

# The Irish Catholic

## IRELAND'S DOCTOR VOCATION CRISIS

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## BRINGING LOURDES TO IRELAND

A celebration of St Bernadette as  
relics grace the country  
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# €25m projected for Dublin Pro Cathedral refurbishment

Exclusive

Chai Brady

The Archdiocese of Dublin is set to spend €25 million approximately on the much-needed refurbishment of St Mary's Pro Cathedral in the heart of Dublin City Centre, well-placed sources can reveal.

The significant injection of funds comes as part of Archbishop Dermot Farrell's new 'twin pillar' strategy which centres on St Mary's Pro-Cathedral and St Andrew's Westland Row – soon to be made a cathedral and minor basilica respectively.

The archbishop pegged the two churches as being well placed to be developed as twin pillars "of a renewed pastoral and missionary strategy".

However direct queries to the archdiocese from *The Irish Catholic* about the strategy were vague, particularly around financing.

The archdiocese did not respond to a query about where Archbishop Farrell's forthcoming "substantial financial support" would be coming from in order to "enable necessary structural work to be carried out without adversely affecting other important pastoral needs".

According to insiders, Dublin diocese is running a two million deficit annually, with 40% of parishes unable to pay as much as would be desired.

The 'Implementation Group', chaired by Bishop Paul Dempsey, will also be spearheading the aim "to identify other sources of support for the development of pastoral and cultural programmes, as well as for the conservation of the fabric and artefacts that are of civic importance. The reality is that these very large and important structures will require care and

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## Meeting Jesus in the Eucharist with Carlo Acutis...



Auxiliary Bishop of Dublin Paul Dempsey visits parishioners and Fr Alan Hilliard of City Quay Parish in Dublin City Centre. After going to the shrine of Blessed Carlo Acutis, Bishop Dempsey said: "Very special to pray at the shrine of Bl. Carlo Acutis, a young man who invites us to meet Jesus in the Eucharist."

## THE CONTRADICTIONS OF NELL

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## BEING LED ASTRAY BY SOCIAL MEDIA

Fr Vincent Sherlock

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## THE SIGN OF PEACE MAY NEVER RECOVER...

Martina Purdy

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investment irrespective of any change in their status or role", according to Archbishop Farrell – no doubt referencing the much-needed refurbishment works needed on the Pro.

Asked about the cost of the refurbishment of the cathedral-to-be, the archdiocese stated: "At the moment there is no amount projected or allocated for possible upgrades at St Mary's Pro-Cathedral."

The archbishop did hold some consultations internally about the future of the Pro-Cathedral. Heads of Office in the archdiocese were consulted and there wasn't a lot of enthusiasm for the Basilica idea and several said the diocese should focus on one place. It is believed much of the money raised for the twin pillar strategy will go towards the Pro Cathedral.

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# Ireland's newest nun: Have courage to take the risk

Brandon Scott

Ireland's most recently professed nun has encouraged those contemplating religious life, something that she recognises might be profoundly countercultural in 2024, to "listen to your own heart" and "have the courage to take the risk" to explore that call as if it is the path for you "you'll find deep peace and fulfilment".

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Sr Maire Brid O'Driscoll, who trained as a primary school teacher before she entered the

Redemptoristine order in 2016 said that her own journey took time to come to fruition and required a lot of reflection on life's big questions.

"When I finished college I trained as a primary school teacher and I suppose I went through a time when I started questioning what life was all about; the meaning of life, if God really existed," she said. "There I had an experience of God's crazy love for me and that kind of set me on a new journey of listening to God in a deeper way, the scrip-

tures just came alive. Within that there was that call to the contemplative way of life and I began that discernment journey. It took time; I was 27 before I actually entered."

"I had heard from friends about the Redemptoristines. I had heard of the Redemptorists before but never the Redemptoristines. I Googled them and was immediately drawn to the red habit. I then got in contact with them and went to visit and it just went from there, step by step."

Asked if she had any advice for other women considering some-

thing as deeply countercultural as religious life in 2024, Sr Maire Brid urged anyone deliberating whether or not to explore the call to "listen deeply their own hearts. Spend time in prayer and listen to your deepest desires. I think God's will is to be found in your deepest desires and if you can really listen to them. Follow your heart and listen to call and have the courage to take the risk. You're going against the flow in society, but if it's the path for you, you'll find deep peace and deep fulfilment so why not follow it?"

## Bringing Lourdes to Ireland with St Bernadette's relics

Renata Steffens

For the very first time, the relics of St Bernadette of Lourdes will be in pilgrimage to Ireland. The relics will visit every diocese in the country from September 4 to November 5. Each diocese will have their own schedule to celebrate the saint.

Fr Gerard Fox, spokesperson for the Saint Bernadette Relic Pilgrimage Ireland 2024, said each diocese/parish identified as a host were provided with "various liturgies, moments of prayer, Masses and so on," that they can use during the course of the pilgrimage.

This visit to Ireland is an opportunity for people to connect with the saint. The event is being facili-

tated by Lourdes Pilgrimage directors and the Shrine.

Fr Fox said the sanctuary authorities decided they would make the relics available in different countries, "recognising that not everybody can travel to Lourdes for whatever reason," so they would "bring the message of Lourdes to other countries."

The relics tours are also taking

place around France, Germany, Spain, South America and North America. "We approached them back in 2019 to discuss the possibility of bringing the relics to Ireland. We were planning to bring them in 2020, but unfortunately COVID intervened there," said Fr Fox.

Many people are drawn to St Bernadette for the feeling of love

and care they can find in her and Lourdes. "The miracles are rare, the healings are rare. But very often the miracle is that people will find the grace to live with whatever it is they're facing," Fr Fox said.

Read more about St Bernadette's relics pilgrimage in Ireland on pages 11-17.

## New Franciscans on the horizon



The Franciscan Friary, Killarney received three new novices for the International Novitiate. Left to right Brothers Flo, Don and Jan.

## Concern Worldwide aids victims of Bangladesh floods

Staff reporter

Concern Worldwide is responding to deadly floods in Bangladesh in which at least 18 people have been killed and millions of others stranded.

The Irish organisation is providing food, oral rehydration solution, water purification tablets, sanitary pads, candles and matches to approximately 35,000 people in Nohakhali district, one of the worst affected districts.

"These floods are the fourth consecutive natural disaster in the last four months in Bangladesh which makes the situation very complex," said Manish Kumar Agrawal, country director for Con-

cern in Bangladesh. "It's estimated that over 20 million people across 40% of Bangladesh have been affected due to these disasters."

Concern is working with local partner, Sajida Foundation in Nohakhali to reach communities. The Irish organisation, as part of the wider emergency response coordination in Bangladesh, is continuing to assess the unmet needs of affected people.

Concern is planning to ramp up its response in the coming days and weeks as the flood water gradually recedes, to provide people affected with food and nutrition support, repair damaged homes, reduce the risk of water and vector borne diseases and help people restart their livelihoods.

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# Senator gives support for withholding RTE licence fee

Chai Brady

Senator Rónán Mullen has said he will not pay his TV licence, accusing RTE of failing to ensure impartiality and a “corruption of public service broadcasting in Ireland through the manipulation of public opinion”.

Senator Mullen took to social media last week criticising a discussion on RTE Radio 1’s Oliver Callan show about the first Pride march in Roscommon, where it was mentioned the county was the only one in which the majority voted against the Marriage Equality referendum. He said on X (formerly Twitter): “No TV licence money from me and many others until there’s more respect for diversity of opinions in Irish society.”

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* the independent senator elaborated on his statement saying that while paying taxes is a civil and moral duty, “in certain circumstances, the withholding of taxes can be a well-justified expression of civil disobedience, particularly where the specific purpose of the tax or licence withheld is to fund a service that is problematic in important ways”.

“In recent years, we have seen the corruption of public service broadcasting in Ireland through the manipulation of public opinion and the failure



of those responsible for the service to ensure standards of impartiality,” he said.

“This has been damaging for our society and has caused harm to people.”

Senator Mullen said that in “such circumstances, where the proper authorities fail to act” citizens are entitled to “take exceptional steps, if their sincere aim is to reform

the situation and not just to avoid paying for services which they are receiving”.

Currently a TV licence costs €160 a year for both homes and businesses. A person can be fined up to €1,000 (or €2,000 for subsequent offences) for not having a TV licence.

The senator stressed that since not paying a TV licence can involve a breach of the

law “it is not for me to urge people to do so. But those who feel that they can do this, and who are willing to take the consequences, if any, have my support. Some people may choose to opt out of the services being provided and on that basis not to pay a TV licence”.

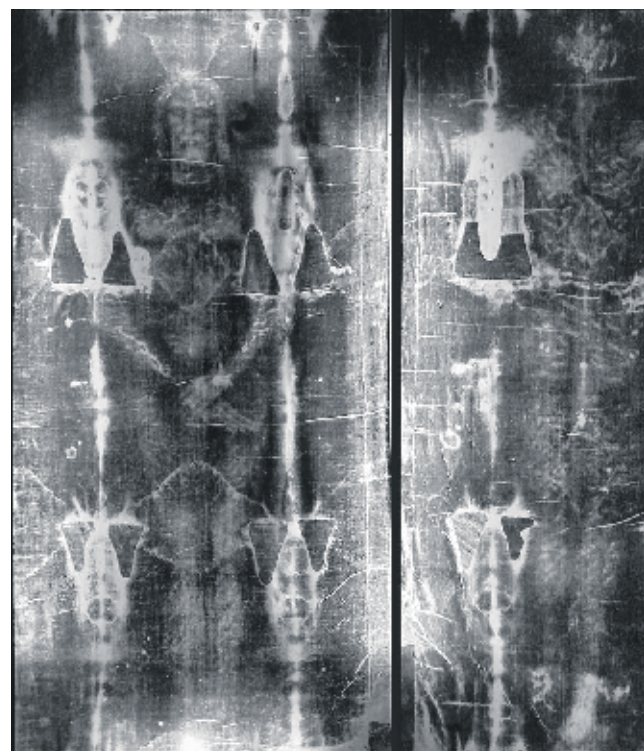
He called on those who choose not to pay a TV

licence for a principled reason to share their decision “as widely as possible” to encourage reforms in RTE and in Irish media generally.

Senator Mullen said on X after the August 20 morning show: “The RTE celebrities who push their agenda, No. 1: Oliver Callan today on @rte @RTERadio1 @Oliver-CallanRTE – ‘Roscommon,

the county that (‘famously’ or ‘infamously’) said ‘No’ to equal marriage’. No doubt about OC’s [Oliver Callan’s] natural talent but he pushes this particular agenda too much. That wouldn’t make him an oddball in RTE though. No TV licence money from me and many others until there’s more respect for diversity of opinions in Irish society.”

## More evidence Shroud of Turin dates back to Jesus’ time



Shroud of Turin: A linen cloth with a negative depiction of a man in full-length, front and back views.

Renata Steffens

Using a new X-ray technique, Italian researchers proved the Shroud of Turin dates from the time of Christ. Initially, it was believed the burial garment, which has the imprint of a man killed by crucifixion, was only 700 years old, but this new study showed it is actually dated from 2,000 years ago.

With a method called wide-angle X-ray scattering (WAXS), scientists at the Institute of Crystallography of the National Research Council (*Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche*, CNR) were able to age a sample of flax cellulose, which are long chains of sugar molecules that slowly deteriorates over time based on the conditions it was kept.

The study published in the journal *Heritage* said “the data profiles were fully compatible with analogous measurements obtained on

a linen sample whose dating, according to historical records, is 55-74 AD, found at Masada, Israel.”

This is the fourth study in just over a decade to conclude the Shroud of Turin dates from the time of Jesus, and the second published this year. In the previous study, it was proven the flax used to make the linen was grown in the Middle East.

A study made in 1988 concluded the garment was dated from medieval times. Dr Liberato De Caro, one of the scientists involved in this last study dismissed those results, saying they were inaccurate as “fabric samples are usually subject to all kinds of contamination, which cannot be completely removed from the dated specimen”.

“If the cleaning procedure of the sample is not thoroughly performed, carbon-14 dating is not reliable.

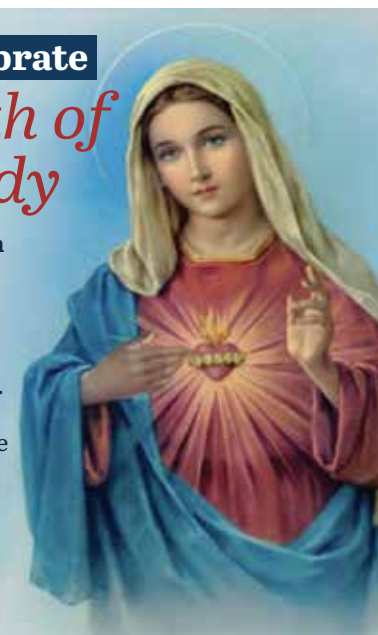
This may have been the case in 1988, as confirmed by experimental evidence showing that when moving from the periphery

towards the centre of the sheet, along the longest side, there is a significant increase in carbon-14”, Dr De Caro added.

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# 'Face up to resistance to change'

## Dublin prelate launches new renewal phase

Chai Brady

Despite the Church in Europe experiencing a time of decline it is also a time of "new beginning" the Archbishop of Dublin has said, launching a new phase of the 'Building Hope' pastoral renewal initiative.

Ahead of the publication of the Building Hope Pastoral Strategic Planning Resource 2025–2027 in September, which was built on three years of "prayer, reflection and tentative action", Archbishop Dermot Farrell published a pastoral letter 'Building Hope with Open Hearts'.

The archbishop said: "These materials are the result of broad consultation and dialogue, prayer, reflection, action, and further reflection, undertaken in

parishes and partnerships of parishes. I ask you all to join with me in using the resources developed here, as you explore creative and courageous ways to renew the Church in our diocese."

Archbishop Farrell said that in coming weeks there will be workshops associated with the Building Hope planning resource which he encourages parish leaders to attend. "In engaging with this resource, we are called to encourage each other. This will mean moving beyond certain worries that we understandably have, as well as facing up to the 'resistance' that often surfaces when we need to change. This is the vision of Building Hope with Open Hearts," he said.

The archbishop said that "there are vibrant communities who live out the gospel, who live out of the words and

actions Jesus has handed on to us. Those vibrant communities may now be small, but smallness is not the issue. Smallness was never an issue for Jesus, and smallness is never an issue for his heavenly Father..."

He added: "The Church in Europe finds itself in a time, both of decline and of new beginning. The decline is there for all to see. However, Christ calls people of faith to look at the Church from the standpoint of his Father. Let us look at the Church – and the world – with the eyes of God. Smallness is not an end-point, but a beginning. This is how the Church began. It is always how the Church begins."

"Let us find our way, step-by-step, working more deeply together, as we build our partnerships of parishes,

embracing the road the Spirit is bringing us on, in such a way that, as Pope Francis says, 'our lives can become a song of love for God, for humanity, with and for creation'."

As part of the Building Hope initiative, in 2022 Archbishop Farrell announced the 53 partnerships of parishes in the Archdiocese of Dublin and also gave a timeline and pastoral aids which informed this stage of the initiative.

The archbishop formed the Building Hope taskforce in April 2021 which published a report based on 3,000 consultation responses in November 2021, this was used to initiate the Building Hope strategic planning process, taking the key elements of the taskforce report as a foundation for renewal in the archdiocese.

### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### Christian charity pleads for a ceasefire in the Holy Land

The Christian charity Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem released a statement on August 26 urging for a ceasefire in the Holy Land.

Noting the current war is approaching its 12th month, the organisation pleads for a de-escalation of violence "from ourselves and the international community, the situation in our beloved Holy Land has only continued to deteriorate," the statement said.

"Millions of refugees remains displaced ... hundreds of innocent lives are weekly killed ... Countless others continue to endure hunger, thirst, and infectious diseases", they said. "Throughout this all, ceasefire negotiations have dragged on interminably, with the leaders of the warring parties seemingly more concerned with political considerations than bringing an end to the pursuit of death and destruction."

The statement said they "once again implore the leaders of the warring parties to heed our calls and those of the international community (UNSC Resolution 2735) to reach a rapid agreement for a ceasefire resulting in the end of the war".

# Seminarians should have ecology training, said priest

Renata Steffens

The Season of Creation, the annual Church period for environmental discussions starts next month. Fr Sean McDonagh, Columban priest and ecologist said priests should have more biology and ecology teaching during their studies in Seminary.

This period in the Church calendar is dedicated to

renew the relationship between humanity and the Creator. It will start on September 1 and end on October 4, the Feast of St Francis of Assisi, patron saint of ecology. Faith leaders from around the world will lead this time of prayer and reflection with theme 'To Hope and Act with Creation'.

Fr McDonagh said he had to look for further education in ecology, as he "never heard

one word about the environment" during his seminarian years. The priest said he never heard about the trees, about the fish, the grass, the wildflowers, "Because they weren't seen as important."

"Even though there was long-time training, they don't have any background in this area." For Fr Sean, it is important to have a background in biology or ecology, to understand climate change, the

difference in gases, and have enough knowledge to act in minimising environmental issues.

The priest said people only see the totality "of the world that God has given us," but they don't realise all the damage humanity is doing, and will continue to do, "unless we change."

Parishes and dioceses should work locally to minimise climate change dam-

age and raise awareness, so the population changes their behaviour towards the planet and work for a greener future, said the ecologist priest.

He said the community should learn about creation. "That's where we should be if we want to know the true God who created this beautiful universe, learn about the features and if we do that we'll take care of it."

# Armagh GAA star honoured with lap of pitch after tragic death

Staff reporter

Beloved GAA player was buried on Monday after one year battling with brain cancer. Caolan Finnegan, aged 20, was buried at St Patrick's Church, Crossmaglen, Co Armagh. The young star was given a final

lap around Oliver Plunkett Park pitch before the burial.

Mr Finnegan scored one of the Crossmaglen's goals in their Armagh Final win over Granemore in 2022. In August 2023 he was diagnosed with brain cancer. The footballer received support from his team mates during the last

year.

"The Sam Maguire paid a visit to Caolan's house on two occasions since the All-Ireland which gave him a great lift at a very difficult time," said Fr Dermot Maloney PP.

He also thanked those involved in the service and said: "Before we go our

separate ways, let us take leave of Caolan. May our farewell express our affection for him. May it ease our sadness and strengthen our hope. One day we shall joyfully greet him again when the love of Christ, which conquers all things, destroys even death itself."

# In 200-year first Belfast parish 'faces future' with just one priest

Staff reporter

St Patrick's Parish, Belfast has been reduced to just one priest for the first time in 200 years.

The parish not only attends the spiritual and pastoral needs of the community, but also serves a hospital, a primary school, several residential and care homes, and the new Ulster University

Belfast Campus.

The large scale building is known as pro-cathedral, or temporary cathedral for Down and Connor Diocese. For decades the parish would count with services of up to six priests, but in 2022 it was reduced to only two Parish Priest, Fr Eugene O'Neill and curate Fr Tony McAleese.

Fr McAleese will be moving to St Oli-

ver Plunkett Parish. Becoming the only priest in the parish, Fr O'Neill told *The Irish News* he has been talking to Bishop McGuckian about the parish's needs.

"But the bottom line is there just aren't enough priests to go around and the bishop simply has nobody else to send us. So now we have to face the future in a very different context", Fr O'Neill said.

### Our Lady of Knock statue graces Tyrone parish



Fr Roland Colhoun is pictured in Newtown Stewart, Co. Tyrone with the newly commissioned statue of Our Lady of Knock in the parish oratory, installed for the 145th anniversary of the Apparition, August 21. Photo: Nicky Canning

# The contradictions of Nell....

Ireland is partitioned politically - but there are also cultural divisions north and south. And one of the significant national achievements of journalist and feminist campaigner, Nell McCafferty, who died recently, aged 80, was that she was equally recognised, and equally relatable, north and south. The Derrywoman's reputation went across 32 counties.

Many accolades have been paid to Nell, and



Mary Kenny

justly so. She was a fearless campaigner who passionately fought for women, whether that be Republican women in Northern jails or Joanne Hayes of the "Kerry babies" tragedy: in her book about the latter, she demonstrated that the law looked for "a woman to blame". (Although obviously

it mustn't be forgotten that an infant died cruelly.)

## McCafferty

Nell was a deeply involved part of the Irish feminist movement of the 1970s, as was I - as were more elevated figures such as Mary Robinson, and the poet Eavan Boland. The

civil rights activist Máirín de Burca, very committed to peace (though she had been in the Official IRA in her youth) was another key figure. Everyone was bewitched by Nell, I think, with her beguiling mixture of audacity and humour.

Nell was an Irish Republican, but not anti-British - she gave credit to the British administration for her education and for the NHS and the welfare state. She was a lesbian, but not a man-hater. She fiercely criticised the Catholic church, especially

over clerical scandals, but I have heard it suggested that this was because she cared about the Church: and she had a comforting Catholic funeral at St Columba's in Derry, with hymns in Irish, English and Latin - a female cantor giving an especially beautiful "Ave Maria" by Gounod.

**“She felt a loyalty to Martin McGuinness, an old family friend. But like him she genuinely came to support peace”**

As it happened Nell had a Protestant grandmother, who converted on marriage. She joked that the legacy was a high Ulster

standard of domestic cleanliness, as illuminated by the Nordie boast: "You could eat your dinner off my kitchen floor!"

She could have a go at southerners, jokily. I once mispronounced a place-name in Derry. "Free State idiot!" she expostulated.

Some friends did have certain reservations about Nell's defence of the Provos, especially around the time of the Enniskillen bomb in 1987 - I think a real turning-point in consciousness about what political violence means. She felt a loyalty to Martin McGuinness, an old family friend. But like him she genuinely came to support peace.

We used to have annual group reunions, which Nell called, with her salty humour "The Dying Feminists' Lunch". God bless her memory.



Nell McCafferty

The renowned English poet W.H. Auden was a schoolmaster in the 1930s, and, while teaching at an Anglican school in Kent, he "fell in love" with a 13-year-old boy, a new biography by Nicholas Jenkins reveals. The relationship didn't become sexual - until the boy was 15, when it apparently did, nobody turned a hair. Such things happened.

Today, Auden would

be outed as a paedophile, and disgraced from public life. At the BBC, a celebrity TV football commentator, Jermaine Jenas, has just been sacked, and his career prospects ruined, for sending suggestive texts to young women - no actual carnal connections took place, but the words alone were enough to condemn him.

Just an interesting measure of how attitudes have changed.

## We can never assume anything about our future...

The drowning of Mike Lynch, his 18-year-old daughter Hannah and four of his friends plus a crew member on a private yacht moored just off Sicily has been a most affecting tragedy. Mr Lynch, aged 59, was something of a tech genius and a truly positive example of an Irish emigrant family who had flourished in England.

He had a Catholic Irish upbringing in a working-class part of Essex, and at 11, won a scholarship to a top private school. Despite his early brilliance, notably in Maths, his first job was as a cleaner in the hospital

where his Tipperary-born mother was a nurse. His brains brought him to Cambridge and he became a billionaire through his tekkie skills. He married his Colombian-American wife, Angela, who survived the tragedy, in one of the oldest and most fashionable Catholic churches in London, St Mary's, Cadogan Street, Chelsea.

Reports of how divers found the dead bodies - with evidence that they had desperately searched for pockets of air while the yacht, The Bayesian, sank after a freak tornado - were heart-scorching. Many ques-

tions remain about how it all happened and whether there had been human error or negligence.

It was highlighted that Mike Lynch regarded this holiday as "the beginning of a new life", and a fresh future - he had endured 13 years of defending a business fraud case in the US, and been totally exonerated. But we can never assume anything about our future. We know not the day nor the hour. That's why people used to say "D.V." - Deo Volente - acknowledging the contingency which underpins every passing day.



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# Right to prayer and religious freedom contingent on Govt's secular creed



Dualta Roughneen

The news that Isabel Vaughan-Spruce has received compensation in the form of a £13,000 payout and an apology from the UK police after she contested her arrests for silently praying in the vicinity of an abortion clinic as a breach of her human rights should be greeted with a degree of caution here in Ireland.

