

The Irish Catholic

**THE REFERENDUM
MAY HELP US
VALUE MOTHERS
MORE**



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AND WOMEN
INCREASINGLY
DIVIDED BY POLITICS**



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Thursday, February 22, 2024

€3.00 (Stg £2.70)

The-Irish-Catholic-Newspaper

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Govt ‘forgetting’ people with disabilities charity head warns

Ruadhán Jones

The Government has “forgotten” people with disabilities, the head of a Christian charity has warned, after a report laid bare the lack of progress on “substantive issues” for disability inclusion.

People with disabilities continue to be treated as “secondary” in Ireland, according to the CEO of a charity dedicated to improving the lives of people with disabilities.

There has been a “lack of movement” on disability rights since Ireland ratified the UN’s convention on rights of persons with disabilities in 2018, Dualta Roughneen of Christian Blind Mission told *The Irish Catholic*.

“It is as if the Government has forgotten to continue work on disability inclusion in Ireland” since signing up, he added.

“No progress is made on substantive areas such as the right to life, accessibility and mobility,” Mr Roughneen said, responding to a report from the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Disability Matters.

Rights for people with disabilities have regressed in areas of significant importance, including health and independent living, the committee’s report shows.

It is “imperative” that the Government take on the committee’s recommendations as it updates its National

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‘Blessed are the peacemakers’



Irish peacekeepers at Camp Shamrock in Lebanon commemorate the lives of four of their fellow peacekeepers who lost their lives in Lebanon on St Valentine’s Day 24 years ago.

**SOUTH KOREA’S BIRTH WOES
FOOD FOR IRISH THOUGHT**

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**MURDERED BISHOP – LA
REMEMBERS BELOVED
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**LEGAL MINEFIELD AWAITS
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Govt 'forgetting' people with disabilities charity head warns

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Disability Strategy, said Mr Roughneen, calling its findings "stark".

The committee's report highlights that living well for people with disabilities is "not getting the attention or investment it requires", he warned.

While some good progress is noted, "it appears the Government lost interest along the way", Mr Roughneen said, with signs of regression in key areas.

"Regression on independence means greater dependency. Dependence means power imbalance and is the opposite of progress towards equality," he added.

Mr Roughneen criticised the Government for having no appetite to recognise the impact of abortion on people with disabilities, and raised concerns about proposals to legalise euthanasia.

"The Government should prioritise living well rather than dying well in their legislative and policy efforts,"

he said.

"The report from the Joint Committee indicates that living well for people with disabilities is not getting the attention or investment it requires."

He also called on Ireland to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Irish aid to take more action on disabilities in its overseas aid.

"It is not just in Ireland that disability is overlooked," said Mr Roughneen. "The SDGs give little more than a passing reference to disability rights even though people with disabilities make up one-sixth of the world's population and this needs to change if disability matters are to be given sufficient importance in the coming years."

To date, there is no dedicated strategy/policy on disability inclusion, nor any earmarked financial commitments on disability through Ireland's overseas aid budget, he added, saying, "This needs to change".

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Priest who has buried A5 victims welcomes funding

Chai Brady

A priest who has witnessed first-hand the devastation caused by road traffic collisions on the "dangerous" A5 road, has welcomed the Irish Government's funding announcement.

While reacting positively to Tuesday's €600m funding promise for the A5, Fr Michael O'Dwyer PP of Errigal Ciaran parish in Co. Tyrone said, "it is long overdue".

"We have had too many deaths, even in my short time here. It is a dangerous road to this day. It will be very welcome, but it will take a while for it all to come

through," Fr O'Dwyer said.

In 2022 the priest spoke at the funeral of 20-year-old Nathan Carter, who died on the A5, and highlighted the need to upgrade the road.

Regarding the feeling of families and friends of victims, Fr O'Dwyer said: "Their main message is they do not want other families to go through what they went through, they still have to live with their grief and their sorrow and all of that pain, but they don't want others to have to face the same.

"We do know that the road from Dungannon to Ballygawley was quite bad at one stage, years ago, but since it became a dual

carriageway, things have changed completely death-wise and accident-wise. So we hope that a new road here would have a similar consequence, just less accidents, less fatalities." Since 2006 more than 50 people have died on the A5.

The Department of the Taoiseach announced €800 million for Shared Island projects including the "long-awaited upgrading of the A5 road link to the north west" on February 20.

The Government committed €600 million to the A5 North-West transport corridor, and is advancing work on linked road projects including the N2 Clontibret and Donegal TEN-T upgrades

in 2024.

Taoiseach Leo Varadkar said: "Construction of the new A5 could start later this year which will bring road connectivity to the North-West on a par with other parts of the island."

The Government also agreed to channel funding through the Shared Island Fund to a host of other projects.

This includes €50m to a redeveloped Casement Park in Belfast, creating a high-quality sports stadium which can also host matches as part of the Euro 2028 tournament as well as €12.5m for a new hourly-frequency rail service between Belfast and Dublin.

Climate change takes centre stage as Trócaire kicks off Lenten campaign



Pictured are sports commentator and Trócaire supporter Marty Morrissey, Kurdish born hurler and author, Zak Moradi, and Trinity camogie players, Yvonne Stack (left) and Aoife Nelligan as they kick-off Trócaire's annual Lenten appeal at Croke Park. Photo: Mark Stedman

Jason Osborne

Trócaire has kicked off its Lenten campaign which aims to highlight that "it is the next generation who will inherit the climate crisis".

Malawi is the focus of this year's Lenten campaign who are suffering from "repeated droughts, flooding and cyclones" and instability in their wake.

In Malawi 2.3 million people have

limited access to food and more than 3.8 million (20% of population) face critical food insecurity.

Speaking on the topic of Trócaire's Lenten focus, CEO Caoimhe de Barra, said, "It is deeply unjust that those who have done least to cause the climate crisis, and who have the least capacity to adapt, are suffering most severely from its impacts.

"In particular, marginalised groups such as women and indigenous peo-

ples must not continue to pay the price for global climate inaction. We want to see a sustainable world, where people and the planet flourish and climate action is rooted in the principles of justice, human rights and gender equality, equity, common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capacities, polluter pays principle and a just transition."

To find out more, visit www.trocaire.org

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Annual Subscription Rates: Ireland €199. Airmail €320. Six months €105.

ISSN 1393 - 6832 - Published by The Irish Catholic,

Unit 3b, Bracken Business Park, Bracken Road, Sandyford,

Dublin 18, D18 K277.

Printed by Webprint, Cork.

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Poll finds 'vast majority' of mothers desire home over work

Jason Osborne

Over two-thirds of mothers with children under 18 would prefer to stay at home with their children rather than go out to work if they could afford it, according to a new Amarach Research opinion poll commissioned by the Iona Institute.

When asked the question, "If you had the option (and money was no issue) would you prefer to be a stay-at-home mother?", 69% of respondents said 'Yes', while 22% said 'No'.

Ten percent said they didn't know.

Additionally, when asked whether they felt "valued for the work you do as a mother by society," 71% said 'Not really or not at all', while only

29% said 'somewhat or very much so'.

Commenting on the survey on behalf of the Iona Institute, Professor Patricia Casey said: "The findings are extremely relevant to the upcoming referendum on carers. Currently, the Constitution acknowledges the importance of mothers, and it says they should not be forced out of the home by economic necessity. We see from this survey and others like it that the vast majority of mothers would prefer to stay at home with their children if they could afford it. This is exactly what the Constitution aims at, even if the State has failed to live up to the promise of the Constitution."

"I have been a working mother for most of my adult life. This is what I wanted and

Article 41.2 of the Constitution held me back in no way, shape or form. Children's Minister, Roderic O'Gorman, says 'a woman's place is wherever she wants it to be', and that is exactly correct. The trouble is that the policy of this and past Governments has made it almost impossible for most mothers to stay at home with their children if that is what they want," she said.

Prof. Casey added that if the Government was really on the side of mothers, "it would make it easier for them to stay at home with their children if that is their wish," but the Government "seems to be on the side of the economy, not mothers".

The questions were asked of a representative sample of 500 women aged 18 and over.

Winners of IC crossword announced

Ruadhán Jones

The winners and runners up for *The Irish Catholic's* annual Christmas crossword have been revealed.

The winner of the first prize – a pilgrimage to Lourdes for the winner and

one other person of their choosing with Marian Pilgrimages – is Valerie Kennedy of Maynooth, Co. Kildare.

There were three runners up, who will receive a free copy of *St Brigid & Other Amazing Irish Women*, published by Columba Books, and

a complimentary one-year digital subscription to *The Irish Catholic*.

The runners up are: Peigi Ruseal of Tralee, Co. Kerry; Dan Greaney of Killarney, Co. Kerry; and John Donovan from Dungarvan, Co. Waterford.

Uplifting youthful voices...



Aontas youth choir are pictured in the Pro-Cathedral, Dublin, after providing uplifting music for those undertaking the Christian Initiation and Full Communion, who joined together for the Rite of Election on Saturday, February 18.



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'Frightening' drug paraphernalia found at Belfast cathedral

Ruadhán Jones

Children as young as seven are being exposed to "frightening" drugs and drug paraphernalia on the grounds of a Belfast cathedral due to the activity of addicts in the area, a local youth leader has warned.

Parents were warned that needles, tablets and other substances were found on the grounds of St

Peter's Cathedral, near St Peter's Immaculata Youth Centre.

"It's a major concern," senior youth worker Stephen Hughes told *The Irish Catholic*.

"Children are bringing us in drugs they find, and we have been identifying drug paraphernalia on the grounds of the cathedral."

Mr Hughes said one little seven-year-old found

pills littered on the ground which turned out to be a "pretty dangerous" drug called Pregabalin, nicknamed 'buds' by drug users.

"I worry about the amount of needles in the grounds of cathedral and the risk to children who play in grounds," he said.

Mr Hughes praised the work of the PSNI, who have increased patrols around the cathedral. A local char-

ity, Extern, who work with addicts in Belfast City Centre have expanded their daily route to include the cathedral grounds.

But the youth worker said he hopes that the addicts will "go somewhere else".

"I say that with compassion, knowing that many are struggling with their own health issues," said Mr Hughes. "But I worry about the risk to young people – we need them to stop and move on.

"It's not good that we have people who are intoxicated around and stupid things like blood spills on the ground. We've had to pour bleach to clean it up.

"We've had heroin and cocaine lying on the ground. It's frightening," he said.

Mr Hughes believes that the issue is not widespread for churches in Belfast and added that they are engaging with local homeless shelters, where many of those using drugs come from.

He said the centre will continue to facilitate sessions with children and young people on the dangers of lifting used needles and drug paraphernalia.

Seoul-searching: Irish missionary laments South Korea's vanishing children

Jason Osborne

Fewer children, shuttered schools and universities and the promotion of pet ownership over and above the formation of families are but a few effects of South Korea's plunging child-birth rate, according to Seoul-based Irish Columban, Fr Donal O'Keeffe.

This comes even as Irish birthrates continue to fall, well below the replacement level 2.1 children per woman, which is required in order for a popula-

tion to replenish itself.

The number of babies expected per woman in South Korea dropped this year to 0.72 and will continue to fall through 2025, when it's expected to reach 0.65, according to the country's latest statistics.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper, Fr O'Keeffe said that the lack of children is a "huge concern" in South Korea.

"I remember when I came here initially, 48 years ago, outside our door there were kids everywhere, running around and playing. Now, you don't see

any kids," he said.

The government is proving powerless to halt or reverse the trend, with Fr O'Keeffe explaining that "money is being poured into it" to little effect.

"Schools are closing right, left and centre. Universities are being forced now to close because there's no students coming through. There are couples – first of all, marriage rates are plummeting too – but couples then are choosing not to have children."

📌 See page 10

NEWS IN BRIEF

Parishioners signal overwhelming support for sale of disused church

The parishioners of Holy Family Church in Belfast have voted resoundingly in favour of selling the site of the Church of the Resurrection on Cavehill Road – which includes a parochial house, a church and a parish centre. The ratio in favour of the proposal was 70% to 30%.

The survey was conducted by the parish after an offer was received from Radius Housing Association to purchase the buildings owned by the parish. The buildings were originally earmarked for demolition after leakages and other various structural weaknesses forced the church to close its doors in 2008. The cost of repair was beyond the resources of the parish at the time, with debts estimated at around £2 million.

It was acknowledged by the parish that those against the proposal were anxious about the future use of the buildings but the parish reassured that the association has said it is keen to listen to the views of the parishioners in shaping the future purpose of the site.

Newest figures suggest over 10,000 Irish abortions in 2023

Figures released to Independent TD Carol Nolan from the HSE showed that from January to November 2023, GPs made claims for reimbursements for a total of 9,218 abortions.

This does not include abortions which were carried out in a hospital setting.

Responding to the figures, Pro Life Campaign spokesperson Eilís Mulroy said:

"These shocking figures show that 2023 was likely the highest year yet for abortions on record, and by some distance. The figures released to Deputy Nolan show that the number of claims made by GPs for abortion reimbursements in the first eleven months of the year totals 9,218. This figure is far in excess of the annual notifications report for every preceding year, despite the fact this figure is just for GP claims and does not include hospital abortions. As such, the abortion rate is likely much higher and undoubtedly exceeds 10,000."

VP of Catholic college to run for Labour party

Staff reporter

Vice-president of Mary Immaculate College (MIC) Niamh Hourigan is set to run for the Labour party for a seat in the European parliamentary elections.

The academic and social commentator's candidacy was announced on Sunday at a convention in the Metropole Hotel in Cork City.

Responding to the news, the vice president of academic affairs at MIC, who previously worked as a sociologist at UCC and the University of Lim-

erick said she was "honoured" to run for Labour and hoped "to bring the Labour voice to Europe".

MIC President Eugene Wall said he wished her all the best with her bid in an email to staff.

Prof. Hourigan had been tipped by MIC insiders as a candidate for the college's presidency, after Prof. Wall announced he would be retiring later this year.

While there had been speculation in the college that the presidency post would be advertised soon, no public announcement has come from MIC.

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'Ashes to ashes...'



Portlaoise parishioners gather in St Peter and St Paul's church to receive their ashes as the season of Lent begins on Wednesday, February 14.

This referendum may make us value mothers at home more

The Hollywood mogul, Sam Goldwyn, coined many amusing quotations still in currency – his way of declining an invitation was “Include me out!”

He most famously set a maxim for our age when he suggested that public attention is always helpful – “Any publicity is good publicity.”

It doesn't turn out to be true in all cases – people have been ruined when the spotlight shone upon their crimes or misdemeanours. Prince Andrew would probably attest to the existence of negative publicity.

But publicity usefully brings into the public realm people and subjects sometimes hitherto overlooked – and publicity can have an unexpected affect.

In the case of the upcoming Referendum on ‘the woman in the home’, the general idea was to modernise, by abolition, the Article 41.2 in which the



Mary Kenny

“I hear more and more people asking, ‘have we valued what women – especially mothers – have contributed to the common good by their life within the home?’”

State “recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State support without which the common good cannot be achieved.”

Mothers

Polls have indicated that most people regard the language, at least, as archaic, and there's an element of finger-wagging in the subsequent clause about women not neglecting their home duties if working at an out-

side job.

That's a bit patronising, and some of us may feel that we'll sort out our home duties ourselves, thank you, and not according to how the State preaches. (And if I choose to have a messy kitchen, that's my business!)

But the publicity generated around the subject of ‘the woman in the home’ has prompted such a lively

debate and public conversation about the situation of women – mostly mothers – in the home that it has launched a reassessment of the role.

No, we probably haven't. And yes, we undoubtedly should do.

Liberation

Modern feminism was, I now regret to say, very much formed by thinkers who despised the role of the ‘housewife’.

Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan, who published such influential works on female liberation, thought a woman at home was wasting her life.

They saw her as little more than a handmaiden of consumer capitalism – dedicated to shopping and manipulated by advertising.

Earlier generations of feminism hadn't pondered too much on this subject –

because earlier feminists often came from upper-middle-class families where servants did the home maintenance.

(Virginia Woolf worried more about managing the servants than she did about the vote.)

But the Referendum discussion has made us think again about the foundations of home life: and I now see mothers in a younger generation saying they want to be acknowledged for the contribution they make.

“More mothers are also explaining that they would like to have the choice to be at home with their young children”

The Referendum is prompting people to think

much more about motherhood's role. Dr Finola Kennedy, the economist and authority on family history, wrote, in connection with changing Article 41: “There is more to motherhood than the ‘provision of care’ [the recommended replacement].”

“For a start, a mother carries a baby in her womb for nine months. Then she might breastfeed for another nine months. These are not jobs that can be done by ‘carers’ no matter how close the ‘bonds’.” She was not advocating for either side, simply reflecting on a biological maternal bond that is unique.

Ironically, even if Article 41 is abolished in the present form, perhaps the outcome will have been to value more seriously just how much women at home have indeed supported ‘the common good’.

The school of life



A still from BAFTA winner *The Holdovers*. Photo: Focus Features

Stories and movies about school life often portray truths about life in general, and I was glad to see that the film *The Holdovers* won awards at the Baftas (and should do at the Oscars). It's an engaging tale about a crusty old bachelor teacher

(Paul Giametti) who is forced to look after the boarding school lads who can't go home for Christmas – the ‘holdovers’. The black actress Da'Vine Joy Randolph was awarded for her touching performance as a bereaved mother. Boston is beguiling as well.

For Bruce Bradley's homily at the funeral of John Bruton was widely acknowledged for its eloquence – and his apt quotation of Seamus Heaney on the evaporation of the transcendent in our inner lives. (Some mainstream media reporters seemed to express surprise that a Catholic priest could be a literary intellectual.)

Bruce Bradley SJ, former Principal of Clongowes

Wood College, is a person of erudite literary learning.

He wrote the entry for James Joyce in the official *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, and it is one of the most enlightening, scholarly but accessible essays one could read about Joyce and his works. You'll never need another biography of the author of *Ulysses*.

(The excellent Royal Irish Academy's *Dictionary of Irish Biography* is available online, and via all public libraries.)




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LA remembers slain Irish bishop one year on

Staff Reporter

The Archbishop of Los Angeles, Irish priests and many of those who knew and worked with the late Irish Bishop David O'Connell, auxiliary bishop of Los Angeles who was shot dead on February 18, 2023, have paid tribute to his memory ahead of a memorial mass on Saturday February 24 to mark the first anniversary of his death.

Saint in heaven

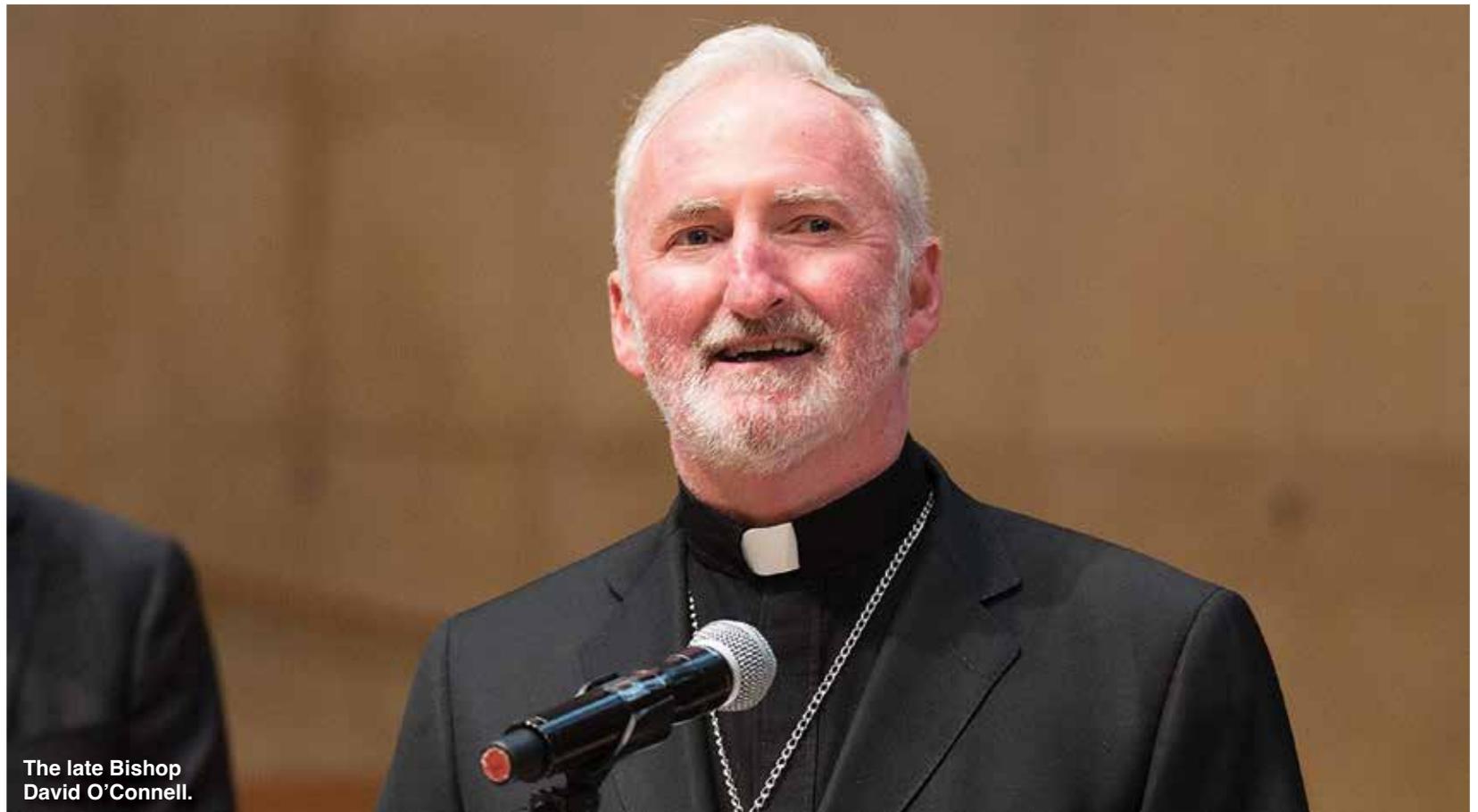
Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper, the Archbishop of Los Angeles Jose H. Gomez said Bishop Dave is a saint in heaven. "Bishop Dave was an incredible man and also a wonderful pastor and I miss him everyday. It was a tragic situation and he was always serving the people, very spiritual and a great ability to help people get closer to God. So I wish to God for his intercession now, I firmly believe he is in heaven and he continues to be close to us. I hope that everyone remembers him as a wonderful man and a priest and a bishop very close to Jesus and bringing all of us close to the love of God."

Sr Rosalia Meza, senior director of the archdiocese's Office of Religious Education, organisers of the annual Religious Education Congress which Bishop Dave often attended said he was not gone.

"I miss him, I miss you Bishop Dave. It was wonderful to know his beautiful life, to share with him, the beautiful ministry he did as well in the diocese of Los Angeles, you Bishop Dave are in our hearts, you are not gone, you are here with us and will continue being with us. We love you and I love you."

In the San Gabriel region of Los Angeles, made up of 66 parishes where Dave O'Connell was bishop, those who worked with and knew him are preparing an anniversary mass.

Katie Tassinari, is associate director of the Office of New Evangelisation and Parish Life, she said: "I worked in the regional office in the archdiocese where Dave was the bishop for the San Gabriel pastoral region and I was part of the staff. I was there before he was named a bishop so I got to see him from the very beginning of his ministry as a bishop. In the San Gabriel region, it's the oldest mission in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, we're going to have a Mass on Saturday 24 at 10am with Archbishop Gomez as our presider.



