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Four Archbishops called to Vatican More Irish dioceses set to amalgamate

Exclusive
Garry O'Sullivan

Ireland's four archbishops are scheduled to fly to Rome this week for meetings with the Dicastery for Bishops to discuss Vatican plans to amalgamate more Irish dioceses.

Bishops have come under increased pressure from the papal nuncio Archbishop Luis Mariano Montemayor to move faster on diocesan mergers. Last year the Bishop of Elphin was appointed Apostolic Administrator of Achonry with a view to an eventual merging of both dioceses and this month was appointed Bishop of Achonry as well as continuing as Bishop of Elphin.

However plans by the Nuncio to amalgamate the dioceses of Raphoe and Derry came unstuck recently when

the bishop of Derry Donal McKeown flew to Rome to tell the Dicastery for Bishops that the time wasn't right for such a merger.

This reflects an unease among some of the Irish bishops at the pace of change being sought by the Vatican, with some complaining that more consultation is needed.

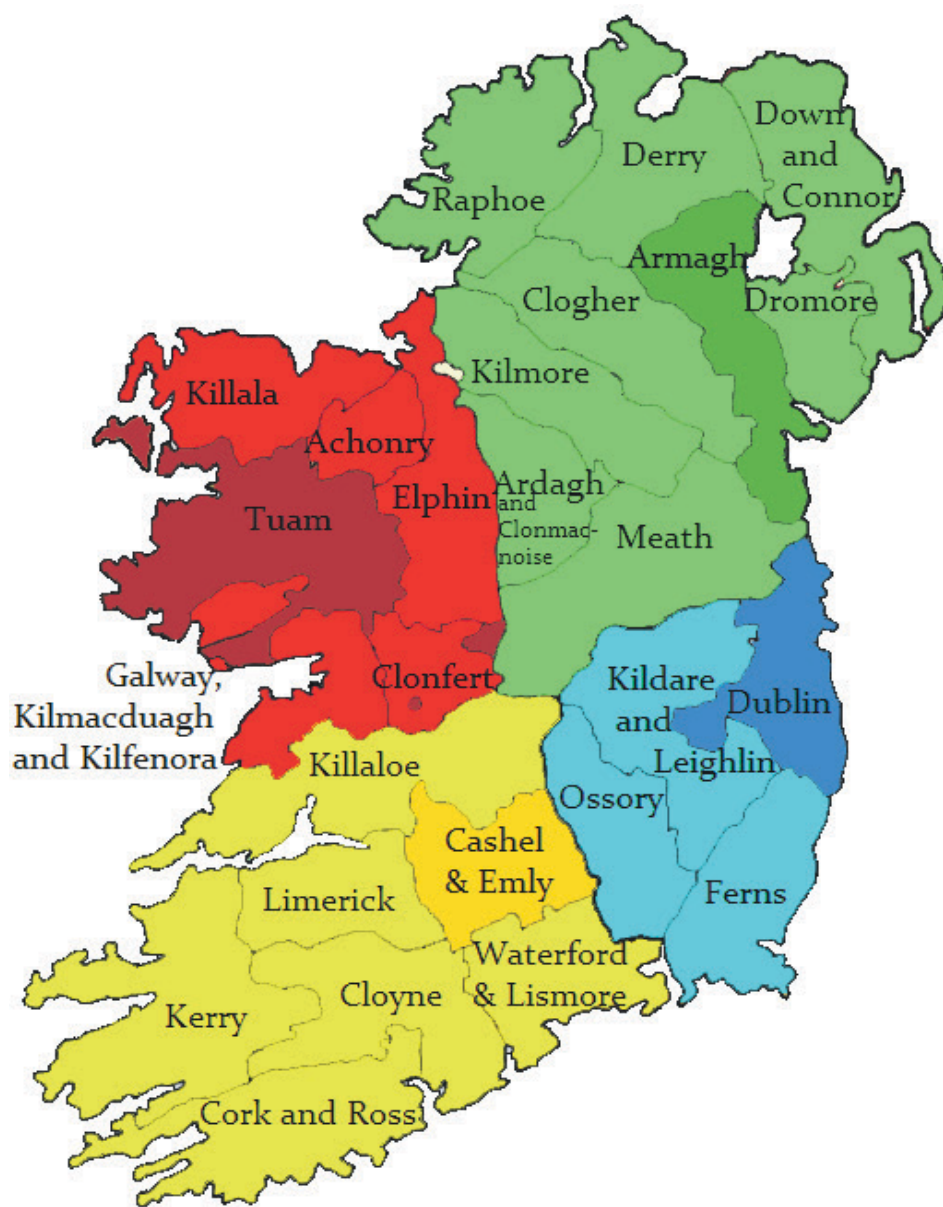
The dioceses likely to be discussed in Rome for possible amalgamation are Kilmore (Bishop Martin Hayes was appointed in June 2020) and Clogher (Bishop Larry Duffy was appointed in December 2018).

Other diocesan mergers on the table appear to be that of Ferns with Ossory. Ossory could also amalgamate with the Archdiocese of Cashel and Emly which would raise the question of provincial bounda-

ries being discussed but this scenario is less likely as the nuncio is believed to want to keep the provincial boundaries.

Another likely amalgamation is the formal amalgamation of Armagh and Dromore - the Archbishop of Armagh is already the Apostolic Administrator for Dromore.

Earlier this month the Irish bishops discussed changes to diocesan boundaries when they were in Knock. Archbishop Emeritus Terrence Prendergast of Ottawa addressed the Bishops Conference with a talk on 'Biblical Perspectives on change'. While these changes aren't of biblical proportions, they are part of a restructuring that marks one of the most significant changes in Irish Church governance in over nine centuries, leading to a more consolidated leadership.



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Down and Connor in second abuse apology in 6 months

Garry O'Sullivan

Nearly six months on from its last statement on the mishandling of child abuse allegations, the Diocese of Down and Connor has issued another statement about more failures in its approach to handling child sexual abuse. On February 23 the diocese said it received a credible allegation against Fr Patrick O'Neill (now deceased) in the last year and that in October 2004 it had received

a similarly credible allegation of the sexual abuse of a minor against Fr O'Neill. Following this allegation Fr O'Neill was stepped aside from his ministry in the Parish of Arkeen to allow a police investigation to take place.

"A statement was drafted by the diocese at this time but was not issued. This statement would have empowered other victims to come forward. This failure to issue a statement has also compounded the hurt endured by his victims and

their families. This omission to issue a public statement is a matter of deep regret by the diocese" Bishop McGuckian writes.

He adds: "In December 2005, the Public Prosecution Service directed that there would be no prosecution brought against Fr O'Neill in respect of this earlier allegation. Fr O'Neill remained permanently out of ministry until his death in November 2009.

In addition to the two allegations of the sexual abuse

of a minor mentioned above, there were three credible allegations of sexual abuse of adults, manipulation and abuse of power made against Fr O'Neill received by the Diocese in 2003, 2005 and 2006. These allegations relate to the 1970's, 1980's and 1990's when Fr O'Neill was ministering in Down and Connor. All of these allegations in relation to adults were reported to the PSNI.

The diocese is committed in working to support those individuals who have been abused by Fr O'Neill. I would also extend this support to their families who have been so anguished by the abuse of their loved ones.

Bishop McGuckian said he extended his "deepest sorrow and unreserved apology to all those who have courageously

come forward and to each of their families. I fully accept that no apology can undo the damage, hurt, trauma and pain that has been caused to the victims and their families.

I also extend my deepest sorrow and unreserved apology to anyone who suffered abuse at the hands of a priest of the Diocese in whom they had placed their trust. The Diocese encourages anyone who has concerns, suspicions or allegations of abuse to come forward and to report that abuse to the statutory authorities or to the Diocese of Down and Connor Safeguarding Office on 028 9049 2798."

In a statement on August 1, 2024 Bishop McGuckian apologised on behalf of the diocese for the failure of the diocese to act on Fr Paddy

McCafferty's abuse at the hands of James Donaghy, a former priest and multiple abuser. Fr McCafferty reported the abuse in the early 2000's when the bishop in charge was Bishop Paddy Walsh.

