baptist identified Jesus as the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. Indeed, the name Jesus means one who saves. After confronting King Herod for taking the wife of his brother, John was imprisoned in Machaerus, a fortress on a high mountain. It must have been a frustrating time for a man accustomed to open spaces, fresh air and food supplied by nature. Now he wanted assurance that Jesus really was the Someone-is-Coming he had promised. He sent some friends to clarify the issue. “Are you the one who is to come, or have we got to wait for someone else?” Jesus let his actions speak for themselves. He was fulfilling what Isaiah had promised. “The eyes of the blind shall be opened, the ears of the deaf unsealed, then the lame shall leap like a deer... everlasting joy on their faces; joy and gladness will go with them and sorrow and lament be ended.” Inspired by these readings, today is called Gaudete Sunday, the Sunday of Joy. Hope in times of darkness is the great virtue of Advent and joy is the daughter of hope.

Pontificate

The first major document of any pope is regarded as an indication of what his pontificate will bring. Pope Francis began with an apostolic exhortation entitled *The Joy of the Gospel*. “The Joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew.” He warns of the danger posed by consumerism with its must-have advertising, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience. “I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this moment to a renewed



The third candle is lit to represent Gaudete Sunday. Photo: CNS

personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them. No one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord.”

St Paul VI also wrote about Christian joy. He identified three steps to joy, namely, giving, seeing and believing.

Giving...for it is in giving that we receive and God loves the cheerful giver.

“In one location the lighting was very poor but she persuaded the team to continue”

Seeing...having eyes that see what is beautiful and wonderful.

Believing...what a beautiful religion we have with the teaching of Jesus Christ, his presence in the Blessed Eucharist, divine mercy, the power of the Holy Spirit. And, the Good News of the Resurrection.

The great saint of our time surely was Mother Teresa of Kolkata. Her work was revealed to the world by a television film produced by Malcom Muggeridge. He

experienced a little miracle while filming. In one location the lighting was very poor but she persuaded the team to continue. Guess what...this episode outshone every other scene in the film! In his book, *Something Beautiful for God*, Muggeridge wrote about her joy.

“Joy is prayer – joy is strength – joy is love – joy is a net of love by which you can catch souls. God loves a cheerful giver. He or she gives most who gives with joy. The best way to show gratitude to God is to accept everything with joy. A joyful heart is the normal result of a heart burning with love. Never let anything so fill you with sorrow as to make you forget the joy of Christ risen.”

Advent is a time of joyful waiting...waiting in hope for Someone-is-Coming. Advent’s hope is the mother of joy.

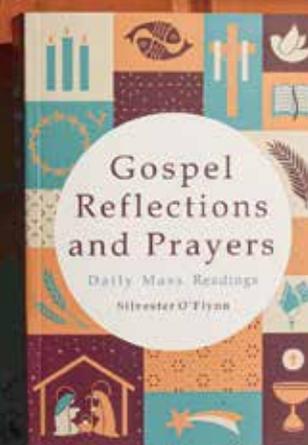
“Rejoice in the Lord, rejoice. Again I say ‘Rejoice’. The Lord is near” (Phil. 4: 4-5).

Advent Prayer (Edwina Gately)

Be silent...be still...alone...before your God.
Say nothing...Ask nothing...Be silent...Be still.
Let your God look upon you. That is all.
God knows. God understands. God loves you with an enormous love
And only wants to look upon you with that love.
Quiet...Still...Be.
Let your God love you.

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TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



Shedding light on what will be a bleak Christmas for many

Two items last week captured a telling moment, a sign of the times as we head towards Christmas.

Both items were on **Morning Ireland** (RTÉ Radio One, Tuesday). A report from the Mid-West Simon Community food bank service in Limerick, showed a strong demand. One woman had asked for porridge, with tears in her eyes – just not the way it's supposed to be, said Jackie Leonard, a spokesperson for Simon. Later it was reported that the Society of St Vincent de Paul was reporting similarly high demand for their services – up 20% from last year.

Also, it was reported that the Government was considering the restoration of bankers' bonuses. The intricacies of the financial world aside, the optics were terrible. I don't often find myself agreeing with them, but Sinn Féin's description of it as "tone deaf" was spot on. There was mention of "attracting and retaining talent" as a reason for the move, though I don't hear any talk of bonuses for teachers even though there are much reported shortages in education.

Reasoning

Later, on **Today with Claire Byrne** (RTÉ Radio One), financial journalist Sean Keyes explain the reasoning behind proposed changes (eventually approved by



Many people are forced to turn to food banks as the cost-of-living crisis bites. Photo: CNS

Government) – e.g. the salary or bonuses caps make it harder for best decisions to be made on hugely important matters of state finance, but Paul Murphy TD (People Before Profit) pointed out that when there was no cap before the crash it didn't work – "that led us over a cliff". Sean Keyes responded that currently there was an "iron-clad banking regulatory system" to guard

against past excesses.