The late Bishop David O'Connell.

Bishop Dave was awesome, just really an amazing man.

“My happiest memories are of him looking into eyes of people who felt like they were nothing and feeling like somebody saw them as a human being for the first time”

"When I met him first it was his humility, here he was coming in as a bishop and he wanted to chat with me and get to know me. It was the year of mercy and we had no bishop in our region so I was leading a team of pastors and he wanted to hear all about it. He said, 'I hear you are doing great things' and he listened, and he said, 'Could I join your team?' And I'm like, 'What do you mean, you're the bishop now?' and he said, 'No it's your team, I would just like to be part of it, you need to still lead it.'"

Ms Tassinari added: "That humility and his recognising and supporting you, that was just my introduction to him and it grew from there. I really consider him a father figure in many ways, he really mentored me and taught me a lot, he listened to me, he challenged

me, he supported me, he was a load of fun, he always had a good joke for you, just a joy, a joy to work with him and losing him was a heartbreak, just a heartbreak."

Bishop Dave got involved in the immigration issue and he led an immigration effort, a task force, for the whole archdiocese but he did that from the San Gabriel region. Ms Tassinari recalls: "He was concerned about that but he was concerned about everybody on the periphery and people came in all the time cause they knew he would take care of them and try to help them. He missed being in South Central Los Angeles which is where he did all his ministry when he came from Ireland. South Central is the toughest part of LA that's where the riots happened and he walked the streets with people at that time. So I know he missed it when he came to the regional office but he found his way and found his way to be present to the people and walk with them wherever they were in life."

Man of the people

Julianne Stanz, director of Outreach for Evangelisation and Discipleship with Loyola Press, originally from Wicklow, knew Bishop David well and used to assist him in his street ministry. She said: "I worked with Bishop Dave many times. He was really a

man of the people so everywhere he went people would flock to him because he was so gregarious and vivacious. My happiest memories with him were when we were one on one, and we would go to various conferences together or we would meet at various projects or meetings or the bishops' conference and we would go out at night onto the streets. And I saw him being with people on the streets, the homeless, the drug addicted, passing out food, clothing, giving people support and love.

“He was an immigrant himself, he came over and he worked in the communities that were the poorest of the poor, Latino and black communities all embraced him, really he was a man of the people”

"My happiest memories are of him looking into eyes of people who felt like they were nothing and feeling like somebody saw them as a human being for the first time. He would go out

incognito, he might have a collar on but usually he'd have a sweatshirt over it, particularly if he was out praying. My happiest memories are also of him praying his rosary and he loved the blessed mother, he talked about her all the time and talked about her with people. He was deeply personal with the people he met, he looked into peoples' eyes, he touched their hearts, he was very unique."

Profound

Ms Stanz said that Bishop Dave had a profound sense of prayer. "He was an Irish priest, he was an immigrant himself, he came over and he worked in the communities that were the poorest of the poor, Latino and black communities all embraced him, really he was a man of the people. He never saw himself as separate or set apart, he always saw himself as a servant, that he was there to serve whatever people were doing. His faith life was very strong, a couple of things were very notable around his spirituality: he prayed what was called the prayer of the heart, slow down your breathing and allow Jesus to enter into your heart.

"He often said that 'when your faith meets your head it creates a fog because you

have to get through layers of confusion but when your faith meets your heart it creates sparks.' He would sit with people and he would allow complete silence and he would have them regularise their breathing, we now know this as mindfulness, but it's contemplative prayer and he taught it in such an easy way. He had a really lovely and simple faith, really simple and profound, incredible."

“May his noble soul stand at the right hand of God”

Irish priest Fr Peter O'Reilly of St Lawrence Martyr Parish, Redondo Beach in California said of the late Bishop O'Connell: "In his extensive outreach to the larger community, Dave never lost sight of the fact that he was above all a priest called by God to minister to the total person, spiritual as well as social. He was truly a man of prayer and his prayer life helped to keep him focused on what was of timeless importance to all of God's people. He was, in short, a truly holy man. As the Irish prayer of intercession puts it, 'May his noble soul stand at the right hand of God.'"

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Over 200 young Catholics connect with Christ in Cork

Brandon Scott

Over 200 young Catholics gathered in Cork to celebrate their faith and socialise with their peers in a day marked with speeches from Bishop of Cork and Ross Fintan Gavin, and special guest Msgr James Shea, president

of the University of Mary, North Dakota.

Addressing the topic of 'What does it mean to be Catholic today?', Msgr Shea encouraged young Catholics to not be disheartened as they navigate their lives in a world that is not overly receptive to their beliefs.

"Young people who are

searching believe they are alone and nobody is listening, so we feel we might as well suffer in silence," he said. "But that's not what God wants. We are brought into union with God and with one another."

Bishop Gavin reminded the young Catholics of their value and mission as bud-

ding custodians of the Faith. "You were born for this," he told the attendees. "You are not alive right now by chance. God chose you to be born. He willed for you to be alive right now, with all that's happening in the world, our country, and his Church. This is the time you are called to be disciples."



Miriam Goulding (Sacred Heart Parish), Gavin Dunne (Laois) and Sean Flack (Dublin).



Back row: Francis Collins (Clonakilty), Mary Crowley (Cork) and Jack Maguire (Bantry). Front row: Colm Butler (Innishannon), Eilis Butler (Innishannon), Aoibh Kingston (Gurrabraher), Saoirse Kingston (Gurrabraher) and David Rivera (Cork City).



Eva Conroy (Focus UCC), Sara Pigliapoco (UCC student) and Maria Mazzucchi (UCC student).



Attendees from the Diocese of Waterford and Lismore.



Elizabeth O'Shea (Waterford and Lismore), Anna O'Shaughnessy (Glanmire) and Philomena Tierney (Roscrea) at the event in Cork.



Maura McDonald, Ireland Johnson, Eva Conroy, Sara Pigliapoco, Alex O'Doherty, Grace Stier.



Brendan Keenan, Nicholas Abusada, André Guérin, Colin Caulfield.



Mary Crowley (Cork) and Eilis Butler (Innishannon).



Participants at the Honan Chapel UCC with Msgr James Shea and Bishop Fintan Gavin.

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South Korea's birth woes food for Irish thought



An Irish Columban in South Korea tells of turbulent times for the east Asian nation with looming conflict and vanishing children at the forefront, hears **Jason Osborne**

After 48 years in South Korea, it's fair to say that Irish Columban, Fr Donal O'Keeffe has his finger on this prosperous nation's pulse, and right now it's beating somewhat quicker than usual. A number of issues are becoming unavoidable, with a belligerent northern neighbour, an inexperienced and hawkish political establishment fanning the flames and a dearth of children pushing to the forefront of the public's mind.

An uptick in military drills north and south of the troubled Korean peninsula's border and the accompanying fiery rhetoric – coupled with the prospect of a contentious US presidential election later this year – have many South Koreans sitting on the edge of their seats, wondering what the future holds for them.

Instability

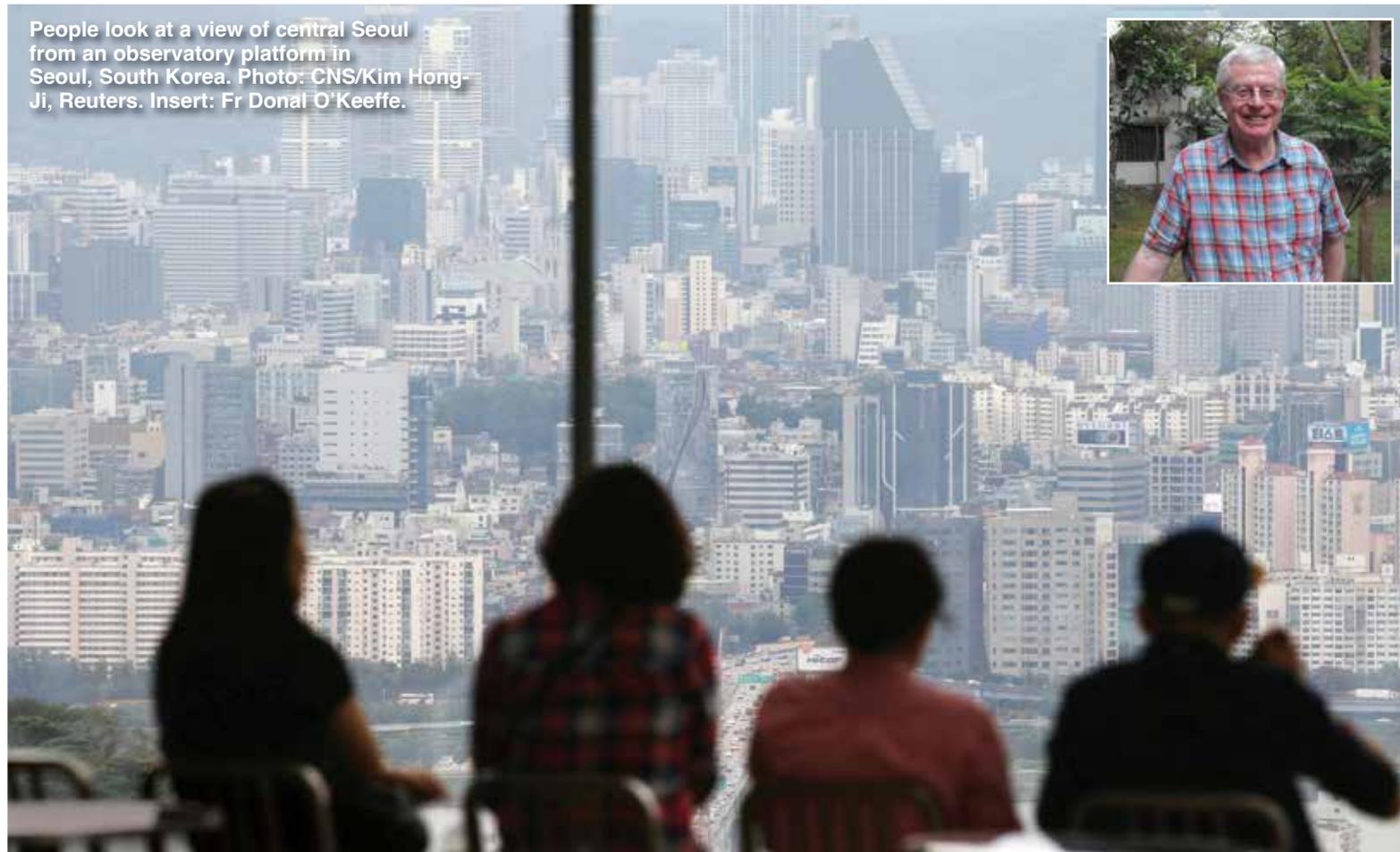
Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper, Fr O'Keeffe – who in recent years was recognised by the Korean state as 'Immigrant of the Year' for his work with the marginalised – said that the concatenation of wars and political instability in recent years is on the nation's mind as they look to their own future.

"There are major political issues behind it all," Fr O'Keeffe told this newspaper.

"For example, here in the South, we have a president, President Yoon Suk Yeol, who had no political experience before he became president – more or less like the president in Ukraine.

"There's a parliamentary election coming up in April, which is the background to all of this posturing by the South. He's trying to show that he's a very strong, hard man and he's playing that to the conservative side of the electorate, that he'll stand up to any threats from North Korea."

President Yoon has seen the end of any "tentative gestures towards dialogue," with the North, and has



People look at a view of central Seoul from an observatory platform in Seoul, South Korea. Photo: CNS/Kim Hong-Ji, Reuters. Insert: Fr Donal O'Keeffe.

appointed a 'hawk' as his defence minister, who has said that he would "annihilate North Korea", if anything were to happen.

Meanwhile, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has been emboldened by his newfound international footing, with a successful recent trip to Russia and China's growing global prominence and buoying his confidence.

“I remember when I came here initially, 48 years ago, outside our door there were kids everywhere, running around and playing. Now, you don't see any kids”

"The thing is, the man in the north knows that he's got close to Russia, and of course, he was very dependent on China, so he's more independent of China, but now Russia and China are getting closer because of the world situation, and so he now feels very strong. He basically will have nothing to do with South Korea in terms of negotiations, but he'd be quite willing to talk to America, to be recognised as a nuclear power, in other words," Fr O'Keeffe said.

Then you have the upcoming presidential elections in the United States, with a potential Trump victory worrying South Koreans who understand his foreign policy

to be "isolationist" – meaning their country might be left without US help if worse comes to worst.

Weak America

"The perception here now is that America is weak at the moment because it's involved in two wars and it's really finding it difficult to keep supporting Ukraine to the extent that it did. So it seems likely that in the long run Russia will just wear them out and get its concessions. Then they're supplying of course Israel...The cost of that – they're pouring billions into it, so the US is weaker and you have Russia and China growing closer together and there's fears because of these wars breaking out everywhere."

If the picture abroad troubles South Koreans, the picture at home is unfortunately looking no better, although for a reason many may not expect: the world's lowest childbirth rate, which is continuing to plunge. While this is a problem many countries are facing, Ireland included, South Korea is at the most extreme end of the spectrum.

According to South Korea's latest statistics, the number of babies expected per woman dropped this year to 0.72 and will continue to fall through 2025, when it's expected to reach 0.65. South Korea already has the world's lowest fertility rate at 0.78 as of 2022. To put this in perspective, a fertility rate of 2.1 children per women is required in order for a population to replenish itself. With Ireland

failing to meet replacement level itself – our fertility rate being around 1.8 births per woman as of 2022 – South Korea tells a cautionary tale of complacency and inaction, as Fr O'Keeffe related.

“Schools are closing right, left and centre. Universities are being forced now to close because there's no students coming through”

"A huge concern here in South Korea is the birth rate. It's the lowest birth-rate in the world, the population is actually shrinking and getting older. In 2015, there were 438,000 babies born – that's 2015. When I came here, '75, '76, that time, around the mid-1970s, there was up to one million being born, and it's more than halved. It went down to 500,000 around 2010. This year, there was only 230,000," Fr O'Keeffe said.

Promotion of pets

Statistics can have a numbing effect, so Fr O'Keeffe puts a human perspective on the toll this is taking on the country – the disappearance of children, the closure of schools and universities and the promotion of pet ownership over and above the formation of families.

"I remember when I came here

initially, 48 years ago, outside our door there were kids everywhere, running around and playing. Now, you don't see any kids. In fact, there was a young couple from England – this was two years ago – came out here...they had a baby with them and they went down to the local supermarket to try and get something for the baby.

"We'd never noticed this before, but they remarked that the section selling what you need for pets, be it food or anything, was much larger than the section that dealt with selling things for babies. Last year, for the first time ever, the number of go-carts for dogs especially – you're pushing your dog around now, you know, everybody's getting old – the sale of those exceeded the number of go-carts that were sold for babies," Fr O'Keeffe said.

The government is proving somewhat impotent to halt – never mind reverse – the worrying trend, with Fr O'Keeffe explaining that "money is being poured into it" to little effect.

"Schools are closing right, left and centre. Universities are being forced now to close because there's no students coming through. There are couples – first of all, marriage rates are plummeting too – but couples then are choosing not to have children."

With trouble both on the horizon and right at the centre of Korean society, Ireland should perhaps look and learn while the going is still relatively good.

Veritas' closure not a surprise



Veritas' closure leaves a big gap in the Catholic ecosystem, writes Ruadhán Jones

It came as a shock to many loyal customers when Veritas announced it is winding down by the end of the year, closing its seven stores nationwide and its three warehouses.

The news is a big blow for its 80 staff, as well many Catholics who turned to it for religious books, gifts and educational material.

The closure of the publishing wing of the Irish bishops' conference, after almost 100 years of trading, is also a big blow to the wider Catholic network.

Veritas is a household name when it comes to religious books, providing a much-needed platform for Catholic publishers.

Its departure leaves a huge gap in the market and no natural home for religious publishers.

“One could easily wonder if it has ever fully recovered from its failed multi-million euro attempt to break into the education market in the US”

On top of that, Veritas has been central to disseminating religious education schoolbooks and catechetical material, providing design expertise, editing facilities and more for the Catholic bishops' projects.

Veritas says it is figuring out what to do with titles such as the 'Grow in Love' series, a critical part of the syllabus for many primary schools.

This paper understands

that a number of meetings are being held between the bishops' conference and education and catechetics stakeholders about this issue.

Future for books

But despite Veritas' confidence that they will find a solution, the question remains – who will provide these functions now?

Will the bishops' turn to a secular company or is there a Catholic one ready to step into the breach?

More broadly, it is a blow to lay involvement in Church life. Involving the skills of the laity in the life of the Church is one of the major goals of the synod and while Veritas was under the auspices of the bishops, it was lay run.

Its closure is a reminder that opportunities for lay Catholics to devote their professional lives to furthering the mission of the Church in Ireland are rapidly shrinking at a time when they are needed more than ever.

Veritas' decision came on the back of a “significant and sustained business downturn in recent years”, its chair Chris Queenan said in a statement.

Mr Queenan identifies a

changing market, societal dynamics and evolving shopping habits as being the primary causes of its decline.

The closure of Veritas could be chalked up to the continuing decline of Catholicism in Ireland, and that's certainly part of it.

However, as this paper has been reporting for almost a decade, Veritas has been on shaky financial ground for some time.

“That suggests that either it has issues moving stock in a timely fashion or else the stock isn't worth what it is being valued at in the reports”

One could easily wonder if it has ever fully recovered from its failed multi-million euro attempt to break into the education market in the US.

The 'Credo' project drained much-needed funds from its accounts in the early 2010s, such that at one stage Veritas was unable to buy sufficient stock for its stores in 2014.

As this paper reported in 2015, the company's net loss rose from just €548,029 in 2011 to more than €1.8 million in 2014.

If it weren't for a series of loans from the Irish bishops totaling in the millions – with another due to complete the wind down this year – it's open to question if the company could have kept afloat even this far.

In 2023, for instance, the bishops gave a short-term loan of €400,000. This was on top of the more than €600,000 that Veritas owed the bishops at the end of 2022, the most recent year accounts are available for.

Net loss 2022

In 2022, Veritas recorded a net loss of €225,000 – although in the previous two years, it reported solid profits with the help of Government Covid subsidies.

Its assets don't make for pretty reading either in relation to its liabilities. On the books, they have sufficient funds to meet the more than €2 million owed to creditors as of the end of 2022.

Between stocks, debtors and cash at bank and in hand,

Veritas is sitting on €3.2 million.

However, this relies almost totally on book stocks of €2.5 million, a figure which the financial reports note as being open to “inherent uncertainty”.

Given that the company is having cash flow issues, it is strange that it didn't seek to mobilise such valuable stock.

That suggests that either it has issues moving stock in a timely fashion or else the stock isn't worth what it is being valued at in the reports.

Either way, if you take out the book stocks, the company has just €676,721 to meet its current liabilities.

When viewed in such stark terms, it's clear why Veritas thought it was time to make a drastic move.

But did it really need to be a complete closure? We are told that a review was undertaken regarding possible restructuring, but what proposals were actually explored?

It is important that these questions are answered. This business was, ultimately, held in trust for the service of the Faithful and they do deserve answers.



On 29 February 2024 *The Irish Catholic* newspaper will publish a special issue highlighting the ongoing Irish Homeless crisis.

The faces behind the figures

Our editorial team will be presenting readers with up-to-date homeless statistics and discussing the implications for individuals and families and of the crisis for those without homes this winter.

Looking forward

We anticipate publishing only one such supplement during 2024. This is undoubtedly the issue to showcase your organisation's work across the sector and highlight where you will be focusing your efforts during the year.

We are inviting all members of the Dublin Homeless Network and all interested groups nationwide to participate in the supplement, to give voice to the many perspectives and challenges facing those who both work in and rely on the homeless services.

Please call us on the contact details below to participate in this special edition.

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Legal minefield awaits ‘durable relationships’ referendum



It is as if the Govt doesn't really care about marriage, writes **David Quinn**

The referendums on the family and on care are closing in fast. They are to take place on Friday, March 8. There has not been much of a debate so far, not compared with the 2015 referendum on marriage, much less the one in 2018 on abortion.

Big campaigns have not been organised on either side. Probably there is a lot of referendum fatigue, and the stakes are not as high this time. Turn-out will almost certainly be low.

But that isn't to say that what is before us lacks importance.

To do a quick recap, the one on carers aims to delete Article 41.2 from the Constitution. This is the article that commits the State to try and protect mothers from being forced out of the home by economic necessity.

The Government wants to replace this with a more generic wording that doesn't mention the home, or mothers, or that seeks to protect mothers from having to go out to work. Instead, the new wording, if passed, will commit the State to “strive” to support family carers.

Misinformation

This referendum has captured more attention so far probably because it is somewhat easier to grasp. Totally misleadingly, the Government keeps saying that Article 41.2 states a woman's place is in the home. It does no such thing, as even the Electoral Commission has admitted. The Government is, in fact, spreading misinformation on this score.

Very few women these days, and probably few enough men either, believe a woman's place is in the home, but repeated opinion



March 8 referendum reduces marriage to one lifestyle choice among many. Photo: CNS

polls show us that the vast majority of mothers would stay at home with their children if they had the economic freedom to do so, but most of them lack that because of the cost of living.

The Government has done little or nothing to support them. On the contrary, Government policy prioritises the economy over the home.

But the referendum on the family is almost certainly the more important of the two and will almost certainly result in many court cases in the years to come.

“At present, the Constitution gives official recognition to one family only, and that is the family based on marriage”

This is because, historically speaking, society has always believed that marriage should be given special status and recognition.

But after the so-called ‘marriage equality’ referendum that recognised same-sex marriage, it was inevitable that we would get around to a ‘family equality’ referendum.

If it was a form of discrimination to bar same-sex couples from marrying, then

isn't it also a form of discrimination to give Constitutional recognition to one form of the family only?” This is the logic behind what the Government is doing.

Therefore, it wants us to vote in favour of an amendment that gives recognition to the family based on marriage or on ‘other durable relationships’.

Durable

But what is a ‘durable relationship’? No-one seems to know for sure. The Government says it has in mind cohabiting couples, grandparents and a grandchild or lone parents and a child.

The former Justice Minister, Senator Michael McDowell, anticipates numerous unintended consequences for the approach the Government wants us to take.

He wonders what the effect might be on the division of incomes, homes, businesses and farms, on pension law, tax law, succession law and immigration law.

He also points out that the Oireachtas is already free to give other families certain legal rights and has done so in the past.

In practice, the Constitution forbids giving non-marital families superior rights to marital ones but it does not forbid the Oireachtas giving non-marital families many

of the same rights as marital ones, and this already happens.

If ‘durable relationships’ goes into the Constitution, let's imagine a possible scenario. At present, if you marry for the first time you probably go into the marriage legally and financially free of past relationships.

Under a current law, if you lived with someone for five years or more, or two if you had children with them, then you might have certain binding financial commitments to that person. (Not many people are aware of this fact).

“But if the ‘durable relationships’ amendment goes through, a cohabiting couple will likely have the same rights and legal duties as a married couple”

This is very strange, because a lot of couples live together without marrying specifically to avoid the legal and financial obligations of marriage.

If the amendment passes, ‘no-strings-attached’ cohabitation may become impossible because a cohabiting

relationship, if deemed to be ‘durable’ will probably be made almost identical to marriage.