Bishop McGuckian wrote that "It is clear now that the report of his abuse was eclipsed by the diocese's focus on child sexual abuse."

Bishop McGuckian also apologised for "An earlier statement made by the diocese in 2006, following the decision of the PPS 'not to prosecute' James Donaghy, supported the then alleged perpetrator at the expense of his victims. In the light of his subsequent conviction as an abuser, the statement was ill-judged."

Ukrainians are on the frontline but are not alone - bishop

Renata Steffens

February 24 marked the 3rd anniversary of the Ukrainian war. To mark the moment, Bishop of the Dioceses of Elphin and Achonry Kevin Doran published a message to the Ukrainians living in both dioceses.

The bishop said he believes most of them would have hoped to be able to return to their countries by now, however, "it is important not to lose hope. As you know, here in Ireland, we went through thirty years of shooting, bombing and burning," he said. "It was not as bad as in Ukraine, of course, but it was vicious and it seemed that it would never come to an end.

Eventually, through the grace of God, wise voices began to be heard on both sides and the weapons were destroyed."

The bishop quoted Pope Paul VI saying, "peace is the fruit of justice". He said "that is why making peace is often much slower than ending violence, because real peace is only possible with a return to right relationship. That takes time."

Bishop Doran said, "Ukraine has taken a courageous stand against occupation you are in the front-line, but you are not alone. We want to support you in whatever way we can. Our solidarity is not against the Russian people, but against the evil that is done in their name." The bishop concluded: "May God bless and protect your homeland and your people."

Prominent human rights priest dies

Staff reporter

The death has occurred of a much-loved priest who won plaudits for his work exposing the mistreatment of prisoners and abuses by the security forces during the troubles.

Msgr Raymond Murray, who was in his late 80s, also published books including with his clerical colleagues Msgr Denis Faul, who died some years ago.

Fr Murray was born in Newtownhamilton, Co. Armagh in 1938, and was ordained in 1962.

Besides his pastoral duties as a full time curate, Fr Murray was chaplain to St Luke's Hospital and chaplain to the prisoners in Armagh Gaol which required him to send annual reports to the Northern Ireland Government.

Fr Murray later gave evidence at Strasbourg in the case the Irish Government brought

against Britain over the so-called 'Hooded Men' who were abused while in British custody.

Over the next 25 years, he continued to produce article highlighting the continued abuse of Catholics by the security forces in the North.

In 1995, along with his friend and colleague, Fr Faul, Fr Murray was made a Prelate of Honour of His Holiness by Pope St John Paul II.

A witness to fraternal charity



Volunteers from The Irish Pilgrimage Trust visited St Agnes Parish, Belfast for a special appeal. £4,772 was raised to help bring children with special needs to Lourdes this Easter.

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Politicians decry calls to discard the Dáil prayer

Chai Brady

A proposal by the Social Democrats and Labour to remove the prayer reading before Dáil sessions has been described as a “self-indulgent... contempt for Christian practices”.

The prayer is read out in both Irish and English by the Ceann Comhairle before Dáil sessions. It is followed by a 30-second moment of reflection.

Carol Nolan TD for Laois-Offaly told *The Irish Catholic* the issue of the prayer was debated and resolved in 2017 when it last

arose, which showed “there is no desire to abandon the prayer”.

“Here we go again on the self-indulgent merry-go-round with parliamentarians trying to disguise what is really a fundamental contempt for Christian practices under a guise of inclusiveness,” Ms Nolan said.

She added that “there certainly is a desire on the part of a small vocal minority to jettison Christian symbolism and practice from the political realm. I think that it is a mistake and I will not support it”.

Minister of State and Kerry TD Michael Healy-Rae said that he

would be “vehemently opposed to any suggestion to remove the prayer and the moment of reflection that we have in the Dáil”.

Mr Healy-Rae said: “I’m not trying to drive the Catholic religion down on anybody... but how could anybody object to, when you start a meeting, blessing yourself? And if you don’t want to bless yourself, there’s nobody forcing you to. Even just standing up and have a moments reflection and just think about things, is there anything wrong with that?”

“For Labour and the Social Democrats, they should be ashamed of themselves. Have they anything

better to do in representing the people of Ireland than using valuable time and concentrating their efforts on this?” he added.

In a debate on Newstalk’s *The Hard Shoulder* on the issue last week between Senator Ronan Mullen and Social Democrat TD Gary Gannon, Mr Gannon said that having a singular prayer from a particular tradition is “not reflective anymore”.

Senator Mullen said “there’s something still deeply Christian about our country... it strikes me that we probably don’t realise just how much we depend on our Christian tradition for a lot of

what we take advantage of as our modern virtues”.

He added that whether people are religious or not “they still value traditions and they still value ideals of goodness. And respect for the tradition might be to say ‘we’ll live with that prayer’”.

The prayer read out by the Ceann Comhairle is ‘Direct, we beseech Thee, O Lord, our actions by Thy holy inspirations and carry them on by Thy gracious assistance; that every word and work of ours may always begin from Thee, and by Thee be happily ended; through Christ our Lord. Amen.’

Pioneers invite faithful to take the pledge for Lent

Staff reporter

Ash Wednesday falls on March 5 this year, marking the start of Lent. The Pioneers, inspired by Pope Francis’ 2025 Lenten message, are encouraging people

to “journey in hope together.” In his message, the Holy Father challenges the faithful to step outside their comfort zones and engage with others, a call that is especially vital in a world he describes as hav-

ing “lost its heart.”

One way to offer hope and support is by abstaining from alcohol, helping families affected by addiction, according to the Pioneer association. This year, the Pioneers invite individuals

to take the Pledge for Lent, which can be made at a parish centre or online at www.pioneerassociation.org.

“This Lent, consider becoming a Pilgrim of Hope, possibly for the first time in your family, school, or

workplace. You could also invite others to join you on this journey, offering to be their sponsor or anchor. In doing so, you’ll help ignite the flame of God’s love and hope in their hearts,” stated the Pioneers in a recent statement. “Additionally, you might prayerfully adopt someone awaiting a place in Cuan Mhuire or a treatment programme. You could also remember those in

your local community who are sustained day by day through the 12 steps of the AA fellowship, offering your prayers for their strength and recovery.”

Messages of support for people who are living with addiction can be posted to Fr Robert McCabe, PO Box 13492, Dublin 7 or can be sent by email to prayer@pioneers.ie.

Will Conclave win the Oscars?



The 2025 Oscars will take place this Sunday and Conclave has been nominated for eight categories. The film won the highest categories of the BAFTA and SAG Awards, which leaves the film in a strong position ahead of the Oscars, and it might win Best Picture on March 2.

All Ireland prays for Pope Francis

Renata Milán Morales

The Standing Committee of the Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference has recently released a message to the faithful, encouraging them to unite in daily prayer of the Rosary after their gathering in the Columba Centre of St

Patrick’s Pontifical College, Maynooth. The prayer will be being broadcasted every evening from St Peter’s Square at 8pm (Ireland time), where clergy and lay people will come together in prayer, asking for the health of Pope Francis.

Speaking to *The Irish*

Catholic Angela McMorrow, a key member of the organising team for the All Ireland Rosary Rally, said that “We will pray for Pope Francis in a special way during the Rosary and include him in the intentions of the Mass.”

The All Ireland Rosary Rally will hold its launch

event on March 1 in Knock, Co. Mayo, the Catholic heart of Ireland. The gathering will begin with the praying of the Rosary, followed by a series of talks highlighting the significance of the Rosary in Irish spiritual life and the legacy of Frank Duff, founder of the Legion of Mary.

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Raphoe to get new bishop as a Derry merger axed

Garry O'Sullivan

The recent trip by Bishop Donal McKeown of Derry to Rome to meet the head of the Dicastery for Bishops Bishop Robert Francis Prevost OSA (Augustinian) to petition for a change in Vatican policy towards plans to merge the diocese of Derry with the diocese of Raphoe

has paid off *The Irish Catholic* understands.