Away from reality, I came across two crime drama series of note. I've been warming to **Astrid: Murder in Paris** (More 4, Fridays). After an impressive feature length episode, it has become a crime-of-the-week drama, not my favourite format, but with enough continuous plot threads to keep interest alive. Astrid (Sarah Mortensen) is a high-functioning autistic

worker at a public records office who gets drawn into crime investigation by police woman Raphaëlle (Lola Dewaere) who befriends her. Her autism gives her an eye for detail and patterns that others miss. She is also socially awkward and works in a very structured and routine driven way. The crimes are fairly intriguing but the exploration of autism and relationships is of more interest. There are some very touching scenes when Astrid visits her autism support group – offering insights into their world in a positive and upbeat way. The leads are endearing, a great team, while the secondary roles are well filled. There is some bad language and grim crime scene and autopsy visuals, but it's a step above the average cop show.

Episode

Last Friday's episode was a particularly good one, with quite a few touching relationship moments as well as some quirky humour. One detective, who's often wrong, spoke about the role of zombies in Judeo-Christian culture! He referenced Lazarus and Jesus – hard to know how far his tongue was in his cheek.

The Pact (BBC One, Mondays) finished last week, but should turn up soon on an Irish channel. It is the second season, but with a completely new story and completely new characters

PICK OF THE WEEK

MY LIFE AT CHRISTMAS

BBC One Sunday December 11, 10.30am

Sally Phillips meets poet Lemn Sissay, who spent years in the care system after being taken from his mother as a baby.

1531 – A STORY THAT IS NOT FINISHED YET

EWTN Sunday December 11, 9pm

Docudrama about the apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe as told through the actual testimonies of St Juan Diego, and others.

THE IRISH CIVIL WAR

RTÉ One Sunday December 11, 9.30pm

This three-part documentary series tells the epic and often challenging story of the origins, conflict and legacy of the civil war that took place in Ireland in 1922 and 1923.

– it does have in common the plot device of featuring a group of people agreeing, reluctantly, to cover up a crime. I had reservations about aspects of the ending (no spoilers ahead!) but the last episode was powerful, packing a hefty emotional punch. The acting throughout was excellent, there was a strong warmth towards humanity even as the worst of it was on display at times. Mostly it was well meaning people caught up in awkward situations, often not of their making, but often rationalising bad behaviour.

An adoption plot strand was central. There was one lovely hospital scene where the compromised main character Christine (Rakie Ayola) helped a pregnant unmarried mother who fears she won't be able to cope. There

was no doubt but that there were two patients, both needing support – the unborn baby was referred to with respect. Themes of family dysfunction, forgiveness and redemption featured, but the destructive power of secrets was to the fore – with regard to cover ups the truth is simple and singular, but lies are legion. A same-sex relationship is fairly prominent and fairly frank, but it still felt tokenistic, and barely figured in the last episode. There was serious violence too, but the overall approach wasn't overly graphic – certainly adult drama.

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Film

Aubrey Malone



Dublin's Northside captured in monochrome magic

North Circular Road has so many connotations for people, maybe we shouldn't just see it as a road anymore but a connection point between different lifestyles and cultures. As one of the speakers in *North Circular* (15A, Irish Film Institute) says, it may end at Sheriff Street geographically but in spirit it stretches to "the river, the docks."

Traditionally the haven of 'culchies' like myself who found themselves in one of the many rental accommodations that were situated on it, it's an area of Dublin that's steeped in history.

Luke McManus' valentine to it has no structure as such and no clear-cut theme either, unless we're talking about the depersonalisation of society

that industrialisation tends to bring in its wake.

The people who speak – a street character, a squatter, a drug addict, a woman from O'Devaney Gardens who inveighs against the high rises that destroy community life – share one thing in common: an abhorrence for "Ireland's insatiable appetite for institutionalisation."

Incarcerated

Such an appetite saw women incarcerated in Grangegorman's psychiatric home for offences as innocuous as stealing a spool of thread, and then shipped off to Van Dieman's Land to buffet up the female population there.

Music, *North Circular* seems to say, is the manner



Luke McManus

in which people with little to call their own assert themselves over their lot. It's their life-blood, their *manna*. In this beautiful little film we see examples of it in the songs that are sung in Smithfield's Cobblestone pub by locals.

This pub was recently threatened with closure by property 'developers.' Thankfully that was averted. It would have been a tragedy for tradition – a 'tragedy' as one of the demonstrators campaigning for its preserva-

tion writes on a poster.

The film ends with footage of Kellie Harrington returning home from her Olympic success to her native Sheriff Street. The first half of the scene is shot in silence. Indeed, silence is the mood the film leaves us with. It makes the music, when we hear it, even more haunting.

Environs

I spent 16 years in the environs of 'North Circular' after arriving in Dublin. I even bought a house in Stoneybat-ter. I loved seeing the grass-roots people who lived there, relics of the 'rare oul times in Dubbelin town.'