This means that if you have been in one or more durable cohabiting relationships before getting married then it will be like you have been in one or more past marriages.

You will not be coming into a first marriage free from legal and financial ties to past relationships.

Commitment

Is this what people really want? Will they really know what they are voting for if they vote Yes on March 8? A legal minefield lies ahead if we go down this path.

But something that has barely reared its head so far is the issue of why we ever gave special recognition to marriage in the first place, and specifically to the marriage of a man and woman. It is like it is almost forbidden now to consider such a thing.

But the answer should be plain to almost anyone who thinks about it; children ideally ought to be raised by the man and the woman who have brought them into the world.

The man and the woman ought to commit to one another before having children and then do their best to stay together. This is why all societies in the world hav

developed the institution of marriage and given it special recognition. It is very strange to do otherwise.

The Government keeps telling us that the family has become more ‘diverse’, which is true in a certain sense, but what it means in practice is ever more children not being raised by a married mother and father.

Unless one or other parent is a bad person, how is this a good thing? Why would you want more family ‘diversity’ in the sense of ever fewer children being raised by their married parents?

“It is as if the Government does not really care about the institution of marriage anymore, and this explains why it never really seeks to promote and protect it”

Increasingly it seems to favour reducing marriage to one more lifestyle choice among others. That is not good for society or for children and it is a big reason why we should vote No on March 8.

Younger men and women are increasingly divided by politics



Instead of trying to 'fix' young men, maybe it's time we gave them a break and listened to them, writes Michael Kelly

Back in the innocent days of the 1990s, when there were only two sexes, US-based relationship counsellor John Gray wrote a best-selling book to try to help couples understand one another better and resolve the conflicts that are part of any relationship.

Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus argued that most common relationship problems between men and women are a result of fundamental psychological differences between the sexes, and that each sex is acclimated to its own planet's society and customs, but not to those of the other.

Of course, Dr Gray's analysis would be woefully inadequate to cope with today's more complex world. Fine Gael at the weekend selected Senator Regina Doherty to be their candidate in the forthcoming elections to the European Parliament. The senator famously said last year: "I think we probably have about nine genders". Which seems a bit stingy, given that at last count social media giant Facebook allowed for up to 58 genders.

But, for now, let's just keep it simple and stick to men and women.

Evidence

New evidence does indeed indicate that men and women are increasingly occupying different planets, at least politically.

Boys and men from generation Z – roughly those born from the mid-to-late 1990s to the early 2010s – are much more likely than older men to believe that feminism has done more harm than good. Researchers at King's College London are warning of a "real risk of fractious division among this coming generation".

One in four UK men aged 16 to 29 believe it is harder to be a man than a woman, and worry-

ingly a fifth of those who have heard of him now look favourably on the social media influencer Andrew Tate.

Mr Tate, who has 8.7 million followers on social media platform Twitter (now known as X), is facing charges in Romania, which he denies, of human trafficking, rape and forming a criminal gang to sexually exploit women.

Canadian academic and best-selling author Jordan Peterson, who has spoken about how he stands up for "demoralised young men" is seen favourably by 32% of 16 to 29-year-old men, compared with 12% among women of the same generation.

The research also found that 37% of men aged 16 to 29 consider "toxic masculinity" an unhelpful phrase, roughly double the number of young women who don't like it.

“Many of them are fed up with the political establishment and are reading people like Jordan Peterson who is giving voice to what they are feeling”

The gulf between conservative young men and progressive young women is growing wider in the UK, and, at least anecdotally, the picture is the same in Ireland. One senior Irish academic I spoke to described hearing young male college students articulate feelings of being left out, or that they don't live in a more equal world, but one where the deck is stacked against them.

"Many of them are fed up with the political establishment and are reading people like Jordan Peterson who is giving voice to what they are feeling," he told me.

In contrast, many young women are experiencing the warm glow of favourable gender quotas and other programmes designed to increase female participation.

The divergence between the sexes was evident in Europe's most recent general election.

While most attention on the polls in Poland focused on the battle between the conservative incumbent Mateusz Morawiecki and the Brussels-backed Donald Tusk, the right-wing populist Confederation party made real gains.

Among young men, Confederation was by far the most popular choice, with 46%, followed by Mr Tusk's Civic Coa-



lition (19%), The Left (5%), Law and Justice (5%) and Third Way (4%). Young women, by contrast, were most likely to want to vote for The Left (21%). However, 16% of them chose Confederation, followed by Civic Coalition (10%), Third Way (8%) and Law and Justice (4%).

The pattern appears to be replicated, with ideological differences opening up between young men and women in many other countries. In the US, women aged 18 to 30 are now 30% more liberal than their male peers, according to Gallup data. The gulf between conservative young men and progressive young women is similar in Germany.

Threatened

So, what's going on? Well, undoubtedly some men do feel threatened by women achieving an equal place in society, and in the workplace in particular. There is no question that there is a dose of old-fashioned misogyny going on.

But what if another factor is that younger man and boys are reacting to the seemingly relentless negativity about men in media? A mother of teenage boys recently told me she had to give up listening to daytime radio because of the constant references to "toxic masculinity".

"My boys are not toxic, they're lovely," she told me.

By any objective measure, boys don't do as well as girls. They lag behind girls in reading and writing ability, and they are less likely to go to university.

Boys are more likely to take their own lives, and often suffer in silence. They need help, but a lot of the help that is on offer seems more interested in unmaking them as boys rather than affirming positive masculinity.

Innate male traits such as competitiveness are seen as negatives, rather than things to be harnessed and used for good.

Fine Gael MEP Maria Walsh recently dismissed her Fianna Fáil opponents as "pale, male and state". Could you imagine the backlash if a male politicians referred to sex of female

no shame about the witch-hunt they led against men.

“Most recently, in the wake of the horrific murder of Ashling Murphy by Jozef Puska, the gaze turned on single-sex schools”

A few years earlier, moral panic broke out at University College Dublin (UCD) when an allegation was made that some 200 boys, mostly studying agricultural science, were running an online group sharing intimate images of their girlfriends or girls they had been intimate with, without their consent.

This was dutifully reported by all the mainstream newspapers, and columns quickly appeared saying the 'scandal' exposed just how toxic boys were. None of those columnists retracted a single word when

an investigation by UCD found no evidence to back up the claims.

Single sex schools

Most recently, in the wake of the horrific murder of Ashling Murphy by Jozef Puska, the gaze turned on single-sex schools. They must be dismantled, the argument goes, because they are havens where boys grow up to hate women and then go on a killing spree. The fact that Mr Puska, a Slovak, never set foot in an Irish school was tossed aside like an old cigar butt. Nothing, it seems, must distract from the ideological point being made, even the truth – and the instrumentalisation of the murder of a young teacher was only part of the wider game.

Here's an idea for policymakers: instead of constantly scolding young men for being young men, maybe it's time to try to listen to them and their concerns and hopes for the future.

Wendy Grace		Eilís Mulroy	
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Ian Dunne			



Out&About

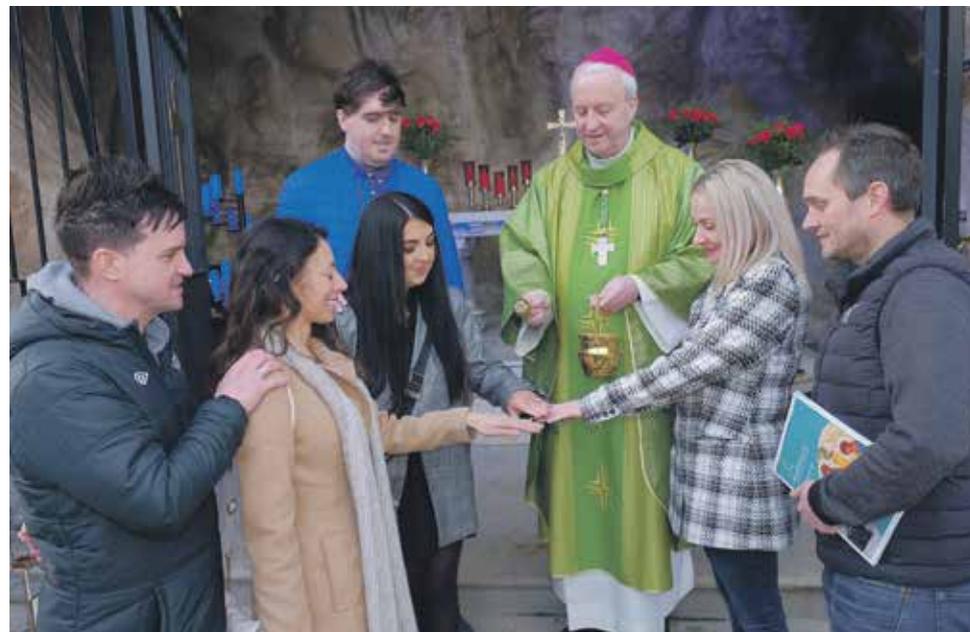
Going from strength to strength



DERRY: The Mayor of Derry and Strabane Patricia Logue welcomes Don Bosco's under 13 team into the mayor's parlour to acknowledge their recent achievements.



DUBLIN: Fr Gerard Timoner, III, Master of the Dominican Order, is greeted by St Mary's Dominican's Priory Youth Club after a Mass in Dublin to launch the beginning of a number of special events to mark the arrival of the Dominicans in Ireland 800 years ago.



BELFAST: Bishop Michael Router blesses engaged couples at St Mary's Grotto, Belfast, to mark the feast of St Valentine.

IN SHORT

Summit deepens students' pro-life knowledge

The annual Student Summit, held at Glencomeragh House in Co. Waterford gathered students and young professionals passionate about the pro-life cause for talks and workshops from February 2-4.

Organised by Students for Life, the event provided a platform for attendees from across the country "to deepen their understanding of pro-life issues and connect with like-minded individuals", a Students for Life spokesperson said.

Stephen Bourke from Hope Ireland delivered a "compelling" presentation on the assisted dying bill, sparking discussions on the ethical considerations surrounding end-of-life care.

Attendees explored the implications of legislation and discussed how best to safeguard vulnerable populations.

Luke Silke, who works for Aontú and is currently running for the upcoming local elections, led a thought-provoking workshop on the significance of political activism, emphasising the importance of advocacy and civic engagement in driving social change.

Melissa Byrne, the Students for Life Outreach Officer, facilitated a workshop centred on the art of compassionate debating, encouraging attendees to engage in respectful dialogue while advocating for their beliefs.

A highlight of the summit was a Zoom panel featuring pro-life student leaders from prominent organisations such as Students for Life America, Pro-Life Europe, and the Alliance of Pro-Life Students. The panel fostered cross-cul-

tural exchange and collaboration, underscoring the global unity within the pro-life movement.

400 people attend Dublin synod talk

Almost 400 people attended St Mary's Church Haddington Road to hear Fr Timothy Radcliffe OP speak on 'The Synod: A Word to the World'.

"It was by any standards an outstanding presentation by a celebrated speaker that we were both fortunate and honoured to have at a time in the life of our Church that is both challenging and full of opportunities," said Fr Patrick Claffey SVD.

Scholarly but accessible, serious but with a gentle humour, and a great feel for the audience, it was an excellent spiritual, theological

and pastoral talk that enriched us greatly and was very warmly received, he added.

"Fr Radcliffe is a firm believer in the whole synodal process but he doesn't ignore the challenges and difficulties involved in a Church of 1.3 billion members spread across the global patchwork of countries and cultures," Fr Claffey continued.

"He feels that the media don't really grasp what is going on at the Synod because they tend to treat it as a political event, which it is not."

What he sees as most important is the 'listening' that had begun to happen, Fr Claffey said, adding a quote from Fr Radcliffe: "I think to see Roman Curial cardinals sitting with young women from Latin America and Asia and listening, really listening. I think that's what is most transformative."

Edited by Ruadhán Jones
Ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie



Events deadline is a week in advance of publication



CORK: Bishop of Cork and Ross Fintan Gavin is pictured with members of the Carmelites, Dominicans and Franciscans at an evening of prayer for consecrated life in the Cathedral of St Mary and St Anne.



CORK: Bishop Gavin joins members of the Medical Missionaries of Mary and the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary at the prayer for consecrated life.



BELFAST: Students from the Catholic Chaplaincy at Queen's University Belfast share out pancakes to students on Pancake Tuesday.



WATERFORD: The young people who attended Students for Life Summit event in Glencomeragh show their support for the pro-life cause.



CAVAN: The Kingscourt Parish Planning Team joins married couples at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Kingscourt, as they mark their significant jubilee of marriage and St Valentine's Day. Collectively the couples were celebrating 1,550 years of lived marriage experience.

ANTRIM

'Too much and too little water: The impact of change in Malawi', a talk from Trócaire's Malawi Office, takes place Wednesday, February 28 in South Belfast Quaker Meeting House, 22 Marlborough Park North.

ARMAGH

Adoration Chapel on Edward Street holds Adoration from 9am-7pm every day.

CARLOW

Annual Trócaire Lecture to take place in Renehan Hall, at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, on Tuesday, March 5, at 7pm on the theme Climate Justice and Catholic Social Teaching: 'Everything is connected' and 'No one is saved alone' (Laudate Deum, 19). To confirm attendance, visit trocaire.org.

CAVAN

Bishop Martin Hayes to celebrate Mass for the 150th Anniversary of former St Patrick's College, Cavan, in the Cathedral of Sts Patrick and Felim, on Saturday, March 16, at 11am.

CLARE

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place Monday to Friday at Ennis Cathedral from 5pm until 7pm.

CORK

Maria Vadia will lead a weekend of Healing and Renewal in Rochestown Park Hotel, Cork, on Friday and Saturday, March 9-10, from 9.30am to 6pm. Mass both days at 12pm. Free admission, for more information contact Pat 087 2505528 or 087 6468658.

DERRY

A vocations retreat weekend to be held in Larne from March 8-10 for Derry diocese. To register, to contact the diocesan Vocations Director Fr Pat O'Hagan at pgoh2111@gmail.com or at 028 7936259.

DONEGAL

There will be a Mass of Thanksgiving with Bishop Alan McGuckian on Monday, February 26, at 7pm in St. Eunan's Cathedral, Letterkenny, to mark his departure from the diocese.

DOWN

Lectio Divina Group 7.30pm

– 8.30pm [St Dymphna's Room] in Bangor Parish every Monday.

FERMANAGH

St Michael's Parish Enniskillen hosts a Divine Mercy Holy Hour every Sunday at 7pm.

GALWAY

The Poor Clares Galway to host a Monastic Experience Day for young women who might be interested in their way of life from 10am to 5pm on March 2, to help those who may be exploring the possibility of a religious vocation. To book contact vocations@poorclares.ie

A Lenten Bible study by Fr Benny McHale, on St. Mark's Gospel to take place on Monday nights of Lent in the Athenry Pastoral Centre at the Church of the Assumption, Athenry. It begins Monday, February 19 and continues each Monday until March 18 at 8pm.

Emmanuel House Clonfert: Day of reflection, including first Saturday Fatima devotions led by Eddie Stones and team on Saturday March 2 at 11am. Confessions, Adoration, talks, music, healing service and Mass. Please bring packed lunch.

LIMERICK

Adoration to take place every Wednesday, Thursday and Friday during Lent after 10am. Mass until 8pm in Abbeyfeale Adoration Chapel.

LEITRIM

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

MAYO

The next Latin Mass will take place in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel Knock on Sunday March 10 at 6pm.

MONAGHAN

The rosary is recited each Wednesday evening at 6.50pm and each Sunday morning at 10:20am before Mass in Corduff and Raferagh.

TYRONE

Eucharistic Healing Service: Every Sunday during Lent at 4pm in Camus Parish, Strabane.

Popcorn with the pope

A still from 2001: A Space Odyssey, with the famous computer HAL in the background.



A Vatican film list shows Catholics don't need to live in silos, Ruadhán Jones hears

The Vatican seems an unlikely source for film recommendations. However, a new book wants to right that wrong by highlighting a hidden gem – a “very eclectic” list of “some important films” released by the Pontifical Commission for Social Communications in the 1990s.

Released to mark the 100th anniversary of the first public exhibition of a film, the list “really appeared out of nowhere”, according to Dr Andrew Petiprin. He is one of the co-authors of *Popcorn with the Pope: A Guide to the Vatican Film List*, recently released by Word on Fire.

Eclectic

“It’s a very eclectic list,” Dr Petiprin tells *The Irish Catho-*

lic. Of the 45 films – divided into three categories, religion, values and art – more than half are in a language other than English, a majority are European and they come in all kinds of styles and genres.

The release of the list marked a change in the Vatican’s relationship and art in general in the modern era, says Dr Petiprin.

“Whether these films are made by people who are avowed Catholics or not, they are films that are, depending on the particular person’s circumstances, potentially edifying for Catholics”

“It’s not to say it’s a reversal or a total switcheroo per se,” he clarifies. “But it is interesting that for several decades, the primary way the Catholic Church engaged with films was – in the US – through the Legion of Decency. Films would be reviewed and given a rating and if they received a ‘C’ rating they were officially considered to be unsuitable for viewing by Catholics.

“That went away in the 1980s... but by 1995 it’s very interesting to see the Vatican issuing a completely different kind of list. One of the

film’s on the list, Federico Fellini’s *8½*, was also on the condemned list. It’s really curious.”

The compilers of the list – although their exact identities are unknown – clearly came into it with an open mind. What the list conveys is that “different people get different things out of different pieces of art”, the American academic says.

“What they are trying to say I think is that whether these films are made by people who are avowed Catholics or not, they are films that are, depending on the particular person’s circumstances, potentially edifying for Catholics.

Caveat

“Now that’s a big caveat. There are films on the list for example that have nudity in them, *Schindler’s List* for example. There are films that are very difficult. And then there are other ones that are just very accessible.”

The list includes directors who had “complicated” relationships with the Church and on the whole, the Vatican is making a “pretty sophisticated judgement about art”, argues Dr Petiprin. He

highlights a film by Roberto Rosellini called *The Flowers of St Francis* which inspired the future Pope St John XXIII to say, “Oh my boy, you don’t know what you’ve done”.

“It’s a little bit confusing to try and figure out what he meant. My hunch is that he meant something like, Rosellini wanted to make a film using this great figure of St Francis as a figure of hope for Europe and particularly for Italy after the devastation of WWII. He wanted this figure of peace, this figure of joy, somebody who tapped into his country’s common identity, but was not necessarily trying to make a pro-Church film. But it’s really hard to watch that film and not think the Catholic Church is a beautiful, wonderful thing.

“I’m not sure what’s going on in this director’s mind, but it’s not evil at all – this is something good”

“Fellini’s *8½* is another example of that. The movie itself is about a director trying to make an anti-Catholic

film and failing, basically. I mean, that’s what the movie is about.

“It’s got some rough edges and it’s a weird movie, it’s full of dream like stuff and it’s really hard to understand. But you get to the final scene, the weird dancing scene at the end and you’re left thinking, wow I’m happy to be left alive. I’m not sure what’s going on in this director’s mind, but it’s not evil at all – this is something good.”

Challenging

Having stressed some of the more challenging aspects of the list, it’s only fair to note that there are many ‘accessible’ films – including westerns, cartoons, comedies and classics. These include the famous John Wayne vehicle *Stagecoach*, children’s classic *The Wizard of Oz* and Christmas favourite *It’s A Wonderful Life*.

“There are a lot of movies like that,” says Dr Petiprin. “Disney’s *Fantasia* is on the list and it’s an interesting selection. There are some people now, thinking of what the Disney brand means, who feel a certain ambivalence about a Disney film being on the list at all. But I think it’s a

worthy selection.

“I didn’t even remember liking *Fantasia*, I thought I’d watch it and see if it’s any good. And I loved it, I thought it was a really interesting movie. I felt that way about a few of the other films I wrote about, and I think my co-authors did too.”

Dr Petiprin watched 11 of the 45 and was fortunate to enjoy all of them. His colleagues, Fr Michael Ward and David Barrett, had more mixed feelings. Fr Ward “drew the short straw” in having to watch the 1927 five-hour silent film *Napoleon*. “I do want to watch it – but boy, that was quite a task,” Dr Petiprin says.

“WWI gave Renoir – himself a veteran of WWI and son of a great painter – the backdrop to tell this great story about humanity”

Though the film list is eclectic and far ranging, certain themes do predominate. One of the more unsurprising examples is the number of films reflecting on the two world wars of the 20th Century, the first of which took place just as film was really taking off. One of the films Dr Petiprin wrote about was Jean Renoir’s war movie *The Grand Illusion*, which Dr Peti-

“Fellini’s *8½* is another example of that. The movie itself is about a director trying to make an anti-Catholic film and failing, basically. I mean, that’s what the movie is about”

prin says is a wonderful film.

“WWI gave Renoir – himself a veteran of WWI and son of a great painter – the backdrop to tell this great story about humanity. That’s what war films often can do,” he says. “I think Steven Spielberg did much the same with *Schindler’s List* as a Jewish American reflecting on his ancestral people – the European Jewry’s – experience of the Holocaust.”

There are many more besides these two, such as Rosellini’s *Rome Open City* and *The Flowers of St Francis*, both responses to WWII from the Italian perspective, and the evocative Japanese war movie *The Burmese Harp*. This unique film reflects on the Japanese experience of the war.

The earliest film included in the list comes the 1920s and the most recent, the only one from the ‘90s is *Schindler’s List*. Dr Petiprin believes it would make for an interesting debate to consider what films would make a list covering the 30 years since.

“A lot are asking more of viewers than what is commonly on offer from the Marvel cinematic universe or any popular form of entertainment”

“People often debate and say if there were to be an addition to the list, what would be included?” he says. “I don’t think that’s going to happen personally, but I think it would be interesting to write another book where we talk about that.

“Honestly the selections would then be about the phenomena that characterised the 30 years that have followed. Namely things like the end of the cold war, 9/11, the rise of technocracy, all kinds of things that we are living in now.”

Given the varied fare this list has on offer, Dr Petiprin offers his advice on how best to approach it. While many of the films are ones that wouldn’t have a wide audience these days, he sees that as a strength of the list.

“A lot are asking more of viewers than what is commonly on offer from the Marvel cinematic universe or any popular form of entertainment,” he says. “When people ask me where



A still from the 1937 French classic *La Grande Illusion*, which the Vatican selected for its 1995 list of significant films.

to begin with the list, I usually say, if you would like to get a sense of what the list is meant to do, watch *Babette’s Feast*.

“Watch that movie as your way into the list. Because then you’re getting the sense, it’s a European movie in a foreign language, it’s a little bit difficult but not that difficult. What’s going on in that movie is pretty straight forward and it will affect you – you will come away from that movie going ‘wow’. That is a piece of art that I’m so glad exists and that has the power to transform.”

Brave

From there, if you were feeling brave, your next movie could be the Danish drama *Ordet*, but perhaps its best to work your way in so that, four, five or six films in you’ll get to *Ordet* and Russian classic *The Sacrifice*.

“I love *The Sacrifice*, I think it’s an incredible movie but if you start with *The Sacrifice*, you may think, ugh, I don’t think I’m really

going to get going here,” Dr Petiprin admits.

“As Catholics, we are prepared to engage with the culture, always being careful, being aware, being critical”

But even if you are feeling a bit lost, that’s where *Popcorn with the Pope* comes in handy. It’s not a book you need to read from cover to cover, says the American academic.