## Vindicated

Vaughan-Spruce was vindicated through the Courts as both her arrests were quashed due to lack of evidence, and subsequently she contested her arrests as a breach of her human rights. She has described the arrest as Orwellian: "There is no place for Orwell's 'thought police' in 21st Century Britain, and thanks to legal support I received from ADF UK, I'm delighted that the settlement that I have received today acknowledges that. Yet despite this victory, I am deeply concerned that this violation could be repeated at the hands of other police forces."



Bishop Kevin Doran of Elphin and Archbishop Eamon Martin of Armagh at the March for Life with other pro-life demonstrators in May 2024. Photo John McElroy

The award comes just as UK ministers are attempting to review previous guidance which stated that: "Silent prayer, being the engagement of the mind and thought in prayer towards God, is protected as an absolute right under the Human Rights Act 1998 and should not, on its own, be considered to be an offence under any circumstances."

Human rights in Ireland and the UK are closely linked under the Good Friday Agreement which incorporates the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), under the UK Human Rights Act 1998, into Northern Irish law.

Although conceptually human rights are supposed to be 'universal' – applicable to

everyone, everywhere, irrespective of the law, the reality is that all human rights are viewed as contingent on the common good and such things. Each human right under the ECHR is framed this way. No human rights is really absolute.

## Coherence

But the Good Friday Agreement expects, implicitly, a degree of coherence between human rights interpretations between Ireland and the UK. Although no such guidance exists in Ireland on the human right to silent prayer, changes in the UK will likely be grasped by an Irish government keen to enforce the Health (Termination of Pregnancy Services) (Safe Access Zones) Act 2024 which

was signed into law by President Higgins on May 7 this year.

**“The Irish Law Bill also refers to churches that fall within the buffer zones. In Dublin, where the zones are likely to cover half the city, most churches will fall within them”**

The law in Ireland is remarkably similar to that which Vaughan-Spruce was arrested under, and which was extended to Northern Ireland in September

2023. While the arrests may be deemed unlawful now, any changes to how the UK interprets the 'human right' or lack thereof, to pray silently, may be utilised in Ireland in the coming months and years by a parliament that voted 117 to 10 to introduce the law.

The Irish law includes a prohibition within 100 metres of "otherwise engaging in conduct directed at the public or a section of the public in a manner that is likely to influence the decision of a person in relation to availing of, or providing, termination of pregnancy services, with intent to influence the decision of such a person in relation to availing of, or providing, termination of pregnancy services, or being reckless as to whether such a decision is thereby so influenced".

## Interpretation

The interpretation of this subsection is likely to, if not immediately, include such actions as prayer, both silent and non-silent, and whether intentionally directed or prayer that may have been carried out "recklessly" and interpreted as having had some form of impact on a person with the intention of accessing an abortion.

Additionally, the Irish Law Bill also refers to churches that fall within the buffer zones. In Dublin, where the zones are likely to cover half the city, most churches will fall within them, particularly as churches and

healthcare facilities are often located within the same area.

The Bill states that "nothing in section 2(2) (communicating and engaging) shall prohibit a person from engaging in lawful conduct that occurs inside a place of religious worship". For clarity, the Bill says the "place of religious worship" means a building but "does not include the grounds or other land associated with the building".

It means that any materials that could be construed as influencing someone attending for abortion services, and potentially prayers, on a Church grounds would be unlawful also. In the UK, the buffer zones are 150m. In Scotland, proposals are in place to extend the zones to 200m. Expect Ireland to follow suit.

It is clear under the current Government, just as what happens on private Church grounds is now subordinate to abortion rights in the safe access zones, religious freedom, the right to prayer and private thought, whenever they come into conflict with abortion rights and the new secular creed, are merely contingent rights.

We should expect similar cases to that of Isabel Vaughan-Spruce coming to the Irish courts in the future but we should not necessarily expect the same outcomes. Ireland has historically been a dogmatic country. It remains so. But the dogma has changed.

# A day of wonder 'to hope and act with creation'



Bishop Martin Hayes

Each year, from September 1 to October 4, starting with World Day of Prayer for Creation the first day of September, the ecumenical family celebrates the 'Season of Creation'. This is an annual opportunity to pause and reflect on how we care for the gift of creation. It is a special Church season that speaks to people of all ages, and one that we should cherish for the benefit of future generations.

## Calendar

So how did the Season of Creation come about as a specific calendar period? As creation has a special significance for Christianity, Pope Francis established the Season of Creation in 2015 as an official, annual, celebration to be marked

from September 1 – now designated as the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation – and this season runs until October 4, the Feast of Saint Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology and the environment. 2015 was also the year Pope Francis published his global bestselling encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*, On Care for our Common Home. The season celebrates the joy of creation and encourages local and national awareness-raising initiatives to protect the natural environment. Each year bespoke resources are prepared by the *Laudato Si'* Working Group, a group of interested people supported by the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, and these are designed to inform and support creation initiatives in dioceses, parishes and families at home.

We can all take comfort in that our Scriptures begin with scenes of creation. From nothingness, the Creator God brought forth light itself. The substance of our Earth, its lands and waters, are filled with creatures whose hearts begin beating at the Creator's touch. All we can see and hear flows from these first moments of existence. From

the chirping of birds to the sigh of wind in the trees, creation sings in harmony with the Creator.

As the Psalmist reminds us, "the Earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness" (Ps 24). We, the people who were made in God's image, have been charged with stewardship of this great gift. Our Creator instructed humanity to "keep" the garden (Gen 2:15).

Unfortunately, the signs of the times make clear that the global community has not lived up to this duty.

## Changing

We humans are changing the climate. Within the next 35 years, temperatures in Ireland are expected to rise by 1C to 1.6C over the pre-industrial average. That may not sound like a lot. However, for the entirety of human civilization, the temperature has swung by only about 0.5 degrees up or down. Warmer temperatures mean that Ireland is likely to see rainfall decrease whilst heatwaves ramp up. Everyone from farmers to schoolchildren will suffer the consequences.

At the same time, life is being

extinguished. Scientists count 1,911 species that have gone extinct since tallies began in the 16th century. Given that science has barely made a dent in mapping the overall extent of life on Earth, this number greatly underestimates our loss. Approximately one million species now stand on the brink of extinction.

How can we, as individuals and as a community, respond? The Church can lead the way.

**“As the bishops' message for this season states, 'to hope in a biblical context does not mean to stand still and quiet, but rather actively striving for new life amidst the struggles'”**

The bishops of Ireland have recognised our duty to care for creation. Whether divesting from the fossil fuels that are driving climate change to returning 30% of Church grounds to nature, the Church across

the island of Ireland is committed to acting on our faith.

## Committed

Bishops have also committed to celebrating the Season of Creation. To support everyone, the Bishops' Conference has provided user-friendly resources, including a guide to Sunday liturgies, prayers and activities for families and children's groups, and a blessing of the animals for the Feast of Saint Francis. These resources are now available on catholicbishops.ie. All across the island, from Kerry to Meath to Kilmore to Derry, parishes and dioceses are celebrating the season, each in their own unique way.

The theme proposed for this year's Season of Creation is 'to hope and act with creation'. As the bishops' message for this season states, "to hope in a biblical context does not mean to stand still and quiet, but rather actively striving for new life amidst the struggles".

We are the custodians of our fragile environment on behalf of our children and their children. So let's hope and act with creation. The important thing is to begin, and don't be afraid to partner with your family, friends and parishioners.

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# Shortage of doctors shows vocational crisis in Ireland



David Quinn

In many parts of the country there is a shortage of GPs. Therefore, it is not just the priesthood that is suffering from a shortage of vocations.

Figures last week from the Irish Medical Council showed the scale of the problem. The worst hit county is Meath, which has only 54 doctors per 100,000 people. Next is Monaghan, with 57 GPs per 100,000.

The World Health Organisation recommends 100 GPs per 100,000 people and only two counties in Ireland reach that level, namely Galway and Waterford. Cork and Dublin are not too far off.

In general, midland counties

are served more poorly than the rest of the country.

The situation nationwide is going to worsen. For a start, not enough GPs are in training. Secondly, a high number are due for retirement, and third, the population of the country is growing faster than we can accommodate.

According to the Irish College of General Practitioners, there are currently around 3,500 GPs in the country. Per head of population, this is almost a third lower than in Britain, where GPs are also under strain.

**“Overall, it is estimated that we need an additional 1,600 GPs in just four years-time. Is that feasible?”**

Around a fifth of GPs, or 700 or so, are due to retire in the next few years, but the total in training is only about 800. That might sound like it is just

enough to cover retirements, but this is misleading because not all trainee GPs finish their training. Also, existing GPs sometimes drop out of the profession entirely or drop down to part-time work, and when a GP retires from a rural practice, it can be very hard to find a replacement.

GPs in rural areas can also find it hard to get holiday cover, meaning burn-out rates among them increase.

Overall, it is estimated that we need an additional 1,600 GPs in just four years-time. Is that feasible?

## Trends

GPs are under a triple hammer of changing social trends. For a start, the population is getting older, fast. The number of over 65s is soaring. In fact, the CSO estimates that by the middle of the century, the number of people aged over 65 will outnumber children aged under 15 by hundreds of thousands.

A high percentage of patients seen by GPs are retired,



and therefore the strain on the system is going to grow enormously.

Secondly, people expect more from the health system than they used to and there are more free schemes. This also increases the pressure on doctors. (I'll come back to this).

Thirdly, it is hard to appreciate just how fast the population of Ireland is increasing. We tend to focus only on the numbers seeking asylum here, but actually a far bigger number of immigrants are coming here for economic reasons.

**“Net immigration is outstripping natural population growth by almost four to one”**

For example, last year, net migration into the country came to almost 78,000 people. The rate of natural increase (births over deaths) was just 20,000.

Therefore, net immigration is outstripping natural population growth by almost four to one.

Now, last year was an exceptional one in terms of immigration, and we must take into account the war in Ukraine. Nonetheless ever since the late 1990s Ireland has seen high net immigration regularly with this pattern being interrupted only by the post-2008 property crash and then the Covid lockdowns. In 2007, we saw net immigration of 107,000 people. That is a huge number for a small country.

A recent report from the real estate agency, Savills, surveyed the rate of population growth in nine countries, including Ireland, and

compared this with its rate of home building. It found that Ireland was building only one house for every 4.1 additional people in the population. This was the worst ratio in the countries considered.

A fast-growing population must create infrastructural and other strains. It increases demand for accommodation, and also for health services. It cannot be otherwise.

## Over-encouraged

Is it possible also that people are too inclined now to go to a doctor and is this being over-encouraged by a State which has turned the pursuit of health and wellbeing into a sort of quasi-religion? In line with this, the number of free schemes is constantly increasing and ultimately the State will not be able to afford all these schemes.

If you speak to doctors and practice nurses, they will tell you that it is not uncommon for people to book appointments for no good reason. They might have something very minor like a cold.

There are also a growing number of what is called 'the worried well' in the population, that is, people who are basically in good health but are worried that they might not be and therefore go to see doctors more than they should.

And obviously when something is free, you will be more inclined to avail of it.

It is perfectly possible in the years ahead that the strain of an ageing, growing population of people more worried than in the past about their health will cause more GPs to drop out of the profession altogether, thereby adding even more strain to the system.

Being a doctor is a vocation, as is being a priest. At their best, both walks of life are a calling. In one case you are looking

after someone's body, and in the other case, their souls. Both vocations require tremendous patience and an orientation towards other people.

As with priests, some doctors don't really have a vocation, or else lose it. They grow weary in the job and become burnt out. Plenty of others are, of course, able to keep their sense of vocation right to the end.

But being a doctor is not as high status as it once was, as it is the case with the priesthood.

In the past, there were far fewer high status and (relatively) highly paid jobs available, and clever people were often eager to enter the medical profession.

**“I think nearly all vocational professions are suffering from the severe competition being offered by other occupations”**

Now there are lots of other high status, highly paid jobs on offer and therefore the medical profession has far more competition than was once the case.

But can it really be said that something like computer programming is a vocation? I don't think so. In fact, I think nearly all vocational professions are suffering from the severe competition being offered by other occupations.

I believe there is a growing vocational crisis in Ireland overall, and it is not just affecting the priesthood. I think it is affecting the medical profession as well, and to judge from the growing difficulty the Gardaí have attracting recruits, police work also. At the end of the day, this is a very bad trend for society.

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# The sign of peace may never recover – but at what price?



Martina Purdy

There is a phrase that seems to send a ripple of fear through many Mass-goers these days. And it's nothing to do with eternal punishment! Though Catholics of course should fear hell, it's rarely mentioned. No, what appears to frighten the congregation these days is when a bishop or priest declares, after the consecration: "You may now offer one another the sign of peace."

In recent weeks, I've noticed this invitation returning in some Masses north and south of the border – is this a discreet attempt to restore the sign of peace? If so, there's hesitation in the pews. Perhaps not so much fear as uncertainty about what is meant. A handshake?

At a recent Requiem Mass, a few of us shook hands, though some kept their heads down while others turned and smiled and offered, at a safe distance, the post-Covid wave.

One woman in the pew in front of me turned and offered her hand to the person directly behind her. To my dismay, her hand was refused and she turned away again.

## Wounding

This has happened to me on a few occasions and it is wounding, even when you know it's not personal (at least I don't think it is!).

This 'sign of peace' gesture has never recovered from the lockdown years, when we became frightened of each other and hid behind the 'security' of masks.

Speaking of which, I watched a woman leave a cafe a few days ago in a

mask. She had come outside for a cigarette and removed her face covering intermittently so she could inhale puffs of toxic smoke.

I pondered how illogical we humans can be when it comes to our safety.

While we cower at the notion of shaking hands with a stranger, how many of us would dive on a £100 euro note lying in the street, not thinking twice about where it had been?

Traditionally, a handshake was to reassure an enemy that one was unarmed, and at Mass it is a formal recognition of the community's role. I once met a priest who decided it was a terrible distraction from the Lamb of God on the altar. "I don't bother with it," he declared.

**“Are any of us immune from this fear of contagion fuelled by Covid – whose dangers we now know were ultimately exaggerated?”**

Frankly, I always wondered if shaking hands at Mass was in the wrong place and perhaps would work better at the beginning. To be honest, shaking hands can be a challenge. A devout in a former parish, who attended mass every day, had a serious germ phobia and admitted to dreading the sign of peace.

I affectionately called her, "Howard Hughes without the money!" after reading that the eccentric billionaire, who had a terror of germs, had once contemplated a run for the American presidency until it was pointed out to him that he would have to shake thousands of hands.

Are any of us immune from this fear of contagion fuelled by Covid – whose dangers we now



know were ultimately exaggerated? With friends I sometimes fist pump at Mass. It seems more modern and hygienic. When the Italian bishops conference re-introduced the sign of peace, it suggested the use of hand sanitiser as a precaution. Is this faith and reason in action – or a lack of faith in the Body of Christ we are about to receive?

A close friend produces hand sanitiser constantly and I often joke she will perish from a rare disease associated with this fluid. "It works," she declares, "I suffer fewer colds than I used to!"

## Monkeypox

The dreaded Monkeypox has just been declared a public health emergency of international concern. The handshake of peace may never recover – though at what price?

I once sat next to an elderly man whose nose

was running like a stream all through Mass. I could see from the corner of my eye that he used his hands as a wipe as he coughed and sneezed. I had no handkerchief and to my shame spent much of the Mass struggling with the notion of shaking his hand.

I was repulsed, but told myself that Christ showed us by example the importance of touch long before the psychologists wrote about it – and Christ touched the lepers, those deemed unclean.

"He is the poor Christ," I told my shrinking soul. "It will be a privilege to touch his hand."

And, shake his hand, I did. I also looked into this man's face. And received not just the gift of peace, but great joy. As St Rose of Lima would say, after suffering comes grace.

## ‘Why are you persecuting me?’

The scripture from Acts 9:4 came to mind, after the ordeal suffered by six Christians who were arrested in Paris this month. They were on a bus painted with the words, "Stop attacks on Christians," and have since been released. These Christians were in France to protest the Last Supper parody at the Olympics. Meanwhile, Isabel Vaughan just received £13,000 (€15,344) from West Midlands police who admitted no liability after she was arrested for praying outside an abortion clinic, a "protected" public space. "Soft persecution" compared to the thousands killed in recent years in North Korea, Somalia, Libya, Uganda and Yemen. "Why are you persecuting me?" the words of Christ to St Paul before his conversion. Why indeed!

## Giving children puberty blockers is false compassion

Common sense and true Christian compassion has prevailed at Stormont – an all too-rare event. So, blessings on Mike Nesbitt, the unionist health minister, for persuading the assembly to put an albeit, temporary, ban on puberty blockers. These drugs have been given to children confused about sex and cause sterility and other health problems. This ban came after transgender activists threatened to use Northern Ireland as a backdoor to bring these drugs into GB, where Labour has already banned them. Giving these drugs to children is false compassion. No child is born in the wrong body.

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# The big mystery of Dublin's twin pillars...



Chai Brady

**A**n air of mystery shrouds elements of the Archbishop of Dublin's ambitious new 'twin pillar' strategy for the archdiocese which centres on St Mary's Pro-Cathedral and St Andrew's Westland Row – soon to be made a cathedral and minor basilica respectively.

Archbishop Dermot Farrell pegged the two churches as being well placed to be developed as twin pillars "of a renewed pastoral and missionary strategy". However a well-placed Dublin priest who wished to remain anonymous said there is an uncertainty as to exactly what this will entail in real terms and how it will be achieved – particularly when the prelate mentions that the strategy will also focus on the churches providing a base for "pastoral engagement".

## Unanswered

*The Irish Catholic* posed many questions to the archdiocese in the days and weeks after the announcement but was met with brief often vague responses, leaving much unanswered. For instance, this paper asked: "In relation to Archbishop Dermot Farrell's statement on the twin-pillar strategy, he noted: 'I am now inviting St Mary's and St Andrew's to begin to implement the proposals they presented to develop their liturgical and pastoral ministries.' What were the proposals presented by St Mary's and St Andrew's?"

To which the archdiocese responded: "These proposals include outreach to the inner-city communities, for example



through St Andrew's Resource Centre and perhaps a similar venture on the Northside. The primary purpose of both churches is liturgy and this will be a particular focus going forward." The primary purpose of most churches is liturgy, so this seems a very evasive answer.

The archdioceses did not respond for a request to see the reports given to them by St Mary's and St Andrew's. It also did not respond to a query about where Archbishop Farrell's forthcoming "substantial financial support" would be coming from in order to "enable necessary structural work to be carried out without adversely affecting other important pas-

toral needs". For the archbishop to spend €25million approximately on the Pro Cathedral, without affecting other pastoral needs, means either he's using the Clonliffe sale money, he has a wonderful benefactor lined up, or the diocese is prepared to get into debt.

## Deficit

According to insiders, Dublin diocese is running a two million deficit annually. 40% of parishes are unable to pay as much as would be desired.

The 'Implementation Group', chaired by Bishop Paul Dempsey, will also be spearheading the aim "to identify other sources of

support for the development of pastoral and cultural programmes, as well as for the conservation of the fabric and artefacts that are of civic importance. The reality is that these very large and important structures will require care and investment irrespective of any change in their status or role", according to Archbishop Farrell – no doubt referencing the much-needed refurbishment works needed on St Mary's.

**“There wasn't a lot of enthusiasm for the Basilica idea and several said the diocese should focus on one place”**

Asked about the cost of the refurbishment of the cathedral-to-be, the archdiocese stated: "At the moment there is no amount projected or allocated for possible upgrades at St Mary's Pro-Cathedral."

In the archbishop's hom-

ily announcing the strategy he also mentioned the Church being in a "time of poverty", keeping tight lipped about funding sources for the 'twin pillars'.

The Archbishop did hold some consultations internally about the future of the Pro-Cathedral. Heads of Office in the Archdiocese were consulted. There wasn't a lot of enthusiasm for the Basilica idea and several said the diocese should focus on one place.

## Neglect

So most if not all of the money raised will go on the Pro-Cathedral its believed, along with the priests residence beside it, which has suffered years of neglect.

Insiders say that just as Gardiner street parish now comes under the remit of the Pro-Cathedral, so will other parishes in the inner city as the religious orders that run them eventually pull back due to manpower issues. Sean McDermot street, run by the Salesians,

is seen as one of the parishes next to be integrated with the Pro.

**“There seems little evidence of an emerging synodality (listening, discussion, hearing) with the clergy and laity of the diocese”**

While voices of some clergy, such as Vincentian provincial Paschal Scallion CM writing in this paper on July 18 believe that the city centre should not be abandoned by the Church and we should try to "rebuild the Church, the Communion that is people of God who are called to be the Body of Christ" there seems little evidence of an emerging synodality (listening, discussion, hearing) with the clergy and laity of the diocese of a major pivot in the direction for the diocese towards the city centre, and even less evidence of a willingness to answer the most basic questions of the Catholic media asking on behalf of the clergy and laity.

**“Insiders say that just as Gardiner street parish now comes under the remit of the Pro-Cathedral, so will other parishes in the inner city as the religious orders that run them eventually pull back due to manpower issues”**

# Touching the divine...



The relics of the saints are a trusted way to draw closer to God, writes **Michael Kelly**

**C**atholic veneration of relics – body parts and indeed objects linked to the lives of holy men and women – goes right back to the early Church. The bodies of the martyrs were often retrieved after their deaths. And their resting places became places of pilgrimage.

As persecution faded and the faith grew, Christians longed to have their own association with the holy men and women who had given their lives for the Faith – soon the practice of distributing relics became common as a way to sanctify places of worship and spread devotion to the saints as a way of encouraging people to emulate their lives of witness.

## Generations

Up until a couple of generations ago, every newly-consecrated altar would have relics placed in it as part of the solemn ceremony presided over by the bishop to set aside the space for sacred duties.

Abuses around the time of the Reformation led some people to be sceptical about relics, and the Church is always cautious to discourage any form of superstition or magical thinking around relics. After all, worship is for God – not the saints, however much we might admire their examples of life and want to feel close to them.

Think about it at a purely human level. When a child dies, a parent will often



A reliquary containing a relic of St Bernadette Soubirous is seen on the altar during a healing Mass in 2022, at Holy Family Church in Queens, New York. The evening service was celebrated in anticipation of the World Day of the Sick, an annual observance that coincides with the February 11 feast of Our Lady of Lourdes. Photo: OSV

hold their blanket dear – because it helps them feel close to the child they miss so dearly. Items associated with the person who had died, are often very dear to us – this is why heirlooms are so important to families.

Some Catholics feel a bit squeamish about relics – the piety and devotion can be off-putting for some, but that is to fail to see and appreciate that God came to us in human flesh and the human body is made in God's image and likeness.

**“The Church refers to the phenomenon as incorruptibility, a belief that divine intervention allows some bodies to completely or partially avoid the normal process of decomposition”**

As the relics of St Bernadette come on their tour of Ireland, people from every part of the country are likely to turn out to venerate this holy woman. Faith is a personal thing, and everyone carries their own

journey on occasions like this. For some, it will be the earnest hope for a miracle, for others it will be for an increase in a faltering faith, for others still it will be simple thanksgiving for all the good things that come in life. Many others will have no particular idea why they are venerating the relics of Bernadette, but will still feel quietly drawn to that simple act of faith, hope and trust.

St Bernadette's body remains on display for public veneration today. The Church refers to the phenomenon as incorruptibility, a belief that divine intervention allows some bodies to completely or partially avoid the normal process of decomposition after death as a sign of their holiness.

None of this is to say that the body must remain perfectly intact and free from all decomposition. To be considered extraordinary, a body has to be in an unusually well-preserved state, with lifelike colour and freshness, lack of odour or signs of normal putrefaction, and some degree of flexibility.