I also loved the musical pubs. Some of the most

electrifying nights of my life were spent in these womb-like taverns. Back in the 80s the only place to be was the Meeting Place in Dorset Street. Hunched in our seats in the jam-packed venue we thrilled to the strains of Freddie White, Christy Moore, Red Peters, Declan Sinnott and countless other exponents of folk, rock, 'trad,' bluegrass, blues. My favourite was the late great Jimmy Faulkner, Ireland's answer to Django Reinhardt. He could make his guitar talk.

Like the Cobblestone, this was where the 'real' people went. Then Ticketmaster came along and started jamming all of us all into the Point Depot, or whatever they call it now.

BookReviews

Peter Costello



Children's and young people's books for Christmastide

This time of the year is the major occasion for people to buy books of all kinds, but especially for younger readers. There is fierce competition among the publishers, so it is easy to overlook interesting, even important books in the piled high melee.

In these pages today we make some suggestions for interesting and appropriate titles for younger audiences. The suggestions are arranged in order of age, youngest to oldest approximately. But buyers should carefully consider the relevance of the book to the intended giftee.

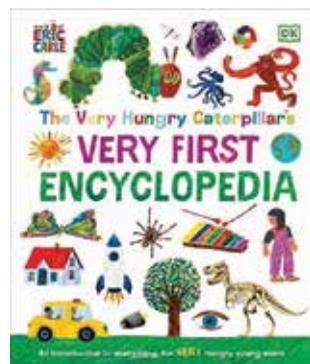
Suggestions

Well Done, Mummy Penguin

by Chris Haughton (Walker Books, €17.99)

From Chris Haughton comes a funny, suspenseful celebration of mothers, set against an atmospheric Antarctic backdrop, a frozen landscape full of challenges. Mummy Penguin is off to find a fishy dinner for her family. She has to swim very fast, climb a slippery cliff and even tiptoe quietly past some sleeping seals.

All the while, Little Penguin looks on in awe and says: "Well done, Mummy Penguin!" The icy – and treacherous – Antarctic landscapes are breathtaking in this funny and exciting celebration of all that mothers do for their brood.



The Very Hungry Caterpillar's Very First Encyclopaedia

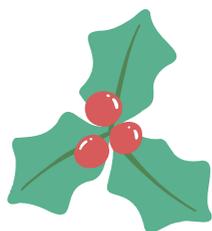
by the editors at Dorling Kindersley, illustrated by Eric Carle (DK Books, €24.99)

Beautifully illustrated, this first encyclopaedia is perfect for curious kids who love to learn about all kinds of everything.

Take part in an amazing journey of discovery with the Very Hungry Caterpillar and learn fascinating facts about everything from science and space to animals and dinosaurs.

Travel around the world to explore the continents, discover where different animals live, learn all about the people who came before us, and find out how your body works in this colourful and charming first reference book for children aged 3-7.

Young learners can find out all about light and sound, the planets in the solar system, how plants grow, and much, much more in this one-of-a-kind introduction to common core subjects.



We Disagree About This Tree

by Ross Collins (Nosy Crow, €14.99)

A fantastically funny festive story about the Bear and Mouse who always disagree from the award-winning Ross Collins, creator of the popular title *There's a Bear on My Chair*.

Bear and Mouse have finally overcome their differences and are living together in perfect harmony... until it's time to decorate the Christmas

tree! Bear wants dazzling lights, while Mouse prefers gigantic baubles... and, wait a minute, did Mouse just put a manatee on the top... well! A topsy-turvy tree is definitely the last straw, and it looks as if Christmas will be ruined... But maybe, just maybe, Bear and Mouse can reach a compromise in time...?

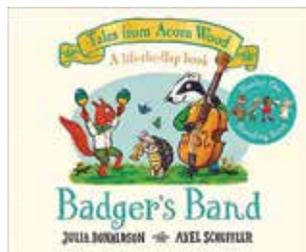
Goldilocks and the Three Crocodiles

by Michael Rosen, illustrated by David Melling (HarperCollins, €14.99)

A fabulously funny take on a classic story from two giants of children's books!

Goldilocks and her little dog are off on an adventure, looking for that house again – the one with the chairs, the porridge and beds. The sound of the sea calls to them and before they know it, they have found quite a different sort of a house... there are bowls, and chairs and sort-of beds... plus some rather unexpected and hilarious inhabitants!

Michael Rosen is the highly regarded author of *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*, while the revamped telling of the famous nursery tale, with its up to date heroine is brilliantly brought to life David Melling, the creator of *Hugless Douglas*.



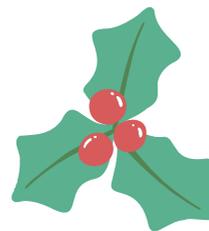
Badger's Band (Tales from Acorn Wood 8)

by Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler (€10.00) Lift the flaps and join in the fun with Badger's Band, a new story in the bestselling *Tales from Acorn Wood* preschool series by Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler, creators of *The Gruffalo*.

Badger wants to start a band and his friends are

keen to join in the fun. Tortoise plays the trumpet, and Bear can play piano, but who else wants to join the band? Lift the flaps to find out. Join Badger and his friends for a special concert.