“You need to navigate and that’s part of what the book was designed to do... you can maybe dip in and dip out of it, saying, oh let’s see what these guys think of a movie I have seen and then maybe you can look at some of the others,” he says.

The list with its curious and occasionally controversial selections has a lot to tell us about how Catholics can

Maria Falconetti stars in *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, a 1920s silent film.



interact with the arts today, says Dr Petiprin.

“I think the beauty of the list is that it’s not trying to say, we must silo ourselves in entertainment that is overtly or explicitly Catholic,” he continues. “But that, as Catholics, we are prepared to engage with the culture, always being careful, being aware, being critical.”

Artists

Ultimately, he says, we must remember that “the Church needs artists, and these artists are not always going to fit neatly into the profile of a

faithful believer”.

“The way the list divides up the films into the three categories is really helpful and maybe hints at ways we can think about other cultural products,” says Dr Petiprin. “There are things we want to turn to for inspiration, for edification, the place where our faith really shines through, whether they are explicitly made by somebody who is trying to convey Catholic truth or not.

“*Ordet* and *The Passion of Joan of Arc* are both made by Carl Theodore Dreyer who was not Catholic – and they are two

I think beautiful – I think the message of the Catholic Faith comes through strongly in those.

“Different pieces of art serve different purposes and faithful Catholics need to not necessarily always look at everything through the same set of lenses,” he finishes.

i Popcorn with the Pope: A Guide to the Vatican Film List, published by Word on Fire and co-authored by David Paul Baird, Andrew Petiprin and Fr Michael Ward, is available for purchase online.

“The Church needs artists, and these artists are not always going to fit neatly into the profile of a faithful believe”

Govt forgetting people with disabilities



No progress has been made on substantive areas of disability rights, writes Daulta Roughneen

On Wednesday January 24 this year, the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Disability Matters launched its report, 'Towards harmonisation of national legislation with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities'.

The findings are stark. It is as if the Government has forgotten to continue work on disability inclusion in Ireland once the administrative process of ratification was completed.

The scorecard of progress against the various articles of the UN Convention lays out the lack of movement on disability rights since 2018.

Looking somewhat like a school report, some 'good progress' is noted initially, but then it appears like the Government lost interest along the way, the traffic-light rating system moving from green to predominantly orange (limited progress) to red (no progress) and even black (regression).

Progress has been made on mostly what would be considered as areas of signalling intent – equality, women with disabilities, and awareness raising.

Substantive

No progress is made on substantive areas such as the right to life, accessibility and mobility. This is the assessment of the Joint Oireachtas Committee, working across parties and across the two houses the Dail and the Seanad.

“To date, there is no dedicated strategy/policy on disability inclusion, nor any earmarked financial commitments on disability through Ireland’s overseas aid budget. This needs to change”

Regression is highlighted in areas of significant individual importance: health and independent living. Regression on independence means greater dependency. Dependence means power imbalance and is the opposite of progress towards equality.

The timing of the report is hugely important. As the government moves towards a new National Disability Strategy, it is apparent that the 2017-22 version has been a substantial failure and it is imperative that the Government takes on board the recommendations from the Joint Committee and take seriously the commitments that come with ratification of the UNCRPD.

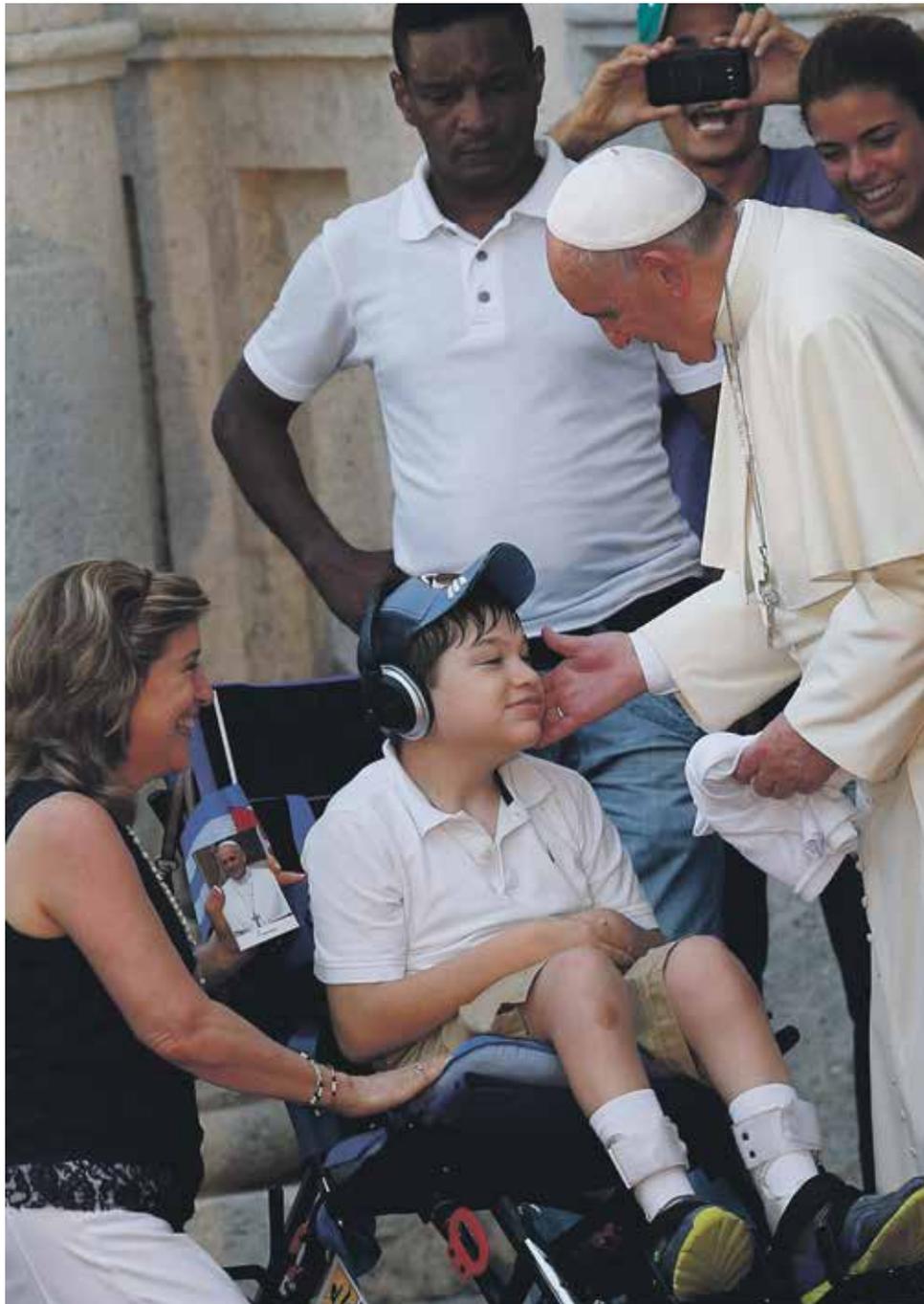
People with disabilities continue to be secondary. Irrespective of views on abortion, the lack of interest of the government on the impact of the removal of the prohibition of abortion on people with disabilities is telling.

A 2020 report in *The European Journal of Genetics* notes that there are 155,000 fewer people – or 27% – with Down Syndrome living in Europe due to abortion. In Ireland, there is no Government appetite to look at this in any manner, let alone consider it an issue of concern.

“The report from the Joint Committee indicates that living well for people with disabilities is not getting the attention or investment it requires”

At the Joint Committee on Assisted Dying, disability rights activists highlighted the threat that the introduction of assisted dying may have on people with disabilities living in Ireland, warning that legislative protections will not prevent people with disabilities feeling the social and societal pressures that their lives are burdensome and of less value.

The clear message was that the Government should prioritise living well rather than dying well in their leg-



Pope Francis blesses a boy with a disability at the Fr Felix Varela cultural centre in Havana. Photo: CNS.

islative and policy efforts.

The report from the Joint Committee indicates that living well for people with disabilities is not getting the attention or investment it requires.

Referendum

The proposed removal of reference to 'the home' in the forthcoming referendum and the watering down of Government commitments to merely 'strive to support' care given by families point away from prioritising independent living.

If the referendum passes, will this slow or regress the

move away from institutionalisation?

“The call for Ireland to advocate for the inclusion of a specific goal on disability in whatever global agenda succeeds the Sustainable Development Goals is important”

Senator Tom Clonan, in the recent Seanad debates emphasises that the “State is trying to avoid compellability, or to provide any sort of legal framework or underpinning to the inalienable and fundamental human rights of disabled citizens.”

Ireland signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2007 and ratified it in March 2018.

The lengthy delay between

signing and ratification was justified by successive Governments, claiming it was necessary to make significant progress on disability inclusion in Ireland before adopting the CRPD into national law.

Commended

The work of the Committee has to be commended. Dedicating significant time over the last two years, chaired by TD Michael Moynihan, engaged in probably the most in-depth public consultation carried out by the various cross-house Committees, hearing from organisations of people with disabilities (DPOs) and disability rights organisations in face-to-face discussions, most often in the evening when the Committee members could have been doing something else entirely – such as enjoying the facilities of the Dáil bar!

As an organisations working on international cooperation, CBM Ireland welcomes the recommendations of the Committee that the Depart-

ment of Foreign Affairs and Irish Aid should take more action on disabilities in its overseas aid.

The call for Ireland to advocate for the inclusion of a specific goal on disability in whatever global agenda succeeds the Sustainable Development Goals is important.

It is not just in Ireland that disability is overlooked. The SDGs give little more than a passing reference to disability rights even though people with disabilities make up one-sixth of the world's population and this needs to change if disability matters are to be given sufficient importance in the coming years.

“Poverty and disability are closely linked and people with disability suffer more in resource poor environments where tough investments decisions have to be made”

The report from the Committee (page 129) recommends Ireland adopts a disability inclusive approach to international co-operation as a cross-cutting conditionality.

However, we feel that the recommendation should go further to require targeted support to address the specific needs of people with disabilities in Ireland's international co-operation.

To date, there is no dedicated strategy/policy on disability inclusion, nor any earmarked financial commitments on disability through Ireland's overseas aid budget. This needs to change.

Poverty and disability are closely linked and people with disability suffer more in resource poor environments where tough investment decisions have to be made. Ireland can help fill that void through its overseas aid in lower income countries.

The frustrations of the members of the Joint Committee that progress on disability rights has slowed since the ratification of the UNCRPD are understandable.

The detailed recommendations of the Committee provide a roadmap for progress under the next National Disability Strategy and call for accountability of the current and next governments to people with disabilities as full citizens with equal rights under the Constitution and the UNCRPD.

i Daulta Roughneen is the CEO of CBM Ireland, an international disability rights organisation.

THE SYNODAL TIMES

“Synodality is what the Lord expects from the Church of the third millennium” – Pope Francis

THE NUNS WHO HEROICALLY FIGHT OFF THE MAFIA

PAGE 20-21

FRANCIS' VISION FOR A RENEWED THEOLOGY

FR JAMES HANVERY SJ

PAGE 22

Online survey reveals a desire for change in the Church in Ireland

Brandon Scott

An online survey commissioned by The Synodal Pathway saw 145 valid responses to hot-button questions posed concerning the future of the Church and its mission in Ireland - with the majority of responses indicating that an appetite for change is present amongst those who have been directly involved in the synodal process over three years.

Prior experience

The research conducted was intended as a needs analysis with lay and ordained local Church leaders, focussed on those with prior experience of the synodal process. In spite of the knowledge acquired as a consequence of active participation, many were still unclear of certain timelines and processes of both the universal synod and the Irish synodal pathway.

Most comments were overwhelmingly positive, but there were also some critical ones as well. There was almost widespread agreement that the synodal process was important, with over 87% of respondents agreeing that talking about the future of the Church was one of the strengths of the listening sessions.

The responses showed a desire for change in the Church. There was a noticeable desire to see co-responsibility in leadership between the priest and the laity in particular. There was evidence of a desire for greater exploration and development of Faith. The desire to find meaningful ways to develop and express Faith emerged as the stronger driver for change.

Many were also unsure how exactly synodality could be devel-



Theresa Kilmurray of the Brigidine Congregational Leadership Team carries the St Brigid relic, draped in red, to St Brigid's Church in Kildare on January 28, 2024.

oped in a parish setting in tandem with the larger processes. Consequently, many called for more clarity to be provided to further their understanding. When asked if people could explain synodality to others, 69% rated this as seven or above out of a possible mark of 10.

Many also expressed that the concept of synodality as a way of being has been somewhat confused by the synodal process, with some noting that there were deficits caused by the production of content and reports as many understood synodality to be driven by prayer and reflection rather than something statistical or regimented.

Respondents

A majority of respondents felt that the opportunities for synodality in the Church have not been widely explored because the approach has not been extensively experienced. Many of these sentiments originated from the perception that little has changed over the last number of decades in the Church and it is difficult for people to harmonise possibilities.

Most felt that diocesan and parish pastoral councils have become key opportunities of further expression of synodality and commended their ability to make decisions about other aspects of the Church's life.

Many lamented that clergy have

not received enough support to fully grasp synodality and its impact on their ministry. Respondents called for a more collaborative, consultative leadership; more reflective decision-making with wider input; a faith-based approach to decision making, a greater seeking to discern; encouraging a wide-range of voices and an increasing diversity of opinion and ensuring the mission of the Church engages more meaningfully with the local community.

Conclusion

It was concluded that insufficient support has been provided for priests specifically, in relation to developing an understanding of how synodality is asking something

different from them, and how they might work through these changes, particularly in relation to the current workload.

It was agreed that without greater clarity about synodality, there will be a 'verbal drag' and 'mental drag' as training time is lost to wider discussion and participants will focus not just on skill development but are distracted by the uncertainty of what they are being asked to apply their skills to.

Research points to designing a listening session (for people both engaged with and disengaged from the Church) as the area where respondents felt the least confident to tackle these issues in the future.

NEXT WEEK: AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH INTERNATIONAL UNION OF SUPERIORS GENERAL PROJECT COORDINATOR PATRIZIA MORGANTE

Nuns fight 'mafias' to protect women

Paola Affato

The International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking (IDPAAHT) is celebrated annually on the Feast of St Josephine Bakhita on 8 February, since it was formally observed in 2015. The primary objective of this day is to create a greater awareness of the phenomenon of human trafficking and to reflect on the situation of violence and injustice that affects so many people's lives. Another goal is to attempt to provide solutions to counter human trafficking by taking concrete actions.

Listen, dream, act

This is 10th edition of the Day and the theme was in continuity with the one chosen in 2023 (Journeying in Dignity), selected by an international group of young people involved in the fight against trafficking. This year, the subtitle 'LISTEN, DREAM, ACT' was added to materialise the 'Call to Action' commitment made by the international representatives of young people gathered in Rome in February 2023.

In order to better understand the meaning of this day for the Catholic Church and the whole world, and to go deeper into the work done by thousands of women religious to fight trafficking, *The Synodal Times* interviewed Sr Abby Avelino (Sisters of Maryknoll), the International Coordinator of Talitha Kum of the International Network of Women Religious against Human Trafficking.

Sr Avelino, can you explain the genesis and meaning of this day?

The process was triggered in 2014, we started a conversation with the Vatican to establish a day dedicated to the phenomenon of trafficking and within a short time we received approval. So since February 8 2015, on the symbolic date of St Josephine Bakhita patron saint of slavery (see side panel), this important day has been celebrated in the Catholic Church.

Due to the alarming growth in the number of victims of human trafficking and so-called new slavery, we felt it was important to create a



Sr Abby Avelino.

Photo credit: @Talitha Kum/UISG



International day of prayer and awareness against human trafficking: Sr Avelino attended a march in Rome. Photos: Margherita Simionati.

moment of reflection. Not only to pray together but also to create awareness together. It was the Pope himself who announced the day and entrusted its promotion to Talitha Kum, the UISG (International Union of Superiors General) and the USG (Union of Superiors General).

We at Talitha Kum are the coordinating group, but we work side by side with other partners at the international level. In all, about 20 of them organise this event with us every year.

Now let's talk about the phenomenon, what are the figures?

According to the UNHDC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) there are 50 million victims of trafficking. But the number is much underestimated because, as you can easily understand, the phenomenon is very hidden.

The annual turnover is 150 billion dollars, more than the trafficking of arms and drugs. The situation is very alarming we try to do awareness campaigns at all levels: Church, governments, schools, grassroots. We at Talitha Kum are

on the front line all over the world and we talk to everyone, not just the Church, we ask all institutional and non-institutional realities to join us in the fight.

Over time the forms of trafficking and slavery have multiplied...

Yes exactly, now there are many forms of forced labour, a very high level, then sexual exploitation, forced marriages, child exploitation, domestic exploitation and child marriages. In the beginning it was mainly sexual exploitation, but now it is very diversified. In addition there are other factors contributing to the increase: forced migration, the climate crisis, the many wars.

Can you give us some facts about your work?

We are present in 97 countries with 58 networks. Many partners are lay organisations, others are formed by nuns, by male religious. In all 6,000 active members. And in 2022 we reached a total of 560,000 people in the areas of prevention, care, advocacy and protection. Prevention,

awareness raising is our main field of work: in all 444,256 people reached. Also in 2022 we reached and protected 34,463 victims.

Sister, your work is very complex and in some cases dangerous, how do you deal with it?

Yes, we are up against mafias, very well-organised criminals. But we do not act alone, that would be impossible.

First of all we work in teams with NGOs, institutions, and when we act we never go it alone: we do not go into action unless we are sure we are protected by police or security agencies. We always follow protocols in rescue operations.

Talitha Kum was established in 2009, this year we are 15 years old. It was established by the UISG. In the beginning it was a small organisation, now we have thousands of people and what gives us hope is also the fact that more and more young people are joining us.

i Paolo Affatato is Asia editor in FIDES News Agency, contributor to L'Osservatore Romano and others.



Who is St Josephine Bakhita



St Josephine Bakhita.



Born in Olgossa in 1869, in the Darfur region (south-west Sudan), her uncle was a tribal chief, and her family was relatively prosperous. Unfortunately Josephine was kidnapped at the age of seven by Arab slave traders, sold into slavery and given the name Bakhita, which means *fortunate*. She was resold many times and lived in various households.

In 1883 she was sold to Callisto Legnani, Italian consul in Khartoum, Sudan who, two years later, took Josephine to Italy and gave her to his friend Augusto Michieli. Bakhita became babysitter to Mimmina Michieli, whom she accompanied to Venice's Institute of the Catechumens, run by the Canossian Sisters.

While Mimmina was being instructed, Josephine felt drawn to the Catholic Church. She was baptised and confirmed in 1890, taking the name Josephine. Michieli's family, some time later, wanted to take Mimmina and Josephine back with them,

but Bakhita refused to go.

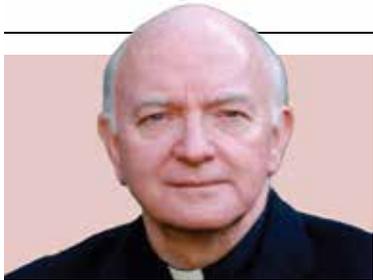
During the ensuing court case, the Canossian Sisters and the patriarch of Venice intervened on Josephine's behalf. The judge concluded that since slavery was illegal in Italy, she had actually been free since 1885.

Josephine entered the Institute of St Magdalene of Canossa in 1893 and made her profession three years later. In 1902, she was transferred to the city of Schio (northeast of Verona), where she assisted her religious community through cooking, sewing, embroidery, and welcoming visitors at the door.

She soon became well loved by the children attending the sisters' school and the local citizens. She once said, "Be good, love the Lord, pray for those who do not know Him. What a great grace it is to know God!".

The first steps toward her beatification began in 1959. She was beatified in 1992 and canonised eight years later.

Francis' vision for a renewed theology



Fr James Hanver SJ

PART ONE

The past ten years of the papacy of Pope Francis have been a time of extraordinary activity and challenge for the Church. Whether with internal renewal and innovation such as synodality, or with the urgency of apostolic outreach to other faiths, conflicts and the ever-widening consequences of the ecological crisis, the Pope has been concerned with the Church's mission. His easy pastoral and colloquial style have led many—supporters and critics alike—to think of him as a 'pastor' and not a philosopher like St John Paul II or a theologian like Benedict XVI. Although it is certainly true that his style is unique, it would be a mistake to underrate and undervalue the intellectual depth and theological insights which inform both his teaching and actions. Pope Francis is the first non-European pope and, in many ways, we are all still adjusting to the perspectives and experiences that this brings.

Vision

An under-recognised aspect of his papacy is his vision of theology and its need for renewal if it is to effectively serve the mission of the Church in the contemporary world. How well is the Church served by the current state of theology and the variety of different theological schools and methodologies that operate within it? Plurality is not the problem here. Has there ever been a time when there was no theological pluralism in the Church? Pluralism or diversity in the Church is not a handicap for Christian theology but an enrichment. Though it may call for careful discernment, it is evidence of a living faith which grows and develops in contact with cultures. As we are learning from the synodal process, mission is a mutual relationship: all parts of the Church are missionary to one another. The problem is more about where formal theology actually takes place today and in whose service it operates. Two of these are the cultures of the university and the seminary. There is no doubt that many faculties of theology, whether they are in universities or seminaries, do impressive work, but for the sake of highlighting the dilemma at the heart of formal theology and at the risk of some caricature, we can see the risk of two quite different but



Pope Francis delivers his homily during his Ash Wednesday Mass at the Basilica of Santa Sabina in Rome February 14, 2024. Photo: CNS/Lola Gomez

problematic dynamics operating in both locations.

In the university, theology risks being locked in its own academic discourses and disputes, increasingly forced to defend its place in the secular academy and demonstrate its intellectual relevance. In doing so, it can become alienated from its own sources and the realities of the life of the Church. Like Narcissus, it becomes enamoured with its own rhetorical and conceptual cleverness, forever in search of relevance and recognition, afraid to challenge the prejudices and fashions of the time for fear of losing its place in the grand parade of academia in which all universities must market themselves and regenerate the myth of their social power and pre-eminence.

In the seminary, which is no less conditioned by ideology and cul-

tural camps, theology can fall into defensive ecclesial silos. It becomes prey to a sterile introversion where its searching is turned into the undisputed certainties of a dull catechesis. This type of 'bunkered theology' may produce a sense of security, especially when it creates a Church contra-mundum mentality. It cannot, however, meet the complexities of a digitalised, globalised, post-truth world or the soteriological promises of the markets and science. A fortress remnant offers the illusion of survival and undefiled fidelity, but it is a poor strategy for a living faith. Socially, it risks becoming a social curiosity or museum in which its defenders of faith become its curators. Theologically, in the belief that it is a keeper of God's revelation, assuming the authority of an alternative and safer magisterium, it has instead rendered God its captive.

It can turn the astonishing gracious freedom of God's mercy into the property of the self-elect.