Of course, faith does not rise or fall on such phenomenon and Catholics are not required to believe that a body is preserved by divine intervention. There are also other factors, including environmental, that can affect the natural process of decomposition.

## Canonisation

At one time, the Church would accept a candidate for sainthood's incorruptibility as one of the miracles required for canonisation. This practice fell out of use

because being incorrupt after death is not one of the requirements to be declared a saint in the Church, nor is it a definitive sign of having lived a life of heroic virtue. According to Catholic tra-

**“The fact that God took on human flesh means Christians venerate with great reverence the bodies of those who have gone before us”**

In 2020, when the Vatican approved the beatification of the Italian teen Carlo Acutis, internet rumours soon spread when his body was put on display that it was discovered incorrupt. This led the Bishop of Assisi, Italy, Dr Domenico

Sorrentino, to clarify that though Blessed Carlo's body appeared intact in photos, that was due to the use of a silicone reconstruction of his face – his body had been found in a normal state of decay when exhumed 14 years after his death in 2006.

## Venerate

Catholicism is an incarnational faith, the fact that God took on human flesh means Christians venerate with great reverence the bodies of those who have gone before us. That's why sprinkling and incensing of the coffin is an important part of the Catholic funeral rites.

Relics are like a signpost pointing towards Heaven, and a reminder to imitate the life of the holy person being held up as a model.

St Bernadette's body remains in Nevers, but the visit of her relics to Ireland is a huge opportunity for Irish Catholics to venerate the saint, and through her intercession draw closer to the God who will raise all our mortal bodies.

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**“Relics are like a signpost pointing towards Heaven, and a reminder to imitate the life of the holy person being held up as a model”**

# St Bernadette's timeless appeal



Brandon Scott

**S**eldom do events or phenomena have a timeless appeal. Global juggernauts in the form of organisations and large-scale companies have tried and mostly failed to perfect products, slogans or inventive designs that transcend generations and secure permanent lustre.

As Catholics, we're reminded to stray away from the material and the commercial, but if we were to crudely compare the timeless appeal of St Bernadette to a marketing strategy or a promotional ploy after almost two centuries of resonance with Catholics and faith-curious people from all corners of the globe, it would undoubtedly be one of the most lauded and would almost guarantee prosperity for whatever business championed it from now until the end of time.

But what makes the story of an unassuming French girl, a girl who was described as a peasant, uneducated, living in abject conditions and unusually small in stature so alluring, generation after generation?

The simple answer is visions, visions which depicted a woman "wearing a white veil, a blue girdle and with a yellow rose on each foot", that illuminated in front of Bernadette 18 separate times in quick succession before they were never to be reprised again in her lifetime.

These visions varied in appearance and theme, but the colour of the garments described by Bernadette, along with the woman's style of clothing, were consistent with the traditional image of Mary that has been portrayed in church grottos and paintings in the latter centuries.

## Enshrined

St Bernadette's name and mystical experiences have been enshrined in the dedication of cathedrals, churches, chapels and Catholic schools, and this trend is no more present than in Ireland, where after her canonisation in 1925, there was a clamour to immortalise her legacy and honour her, and this is still visible today, and is particularly noticeable when one examines the names of schools and churches.

Against the backdrop of St Bernadette's relics set to journey around all of Ireland's 26 dioceses for the first time between September 4 and November 5, *The Irish Catholic* investigates the circumstances



The incorrupt body of St Bernadette in her shrine in Lourdes, France.

surrounding the sustained devotional popularity to her life and story – a popularity that sees an incredible 5 million people travelling annually to her shrine in Lourdes, France to encounter her graces and unite themselves wholly to her works and message.

Born on January 7 1844 at the Boly Mill in France and baptised the next day by Fr Dominique Forgue in the parish church of Lourdes, Bernadette Soubirous was the first child of Francois Soubirous and Louise Casterot.

**“Tragedy was commonplace in the family: out of six brothers and two sisters, only three lived beyond the age of ten”**

St Bernadette grew up in a close-knit family in which she was cherished and deeply adored. Her father was a miller at the local Boly Mill and although her childhood is observed as being idyllic and carefree, poverty, sickness, mortality and extreme famine marred her adolescence and brought hardship to the family.

Tragedy was commonplace in the family: out of six brothers and two sisters, only three lived beyond the age of ten. The

young Bernadette was illiterate and this became an obstacle to her making her Holy Communion as she needed to learn the Catechism in French when she could only speak patois, a colloquial form of the language.

Eventually a priest, Fr Pomian, promised that if she returned to Lourdes from Bartres (where she was sent at 13), he would prepare her for her Holy Communion. Three weeks after her 14th birthday, the young Bernadette walked back to Lourdes on her own, and never went back to Bartres. This return to Lourdes proved to be the defining moment in the life of St Bernadette and inspired a series of inexplicable events that irreversibly altered her life and the landscape of European Catholicism in the 19th and 20th centuries.

## Vision

On February 11 1858, Bernadette, then aged 14, was out gathering firewood with her sister Toinette and a friend near the grotto of Massabielle when she experienced her first vision. While the other girls crossed the little stream in front of the grotto and walked on, Bernadette remained behind.

She finally sat down to take her shoes off in order to cross the water and was lowering her stocking when she heard the sound of ferocious wind, but nothing moved. A wild rose in a natural niche in the grotto,

however, did move. From the niche, or rather the dark alcove behind it, “came a dazzling light, and a white figure”, according to Bernadette.

This was the first of 18 visions of what she referred to as *aquerò*, Gascon Occitan (a dialect in southern France) for “that”. In later testimony, she called it “a small young lady” (*uo petito damizelo*). Her sister and her friend claimed that they had witnessed nothing.

**“The supposed apparition did not identify herself until the seventeenth vision”**

On February 14, after Sunday Mass, Bernadette, with her sister Marie and some other girls, returned to the grotto. Bernadette knelt down immediately, saying she saw the apparition again. When one of the girls threw holy water at the niche and another threw a rock from above that shattered on the ground, the apparition disappeared. On her next visit, February 18, Bernadette said that “the vision” asked her to return to the grotto every day for a fortnight.

This period of almost daily visions came to be known as *la Quinzaine sacrée*, ‘holy fortnight’. Initially, Bernadette's parents, especially her mother,

were embarrassed and tried to forbid her to go. The supposed apparition did not identify herself until the seventeenth vision.

Although the townspeople who believed she was telling the truth assumed she saw the Virgin Mary, Bernadette never claimed it to be Mary, consistently using the word *aquerò*. She described the lady as wearing a white veil, a blue girdle and with a yellow rose on each foot – consistent with “a description of any statue of the Virgin in a village church”.

## Conflicted

Bernadette's story caused disquiet among the townspeople, who were conflicted in their opinions on whether or not she was telling the truth. Some believed her to have a mental illness and demanded she be put in an asylum.

The other contents of Bernadette's reported visions were simple and focused on the need for prayer and penance. On February 25, she explained that the vision had told her “to drink of the water of the spring, to wash in it and to eat the herb that grew there”, as an act of penance.

To everyone's surprise, the next day the grotto was no longer muddy but clear water flowed. On March 2, at the thirteenth apparition, Bernadette told her family that the lady said that “a chapel should be built and a procession formed”.

The sixteenth vision, which Bernadette stated went on for over an hour, was on 25 March. According to her account, during that visitation, she again asked the woman for her name but the lady just smiled back.

She repeated the question

three more times and finally heard the lady say, in Gascon Occitan, “I am the Immaculate Conception” (*Que soy era immaculada councepciou in Occitan*). Despite being forensically interviewed by officials of both the Church and the French government, she stuck resolutely to her story.

On April 7, Bernadette had another vision, during which her hand was apparently not burnt while being in contact with the flame of a candle for several minutes. On June 8 1858, the mayor of Lourdes decided to barricade the grotto and put guards to prevent public access.

On July 16, Bernadette came back to see the grotto from the other side of the river and experienced her eighteenth and last apparition of the lady.

**“Bernadette said that it was faith and prayer that cured the sick: ‘One must have faith and pray; the water will have no virtue without faith’”**

After investigation, Church authorities confirmed the authenticity of the apparitions in 1862. In the 160 years since Bernadette dug up the spring, 70 cures have been verified by the Lourdes Medical Bureau as “inexplicable” – after what the Church claims are “extremely rigorous scientific and medical examinations” that failed to find any other reason.

The Lourdes Commission that investigated Bernadette after the visions ran an inten-

sive analysis on the water and found that, while it had a high mineral content, it contained nothing out of the ordinary that would account for the cures attributed to it. Bernadette said that it was faith and prayer that cured the sick: "One must have faith and pray; the water will have no virtue without faith".

Bernadette's remarkable life took another abrupt turn as unable to cope with the ensuing attention after the visions, she sought solitude and seclusion and entered the local hospice school run by the Sisters of Charity of Nevers where she learned to read and write.

Although she considered joining the Carmelites, her health prevented her entering any of the strict contemplative orders. On July 29 1866, with 42 other candidates, she took the religious habit of a postulant and joined the Sisters of Charity at their motherhouse, the St Gildard Convent at Nevers.

The Mother Superior at the time gave her the name Marie-Bernarde in honour of her godmother who was named 'Bernarde'. The experience of becoming 'Sr Marie-Bernard' marked a turning point for Bernadette as she realised more than ever that the great grace she received from the Queen of Heaven brought with it great responsibilities.

Bernadette spent the rest of her brief life at the motherhouse, working as an assistant in the infirmary and later as a sacristan, creating elaborate embroidery for altar cloths and vestments. Her contemporaries admired her humility and spirit of sacrifice. One day, asked about the apparitions, she replied:

"The Virgin used me as a broom to remove the dust. When the work is done, the broom is put behind the door again."

### Development

Bernadette had followed the development of Lourdes as a pilgrimage shrine while she still lived at Lourdes but was not present for the consecration of

the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception there in 1876.

Unfortunately, Bernadette's childhood bout of "cholera left ... [Bernadette] with severe, chronic asthma, and eventually she contracted tuberculosis of the lungs and bones". For several months prior to her death, she was unable to take an active part in convent life. She eventually died of her long-term illness at the age of 35 on April 16 1879 (Easter Wednesday), while praying the Holy Rosary.

On her deathbed, as she suffered from severe pain. Her final words were, "Blessed Mary, Mother of God, Pray for me". Her body was laid to rest in the St Joseph Chapel, in the grounds of her convent.

30 years after her death, Bishop Gauthery of Nevers exhumed the body of Bernadette on September 22 1909, in the presence of representatives appointed by the postulants of the cause, two doctors and a sister of the community.

**“The body is practically mummified, covered with patches of mildew and quite a notable layer of salts, which appear to be calcium salts”**

They claimed that although the crucifix in her hand and her rosary had both oxidised, her body appeared incorrupt. This was referenced as one of the miracles to support her canonisation. They washed and re clothed her body before reburial in the Chapel of St Joseph in a new double casket.

The Church exhumed the corpse a second time on April 3 1919, on the occasion of the approval of Bernadette's canonisation. Dr. Comte, who examined the body, noted, "The body is practically mummified, covered with patches of mildew and quite a notable layer of salts, which appear to

be calcium salts... The skin has disappeared in some places, but it is still present on most parts of the body". Again, the body was returned to the vault of St Joseph's chapel.

In 1925, the Church exhumed the body for a third time. They took relics, which were sent to Rome. A precise imprint of the face was moulded to make a wax mask based on the imprints and on some genuine photos to be placed on her body.

This was common practice for relics in France as it was feared that the blackish tinge to the face and the sunken eyes and nose would be viewed as corruption by the public. Imprints of the hands were also taken for the presentation of the body and the making of wax casts.

The remains were then placed in a gold and crystal reliquary in the Chapel of St Bernadette at the main church of the convent.

Bernadette was declared blessed on June 14 1921 by Pope Pius XI. She was canonised by Pius XI on December 8 1933, the feast of the Immaculate Conception. She is celebrated in the liturgical calendar of the Church on April 16.

### Marvels

The marvels rich in Bernadette's life have encouraged many of the Irish faithful to actualise her devotion and establish prayer groups and yearly diocesan pilgrimages to Lourdes to experience the sacredness of the site. Pilgrims are able to wash themselves and collect the water in the spring where St Bernadette washed her face in, offering both a profound physical and spiritual healing.

In 1913, the Irish hierarchy organised a national pilgrimage. Canon Lockhart of Glashule was General Secretary of the 1913 Pilgrimage. A total of 2,187 pilgrims travelled to Lourdes. One pilgrim, Grace Maloney from Co. Clare was cured of a tubercular femur during this Pilgrimage.

Now, with St Bernadette's



Pope Francis, left, celebrates Mass with Cardinal Fernando Vérgez Alzaga, president of the Pontifical Commission for Vatican City State, during a Mass for the Vatican's police force, known as the gendarme, in the Lourdes grotto of the Vatican Gardens October 1, 2022. Photo: CNS/Vatican Media

relics poised to touch thousands on this island as they take their maiden trip around all the corners of the country, let us recall the gifts and immense sanctity of one of the Faith's most consequential figures of the last two centuries. Her humble origins, her adversity, her tenacity and, most importantly, her steadfast faith in the Church and the Blessed Mother.

Faith is sometimes advised as optimally being on the far side of reason – that has its merits. Sometimes the inexplicable or anomalous can't be properly explained with-

out something artificial or humanly inspired underlying it.

### Perfect

St Bernadette's account of the apparition is the perfect example of this ever-lively conflict. Her initial reports of the apparition she saw were greeted with a mixture of support and suspicion; the latter compelling some locals to demand that she be admitted to a psychiatric hospital. But Bernadette persevered and never recanted or deviated from what appeared before her; validation wasn't her objective. She knew what

she saw.

From initial doubt to canonisation, St Bernadette's story exemplifies the courage that's needed to become a saint; to be imperturbable in the face of derision and inspired purely by faith and not worldly personal motives.

If you're fortunate enough to get a glimpse of the relics this Autumn, let the overriding thought be as you take part in this historic event that, as attested by St Bernadette and her story, miracles do happen and savour the moment as you're now in the presence of one.

## Who will pass on the flame of faith?

A future where young people are exposed to the power of the Good News can be part of your legacy, help spread the light of the Gospel to future generations across Ireland by remembering *The Irish Catholic* in your Will.



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A member of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in De Pere, Wisconsin, US, has her necklace placed against a glass case containing first-class relics of St Bernadette Soubirous June 14, 2022. Photo: CNS/Sam Lucero, The Compass

# Irish Family had life changed forever by St Bernadette and Lourdes



Renata Steffens

**M**any miracles are attributed to St Bernadette and the Shrine in Lourdes. People travel to Lourdes from all around the world to be cured from all sorts of illnesses. Ireland has a long connection with the French town, dating back to the 1880s, when the first English-speaking pilgrimage was organised.

Terry Clarke, director for The Lourdes Kindness charity told *The Irish Catholic* people go to Lourdes for many reasons, she believes St Bernadette and the shrine have such strong energy that they will attract even those with no faith at all.

"Many people come to Lourdes and don't have faith, or they are from a different faith. But you can't help but feel it when you get to Lourdes," Ms Clarke said, adding that even if some pilgrims don't believe in everything that happened in 1858, "it did happen, so whether they believe it or not, they feel it."

## Impact

Ms Clarke's story with Lourdes and St Bernadette goes back over 35 years. Her husband Peadar Clarke was in a wheelchair and cured on May 7, 1989 during a pilgrimage to Lourdes. Ms and Mr Clarke were also struggling to have children, and after trying for ten years, only a miracle would be able to make that a reality.

During that first pilgrimage, a priest came to them and said, "something would happen between February 11-18 of the following year," to what she replied "Oh my God, that's nine months. I can't take any more miracles." Marie-Bernadette Checkmodine-Chatoua was born in the following February, being a result of the second Clarke family's miracle.

These miracles changed the family forever. Since then, they go to Lourdes multiple times every year. They founded the Lourdes Kindness Pilgrimage, which is an annual pilgrimage paid by fundraise throughout the year.

The organisation takes "people who wouldn't be able to afford to go to Lourdes. We

take them from all settings, and we sometimes have children with us. We help fund their parents to bring them down, they'd be very sick children." They also take people from hospitals, nursing homes and hospices.

Ms Checkmodine-Chatoua and her brother had a unique upbringing compared to other children. They grew-up in between Dublin and Lourdes, as Mr Clarke started to work for a travel agency after being cured, and the family would go on numerous pilgrimages to Lourdes themselves.

Even their games would include St Bernadette, that was how inserted the saint was in their lives. "I would always pretend to be Bernadette, and I'd make my friends be Holy Mary. She was always in my mind," Ms Checkmodine-Chatoua mentioned.

**"I love these parts of her, and I try to emulate those parts. Her humility and her strength of character, her defiance"**

For her, carrying the name of Bernadette growing up just felt natural, as if she knew the saint personally. Which in a sense she did. She told this paper she was in the presence of St Bernadette's relics before: "It is an absolute privilege to be in a room with them, and let alone to have actually held the monstrance holding the relics in my hand."

"But it's the [saint's] human qualities that always drew me to her," Ms Checkmodine-Chatoua said. Sharing her name with the saint means a lot to her, as it carries "Bernadette's message, who she was, her character."

"I love these parts of her, and I try to emulate those parts. Her humility and her strength of character, her defiance. [She was a] 14-year-old girl having the strength of character to withstand."

St Bernadette was tested many times, she was brought before the police and priests, but she was standing to what she saw. She "had to stay true to her word and which she did...I think in many ways that's probably what has always helped me with my own faith. I'm Catholic, I was born Catholic. But I'm also just 34, any time I wavered, not so much from my faith, but from the Church. It was her and her integrity that

gave me strength to keep my faith going."

For Ms Checkmodine-Chatoua, it is important to learn to separate one's faith and the Church. She recalls growing up and finding herself questioning the Church. Talking to friends who stepped away from the Catholic faith and reading about Church scandals made her sceptical, but her faith was never shaken.

"I always had that [link to St Bernadette and to Lourdes] to come back to, [I] have my faith to support me and guide me. So, it's been a real source of comfort and resilience in my own life. Personally, that's what it would mean to me. Resilience."

This resilience and unshakable faith are characteristics that run through generations in the Clarke family. Ms Checkmodine-Chatoua has 7-year-old twins, who are being raised as practicing Catholics. "We talk about Jesus every day, we talk about Our Lady every day, we talk about St Bernadette every day."

## Challenges

The twins are studying in an 'educate together school', as she wants to raise them having as much respect for other people's religions as possible. However, Ms Checkmodine-Chatoua never anticipated the children would face faith challenges so young.

One day, the boys came back from school and one of them said "so and so doesn't believe in God, mammy." She then explained that "some people don't believe in God. What's important is what you believe, and you know we can respect that they don't believe. I hope that they would respect what you believe."

The boy said he was "feeling upside down" with the fact that some people don't believe in God, as the family is very religious and that was the first time they encountered a situation where they had such a conversation.

Ms Checkmodine-Chatoua said the boy stated laughing, what she questioned, and he said "I actually don't really feel upside down about it. I kind of feel happy. Because just wait till we all go to heaven and they all see God there." She told this paper in that moment she saw "pure faith".

"It's a challenge because I'm having those kind of conversations with them earlier than I thought. I mean, I had questions about my faith and the Church when I was 14/15, but he was 6. They're already being challenged in their faith

and they're coming to their own understandings."

She is transmitting to her twins the same sense of faith she had growing up. "Growing up with St Bernadette was reflected in the people I met. I grew up going to this place where people just purely loved each other, and purely wanted to help each other for no other reason than knowing it's right."

Ms Checkmodine-Chatoua believes that many people go to Lourdes not looking for a cure, but looking for acceptance, for comfort.

Growing up, she would invite some friends to do the pilgrimage. Some of these friends were LGBTQ+, "struggling to come to terms with who they are as a person and trying to balance that with their faith and the teachings of the Church." These friends would come back to Ireland with their faith renewed.

She believes that sometimes, people would leave the Church not because they don't have faith anymore, but because they don't feel welcome or feel judged for who they are. "I believe that the Church needs to do more to accept and welcome all believers in Christ, as Christ himself asked us to do," Ms Checkmodine-Chatoua said.

**"Young people should not feel they need to choose between who they are or their integrity as good people in society, and their belief in God"**

"Young people in the Irish society today, thankfully have the freedom to be themselves in whatever way God made them, and many of whom still feel cast aside by the Church's outdated teachings, but whose Christian beliefs and actions often outweigh those being shown by Church representatives and teachings in our communities."

"As a contemporary Irish Catholic family and a charity organisation, we believe in Christ's message of acceptance and complete love for one another, and this means inclusion," she explained.

"Young people should not feel they need to choose between who they are or their integrity as good people in society, and their belief in God - and I think this is what Lourdes offers to any young person at a crossroads in their



Terry Clarke and Marie-Bernadette with her husband (who she met in Lourdes) and twins, Romain and Mathéo who were born in 2017. They are 7 years old and looking forward to making their holy communion in Lourdes next June.



Terry Clark and Fr Liam V. Scanlan.



Marie-Bernadette and her brother Luke about 12 years ago.



Terry and Peadar Clarke in Lourdes in 1989 when Mr Clarke was cured.



Marie-Bernadette and Peadar Clarke in Lourdes when she was 19.

faith: they can experience pure Christianity in action, and not in theory or any outdated, man-made dogma.”

### Meaning

These actions are the kindness and love people show to one another. Pushing wheelchairs, caring for strangers, supporting and accepting each other in prayer. Ms Clarke believes these actions give people a sense of adrenaline, of excitement, and that St Bernadette’s relics will bring to Ireland a similar feeling.

The relics coming to Ireland is an opportunity for the youth to find their way back to the Church, Ms Clarke said. As the young people would bring their elderly parents to see St Bernadette’s relics and feel the energy of faith.

**“Our Lady needed that strong character”**

She particularly believes the coming of the relics will “excite some of the younger

people” in their 30s and 40s who have been to Lourdes as children, with their schools or parents but fell out of faith, not faith in God, but faith in the Church.

Fr Liam V. Scanlan, spiritual director of Lourdes Kindness Pilgrimage and leader of the next pilgrimage in 2025 said that Bernadette’s “selection by Mary was perfect. Our Lady needed a special person, not well-known, not well-educated, but someone who would carry Her message right through

to the parish priest and carry it through to the end.

“Our Lady needed that strong character, even as she was at 14, to be able to face up to the various authorities, Church and locals.”

### Legacy

Fr Scanlan believes “young people today should be impressed by the strength of character of Bernadette and the visit of her relics will mean that St Bernadette’s story will be shared and spread among young

people. This in turn will give them plenty to think about”.

St Bernadette seems to keep the Clarke Family close to her. Ms Clarke hosts students who are in Ireland for a few months to study or work. Coincidentally, one of the students who is living with her is a descendant of the saint. The girl told Ms Clarke she does not believe and has no faith, but Ms Clarke plans on bringing the student to Lourdes anyway, “she is a beautiful person inside and out. I’m going

to say, ‘come on, you’ve got to come down, this is your ancestor.”

“I couldn’t believe it when she said it to me and she gave me her family name. When I put it in, Soubriou family it came straight up. She’s a descendant on her mother’s side of the family of St Bernadette.

“What are the chances of her coming to live in my house with the history that I have with Lourdes, things happen, don’t they? They happen for a reason.”