With sturdy flaps on every spread and rhyming stories that are a joy to read aloud, Badger's Band joins the bestselling *Tales from Acorn Wood* which have been delighting children and their parents for over two decades.



Meanwhile Back on Earth

written and illustrated by Oliver Jeffers (HarperCollins, €17.99)

A father takes his two children on a thrilling out-of-this-world adventure into space and invites them to look back at Earth and the conflicts that have taken place since the beginning of time. This becomes a brief history of the world and a whistle-stop guide to the universe, all rolled into one – and told with Oliver Jeffers's inimitable perspective, wit and exquisite artwork.

Meanwhile Back on Earth gives a unique look at life on Earth with a cosmic perspective – and an enduring message that what binds us together matters more than what sets us apart. A timely story for families everywhere, and another great creation by the Belfast artist/writer.

The Search for the Giant Arctic Jellyfish

by Chloe Savage (Walker Books, £12.99)

A moving tale of grit, endurance and self-belief to inspire young explorers and dreamers from a stunningly



talented debut.

Dr Morley is about to embark on a quest to the northernmost tip of the world, to discover a creature that everyone talks about but nobody has ever seen: the Giant Arctic Jellyfish.

After years of research and hard work, she gathers together a highly trained crew and a boat full of specialist equipment and sets sail for the vast icy water lands of the Arctic. Will she find what she is searching for? Or will it find her?

From debut author-illustrator Chloe Savage comes a beautifully detailed adventure into the unknown, sure to captivate the imagination of young explorers aged five and upwards. All enough to make that inquiring young naturalist into a cryptozoologist!



Mythical Irish Places

written and illustrated by Mark Joyce (Columba Books, €22.99)

Following the success of *Mythical Irish Beasts* (2018) and *Mythical Irish Wonders* (2020), Mark Joyce returns with *Mythical Irish Places*, a gazetteer of Ireland's most magical and wondrous locations.

From Newgrange to the Hill of Tara, Ireland is a mysterious land steeped in folklore.



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.



Learn how the Cliffs of Moher got their name, and why Uisneach is called "the bellybutton" of Ireland. Discover how ancient Ireland was divided, and which castle is reputedly the most haunted. Explore the myths surrounding the picturesque Giant's Causeway in Antrim and venture to the spot that Cú Chulainn was born.

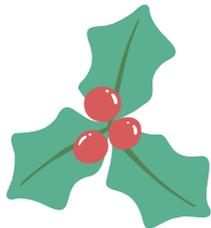
Mark Joyce provides a magical journey around the country visiting some of the most mythical places in Ireland. Brimming with beautiful illustrations, this is a book that children (and adults too) will enjoy for years to come.
Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening by Robert Frost, with illustrations by P. J. Lynch (Walker Books, €14.99)

One of the most famous and best loved of modern American poets by Robert Frost, who spans the last century in his universal appeal.

*The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.*

Award-winning artist-author P.J. Lynch brings Robert Frost's insightful poem from 1923, *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* to life with his atmospheric and exquisitely detailed illustrations. The horse and its mysterious rider are expertly rendered against the striking background of a dark woods shrouded in snow.

This edition is the perfect gift for adults and children alike.

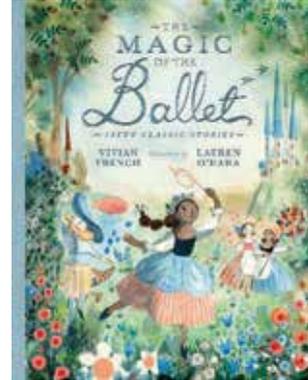


The Truth about Riley by Sinead Moriarty (Gill Books, €13.99)
When Riley's dad dies suddenly, leaving behind a mountain of debt, the life she's used to starts crumbling around her.

Suddenly finding herself homeless, Riley tries to keep up appearances at school, hiding the truth from her lovely but clueless friend Sophie and spiteful, suspicious Vanessa.

But as strangers step up to help her and her mum, Riley realises that sometimes it is those you least expect who will change your life for the better...

The Truth About Riley is the timely and thought-provoking new story for young readers from one of Ireland's best-loved storytellers.



The Magic of the Ballet: seven classic stories by Vivian French, illustrated by Lauren O'Hara (Walker Books, €19.99)

A book of beautiful, lively retellings of classic ballet stories. From *Swan Lake* to *The Firebird*, and *The Nutcracker* to *Coppélia*, Vivian French breathes new life into seven ballet favourites in her timeless, gloriously-immersive retellings.

Her evocative words are perfectly complemented by Lauren O'Hara's characterful illustrations, which strike the perfect balance between classic and contemporary, and the result is a treasury which shimmers with the magic of the ballet... certain to leave readers of all ages spellbound!

The Worry Jar by Lou John, illustrated by Jenny Bloomfield (Oxford University Press, £11.99)

Frida worries all the time. Big worries, small worries, and all-the-time worries. Her worries feel heavy, just like the pebbles she collects every day. Some days, Frida's worries become the only thing she can think about.