Reasons for hope

In both cases, theology ultimately fails the Church and its members who search their faith for meaning and develop spiritual lives and practices which express the 'reasons for hope'. Whether in the theatre of the university or the classrooms of the seminaries, there is a need for a theology that is not only scientia but sapientia as Augustine recognised, and can do adequate justice to the sensus fidelium. A theology that lives in prayer, that knows itself always to be standing before the inexhaustible mystery of the Triune God, blinded by the light of the crucified and resurrected Christ, and overwhelmed by unbounded graciousness of the Holy Spirit. Such

a theology recognises the reality of a Church scarred by abuse, cover-up and corruption, yet a Church still able to astonish the world with its compassion and commitment to the marginalised and the powerless, still able to endure in service when governments have forgotten, and the media has moved on. This is a Church on a synodal journey which lives in the transcendence of its own experience of forgiveness and mercy, compassion and repentance. Out of its poverty, in communion with every generation, past, present and future, it draws from the life-giving well of its sacraments. Every day it undertakes its metanoia of heart and mind and spirit; it renews its look on the world with Christ's love and sees it again through his eyes. Amid all deserts of the broken and discredited institutions that litter the public square, in the ruins of war and its unhealed memories, precarious democracies and authoritarian regimes, this is the Church for which the world continues to yearn and hope it exists.

“Such a theology recognises the reality of a Church scarred by abuse, cover-up and corruption, yet a Church still able to astonish the world with its compassion and commitment to the marginalised and the powerless”

PART TWO NEXT WEEK

i This article first appeared in *Faith Dimensions* magazine and is re-published with the kind permission of the author.

Israel-Vatican rift widens over cardinal's Gaza remarks



Elise Ann Allen

A growing rift between the Vatican and Israel was exacerbated recently when the Israeli ambassador to the Holy See hit back against a top Vatican official who said the ongoing Israeli military offensive in Gaza is disproportionate.

On the margins of a February 13 event commemorating the 95th anniversary of the Lateran Pacts, which regularised the relationship between the Holy See and the new Republic of Italy in 1929, Vatican Secretary of State, Italian Cardinal Pietro Parolin, told reporters that it's time for Israel to change its strategy in Gaza.

Cardinal Parolin said broad calls for Israel to stop the carnage have become "a general voice, that it can't go on like this and other paths have to be found to resolve the problem of Gaza, the problem of Palestine".

He repeated the Vatican's "sharp and unqualified condemnation" of Hamas's October 7 attack on Israel and of all forms of anti-Semitism but maintained his criticism of Israeli policy.

"Israel's right of self-defence, which has been invoked to justify this operation, must be proportional, and with 30,000 dead it certainly isn't," he said, citing unconfirmed statistics provided by the Gaza Health Ministry.

Deplorable

In a statement the following day, Israel's Embassy to the Holy See responded to Cardinal Parolin's remarks, calling it "a deplorable declaration".

"To judge the legitimacy of a war without taking into account ALL of the circum-



Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, at the UN Climate Change Conference in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, last December. Photo: CNS/courtesy of UN Climate Change COP28, Christopher Pike.

stances and relevant data inevitably leads to mistaken conclusions," they said, and ticked off several points they said must be considered.

“ Hamas’s objective of building an unprecedented terrorist operation has been ‘actively sustained by the local civilian population’ ”

Gaza, the embassy said, has been transformed by Hamas "into the largest terroristic base ever seen. There is almost no civil infrastructure that has not been used by Hamas for their criminal plans," including hospitals, schools, and places of worship, among others.

Hamas's objective of building an unprecedented terrorist operation has been "actively sustained by the

local civilian population," the statement said, saying civilians themselves actively participated in the October 7 attack on Israel, "killing, raping, and taking civilian hostages".

"All of these acts are defined as war crimes," the embassy said, insisting that the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) is conducting its own retaliatory military operation "in the full respect of international law".

Statistics

To this end, the embassy compared statistics from the current war in Gaza to those from previous, western-led regional conflicts.

Citing information available to them, the embassy said that in Gaza, three civilians have died for every one Hamas militant killed.

"All civilian victims are to be mourned, but in wars and in past operations by NATO forces or by western forces in Syria, Iraq, or Afghanistan, the proportion was of 9 or 10 civil-

ians for every terrorist. Thus, the percentage of the IDF's attempt to avoid the death of civilians is around three times higher, regardless of the fact that the battleground in Gaza is much more complicated," the embassy said.

“ The spat over Cardinal Parolin’s remarks is the latest twist in a steady splintering of Catholic-Jewish relations since the Gaza war broke out ”

Taking these points into consideration, the embassy said that "any objective observation cannot not arrive at the conclusion that the responsibility for the death and destruction in Gaza is from Hamas and Hamas alone".

"This is forgotten too often and too easily," they said, saying, it is not enough for the Vatican "to condemn the genocidal massacre of October 7 and then point the finger at Israel referring to their right to existence and self-defence only as a simple duty and not considering the bigger picture".

The spat over Cardinal Parolin's remarks is the latest twist in a steady splintering of Catholic-Jewish relations since the Gaza war broke out, with a series of perceived missteps by Pope Francis and the Holy

See angering the Jewish community.

Over the weekend, for example, Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, 81, and former president of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Culture, inadvertently made waves by quoting an Italian rapper critical of Israel's actions in Gaza.

Cardinal Ravasi February 11 had tuned into the finale of Sanremo, the country's largest annual music festival, and had published a post on social media platform X, previously known as Twitter, containing lyrics from an Italian-born rapper of Tunisian origins named Ghali, who placed fourth in the competition.

After concluding his performance, Ghali used the spotlight to issue a brief but explosive political statement, saying, "Stop the genocide," in reference to the Israeli offensive in Gaza.

Backlash

Ghali's remarks sparked immediate backlash and, while not intending to make a political statement with post, Cardinal Ravasi also came under fire for having given a public shout-out to the rapper.

Pope Francis has also consistently come under fire for his handling of the war in Gaza, most recently from a prominent liberal German theologian Gregor Maria Hoff, who penned a February 9 essay in the prestigious

journal *Communio* criticising the Pope's actions.

Mr Hoff specifically took issue with the Pope's February 3 letter to the Jews of Israel, saying the Pontiff failed to "call a spade a spade," clearly distinguishing between Hamas terrorism and Israeli self-defence.

In his letter, Francis attempted to extend an olive branch to the Jewish community, condemning attitudes of anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism that have arisen since the Gaza war broke out last year.

"The path that the Church has walked with you, the ancient people of the covenant, rejects every form of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism, unequivocally condemning manifestations of hatred towards Jews and Judaism as a sin against God," Francis said.

“ Mr Hoff in his essay questioned the sincerity of Francis’s commitment to a ‘special relationship’ with Judaism ”

This letter was published after objections from many Jewish leaders to what they argue is the Pope's perplexing moral equivalence regarding the war in Gaza, lamenting violence on all sides but failing to identify Hamas as the aggressor and Israel as engaged in legitimate self-defence.

Many Jewish leaders were offended in November after a Palestinian delegation visited the Vatican and reported that Pope Francis had used the word "genocide" to describe Israel's offensive, a claim a Vatican spokesman attempted to deny but without great success.

Mr Hoff in his essay questioned the sincerity of Francis's commitment to a "special relationship" with Judaism, saying that if it doesn't mean "trustworthy loyalty in an emergency" then it is just empty rhetoric, and that what Jews really want to hear from the Pope is simple: "Whoever attacks Jews, also attacks us!"

As it stands, the Pope's letter drew little reaction from the Jewish community, and likely left many unsatisfied. Cardinal Parolin's remarks and Israel's immediate response have only added to what is becoming a festering crisis that is increasingly difficult for the Pope and his aids to ignore.

“ The path that the Church has walked with you, the ancient people of the covenant, rejects every form of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism, unequivocally condemning manifestations of hatred towards Jews and Judaism as a sin against God ”



World Report

IN BRIEF

Mexican bishops meet with gangs in the hope of forging peace

● During a February 14 press conference, Bishop José de Jesús González of the Diocese of Chilpancingo-Chilapa said that the prelates of the area “began to seek dialogue with the [crime] bosses that could bring us peace”. However, he lamented that his goal “was not achieved”.

The main obstacle to these negotiations, according to González, is that criminals “covet territories”. The prelate pointed out that initially one of the criminal organisations wanted “a truce with their conditions,” but for their rivals “those conditions were not to their liking”.

Marian statue vandalised in US

● In an incident that police are treating as a possible hate crime, a statue of the Blessed Mother in a prayer garden near a prominent Washington DC, basilica was damaged by an as-yet-identified assailant last Thursday.

The statue, located on the grounds of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, appeared to have been struck in the face with a hammer. Light fixtures along a walkway in the garden were also shattered.

Msgr Walter Rossi, rector of the basilica, said in a statement that although he is “saddened that acts of this nature take place, he was “more concerned about the individuals who perpetrate such activity and pray for their healing”.

Cardinal Zen publishes new critique of Synod

● Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun, the bishop emeritus of Hong Kong, has released another critique of the Synod on Synodality, arguing that the ongoing discussion and discernment process offers “two opposing visions” of the nature, organisation, and role of the Church.

“There is talk of an undefined synodality, a ‘democracy of the baptised’, which baptised people? Do

they at least go to church regularly? Do they draw faith from the Bible and strength from the sacraments?” the 92-year-old cardinal observed in a nearly 3,600-word commentary published on February 15 titled ‘How will the Synod continue and end?’

“This vision, if legitimised,” he warned, “can change everything, the doctrine of faith and the discipline of moral life”.

Greece becomes first Orthodox Christian country to legalise same-sex marriage

● Greece last week legalised same-sex marriage at a national level, becoming the first officially Orthodox Christian country to do so.

The Greek Constitution stipulates that “the prevailing religion in Greece is that of the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ”. The Holy Synod of the Church of Greece had previously come out against the proposed legislation, saying in a statement last month that “the duality of the sexes and their complementarity are not social inventions but come from God”.

“Christian marriage is not a simple cohabitation agreement but a holy sacrament, through which the grace of God is granted to the communion relationship of a man and a woman with the aim of their common path to theology,” the synod said.

Argentine nun, who died at 43, considered for sainthood

● The archbishop of Santa Fe de la Vera Cruz in Argentina, Sergio Fenoy, signed an edict that begins the process prior to the opening of the cause of canonisation of Sr Cecilia María of the Holy Face, a Carmelite nun from the province of Neuquén who died from cancer in 2016 at the age of 43.

Dated February 14, the edict bears the signature of the archbishop of Santa Fe because the nun lived in the Carmelite monastery located in the archdiocese from 1997 to 2016, the year of her death.

Her testimony of “love and trust in Jesus Christ, even in the midst of the hardest trials, has awakened in many hearts the desire for a greater commitment to Christian life”, the edict states.

Vatican orders German bishops to halt vote on disputed ‘Synodal Committee’

The Vatican has threatened canonical action if the German bishops refuse to comply with an order to halt a vote on the statutes of a controversial new committee that had previously been disapproved. The German bishops meet this week to advance their national reform process as part of their current February 19-22 general assembly in Augsburg.

The roughly 60 members of the German Bishops’ Conference (DBK) attending were scheduled to address the results of their recently concluded ‘Synodal Path’ reform process and vote on the statutes of a ‘Synodal Committee’ that has the task of establishing a new national ‘Synodal Council’.

However, after receiving a new letter from the Vatican threatening punitive measures, the German bishops’ have apparently put that vote on hold. A German-language edition of the letter – dated February 16 and signed by Vatican Secretary of State Italian Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Prefect of the Vatican Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith Argentine Cardinal Victor Fernández, and Prefect of the Vatican Dicastery for Bishops American Cardinal Robert Prevost – has been published on the DBK website.

These “indications”, they said, “have been brought to the Holy Father and approved by him”. The Vatican said this kind of ecclesial body is “not



Cardinal Reinhard Marx of Munich shakes hands with Pope Francis in the Clementine Hall of the Apostolic Palace during the German bishops’ *ad limina* visits to the Vatican.

foreseen by current canon law and therefore a resolution of the DBK in this sense would not be valid, with the related legal consequences”. Citing specific articles of Canon Law, the Vatican said there is no basis for the Synodal Council as conceived by the DBK, “nor has a mandate been issued by the Holy See” to establish it. “On the contrary, [the Holy See] has expressed itself to the contrary,” the letter says.

The idea for the Synodal Council, a governing body composed of both bishops and

laypeople that would permanently oversee the Church in Germany, was approved during the fourth plenary assembly of Germany’s “Synodal Path” in September 2022.

In January of last year, the heads of several Vatican major departments wrote a letter to the German bishops vetoing the Synodal Council on grounds that it constituted a new form of ecclesial authority not canonically recognised, and which would essentially usurp the authority of the national bishops’

conference.

However, during the German bishops’ spring assembly a month later, in March 2023, Bätzing announced that plans would still move forward, and that the Synodal Committee would be formed regardless of the Vatican’s concerns.

The Synodal Committee is currently scheduled to hold its second plenary meeting in June, however, it is unclear if that meeting will in fact be held given the Vatican’s most recent letter.

Mass of reparation held after ‘scandalous’ funeral for trans activist in US

The pastor of St Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City said the church has offered a Mass of Reparation after a controversial irreverent funeral service was held there last week for a well-known transgender advocate.

The Manhattan cathedral hosted the February 15 funeral service for Cecilia Gentili, an activist who helped to decriminalise prostitution in New York, lobbied for “gender identity” to be added as a protected class to the state’s human rights laws, and was a major fundraiser for transgender causes. Gentili was a man who

identified as a woman.

Throughout the liturgy, the presider, Fr Edward Dougherty, referred to Gentili with feminine pronouns and described the trans-identifying man as “our sister”. Additionally, during the prayers of the faithful, the reader prayed for so-called gender-affirming health care, while attendees frequently and approvingly referred to Gentili as the “mother of whores”.

On Saturday, Fr Enrique Salvo, the pastor of St. Patrick’s, said in a statement on the website of the Archdiocese of New York that Church

officials shared in the “outrage over the scandalous behaviour at a funeral here at St Patrick’s Cathedral earlier this week”.

“The cathedral only knew that family and friends were requesting a funeral Mass for a Catholic and had no idea our welcome and prayer would be degraded in such a sacrilegious and deceptive way,” Fr Salvo said.

“At [archbishop Cardinal Timothy Dolan’s] directive, we have offered an appropriate Mass of Reparation,” Salvo said.

English Catholic priest vindicated for ‘pro-life’ stance in end-of-life case

Fr Patrick Pullicino, an English Catholic priest and neurologist, has been vindicated after being investigated by a UK medical regulation agency for giving his expert opinion in an emergency end-of-life case in which he called for further tests before cutting off a hospitalised man’s nutrition

and hydration.

The man, referred to as ‘RS’, ultimately died in 2020 amid legal battles between his family and the hospital over his fate.

But shortly after the man’s death, a complaint was brought against Pullicino by an academic researcher and

end-of-life planning advocate in 2021 accusing the priest of bias because of his Catholic and ‘pro-life values’, according to Christian Concern, the advocacy organisation that defended the priest.

Pullicino was subsequently investigated by the UK’s General Medical Council (GMC) in

early 2021, and this month he was finally exonerated.

“No evidence was adduced to support the allegation that Dr Pullicino’s religious faith or personal beliefs affected his opinion on Patient RS,” the council said in its decision, according to Christian Concern.



Edited by Jason Osborne
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Getting penitential with the Pope



Altar servers lead the procession from the Church of St Anselm to the Basilica of Santa Sabina in Rome for the celebration of Ash Wednesday Mass with Pope Francis February 14. Photo: CNS/Lola Gomez.

Disappeared Ukrainian Catholic priest thought to be in Russian prison

One of two disappeared Ukrainian Greek Catholic priests seized from their church in Berdiansk in November of 2022 appears to have been illegally transferred to Russia, according to a human rights activist.

Redemptorist Fr Ivan Levitsky is likely being held in an investigation prison in Russia's Rostov region, according to Yevhen Zakharov of the Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group.

Mr Zakharov recently shared the update with Felix Corley of *Forum 18*, a news service that partners with the Norwegian Helsinki Committee in defending freedom of religion, thought and conscience.

Fr Levitsky's fellow Redemptorist Fr Bohdan Geleta, who served with him at the Church of the Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos in Berdiansk, is reported to be held in a separate investigation prison in Russian-occupied Crimea. Fr Geleta is known to suffer from an acute form of diabetes.

Both priests had refused to leave their parishioners following Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, which continued attacks launched in 2014 against Ukraine. Two joint reports from the New Lines Institute and the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights have determined Russia's invasion constitutes geno-

cide, with Ukraine reporting more than 124,651 war crimes committed by Russia in Ukraine since February 2022.

Mr Corley told *OSV News* that based on his own efforts to contact multiple Russian investigation prisons, where accused are held during the pre-trial period, "there's absolutely no confirmation" of where the two priests are.

"We called as many of (the prisons) as we could reach, and four of the five in (Russia's) Rostov region said they did not hold Fr Ivan, and of the three investigation prisons in Simferopol (in occupied Crimea), none of them would say they were holding

Fr Bohdan," said Mr Corley, adding that the three prisons in occupied Crimea "refused to give any information at all".

In addition, Russian occupation officials have failed to provide *Forum 18* with the exact charges against the priests, or name the Russian agencies handling the investigations.

At the same time, said Mr Corley, "it does seem they (the priests) are alive," but the Donetsk Exarchate of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, to which the priests belong, "has been very cautious".

Pontifical Mission Societies USA head resigns after breaking celibacy vow

Msgr Kieran Harrington, a priest of the Brooklyn Diocese, has resigned from his post as the national director of the Pontifical Mission Societies in the United States after an allegation against him of "inappropriate conduct with an adult" was substantiated, the Diocese of Brooklyn announced.

Msgr Harrington also has been placed on a leave of absence from his priestly ministry "pending an evaluation to determine his suitability to serve the Church in the future," the diocese said.

The allegation of inappropriate conduct against Msgr Harrington was received by the diocese March 6, 2023. An investigation was conducted, and the findings were presented to the Diocese of Brooklyn Adult Allegation Committee, or AAC, which substantiated the allegation, according to a diocese statement.

"The AAC, comprised of professionals in the fields of law enforcement, human resources, law, and psychology, found sufficient proof of inappropriate behaviour with an adult – a violation of

the code of conduct and Priestly Holy Orders," the diocese statement reads.

"As a result of this finding, Msgr Harrington submitted his resignation to the Pontifical Mission Societies."

Msgr Harrington said he "regrettably" had a "single, inappropriate, consensual encounter with an adult woman," adding that he was "wrong to have done so". The diocese said "the board did not make a finding on the issue of consent," but Msgr Harrington said he "stands by" his statement.

Vatican roundup

Vatican announces theme for World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly

● Pope Francis has chosen a line from Psalm 71 – "Do not cast me off in my old age" – as the theme for the 2024 celebration of the World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly.

In a note announcing the theme for the day, which will be celebrated July 28, the Vatican said the choice was "meant to call attention to the fact that, sadly, loneliness is the bitter lot in life of many elderly persons, so often the victims of the throwaway culture".

Pope Francis celebrated the first World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly in 2021 and decreed that it be observed each year on the Sunday closest to the feast of Sts Joachim and Anne, Jesus' grandparents.

As the Catholic Church prepares for the Holy Year 2025, Pope Francis has asked Catholics to focus on prayer, which is why he chose the prayer of an elderly person from the Psalms for the theme, the Vatican said in a statement released February 15.

"By cherishing the charisms of grandparents and the elderly, and the contribution they make to the life of the Church, the World Day seeks to support the efforts of every ecclesial community to forge bonds between the generations and to combat loneliness," the statement said.

Pope accepts resignation of cardinal who disappeared for two days

● Pope Francis has accepted the resignation of Cardinal José Luis Lacunza Maestrojuán of David, Panama, two weeks after he had gone missing for 48 hours and was found well but "a bit disoriented".

Archbishop José Domingo Ulloa of Panama said that the cardinal was found "in good health" and was being treated by paramedics after he was found in a town some 25 miles north of his diocese.

His disappearance had provoked a police search and a nationwide call for prayers for the cardinal.

The Vatican announced February 15 that the Pope

accepted the resignation of the cardinal, who will celebrate his 80th birthday February 24.

On the same day, the Vatican announced that Pope Francis had named Franciscan Fr Luis Enrique Saldaña Guerra, provincial minister of the order's Province of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe of Central America and the Caribbean, to be the new bishop of David, a city in western Panama. Cardinal Lacunza had been bishop there since 1999.

Bishop-designate Saldaña, who shares a birthday with Cardinal Lacunza, will turn 58.

Pope Francis to visit prestigious Venice Biennale art exhibition

● Pope Francis will become the first pope to visit the prestigious Venice Biennale art exhibition when he travels to the "city of canals" this spring.

The theme of this year's 60th International Art Exhibition – one of the most important contemporary art events in the world – is on foreigners and marginalised people. It has also generated headlines this year because of what event organisers have described as a special emphasis on "queer" artists, though the Holy Father's visit will focus primarily on the Vatican's exhibition on human rights.

The Vatican announced that the Pope will make the one-day trip to Venice on Sunday, April 28.

The Venice Biennale was founded in 1895. The Biennale takes place every year alternating between the Architecture Biennale and the Art Biennale. The 2024 Art Biennale will open to the public from April 20 to November 24. The theme of this year's art Biennale is "Foreigners Everywhere".

In spite of threats and torment, Navalny never lost the faith



Jonah McKeown

Russian leaders last Friday announced the death of Alexei Navalny, a prominent opposition politician to President Vladimir Putin, in a Siberian prison. Navalny, 47, had been serving a 19-year sentence for alleged extremism and years of criticism of the authoritarian Putin in a harsh penal colony north of the Arctic Circle.

Navalny's political opposition to Putin and to corruption in Russia had garnered attention around the world for years, especially after Navalny chose to return to Russia after the Kremlin allegedly tried to poison him in 2020.

A complex figure

Navalny, a complex figure, ran for the presidency in Russia in 2018, despite a court ruling him ineligible. After Russia detained him in 2021, he continued to speak out from prison, including against Putin's now two-year-old war of aggression in Ukraine. Putin, who has essentially ruled Russia as president for more than two decades, is currently seeking a fifth term in office.

Despite not making faith a central component of his political activism, Navalny has described himself as a Christian and has said that the fact that the Bible provides him guidance has led to "fewer dilemmas" in his life.

Caution

Western leaders and others initially responded cautiously or sceptically to the news of Navalny's death, which came via the official Russian Tass news agency. Navalny's wife, Yulia Navalnaya, said in a news conference that Putin's government is "lying constantly".

“We are a very unhappy country. We're in a vicious circle of unhappiness that we can't escape from”

In a press conference Friday, President Joe Biden said he was "surprised and outraged" at the reports of Navalny's death, adding that he has "no reason to believe" the reports of his death are false.

He praised Navalny's commitment to "calling out Putin's lies", noting that he could have "lived safely in exile" after his poisoning but returned to Russia. Biden called



Russian opposition figure Alexei Navalny delivers a speech in Moscow during a rally to demand the release of jailed protesters on September 29, 2019.

“The fact is that I am a Christian, which usually rather sets me up as an example for constant ridicule in the Anti-Corruption Foundation, because mostly our people are atheists and I was once quite a militant atheist myself”

Navalny's death "yet more proof of Putin's brutality" and called on Congress to pass aid funding for Ukraine. "He was so many things that Putin was not. He was brave, he was principled," Biden said. "God bless Alexei Navalny. His courage will not be forgotten."

In Navalny's closing statement during his 2021 trial – which was replete with pop culture references, as was his style – the opposition leader also spoke about his faith.