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# The Pilgrimage of Saint Bernadette's relics 2024

Pilgrimage of St Bernadette's relics 2024		
04/09/2024	Arrival Knock Airport	
05/09/2024	Galway & Clonfert	Cathedral of Our Lady & St Nicholas, Galway
06/09/2024	Galway & Clonfert	Cathedral of Our Lady & St Nicholas, Galway
07/09/2024	Galway & Clonfert	St Brendan's Cathedral, Loughrea
08/09/2024	Galway & Clonfert	St Brendan's Cathedral, Loughrea
09/09/2024	Killaloe	Our Lady of Lourdes, Silvermines, Tipperary
10/09/2024	Killaloe	Our Lady of Lourdes, Silvermines, Tipperary
11/09/2024	Limerick	Our Lady of Lourdes, Childers Rd, Limerick
12/09/2024	Limerick	Our Lady of Lourdes, Childers Rd, Limerick
13/09/2024	Kerry	Our Lady & St Brendan's Church, Tralee
14/09/2024	Kerry	Our Lady & St Brendan's Church, Tralee
15/09/2024	Cloyne	St Mary's Church, Mallow
16/09/2024	Cloyne	Holy Rosary Church, Middleton
17/09/2024	Waterford & Lismore	Holy Trinity Cathedral, Waterford City
18/09/2024	Waterford & Lismore	Holy Trinity Cathedral, Waterford City
19/09/2024	Cashel & Emly	Holycross Abbey, Thurles, Tipperary
20/09/2024	Cashel & Emly	Holycross Abbey, Thurles, Tipperary
21/09/2024	Ossory	St Mary's Cathedral, Kilkenny City
22/09/2024	Ossory	St Mary's Cathedral, Kilkenny City
23/09/2024	Ferns	St Aidan's Cathedral, Enniscorthy
24/09/2024	Ferns	St Aidan's Cathedral, Enniscorthy
25/09/2024	Dublin	Our Lady of Victories Church, Ballymun Road, Dublin
26/09/2024	Dublin	Our Lady of Victories Church, Ballymun Road, Dublin
27/09/2024	Ardagh & Clonmacnoise	St Mel's Cathedral, Longford
28/09/2024	Ardagh & Clonmacnoise	St Mel's Cathedral, Longford
29/09/2024	Tuam	Knock Shrine
30/09/2024	Tuam	Cathedral of the Assumption, Tuam
01/10/2024	Elphin	Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, Sligo
02/10/2024	Elphin	Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, Sligo
03/10/2024	Killala	St Muredach's Cathedral, Ballina
04/10/2024	Killala	St Muredach's Cathedral, Ballina
05/10/2024	Achonry	Cathedral of the Annunciation & St Nathy, Ballaghaderreen
06/10/2024	Achonry	Cathedral of the Annunciation & St Nathy, Ballaghaderreen
07/10/2024	Kildare & Leighlin	Cathedral of the Assumption, Carlow



Pilgrimage of St Bernadette's Relics 2024

08/10/2024	Kildare & Leighlin	Church of Ss Peter & Paul, Portlaoise
09/10/2024	Clogher	St Mary's Church, Castleblaney
10/10/2024	Clogher	Holy Cross Church, Lisnaskea
11/10/2024	Raphoe	St Eunan's Cathedral, Letterkenny
12/10/2024	Raphoe	St Eunan's Cathedral, Letterkenny
13/10/2024	Derry	St Eugene's Cathedral, Derry City
14/10/2024	Derry	St Eugene's Cathedral, Derry City
15/10/2024	Down & Connor	St Mary's Church, Belfast
16/10/2024	Down & Connor	St Mary's Church, Belfast
17/10/2024	Dromore	Cathedral of St Patrick & St Colman, Newry
18/10/2024	Dromore	Cathedral of St Patrick & St Colman, Newry
19/10/2024	Armagh	St Patrick's Cathedral, Armagh
20/10/2024	Armagh	St Patrick's Church, Dundalk
21/10/2024	Meath	Christ the King Cathedral, Mullingar
22/10/2024	Meath	Christ the King Cathedral, Mullingar
23/10/2024	Oblates of Mary Immaculate	Oblate Church of Mary Immaculate, Inchicore, Dublin
24/10/2024	Oblates of Mary Immaculate	Oblate Church of Mary Immaculate, Inchicore, Dublin
25/10/2024	Franciscans	Adam & Eve's, Merchants Quay, Dublin
26/10/2024	Franciscans	Adam & Eve's, Merchants Quay, Dublin
27/10/2024	No Public Venue	
28/10/2024	Kilmore	Cathedral of St Patrick & St Felim, Cavan
29/10/2024	Kilmore	Cathedral of St Patrick & St Felim, Cavan
30/10/2024	Cork & Ross	Cathedral of St Mary & St Anne, Cork City
31/10/2024	Cork & Ross	Church of the Immaculate Conception, Clonakilty
01/11/2024	No Public Venue	
02/11/2024	UIPL/Elphin Diocese	Church of Sts Peter & Paul, Athlone
03/11/2024	UIPL/Elphin Diocese	Church of Sts Peter & Paul, Athlone
04/11/2024	UIPL/Elphin Diocese	Church of Sts Peter & Paul, Athlone
05/11/2024	Farewell Ceremony (UIPL)	Church of the Risen Christ, Kiltoon



The Irish Catholic

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# Out&About

## Holy well blessing



**TIPPERARY:** The Templeberry Parish's blessing of the Holy Well of St Odhrán happened on August 15, the Feast of the Assumption. Photo Mr Pádraig Ó Flannabhra.



**OFFALY:** Mr Brian Kennedy who was presented with a scroll of honour for outstanding voluntary work in the parish by Bishop Fintan Monahan and Fr Tom Hogan during the Bicentenary Celebration of St Brendan's Church, Birr on August 10.



**CORK:** Bishop Fintan Gavin who concelebrated the 73rd Mass at the Holy Rosary Shrine at the Lee Road on August 15 with L/R, Fr Marius O'Reilly, Fr Ken Cooney SMA, Fr Declan Mansfield, Archdeacon Kerry Murphy O'Connor, Fr Sean O'Sullivan, Fr Aidan Vaughan OFM Cap and Fr Cian O'Sullivan. Photo: Tony O Connell.

## IN SHORT

### 73rd Lee Road Shrine Mass celebrated in Cork

The 73rd annual Mass and devotions at the Holy Rosary Shrine at the Lee Road, Cork was held on the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary on August 15. The main celebrant was Bishop of Cork and Ross Fintan Gavin, who was joined by priests from the local family of parishes and beyond.

The Shrine was erected in 1952. It was designed by Soirle M. MacCana (1901-75) and is composed by a set of twelve rectangular plaques located at intervals along the roadside wall marking the rosary stations.

Bishop Gavin said in his homily: "In the words of this evening's second reading, 'all will be brought to life in Christ'. Mary's assumption proclaims our own ultimate destiny as believers, as well as God's desire for all humanity."

"There is a very close association between

the ultimate destiny of Mary, which we celebrate today, and the ultimate destiny of the Church, of each and every one of us," Bishop Gavin said during the pilgrimage.

### Thanksgiving Mass celebrates church restoration in Co. Kildare

Mass of thanksgiving for the restoration of St Patrick's Church, Johnstownbridge, Co. Kildare was celebrated on The Assumption of Blessed Virgin Mary Feast, August 15 by Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin Denis Nulty.

St Patrick's Church is a gothic style building dated circa 1830, the church has beautiful ceiling plasterwork and a gallery at its rear.

The big restoration of the church included painting work on the interior and exterior of the building, and "the replacing of the three heritage windows in a church that dates back

to the 1830's stands out for special mention as we soon begin 'National Heritage Week'", said Bishop Nulty. "The rewiring and the amplification have also been part of this work, all of this done by local fundraising and some generous donors. Well done to one and all."

The bishop also thanked the sacristan Caroline McNally "for her watchful eye on this church during the entire project; she is a huge presence in this place and deeply appreciated, as are the other church sacristans".

### Parish priest concerned about Lidl opening in rural town

Parish priest expressed concern about Lidl's plan to open a store in Sixmilebridge, Co. Clare. Fr Harry Bohan has told Clare County Council "Our local, human, social values are threatened".

The priest is worried about the local retailers in the small town. "We need our local shops and businesses to survive, always did. When they are threatened we need our community to be aware of that threat", he said.

Local retailer Flora Crowe welcomed Fr Bohan's words and told *The Irish Examiner*: "Fr Harry is a visionary and has always been a huge supporter of community and supporter of all businesses in Sixmilebridge. If he believes in that then we need to take stock of what he says."

"Lidl may not come in overnight and close us down but they will slowly edge away and they will take from our business," she said.

On the other hand, Tony Bamford Planning, Lidl planning consultant said "A dominant focus of retail policy in the County Development Plan is to see the growth of main food shopping retail in the smaller towns like Sixmilebridge."

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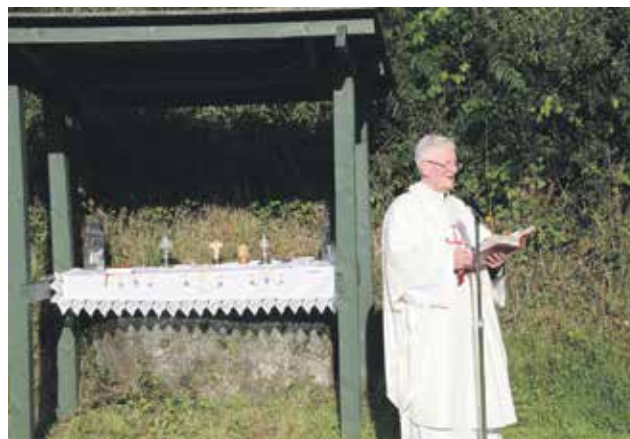
Events deadline is a week in  
advance of publication



**OFFALY:** Bishop Fintan Monahan, Rena Haverty and Sr Anne (Mercy sister, Birr) during the celebration of the Bi-Centenary Celebration of St Brendan's Church Birr on August 10.



**OFFALY:** The Bi-Centenary Celebration of St Brendan's Church, Birr took place on August 10 with a concelebration Mass. The chief celebrant was Bishop Fintan Monahan. Pictured are Sr Gemma (Mercy Sister, Birr) and Bishop Monaghan.



**MONAGHAN:** Fr Corrigan celebrating annual Mass at Corconnelly Mass Garden in the Killeevan Parish on August 15. Fr Corrigan has been celebrating this Mass for the past 25 years. Photo: Peter Cassidy.



**CORK:** The 73rd Mass and Devotions at the Holy Rosary Shrine on the Lee Road happened on August 15. Shrine Volunteers: L/R Eoin O'Leary, Jerry Desmond, Kevin Mackey, Eoin Sheehan, Tony Aherne, Bishop Gavin, Donie O'Donovan, Colette Fitzpatrick, Jim O'Mahony, Mick Murphy and Caroline Nuads. Photo: Tony O'Connell.



**LONDON:** Chevalier Thomas Kilduff, GCHS (Cavan); Dame Karen Singarayer, DHS (Westminster); The Most Reverend Kevin McDonald, Archbishop Emeritus of Southwark KC\*HS with Very Rev Fr Vitaliy Fedun, Judicial Vicar, Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of the Holy Family of London, during the gathering to celebrate the Feast of St Hélène in the Oratory of St Mary Magdelene Catholic Church, Wandsworth on August 17.



**CORK:** Mass at the ancient site of Kiltreskin Well in the Parish of Aghada was celebrated on August 15 for the Feast of the Assumption. Canon Denis Kelleher, Bishop Emeritus John Buckley, Chief Celebrant and Fr Donal Leahy. Photo: John Walshe.

## ARMAGH

Catholic Mothers Ireland's Family Day will happen on Saturday September 7 at the Church of Immaculate Conception, Tullysaran. This is the first National Mass celebrated by Archbishop Eamon Martin at 12pm. Refreshments and light lunch provided. Donations on the day. For more information contact WhatsApp 085 147 1516.

10am. That day will have talks, Mass and adoration. On the following day, Mass at 9.05am and farewell at 1pm.

St Patrick's Church Ringsend are holding their annual Mass for the anointing of the sick on Sunday, September 15 at 3.00 pm. Refreshments will be available after Mass.

## FERMANAGH

Blessed Sacrament (Adoration) takes place every Wednesday in St Ninnidh's Church. It begins after 10.00am Mass and will end at 11.30am.

## LAOIS

Alanon Family Group for family, friends and anyone affected by someone struggling with alcoholism meets every Thursday night at 8pm in Portlaoise. More information contact 086 870 6017.

## LEITRIM

Kilmore Diocesan PTAA celebrations to mark 125 years of the founding of the association. Mass and presentation of pins in St Mary's Church Carrigallen on Sunday, September 15 at 2pm followed by Dinner in the Kilbracken Arms. Members due 10 year, Silver, Gold or Diamond pins please contact the Secretary Rosaleen 087 245 0692 on or before September 1.

## MAYO

Evangelisation Mission Ireland's Spiritual Revival talk happens at St Patrick Church, Woodfield on September 1 at 10am to 12.30pm. The event will be led by Bro. Sajith Joseph and Bro. Santhosh T. For more info contact 087 685 6488 or 089 417 9676.

## SLIGO

There is Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in St Colmcille's Church, Rathcormack, every Sunday from 4-5pm. Everyone is welcome.

## WATERFORD

Charismatic Day of Prayer happens on Sunday, September 29 in the Edmund Rice Chapel. from 10.30am to 5.30pm. The speaker is Fr Pat Collins and Mass celebrated by Bishop Phonsie Cullinan. Contact Word of God Outreach at 086 859 0394.

## CAVAN

Eucharistic adoration takes place daily in St Clare's Chapel from 11am to 7pm. New people are welcome to a moment of prayer and devotion. To arrange your time, contact Liam on 087 235 8440.

## CLARE

The Corofin & Belclare Parish main centenary celebration will now take place at the 10am Mass on Sunday, September 1. All are welcome to a cup of tea in the School Hall after Mass. The priests & religious are also invited to lunch in the Parochial House, Corofin at 2pm on September 1.

## CORK

Alpha Ireland welcomes all to participate in the ten-week experience of exploring the meaning of life and how God fits into our lives today in Clonakilty. The program starts on September 18 from 7.30pm to 9.30pm. Alpha is free. For more info contact 087 483 4039 or alphaclonakilty@gmail.com.

## DONEGAL

The Franciscan Friars of the Renewal will be leading the St Columba's Church, Kilmacrenan Parish Mission on September 2-5. The event will start with Mass at 9.30am and mission talk and adoration at 7pm. All welcome.

## DOWN

Confession at St Patrick's Church happens on Mondays from 6.45pm to 7.30pm, on Fridays from 3pm to 4pm, and on Saturdays from 12noon to 1pm.

## DUBLIN

Visit the relic of Blessed Carlo Acutis in St Patrick's Catholic Church, Blackcourt Road, Blanchardstown, D15 WC90 on September 10-11. On September 10, the reception of the relic starts at

# In the Footsteps of Colmcille

At the Tao Cross on Toraigh Island



Brandon Scott

**T**he 3rd annual Slí Cholmcille Walking Pilgrimage/Retreat took place from July 21 to July 28 and was a resounding success. Initiated in 2022 by Fr Brendan Mc Manus SJ, this year's Walking Pilgrimage/Retreat was led by Jim Deeds, an experienced and inspiring spiritual guide.

20 participants embarked on a journey from Donegal's Rosses, walking through Dungloe,

to Toraigh and on to Gartan, the birthplace of St Colmcille. The pilgrims, who hailed from diverse locations including the island of Iona, Sydney, Cambridge, Belfast, Omagh, Magherafelt, Newcastle, Newry, Carlow, Kildare, Ennis, Dublin and Donegal, experienced a week of physical challenge and spiritual renewal.

## Terrains

Each day, the group walked approximately 20 kilometres through diverse terrains, including sandy beaches, mountains, bogs, and streams. The pilgrimage was a blend of quiet reflection and shared experiences, allowing participants to ponder their lives and find spiritual insights in the surrounding natural beauty. The journey aimed to recreate the original

Celtic Christian experience of discovering God in all things, embodying the spirit of St Colmcille.

The dramatic and ever-changing landscapes of Donegal provided a perfect backdrop for introspection and a deep connection with nature, helping pilgrims gain a better understanding of themselves and their spiritual journey.

The pilgrimage was all-inclusive, with participants staying at both Ards

Retreat Centre and the Outdoor Education Centre in Gartan. The final Sunday brought a special moment at St Colmcille's Church in Glendowan, which overlooks the saint's birthplace.

## Welcomed

Here, Bishop Alan McGuckian, SJ Bishop of Down and Connor, welcomed the pilgrims for a Eucharistic celebration, marking the conclusion of their Walking Pilgrimage/

Retreat. The journey ended with a final lunch at Victor Wilkin's Restaurant in Churchill, where the group reflected on their experiences.

Slí Cholmcille is an ambitious project that seeks to establish a pilgrimage trail linking key sites associated with St Colmcille, spanning from Donegal to Derry, through the North Sperrins and the Bann, to Argyll, and ultimately to the island of

Iona.

This trail not only offers breathtaking scenery but also follows in the footsteps of one of Ireland's most significant early Christian saints, providing a deeply spiritual experience for those who walk it.

## Transformative

Feedback from the participants was overwhelmingly positive, with many describing the week as a significant and transformative experience. The combination of physical exertion, spiritual reflection, and the beauty of the landscape made the pilgrimage a memorable and enriching journey for all involved.

**i** For more information on Slí Cholmcille and upcoming events -website: [www.slicholmcille.org](http://www.slicholmcille.org)

**“Slí Cholmcille is an ambitious project that seeks to establish a pilgrimage trail linking key sites associated with St Colmcille, spanning from Donegal to Derry, through the North Sperrins and the Bann, to Argyll, and ultimately to the island of Iona”**



Bishop Alan Mc Guckian, Bishop of Down and Connor welcomes pilgrims to a celebration of the Eucharist, in St Colmcille's Church, Glendowan, overlooking Gartan - the saint's birthplace



Gathering at Dungloe



Pilgrims relaxing at Gartan Lake



Some pilgrims take a rest at Loch Innseagh



Walkers meet Fr Brian O Fearraigh at Derrybeg



On the final day with Bishop Alan Mc Guckian - St Colmcille's Church, Glendowan overlooking Loch Gartán and the birthplace of St Colmcille



Pilgrims on Port Arthur Beach

# ‘I felt a deeper calling to serve’, Franciscan Brother says



Renata Steffens

**T**he Franciscans in Killarney heard the first professions of five Brothers on August 15. They lived in Ireland for a year volunteering and helping the community, and now are back to their countries.

One of the five brothers, Bro. Vincent McDonnell talked to *The Irish Catholic* about his experience in Ireland, his background, his faith and about the future after making his vows.

**Q: With the last name McConnell, I assume you have some Irish ancestry. Is that correct?**

A: Yes, I do have Irish ancestry; my great-grandfather came from Co. Kilkenny. This was my first time in Ireland and only my second time in Europe. I would love to return to Ireland—it’s a beautiful country.

**Q: Could you share with us a bit about your background in faith?**

A: My family stopped attending Church when I was around 11 years old, but I returned to the Church when I was 15. I was curious about the faith and wanted to learn more. I was introduced to someone in the deacon program, and he guided me on my path to faith. He is one of the reasons I decided to join a religious order.

**Q: When did you realise you were being called to the religious life?**

A: I started considering a diocesan calling when I was 15, participating in a high school mentorship program with my parish priest. However, I found that life to be somewhat isolated, and I felt a need for community. I worked as a frontline shelter worker for five years before applying



Bro. Vincent McDonnell

to the Franciscans. I knew the Franciscan order was involved with helping the homeless, something I’m passionate about.

**Q: Was it difficult to accept the calling? What are the main challenges one faces when living the vocation?**

A: Leaving everything behind was the hardest part. Moving to Quebec for my postulancy, then to Ireland for my novitiate, not knowing what to expect or when I would see my friends and family again,

and not knowing the members of the community I would be living with were all challenging.

**Q: What does it mean to you to live a faithful life?**

A: To me, living a faithful life means serving God and others.

**Q: Could you comment on your faith and daily life—the sacrifice, obedience, and love of God?**

A: It was a big change at the beginning. Going from attending Mass a few times a week and trying to pray

on my own to adhering to a structured schedule of prayer was difficult at first, but it just took time. Learning to live a life of prayer, being obedient, and moving to Ireland for my novitiate year was challenging. However, trusting in my provincial and formation team made it easier to obey the decision to do my novitiate year in Ireland.

**Q: What made you decide to leave your social work job and follow your vocation?**

A: My passion for working with the homeless was a major part of my life, and it’s something that still drives me. However, I felt a deeper calling to serve not just through social work but through a spiritual vocation that would allow me to integrate my faith more fully into my service. Becoming a Franciscan seemed like the natural path to deepen

my commitment to those in need. A quote I live by, often attributed to St Francis, says, “Preach the Gospel always; use words when necessary.” My experience in social work embodies this idea. It taught me that evangelisation isn’t just about speaking the Gospel but living it through actions—showing Christ’s love through compassion, understanding, and service.

**Q: Now that you are back in Canada, what are your next steps?**

A: My next step is to move to Edmonton, Alberta, and start at John Henry Newman Theology Institute to continue my formation.

**Q: May I ask how old you are? What is the average age at which one professes their first vows?**

A: I just turned 27 on August 6. There isn’t really an average age—among the five of us

in the novitiate, we were all between the ages of 25 and 34.

**Q: How was your relationship with the other novices? Did you become friends?**

A: My co-novices were the greatest gift I received. They were a great group of guys, and I will miss them deeply. We became close friends over the year, and there is no doubt that we will keep in touch.

**Q: Do you have any advice for those considering the religious life?**

A: Be patient—don’t rush your vocation. Let the Holy Spirit guide you over time, and trust in God.

**Q: Is there anything else in particular that God might be asking you to share?**

A: The one thing I’ve learned over the last two years of formation is that love and trust are key. Trust in your superiors, and love yourself, God, and others.

**“A quote I live by, often attributed to St Francis, says, ‘Preach the Gospel always; use words when necessary.’ My experience in social work embodies this idea”**

# Nicaragua's Ortega aims to 'financially suffocate' the Church – critics



Eduardo Campos Lima

In its latest crackdown on religious groups, including the Catholic Church, the Nicaraguan government has shut down hundreds of nonprofits and declared that from now on religious bodies will have to declare income and pay taxes.

Last week, the regime headed by President Daniel Ortega and his wife, Vice President Rosario Murillo, issued a decree that closed 1,500 civic organisations, claiming that such entities have failed to present their financial reports for several years. All properties connected to such organisations will be transferred to the government.

In the context of Nicaraguan politics, churches are often seen as bases of support for opposition by the Ortega government, and have suffered increasing pressure and assaults.

The list of targeted institutions included several Christian churches and associations and a number of Catholic institutions, such as the Diocese of Granada's Caritas and the congregation Madre del Divino Pastor (Mother of the Divine Shepherd).

According to the Nicaraguan newspaper *La Prensa*, the congregation has three schools in the cities of Diriamba, Managua, and Bluefields. The one in Diriamba informed the community that it will now be administered by the Ministry of Education. Parents were told that for now no changes concerning tuition and classes will be applied, given that the school hasn't yet been contacted by the government.

## Abandon

The religious sisters who run the school, however, are preparing to abandon their belongings, schools

and houses, fruits of a 101-year-old work in Nicaragua. According to *La Prensa*, sources informed it that the school's principal was out of the country when she learned about the decision. When she tried to come back, she was blocked by the regime.

The newspaper added that was the first time the government has shut down so many non-governmental organisations at once. Another 3,600 NGOs have been closed since 2018.

Three days later, on August 22, the government decreed the end of the legal status of another 151 civic organisations, all of them chambers of commerce and trade associations.

The Nicaraguan government announced that civic institutions will only be allowed to operate if they establish "association alliances" with state entities.

On August 22, the regime also released modifications to the tax legislation, cancelling tax exemptions for churches. Now, all religious entities will have to report their income and pay taxes that can reach 30%.

The measure was received by critics of the regime and members of the Church as an attempt to "financially suffocate" religious bodies in Nicaragua.

**“In Fr Tojeira's opinion, the regime wants to impose more and more 'a dictatorship of monolithic thinking'”**

“It's not so much a matter of finance. If priests were paid a salary, it would be normal for them to pay taxes. But that measure is really about the Sandinista regime trying to weaken the Churches, to destroy them, and take control of them,” Fr José María Tojeira, the spokesman of the Jesuits in El Salvador – where many Nicaraguan Jesuits took refuge after the society's university in the country was shut down – told *Crux*.