It was revealed exclusively in this paper that Bishop McKeown went to press his case that the diocese of Derry should not be amalgamated with the Diocese of Raphoe (mostly Donegal) as this point in time. It is also believed he spoke with Archbishop Paul Gallagher, the Vatican's Sec-

retary for Relations with States.

Policy

The Irish Catholic understands that while the current Nuncio, Archbishop Luis Mariano Montemayor wanted the Diocese of Derry to merge with the Diocese of Raphoe as part of the Vatican's public policy to reduce the number of dio-

ceses in Ireland to make a leaner more streamlined Irish Church, this will not now happen.

The diocese of Derry will fall vacant next April on the retirement of Bishop McKeown and the Vatican had seen this as an opportunity to unite the two dioceses. Now, however, the Nuncio is tasked with finding a new bishop for Raphoe and Derry

as the merger idea is off the table.

Archbishop Eamonn Martin may yet have his hands full if he has to administer the formal amalgamation of the dioceses of Armagh and Dromore, with only one auxiliary, although the Bishop of Elphin is also now Bishop of Achonry and has the workload of two dioceses with no auxiliaries.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Arsonist sentenced for devastating fire at iconic church crypt

The man who set fire to the crypt of St Michan's Church in Dublin, damaging mummified remains, has been sentenced to six years in prison. Cristian Topiter, 39, who has a previous conviction for arson in Northern Ireland, pleaded guilty to the crime at Dublin Central Criminal Court. The fire destroyed relics, including the 800-year-old 'Crusader', and caused severe financial damage to the church. The Church of Ireland's Archdeacon David Pierpoint condemned the act as "desecration and sacrilege," noting that the fire has halted tours, which previously generated €75,000 to €100,000 annually. The archdeacon called it a loss not just for the parish but for Dublin and the nation.

Spiritans pay €8.8m to abuse survivors

The Spiritans have paid €8.8 million to 125 abuse survivors, including former pupils of Blackrock College and other schools. This includes €3.4 million to 52 survivors who came forward after RTÉ's *Blackrock Boys* documentary in 2022. Since then, 58 claims have been made, with 52 addressed. Between 1998 and 2022, €5.4 million was paid to 73 survivors, excluding legal costs. A scoping inquiry identified 359 survivors and allegations against 67 Spiritans. So far, 171 survivors have engaged in a restorative justice program.

Mary O'Donovan appointed as MIA new Chief Executive Officer

Mercy International Association (MIA) has announced the appointment of Mary O'Donovan as their new Chief Executive Officer, succeeding outgoing CEO Sr Patricia O'Donovan RSM.

Mary has 30 years of experience working in the non-profit sector in Ireland and overseas, and she comes to MIA from the role of Executive Director at the National Maternity Hospital Foundation at Holles Street, Dublin.

Mary is "happy to be taking up the role of CEO at Mercy International Association. Especially now as the Mercy Family prepares for the celebration of the opening 200 years ago of Catherine McAuley's First House of Mercy on Baggot Street."

If kids can understand Star Wars they can understand the Bible - Bishop Barron

Eoin McCormack

Over the weekend, more than 1,600 people gathered in the ExCel Centre in London for an Evangelisation conference on the Bible, organised by Word on Fire Catholic Ministries. Addressing the large crowd at the keynote address on Friday evening, Bishop Barron spoke in a tone of optimism in the spirit Pope Francis' declaration of the Jubilee as a year of hope by highlighting the growing curiosity about the Bible and religious matters emerging even within secular

circles.

"Something is shifting in this world. New atheism is making people ask: Where does that lead me? Young people are now searching for meaning," he remarked.

As evidence of this shift, Barron referenced the growing popularity of Canadian-Psychologist Jordan Peterson (whom he shared the same stage with only days previous at the Alliance for Responsible Citizenship conference) who's lectures on the psychology of the bible are attracting thousands of attendees in person and millions of viewers online. His influence, Bar-

ron suggested, reflects a broader hunger for spiritual depth that is resurfacing in unexpected places.

Star Wars

One of the highlights of the conference was an ecumenical panel discussion between Bishop Barron and Anglican New Testament scholar NT Wright, moderated by podcaster and Evangelical broadcaster Justin Brierley. Both speakers noted a growing openness among younger generations and emphasised that the Churches must seize this opportunity to reintroduce their message in a

compelling way, rather than retreating from the perceived "unrelatability" of biblical narratives. "If kids can tell you every detail and subplot of the Star Wars story, don't tell me they can't understand the Bible," Bishop Barron remarked.

Irish

Over 30 Irish attendees at the conference gathered on Saturday for a dedicated Irish gathering, where they reflected on the impact Word on Fire has had on their personal faith and parish communities back home. The discussion also explored how the movement's distinctive ethos—marked by smart, coherent apologetics—could contribute to revitalising missionary efforts in contemporary Ireland.

Lough Derg clergy attend Jubilee of Deacons in Rome

Renata Steffens

Permanent Deacons from across the globe gathered in Rome from February 21 to 23 for the Jubilee of Deacons. Among the Irish representatives were Msgr La Flynn and Deacon Martin Donnelly from Lough Derg, who in 2025 are celebrating their 50th and 7th anniversary of ordination to permanent diaconate respectively.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Msgr Flynn said that the most striking thing he is taking from the experience was taken from the Pope's homily, which was read by Archbishop Rino Fisichella, as the Pope is still hospitalised. "He said 'You are about to descend to the first step of ordained ministry - notice that I deliberately said 'descend' not 'ascend'. Among the People of God, ministry is serving.'"

During the catechesis gatherings on Friday, some deacons had a Q&A, when "one of the deacons suggested that the Vatican might need to issue a letter urging more bishops worldwide to take up the option of introducing permanent



Deacon Martin Donnelly

Fr La Flynn

deacons in their dioceses."

Msgr Flynn said "the Irish College was hosting a group of Deacons from Dublin Archdiocese with their wives - maybe 10 or 12 of them. The only others that we met from Ireland were two from Kildare and Leighlin." He added that "the presence of deacons' wives, and other family members was a notable aspect of the Jubilee event as a whole."

For Deacon Donnelly, "the words which stay with me were 'When you do good work as a deacon it should remain a closely

guarded secret between you and God'." Another comment that stayed with him said that deacons are not "half-priests" or "special altar boys", but "they will be caring servants who do their best to ensure that no one is excluded and the love of the Lord touches people's lives in a tangible way."

"The Joy of the Jubilee of Deacons was marked by worry and concern for the health of the Holy Father yet in all the liturgies and pilgrim activities he was close to our hearts in prayer," concluded Deacon Donnelly.

'Great sadness' as Benedictines mourn their former abbess

Staff reporter

The Benedictine communities of Kylemore Abbey and of Abtei St Scholastika, Dinklage, Germany gave tribute to Mother Máire Hickey OSB who died on Sunday, February 23.

Sr Hickey is known to have been a primary driver behind the building of the Benedictines new monastery, retreat, and education centre. She laid the first brick on February 13, 2020.

Despite delays due to the Covid-19 pandemic, 15 Benedictine sisters moved into the new monastery in August 2024.

Sr Hickey retired in August 2022 as abbess after 14 years of leadership.

Requiem Mass will take place on Saturday, March 1 at 12 noon, followed by burial at the graveyard of the Neo-Gothic Church, Kylemore Abbey.

Requiem Mass will be streamed from 11.45 am via the webcam at <https://www.kylemoreabbey.com/>

Is 'Kneecap' really the best advert for the Irish language?

I believe the majority of us favour the flourishing of the Irish language (even if some school pupils do try to obtain exemptions – it's not an easy subject to master). And in Northern Ireland, as I've written previously, I think the Unionists have been daft to try to oppose its introduction: they should have proudly owned their part in its revival, since so many Irish Protestants in the past were Irish language scholars.

But is the award-winning movie *Kneecap* really the great advertisement for Irish that it purports to be? Its purpose is evidently to show that Irish can be the language of hip-hop music and rappers, as well as sex and drugs – and the tireless use of that fricative English word “f****”.