"If you want I'll talk to you about God and salvation. I'll turn up the volume of heartbreak to the maximum, so to speak. The fact is that I am a Christian, which usually rather sets me up as an example for constant ridicule in the Anti-Corruption

Foundation, because mostly our people are atheists and I was once quite a militant atheist myself," Navalny said, as reported by the Moscow Helsinki Group, a now-defunct Russian human rights organisation.

I am a believer

"But now I am a believer, and that helps me a lot in my activities, because everything becomes much, much easier. I think about things less. There are fewer dilemmas in my life, because there is a book in which, in general, it is more or less clearly written what action to take in every situation. It's not always easy to follow this book, of course, but I am actually trying. And so, as I said, it's easier for me, probably, than for

many others, to engage in politics."

Navalny went on to quote the Bible, specifically the Beatitude passage from Christ's Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied." "I've always thought that this particular commandment is more or less an instruction to activity," Navalny continued.

"And so, while certainly not really enjoying the place where I am, I have no regrets about coming back, or about what I'm doing. It's fine, because I did the right thing. On the contrary, I feel a real kind of satisfaction. Because at some difficult moment I did as required by the instructions, and did not betray

the commandment."

He added that he believes Russian authorities try to intimidate and isolate people who hold such beliefs. (According to one analysis, religion in Russia is in some ways associated with freedom, perhaps stemming from the historical religious persecution of the atheistic communist regime.)

Unhappy country

"We are a very unhappy country. We're in a vicious circle of unhappiness that we can't escape from. But of course, it would be good to, and I am therefore proposing to change our slogan. It's not enough for Russia to be free, Russia should also be happy. Russia will be happy," he concluded.

Though he has not commented specifically on reports of Navalny's death, Pope Francis has repeatedly condemned the violence of Putin's war in Ukraine and appealed for peace.

i Jonah McKeown is a staff writer and podcast producer for Catholic News Agency.

Letters

Letter of the week

Legislature has failed to honour our Constitution

Dear Editor, In the upcoming referendums we are being asked to delete reference to the 'home' and to hand over to the courts a hot potato, that of redefining the 'family'; as they interpret the phrase "other durable relationships".

The human rights implications of cutting our understanding of family adrift from being founded upon marriage has strangely escaped comment.

Each of our relevant human rights codes have an article which specifically links the family to marriage: The UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, #16; the Charter on Fundamental Rights

of the EU, #9; the European Convention on Human Rights, #12; The European Social Charter, #16. These assert the right of the family to social, legal and economic protection.

In the same way as our capitalist economic system threatens the environment, it is also dismembering our families. Currently home break-up is the major cause of homelessness, while our birth rate has fallen unsustainably, such that we as a people, are no longer replacing ourselves. Redefining the family so that it is cut off from its natural moorings (marriage) is merely

an unwelcome distraction.

Last month's Supreme Court unanimous (7:0) decision in the John O'Meara case, where he was awarded a widower's pension, despite the State's opposition, demonstrates that politicians cannot predict how the Supreme Court will interpret vague phrases. It also shows that the real problem is not the wording of our Constitution, but that the legislature has failed to honour our Constitution's wording.

*Yours etc.,
Gearóid Duffy
Lee Road, Co. Cork.*

'Mind boggling' HSE takeover of St John of Gods

Dear Editor, I have just read that the HSE will be taking over St John of Gods.

It made me cry! It's mind boggling. The HSE has shown themselves to be in a very sorry state with the problems of trolleys in hospital corridors, dealing with waiting lists for mental care of teenagers and long waiting lists for operations for children. Just to mention a few problems. Now, they are taking over St John of Gods. Unimaginable! Totally bonkers.

St John of God Order has provided community services in Ireland since 1892. Great records of providing a successful track record in developing strengthening and improving services for adults and children with intellectual and physical disability and mental health problems.

St John of God devoted his life to alleviating human suffering and comforted the afflicted and dying in Spain in the 1500's.



The pomegranate symbol of the order reminds us of our heritage. The cross is the symbol of Christianity reminds us of Jesus suffering and our call to follow in his footsteps.

The nurses, psychologists, doctors, and staff are second to none and all deserve an Oscar.

I worked in St Johns and also within the HSE for about 40 years in St Raphael's Celbridge, residential care, fund

raising and in Thomas Street Dublin and it was a privilege and a great joy to do so. I was a small cog in a big wheel and felt it was like heaven on earth to work there.

I read too that the HSE may move the St John of God service users from where they live now for maybe 40 years to other facilities away from their 'brothers and sisters' they have grown up with. What will it do to them and their parents and

relatives?

Over the 40 years of happiness joy and such an honour to be associated with St John of God brothers and clients and service users I thank you one and all for your pure dedication to caring for people with special needs.

I hope the HSE know that they are undertaking a very valuable treasure.

*Yours etc.,
Terry Healy Riordan
Kill, Co. Kildare*

Marginalised early Church good example for modern Ireland

Dear Editor, Regarding Steven P. Millies's article 'Catholic mission has to come before the institution' [*The Irish Catholic* – February 1, 2024], in terms of prioritising mission over institution, he says: "Mostly I'm talking about presentation and how we approach the world."

Consequently, and despite granting that "Scripture, dogma, or any infallible propositions of Catholic faith" be left intact, the Catholic product needs to be augmented, enhanced with new features, and presented in a manner making it more attrac-

tive to consumers. He leaves room for the removal of non-infallible propositions. He posits this recipe as the only response to the marginalised state of Catholicism in places like Ireland. But two aspects of the marginalised early Church provide a better example of response to the current social status of marginalised Catholicism.

Firstly, the Faith was actually preached and taught to the early Christian community itself. Secondly, despite intermittent persecution the doctrine-based, virtue enhancing practices of enough Christians

constituted an "approach to the world" different to that posited by Stephen Millies. It generated a witness or presentation that was eventually received as a coherent source of meaning for life which slowly inebriated a significant section of the culture. This same slow process of conversions, devoid of sudden mass conversions is still happening today. It's best to learn from it.

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

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.

Church must invest in lay infrastructure

The Irish Catholic

Over the weekend, Pope Francis announced the dates for the second round of the synod later this year. Bishops, clergy, religious and laity will descend on Rome from October 2 to 27 to consider once more how we can foster a co-responsible Church.

'Co-responsible' is a word that reeks of business-ese, but it points to a truth at the heart of life in the Church: we are members of the body of Christ, each with our own roles, skills and specialties.

If the Church is to succeed in its mission, it will only be through close cooperation between these members, laity and priests and religious.

The synod has laid a particular emphasis on reinvigorating lay involvement, making space for laity to put their skills at the service of the Church.

This means both on the ground in local churches and also at leadership level.

Given their wide involvement in secular life, from their professions to their hobbies, the laity offer a whole host of distinctive skills and experiences to the Church.

Many of them would give their left arm to lend these skills to the Church's mission.

But words don't carry much sway if they are not followed up with action. If we want more lay involvement, the structures must be in place.

In this light, the recent announcement of Veritas' closure is to be greatly lamented.

The loss of 80 jobs is a tragedy for each individual involved first and foremost. It is also a great loss for the wider Church, with an ever-shrinking pool of jobs available to laity.

As Ruadhán Jones points out (page 11), Veritas was a lay-run institution that enabled lay men and women to offer their professional skills to the mission of the Church.

The bishops' now have the task of identifying a replacement – or replacements – to fill the rather

large shoes of their publishing wing, which first opened for business in 1928.

They will need skills in copyediting, translation, graphic design, editing, distribution and a whole host more.

This paper understands that the bishops are yet to finalise any replacement for Veritas and that meetings are ongoing to update staff and discern a way forward.

There is no obvious Catholic body who can take on all of these responsibilities – but there are many Catholics in Ireland who are more than qualified, both professionally and in their commitment to the Church.

The bishops must keep this in mind as they plan for life after Veritas.

There may be a temptation to go to a secular company who offers more on the surface in terms of skills but has no interest in the mission – this temptation has to be resisted.

Historically, Ireland has not been great for encouraging an engaged, educated laity taking ownership of the life of the Church.

But the bishops have a good chance to make good on their word to foster co-responsibility by establishing an infrastructure that would support the involvement of lay professionals.

If we look to the example of the United States or even to Germany, these already have a solid tradition of lay employment at parish and diocesan level.

Youth ministers, secretaries, faith development officers, accountants, parish managers – in many parts of these Western nations, such positions are almost as ubiquitous as the parish priest.

We are in mission territory and can't afford to lose the skills of talented professionals to a secular world that is increasingly hostile to religion.

The synod has sparked renewed conversations about involving laity more fully in the life of the Church. This talk must be followed up with action.

Faith can have a positive impact on our vote

Fr Raphael Gallagher

There will be a lot of opportunities to vote in the coming 12 months. Dates for Constitutional amendments, local elections, European parliament are already set in place. Dáil and Seanad elections are at most a year away.

There are many issues to think through when we vote. One question worth considering at this stage, before we are snowed under with propaganda materials, is the relationship between our practice of the Faith and the voting choices we make.

There is no straightforward answer. There is a group that says it is not even a proper question for a modern society. Religion should be treated as a private matter, not relevant in the public sphere. Examples are given of the harmful influence of institutional religion on public life.

Would it not be better to stop asking questions about the relationship between personal faith and voting decisions? Some politicians might be happy for that to happen.

Complicated

There are probably decent Catholics who would also approve, for different reasons, reasoning that politics in Ireland is complicated enough without bringing up religious faith.

The challenge is thought-provoking. Is being a Catholic only a matter of personal worship for a limited period every Sunday? If our practice of Catholicism is reduced to that, it comes close to saying that faith is an optional extra for a Catholic contribution to society.

We should accept that a mistaken promotion



Srs Martinez Fuentes and Laudelina Martinez Fuente wait in line to cast their votes. Photo: OSV News/Violeta Santos Moura, Reuters

of the Catholic religion is harmful. The greatest harm has perhaps been caused by a powerful institution imposing silence on sinful behavior that should have been exposed.

We should not repeat the damage of a new silence by hiding our convictions on the importance of a life guided by faith.

“Catholics are not necessarily better or more moral than other citizens”

This will involve a healthier understanding of the responsibility of

the church in a modern society. Catholics are not necessarily better or more moral than other citizens.

There are as many sinners within the Church as outside it. What Catholics share with other citizens is more decisive than questions of faith that may divide us.

Implications

There are practical implications to that view. Some Catholics may be quite happy to keep a low profile about their religion, partly out of a sincere sense of guilt about the harm done by the Church. They don't want to provoke even more anger. Better be quiet.

To maintain that faith can have a public role in Irish society is not to start

a campaign for a powerful political institution called 'the Church'. Quite the opposite. A Church that seeks political power is in fact a contradiction of terms.

“Asking questions from a faith perspective is not to downgrade the political process”

Starting with what the Church shares with the world, and keeping that as the focus all the time, is the decisive first step.

The issues that will be important in the coming elections – immigration, housing, health care, political stability on the island – are not specifically Catholic or even religious issues.

When we vote in the elections of the coming year, we will be doing so as citizens of the State. We should be grateful for the comparatively vigorous state of our democratic institutions.

Asking questions from a faith perspective is not to downgrade the political

process. It is an effort to take another assessment of the social and political challenges that we share in common.

The heart of that perspective is to look at political issues consistently from the other person's point of view. The issues that will be important in an election – immigration, housing, health care – are social challenges.

Predetermined

My vote should not be predetermined by my private vested interests. When if I look at these questions from the perspective of an immigrant or a homeless person, I may come to a different decision.

Taking other people's interests into account is not an exclusively religious choice. Most political parties will cover that with policies under the umbrella of what is often called the common good.

What is different in what I am suggesting is that our faith should compel us to consider everyone as a person created in God's image.

That should not be a vague wish.

“It is not sufficiently noticed that religious convictions can be a powerful guarantee of conscience”

Protecting the conscience of every person is the practical consequence of a faith-based view of life. That should have consequences in how I vote.

My own conscience and that of another person are sacred – again, that should not be a pious general wish. It will have practical consequences, for instance, in end-of-life issues that are already at an advanced debate stage.

It is not sufficiently noticed that religious convictions can be a powerful guarantee of conscience. That is an aspect that merits consideration when we are voting, particularly at a time when there is a lot of social pressure to be conformist without necessary critical thinking.

i Raphael Gallagher is a Redemptorist priest based in Dundalk. He taught theology for many years in Rome

“Protecting the conscience of every person is the practical consequence of a faith-based view of life. That should have consequences in how I vote”

Your Faith

The Irish Catholic, February 22, 2024

The art of the apology
Learning to say sorry this Lent

Page 31



Fasting and abstinence: More than laws of the Church



As the penitential season of Lent begins, we Catholics, like Christians everywhere, prepare to commemorate the passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Just a few short weeks ago, we celebrated his birth, and now the Church begins our preparation to join him on his journey to Calvary. The Church scene becomes sombre, more intense, and such terms as contrition, conversion, penance, almsgiving, fasting and abstinence dominate the liturgy.

Benedictine Dom Prosper Gueranger wrote about Lent in *The Liturgical Year* (1887): "Lent, then, is a time consecrated, in a special manner, to penance, and this penance is mainly practiced by fasting. Fasting is an absti-

Fasting and abstinence are part of a long spiritual tradition in the church going back centuries, writes D.D. Emmons

nence, which man voluntarily imposes upon himself, as expiation for sin, and which, during Lent, is practiced in obedience to the general laws of the Church."

Pope Clement XIII in 1759 said that "penance also demands that we satisfy divine justice with fasting, almsgiving and prayer and other works of the spiritual". The purpose of our fast is to not become physically weak or lose weight but to create a hunger,

a spiritual void that only Christ can fill; in fasting from the heart, we express our love of God and acknowledge our sinfulness. Though unworthy, we pray our sacrifices will be acceptable to the one who suffered and gave his life blood for us.

Every Ash Wednesday we hear from the prophet Joel (2:12-14): "Yet even now - oracle of the Lord - return to me with your whole heart, with fasting, weep-

ing and mourning. Rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the Lord, your God." It is not our clothes but our hearts we need to rend in reflecting our sorrow. Our fast is not for man but for God.

Fasting and abstinence are Church-imposed penitential practices that deny us food and drink during certain seasons and on certain days. These acts of self-denial dispose us to free ourselves from worldly distractions, to express our longing for Jesus, to somehow imitate his suffering.

Abstinence traditionally has meant not eating meat and, for centuries but no longer, included meat by-products. Many may recall the calendar hanging in the kitchen that included a fish

symbol on each Friday of the month. Catholics never have been compelled to eat fish on days of abstinence, but rather, to avoid meat. While abstinence refers to the kind or quality of food we eat, fasting refers to the amount or quantity of food consumed. It is contrary to the spirit of abstinence and fasting if we avoid steak but pile our plate high with fish.

In the Old Testament, God told Adam and Eve not to eat (abstain) from the Tree of Knowledge (Gn 2:17). Queen Esther (Est 4:15), in a successful attempt to save the Jews, ordered a three-day fast for herself and her court. The Book of Jonah describes how the people of Nineveh fasted and were saved from God's wrath (3:4-10).



Jesus set the example for our fasting when he went into the desert and fasted for 40 days and 40 nights (Mt 4:1-11). His entire life involved suffering and self-denial. In Mark 2:18-20, Jesus responds to the Pharisees' accusation that his disciples do not fast: "As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day." Once Jesus was not with them, the Apostles did fast and advocated fasting to new Christians as evidenced in the books of Acts and the Epistles.

“Until the 9th Century, fasting meant one meal a day and then only enough food to sustain life”

By the 2nd Century, fasting was integrated into Christian worship. Jews had long fasted on Mondays and Thursdays, but the Christians chose to fast on Wednesdays, because that was the day of Christ's betrayal, and Fridays, the day he was crucified. By the 4th Century, Saturday

had replaced Wednesday as a day of fasting, and over the centuries every-Saturday fasting was dropped.

Fasting before Easter was practiced in those first centuries, but the times and extent varied. Until the 9th Century, fasting meant one meal a day and then only enough food to sustain life. Those keeping a fast often would give the food not eaten to others in need.

Compassion

St John wrote in 1 Jn 3:17, "If someone who has worldly means sees a brother in need and refuses him compassion, how can the love of God remain in him?" The philosopher Aristides, around the year 128, explaining how Christians lived, noted, "And if there is among them a man that is poor or needy ... they fast two or three days that they may supply the needy with their necessary food" (*Apologia*, XV).

Hermes, a writer in the first and second centuries, said, "and having reckoned up the price of the dishes of that day which you intended to have eaten, you will give it to the widow or the orphan".

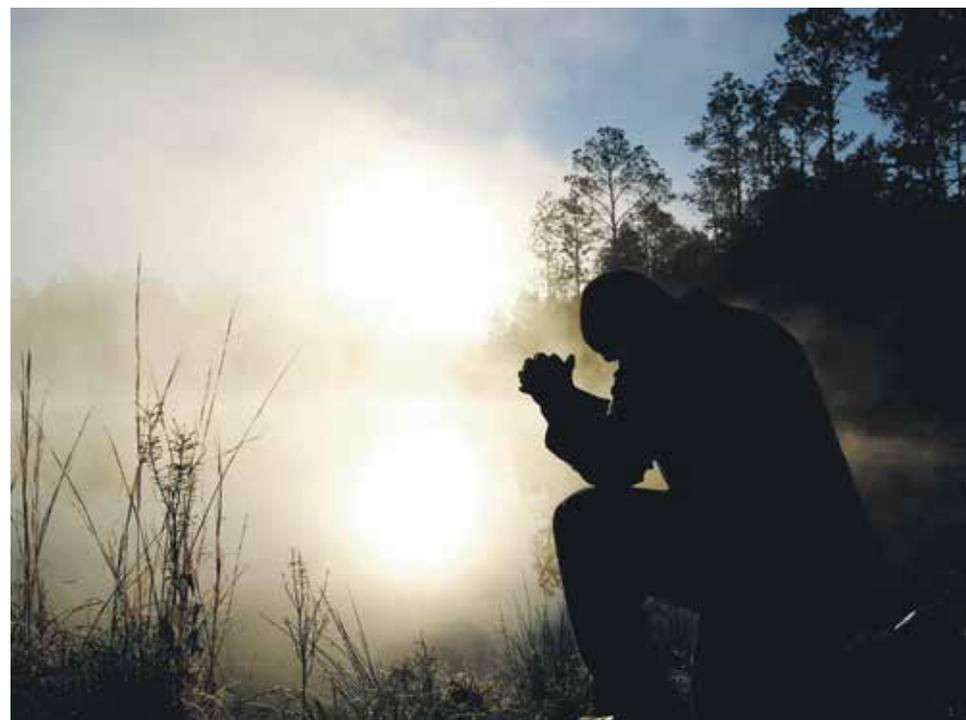
Later, St Augustine said, "What you deprive yourself by fasting, add to your

almsgiving". Today we are often encouraged to calculate the funds not spent for food during Lent and put that amount in the "poor box".

“Abstinence was required on all Fridays, Ash Wednesday, the vigils of the Assumption and Christmas. This all would change”

By the Middle Ages, the number of fast days during the liturgical year had increased and at times included 70 days. Sundays and solemnities have never been days of fast. Through the mid-20th Century, Catholic missals identified fasting on weekdays of Lent, ember days, the vigils of Pentecost, All Saints, Immaculate Conception and Christmas. Abstinence was required on all Fridays, Ash Wednesday, the vigils of the Assumption and Christmas. This all would change.

In 1966, Pope St Paul VI significantly amended the laws of fasting through his apostolic constitution *Paenitemini*, in which he affirmed some practices and gave



certain authority to national conferences of bishops around the world. St Paul VI's changes were incorporated into the 1983 Code of Canon Law.

Required

Abstinence and fasting are required on both Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. On those days, one full meal is allowed along with two other smaller meals.

Catholics bound by the law of abstinence include everyone age 14 and over; the law of fasting includes individuals age 18 through the beginning of their 60th year.

Canon Law, the Catechism, and precepts of the Church explain our fasting obligations. Before Lent, most every Catholic parish emphasises the rules and rewards of fasting and abstinence. A one-hour fast

is always required before receiving Communion.

In addition to Friday abstinence during Lent, every Friday is a day of penance (Canon Law, No. 1250). According to Canon 1253, the conference of bishops in each nation may "substitute other forms of penance ... for abstinence and fast".

D.D. Emmons writes for OSV News from the US.

This Lent, say sorry – and mean it



Dr Greg Popcak

Lent is a time of reparation – a season of sorrow for sins committed and expressions of a sincere desire to reform our lives. But what does it mean to be sorry? What are the components of real remorse?

Whether we are expressing sorrow to God, a spouse, family member or friend, it can be hard to say, “I’m sorry”. It can be even harder to say it well. Sometimes, when people say that they are sorry to us, we can feel like there is something missing. Often, it’s because there is. But what?

As we express our sorrow to God this Lent for the ways that our lives do not reflect his plan for us, it can be important to make sure our ‘I’m sorrys’ have all the components of sincere remorse. Researchers note that good apologies involve three ingredients: empathy, restitution and objective criteria.

Obligation

When people offer a sincere apology rooted not in obligation but genuine remorse, they tend to express a real emotional understanding of how their actions hurt us. ‘I am so sorry for doing that. I never meant to treat you that way. I know how badly you were hurt. Please forgive me.’

The truly remorseful person doesn’t make excuses or tell the person they hurt that they were ‘just kidding,’ or that the wounded party needs to get a thicker skin or a better sense of humour. They understand the impact of their actions and they let you know that they feel your pain.

When we express our sorrow to God this Lent, are we going through the motions of repentance, or are we

“In our relationship with God, how often do we think that the real problem is that he is just asking for entirely too much”



allowing ourselves to express genuine sorrow for the pain God feels when we reject his attempts to love us and make us whole?

“Restitution isn’t about asking people to jump through hoops for the sake of watching them dance”

When people offer a sincere apology, they don’t just ‘say the magic words’. They offer a plan for making things right again. Or, if they don’t know what to do to make it

right, they ask you what you need them to do to heal the hurt their actions caused. They say things like, ‘The next time I feel that angry about something, I’m going to do this instead of that,’ or, ‘I really want to make this right. What can I do to earn your trust again?’

Restitution isn’t about asking people to jump through hoops for the sake of watching them dance. It is about committing to the process of reconciliation – healing the wounds our actions caused.

Confess

When we confess our sins this Lent, have we put some time into how we would handle similar problem situations differently in the future? Hearing the words ‘I absolve you’ is just the beginning. How will we let the grace of that absolution compel us to heal the wounds our actions have caused those we love,

and how can we make sure to avoid those problem behaviours the next time we are tempted to go down a similar path?

“How often do others apologise to us in ways that make us feel strangely ashamed for daring to expect them to be faithful, trustworthy or respectful?”

Truly sorrowful people don’t hide out behind the belief that ‘the real problem’ is that others are expecting too much of them. If we are truly sorry, we recognise that the person we hurt had an objective right to expect more from us.

How often do others apologise to us in ways that make

us feel strangely ashamed for daring to expect them to be faithful, trustworthy or respectful? How often do the apologies others offer sound like, ‘I’m sorry, but don’t you think you’re being a little controlling/sensitive/judgmental/ needy/demanding/unfair?’

The person offering a sincere apology acknowledges that anyone in a similar situation would be reasonable to expect what you are asking of them. ‘You’re absolutely right to expect more of me. I’m really sorry I let you down.’