In Fr Tojeira's opinion, the



A woman raises her palm fronds for blessings during Palm Sunday Mass in Managua, Nicaragua, March 24, 2024. Photo: OSV/Maynor Valenzuela, Reuters

regime wants to impose more and more “a dictatorship of monolithic thinking”.

“Religion is one of the few social segments that incentivise a distinct set of ideas in the face of the dictatorship. That's why they have been closing NGOs and that's why they want to destroy the Church as much as possible,” he added.

For Eliseo Núñez, a Nicaraguan political analyst currently in exile in Costa Rica, “the scrutiny of the alms” that is being implemented by the regime is a new low in a sequence of dictatorial measures.

“The churches will have to declare all money they receive and then pay taxes. But that money certainly had already been taxed when it belonged to the people,” Núñez told *Crux*.

## Suffocate

In his opinion, the Sandinista regime “wants to financially suffocate the church”, something that began months ago when parishes and Caritas organisations had their bank accounts frozen or sus-



Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega and his wife, Vice President Rosario Murillo, greet supporters during the opening ceremony of a highway overpass in Managua, 2019. Photo: OSV/Oswaldo Rivas, Reuters

pending by the government and couldn't take their money from them.

**“Remember that the Holy Spirit always guides our history towards higher projects”**

“They're using a wasteland strategy. They want to completely destroy the Church,” Núñez concluded.

The local news website *Mosaico CSI*, which

operates in the region of Matagalpa, reported on August 18 that two more priests left Nicaragua, exiled to the Vatican.

## Exiled

Fr Denis Martinez of Matagalpa and Fr Leonel Balmaceda of Estelí, both dioceses headed by Bishop Rolando Álvarez, the regime's major target in the Catholic Church, who is now exiled as well, had been detained on August 10 and 11, and were deported from Nicaragua on August 14.

On Sunday, Pope Francis expressed fresh concern over developments in the Central American country.

“To the beloved Nicaraguan people, I encourage you to renew your hope in Jesus,” the Pontiff said. “Remember that the Holy Spirit always guides our history towards higher projects. May the Immaculate Virgin protect you in moments of trial and make you feel her maternal tenderness. May the Madonna accompany the beloved people of Nicaragua,” he said.

**“The churches will have to declare all money they receive and then pay taxes. But that money certainly had already been taxed when it belonged to the people”**



# World Report

## IN BRIEF

### Diocese finds US sister's body seems not to have decomposed

● Bishop James V. Johnston of the Diocese of Kansas City-St Joseph, Missouri, released results of the investigation by medical experts into Sr Wilhelmina Lancaster's incorruptibility in a press release on the diocesan website August 22, the feast of the Queenship of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

"The body of Sr Wilhelmina Lancaster does not appear to have experienced the decomposition that would have normally been expected under such previous burial conditions," stated a news release on the official diocesan investigation of incorruptibility into the late Black Catholic nun who founded the Benedictine Sisters of Mary, Queen of the Apostles, in Gower, Missouri. According to the release, the bishop commissioned a team of local medical experts in May 2023 to conduct an examination and evaluation of Sr Wilhelmina.

### Uganda bishops express sorrow after rubbish collapse kills dozens

● Church leaders in Uganda have expressed sadness at the high number of deaths after piled-up rubbish collapsed at a vast landfill in the country's capital, Kampala.

The 36-acre garbage dump known as Kiteezi serves the whole of Kampala, and gave way earlier this month. The avalanche of trash swept away people, homes, animals and farmlands.

At least 35 people were confirmed dead by the police on August 19. Another 28 others were

still missing.

Members of the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda that includes the Catholic Bishops' Conference have expressed their spiritual closeness with the victims.

"Our hearts go out to the people of Kiteezi who have been affected by the tragic collapse of the landfill," the council said on 'X' previously known as Twitter.

"We are deeply saddened by the loss of life, the injuries, and the damage to property..."

### Church hails India Supreme Court for reaffirming ban on euthanasia

● Catholic leaders in India have lauded the country's high court for rejecting a plea for "passive euthanasia" from the parents of a 30-year-old man who has been in a vegetative state for 11 years.

Commenting on the August 20 verdict issued by a three-judge bench led by Chief Justice Dhananjaya Chandrachud, Archbishop Raphy Manjaly of the Archdiocese of Agra, the chairman of the doctrinal commission of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, said: "We would like to congratulate the Court for its unambiguous verdict while calling for support for the family facing a serious crisis."

"We are extremely happy that the sacredness of life has been upheld by the court," the prelate said.

### Survey shows 28% of US parishes have Spanish-language Masses

● A first of its kind study by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) shows that 28% of parishes in the country offer Spanish-language Masses.

This number suggests a rise in the number of US Catholic parishes offering Spanish-language Masses over the last 10 years.

Alejandro Aguilera-Titus, assistant director of Hispanic Affairs in the USCCB's Secretariat of Cultural Diversity in the Church, said in a statement that the survey "reflects the dedication of our dioceses to Hispanic and Latino communities".

## Amazonian Church discusses new rite, finance, and participation of women

Five years after the Amazon Synod, members of the region's Church gathered in Manaus, Brazil, in order to discuss ways to implement the changes suggested in 2019 during the meeting in Rome.

The need to increase the women's participation in ecclesial life and alternatives for the Church's financial challenges in the Amazon were among the most pressing themes debated by the participants between August 19-22.

The meeting was led by Brazil's Bishops' Conference's Special Episcopal Commission for the Amazon (CEA) and was attended by members of the Pan-Amazon Ecclesial Network (REPAM) and of the Amazonian Ecclesial Conference (CEAMA).

The message released by the participants of the encounter on August 22 demonstrates the local churches' biggest concerns and how they expect the Church to deal with them.

"We structured the discussion and the themes of the letter according to the reality of several Amazonian communities," Bishop Raimundo Vanthuy Neto of São Gabriel da Cachoeira told *Crux*.

The document estab-

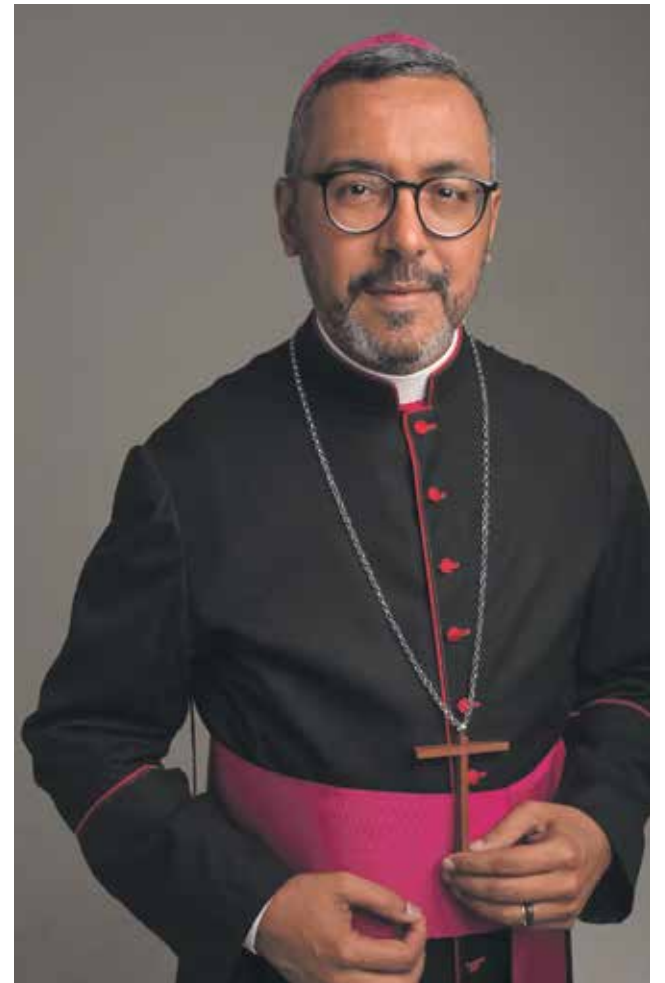
lishes six commitments assumed during the event regarding the Church's challenges to keep evangelising the Amazonian communities.

The first one concerns the formation of Catholics in the region. The participants agreed to establish a committee to accompany the education of priests, to keep promoting dialogue between Catholic universities and seminaries, and to allow the exchange between schools and experiences of education of lay people.

"There was much debate about the participation of the Church in the United Nations Convention on Climate Change [known as COP 30], which will happen in Belém next year. There's an urgent need to stop deforestation in the region in the face of a continuous climatic crisis," Bishop Vanthuy Neto said.

After a long and severe drought in the Amazon in 2023, the level of the rivers are falling again this year, and the air quality is unprecedentedly low in different Amazonian areas.

"The climate crises that have been occurring in the Amazon over the past years are a sign that human actions are destroying the



Bishop Raimundo Vanthuy Neto of São Gabriel da Cachoeira

biome. The last administration [headed by President Jair Bolsonaro] was responsible for loosening control over the Amazon," Sr Laura Manso, a member of the Amazonian Ecclesial Conference said.

## EU watchdog reports huge rise in Christian persecution

A European watchdog has warned of serious anti-Christian violence in Europe and called on governments to protect converts from Islam in particular.

The Vienna-based Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians in Europe (OIDAC Europe) has reported an increase in anti-Christian hate crimes by 44% on the International Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Violence Based on Religion or Belief last week.

Though the OIDAC Europe 2022/23 Annual Report reports the major-

ity of the 749 cases of anti-Christian hate crimes were acts of vandalism or arson, the religious freedom watchdog noted a marked increase in violent attacks against individual people.

Executive Director of OIDAC Europe, Anja Hoffmann, said the rising threats against Christians in countries across Europe are alarming and should not be overlooked, reported CNA Deutsch, CNA's German-language news partner.

Since the beginning of 2024, OIDAC Europe has documented 25 cases of violence, threats and attempted mur-

der against Christians in Great Britain, France, Spain, Italy, Germany, Austria, Poland and Serbia.

In some cases, entire communities have been attacked.

In June this year, there was an attack on a Seventh-day Adventist congregation in Dijon during a church service. The tear gas attack sparked panic and left nine people injured, the watchdog's statement said.

Hoffmann also highlighted the need to protect and support Christian converts from Islam who are viewed as "apostates."

## Vatican expels founder of Peru's Sodalitium religious movement

Following a probe, the Vatican's Dicastery for Consecrated Life expels Luis Fernando Figari, the founder of Peru's Sodalitium religious movement, who several years ago had been removed from leadership of the movement he had established in the 1970s, due to accusations of psychological and sexual

abuse, including against minors, and for financial irregularities.

The Peruvian apostolic society Sodalitium Christianae Vitae (SVC) is more commonly known as Sodalicio.

The Bishops' Conference of Peru made public the decree that had been issued by the Dicastery for

Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, which, under Canon 746 of the Code of Canon Law, effectively expelled Figari from the organisation.

These communities were often called "sodalities", which were composed of laypeople and consecrated priests living together under perpetual vows of

celibacy and obedience.

The first accusations of abuse emerged in the early 2000s. The case then exploded in 2015 with the publication of a book that collected the testimonies of the victims and detailed physical, psychological, and sexual abuse carried out by the movement's leaders and by Figari himself.



Edited by Brandon Scott  
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## Bird .... Plane .... Or supermoon?



A supermoon, known as the blue moon and 'Sturgeon Moon,' rises behind the world famous Gothic cathedral in Cologne, Germany, August 19, 2024. The 'super' part refers to the moon's orbit, which brings it slightly closer to Earth in August, making it appear bigger and brighter. Photo: OSV/Thilo Schmuelgen, Reuters

## Catholic archbishop supports Ukrainian ban on Russian Orthodox Church activities

Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, this week defended a new Ukrainian law that aims to limit the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church in the country because of its support for Vladimir Putin's invasion and regime.

Shevchuk, who has spoken out frequently in Ukraine's defence since the start of the war, said Russia has used the Russian Orthodox Church "as a tool of militarisation" and that the new law aims to offer protection against ideology and narratives being pushed about Ukraine being part of the "Russian world", Crux reported.

The Russian Orthodox Church is an autocephalous

Eastern Orthodox Church with an estimated 150 million members, accounting for more than half of the world's Orthodox Christians. The leader of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill, has garnered criticism and even international sanctions for his support of Putin's invasion, which began on February 24, 2022.

The new law, which passed the Ukrainian parliament on August 20, bans the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukrainian territory. It also encourages religious organisations in Ukraine, including the Moscow-aligned Ukrainian Orthodox Church, "to break the existing ties with the Russian state", according to the parliamentary news agency.

The parliament said the law "establishes a transparent legal procedure for identifying ties with Russia" by way of "an impartial and independent commission of experts. Then, through a judicial procedure, all the facts will be established and the severance of ties with Russia will be ensured".

"The so-called 'Russian Orthodox Church' has become a de facto part of the state apparatus of Putin's criminal totalitarian regime, and is used by Russia to justify and support aggression against Ukraine and Putin's insane policies in general," the news agency said.

In a statement issued on the first day of the attack, Kirill stressed that he was

"the Patriarch of All Russia and the primate of a Church whose flock is located in Russia, Ukraine, and other countries" and called "on all parties to the conflict to do everything possible to avoid civilian casualties", reiterating that "the Russian and Ukrainian peoples have a common centuries-old history". The statement did not include any condemnation of Russian aggression but instead seemed to reaffirm the conviction that Ukraine is Russia's canonical territory.

And in a March 27, 2024 document posted to the Russian Orthodox Church's website, a council organised by the Church called Putin's "special military operation" a "Holy War".

## Pope prays for Nicaragua's persecuted Christians

As the Church and Christians at large experience intense persecution in Nicaragua, Pope Francis expressed encouragement and support to the people living under the country's authoritarian regime.

"To the beloved people of Nicaragua: I encourage you to renew your hope in Jesus," he said after praying the Angelus, August 25. "Remember that the Holy Spirit always guides history toward higher projects."

The previous week, the Nicaraguan government revoked the legal status of 1,500 nonprofit organisations operating

in the country, many of them Christian churches as well as Catholic charitable organisations and religious congregations. Nicaragua's national assembly also approved new measures on August 20 to tax donations to churches and religious organisations of all denominations. And during the first three weeks of August, nine Catholic priests were arrested in Nicaragua and exiled to Rome.

"May the Immaculate Virgin protect you in times of trial and help you feel her motherly tenderness; may Our Lady accompany the beloved people of Nica-

ragua," the Pope prayed with visitors in St Peter's Square.

Pope Francis also expressed his solidarity with the thousands of people affected by outbreaks of monkeypox, which was declared a "public health emergency of international concern" by the World Health Organization, August 14. According to figures from the UN, updated on August 22, there have been 3,562 cases of monkeypox in 2024, resulting in 26 deaths. Twelve countries have reported cases of monkeypox with the outbreak being most acute in Congo.

## Vatican roundup

### Papal trip will offer Singaporeans a message of hope, cardinal says

● With Pope Francis's sweeping visit to Asia less than two weeks away, Singapore's cardinal has said the trip will be an opportunity to send a clear message on issues such as artificial intelligence and the environment, and to showcase the diversity and history of the church in Asia.

Speaking to *Crux* in a written interview, Cardinal William Goh of Singapore said that from the beginning, "Pope Francis has been a tireless champion of inclusiveness, fraternity, dialogue, and care for the environment, among other things".

"To many in Singapore, these themes reveal that Pope Francis is close to the lived realities of people and that he is familiar with their struggles and pains," he said, voicing his hope that while in Singapore, the Pope comes with a message of unity, hope, and of advocacy for the "missionary option" he has so often called for in the Church.

### Excommunicated archbishop, former US envoy in fear of life

● A former Vatican envoy to the United States who has publicly called for Pope Francis's resignation and who was excommunicated earlier this summer has said his life is in danger and voiced belief that the sanction against him is invalid.

Speaking to veteran Vatican journalist Franca Giansoldati with Italian newspaper *Il Messaggero*, Italian Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò said he has been candid about his whereabouts because

"after the release of my memoir on the McCarrick case in August 2018 a contact of mine from the United States warned me that my life was in danger".

"This is why I do not reside in a fixed place. I don't want to end up like Cardinal Pell, or like my predecessor in Washington, the nuncio Pietro Sambini," he said, referring to the late Archbishop Pietro Sambini, who served as Vatican envoy to the US from 2005 until his death in 2011.

### Vatican approves devotion to Our Lady of Sorrows of Chandavila, Spain

● The Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith "gladly gives its consent" for Archbishop José Rodríguez Carballo of Mérida-Badajoz to proceed with the declaration of the proposed "nihil obstat", so that "the Shrine of Chandavila—which is an heir to a rich history of simplicity, few words, and yet much devotion—may continue to offer to the faithful who wish to approach it, a place of interior peace, consolation, and conversion".

The Prefect of the Dicastery, Cardinal Victor Manuel Fernández, articulated this in a letter that Pope Francis had approved on August 22.

It came in response to a July 28 letter from the Spanish Archbishop regarding events in 1945, in which two young girls are said to have seen the Virgin Mary as Our Lady of Sorrows in the Spanish town of Chandavila, in Extremadura, near the Portuguese border.

### Synod on Synodality: Bishops launch regional workshops

● Around the world, bishops together with the Catholic faithful of their dioceses in Europe, Asia, Latin America, and Africa are gearing up for the second session of the 2021-2024 Synod on Synodality to take place October 2-27 in Vatican City.

The worldwide process launched by Pope Francis for the Catholic Church is centred on the theological concept of "synodality" or "journeying together" as the People of God. Synodality places particular emphasis on renewing the call of each baptised person to actively participate in the mission Jesus Christ entrusted to his church.

As part of this global process of listening, dialogue, and discernment, regional bishops' conferences — in collaboration with clergy, religious men and women, and laypeople — have spearheaded continental-wide workshops to discuss key theological and pastoral considerations raised in the *Instrumentum Laboris*, the Vatican's working document for the second and last global session of the Synod on Synodality released on July 9.

# Synod organiser Cardinal Hollerich: Catholic Church in Africa 'not afraid to speak'

Tyler Arnold

Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich praised the boldness and the faithfulness of the Catholic Church in Africa after a pilgrimage the prelate took to the west African country Benin last week, particularly after the continent spoke out against the Vatican's decision to bless same-sex couples last December.

"The Church in Africa is a Church that knows its own value and is not afraid to speak," Cardinal Hollerich, a leading organiser of the Vatican's Synod on Synodality, told *La Croix International*, a French Catholic newspaper.

Cardinal Hollerich, who serves as the relator general of the synod, participated in the annual Marian pilgrimage to the Notre-Dame d'Arigbo cave in Dassa-Zoumè.

The prelate told *La Croix* that the Church in Africa is one that is "alive and full of faith" and that he came to "learn", adding: "I am looking at this Church as a pastor from a European Church to see how we can move forward in the future". He noted the "joy" seen in the celebrations in Africa, which he contrasted with European celebrations that he said "are sometimes very dull".

## Participate

"People do not always participate with their hearts," the cardinal, who has served as Archbishop of Luxembourg since 2011, explained. "It becomes merely a ceremony — a rite. However, here in Africa, what is done is magnificent. Even the pilgrimage I am attending shows this participation and deep faith in Africa. In Europe, we speak more of tradition than of faith. But tradition is only understood when there is faith to interpret it. So, it is beautiful to see the faith as it is lived in Africa."

The Catholic hierarchy in Africa often leans more traditional and conservative than the hierarchy throughout the Western

world. Earlier this year, African bishops declined to implement a Vatican directive that sanctioned "spontaneous" pastoral blessings for "same-sex couples" and other couples in "irregular situations".

The Vatican declaration, *Fiducia Supplicans*, maintained a ban on liturgical blessings for same-sex couples, did not allow recognition of civil unions, and instructed the clergy to not take any actions that could make the blessings appear like a marriage. Less than a month later, the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar issued a statement that said there would be "no blessing for homosexual couples in the African churches".

**“Pope Francis later said Africa was ‘a special case,’ because ‘for them, homosexuality is something ‘ugly’ from a cultural point of view; they do not tolerate it”**

Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, who heads the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, had earlier granted leeway to Church hierarchy in enforcing the directive, saying: "It's proper for each local bishop to make that discernment".

Pope Francis later said Africa was "a special case," because "for them, homosexuality is something 'ugly' from a cultural point of view; they do not tolerate it".

Hollerich addressed the issue of the upcoming Synod on Synodality, which is scheduled to meet for its concluding session from October 2 to October 27, at which point officials will produce a final report to deliver to Pope Francis.

"My role ... is to ensure that everyone is heard, that there are no political machinations within the Church, but that all the people of



Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich of Luxembourg speaks during a news conference in Rome July 29, 2024, on the occasion of the XIII International Pilgrimage of Altar Servers to Rome. Cardinal Hollerich is president of Coetus Internationalis Ministrantium, the association of altar servers that hosted the pilgrimage along with the German bishops' conference. Photo: CNS/Lola Gomez

God, from all continents, are listened to and that the entire Church can journey together," Hollerich said in the interview.

## Damaging

An Africa cardinal who led the continent's bishops in rejecting blessings for same-sex couples called it "damag-

ing" to the synodal process convened last January.

**“The timing, the moment when this document was published, was damaging for the synodal process”**

Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo Besungu of Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo said that because the release of *Fiducia Supplicans*, which authorised non-liturgical blessings of persons involved in same-sex relationships, came between the two Synods of Bishops on Synodality, it created the misleading notion that the document was the

fruit of synodal discussions.

"The timing, the moment when this document was published, was damaging for the synodal process," Ambongo said earlier this year. He was speaking at a press conference during the January 24-26 joint meeting between representatives of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE) held in Nairobi, Kenya.

## Discredit

The 64-year-old cardinal, who also serves as president of SECAM, said the timing of the document's release "brought discredit to the synod, to synodality".

He explained: "In the first session, the synod dealt with all these issues, but the synod did not decide. So the publication of this document, between the two sessions of the synod, was seen by most people as if it was the fruit of the synod, when it had nothing to do with the synod."

Ambongo highlighted that many people already saw the synod's first session as at least indirectly signifying "approval of homosexual couples and homosexuality", which, he added, goes against both African culture and the fundamental teachings of the Catholic faith, in conflict with the Pope's contention that the objection made by Africa was purely on cultural grounds.

**“In the first session, the synod dealt with all these issues, but the synod did not decide. So the publication of this document, between the two sessions of the synod, was seen by most people as if it was the fruit of the synod, when it had nothing to do with the synod”**

# Letters

## Letter of the week

### Reform broken system to save children

**Dear Editor,** A Tribunal of Inquiry into the State and ministerial neglect of children under the care of Tusla may not be enough [*The Irish Catholic* – August 22, 2024], a complete rehaul of Tusla is in order and the General Election can't come fast to make a much necessary change of the guard. The more than 100,000 children set to be referred to the Child and Family Agency are entering a system that is deeply flawed and in crisis.

These children must not fall through the cracks.

As highlighted by Maria Steen, the State care system, which is intended to protect our most vulnerable children, is failing them in the most tragic ways. Children who have already suffered unimaginable trauma are being placed in environments that are anything but safe and nurturing.

Peadar Tóibín's condemnation of Minister Roderic

O'Gorman's inaction is a damning indictment of the current administration's approach to child welfare. The idea that a future tribunal will investigate these failings, as children continue to suffer and die today, is beyond horrifying. How many more lives must be lost before action is taken?

The voices calling for change – from political leaders like Tóibín to religious figures like Bishop Niall Coll

– represent a broad consensus that cannot be ignored. It is time for the Government to start prioritising the lives of these children. A Tribunal of Inquiry, at least, is not just necessary; it is a moral imperative. We owe it to these children to demand accountability and to reform a broken system before more lives are irreparably damaged.