Storyline

The storyline loosely centres around the campaign to get Irish formally recognised by Stormont (which occurred with the



Mary Kenny

Identity and Language Act of 2022), as well as following a couple of Republican bowsies and a prim Irish-language teacher (who finally discovers his “inner scumbag”). It also features Michael Fassbender as an ageing Provo on the run.

“Explicit sexual scenes are accompanied by a ‘Brits Out’ leitmotiv; the worship of recreational drugs – notably ketamine – is a dominant note throughout the narrative”

Rich Peppiatt's movie is awash with obscenities,

violence – albeit sometimes represented in a jokey way – and corny visual references to religion. There's a Padre Pio on the wall and an Infant of Prague on the mantelpiece of the bold rapper's home. Explicit sexual scenes are accompanied by a “Brits Out” leitmotiv; the worship of recreational drugs – notably ketamine – is a dominant note throughout the narrative.

Granted, some of the jokes are sardonically funny. “No parkin or car will be burnt,” is a street notice that would surely deter any motorist from illegally parking. And quips about “the price of Semtex is going through the roof,” and “Some f**** is making a killing” can be laughably amusing.

Advances

But I still wonder if the *Kneecap* image really advances the Irish language. Maybe the drugs, sex, rapping, and violence are a bid to be ‘cool’, but how distant it all seems from the old Gaelgoirs who saw Irish as something associated with dignity, refined culture and sobriety – the lexicographer Father Dinneen, the scholar Douglas Hyde, the Tomás de Bhaldraithe and Pádraig de Brúns, the idealistic William Rooney's who “wore themselves out” propagating the language as something essentially



Rap group, Kneecap. Source: Instagram account @kneecap32

high-minded?

I suppose every generation re-invents the wheel; and though some viewers would find *Kneecap* offensive, it may herald a significant moment in cultural change.

Ironically, for a movie which refers to Britain as “the Imperialist State” it

was made with the support of British finances and won a BAFTA award as ‘the Best

British Independent film’. They should make a rap song about that.

“I still wonder if the Kneecap image really advances the Irish language. Maybe the drugs, sex, rapping, and violence are a bid to be ‘cool’, but how distant it all seems from the old Gaelgoirs who saw Irish as something associated with dignity, refined culture and sobriety”

The world of imagination

February has been the month marked by ‘Ireland Reads’ – a Government initiative to encourage the activity of reading, especially among children. And it so happened that while it was being promoted, I visited my old neighbourhood library – in Ballsbridge, Dublin 4 – where I first started borrowing books from about the age of eight. Thankfully, the library itself hasn't changed substantially, although the children's section is brighter.

I wasn't particularly encouraged to read, in my childhood; and I was only permitted to borrow one book at a time. On the occasion where I disobeyed orders and took out two books, I was made to go back to the library and return the second tome. I lived then with an aunt who talked disparagingly about those who “had their nose stuck in a book”, instead of out in the fresh air playing wholesome games.

Still, rationed to only the one book, I entered the world of the imagi-

nation, in which stories, characters and adventures came to life. I was captivated by an Enid Blyton story called ‘The Mountain of Adventure’, and then by a Patricia Lynch tale ‘The Turf-Cutter's Donkey’.

Enid Blyton was subsequently criticised for being snobbish, suburban and mildly racist – and elements of all these values can be glimpsed in her writing. But I still recall the sense of total immersion I found in browsing these stories at the Ballsbridge library.

It has really been touching to observe so much concern, and so many kind words of appreciation, for Pope Francis during his very serious illness. Not all Catholics agree with

the Holy Father on a number of points – there's been much repining over his coolness towards the Latin Mass – but there remains, I feel sure, universal affection for this Pope.

As can be seen in the pages of his autobiography, ‘Hope’, Pope Francis has a kind, compassionate nature, and he is rooted in the experience of growing up in a working-class fam-

ily and a mixed neighbourhood. He must be the first Pontiff to have danced the tango in his youth. Whether the Lord calls him now or later, Francis has been a revered global figure.

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Bishop Willie Walsh: A kind and understanding radical



Bishop Fintan Monahan

The quality of Jesus and God the Father that was echoed and reflected in the life and ministry of Bishop Emeritus Willie Walsh. His Episcopal motto was 'Cineáltas Chríost, the Gentleness of Christ'.

During the week we were busy praying for the health and recovery of Pope Francis. While we were doing that a pastor cut out of the same cloth as the Holy Father stole away with no warning and less fuss. Willie Walsh died as he lived, getting on with the business of things, not hanging around, just moving on with intent and clear direction.

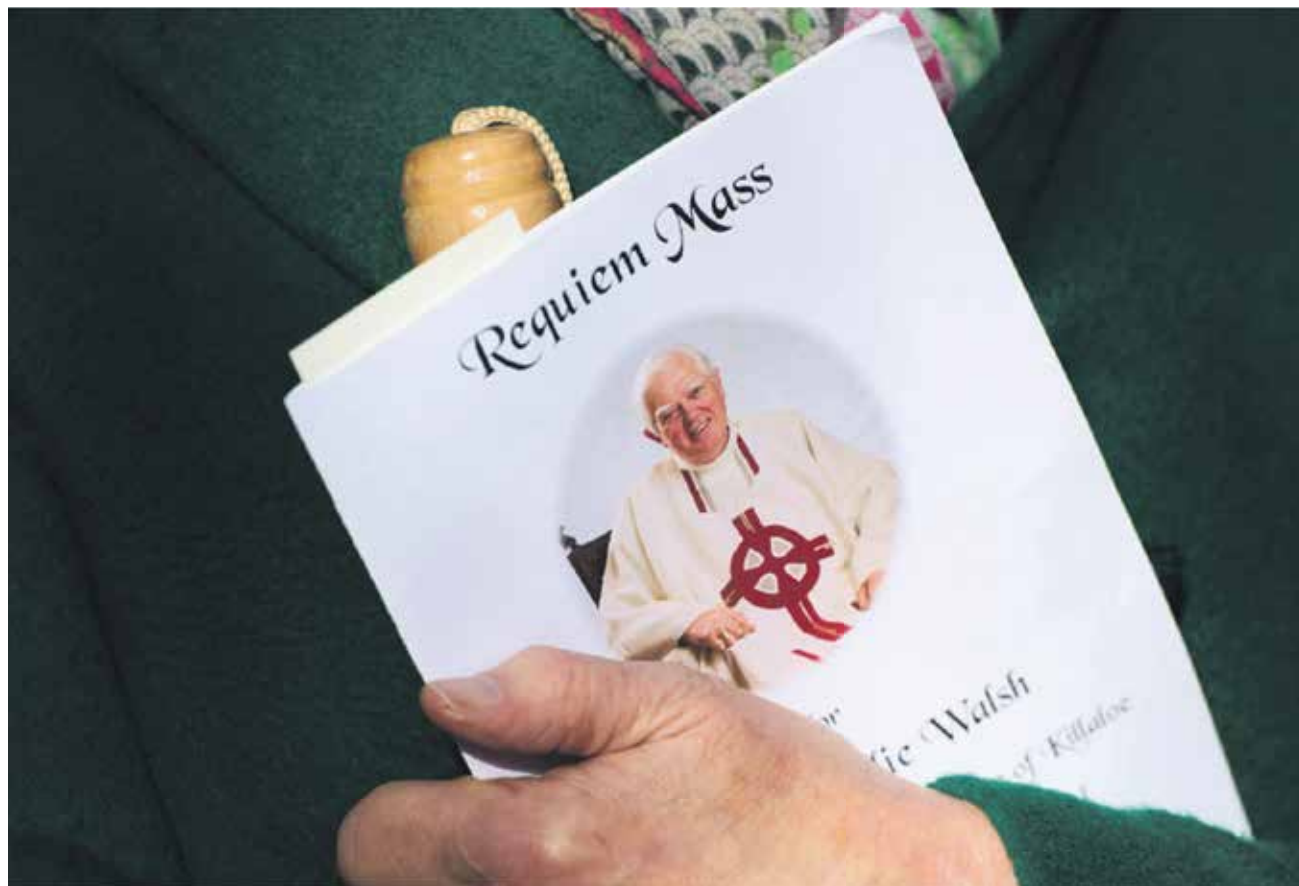
No Crusader

The title of his acclaimed autobiography is *No Crusader*. Yet in his typical, understated, yet very effective, way he was a profound and effective crusader, winning people over to genuine Christian values through kindness, understanding, listening, generosity, care for the poor, the marginalised, people struggling and suffering in life.