When she goes to the swimming pool, she's worried that she may sink out of sight. But then, one day, her granny teaches her an ingenious way to keep her worries in check-and Frida finally feels the weight of her fears slip away... She puts a stone in the jar for every worry and so keeps them all in control.

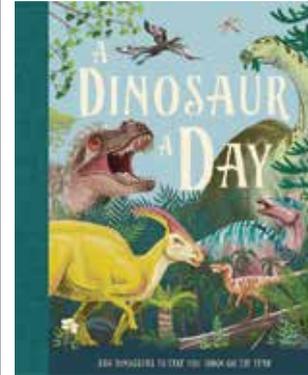
This sensitively written picture book explores how a young girl learns to manage her worries. Jenny Bloomfield's beautifully observed illustrations bring Frida's feelings and experiences vividly to life.

We Wish You a Merry Christmas and other Festive

Poems, gathered and illustrated

by Chris Riddell (Macmillan, €12.99)

This is the perfect Christmas selection for poetry lovers of all ages. Includes much loved traditional verse: *The Night Before Christmas*, *The Twelve Days of Christmas*, *Deck the Halls*, *We Wish You a Merry Christmas* and *We Three Kings*. Together with poems by: Neil Gaiman, William Wordsworth, Thomas Hardy, Hollie McNish, Sue Hardy Dawson, Roger Stevens, Benjamin Zephaniah, Clare Bevan, Sara Teasdale, A.F. Harrold, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Ogden Nash, Robert Burns and Jackie Kay. The old and the new, a cornucopia of poetry for all tastes.



A Dinosaur a Day by Miranda Smith (HarperCollins, €22.99)

A different dinosaur for every day. Dip in each day to discover a new dinosaur and enjoy sharing with friends or family. Immerse yourself in this unforgettable year-long encounter with the most astonishing creatures ever to walk the Earth. From ferocious Tyrannosaurus to gentle giant Titanosaurus.

You'll find familiar and lesser-known names, alongside newly discovered species, all brought to life with stunning illustrations and fascinating facts. With beautiful illustrations of every dinosaur and gorgeous presentation, this is the ultimate gift for dinosaur fans aged six and up.

Ripley's Believe It or Not 2023 (Century, €11.99)

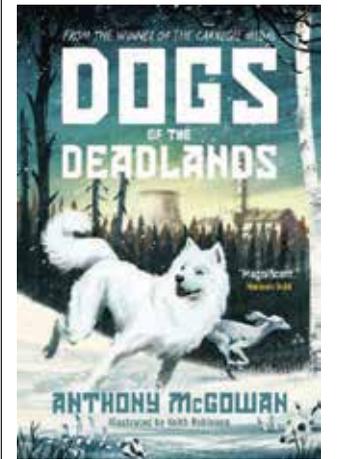
Robert Leroy Ripley was an American journalist who created and developed the world-famous *Ripley's Believe It or Not!*, a syndicated graphic panel for newspapers in the 1920s. He travelled the globe in search of unusual objects and strange stories, and astonishing human beings, building up an extraordinary collection of everything from shrunken heads to dinosaur eggs and iron maidens. These are now exhibited in the Ripley museums around the world. Though the creator has passed on, this annual publication and the related museums continues his

spirit of energetic curiosity. A far better buy, many readers think, than that other celebrated book of records.

And Everything Will Be Glad to see You edited by Ella Risbridger, illustrated by Anna Shepeta (Nosy Crow, €24.99)

A forceful, passionate and uplifting collection of poems by women and girls that is guaranteed to inspire, delight and empower.

From well-loved poets, including Maya Angelou, Wendy Cope, Lucille Clifton and Christina Rossetti, to newer voices such as Amanda Gorman, Yrsa Daley-Ward and Ada Limón, this outstanding collection from talented anthologist Ella Risbridger has poems for every mood and every moment. Ella's selection is wide-ranging but accessible, and will appeal to poetry lovers both young and old alike. This is the perfect gift to begin a lifelong love of poetry.



Dogs of the Deadlands by Anthony McGowan (Rock the Boat, £12.99)

Chernobyl 1986. Those left behind must fight to survive. The world is coming to an end. Dragged from her bed in the middle of the night and forced to leave her beloved puppy behind, Natasha has no idea if she'll ever return home.

Abandoned the mother hound Zoya and her pups growing up in the shadow of the ruined nuclear power plant, pups Misha and Bratan need to learn how to live wild - and fast. Creatures with sharp teeth, scythe-like claws and yellow eyes lurk in the overgrown woods. And they're watching the brothers... But will the dogs survive without humans? And can humans live without them?

A devastating tale of courage, companionship and hope which could be plucked from today's news from Eastern Europe, for the young adult readers who are the citizens of tomorrow, from the award-winning author of *Lark* - Jack London meets Richard Adams.



Leisure time

The Gift Of A Lifetime

Be there for others after you're gone.

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

Email Anna Sadlier at anna.sadlier@hospicefoundation.ie or call 01 679 3188



www.hospicefoundation.ie



Your heart for the homeless

Merchants Quay Ireland reaches out with kindness to people living on our streets, sleeping in doorways, suffering and alone.