*Yours etc.,*  
**David Murray**  
Cork City, Cork

### A priest with pro-life bidding prayers

**Dear Editor,** I was heartened by the IC article "Unwanted babies being remembered at Mass" [*The Irish Catholic* – August 8, 2024]. I thought I was the only priest in the country with pro-life bidding prayers (at practically all Masses). As it stated: "To lose a wanted child is tragedy. To get rid of an unwanted one, a right – and in some extreme circles, a moment of celebration or liberation." Such bidding prayers would be completely normal if the approx 250,000 death toll since the late 1960s had been born rather than preborn babies.

I have the privilege of joining the monthly 'Donegal Pro Life' witness near Letterkenney Hospital. At the end I lead those present in the Church's liturgical prayers for the commendation of the dead – the closest these abortion victims will have to a funeral. These prayers can be offered by anyone and can be found at [www.tiny.cc/LCDEU](http://www.tiny.cc/LCDEU).

I also promote a daily prayer asking that the aborted babies would receive the grace of baptism – [www.tiny.cc/ABBP](http://www.tiny.cc/ABBP).

*Yours etc.,*  
**Fr Morty O'Shea SOLT**  
Inver, Co. Donegal



### Amoris Laetitia should be part of pastoral advice

**Dear Editor,** In relation to your featured article "What are the steps to receive Communion after divorce and remarriage" [*The Irish Catholic* – August 15, 2024] and while not dissenting from the comprehensive answer given, I was greatly disappointed that it made no mention whatever of Pope

Francis' landmark apostolic exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love).

This was published as far back as April 2016 and should by now have become part of pastoral advice.

The Pope says very firmly that the divorced who have entered a new union

should be made to feel part of the Church. They are not excommunicated and they should not be treated as such, since they remain part of the ecclesial community.

*Yours etc.,*  
**John O'Mahony,**  
Renmore, Galway.

### Spiritual alarm bells triggered

**Dear Editor,** I still get my Thursday 'fix' each week by reading *The Irish Catholic*. It's the only newspaper I read, coupled with looking at the news headline on TV once a day.

My spiritual alarm bell was triggered twice, recently. Fr Bernard Cotter agrees with the statement, "that a mature Christian is someone who is

very hard to offend" [*The Irish Catholic* – August 15, 2024]. I must be the most immature Christian because I was very offended by the mockery of The Last Supper, as depicted in an opening scene at the Olympic games. In mocking my Lord and saviour, they mocked me also. My heart bled at its demonic depiction. In reparation to the Lord, I turned off

the Olympics.

Deacon Frank Brown set off my second spiritual alarm bell. He maintains that anyone, even a well-known politician, who voted for the repeal of the 8th Amendment, (agreeing to the 'murder' of the unborn), without repenting, has a 'right' to approach the altar of God to receive the body and blood, soul and divinity of

Jesus Christ.

We are all sinners in need of God's love and mercy. Lord, thank you for the Sacrament of Reconciliation and for your great gift of the Eucharist.

I kneel down in Adoration, thankfulness, awe and repentance in your presence. Amen

*Yours Etc.,*  
**Lorraine Doran**  
Marino, Dublin 3

### Euthanasia advocates only have to be lucky once...

**T**he release by the Vatican's Pontifical Academy for Life of a new booklet on end-of-life issues 'Small Lexicon on End of Life' comes at a time when the final stages of life are subject to increasing scrutiny – both in Ireland and abroad. The booklet continues to offer a clear "no" to euthanasia and assisted suicide, it offers clarifications that can be useful for Catholics who attempt to present the Catholic position on end-of-life care in the interminable debates that are at play wherever protections of life are coming under attack for those at the final stages of life.

From October 2013 until March 2024, a Joint Oireachtas Committee on Assisted Dying met more than monthly and listened to a wide variety of submissions on Ireland's approach to end-of-life care. A report, subsequent to the deliberations, was released on March 20 this year, which recommends that the Government introduces legislation allowing for assisted dying, in certain restricted circumstances as set out in the recommendations in this report.

The report was agreed by a majority of the committee members and contains 37 recommendations focussing on primarily on the practicalities of what the assisted suicide regime may look like. After the release of the report,

three members of the committee who opposed the conclusions released a dissenting report, an unusual approach taken indicating how divisive the issue is.

The minority report was presented by the committee chair Michael Healy-Rae TD, Independent Senator Rónán Mullen and Fianna Fáil's Robert Troy TD and focused on recommending that Government not introduce legislation for assisted suicide, arguing that the "case has not been established, whereas the case against any change is overwhelming".

In Canada, a new report on assisted suicide has found that the practise has risen thirteen-fold since legalisation in 2016 and has become a "routine" practise. Entitled, 'From Exceptional to Routine: The Rise of Euthanasia in Canada' found that the average time between request and an "assisted death" being carried out is about 11 days.

The Irish Committee heard submissions on the practice of 'Medical Assistance in Dying' (MAiD) which outlined the rapid progress and evolution that has occurred in Canada and other jurisdictions. This made little impression on the committee members who retained their pre-consultation positions with the majority report presuming Irish 'exceptionalism' of being able to legislate to avoid the slippery slope that has manifest in other jurisdictions.

The report says Canada's model is similar to that of Belgium and the Netherlands, in that it now allows assisted death for persons with non-terminal illnesses, which expands eligibility to those living with disabilities whose death is not reasonably foreseeable.

In Scotland, the Scottish Bishops' Conference has warned a Scottish parliamentary committee on Health, Social Care and Sport that the introduction of euthanasia/assisted suicide/assisted dying will create "chilling" economic incentives that could result in assisted suicide becoming the preferred course of action over providing palliative care to the most vulnerable in society after Liam McArthur, a member of the Scottish Parliament, introduced the Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill earlier this year.

These are just some of the debates that are ongoing. Where assisted suicide or euthanasia is not allowed under the law, this protection is constantly under attack. In these jurisdictions, defenders of life in its final stages are constantly carrying out a rearguard action.

To paraphrase what the IRA said to the British security services after the Brighton bombing, euthanasia advocates only have to be lucky once, those who fight against assisted suicide will have to be lucky all the time.

It appears that this luck has run out in Ireland and the report by the Committee on Assisted Dying, despite bearing no resemblance to the committee hearings, will be used as a tool to introduce assisted dying in Ireland through parliamentary measures.

The vote of the committee itself provides an indication of how the political parties will approach legislation once it is brought to the two houses of the Oireachtas. The Irish Bishops' Conference will need to be prepared to mount a defence of life yet again and to instruct the faithful on their responsibilities as citizens to engage and oppose any attempts by the Government to introduce euthanasia to Ireland.

## 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.

# ‘Religious Conversations’: What’s going on with religion in Ireland?



Eoin McCormack

**H**ave you ever found yourself in the often-awkward position in work or in another other social setting where you are somehow elected the spokesperson for all things Catholic? Over the next few weeks, this column will explore how we can better prepare for those uncomfortable conversations that many Catholics find themselves in today.

Last week’s column highlighted the need for us to upskill in our apologetics (defences) if we want to be in any way compelling. To do this, we need to go back to the books and make use of the many online resources now available to properly study the faith in order to truly know what we’re talking about. Equally however, in the spirit of echoing St Paul’s evangelisation techniques in Athens, we also need to be experts on the given culture to know what apologetics skills are necessary to propose anything that can be meaningfully understood.

This week’s column will take a philosophical look underlying the current state of religion in Ireland. Just as St Paul demonstrated to the pagans that their worship of an ‘unknown god’ was in fact pointing towards the deeper mystery behind the universe – the one true God revealed in Jesus Christ – we too need to be able to read the culture to point people towards the truth.

To read last week’s article be sure to check out [www.irishcatholic.com](http://www.irishcatholic.com).

## Faith & Culture

Working in a multicultural parish in Dublin city, I am continually approached by Catholics from all over world



Pope Benedict XVI

who ask What is going on with religion in Ireland? It has become an apparent observation by many international Catholics, either visiting or living here, that Ireland is a cold house for joyful people of Faith. To our shame, for the most part, this coldness is largely coming from cradle Irish-Catholics who themselves have received the sacraments and a Catholic education within the Irish Church. This comes as a particular surprise to many international visitors who are acutely aware of Ireland’s reputation as the ‘land of saints’ and our extensive missionary outreach in the last century.

**“All you have to do is google ‘Catholic Church in Ireland’ and you’ll find hundreds of news articles with few offering anything hopeful”**

If we want to construct an appropriate model of apologetics that makes sense for the modern world, the question “What is going on with

religion in Ireland?” is actually the perfect place to begin. Like St Paul in Athens, we need to understand the philosophies that shape people’s often ill-informed remarks or comments regarding religion in the modern world.

## Ireland’s Philosophy

For the past 30 years, the narrative surrounding the relationship between Church and culture in the secular media at least, has largely focused on controversial issues such as the child-sexual abuse scandals, the Church’s place in state education, declining vocations, and so on. All you have to do is google ‘Catholic Church in Ireland’ and you’ll find hundreds of news articles with few offering anything hopeful. It is true to say in a quick conversation, much of the reasons people give for their contempt of Catholicism in Ireland is generally related to at least one or more of these issues in some form or another. But if the conversation develops and you press the person with even one or two simple questions regarding matters of Faith, you might just find that they will reveal a very surface-level understanding of any of the

big questions – whether there is any real purpose to life, whether there is an objective nature to truth or whether belief in God is a reasonable or meaningful proposition.

**“The scandals could not have come at a ‘worse time’ not because there is ever a ‘good time’ for scandal, but because Ireland was changing culturally and philosophically”**

At an address given in New York, in 2013, the then Archbishop of Dublin, Diarmuid Martin, indicated, “in one sense the scandals could not have come at a worse time.” This is a highly important point to not get lost in a debate about recent scandals, these are largely the types of conversations where no one benefits. Rather, as the former Archbishop alludes, there is something else lurking under the culture. The scandals could not have come at a ‘worse time’ not because there is ever a ‘good time’ for scandal, but because Ireland was changing culturally and philosophically. Secular-rational philosophical trends that were once restricted to the universities of the enlightenment era and had yet to have any real influence in Ireland, had just arrived on our shores alongside the rapid growth in material prosperity blended with a new openness to the wider world and multiculturalism. And while some of these developments have

come with many positive influences, with every form of change there is always unintended consequences. Religion had become not just contemptuous because of the scandals, but it also became increasingly culturally irrelevant.

For the most part, while people may still site the various controversial issues for not engaging with the Church, experience and statistics tell us that those who actually leave the Church do so for much deeper philosophical reasons. When it comes down to it, religion is neither rational nor relevant. To submit to a singular ‘truth claim’ of any kind is deemed potentially offensive and nonsensical because there are alternative views and opinions. Even gender is now a relative term. We are, as Pope Benedict XVI predicted in 2005, living in a “dictatorship of relativism.”

## ‘Nones’

As of the last census, the second largest religious group in Ireland is ‘no-religion’. This is very telling considering the corresponding drop in those identifying with Catholicism. Much like their counterparts in the UK and the US, Irish Catholics who leave the Church do so to enter the ‘no-religion’ bracket. This statistic is important because it indicates that people are not merely disillusioned with the institutional Church and finding other ways to practice their faith in the triune God, such as through Anglicanism for example. Instead, it shows that many are explicitly stating that belief in the Christian God is no longer relevant

to them, leading them – and their future children – to identify as religious ‘nones’.

**“All three of the most recent Popes have recognised this growing need within the cultural dialogue writing encyclicals stressing the reasonableness of Faith”**

Understanding these philosophical and statistical insights is essential to recognise the true nature of your ‘religious conversation’. What might seem like surface-level remarks could actually be something much deeper and more philosophical than you initially realise. When ‘talking religion’ in modern Ireland, we therefore need a model apologetics that is very much grounded in reason to tackle the conception that Faith is irrational. We need to prime ourselves with reasons to believe in God who is the ultimate logos – reason – behind all things as St Paul told the pagans in Athens. We need to have answers for people’s questions on why we exist, what is the fundamental purpose to life, and arm ourselves with good philosophy for the existence of truth itself.

All three of the most recent Popes have recognised this growing need within the cultural dialogue writing encyclicals stressing the reasonableness of Faith. Just before we entered the new millennium in 1998, John Paul II wrote his groundbreaking encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (Faith and Reason) in reminding to the culture of the “two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of the truth.” Similarly, both Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis together scripted *Lumen Fidei* (The Light of Faith) in 2013, which acts as a complementary follow-up to *Fides et Ratio*, dialoguing with enlightenment criticisms. In it, the Popes recognise that faith “might have been considered sufficient for societies of old but was felt to be of no use for new times for a humanity come of age, proud of its rationality.” ‘Talking religion’ in modern Ireland therefore needs to be informed with confident reasons to believe.

**“Next week’s column will tackle the issue of ‘talking God’ in the office – how do we use these ‘reasons to believe’ to demonstrate that faith in God is not irrational as the secular culture might like you to think.”**

**“When ‘talking religion’ in modern Ireland, we therefore need a model apologetics that is very much grounded in reason to tackle the conception that Faith is irrational. We need to prime ourselves with reasons to believe in God who is the ultimate logos”**

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## ITINERARY HIGHLIGHTS

- Plaza of three cultures in Tlatelolco to see the Church of St James where St. Juan Diego presented the 'tilma' of Our Lady to the Bishop as proof of her apparitions.
- Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe built in response to Our Lady's request to the visionary, St Juan Diego Cuauhtlatotzin.
- At Tepeyac Hill, kneel before the miraculous image of Our Lady.
- Explore Mexico City.
- Ruins of the Aztec city.
- Palacio National
- Paseo de la Reforma, Teotihuacan
- a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the pyramid of the Sun and the Moon.
- Church of the Holy Family, where the remains of the martyred Miguel Pro are venerated.
- Floating Gardens of Mexico, Xochimilco.
- City of Angels.
- Old City of Puebla.
- Shrine of San Miguel del Milagro.
- See the image of Our Lady of Ocotlan burnt into a tree trunk after she appeared to Diego Bernardino in 1531.

## INCLUDES

- Return flights from Dublin to Mexico City via Amsterdam with 23kg checked bag.
- 5 nights in the Hotel Casa Blanca, Mexico City with breakfast.
- 2 nights in the NH Hotel Puebla, Puebla with breakfast.
- 1 night in the Hotel Fontan, Mexico City with breakfast.
- 5 lunches in local restaurants and 2 dinners in hotel.
- Modern coach with professional guide throughout.
- Mass at the Basilica of our Lady of Guadalupe
- Tour of the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe
- Entrance fees to Teotihuacan (pre-Aztec Pyramids).
- Gondola boat trip of Xochimilco.
- Entrance to Anthropology Museum.
- Tour earpiece system "whispers"
- All taxes and surcharges
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- Single supplement: €450
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# Your Faith

Three  
ways to find  
silence in  
our digital  
age

Sister Hosea Rupprecht

Page 32

The Irish Catholic, August 29, 2024



## Rather than working against one another, faith and science together offer a fuller picture of creation

Pope Paul VI views the moon through the viewfinder of the Schmidt telescope at the time of the first landing on the moon, 1969. This print was photographed on display at the Vatican observatory in Castel Gandolfo, 2018

**“W**hat do I do if science tells me one thing, but religion tells me another thing? Which do I believe?”

There's a false assumption at the centre of that question, because neither science nor religion are about believing in 'things.'

Our religious belief is not in a 'thing', but in a person - indeed, three persons. Our faith is in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as described and identified in the creed, and in the Church that leads us to those persons.

The words of the creed are important precisely because they identify one very specific God: the Father outside of time and space (already present in the beginning) who deliberately chose to create time and space, and who loves this universe; Jesus who was incarnate in this universe by the Holy Spirit, born of Mary, who lived at a particular time, died in a particular way, was resurrected at a particular moment; and that same Holy Spirit now sent to us as our advocate, present in this universe in our Church.

### Creed

When the creed was written, there were plenty of other gods that some people wanted to believe in. But we Christians specifically reject the pagan nature gods. We no more believe in them than we would worship some other guy named Jesus who lived at a different time



**Assuming that only atoms and forces exist, you'll miss out on things like beauty, truth and love says Br Guy Consolmagno**

and place and had a different history than the Jesus we call Lord.

**“Just as it's tricky to understand Jesus as both true God and true man, it's tricky to understand how the Creator relates to creation”**

It's tempting to turn our worship of the Creator into worshipping a nature god, one who fiddles with how things work in the natural world, like a force alongside electricity and gravity. It's the same temptation as worshipping a version of 'Jesus' who was just a nice guy that came to an unfortunate end, or a version of 'Jesus' who was merely a deity dressed up in a man-suit. Both the nature god and the simplified 'Jesus' are easy to grasp and understand; but they are false. They're not what Christians believe.

Just as it's tricky to understand Jesus as both true God and true man, it's tricky to understand how the Crea-

tor relates to creation. That's where science comes in.

Science is our best way of describing how the universe behaves. You might say, where faith tells us that God created the universe, science tells us how he did it.

### Purify

Science is important precisely because “science can purify religion from error and superstition,” to quote Pope St John Paul II. But science is never finished; it's never perfect. It's a human understanding of truth. Science's description of truth is humanly understandable, but it is always an incomplete description. Science is understanding, seeking truth - constantly approaching the truth without ever fully grasping it.

That's where religion comes in. To quote St John Paul II again, “religion can purify science from idolatry and false absolutes.” Religion gives us truths and absolutes that science has no power to contradict. But while religion begins with truths, we must recognise that they

are always only imperfectly understood.

As we experience God in prayer, in life, in theology, we constantly come to moments where we can say, “Aha! Now I see a little better what that means.” Religion is truth seeking understanding.

**“Religion is where our understanding of the physical world is situated into the broader universe that includes not only atoms and forces but also the human desires”**

So, we shouldn't be afraid if science and religion sometimes give us different pictures of God's universe. That's to be expected; both are still works in progress. Science can never disprove (or prove) a point of religion any more than our current understanding of our faith can deny (or confirm) some scientific theory. Ultimately, “truth does not contradict truth,” to quote John Paul II one more time.

Furthermore, religion is where our understanding of the physical world is situated into the broader universe that includes not only atoms and forces but also the human desires that make us want to understand

atoms and forces, to come closer to the Creator by experiencing and appreciating his creation.

The fact is, science has its fundamental credo, too. A scientist must believe that the physical universe is real, not an illusion; that it operates by laws greater than the universe itself, not by the whims of nature gods; and that understanding those laws is something good in and of itself, not just as a way of controlling nature but as a way of being in a relationship with nature, a way of enjoying and appreciating and loving creation. Notice how this credo is in complete accord with the Christian credo, and indeed grows out of it.

### Atheist

Of course, if you choose to be a materialist and an atheist, God won't stop you. If you want to assume that the physical universe is nothing but atoms and forces, then you can succeed at looking at the whole universe and seeing nothing but atoms and forces. You can even do something that looks like science with that assumption.

But by assuming that only atoms and forces exist, you'll miss out on things like beauty, truth and love. You'll miss out on the very things that make you want to do science in the first place.

**i** Jesuit Br Guy Consolmagno is an astronomer at the Vatican Observatory and president of the Vatican Observatory Foundation.

# 75 years after George Orwell's 1984, we are awash with Newspeak and Doublethink



**Kenneth Craycraft**

**T**he Book of Genesis explains that God created the universe by His word alone, speaking the world into existence. As we read throughout the first chapter of Genesis, "God said, 'Let there be ...'" And as God reflected on the six days of creation, He looked upon his work, and "found it very good."

The Gospel of St John further explains that the Word through and by which the Father created the world is Christ, Himself. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be" (Jn 1:1-3a). The Greek word St John uses is *logos*, which can be translated 'reason' as well as 'word'. By using the word *logos* to explain that the Father created the world by and through the Word, St John is telling us that the universe is rational and true. Jesus, the eternal Logos through which the world was created, is "the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6).

## Logos

From these first chapters of Genesis and the Gospel of John we discern that the world is formed and permeated by the Logos - the very reason and truth of God. This is another way of saying that the world is built upon and sustained by rational communication - the continual utterance of the Divine Word. Where truth is found, the Logos of God is found. Of course, this implies that falsehood is the absence of goodness and reason. Truth is necessary for an authentic, rational human community. Where truth fails, irrationality reigns, and public life is reduced to the imposition of violence by those who control the falsehood.

I thought about these aspects of the Christian revelation as I recently re-read George Orwell's prescient novel, *1984*,



Poster for the 1956 film adaptation of 1984, directed by Michael Anderson

which was published 75 years ago, in 1949. It could be argued that Orwell's fictional predictions of a dystopian future have never been more relevant than they are now, especially his depictions of "Newspeak" and "Doublethink," both of which are becoming the *lingua franca* of American political and public life.

**“‘Newspeak’ in the novel is a spot-on description of how abortion advocates disguise the unjust killing of unborn human beings”**

With the proliferation of 'deep fakes', artificial intel-

ligence, various ideological falsehoods, and prevaricating politicians, we do well to revisit Orwell's novel and to take lessons about the necessity of truth-telling and honest communication to sustain rational human communities.

For example, "Newspeak" in the novel is a spot-on description of how abortion advocates disguise the unjust killing of unborn human beings, by referring to "reproductive justice." Newspeak also accounts for the mutilation of healthy organs and sterilisation of children as "gender affirming care."

## Newspeak

The purpose of "Newspeak," Orwell explains, is "to provide a medium of expression

for the worldview and mental habits proper" to *Ingsoc*, the ruling political ideology. When Newspeak had been adopted to obfuscate reality, "Oldspeak" - that is, truthfulness - "should be literally unthinkable, at least as far as thought is dependent on words."

**“Doublethink is to hold simultaneously two opinions, ... knowing them to be contradictory and believing both of them, ... to repudiate morality while laying claim to it”**

To exert control over all aspects of society, the party replaced truthful words with false ones, and exerted absolute control over their definitions. "This was done ... by the invention of new words" and "by eliminating undesirable words and by stripping such words as remained of undesirable meanings." In other

words, Newspeak destroys authentic, rational human community by replacing truth with falsehood, and imposing it by force.

Closely related to this destruction of truthful speech is *Ingsoc*'s notion of "Doublethink": "to know and not to know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully constructed lies." Doublethink "is to hold simultaneously two opinions, ... knowing them to be contradictory and believing both of them, ... to repudiate morality while laying claim to it."

## Ideology

What better way to describe an ideology, for example, that declares men can become pregnant and women can be outfitted with a man's reproductive organs? Or simultaneously to profess the mutually contradictory and self-refuting notions that gender is both a "social construct" and an "innate" sense of identity? To declare that sexual physiology is irrelevant to gender, but to insist on amputating sexual organs to conform to gender iden-

tity? Doublethink is quickly becoming the prevailing dogma of public life.

**“‘War is Peace,’ ‘Freedom is Slavery,’ ‘Ignorance is Strength’”**

In *1984*, the ideology of *Ingsoc* is built upon the foundation of three slogans: "War is Peace," "Freedom is Slavery," "Ignorance is Strength." 75 years after its publication, and 40 years after its historical setting, *1984* has never been more accurate in its description of the increasing dystopia of public life. Nor has the novel ever been more relevant as a cautionary tale about the danger of exchanging truth for lies.

**i** Kenneth Craycraft is an associate professor of moral theology at Mount St Mary's Seminary and School of Theology in Cincinnati, and author of *Citizens Yet Strangers: Living Authentically Catholic in a Divided America* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2024).

**“To declare that sexual physiology is irrelevant to gender, but to insist on amputating sexual organs to conform to gender identity? Doublethink is quickly becoming the prevailing dogma of public life”**

# Three ways to find silence in our digital age



Sr Hosea Rupprecht

One day, I was at the Pacific Coast Highway. It was a bright, sunny day and the ocean was sparkling. On my way home, I spotted a few empty parking spots along the side of the road and, totally on a whim, pulled into one. I rolled up that window but kept the other one down. This made the rhythmic sound of the ocean waves more prominent.

I sat in the car, closed my eyes, and just listened for three minutes. I felt such a sense of calm, even among all the tasks that had crowded my day, that I still remember that feeling months after the day I've described.