He did this through his unstinting work with the Traveling Community, his pastoral outreach to survivors of abuse, the sick, the vulnerable, so many who availed of his spiritual outreach as a true pastor of Jesus Christ.

I just got to know Bishop Willie personally eight and a half years ago on coming here to Ennis. His warmth, kindness and ever available wisdom was such an asset to help settle in. Even though he immersed himself in enjoying a richly deserved retirement with so many hobbies, interests and such a wide circle of friends and his most beloved family - he was always available to help out and offer a word of advice if requested.

“I can’t say that I am always waiting in joyful hope, but I do believe that the joy of new life in God’s love will be beyond any joy we have experienced in life”



Faithful paid their respects to the late Bishop Willie Walsh as he was laid to rest on the grounds of the Cathedral of Sts Peter and Paul in Ennis this afternoon. Bishop Fintan Monahan, Bishop of Killaloe, was chief celebrant of the Mass which was attended by Bishop Willie’s family, friends and many people who shared in the blessings of Bishop Willie’s pastoral care. Concelebrants included Archbishop Kieran O’Reilly of Cashel and Emly, Bishop Ger Nash of Ferns, Fr Laurence Walsh OCSO of Our Lady of Silence Abbey Roscrea along with other Bishops and Priests in attendance. Photo: John Kelly

Listen, anyone who has ears to hear...

The fact that Willie and I were both struggling with the challenges of hearing loss - he often joked of the advantages of not being able to hear certain things being an actual advantage and a plus in the life of being a bishop...

On a recent trip in the car - we had an interesting experience, with me driving, obviously on the right and Willie being on my left. He was deaf in the right ear and me in the left. Nonetheless, we had a delightful journey, with much talk and neither of us having much of a clue what the other was saying....

Pastoral and Human Outreach

Whether as a teacher in St Flannan’s College, Parish Priest in Ennis, or Bishop of Killaloe, Willie immersed himself wholeheartedly in getting to know people, their interests,

their needs, sharing their ups and downs and bringing the Gospel values to them in a warm and attractive manner.

Polyglot

Being a natural communicator, and a keen linguist he liked to exercise his mind with his interest in languages, mainly Italian agus An Ghaeilge.

On the day before he died he was polishing up one of his party pieces for an occasion he was invited to on Friday, his Latin version of the song Molly Malone!

One of the beautiful tributes as Gaeilge on line the day he died runs:

Múinteoir, sagart, scoláire diagachta, easpag, cóitseálaí iomána agus comhairleoir a lean briathar Dé i rith a shaoil le cineáltas Chríost agus tuiscint á léiriú aige i gcónaí do dhaoine ar an imeall. Beidh an saol seo níos boichte dá uireasa. Guím beatha shíoraí dá anam uasal séimh.

“May he experience the joy of heaven in which he believed and see in the face of God a mirror of the gentleness of Christ”

Pastoral Leadership

As a bishop he led with vision and clarity encouraging pastoral planning to address urgent needs establishing the cluster system, empowering lay people, adult faith development, scripture exploration, support for marriage through his work with Accord, improving the role of women in the Church, youth ministry, pilgrimages, outreach to the poor in the developing world in Africa, South Africa and of course at home.

Generosity and Giving

“Give, and there will be gifts for you: a full measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, will be poured into your lap.”

The words of yesterday and today’s Gospel, very much taken to heart by Willie. On a number of occasions I went

to see Ennis native Diarmuid de Faoite’s one man show on Sean-Phádraic Ó Conaire; Pádraig, an Fear. Sean-Phádraig died with two items or possessions to his name, his clay pipe and an apple. Such was the generous life of charitable giving that Bishop Willie was not far behind. He literally gave away everything he had, “because the amount you measure out is the amount you will be given back.”

Challenging the System

Willie was a radical in the true sense of the word. He challenged unquestioned beliefs, the accepted mores of society and in doing so stripped them back to their origin, measuring them up against what he believed was the core of the Gospel, Cineáltas Chríost, the gentleness of Christ. Being frequently out-spoken, he

stirred things up. This sometimes ruffled feathers, was occasionally misunderstood, upset a few and others saw it as an effort to overturn hard earned orthodoxy. However Willie, often in thinking out loud - did this with raw honesty, integrity, conviction and belief that his exploration, questioning was a legitimate response to arriving at the divinely revealed truth using the gifts that God generously bestowed upon us.

Christian Hope

The day before he returned to God I had made arrangements with him to meet on Saturday morning at 9.30am and record a video message of Hope, part of the series of Lenten videos for the Jubilee Year of Hope. He was very enthusiastic and looking forward to doing that. I had suspected, considering his passion for hurling that his hopes would be around retaining the All-Ireland crown and prolonging the joy and delight of being victors. However, on Wednesday evening last beside his armchair a copy of his own book was opened with a marker in the chapter on Christian Hope. In that short chapter we read: “I feel in a different place at this stage of life - more happy to leave things in the Lord’s hands. Ultimately everything is in His hands and surely He is as much present with us today, as He ever was... And even if I have no way of knowing what it will be like in life after death, I am still happy to leave it in his hands... I can’t say that I am always waiting in joyful hope, but I do believe that the joy of new life in God’s love will be beyond any joy we have experienced in life.”

Thank God for the life and times of this outstanding human being, this man with such a gift for friendship, who for so many made this world a better place. Sympathies and condolences to family and friends who mourn his passing and the great loss.

May he experience the joy of heaven in which he believed and see in the face of God a mirror of the Gentleness of Christ, ‘Cineáltas Chríost’

Suaimhneas síoraí don duine uasal, an tEaspag Willie agus go lonraí solas na bhflaitheas air.

Funeral homily of Bishop Fintan Monahan for the Requiem Mass for Bishop Emeritus Willie Walsh on February 24, 2025 at the Cathedral of Sts Peter and Paul, Ennis, Co. Clare.

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Graeme Mulcahy: Guided by faith, family and perseverance



Éanna Mackey

An ever-present in the emerald green of Limerick for sixteen seasons Graeme Mulcahy has seen it all. From the doldrums of the hurling strike in 2010 to the glory of the four in a row, the thirty-four-year-old Kilmallock native has etched his name as one of the all-time Limerick greats.

Having retired shortly after the 2024 season, Mulcahy leaves the intercounty stage with five All-Ireland's, seven Munster championships, and an All-Star. However, Limerick supporters will probably most fondly remember his 2018 All-Ireland final performance against Galway—scoring 1-2 from play, including Limerick's final score, which would bridge a 45-year wait for the Liam McCarthy cup.

Yet success on the field has always been about more than just trophies and personal accolades. The now-retired Limerick star can reflect on a career marked by resilience, spirituality, and an unwavering connection to his family and local community.

Born and raised in Kilmallock, a town deeply embedded in the fabric of Limerick hurling, Graeme grew up with his brother and two sisters in a sporting mad household. Along with his immediate family, fundamental to his upbringing were his late grandparents who lived in the town itself.

"I would have been very close with my grandparents, they were always there to support us and guide us in life to be good people," he said. "I wouldn't be someone who goes to Mass too often but I am a very pensive person, I'm often in my own head thinking about things, reaching out on a spiritual level for support. I definitely do feel connected to something greater than myself and I do believe in there being something after this life."

That belief is something that Graeme has drawn strength from on the pitch as well as off it.