Relationship

In our relationship with God, how often do we think that the real problem is that he is just asking for entirely too much. Sure, we’re sorry for what we did, but the real problem is that he expects us to be saints. Saints, I tell you! Can you believe it?!? How ridiculous is that?!?

As we conclude Lent, will we continue to pay lip

service to the idea that God wants great things for us, or will we embrace the fact that every day he is calling us into deeper union with him and greater perfection in his grace?

Whether we are expressing remorse to God or others, being sorry isn’t, ultimately, about making ourselves seem pitiful enough or appearing pathetic enough to make the other person feel bad and let us off the hook.

Apologising is about picking up our cross and embracing the hard work that comes with changing our behaviour – not so that we can jump through some spiritual hoop but so that we can participate more effectively in the healing process that allows us to achieve our ultimate destiny: loving union with God.

Dr Greg Popcak is an author and the director of www.CatholicCounselors.com

Elmo and the challenge of Lent



Effie Caldarola

For two or three days in January, a furry red muppet's concern for the well-being of his followers became news, dominating Twitter, now "X", and sparking discussions from National Public Radio to cable news.

“What am I attached to which prevents me from giving myself wholeheartedly to God?”

When the commotion died down, I was left thinking about how Ash Wednesday was very near and maybe this strange little episode had something to say about Lent.

On January 29, Elmo from Sesame Street posted a simple tweet: “Elmo is just checking in. How is everybody doing?”

What followed was a deluge of replies, a lot of jokes, but such a large volume of cries of despair and angst that the official *Sesame Street* account felt compelled to tweet out mental health resources. A lot of people made it plain they were doing very badly.

Who is Elmo?

Elmo has been a staple of *Sesame Street* since the 1980s. My children

grew up with Elmo as a backdrop to childhood. Elmo is - perpetually - three-and-a-half years old, and apparently the ‘and a half’ is important because toddlers like to use that half to make them feel older, sort of the reverse of their grandparents being ‘sixtyish’ for years.

“Prayer? Make it a priority, not something you do when you ‘find’ time”

Elmo is kind and curious, a bit naïve, and, if I had to guess, a favourite in the stuffed toy menagerie. I mean, who wants to cuddle with Oscar the Grouch at bedtime?

It would never occur to me to follow Elmo on Twitter, but it didn't take long for the responses to Elmo to explode in my feed. My kids sent me funny replies, but then I started to notice the sad and troubled ones. Even the White House weighed in, with President Biden's post reading, “We have to be there for each other, offer our help to a neighbour in need, and above all else, ask for help when we need it”.

As the uproar subsided, I continued my annual quest for what to ‘do’ for Lent. We all know the trilogy: fasting, almsgiving, prayer. But those expressions of anguish kept calling me.

Meaning of fasting

“Fasting” may mean, for some, giving up a food item. For me, I like the idea of “attachments” of which St Ignatius of Loyola spoke. What am I attached to which prevents me from giving myself wholeheartedly to God?

Money? Security? My appearance? Selfishness with my time? Gossip? Obsessive scrolling on my phone? There are endless attachments from which we could fast during Lent.

Almsgiving is a little more clearcut. Give more to the poor, sacrificially. If you combine this giving with fasting, all the better. Love those fancy coffee drinks? Love to buy clothes? Give them up and give every dime saved to Catholic Relief Services or Catholic Charities.

Prayer? Make it a priority, not something you do when you ‘find’ time. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “Be silent at the beginning of the day, because God should have the first word ...”

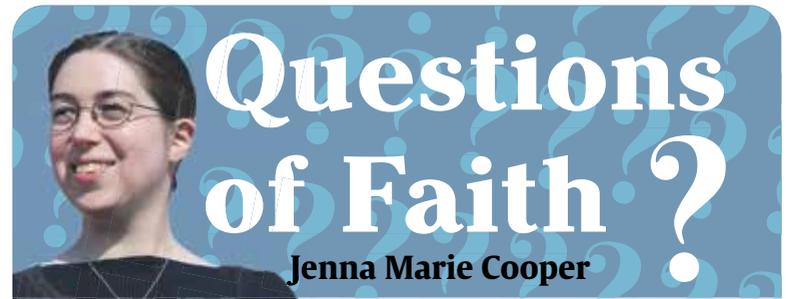
So why Elmo?

So where does Elmo fit in? As I studied my Lenten ‘to dos’, I realised that much of them were inward-looking. Maybe I should also look outward, to the way Jesus led his life amid the crowds, being aware of the needs of others, the need for healing, right up until he gave his very life for me.

Maybe it's my turn to think of someone each day to turn to and say, “Just checking in. How are you doing?” And then, most importantly, listen to the response. People are anxious about war, climate change, ruptures within our political life and within our own families. People have lost faith and lost heart.

There's a broken world out there this Lent. Just ask Elmo.

Effie Caldarola is a wife, mom and grandmother who received her master's degree in pastoral ministry from Seattle University.



Questions of Faith?

Jenna Marie Cooper

Is Communion by intinction permissible and is the devil a being?



Q: Where exactly in the Catechism of the Catholic Church does it say we can receive Communion by intinction? Our parish has started doing this recently, and people love it! But other parishes' priests say this is not 'legal' according to Church doctrine. I have looked in the catechism and cannot find exactly where it says it is OK. Can you help me?

A: The practice of administering Holy Communion by intinction – i.e., where the minister dips the host in the precious blood, which the communicant then receives on the tongue – is certainly ‘legal’ and is an established option for receiving Communion under both kinds.

This is not referenced in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, as the catechism is meant to teach us about the theological aspects of the truths of our faith, as opposed to spelling out the very practical nuts-and-bolts of Catholic life. For more concrete directives, we need to turn to other sources.

One such source is the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM), which is essentially the worldwide ‘instruction book’ for how Mass is to be celebrated. Paragraph 287 of the GIRM tells us how Communion via intinction should be handled: “If Communion from the chalice is carried out by intinction, each communicant, holding a Communion-plate under the mouth, approaches the Priest who holds a vessel with the sacred particles, with a minister standing at his side and holding the chalice. The Priest takes a host, intincts it partly in the chalice and, showing it, says, The Body and Blood of Christ. The communicant replies, Amen, receives the Sacrament in the mouth from the Priest, and then withdraws.”

Clearly, the Church is not going to give us specific liturgical directives for something that is illicit or otherwise not allowed.

Q: Is the devil an actual being, or is he a metaphor for ‘people doing bad,’ and for just general evil in the world? I’ve sometimes heard this last called ‘the demonic’, which I understood to mean just a sort of negative spirit that people put out, or create, by being mean to each other.

A: While there might be contexts in which we might speak of the devil or the demonic in a purely metaphorical or rhetorical sense – such as when we describe some evil but obviously human action as “demonic” or “diabolical” – we as Catholics do believe that the devil or Satan is a real, personal being.

Paragraph 414 of the catechism speaks of the devil in literal terms when it tells us that: “Satan or the devil and the other demons are fallen angels who have freely refused to serve God and his plan”. There are also several places in the Gospels where the devil and demons are described as playing an actual, historical role in the earthly life of Jesus, such as when Satan tempted Jesus in the desert (see Mt 4:1-11 and Lk 4:1-13), or when Jesus cast out demons who called out to him by name (e.g., Lk 4:34).

There is a Catholic Latin maxim that goes: ‘*lex orandi, lex credendi*’, which can be roughly translated as: “what we pray is what we believe”. Our Catholic belief in the existence of literal demons is made very clear in our liturgy and other prayers. The most obvious example is the ritual of major exorcism, which a properly mandated priest-exorcist uses to free those who are really possessed by actual demons. But there are also several ‘minor exorcisms’ used in the sacraments of initiation, where the Church prays for the spiritual protection of those soon to be baptised.

Jenna Marie Cooper is a columnist for OSV News.

After the bloom has left the rose



What is our deepest centre? Normally we take that to mean the deepest part of our heart, the deepest part of our soul, our affective centre, our moral centre, that place inside of us which Thomas Merton called *le pointe vierge*. And that is a good way of imagining it. But there's another.

John of the Cross

The classical mystic John of the Cross saw things differently. For him, the deepest centre of anything is the furthest point attainable by that object's being and power and force of operation and movement. What does he mean by that? In essence, this is what he is saying: The deepest centre of anything, be it a flower or a human being, is the furthest point to which can grow before it dies.

Take a flower for example: It begins as a seed, then grows into a tiny bud that sprouts into a young plant. That plant eventually bursts forth in a beautiful bloom. That bloom lasts for a while and then begins to dry out and wither. Eventually, what was once the substance of a beautiful bloom turns into seeds, and then in its very act of dying, the flower gives off those seeds to leave new life behind.

The Last Moment

Thus, for John of the Cross, the deepest centre for a flower is not its moment of spectacular beauty, its bloom, but its last moment when



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

its bloom has turned to seed and it is able to give off that seed in its very act of dying.

There's a lesson in which goes against how we commonly assess things. When are we the most generative potentially? When do we have the greatest capacity to use our lives to give off the seeds for new life? What is our deepest centre of growth?

Our bloom

Normally, of course, we think of the deepest centre as the bloom, namely, that period or moment in our lives when a combination of good health, physical attractiveness, talent, achievement,

and influence make us someone who is admired and perhaps envied. This is the time in our lives when we look our best and, as they say, are at the peak of our game. This is our bloom! The best we will ever look!

John of the Cross wouldn't denigrate that moment in our lives. Indeed, he would challenge us to be in that moment, to enjoy it, be grateful to God for it, and to try to use the advantages and privileges that come with that to help others. But, he wouldn't say this is the peak moment of our generativity, that this is the moment or period of our lives when we are giving off the most seeds for new life. No,

like a flower that gives off its seeds in its very act of dying, we too are potentially most generative after the bloom has given way to the grey of age and our achievements have given way to a different kind of fruitfulness.

Young woman

Imagine a young woman who is beautiful and talented and becomes a famous movie actor. At the height of her career, she is in full bloom and is given the gaze of admiration. Indeed, she is adulated. Moreover, in her life outside of the movies she may be a generous person, a wonderful wife, a dedicated mother, and a trusted friend. However, that bloom is not her furthest point of growth, her deepest centre, that time in her life when she is giving off the most vis-a-vis generating new life. Instead, when she is an aged grandmother, struggling with health issues, her physical looks diminished, facing the prospect of assisted living and

imminent death that, potentially, like the flower whose bloom has dried and turned to seed, she can give her life away in a manner that helps create new life in a way she couldn't do when she was young, attractive, admired, envied, and in full bloom.

Young man

A similar case might be made for a star male athlete. At the height of his career, winning a championship, becoming a household name, his envied youthful athletic image seen everywhere in ads and on billboards, he is in full bloom; but at that time, he is not optimally generative in terms of his life giving off seeds to bring about new life. That can happen later, in his old age, when his achievements no longer define him, and he, like everyone else, with his hair greying, is facing physical diminishment, marginalisation, and imminent death. It's then, after the bloom has left the rose, that in his dying he can give off seeds to create new life.

We tend to identify a spectacular bloom with powerful generativity. Fair enough, that bloom has its own importance, legitimate purpose, and value. Indeed, one of our challenges is to give that bloom the gaze of admiration without envy. Not easy to do, and something we often don't do well. The bigger challenge however is to learn what we ourselves are called to do after the bloom has left the rose.

“Like a flower that gives off its seeds in its very act of dying, we too are potentially most generative after the bloom has given way to the grey of age”

Harnessing our faith in Jesus to the fullest this Lent



Actors do a live re-enactment of the Stations of the Cross during a mile-long procession in Houston on Good Friday.

Gn 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18
Ps 116:10, 15, 16-17, 18-19
Rom 8:31b-34
Mk 9:2-10

The Sunday Gospel

Jem Sullivan



Lent is a graced time for spiritual transfiguration. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church notes, “the Transfiguration ‘is the sacrament of the second regeneration’: our own Resurrection”. The Gospel account of the Lord’s transfiguration invites reflection on this momentous event in Jesus’ earthly life and our participation in this event.

When Jesus tells his disciples he will suffer greatly, be killed and then raised on the third day, a shadow of doubt marks the

disciples’ act of faith. They must learn to see with eyes of faith what their minds and hearts cannot imagine or understand. Jesus’ transfiguration becomes a mysterious glimpse, a foretaste of the Lord’s future and glorious resurrection.

Transfigured

Jesus took the apostles Peter, James and John to a mountain where he was transfigured before their amazed eyes. Jesus is bathed in brilliant heavenly light while Moses and Elijah appear on either side of his radiant form. A

heavenly voice from the clouds declares Jesus as the Son of God.

Why does Jesus show himself in transfigured form? At his Transfiguration, Jesus sows seeds of hope in the hearts and minds of the disciples. And Jesus is removing the horror of the crucifixion from the disciples’ hearts. To prevent their faith from being understandably

disturbed by the humiliation of his passion, Jesus offers a foretaste of his glorified body.

Radiant

Jesus shone the radiant light of faith, hope and love into the hearts and minds of his disciples. God’s word invites us to the same “life transfigured by the Holy Spirit.” And the graces of the Lenten season invite a

renewal in the new life in Jesus we received at baptism.

Faith in Jesus, the Son of God, opens a life of hope in God’s love and mercy. We are given a new way of seeing the world. After the experience of Jesus’ transfiguration, the disciples gradually begin to see and to understand, with eyes of faith, the saving gift of Jesus’ suffering, death

and resurrection. And they receive the grace to see, in faith, their own participation in his paschal mystery.

Transforms

Faith in Jesus transforms life. Our Lord’s transfiguration transforms the disciples’ hearts and minds. And He desires to transfigure our lives too, if we are open and humbly approach Jesus in faith as we pray, “speak to me, Lord”.

i Jem Sullivan holds a doctorate in religious education and is an associate professor of Catechetics in the School of Theology and Religious Studies at The Catholic University of America in Washington, DC.

“Jesus is removing the horror of the crucifixion from the disciples’ hearts. To prevent their faith from being understandably disturbed by the humiliation of his passion, Jesus offers a foretaste of his glorified body”

TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



'Virtue signalling meaningless husk of an amendment'

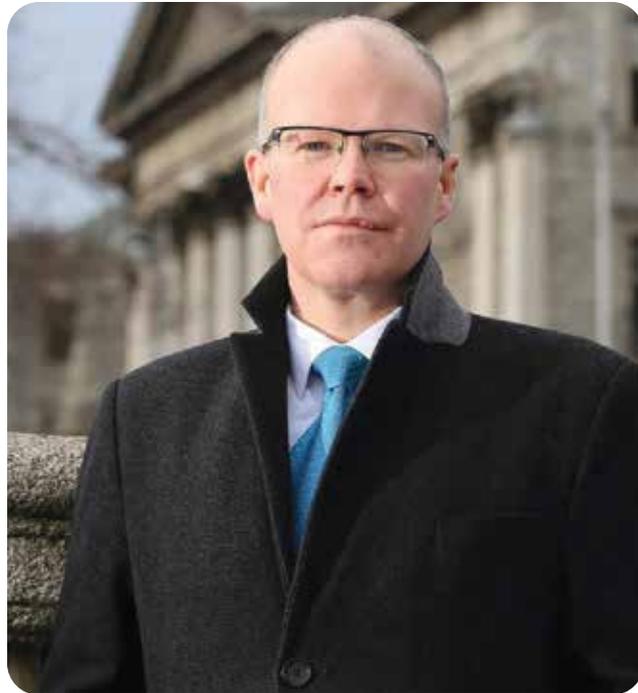
So, the referendum debates go on. The media coverage is increasing, though I'm not so sure it's that enlightening.

Today with Claire Byrne (RTÉ Radio 1, Wednesday) gave plenty of time to it and was well balanced, though it became overly fractious. Minister Thomas Byrne struggled to define 'durable relationships'. He said it would be "other relationships that will be recognised as founding the family", whatever that means.

He added that it would comprise other relationships already recognised in Irish law, such as co-habitation, single parent families and "and the wide variety of relationships in Irish society" – rather vague I thought.

As Peadar Tóibín TD said later, the Government may want to keep the definition "mobile". You can guess why. Deputy Tóibín referenced the "sloppy language" in the proposed amendments, with implications for taxation, social welfare and succession.

He criticised the Government for not engaging in pre-legislative scrutiny, for refusing amendments in the Seanad, and for not acceding to Senator Michael McDowell's request to see the advice and discussions in Government on the implications of the wording. He referenced the "virtue signalling meaningless husk of an amendment".



Aontú leader Peadar Tóibín has described the March 8 referenda as meaningless.

Orla O'Connor of the National Women's Council claimed the existing wording excluded thousands, eg families not based on marriage, and she believed "absolutely" that the proposed changes really did include them. Brenda Power, advocating a NoNo vote was concerned about how 'durable relationships' would be defined, reckoning it would have to be a romantic context, thus excluding single parents not in such a relationship.

Minister Byrne raised

the temperature for some strange reason by criticising "the same voices" who opposed referenda every time and who introduced "red herrings". He accused journalist Brenda Power of not supporting recent referendum votes, whereupon she insisted she did.

That really got her goat: "how dare you come in here so ill-informed!" She said this was an example of the misinformation coming from the Yes side – labelling the No voters as "right wing conserv-

ative God-botherers"!

Sheepishly Minister Byrne accepted her word. But he didn't help his case by saying that Irish people won't countenance waking up after a referendum No vote and seeing headlines around the world saying we'd kept the outdated language in the Constitution.

Actually, I think they're finding it hard enough to drum up referendum interest in this country, never mind abroad. Presenter Claire Byrne asked an incisive question: if the current wording has delivered nothing, so why would new wording deliver anything?

I was reminded of this on **The Tonight Show** (Virgin Media One, Wednesday) when presenter Ciara Doherty ably quizzed Minister Roderrick O'Gorman. Despite his concerns about 'misinformation' and 'disinformation' I'm not so sure how reliable the information was in his own contribution.

He seemed to think that to add 'shall strive' (to do more for families and carers) was a big improvement, conferring "obligations" on the State. At the moment, he said, we have "nothing". Actually, the current wording says that the state "shall ... endeavour". Hardly 'nothing', and surely just as effective (or ineffective) as 'strive'.

The Minister might also have a word with his colleague Minister Catherine Martin. She had tweeted that

PICK OF THE WEEK

I AM FIRE

EWTN Sunday February 25, 9pm

He was a gambler, into heavy metal and high stakes trading in the stock market. Learn how Fr Henry heard God's call and left everything to follow him.

DANA, THE ORIGINAL DERRY GIRL

BBC One (NI) Monday February 26, 10.40pm

In 1970, Dana won the Eurovision Song Contest. It was a moment that changed her life. This is an emotional and honest look back at the incredible story of what happened next.

THREE LITTLE BIRDS

RTÉ One Wednesday February 28, 11.35pm

Drama series about three strong women from Jamaica who meet a variety of challenges in 1950's Britain. Funny and moving adult drama (in a good sense!). Religion treated positively.

the Constitution says a woman's place is in the home. On **It Says in the Papers** (RTÉ Radio 1, Sunday) a report from The Mail newspaper was referenced - it reported that Electoral Commission Chair Judge Marie Baker had said that "the Minister is wrong".

Another presenter that did well was on **Ayesha Hazarika** (Times Radio, Saturday). Prompted by a UK report into the increase in antisemitism she asked to what extent one could be critical of the Israeli Government without being antisemitic.

Dave Rich of the Community and Security Trust had expected an increase after the October 7 Hamas attack, though I'd say it was more to do with Israel's ongoing and

disproportionate attacks on Gaza. Apart from that I think he was very much on the ball.

He didn't have a problem with that day's pro-Palestine protests in London – that was normal politics – but targeting Jews as a race, or individual Jews, was wrong. For example, protesting outside synagogues on a Saturday morning when they were at prayer, or abusing them in the street. One shouldn't assume that any race was a homogeneous group with all the same ideas and sympathies.

It struck me that for Christians to be antisemitic is particularly offensive seeing as how Jesus, Mary and the apostles were Jewish.

Film

Aubrey Malone



Enduring appeal of reggae star captured in biopic

Bob Dylan's career ran chronologically alongside that of another iconic singer with the same Christian name. Bob Marley is less well known to most people than Dylan but *Bob Marley: One Love* (12A), a biographical drama of the Jamaican singer-songwriter, may change that.

The casting of Kingsley Ben-Adir in the title role received the blessing of Marley's widow Rita. It isn't hard to see why. As well as resembling the reggae legend physically he replicates his speaking voice and also sings in some parts of the film.

It isn't Ben-Adir's first time appearing as a real person. He played Barack Obama in *The Comey Rule* and was Malcolm

X in *One Night in Miami* in 2021. That film, like this one, was directed by Reinaldo Marcus Green. Green propelled Will Smith to an Oscar for *King Richard* in 2021.

Lashana Lynch is equally convincing as Rita. Marley married her in 1966. He also converted from Catholicism, the religion of his parents, to Rastafari that year.

From slum origins he shot to fame with his group The Wailers. As well as being a singer he was an activist for the underprivileged. It was this that resulted in both he and Rita being shot in 1976 in a hate crime. Thankfully neither injury was serious. Marley even performed a concert on the night of the shooting.

The film gets its title from



Kingsley Ben-Adir as Bob Marley in *Bob Marley: One Love* biopic. Photo: Paramount.

his single 'One Love'. His 'One Love Peace Concert' came to be known as 'The Third World Woodstock'. Profits went towards helping to house disenfranchised residents of

West Kingston in Jamaica.

Humanitarian concerns were always high on his list of priorities. That's why he's still championed more than four decades after his passing. And

why tunes like 'Love is My Compass' and 'Redemption Song' continue to inspire his legion of fans the world over. "Reggae," he pronounced, "is people music."

He succumbed to toe melanoma in 1977. Amputation was advised but it went against his religious beliefs. A verse in Leviticus states, "Thou shalt not make baldness upon the head nor make any cuttings in the flesh."

The former part of the verse resulted in his famous dreadlocks; the latter one caused him to refuse medical treatment that could have saved his life. The cancer spread in subsequent years, leading to his death in 1981.

By then he'd made many attempts to have himself

treated with alternative medicine. He was only 36, the same year as another icon who died prematurely – Marilyn Monroe.

One Love will enhance Marley's legacy. He made reggae mainstream and also popularised Rastafarianism. The late Sinéad O'Connor, to name but one fan, was a particular devotee.

Should Catholics be concerned about the rise of alternative religions in this country or accepting of the fact that spirituality is 'a broad church'? Maybe those who remain in the faith in which they were raised, despite (or because of?) the numbers being smaller will be stronger as a result.

BookReviews

Peter Costello



Bringing the Word to people, not only in Africa but here at home

My Last Book,
by Robert Nash SJ
(Glendale Press, widely
available on the internet)

J. Anthony Gaughan

Robert Nash, SJ (1902-89) was a popular and well-known spiritual writer, here in Ireland, a man with an international reputation in the decades before Vatican II.

Apart from publishing numerous books, he spent his life conducting retreats for religious and leading parish missions.

This, his last book, is an excellent summary of his Ignatian Spirituality with its emphasis on total commitment. It is a combination of autobiographical reflections and advice on prayer. It is a book which many will like to read in this Ignatian Year.

Impressed

In this final book Fr Nash also describes a number of persons who impressed

him greatly. Among them was Eamon Murphy, whom he recalled as follows; "A very pleasing picture moved before my imagination. I saw again the day of our first meeting when you were a clerical student soon to be raised to the priesthood as a member of the Society of African Missions (SMA).