Those three minutes in the car were not silent. I could hear all kinds of sounds around me, but what was important was that my heart was silent. In that inner silence, I found peace and serenity.

How often in our daily lives do we long for moments like that only to find that they consistently elude our grasp? I think God is laughing a little because, even as I write about silence, there's a guy with a chainsaw going right outside the office where I'm working, cutting down a dead tree. Seriously?

## Overload

Alongside the sounds of life, the digital world provides plenty of sound, noise and input that fills not only our ears but our brains, sometimes to the point where we feel overloaded with visual, audible and intellectual stimuli. Where do we draw the line to find the balance we need? And why bother? Because silence con-

nects us with God, others, and ourselves.

Here are some things to remember:

1. Silence is a choice.

Well, ambient silence may not be, such as traffic or chainsaw noise, but we can choose to be interiorly silent. Pope Benedict XVI talked about having an "ecosystem" that favours silence.

**“God’s voice is the most important one to hear each day, but we can only hear it when we are silent ourselves. During your morning routine, carve out a few minutes to silently connect with God”**

“When messages and information are plentiful, silence becomes essential if we are to distinguish what is important from what is insignificant or secondary,” he wrote in 2012, “it is necessary to develop an appropriate environment, a kind of ‘ecosystem’ that maintains a just equilibrium between silence, words, images and sounds.” Make it a point to set up times and/or places for yourself where silence is the default. Maybe it’s unplugging from media during your commute to work or designating a special room or corner in your home where you can sit in silence. I crave quiet in the evening hours, so I programmed my phone to silence notifications from 8pm to 8.30am the next day.

2. Use silence to enter into contemplation.

On a recent road trip to lead a retreat, I was listening to an audiobook novel to help pass the six-hour

drive time. Eventually, I turned off the book and just drove in silence. It gave me the perfect opportunity to be in touch with God’s love for me, and to pray for the people I was going to meet the next day.

God’s voice is the most important one to hear each day, but we can only hear it when we are silent ourselves. During your morning routine, carve out a few minutes to silently connect with God. Ask God to bless your day and give you the courage to seek and follow His will for you. Then relax and listen, letting God love and guide you.

3. Practice silence in your relationships.

The Letter of St James says, “You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger” (Jas 1:19). True, authentic communication begins with listening. That means being silent so as to hear the needs of the other, whether those needs are expressed in words or not.

## Authentic

Pope Benedict XVI observed, “It is often in silence, for example, that we observe the most authentic communication taking place between people who are in love: gestures, facial expressions and body language are signs by which they reveal themselves to each other.”

Outside my window, the chainsaw wielding guys have progressed to the stump grinder so ambient silence isn’t on the agenda for me any time soon. Even so, my heart and soul can be peaceful and still, trusting in God because inner silence is possible, despite the cacophony around me. So, if you’re feeling frustrated from the digital, mechanical or relational ‘noise’ you experience, be patient. Interior silence comes with prayer and practice.

**i** Sr Hosea Rupprecht, a Daughter of St Paul, is the associate director of the Pauline Centre for Media Studies.



Jenna Marie Cooper

## Is spiritual communion the same as sacramental Communion?

**Q: Some people have said a spiritual communion is the same as a sacramental Communion when one has a sincere desire and cannot receive otherwise. If this is so, why do we say, “Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart.” Would it count in the case of making a plenary indulgence?**

A: While a spiritual communion might be a praiseworthy aid to one’s spiritual life, it is not the same thing as a physical, sacramental Communion.

For those who may be unfamiliar with the practice, a “spiritual communion” is a prayer expressing one’s desire for deep closeness with Jesus, particularly in situations where it is not possible to receive Communion sacramentally. Making a spiritual communion can be devoutly helpful for many Catholics, and can certainly be an occasion for receiving God’s grace.

But this does not mean that the Church considers spiritual communion and sacramental Communion to be exactly the same or interchangeable. And as you note, this is evident in the very wording of many common prayers for spiritual communion. For example, if a spiritual communion was identical to a sacramental Communion, clearly we would not be asking Jesus to come “at least spiritually” into our hearts.

One very rough analogy might be talking with our loved ones over the phone or a video call versus being with them in person. Phone calls can be a great way to maintain a relationship with friends or family we cannot see very often, but nothing is quite the same as meeting face-to-face.

Because a spiritual communion is different from a sacramental Communion, normally it would not fulfil the requirements for obtaining an indulgence.

For reference, Canon 992 of the Code of Canon Law describes indulgences as: “the remission in the sight of God of the temporal punishment due for sins, the guilt of which has already been forgiven. A member of Christ’s faithful who is properly disposed and who fulfils certain specific conditions, may gain an indul-

gence by the help of the Church which, as the minister of redemption, authoritatively dispenses and applies the treasury of the merits of Christ and the Saints.”

Or in other words, the Church uses her authority to “bind and loose” (see Mt 18:18) to apply merits and virtues “stored up” by those in heaven towards our own sanctification or the sanctification of souls in purgatory.

Typically, an indulgence is attached to some pious act, such as making a pilgrimage or doing a work of charity. But to actually earn the indulgence, other conditions must be met. The document *The Gift of the Indulgence* from the year 2000 lists these conditions as: making a sacramental confession and receiving holy Communion; not maintaining an attachment to any kind of sin; and praying for the Pope’s intentions.

Still, even if a Catholic does not have ready access to daily Mass, this does not mean that they are thereby unable to obtain an indulgence.

For one thing, *The Gift of the Indulgence* indicates that while it is preferable to go to confession and receive holy Communion on the day the indulgence is earned, it is sufficient for these sacraments to be received “within several days (about 20) before or after the indulgenced act.” This document further explains that while it is ideal for the requisite holy Communion to occur in the context of the Mass, even a Communion received outside of Mass would count for the purpose of the indulgence.

*The Gift of the Indulgence* goes on to tell us that “for the sake of those legitimately impeded, confessors can commute both the work prescribed and the conditions required (except, obviously, detachment from even venial sin).” That is, if a Catholic is truly unable to receive Communion through no fault of their own, a priest confessor can adapt the indulgence’s requirement accordingly.

**i** Jenna Marie Cooper, who holds a licentiate in canon law, is a consecrated virgin and a canonist whose column appears weekly at OSV News. Send your questions to CatholicQA@osv.com.

# The precious memory of God's original touch



Inside each of us, beyond what we can picture clearly, express in words, or even feel distinctly, we have a dark memory of having once been touched and caressed by hands far gentler than our own. That caress has left a permanent mark, an imprint of a love so tender and deep that its memory becomes a prism through which we see everything else. This imprint lies beyond conscious memory but forms the centre of our soul.

This is not an easy concept to explain. Bernard Lonergan, one of the great intellectuals of the past century, tried to explain it philosophically by saying we bear inside us "the brand of the first principles", namely, the oneness, truth, goodness, and beauty which are the attributes of God. That's accurate, but abstract. Maybe the old myths and legends capture it better when they say that, before birth, each soul is kissed by God and it then goes through life always in some dark way remembering that kiss and measuring everything it experiences in relation to that original sweetness. To be in touch with your heart is to be in touch with this primordial kiss, with both its preciousness and its meaning.

What exactly is being said here?

## Precious

Within each of us, at that place where all that is most precious within us lives, there is an inchoate sense of having once been touched, caressed, loved, and valued in a way that is beyond anything we have ever consciously



Fr Rolheiser

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

experienced. In fact, all the goodness, love, value, and tenderness we experience in life fall short precisely because we are already in touch with something deeper. When we feel frustrated, angry, betrayed, violated, or enraged, it is because our outside experience is antithetical to what we already hold dear inside.

**“There we are temples of God, sacred churches of truth and love. There we bear God's image”**

We all have this place, a place in the heart, where we hold all that is most precious and sacred to us. From that place our own kisses issue forth, as do our tears.

**“To be truly ourselves is to remember, to touch and to feel the memory of God's original touch in us. That memory fires our energy and provides us with a prism through which to see and understand”**

It is the place that we most guard from others, but the place where we would most want others to come into; the place where we are the most deeply alone and the place of intimacy; the place of innocence and the place where we are violated; the place of our compassion and the place of our rage. In that place we are holy. There we are temples of God, sacred churches of truth and love. There we bear God's image.

## Understanding

But this needs understanding: the image of God inside of us is not a beautiful icon stamped inside of our soul. No. The image and likeness of God inside us is energy, fire, and memory; especially the memory of a touch so tender and loving that its good-

ness and truth become the prism through which we ultimately see everything. Thus, we recognise goodness and truth outside of us precisely because they resonate with something that is already inside us. Things touch our hearts when they touch us here. Isn't it because we have already been deeply touched and caressed that we passionately seek a soulmate, that we seek someone to join us in this intimate place?

**“Are not the touch and tenderness that bring ecstasy nothing other than the stirring of deep memory? Are not the ideals that inspire hope only the reminder of words somebody has already spoken to us?”**

And, consciously and unconsciously, we measure everything in life by how it touches this place: why do certain experiences touch us so deeply? Why do our hearts burn within us in the presence of any truth, love, goodness, or tenderness that is genuine and deep? Is not all deep knowledge simply a waking up to something we already know? Is not all love simply a question of being respected for something we already are? Are not the touch and tenderness that bring

ecstasy nothing other than the stirring of deep memory? Are not the ideals that inspire hope only the reminder of words somebody has already spoken to us? Does not our desire for innocence (and innocent means "not wounded") mirror some primal unwounded place deep within us? And when we feel violated, is it not because someone has irreverently entered the sacred inside us?

## Sensitivities

When we are in touch with this memory and respect its sensitivities, we are in touch with our souls. At those times, faith, hope, and love will spring up in us, joy and tears will both flow through us freely, and we will be deeply affected by the innocence and beauty of children, as pain and gratitude alternately bring us to our knees.

That is what it means to be recollected, centred. To be truly ourselves is to remember, to touch and to feel the memory of God's original touch in us. That memory fires our energy and provides us with a prism through which to see and understand.

Sadly, today, too often a wounded, calloused, cynical, over sophisticated, and overly adult world invite us to forget God's kiss in the soul, to view this as childish. But, unless we lie to ourselves and harden ourselves against our own ourselves (the most dangerous of all activities), we will always remember, dimly, darkly, unrelentingly, the caress of God.

# Called to put our Faith to work



Christ among the Pharisees,  
Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678)

Dt 4:1-2, 6-8  
Ps 15:2-5  
Jas 1:17-18, 21b-22, 27  
Mk 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

**A**re we doers? The letter from James this Sunday lays it all on the line and reminds us of what truly matters. Think showing up at church, saying prayers and dropping an envelope in the collection basket is enough? Think again.

"Humbly welcome the word that has been planted in you and is able to save your souls," James wrote. "Be doers of the word and not hearers only... care for orphans and widows in their affliction and keep oneself unstained by the world."

This comes from the same writer who cautioned his readers later in the same letter that just believing isn't enough:

## The Sunday Gospel

Deacon Greg Kandra



"Faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead."

Looked at another way: If you want faith that is alive, you have to make it breathe and put it to work.

### Divided

Scholars are divided about who, exactly, James was writing to, but his message clearly transcends time and place - and resonates perfectly for us today alongside the excerpt we hear this Sunday from Mark's Gospel.

In a nutshell: We need to get busy.

**"A Christian is called to do more than just listen to God's word; we need to take it to heart and act on it in the world"**

This weekend, we're challenged to labour in the vineyard, to work on our faith by being people of action, charity, sacrifice, love. To do, not just hear. The letter from James is a timely lesson (in case we've forgotten over the lazy days of summer) that the Christian

vocation doesn't take a vacation. We are never not living our faith. We are called to put it to work. We're not only supposed to show up at church on Sunday morning, but we have to open our hearts to those in need on Monday.

A Christian is called to do more than just listen to God's word; we need to take it to heart and act on it in the world. And we need to remember the source.

### Gift

"All good giving and every perfect gift is from above," James noted, "coming down from the Father of lights." This is where everything begins - inspiration, guidance, courage, faith. From

above, God offers us light to guide our way and direct our lives.

In his letter, James exhorted the early Christians to cooperate with God. For us, that means to put faith into action and prayerfully seek ways for God to use us.

What will we do?

To paraphrase St Teresa of Avila, we are now his hands, his legs and his body. What will we shape with those hands? Where will we walk with these legs? What will we bear on our shoulders? What will we do for others? What will we do for him?

For it is in the doing - in the living of the Gospel, day by day, moment by moment, choice by choice - that we make Christ present in the world.

It is in the doing that we are redeemed.

And it is in the doing that we can help, in some small way, to redeem the world. Faith and devotion

to the will of God has to be more than skin-deep.

In the Gospel, Jesus quoted Isaiah and delivered a similar message to the scribes and Pharisees, who couldn't help but notice that some of the apostles didn't follow closely the Jewish laws of purification.

Their complaints struck Jesus as misguided.

### Honours

"This people honours me with their lips," Jesus said, "but their hearts are far from me..." And he added: "You disregard God's commandment but cling to human tradition."

This reading should make all of us dig deep and take stock of how we hear God's word, and what we do with it.

What will we do?

**i** Deacon Greg Kandra is an award-winning author and journalist, and creator of the blog *The Deacon's Bench*.

**"What will we shape with those hands? Where will we walk with these legs? What will we bear on our shoulders? What will we do for others? What will we do for him?"**

# TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



## Predictability is the order of the day

With TV and Radio, I yearn for something different, unexpected and original. I rarely get it – predictability is the order of the day.

The interview with *Irish Times* Religious Affairs correspondent Patsy McGarry on **Brendan O'Connor** (RTÉ Radio 1, Saturday) fell for the most part into the 'predictable' category as the host teased out some issues from Mr McGarry's new book 'Well, Holy God'. We got the familiar trawl through the sins of the past with little awareness of the sins of the present. O'Connor started by mentioning the 'decline of the Catholic Church', and yes, there has been a decline, though having been at several Sunday Masses recently in different parishes I was struck by the impressive attendances and the diversity of the congregations. He thought young people wouldn't believe him if he told them about McGarry's descriptions of station or house Masses – are they so unusual? It 'almost surprises me', he said, followed by 'I kind of remember this Ireland'. Dear fellow Brendan, it's the same Ireland, we've just swapped some abuses for others, made plenty of improvements and lost

much of value.

Mr McGarry referred to so many aspects of life being 'dominated' by the Church in the past, though with another perspective one could see much of this as service. He described his schooling as being a 'brutal regime', referencing corporal punishment which was pervasive at the time – we thought it was normal, part of life, he said. Normal isn't the same as moral of course, and I remembered early campaigners against it, like Dr Cyril Daly, being regarded as extreme. McGarry remembered being 'very devout', a potential priest in a different context, but he started questioning in secondary school and he wasn't getting answers (at least none that satisfied him) and he now describes himself as 'agnostic'. He was, and still is, interested in the social teaching of the Church and believes that most clergy were, and still are, 'decent people', doing a good job on the ground. He was however angry with the Church authorities, in relation to abuse cover-ups, an anger shared I'm sure by many practising Catholics. He saw just one purpose – the protection of 'the institution'. Unfortunately, this 'institutionitis' infects so many institutions, but



Fr Martin Shanahan

you'd expect the Church to have done better. I thought he overstated the criticism when, being overly judgemental, he said that the welfare of children was 'not a consideration' for the Archbishops of Dublin prior to Diarmuid Martin.

In relation to Eamonn Casey, he admired the Bishop for his social justice work, e.g. with Trócaire, a Church organisation that, he said, did 'enormously good work'. Brendan O'Connor seemed either puzzled or peeved when McGarry seemed to stand up for Bishop Casey to an extent – e.g. pointing out that allegations of child

abuse against him were not proven – the only case tested did not proceed to a charge. When he wanted to elaborate what the out-of-court settlements meant, O'Connor cut him off rather abruptly, saying that to do so would be disrespectful to victims.

### Prayer

The role of prayer in the life of the Church is not at all unrelated to these damaging controversies. The topic was covered by Fr Martin Shanahan on the cleverly named **Chatechesis** (Radio Maria, Friday) – his first outing in this regular Friday

### PICK OF THE WEEK

#### SONGS OF PRAISE

**BBC One Sunday, September 1, 1.15pm**

To mark 100 years since the BBC first broadcast a service of worship, Pam Rhodes hears inspiring stories from some of today's Christian broadcasters.

#### THE MESSAGE OF FATIMA

**EWTN Sunday, September 1, 9pm**

A condensed version of the EWTN series documenting the astounding miracles at Fatima, where Lucia dos Santos and her cousins, Francisco and Jacinta, were visited by the Blessed Mother.

#### THE US AND THE HOLOCAUST: A FILM BY KEN BURNS

**RTÉ 2 Wednesday (night), September 4, 12.55am**

Part 1: After decades of open borders in the United States, a xenophobic backlash prompts the passage of laws restricting immigration. In Germany, Hitler takes power.

slot. Fr Martin, from Quilty in West Clare, told of how he had been a married man but joined the priesthood after his wife died. He quoted St Therese of Lisieux describing prayer as 'a surge of the heart ... a simple look towards heaven'. I liked his description of prayer as 'the encounter of god's thirst with ours', as he stressed the role of the heart in prayer – if our heart is far from God, the prayers are in vain.

He noted how so often we practice prayer and are asked for prayer in various ordinary situations – for students doing exams, for safe

travels. He reckoned we had lost many of our traditional prayer practices, sometimes because of time pressures in our modern lifestyles.

I thought the programme needed to be a bit shorter, but it was good to include texts from listeners, a song – 'Only in God' by John Michael Talbot sung beautifully by Hugh and Maria Doherty, and a concluding prayer.

Finally, where have the weekend editions of **It Says in the Papers** (RTÉ Radio 1) gone to? RTÉ, bring them back!

# Music

Pat O'Kelly



## A virtuoso work in the grand style...

As promised last time round here is a little more about Waterford-born composer William Vincent Wallace (1812-1865). Now, it must be remembered Wallace revelled in story telling with one commentator claiming he was 'charming but unprincipled, and his habitual untruthfulness makes it hard to determine real facts about him'.

Wallace definitely was in Mexico City in 1841, where he quickly composed a setting of the Mass, which was performed on several occasions at the Cathedral. He was also engaged as director at the Italian Theatre in the Mexican capital before proceeding to New Orleans to become conductor at the

French Theater and where he composed his 'Grand Fantasia and Variations - *La Cracovienne*' for piano and orchestra, 'a virtuoso work in the grand style', giving its première in December 1842.

The following year found Wallace in Philadelphia and Boston before he made his New York debut at the Apollo Rooms on June 6, 1843 featuring *La Cracovienne* in his programme. A contemporary report described him as 'elegant, recherché and svelte with beautiful manners'.

Back to Europe in 1844, Wallace made his English debut as a pianist at the Hanover Square Concert Rooms on May 8, 1845. Through a fortunate contact with an old Dublin friend,

Hayward St Leger, Wallace was introduced to the dramatist Edward Fitzball. The meeting proved extremely fruitful with Fitzball providing the libretto for Wallace's most successful opera – *Martha* – première at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane on November 15, 1845. Julius Benedict, composer of the equally popular *The Lily of Killarney*, conducted.

In the meantime Wallace had returned to New York where he took out American citizenship. He fell in love with and married the German-born pianist Hélène Stöpel in 1850 having fortified himself with a lawyer's opinion that his marriage to Isabella Kelly was, *ab initio*, illegal as, at the time, he was under twenty and had been

'bred up a protestant'.

Wallace's 'grand romantic opera' *Lurline*, based on the German legend of the Lorelei had its first performance at Covent Garden by the Pyne and Harrison English Opera Company on February 23, 1860. Soprano Louisa Pyne sang the title role but despite the opera's success Wallace made nothing from it having sold the English performing rights to the Pyne/Harrison Company for ten shillings which he then handed to the impoverished widow of a Covent Garden Theatre carpenter. It is estimated that the Pyne/Harrison Company made at least £50,000 from *Lurline*'s various productions.

*The Amber Witch*, that Wallace considered his best

opera, followed in 1861. Charles Hallé founder of Manchester's Hallé Orchestra in 1858, conducted the première at Her Majesty's Theatre, London on February 28, 1861.

Wallace's health and eyesight deteriorated rapidly in 1865 and the family travelled to the Pyrenees, where they lodged at the Château de Bagen, owned by Hélène Stöpel Wallace's sister and her husband, the Marquise de Sainte-Geme, in the Haute Garonne region. William Vincent Wallace died there on October 12, 1865. He is buried in London's Kensal Green Cemetery quite close to another Irish-born composer Michael William Balfe (1808-1870).



William Vincent Wallace



# BookReviews

Peter Costello



# An activist guide to a better way of living

**We Are Saved Only Together. Living in the Revolutionary Vision of Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement,**

by Colin Miller, foreword by Seth Haines  
(Ave Maria Press, €19.50 / £16.30 / US \$17.95)

Frank Litton

**T**he parable of the Good Samaritan is surely the best known of Jesus' parables. It is among the most easily understood: our neighbour is all mankind, regardless of our position, we should attend to their needs. It is a humanitarian manifesto whose appeal is heard by believer and unbeliever alike.

This, however, as Miller reminds us, is not how the early Fathers of the Church understood it. Augustine tells us that Jesus is the Good Samaritan and the wounded wretch lying in the ditch stands for us. Wounded by sin, we are brought to health by Jesus. In the inn we await his second coming.

Not then a call to be good to the unfortunate, but a reminder of our fallen state, our need for salvation that is to be found in following Christ. And where do we find Christ? Nothing could be more straightforward: 'when you did it to the least of these, you did it for me'.

As a young lad, I joined the youth conference of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul based in my school. As we cycled down, on my first visitation, to the tenement on James Street East, now demolished to make way for the Bank of Ireland on lower Baginbun street, the older brother said to me 'remember in visiting and seeking to help Mrs D, you are encountering Christ.'

## Overwhelmed

Visiting the web page of the SVP, I found the message muted, overwhelmed by the undoubtedly fine humanitarian work of the Society. Anyhow it made a deep impression on me, an impression that came back to me as I read this marvellous book.

Miller tells us of what he learnt on his path to follow Christ in the service of the poor. His journey started with the homeless he met close to his Church, when he was a student studying for PhD in theology and then as an Episcopalian priest.

His guides were Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin and the Catholic Worker Movement they inspired.