"I do often turn to my grandparents who have passed to look down on me and help and guide me



Graeme Mulcahy of Limerick with his two daughters Róisín, left, and Aislinn after the GAA Hurling All-Ireland Senior Championship semi-final match between Limerick and Cork at Croke Park in Dublin, July 7, 2024. Photo: John Sheridan/Sportsfile

through tough moments in life, to look out for me and my family. Before big games, I might be on the train up and I may turn to them to ask for their support and guidance. Sometimes I might find a quiet moment to myself within the game and I'd ask them to keep me safe."

“Mulcahy has dealt with a congenital fourth nerve palsy, a condition that caused a squint in his eye and worsened considerably over time”

Mulcahy's career has been defined by astonishing success yet personal accolades like his 2018 All-Star award take a back seat to the memories he made with his teammates. However, his journey to the very pinnacle of hurling was not without its hurdles.

From birth, Mulcahy has dealt with a congenital fourth nerve palsy, a condition that caused a squint in his eye and worsened considerably over time. For much of his career, he managed to adapt to it, but in recent years, it began to significantly affect his performance on the field.

In early 2023 Mulcahy got surgery on his eye to try to rectify its degeneration but it came with very serious risks, both to his health and his hurling career.

"It was a tough period filled with doubt," Graeme recalls. "I didn't know if the surgery would work or if I'd ever play again. There were huge risks involved, and I had to face the reality that it could make things worse."

Support

With the support of his wife, Laura, and the confidence he placed in his medical team, Graeme underwent surgery. Defying expectations, he returned to the pitch within a month. Thanks to his drive and his unrelenting determination his recovery cul-

minated in reclaiming his starting position for the 2023 Munster Final—a moment he cherishes deeply.

"That was one of the proudest moments of my career," he says. "Coming back from surgery, getting my place back on the team—it was huge. Looking back now, it wasn't one of my better games, but it's a memory I'll always hold close."

“To get my place back on the team and given that it was on in Limerick and the scenes that followed – it was something else”

The 2023 Munster Final stands out above all else as it was more than just the glory of a five-in-a-row. For Mulcahy, it represented a triumph over his own personal adversity.

"Obviously we went on to win the 4-in-a-row which

was incredible but for me that Munster final and everything that I went through with my eye, to get my place back on the team and given that it was on in Limerick and the scenes that followed – it was something else."

It was moments like that on his long journey with Limerick that helped to shape Graeme both as an athlete and a hurler. The perseverance he showed has also helped him to remain a role model for the people of Kilmallock despite living in Carrigaline with his wife and young family.

Pivotal

It was his wife Laura who played a pivotal role in enabling him to reach the heights of his intercounty career as he balanced it alongside his family life and his work as a project manager in Cork City.

"The amount of sacrifice that my wife has made to allow me to keep hurling has been enormous. The travelling up and down to Limer-

ick was hard but the success that we had made it that bit easier."

“I just hope that in years to come, my kids will look back at me like I still do my grandparents—with admiration and love”

"When I started to get less game time the balance kind of shifted, with the commitment that it was and with the sacrifices that my family were making on my behalf it made me realise that the time was probably right to retire."

Graeme's family has always been his foundation, but the enduring influence of his late grandparents remains a guiding force in his life.

"I don't really care to be remembered outside of my family," he said. "I just hope that in years to come, my kids will look back at me like I still do my grandparents—with admiration and love. If I could be remembered in any way like that, it'd be more than enough for me."

A cold shower and prayers in spiritual bootcamp



Martina Purdy

Easter might be late this year, but Lent has come early for a group of Irish men, who have signed up for 'spiritual bootcamp'. While the Lenten journey is 40 days, an estimated 1,000 Irish men are about halfway through a 90 day experience - which includes daily cold showers and no television. "It's Lent on steroids," said Luke McCann, who completed his first Exodus 90 journey about four years ago. Exodus 90 sprang from a monastery in the United States about ten years ago and is taking root in Ireland.

Among the enthusiasts is Irish Gaelic football manager, Mickey Harte. While Exodus 90 attracts a range of men - from the fervent to the faithless - it is not for the faint-hearted. "It is a challenge," said Mickey Harte. "But you know men love a challenge. That's a good starting point."

Regime

Participants commit to a daily regime that might have been unremarkable a few generations ago, but is now quite challenging: cold showers, prayer, no alcohol, no sweets, no fizzy drinks, no snacking between meals, no TV, no video games, and no unnecessary purchases.

There is no meat on Wednesdays and Fridays when the men are restricted to one meal, and two light ones.

The men are encouraged to avoid unnecessary use of



A crown of thorns is pictured on a table draped in purple during Lent at Jesus the Good Shepherd Church in Dunkirk, Maryland, April 7, 2022. Photo: OSV News/Bob Roller, Reuters

their computer and smartphone, and exercise three times a week.

The good news is that eight hours of sleep is recommended!

Music is allowed, but only that which lifts the soul up to God.

“Look to the cross. On the cross hangs the great deliverer, the only one who has the power to set you free”

In a world where men often feel isolated, or alone, Exodus 90 includes a fraternity, usually four to six men, and assigns an anchor, who shares daily contact, a role Mr Harte now takes on.

One of the aims of Exodus is to convince men that God wants to liberate them. "God desires your freedom even more than you do," said Mr McCann. "Look to the cross. On the cross hangs the great deliverer, the only one who has the power to set you free."

While Egypt was the land of slavery in biblical times, Mr McCann said modern man can be enslaved in his own home, where so many are addicted to the iPhone,

social media, the television to name a few devices. There are also the vices of over-eating, alcohol, drugs, gambling, and pornography so readily available.

Mr McCann, the all-Ireland Mission Coordinator for Human Life International in Ireland, said Exodus 90 can be transformative.

Mr McCann recalled that after he came back to his faith, he no longer has the same passion for things that used to consume his time. "Even watching football," said Mr McCann. "Now I just find it boring."

Famous

Mr Harte is arguably as famous for his Catholicism as he is for coaching abilities. He said one of the benefits of Exodus 90 is that it "instils discipline" and "self-control". "In a world of plenty," he said. "We can eat, drink and be merry and we often do. This means you have to take control of the way you live your life."

Exodus 90, said Mr Harte, can set men on a path away from their attachments that get in the way of God, of life and love. "We don't realise it but we kind of become addicted to the phone, the TV, iPads and we miss the real people around us in our family and the people we meet in day to day life."

Mr McCann recalled one participant, a grandfather, who became quite emotional when he shared his own experience. He said the man revealed that he was really getting to know his grandchildren because he was no longer distracted by watching football or horse racing during their visit.

“I had been saying to myself for months that I would like to join a group to challenge myself to give up some bad habits and cravings that I've had most of my adult life”

A new participant who gave his first name as, James, told *The Irish Catholic* that he could not

have imagined taking up the challenge a few months back. "I would have laughed - or maybe cried!"

But James felt drawn to join Exodus 90 in January. "It ticked all the boxes," he recalls. "I had been saying to myself for months that I would like to join a group to challenge myself to give up some bad habits and cravings that I've had most of my adult life."

Rewarding

Now he gets up at 6am for prayer and finds it rewarding. "I've learned strength through prayer and patience. I have a clarity of mind that I didn't feel before." The Exodus 90 fraternity meets in person or online each week to share and to encourage each other to keep going, even if the previous week was not perfect. "It's very honest," said Mr Harte, "and very open and

a really safe place for men to be together and speak about their faith and other things in the world as well." Each member of Exodus 90 speaks to their anchor daily even if it is just for a few minutes. "It is very fulfilling for both sides," said Mr Harte. "It means you are not on your own."

Mr Harte said that the men, without TV or other distractions, take more time for prayer and scripture-study, which for many is confined to Mass on Sunday. "A once-a-week event in our life is not going to create an awful lot of growth," said Mr Harte, who is fired up about sharing the faith. "We shouldn't be hiding the faith or keeping it as a private thing. It is not private. God said 'go out into the whole world and tell the good news!'"

"The best thing that anybody can have is the presence of Jesus in their lives."