Your legacy, of any amount, can enfold the most vulnerable and lonely in wrap-around supports. You may wish to keep the details confidential. But we want to give you this little wooden keepsake, made by a client, for you.

This is your heart for the homeless and those on the road to recovery.

To receive your little wooden heart and information on remembering

Merchants Quay Ireland in your will, ring Emma Murphy, Legacies Manager at 01-524 0965 or email emma.murphy@mqi.ie

Please pray for the beatification of

Little Nellie of Holy God

"May God enrich with every blessing all those who recommend frequent Communion to little boys and girls proposing Nellie as their model"

— Pope St Pius X, June 4, 1912

Will the MSC Missions

Missionaries of the Sacred Heart bring hope to the poorest people living in over 48 countries worldwide.

Please help us with a gift in your Will

Contact:

MSC Missions Office, PO Box 23 Western Road, Cork. Tel: 021-4545704 Email: info@mscmiissions.ie

www.mscmissions.ie

When you remember Trócaire in your Will, you bring hope to people living in the world's poorest places

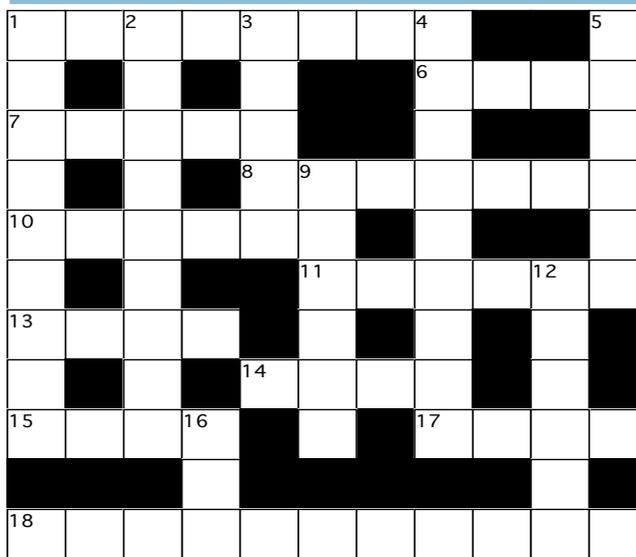


It's easy to get started, and we'll help you every step of the way. Call Grace Kelly on 01 629 3333, email grace.kelly@trocaire.org or write to me at Trócaire, Maynooth, Co Kildare.

One day, parents and their children will tell the story of how your legacy of love changed their lives. Thank you for considering a gift to Trócaire in your Will.

Crossword Junior

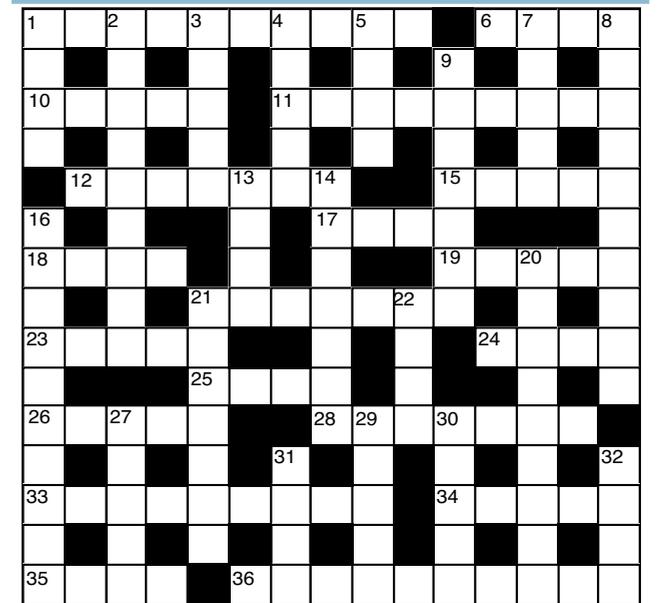
Children's 462



- Across**
- 1 There is a TV show called '_____ Come Dancing' (8)
 - 6 It allows you to hear your own voice coming back from a cave or other place (4)
 - 7 There's a book about her adventures in Wonderland (5)
 - 8 Here, something is sold to the highest bidder (7)
 - 10 "I like a story with a happy _____" (6)
 - 11 You shoot them from a bow (6)
 - 13 The part of a plant that is under the ground (4)
 - 14 A thought (4)
 - 15 Make one, and it might come true (4)
 - 17 Twelve months (4)
 - 18 Group of brave people who will come if your house is burning (4,7)
- Down**
- 1 It's put up to keep birds from the farmer's crops (9)
 - 2 Lots of them fall from the sky on a showery day (9)
 - 3 Not dirty (5)
 - 4 24 hours ago (9)
 - 5 Score them by sending the ball over the bar (6)
 - 9 Kampala is the capital of this country in East Africa (6)
 - 12 A magician, like Harry Potter (6)
 - 16 Use this to scratch weeds out of the ground (3)