“The model of St Francis Xavier would have been held up to the youth of Ireland by Fr Nash in his writings”

“You believed your vocation would be to go out to that difficult mission field and spend your whole life there working for the salvation of souls. A noble ideal but we both know now at this stage that things did

not turn out just like that.”

The model of St Francis Xavier would have been held up to the youth of Ireland by Fr Nash in his writings.

Fr Edward (Eamon) Murphy, so admired by Fr Nash, was born in Carrickmacross, Co. Monaghan on April 17, 1910. He was educated at the local St Patrick's Academy and the Marists' St Mary's College in Dundalk.

After spending some time as a member of the Marist Congregation he decided to be an African Missionary and joined the Society of African Missions. He was ordained in 1936 and set out for his mission in the Vicariate of Benin in South-West Nigeria in the following year.

Outbreak

He arrived in the midst of an outbreak of yellow fever. On becoming ill, he was inoculated for his condition, but died soon afterwards. He was just six weeks into the mission. A similar fate befell two of his young colleagues – Anthony Dwyer and John Marren – in the mission station at Jos.

The dedication and heroism of Fr Murphy and his colleagues was typical of those who were part of the remarkable European Missionary Movement of the 19th and first half of the 20th Century.

Thousands of young men and women travelled as brothers, sisters, priests and lay-missionaries to the countries of Africa, Asia and beyond, where in difficult physical conditions and dangerous environments they spent their lives sharing the Gospel with and improving the lot of the peoples of those lands.

The flourishing Churches in many of the countries of Africa and Asia to-day are the result of their extraor-



Fr Eamon Murphy SMA

“You believed your vocation would be to go out to that difficult mission field and spend your whole life there working for the salvation of souls. A noble ideal but we both know now at this stage that things did not turn out just like that”



Fr Eamon Murphy's grave on the grounds of St Theresa's Seminary, Oke Are, Ibadan, Nigeria

“There will be challenges and difficulties associated with these arrangements but this did not deflect Irish priests helping to staff dioceses across the English-speaking world for more than 100 years”

dinarily generous commitment. In stark contrast is the state of the Catholic Churches today across the deeply secularised countries of western Europe, including Ireland.

Struggling

In these countries the Church is struggling with a decline in vocations to the priesthood and religious

life which is little short of catastrophic.

“These Churches now owe a debt of honour to come to the assistance of the struggling Churches in Europe”

The abundance of vocations to the priesthood and religious life has been a feature of the flourishing Churches in Africa and Asia for some generations. These Churches now owe a debt of honour to come to the assistance of the struggling Churches in Europe.

As everyone is aware, to leave parishes without priests and Mass is not an option.

Thus, as a matter of urgency, priests who are surplus to requirement in dioceses and religious orders in Africa and Asia should be transferred to where the need of their ministry is greatest. Steps have already been taken successfully to this end but the process could and should be considerably improved to achieve better results.

There will be challenges and difficulties associated with these arrangements but this did not deflect Irish priests helping to staff dioceses across the English-speaking world for more than 100 years.

It should also be remembered that the most recurring theme in the Church has been priests and missionaries from one part of the world evangelising in other parts of it just like Fr Eamon Murphy and his colleagues.

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.

On retreat with Pope Francis



Austen Ivereigh at a recent encounter with Pope Francis

First Belong to God: On Retreat with Pope, created by Austen Ivereigh, with a foreword by Pope Francis (Messenger Publications, €17.50)

Peter Costello

One would have thought that every possible literary item from the present pope's early years would have been brought to our notice. But this seems not to be the case, for here is a book, brought to us from those days in Argentina which will arouse great interest.

How it came to be written needs a little explanation. Ivereigh points out that the life of Pope Francis falls into three distinct periods: his time as a Jesuit, his time as the Archbishop, then Cardinal Archbishop of Buenos Aires, and last the time after his election to the Papacy.

In those early years he had a popular reputation as a retreat director. The material mainly utilised by Ivereigh in the creation of this book are the largely unpublished retreat notes from his Jesuit period, but they are strongly supplemented by references to more recent documents and allocutions, which express the Pope's concern with ecology and the development of synodality.

Traditional

In layout, the creator follows the plan of the traditional eight day Ignatian retreat. This provides the framework for the text, but these pages are supplemented by points for reflection, sets of spiritual exercises, a paragraph pointing to contemplation, discernment and

proposals.

These chapters are supported, however, by a user's guide, an overview of the retreat as a whole detailing the themes, sections, references to the original exercise of Ignatius, and relevant texts from scripture and the Pope's own teachings.

But that is not all: there is a coda which stresses, on leaving the retreat, what we can carry away into our daily lives, experiences that will indeed change, even transform, the retreatant.

“Many people are distressed at times by the treatment the Pope receives, not just from his critics but from the press, seeking always to arouse conflict and controversy”

Taking an eight day Ignatian retreat will not be possible for everyone. But in the text this is contrasted with those healing weekends or retreats which are now so popular. They lay emphasis on self, but as is clearly underlined throughout the book Jorge Bergoglio, and by extension Ivereigh, are concerned not with self but with a relationship with God as a transformative experience.

Each reader will be struck by different parts of the book. There are two other books referred to through the book: one is Robert Hugh Benson's *Lord of the World* (1907) – one of the Catholic classics which can be obtained from the Cluny press, as mentioned last week.

Benson is a well known writer, long popular. But also much admired by the Pope, so much so that he constantly gives away copies, is a narrative of a migrant into Europe, a text for our times, entitled *Little Brother: An Odyssey to Europe* by Ibrahima Balde (London: Scribe, £12.99). On the recommendation of the Pope this certainly seems well worth reading.

Many people are distressed at times by the treatment the Pope receives, not just from his critics but from the press, seeking always to arouse conflict and controversy.

Responses

The Pope's responses, or lack of them, are often commented upon. But there is a telling little aside in the book under the discussion of fraternity, concerning Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò back in 2018. Francis, on a plane back to Rome, after the 'scandal' broke, suggests that the reporters follow their own vocation and investigate the matter for themselves.

So they did and quickly exposed the misinformation and indeed venom on the part of some involved in the uncharitable accusations. Sometimes silence can speak louder than words.

And these words of the Pope from *Querida Amazonia*, where Pope Francis explains that “conflict is overcome at a higher level, where each group can join the others in a new reality, while remaining faithful to itself”: wise words the world needs still to hear.

This is an amazingly rich book, which everyone, both believers or doubtful, can benefit from reading with patience and pondering with care.

Making Irish bricks, building Irish communities

Brickmaking in Ireland: a Gazetteer, by Susan Roundtree (Wordwell, €40.00 / £35.00)

Peter Costello

They say (and rightly) that all history is at heart local history. In the past people in Ireland did not think first of 'national identity' at all. Asked where they were from they would begin with the townland on which they resided, where indeed they may have been born, followed by the barony and so on up to county level: our modern post codes are not in the same rank at all. They may determine a location, but not the place, so to speak.

Brick making, to which author Susan Roundtree has devoted many years of assiduous and toilsome research, is a case very much in point. Brick making was often a town land trade.

Today when so many buildings are made of poured concrete – one of the most un-green materials in the world – which look and are the same from Killorglin to Kinshasa, but in the past, that is down to the 1950s, across Ireland most buildings, when not made of local stone, were made of local bricks, nothing imported.

One of my early memories is being taken by my father, who was a consulting engineer, much involved in new buildings, to visit a disused bricks factory. It was an amazing place which has haunted me ever since: an abandoned factory still with the furnaces in place, still with brick being processed, piled around inside and out, as the workers would be back in an hour or so from their dinner break. But it was a break that never ended.

Informative

I now discover from these highly informative pages that this was the Dolphin's Barn, Brick and Tiles Company's works out on the Crumlin Road. The firm ceased operations in the early 1940s, and was dissolved in 1948. As my visit must have been in the early 1950s that seems right to date my memory.

The author gives a long list of the notable buildings in Dublin which were built using Dolphin's Barn Bricks. Notably the modern Church of Ireland parish church, St Mary's, on Crumlin Road, a wonderful creation, simple, elegant, yet expressing a sense of permanence.

It was completed in 1942, and must have been one of the last projects on the company



St Mary's Crumlin, Church of Ireland, soundly built of local brick.



Newman University Church, Dublin, a splendid use of polychrome brick.

books. But their bricks were also used in the O'Connell's schools in North Richmond Street and the once-admired Players Wills cigarette factory.

But escaping from Dublin, Susan Roundtree describes brick making all over the country, though her maps show that the majority of factories were located in Leinster and Ulster rather than in Munster and Connacht. But the post famine population has shifted eastwards and that was where the bricks were needed.

I recall my father explaining to me, as I trailed around building sites with him as an eight-year old, that bricks had to be used carefully. They would come on site as single loads, often from a single firing in the factory. But once on site, the bricks from different firings had to be mixed to achieve that smooth but variegated surface that is such a delight in older buildings.

There is a lot to learn about bricks and brick making and this is the place to begin.

But it will be seen on going around the country, and indeed in the lovely photographs in this book, just how

localised building practice in Ireland once was. I was reminded of the drawings and plans in Eysyth Evans' *Irish Heritage*, showing the numerous local variations of the simple Irish cottage.

Taste

The Church seems not to have cared for brick as a church material – too familiar, too domestic perhaps for the taste of the bishops. An exception is the University Church on St Stephen's Green in Dublin, with its polychrome facade; but then St John Henry Newman, its initiator, was never really in step with the Irish hierarchy.

But when one sees what can be done with modern brick as at the Medial School at Limerick University, or the Cape Cross Centre at Kildangan Stud, one can only regret their lack of creative initiative.

On the other hand Irish brick makers have given us so many fine buildings, great and small, across all the 60,000 townlands of Ireland, celebrating the merits of all things local.

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Ireland

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“May God enrich with every blessing all those who recommend frequent Communion to little boys and girls proposing Nellie as their model”

– Pope St Pius X, June 4, 1912

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PROFOUND MESSAGE – Ponder 20th January profound message concerning the official church of Rome. See www.revelacionesmarianas.com/english.

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(Legion of Mary Envoy 1953-1959)



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Celebrant and Homilist - Fr Tony O'Shaughnessy, PP Crumlin

Classifieds: 01 687 4028

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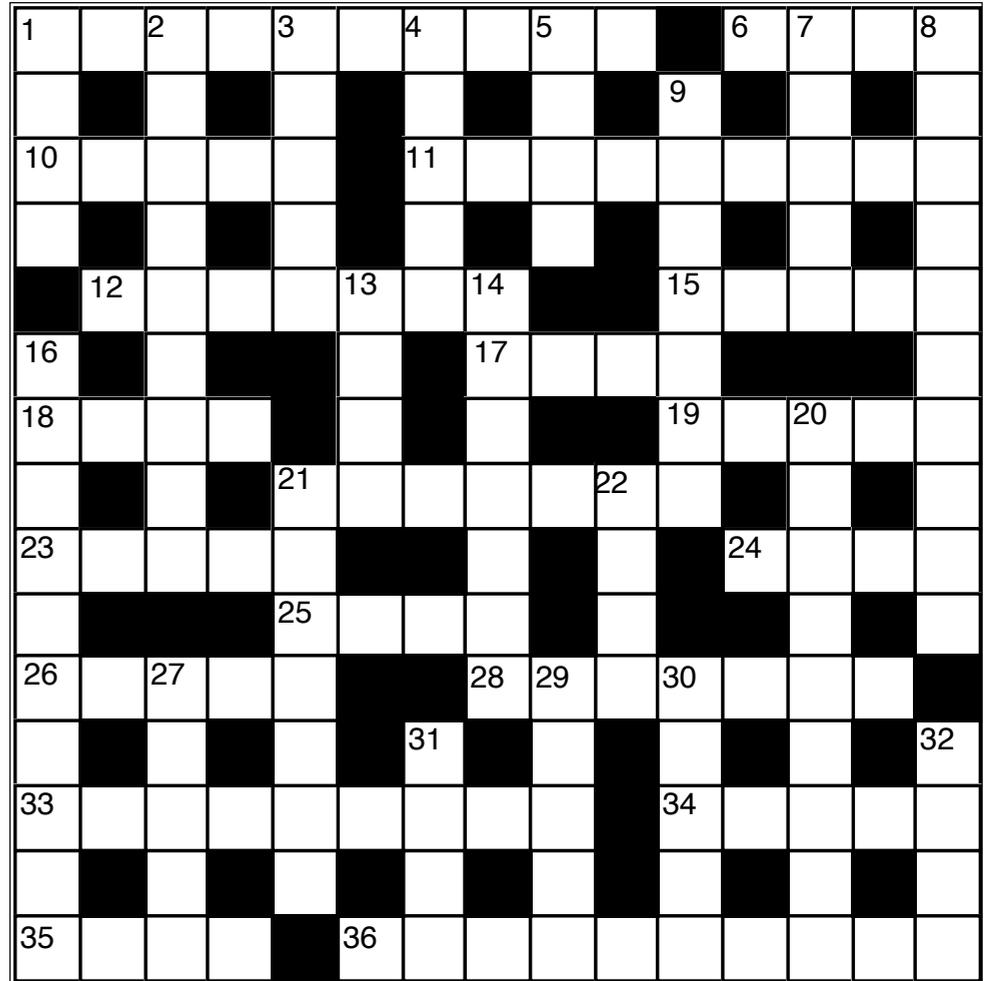
Leisure time

Crossword

Gordius 651

Across

- 1 Slang for a completely crazy person (6,4)
- 6 Ballpoint pen (4)
- 10 The colour of the middle traffic light (5)
- 11 An upward move in one's career (9)
- 12 Costume drama (7)
- 15 'Knight of the road' (5)
- 17 Operatic song (4)
- 18 A brief attack (4)
- 19 Subvention (5)
- 21 Slow, accidental loss of liquid (7)
- 23 One from Stockholm or Malmo, perhaps (5)
- 24 Scrutinise (4)
- 25 Slightly open (4)
- 26 Of poorest quality (5)
- 28 Term of endearment (7)
- 33 Breed of hunting dog (3,6)
- 34 Gullible (5)
- 35 Certain (4)
- 36 Prehistoric monument in Wiltshire (10)



Down

- 1 Ursine creature (4)
- 2 Undersea vessel (9)
- 3 Spooky (5)
- 4 Chicken bred for roasting (5)
- 5 Presently (4)
- 7 Mediterranean

island, popular with holidaymakers (5)
 8 All-powerful (10)
 9 Kidnap victim (7)
 13 Trusted assistant (4)
 14 Drinking-vessel (7)
 16 Puzzles such as this one (10)

20 Jesus' journey to Heaven, forty days after Easter (9)
 21 Tanned animal-skin (7)
 22 Select the correct one to help you drive the car more efficiently (4)

27 One on horseback (5)
 29 Protection worn in the kitchen (5)
 30 Midday meal (5)
 31 Let it stand - used to nullify a correction (4)
 32 In this place (4)

SOLUTIONS, FEBRUARY 15

GORDIUS No. 650

- Across** - 1 Chapter and verse 6 Shah 10 Motel 11 Principal 12 Grenade 15 Rodeo 17 Girl 18 Room 19 Ebbled 21 Whatnot 23 Finch 24 Blur 25 Ills 26 Reads 28 Trellis 33 Barcelona 35 Eels 36 Fertiliser
- Down** - 1 Camp 2 Afternoon 3 Talon 4 Rapid 5 Nail 7 Hoped 8 Holy Orders 9 Scarlet 13 Arch 14 Egotist 16 Preferable 20 Billiards 21 Whisper 22 Ooze 27 April 29 React 30 Level 31 Love 32 Beer

Sudoku Corner

520

Easy

4				7	6		9
6			4	5			
			9			3	5
	3	8					6
	2	5			3	1	
9					7	2	
3	6				5		
				3	6		2
8		4	1				3

Hard

6					9			8
	7	1			3		5	
		2		5		7	4	
5	2							
		9				3		
							1	7
	3	5		8		2		
	9		1			5	8	
8			2					1

Last week's Easy 519

5	2	8	1	3	4	6	9	7
3	1	9	8	6	7	5	2	4
4	7	6	9	5	2	3	8	1
1	9	3	4	7	5	8	6	2
7	5	4	2	8	6	1	3	9
8	6	2	3	9	1	7	4	5
9	3	1	7	4	8	2	5	6
6	8	7	5	2	9	4	1	3
2	4	5	6	1	3	9	7	8

Last week's Hard 519

1	4	8	3	5	9	7	6	2
9	2	3	4	7	6	1	8	5
6	5	7	2	1	8	9	3	4
5	9	4	8	6	1	2	7	3
8	1	2	7	9	3	5	4	6
3	7	6	5	2	4	8	9	1
2	3	5	9	4	7	6	1	8
4	6	9	1	8	2	3	5	7
7	8	1	6	3	5	4	2	9

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Trócaire

It's easy to get started, and we'll help you every step of the way. Call Grace Kelly on 01 629 3333, email grace.kelly@trocaire.org or write to me at Trócaire, Maynooth, Co Kildare.

One day, parents and their children will tell the story of how your legacy of love changed their lives. Thank you for considering a gift to Trócaire in your Will.

The Gift Of A Lifetime

Be there for others after you're gone.

A gift in your will to Irish Hospice Foundation is a meaningful way to help ensure no-one faces death or bereavement without the care and support they need.

Email Anna Sadlier at anna.sadlier@hospicefoundation.ie or call 01 679 3188



www.hospicefoundation.ie



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Fr Martin Delaney

Notebook

Poorly proclaimed readings lose richness of God's word

Many of you will remember the name of Eamon Andrews. He was an Irish broadcaster who became very successful in Britain and was perhaps best known as the first presenter of *This is Your Life*. Eamon was also an active member of his parish community.



Preparation

I recently came across a response he gave to his local parish priest who had sent an altar server around to Eamon's house on a Saturday evening asking him to 'do the readings' at Mass the following morning. Eamon replied, "The Word of God, as far as I'm concerned is something which is absolutely precious. It means an awful lot to me. You have asked me to come along tomorrow to go out and read something I have never seen before. If I were doing a television programme, I would spend a whole week preparing it. I will not go out there just to read in front of people without putting a lot of preparation into it, without having it explained to me. I want to know what it is about. I want to know what the people are to get out of it. I want to pray about it."

When I read that it stopped me in my tracks. I know I may insult

and upset a few people by saying this but in my experience the quality of reading or proclaiming the Word of God in many Irish churches is pretty dismal. If there is one area of ministry where we as priests must beat our breasts in repentance it must be the selection and preparation of lay-readers or lectors.

Quality

I think we allowed the principle of lay-participation to take all precedence over the quality of reading or proclamation of the Word of God. The end result is that in many weekend celebrations the message of the readings is lost or at least diminished by the poor quality of reading.

We can be so grateful to get a few volunteers to have the courage to stand up and 'do the readings' that we forget about what the end result will be. We are often reluctant to suggest that the

readers might attend a practice or worse, a course being put on by the diocese. Readers who have been doing this for years can feel insulted to be asked to take a refresher course.

In many ways we are losing out on the incredible richness of the scriptures when the reading is poorly proclaimed.

When it comes to weddings and funerals the situation can get even worse because the family member or friend asked to read has no experience at all. I have known people to be handed the reading at a wedding or a funeral as they are on their way up to the ambo. Most people will pay

significant amounts of money to have a good singer or musician to add a sense of celebration or solemnity to their particular family occasion but pay very little attention to how the message of the scriptures is chosen or proclaimed.

I'm sorry if this is sounding like a bit of a rant and I realise some may feel I'm making a big thing out of nothing. However, something tells me that if we are going to have any chance of renewing or strengthening our faith communities it will have to involve paying greater attention to the Word of God and how it is communicated in the liturgy.

Three insights from Pope Francis on The Word of God

- **Universal call to conversion:** The Word of God is for everyone, inviting us to conversion. Just as Jesus called his first disciples and spread the good news of God's boundless love, we too are called to be heralds of this message. Jesus reaches out to all, emphasising that God's mercy is available to everyone.

- **Priority of proclamation:** The Word of God should be a main priority for believers. Like Jesus, we must put the Word at the centre of our lives, enlarge our boundaries, and open ourselves to people. Our preaching should have an expansive heart, welcoming all, and never closing off from anyone.

- **Life-transforming power:** The Word of God challenges us to conversion. It cannot leave us unchanged; it enlivens our hearts, purifies us from hypocrisy, and fills us with hope. It is a dynamic force in history, shaping lives through events, words, and actions.

Food for the hungry!

An old nun who was living in a convent next to a construction site noticed the coarse language of the workers and decided to spend some time with them to correct their ways. She decided she would take her lunch; sit with the workers; and talk with them. She put her sandwich in a brown bag and walked over to the spot where the men were eating. Sporting a big smile, she walked up to the group and asked: "And do you men know Jesus Christ?" They shook their heads and looked at each other... very confused. One of the workers looked up into the steelworks and yelled out, "Anybody up there know Jesus Christ?" One of the steelworkers yelled down, "Why?"

The worker yelled back, "Cause his mother's here with his lunch."



A bishop in southern India looks to The Little Way Association for vital aid for many suffering from flooding

Bishop Antonsamy of Palayamkottai in south-east India has written to The Little Way Association in the aftermath of severe floods which have ravaged parts of Tamil Nadu including his diocese. He says "Many groups of people, including expectant mothers, children, the disabled, aged and sick have been left in a state of acute distress. Many have lost their employment and daily wages, significantly affecting their food security and health. Households have been particularly badly-hit, losing essential items such as cooking vessels, clothing, livestock, and more.

We need your help to provide food supplies, protective clothing, blankets, and nutritional supplements

"These people are struggling to meet their basic needs. I reach out to you, on behalf of all our people, to request your compassionate response to my appeal for funds to be used for food supplies, protective clothing, blankets, and nutritional supplements. Our Social Service Society will implement the relief work and are well-equipped to bring relief to those most in need.

Please do help us to aid the recovery of the affected families and individuals, helping them to rebuild their lives.

"Your generosity, dear Little Way donors, will undoubtedly contribute to the alleviating of suffering and the restoration of hope in the affected communities. May God bless you."

Every euro you send will be forwarded without deduction and gratefully received.



Sadly, the mother of these three children has lost her husband. Her home has been severely damaged in the flood, leaving her in a dire situation.



"I rejoice to be little, because only children and those who are like them will be admitted to the heavenly banquet."
- St Therese

You can help repair a Mission Chapel

The Little Way Association has a long history of providing humble places of worship for far-flung parishes in mission countries. Nature can take its toll on these simple buildings, and we receive requests from priests for help with repairs.

We humbly ask that you allocate some of your kind giving to our chapels fund. By ensuring that these small but dignified churches are in good repair, you help to make possible the offering of Holy Mass in needy Catholic communities.

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We like to send a minimum stipend of €6.50 or more for each mass

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www.littlewayassociation.com

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- €..... **MISSION CHAPELS**
- €..... **WELLS AND CLEAN WATER**
- €..... **MASSES** (please state no.)
We ask for a minimum of €6.50 or more for each Mass
- €..... **LITTLEWAY ADMIN EXPENSES**

Please tick if you would like an acknowledgement

Name (Rev. Mr. Mrs. Miss)

(Block letters please)

Address

To donate online go to
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DONATIONS FOR THE MISSIONS ARE SENT WITHOUT DEDUCTION FOR ANY EXPENSES.