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I could not help noticing the number of 'drag queen' events popping up in Belfast to celebrate Mother's Day luncheons on March 30. To each his own. But I do find it quite odd. Why is a man dressed in exag-

gerated female clothing and make-up now the 'thing to do' on a day dedicated to mothers. Count me out. Motherhood is a great gift from God and I do think there are better ways of celebrating!

There are proposals in the US State legislature in Washington to legally require Catholics priests to break the seal of confession in the case of child abuse. The aim is worthy but once the seal is

broken on one issue, what is to stop other changes? Once the seal is broken, trust will be eroded. It reminds me of an old joke. Two protestants take to heart the scripture in the Letter of James to "confess your sins to one another." So,

one says to the other, "I am a terrible adulterer and I'm having an affair with two different women in this congregation...what about you?" "Oh," said the other. "I'm a terrible gossip and I can't wait to tell everybody!"

£1.1 million project opens in Armagh school

Renata Steffens

Armagh school celebrated the opening of a new multi-purpose sports hall and modular classrooms on Wednesday, February 19. Foley Primary School in Ballymacnab received Education Minister Paul Givan and Archbishop Eamon Martin amongst other guests for the occasion.

The £1.1 million investment project includes the multi-purpose sports hall, two mobile classrooms, new school central heating system, resurfacing of the school yard and new perimeter fence with controlled access.

Speaking at the official opening, Mr Givan said the new facilities “will enhance the educational experience for everyone attending the school and for future generations. The opening of any school buildings and refurbishments is something to be celebrated and improving the schools’ estate remains a key priority for me.”



Cutting the ribbon at the Opening of Foley Primary School Multi-Purpose Hall are Daire Hughes MP, Paul Givan MLA, Education Minister, Kieran McCrory, Principal, Archbishop Eamon Martin, Archbishop of Armagh and Bróna Haughey, Chair Board of Governors. Photos: LiamMcArdle.com



Archbishop Eamon Martin, Archbishop of Armagh is shown the work of the Primary 1 class at the Opening of Foley Primary School Multi-Purpose Hall at Foley Primary School Ballymacnab, Co. Armagh on February 19. Photos: LiamMcArdle.com



Paul Givan MLA, Education Minister is shown the work of the Primary 1 class at the Opening of Foley Primary School Multi-Purpose Hall.



Paul Givan MLA, Education Minister speaking at the Opening of Foley Primary School Multi-Purpose Hall.



Kieran McCrory, Principal and Paul Givan MLA, Education Minister at the Opening of Foley Primary School Multi-Purpose Hall.



Archbishop Eamon Martin, Archbishop of Armagh speaking at the Opening of Foley Primary School Multi-Purpose Hall.



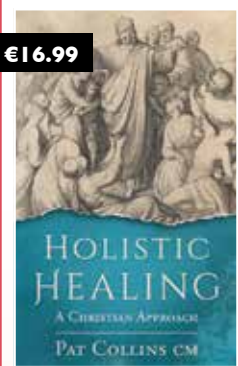
Daire Hughes MP speaking at the Opening of Foley Primary School Multi-Purpose Hall.



Daire Hughes MP speaking at the Opening of Foley Primary School Multi-Purpose Hall.



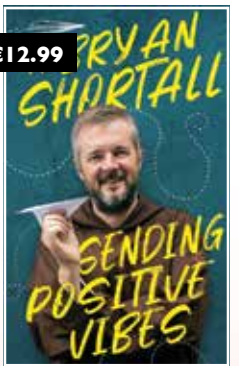
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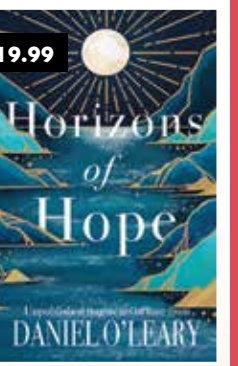
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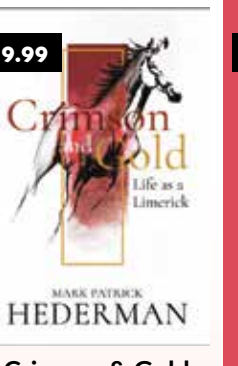
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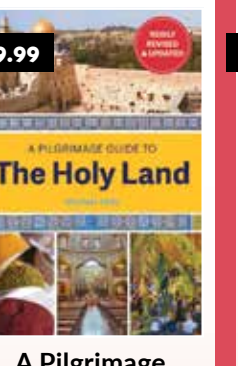
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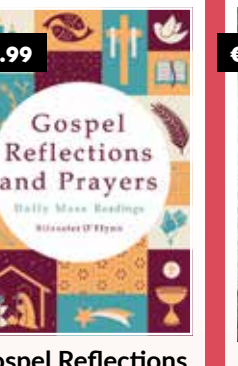
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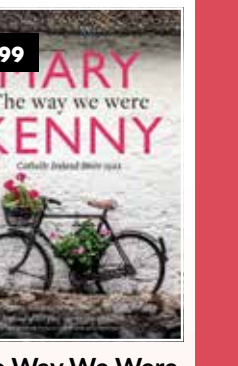
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New school schemes were the wrong move at the wrong time



Breda O'Brien

In early February, newly appointed Minister for Education, Helen McEntee, announced the final phase of the free textbook scheme. The scheme now extends from primary schools to all post-primary students except those attending fee-paying institutions at a cost of up to €191 million.

The Department of Social Protection has instituted free of school lunches for all primary school pupils. The Department of Education also funded €9 million for schools to purchase pouches that prevent pupils from using mobile phones during the school day. At first glance, these are

useful steps. School textbooks are expensive and a significant burden on some parents. What's not to like about not worrying about what to put in the school lunchbox? And given that there is widespread unease about the use of mobile phones, it seems good to subsidise a way of reducing their use.

“One-third of State-funded schools in England have a faith designation, mostly Anglican. Scotland fully funds Catholic schools since 1918”

The problem is that Irish education, despite being allegedly free, is chronically underfunded. Ireland is unusual in that most primary and secondary schools are still under the patronage of the Catholic

Church but receive most of their funding from the State.

To be clear, it is not unusual for countries to fund Catholic or other denominational schools. It is just unusual that the majority of schools belong to one denomination. One-third of State-funded schools in England have a faith designation, mostly Anglican. Scotland fully funds Catholic schools since 1918.

Of European countries, very few countries provide no State funding at all, while the Netherlands funds both private (including Catholic) and public schools to the same degree.

Needs

However, in Ireland, State funding has never met the needs of the schools, leading to a culture of voluntary contributions to meet the shortfall. The obvious problem is that some schools are in areas where parents cannot contribute anything.

As a result, schools in



deprived areas, including those that receive additional funding under the Delivering Educational Opportunity in our Schools (Deis) barely manage to scrape along.

We have an antiquated system of school funding that relies on capitation grants, that is, payments per enrolled student, and a patchwork of additional grants.

Questions about funding may appear to have wandered far from free school textbooks, free school lunches and free mobile phone pouches but in a chronically underfunded system, it is a question of priorities.

“The cost of identifying those most in need and the ongoing administration costs as much as giving it freely to everyone”

Parents have welcomed both the textbooks and the lunches but because they are universal, many parents who could well afford to pay for them (and sometimes 2 complete sets, one for school, one for home) are now receiving them free.

There is a well-documented dilemma regarding targeted interventions versus universal benefits, which is that sometimes, the cost of identifying those most in need and the ongoing administration costs as much as giving it freely to everyone.

But should you start with free textbooks and lunches in a chronically underfunded system? Reform of the funding model so that no school

“Should you start with free textbooks and lunches in a chronically underfunded system? Reform of the funding model so that no school would have to ask for a voluntary subscription would surely have been a better place to start”

would have to ask for a voluntary subscription would surely have been a better place to start.

Pressure

The textbook scheme put additional pressure on schools to administer. Paul Crone, director of the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (post-primary) describes the chaos in schools, forced to tender for the materials across the EU.

He says that schools were dealing with 'delayed delivery dates, books not covered, not alphabetised, incomplete orders, mountains of stationery, rooms out of action as they are full of books and stationery, teachers who are stressed because their students have no book in front of them, parents who have added up the cost and feel short-changed, students who have lost two calculators already and I could go on.'