Crossword

Gordius 588



- Across**
- 1 & 8d Feast day celebrated on December 8th each year (10,10)
 - 6 Metal used in galvanisation (4)
 - 10 A snap (5)
 - 11 Athletics event contested over ten disciplines (9)
 - 12 Novel by James Joyce (7)
 - 15 Manner or fashion (5)
 - 17 & 3d Distinctive Celtic crucifix monument (4,5)
 - 18 Ms Korbitt, former Russian gymnast (4)
 - 19 Vote into office (5)
 - 21 Noticed (7)
 - 23 Metric unit of capacity (5)
 - 24 Traditional board game (4)
 - 25 Snug (4)
 - 26 Not left? That's correct (5)
 - 28 Tell sea about Miss Havesham from 'Great Expectations' (7)
 - 33 Travelling on horseback at the fastest gait (9)
 - 34 Disconcert or overturn (5)
 - 35 Hasty, lacking forethought (4)
 - 36 Three-dimensional shape with many faces - or a strange pony holder? (10)
- Down**
- 1 Little devils (4)
 - 2 Lunar illumination, or to work unofficially (9)
 - 3 See 17 across
 - 4 Put money into an account (5)
 - 5 & 13d Traditionally, where boarding schoolchildren buy sweets (4,4)
 - 7 Marquetry (5)
 - 8 See 1 across
 - 9 Stowed away, often in secret (7)
 - 13 See 5 down
 - 14 Slang for sleep (7)
 - 16 Pirate flag (5,5)
 - 20 The score that makes the scores level again (9)
 - 21 The Department of Jumbled Notices (7)
 - 22 Way out (4)
 - 27 Seabirds (5)
 - 29 damp and heavy, like poorly-baked bread (5)
 - 30 Avoid capture (5)
 - 31 Alcoholic down-and-out (4)
 - 32 Affectionate nickname for Sr Stanislaus Kennedy (4)

SOLUTIONS, DECEMBER 1

GORDIUS NO. 587

Across - 1 Get your sea legs 6 Data 10 Syria 11 Betrothal 12 Far East 15 Mocha 17 Hole 18 Ills 19 Nigel 21 Sea-salt 23 Ringo 24 Flow 25 Menu 26 Carla 28 Satchmo 34 Padre 35 Dunk 36 Principles

Down - 1 Gust 2 Tarpaulin 3 Orate 4 Robes 5 Efts 7 Ad hoc committee 8 All Hallows 9 Torment 13 Acre 14 Theseus 16 Citric acid 20 Gold medal 21 Somalia 22 Last 27 Ramen 29 Ahern 30 Capri 31 Stir

CHILDREN'S No. 461

Across - 1 Waterford 6 Oar 7 Lorries 9 Teeth 10 Image 11 Rabbits 14 Mail 16 Neighbour 20 Eclair 21 Ruined
Down - 1 William 2 Terrapin 3 Raider 4 Dove 5 Arches 8 Stab 12 Argued 13 Bib 15 Lemon 17 Oval 18 Rory 19 Jar

Sudoku Corner

462

Easy

		8	4		3			
6	9						1	
		1				5	8	2
				7				5
		3	8		4	6		9
		5		9	6	3		1
	7			8				4
8	5		1				3	
	4	2	6			7	9	

Hard

1	4	9		5			6	
					7	9		
				2	9			
9				8		3	7	1
		3				6		
2	1	4		6				9
				2	4			
		6	8					
	8			3		7	5	2

Last week's Easy 461

2	1	8	9	4	3	6	5	7
6	9	5	7	8	2	1	3	4
7	3	4	6	1	5	9	2	8
4	5	1	3	9	8	2	7	6
9	2	3	5	7	6	8	4	1
8	6	7	4	2	1	3	9	5
3	7	2	8	6	4	5	1	9
1	4	6	2	5	9	7	8	3
5	8	9	1	3	7	4	6	2

Last week's Hard 461

4	7	3	5	1	8	9	2	6
5	9	2	4	6	7	8	3	1
1	8	6	3	2	9	4	7	5
8	5	4	2	7	3	1	6	9
2	3	9	1	8	6	5	4	7
6	1	7	9	4	5	2	8	3
7	4	5	8	3	1	6	9	2
3	2	1	6	9	4	7	5	8
9	6	8	7	5	2	3	1	4

Notebook

Fr John Harris



Sin can't win despite evil seeming more powerful

ON A NIGHT OUT with friends from college I was once asked if I was an optimist or a pessimist; did I see the glass half full or half empty. I had to think about it for a moment. I had to admit I generally see the glass as being half empty. So, I was deemed to be a pessimist.

I see it somewhat differently. When the glass is half empty then it is time for another drink. As Christians believing in the Risen Lord the challenge is to be positive. Our hope is in Christ not in ourselves or our human projects. When the glass is half empty, we turn to Christ to fill it anew. As Pope Francis has written: Our hope is not based on statistics or accomplishments, but on the one in whom we have put our trust... a hope which enables us to keep writing our history in the future.