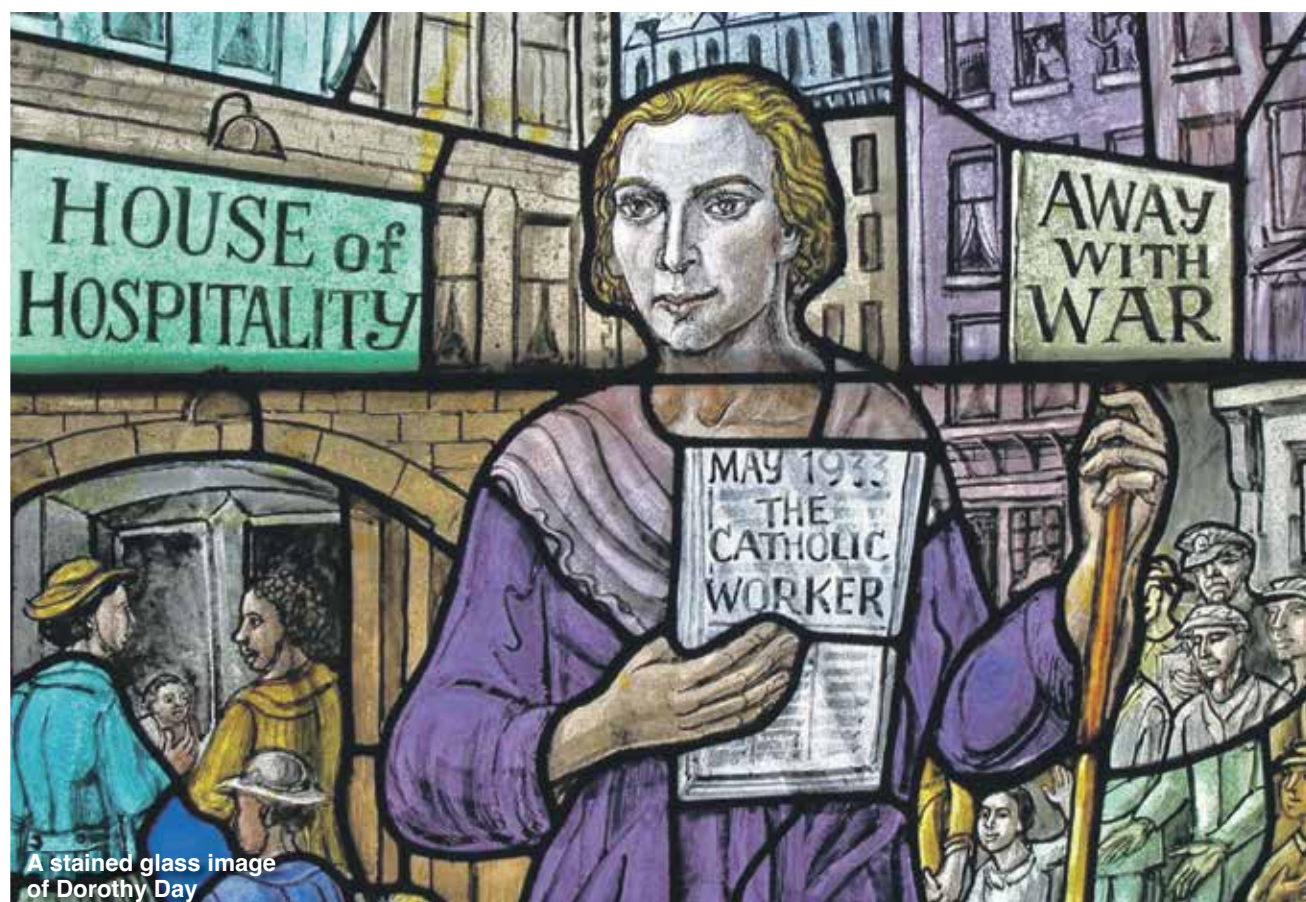
He brings the lessons he learnt alive in clear prose and vivid details that manifest profound truths. He co-founded a Catholic Worker House of Hospitality in Durham, North Carolina. Now a Catholic and director of the centre for Catholic social thought at the Church of the Assumption, St Paul's Minnesota, he lives in a House of Hospitality with his family.

Dorothy Day (1897-1980), a bohemian who moved in literary circles while active in socialist and anarchist movements, converted to Catholicism in 1928. Her keen awareness of the injustices of this world remained, and the question as to what, as a Catholic, she should do troubled her.

**“He had the theory, she had the determination and strength to put it into practice, together they inspired communities that gave and continue to give powerful witness”**

She prayed and her prayer was answered when Peter Maurin (1877-1949) arrived at her door. Maurin, from a poor French farming background, who served briefly as a De La Salle brother, was well versed in the Catholic tradition, its theology, philosophy and especially its social teaching. He led a hand-to-mouth existence, tutoring in French, working as a labourer and telling anyone who would listen how the Gospel would set them free.

He had the theory, she



A stained glass image of Dorothy Day

had the determination and strength to put it into practice, together they inspired communities that gave and continue to give powerful witness.

These communities are models, or fractals, of what the Church is called to be: committed to helping the poor, not only with handouts but in community, sharing their lives as we eat and worship together; studying the tradition of the Church, making its teachings relevant to a changing world; showing the world that the promise of a social order free from the abuses of power, exploitation, the fragmentation, the loneliness, the work that drains and does not fulfill, is not vain.

## Dimension

Going to Mass had once both a social and a spiritual dimension. You were Irish and Catholic and that is what you did, dressed in your best. Not to attend, to decide to step apart was to be eccentric; it was easier by far to conform to the conventions of your social circle. The social pressure has



Colin Miller spreading the word

gone into reverse. To attend is now, especially for the young, the eccentric choice. The social dimension has disappeared.

Regular attendance at the gym keeps the muscles strong and supple; that it hardly benefits society, or anybody else, is not a problem. A question that bothers me: is my attendance at Mass any better than a visit to a spiritual 'gym'? Surely it should be more?

The readings instruct us in the kingdom of God that the Eucharist, prefigures making it a real presence amongst us. As we pray the Pater Noster we are reminded of the gap between the world and the Kingdom. We are strengthened to resist the lures, the sins of the world. It is one thing to be told to mind the gap, another to work to close it.

Surely, our celebration of

the Eucharist is incomplete if it does not bring us, however inadequately, together to work to bring the Kingdom closer? We need to build community and recover a social dimension. How to do this?

*We Are Only Saved Together* is a good guide and an inspiration. All will benefit from reading it, especially those on pastoral councils or engaged in the synodal processes.

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.

# Centuries of change in the alleys of Galway

**Reforming Galway: Civic society, religious change and St Nicholas collegiate church, 1550-1750,** by Raymond Gillespie (Four Courts Press, €50.00 / £45.00)

Peter Costello

Raymond Gillespie, Professor Emeritus at the University of Maynooth, died in March of this year, while this book was in the very final stages of production. *Reforming Galway* is thus the last work of a much admired and influential historian. In his book he opens out a new approach to the treatment of the Reformation era in the Irish context.

His initial inspiration was *The Voices of Morpeth* by Eamon Duffy, the Cambridge historian, which drew on the very full parish accounts kept for that small Devon village by its parish priest Sir Christopher Trychay, which contained a very full account of the changes in the village and its outlook over 50 years from 1520. It was a way of writing about the past through the detailed history of one institution.

## Revealing

Lacking such a revealing single document for Galway, Gillespie tells the tale of the Collegiate Church of St Nicholas in Galway, one of the sights of the city even today, and the social, religious and commercial changes largely among its prosperous merchants.

But first, just what is a collegiate church, as distinct from a parish church or a cathedral. It is an institution defined in the Christian tradition as "a church where the daily office of worship is maintained by a college of canons, a non-monastic or secular community of clergy, organised as a self-governing corporate body, headed by a dignitary bearing a title which may vary, such as dean or provost."

In the case of the collegiate church in Galway this office was in the hands of a warden, appointed by the civil govern-

**Gillespie, lacking a single unique document (such as Duffy had), builds up his facts slowly from extensive research seemingly in every available source relating to medieval and early modern Galway"**



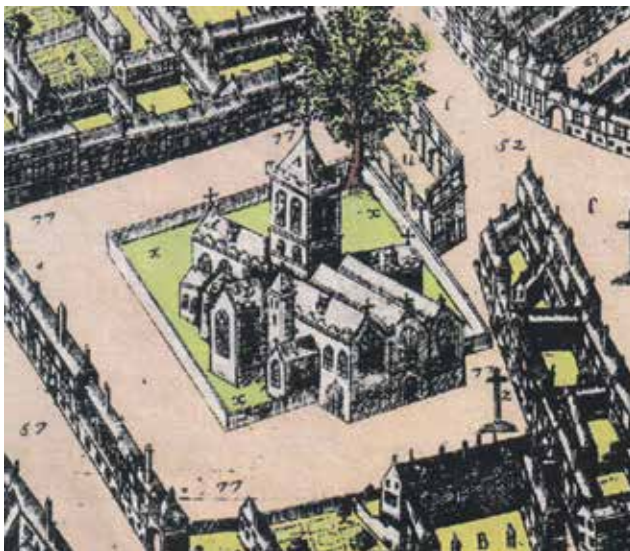
Medieval Galway from the sea, with the prominent tower of St Nicholas' rising over all (pen and watercolour by Anne Korff / Tir Eolas Publishers)

ment. So during the period of the book from 1550 to 1750, by turn and turn about, as the rulers changed from Anglican to Catholic to Republican Commonwealth and back again to the Established Church, the warden was elected in accordance with the views of the town's governors, with no input from any kind of archbishop.

**“For anyone interested in Galway and its history - and what Irish reader cannot be - it provides all kinds of new insights”**

Gillespie, lacking a single unique document (such as Duffy had), builds up his facts slowly from extensive research seemingly in every available source relating to medieval and early modern Galway.

Uniquely he gives a ground floor view of the changing nature of Ireland at the local



St Nicholas' at the heart of the city, circa 1660

level which is much more engaging than the broader chronicles we already have from the national level. Rather than the grand clashes of national destiny and European politics we are used to, this text relies on details of what it was like to live through such an ever changing era at a local level.

All this makes for a fascinating read, but this is a book written for an academic rather than a general audience, so many may find it slow going. Yet for anyone interested in Galway and its history - and what Irish readers cannot be - it provides all kinds of new insights.

Galway's wealth faded as the

transatlantic trade passed into the hands of Limerick and then Cobh. The last lines of the text suggest, however, that Gillespie might have been turning his mind from a study of the city, to a continuing study of the city of Galway in relation to the county of Galway, moving from the last "sign of civility and order" to the wilder haunts of a dying Gaelic culture.

**The image of Galway from the sea created by Anne Korff is from *Medieval Galway: A Rambler's Guide & Map, an essential visual aid to understanding the history of the city* (Tir Eolas Publishers, €10.00)**

## Redrawing the boundaries of the modern Church

**The Restructuring of Irish Dioceses,** edited by Eugene Duffy (Dominican Publications, €20.00 / £17.50)

Peter Costello

This book, the publishers explain, "provides a timely and thought-provoking exploration of the challenges facing the Catholic Church. The boundaries of Ireland's 26 dioceses, unchanged since the 12th century, no longer reflect the distribution of the Catholic population."

But such demographic change is only part of the problem; also of importance surely is the changed nature of that "Catholic population". The Irish nation is just not what it was in the days of St Malachy.

A friend of mine remarked humorously that if the uniting of parishes went on they would get so large one might as well make the parish priest a bishop.

It was surprising to find this wry comment echoed by Bernard of Clairvaux, that in Ireland "bishops ...were multiplied at the whim of the metropolitan until one episcopal see was not satisfied with one bishop, but almost every single church had its own bishop."

The term diocese comes from the civil administration of Rome and the Roman Empire, which in a sense the Catholic Church was taking over. As a manner of organisation it had no scriptural or apostolic sanction. It was merely the most convenient way of doing things: by adopting the local form of civil rule.

So today what the Church needs to find is a manner of effective administration that is most convenient to our day and age. But this it seems will not be an easy task to provide a model that will work globally given the divergences of cultures now living in the Church.

This collection of a dozen reflective essays has been brought together with an introduction by Eugene Duffy, a former academic and now Episcopal Vicar for Pastoral Renewal and Development in the Diocese of Achonry.

The book does not present solutions as such, but explorations of experiences of administrative change of various kinds, here and elsewhere in Europe, with the experiences of such changes in religious orders and in the missions.

All of these present insights on what drives change and what it has achieved, and could achieve. The pieces are intended to provide "food for thought" - taken literally - and as such are full of insights.

Most people identify with their parish; or for those who live on a boundary as this reviewer does, their parishes, with all their associations with the events of life and death.

The parish of Donnybrook was once in the 16th century a much larger entity. But as the population of Dublin grew over the following centuries it was divided into several new parishes. Sometimes these were for social reasons: such as the creation of City Quay into which the dockers and their families could be assigned, removing them from the pews of St Andrews in Westland Row where the wealthy Catholics of Merrion Square worshipped.

Now the process is being reversed. But applied to a diocese, if two or three are united the authority of the bishop is removed further from the actual people. So a new definition of both parish and diocese is needed. In a passage in this book (p.156) Eamon Conway describes a visit to Cambodia where a Jesuit group was at work, one of whom was the parish priest for a fishing community. They drove down to the shore and he telephoned to make contact with someone to pick them.

"He could never be quite sure where his parish was, geographically speaking," as sometimes the boats the people lived on were near the shore, at others miles away at sea. He had built a floating church and a floating school and followed them. Here was a redefinition of "parish" not as a static place, but as a living community of faith in a real way.

So valuable as all the sights of history and experience in the book are - the essay by Willie Walsh on the relation of the diocesan bishop and the Episcopal Conference is particularly interesting - what the Church would seem to need is a new sense of definition of what a parish and a diocese are, breaking with the imperial domination of the Roman Imperial past.

The food for thought these pages provide will need digesting, but also like all food eventually absorbed into building a better and healthier church body. Eugene Duffy's collection needs not only to be widely read, but acted upon. Even if it means creating a "floating" community that is quite new.

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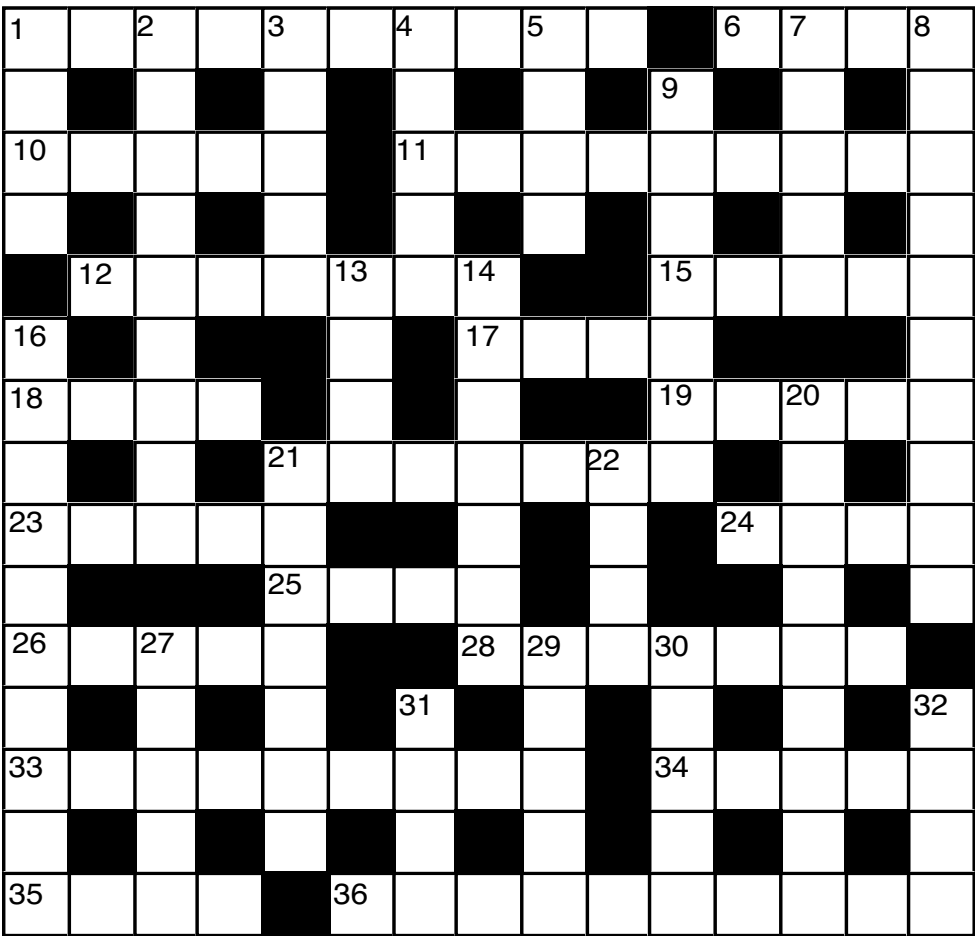
Gordius 678

Across

- 1 Space wherein to leave the car (7,3)  
6 Layer of matter on the surface of a liquid (4)  
10 Potato dish (5)  
11 Barbecue treat (5,4)  
12 The period of a man's early years (7)  
15 Spanish wine region (5)  
17 Egyptian goddess or terrorist organization (4)  
18 Conceal (4)  
19 Ancient Greek famous for his fables (5)  
21 A hundred years (7)  
23 The oldest city in Northern Italy, associated with St Anthony (5)  
24 Incinerate (4)  
25 Goading attachment to a cowboy's boot (4)  
26 The number of pints in a gallon (5)  
28 Cutting tool (7)  
33 Finger of land (9)  
34 Surmise (5)  
35 On which to wind fishing line (4)  
36 Prelate (10)

Down

- 1 Chaste (4)  
2 Replied (9)  
3 Coming from the Emerald Isle (5)  
4 Enthusiasm (5)



- 5 Regrettably (4)  
7 The capital of Egypt (5)  
8 Variety of soft cheese (10)  
9 Rumour, gossip (7)  
13 On a single occasion (4)  
14 Rearrange or upset (7)  
16 Retail trader (10)  
20 Easily nauseated (9)  
21 Activity of anglers, or of those choosing actors (7)  
22 Dilapidated building (4)  
27 Style or category of creative work (5)  
29 Waterlogged, overflowing (5)  
30 Indian loincloth (5)  
31 The sound of a contented cat (4)  
32 Pile (4)

SOLUTIONS, AUGUST 22

GORDIUS No. 677

Across

- 1 Pip 3 Apocalyptic 8 Icicle 9 Rock star 10 Octet 11 Lurid 13 Whiff 15 Algebra 16 Glutton 20 Empty 21 Smile 23 Curio 24 Bluebird 25 Adored 26 Screwdriver 27 Pun

Down

- 1 Pair of Jacks 2 Painting 3 Allot 4 Curtail 5 Yokel 6 Tutors 7 Car 12 Downtrodden 13 Worse 14 Folly 17 Teardrop 18 Opus Dei 19 Liquor 22 Elbow 23 Cedar 24 Bus

Sudoku Corner

548

Easy

			5		6			9
	9	7				2		
		1		4				3
	1	9	2	8				5
6								2
	2			6	5	3	1	
9				5		7		
		3				8	6	
8			1		3			

Hard

	7							
	9	6		7		5		4
			1			7	3	2
					6			5
	1	3				4	7	
4			8					
9	4	7			5			
6		1		2		3	4	
							5	

Last week's Easy 547

7	8	1	3	2	9	5	6	4
4	2	5	6	7	1	8	3	9
3	6	9	4	5	8	2	7	1
5	9	8	1	3	7	6	4	2
1	7	4	2	6	5	3	9	8
6	3	2	8	9	4	1	5	7
2	4	6	9	1	3	7	8	5
9	5	3	7	8	2	4	1	6
8	1	7	5	4	6	9	2	3

Last week's Hard 547

9	5	2	7	1	3	8	4	6
3	4	6	9	2	8	1	7	5
7	1	8	5	6	4	9	3	2
8	3	9	1	7	6	5	2	4
5	6	1	4	3	2	7	9	8
2	7	4	8	9	5	3	6	1
4	9	7	6	8	1	2	5	3
6	8	3	2	5	9	4	1	7
1	2	5	3	4	7	6	8	9

Notebook

Fr Vincent Sherlock



# ‘Social’ media can all too easily lead us astray

I spend a lot of time on social media, sometimes I fear, too much time. Technology and communications have always held an interest for me so, in many ways, it is perhaps natural and understandable that I would pursue these interests and social media sits squarely in that space. For many years I have had a blog that I enjoyed updating – nothing major there, a few reflections, thoughts, the occasional tune, poem or song that spoke to me, room for a few photos and, overall, an easy space. I use ‘X’ but am less convinced about its place for me and, since Covid-19, I have used Facebook. Alongside this I set up and maintain a website for our diocese and have been involved in creating parish websites in my most recent appointments. I have avoided Tik-Tok and Instagram because I fear that even more time would go and, consequently, be lost to these.

## Interaction

I hope I am not lost in a place where a computer screen, keyboard or phone become more important than daily interaction with people. Nothing can or should replace that basic level of being where we want to meet, be met and communicate with others in the real day-to-day existence we call life. The why of my involvement in social



media, I believe, lies in a desire to communicate and, in some sort of meaningful way, with those around me and those far away who make that virtual connection. My hope is that nothing I would write or say, would ever cause offence or seek to score points at another’s expense. I believe the only place to start and remain and to work out of is respect.

**“Hostility owns the day and something sacred seems to be lost, ironically by some feeling the sacred is being defended”**

Sometimes I notice very angry people on these platforms. People who feel it is right and proper to belittle others, to score points and assume an

air of superiority that pushes people down rather than raise them up. Sadly, and not infrequently this can be done in the name of religion and, more worryingly and closer to home for many of us, in the name of Catholicism. Hostility owns the day and something sacred seems to be lost, ironically by some feeling the sacred is being defended.

‘Keyboard warriors’ is a phrase sometimes used to describe people who type what they would never say. There is only a half-truth in the phrase since the noble reality of the warrior is lost in anonymity and only the keyboard remains. By itself, the keyboard is just a collection of letters, numbers and characters but at the tips of angered fingers becomes a megaphone, often filled with the echoes of someone else’s rant or prejudice. Terrible things can be said, often without foundation or merit. This is the angry side of social media, the worrying side and seems to me to be at odds with the word ‘social’ – perhaps ‘anti-social’ might be more accurate.

## Awareness

So where does this leave us? I think it calls us to an awareness of the consequences of negativity. Anything that causes unnecessary hurt to another person must remain at odds with the

best of what is best in us all. Comments about people’s appearance, religion or personal situations that seek to belittle are best left unsaid – or un-typed. Anything that we would not be willing to say to a person, taking full ownership of the saying and in person, most likely is best not said. We should recoil from anything that seeks to bring us into a hostile space especially when those rallying us to occupy that space will most likely be found nowhere near it.

**“There is a call to follow and an invitation to be followed and all of this has the ring of possibility about it**

I still believe in Social Media. It truly has a place and is an outlet for many. Some find a voice in its shelter that might not easily be found elsewhere. There are humorous moments, musical moments, spiritual glimpses, human life stories, animals and nature all at work to remind us that better is possible and that life is to be enjoyed. We are given opportunities to reach out and connect and to take the virtual hand of another in trust and friendship. There is a call to follow and an invitation to be followed and all of

this has the ring of possibility about it. The best of what it has to offer speaks to the best of us and, in contrast, the worst of what it has to offer can all too easily lead us astray.

Make the best of it, be your best in it and make a difference. Clicking ‘like’ is one thing but lived and life-giving response and interaction is the key.

## A quick aside...

A man who did not have a computer or smartphone decided he wanted to live his life in the style of Facebook. He got an instant camera; took photos of the food he ate and stuck the pictures on walls and windows. He stopped in the street and roared out his location. He asked random strangers if they would be his friends and to ‘like’ what he said. After three days, he declared: “This works. Already I have three followers. Two policemen and a psychiatrist.”



## Funds are urgently needed for Metahara Clinic in Ethiopia

Sr Fikrte Motto of the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady has contacted The Little Way Association from Metahara Health Clinic which is run by the Sisters with many lay helpers. She tells us that the Catholic Mission in Metahara began providing health care to the community in 1981. Despite difficulties, a clinic was established to help the sick. Now, 60 to 80 new patients visit the clinic daily for various conditions which include malaria, eye diseases, typhoid and typhus, as well as skin infections.

Sister writes: “We urgently need financial help, and that is why I am turning to The Little Way Association. Prices of medicine and our running costs have risen unexpectedly. We lack funds to reach needy communities in the district, we have no ambulance, we need to tackle the malnutrition and chronic diseases of many of those who come to our clinic. These, and other, reasons make me turn to you and your friends and supporters with confidence. Please help us. Many needy people, as well as our Sisters, will be eternally grateful.”

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**KNOCK (Ireland)**  
Tel: (0) 94 938 8406

## MISSION CHAPELS

St. Therese, our patroness, wished to spread the Gospel throughout the world “until the end of time”. We receive many requests for help from bishops and priests to build, renovate or complete their mission chapels. We are often asked for funds to provide a permanent roof for a chapel. In many places the only roofing chapels have is made of straw or other flimsy material which, as you may imagine, is easily damaged or destroyed in bad weather.

**Your donation will help a priest in a mission country to provide a decent chapel for his congregation, a fitting place for the celebration of Holy Mass.**

Crossed POs and cheques should be sent and made payable to:

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We ask for a minimum of €7 or more for each Mass

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