Sunday

For us Christians our celebration of Sunday colours our whole approach to life. The Martyrs of Abitinae, (a town in North Africa) were a group of 49 Christians found guilty, in 304AD, during the reign of the Emperor Diocletian, of having illegally celebrated



The Martyrs of Abitinae in the Roman province of Africa in 304AD.

Sunday Eucharist. When the group were asked why they came together on a Sunday they said, "without Sunday life isn't worth living". St Ignatius of Antioch, another early Christian bishop and martyr described Christians as "having attained new hope" and presented them as people

"who lived in accordance with Sunday".

Tempted

As we look around the world and the Church today, we can become very negative and we can be tempted to give up. But that is not living in accord with Sunday. Seeing the glass as being half empty or worse is a real challenge for us to truly believe that the Risen Lord can do great things.

Back in the 1990s when the sexual scandals were first gaining media attention, I was giving a retreat to a group of elderly religious. I was a young priest at the time, just beginning my ministry. I asked one of the sisters how did she keep going. She said, "there never was a worse day than Good Friday, but look how God changed it from being a scene of utter suffering and disgrace to being a moment of the triumph of love... you must always look at Friday from the vantagepoint of Sunday".

Suffering

When I see so much suffering in our world it makes me look to Jesus all the more and say that this world, so marked by sin,

cannot be the whole story. There has to be more than suffering and selfishness. But it can be very hard to see things from this faith perspective on a "Saturday", when we are in the midst of loss and pain, when it seems that evil is so much more powerful than goodness. Sin can't win. That's our Christian belief. We believe that love will win out. We are Sunday people.

Challenging to get religious Christmas cards

"I had to put my money where my mouth was" so my friend told me during the week. She explained that she had decided that this year she would only send religious Christmas cards. This turned out to be easier said than done. Not only was it much easier to find cards with Santa Claus and Rudolf on them, but when she did find cards with the Baby Jesus and Our Blessed Mother, they proved to be more expensive. But she is happy to pay the extra in order to do her little bit for the Gospel. In every house that receives a card from her Jesus will be remembered.

Rushing to see the Queen

The death of Queen Elizabeth reminded me of a story my sister told me of being with our mother in London many years ago. My mother kept insisting that they go to Buckingham Palace for noon on the Sunday. My sister couldn't work out my mother's fixation on Buckingham Palace at noon on the Sunday. Half way down Pall Mall on the Sunday morning it struck her. She reminded my mother that it was the Pope who came out on the balcony in Rome at noon on a Sunday, and not the Queen in London. My mother said nothing but suddenly lost all interest in seeing the palace.



WILL YOU HELP RELIEVE THE PAIN OF HUNGRY AFRICANS AND SAVE LIVES?

Millions of people in many parts of Africa are suffering from hunger now. Somalia's situation is currently the most publicised but Ethiopia, Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, South

Sudan and the Sahel region are very badly affected also. One of the main causes is violence and civil strife which destroys crops. The war in Ukraine, climate change and the pandemic have caused food prices to skyrocket. Droughts have caused the death of livestock, the failure of crops and made water more scarce.



The Little Way Association is receiving many requests from missionary priests and Sisters urgently needing funds to purchase sacks of wheat flour, sorghum, maize and beans for their people and for medical needs of their clinics such as intravenous feeding of children and babies. Our Lord says, "I was hungry and you fed me."

Please send The Little Way Association whatever you can. Your donation, added to others, will be sent with no deduction for the relieving of hunger and malnutrition in Africa. Thank you.



"Our Lord does not look so much as the greatness of our actions, but at the love at which we do them."

~ St Therese

PLEASE HELP FEED THE HUNGRY

Please spare a thought for the millions who die each year of hunger and disease in mission lands. Your donation will relieve the pangs of starvation, and every euro you send will be forwarded to a missionary priest or sister for food for the hungry.

MISSIONARIES NEED YOUR MASS OFFERINGS

In these fraught times, missionary priests rely more than ever on stipends for their daily subsistence and for helping the poorest of their communities. The Little Way Association will convey your stipends and your intentions to the clergy overseas.

We like to send a minimum of €6 or more for each Mass

Crossed POs and cheques should be sent and made payable to:

THE LITTLE WAY ASSOCIATION
 Sacred Heart House, 119 Cedars Rd, Clapham Common, London SW4 0PR
 (Registered Charity No. 235703) Tel 0044 20 76 22 0466
www.littlewayassociation.com

I enclose €..... to be allocated to:

- €..... **AFRICAN FAMINE**
- €..... **NEEDS OF MISSIONARIES**
- €..... **WELLS AND SANITATION**
- €..... **MASSES** (Please state no. _____)
- €..... **LITTLE WAY ADMIN EXPENSES**

Please tick if you would like an acknowledgement

Name (Rev. Mr. Mrs. Miss)

(Block letters please)

Address

To donate online go to www.littlewayassociation.com

DONATIONS FOR THE MISSIONS ARE SENT WITHOUT DEDUCTION FOR ANY EXPENSES.