At least ten independent bookshops closed, because they depended both on the contracts for schoolbooks and also on the footfall from customers coming to collect them.

also received criticism for using ultra-processed foods.

As for the pouches, some schools had already implemented their own systems, which varied from clear boxes on the front of lockers, to honour codes. The pouches work on a magnetised system like tags on clothes in shops. In theory, students cannot demagnetise them until they go outside to various stations.

In reality, they are up to every trick in the book, from placing a carefully calibrated slit in the bottom which allows the phone to be extracted to putting an old burner phone in the pouch and keeping the real phone.

Many schools admit that while the pouches help to have a no-phone environment, other rules, like a parent having to collect any phone that is confiscated, have more impact.

These schemes might have been the icing on the cake in an ideal world, but in an underfunded school system where principals lose sleep worrying about paying ESB and gas bills, they were the wrong move

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Irish foreign and defence policy at a crucial crossroads



David Quinn

The war in Ukraine has now been raging for three years with hundreds of thousands dead and injured on both sides. A few weeks after the invasion began, I wrote a piece for this newspaper that I think has aged very well.

I said: "Here is one very plausible scenario if peace is not arrived at early: the war drags on for months, and possibly years, with tens of thousands dead on both sides. More and more Ukrainian cities are devastated, and the economy ruined. But by and large the conflict is a stalemate because the Russian army is not as powerful as many thought, and the Ukrainian army is far better. But neither side is strong enough to defeat the other."

This has been exactly borne out, except the number of dead is even higher than I predicted. Ever since roughly the end of 2022, the war has been more or less stalemated. At the start of the invasion, Russia made big gains, then the Ukrainians fought back regaining much of their territory. The frontline positions more or less stabilised after that with a big Ukrainian counteroffensive in summer 2023 failing badly.

Cost

Since then, Russia has made small territorial gains at huge cost and Ukraine is being slowly worn down. But no end to the fighting is in sight. At this rate the war could go on for years to come.

I wrote in that article in April 2022 that neither side was going to be able to achieve all it wanted, that is a total defeat of Ukraine by Russia or Ukraine regaining all captured territory including Crimea. So it has proved. This war only ends in compromise as has happened in many wars, including our own War of Independence.

"Ireland has a big mouth on the international stage. We like to present ourselves as a moral voice, a champion of human rights, even though we are highly selective and hypocritical in how we go about this"



Fr Wojciech Stasiewicz, director of the Religious Mission of Caritas-Spes in the eastern Diocese of Kharkiv-Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine, is seen November 4, 2023, holding the Bible at a Kharkiv cemetery and praying for fallen Ukrainian soldiers. Photo: OSV News/courtesy Fr Wojciech Stasiewicz.

From early on, Pope Francis was also calling for peace seeing where all this was going.

"There is actually a precedent for what Trump is doing, and that is the Korean war which ranged from 1950 until 1953 leaving millions dead"

Now Donald Trump has come along and seems intent on imposing a peace deal on Ukraine much to the disgust of Ukraine and many European countries. Nations like France, Germany and Britain say Ukraine must take the lead in deciding the terms of peace. But if that means chasing the impossible goal of regaining all territory with hundreds of thousands more people dead and injured, what then?

There is actually a precedent for what Trump is doing, and that is the Korean war which ranged from 1950 until 1953 leaving millions dead. On the side of communist North Korea were the Chinese and Russians, while on the South Korean side was the US and various other armies with the backing of the UN.

The war ebbed and flowed at enormous cost and no end was in sight. Then in January 1953, Dwight D. Eisenhower became US president and he

decided to bring about peace. A ceasefire was agreed later that year and signed by the UN (in practice, basically by the Americans), the Chinese and the North Koreans.

The leader of South Korea did not sign it because he wanted total victory. Eisenhower knew this was unrealistic. Maybe the South Korean leader felt his own side would overthrow him if he compromised and was glad the Americans brought the war to an end over his head.

Was that ceasefire deal immoral? It was not. The alternative was endless war with no finish in sight. That would have been much, much worse.

Frontline

It is possible that in a few months-time, fighting in Ukraine will stop, frozen along the present frontline. Ukraine's army will be built up to the strength of Israel's in the next few years, thereby deterring future Russian attack, and the country will continue on a path to EU membership but not NATO. Ukraine can then begin to recover from the war and countless lives will be saved. Possibly after Putin dies, a future Russian leader will hand back much of the captured land in return for normal relations with the West.

Somewhere at the edge of all this is little Ireland. Trump has also basically told Europe that from now on it will have to do a lot more to look after its own defence and not rely so heavily on the American

taxpayer. The US spends more on defence than all the countries of Europe put together. Europe easily has the strength to match Russia militarily without any US help. It is far richer and more powerful than Russia but has been free-riding on the US for years.

"Many vital underwater cables cross from America to Europe and Ireland under Irish waters and Russia could cut some of them if it really wanted"

Ireland is militarily neutral and our geographical position as an island on the northwest edge of Europe means we have no threatening countries anywhere near us. This means we have a tiny defence force on a tiny budget.

But now other European

countries are looking at us and wondering why we don't spend more. We have extensive waters and airspace around our island that we are basically incapable of patrolling and we rely on the British and other powers to do that for us.

Many vital underwater cables cross from America to Europe and Ireland under Irish waters and Russia could cut some of them if it really wanted. There is nothing we could do about it and we would be totally unable to help any other military that was aiming to stop the Russians.

Credibility

This means our neutrality has no moral credibility. There is pressure on us to join NATO or some European military alliance based around the EU, but this pressure might relent if we spent more on our own defence.

NATO countries aim to spend about 2.5% of their GDP on defence. Some go higher

than that and some lower. We spend 0.2% of our GDP on defence which incredibly low. The Government wants to increase that to 0.4% which is still very low. Neutral Austria spends 0.8% on defence, which is low by European standards, but a lot higher than us.

Ireland has a big mouth on the international stage. We like to present ourselves as a moral voice, a champion of human rights, even though we are highly selective and hypocritical in how we go about this. For example, we condemn Israel while all but ignoring terrible human rights abuses by China because we want to trade with them.

But a growing number of countries want us to put our money where our mouth is in terms of providing for our own security and contributing to the security of Europe. That means massively increasing defence spending. Will we do it? It seems doubtful, but the price will be a loss of credibility on the international stage.

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David Quinn, CEO, The Iona Institute

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A new series
written by Priests

Relentless

People need priests more than ever before

When I was asked to contribute to *The Irish Catholic* series of articles on exploring the challenges of being a priest in Ireland today, I was a bit hesitant as I have never done anything like that before. Then I thought to myself after 43 years in ministry I surely have something to say from my own experience.

The first thing I would like to say is that I have been very happy as a priest having worked in 5 different parishes with the experience of a variety of different ministries such as Hospital Chaplaincy - both in General and Psychiatric hospitals - Prison Chaplaincy and Catechetics.

If I was asked, 'Why did I become a priest?' My first response would be 'to help people'.

I have always felt a sense of gratitude that my vocation as a priest has given me the opportunity to be with people especially at different times of their lives: Bereavements and tragedies of one kind or another; to share moments of great happiness; Marriages, Baptisms and other important events in parish life.

People need priests, possibly more than ever before.

I also feel appreciated by the people I serve and every so often they do acknowledge it. Sometimes verbally but in all kinds of different ways as well.

Change

Having said that there has been an enormous change in the life of the priest. I suppose the biggest change has been the fall off vocations and the age profile of priests. Personally, speaking I cannot see a rise in vocations, I feel that boat has gone. I was recently asked to attend a careers night in our local Secondary School. They had all kinds of people there who do different jobs: accounts, guards, nurses, carpenters and many others.



All the students were approaching the other tables, and no one was coming to mine. Eventually one boy came up to me and I said at last someone who may be showing an interest in being a priest. He sat down, and his first question was, "What is the money like?"

“Many priests feel that they are being pulled from Billy to Jack, and it is having an adverse effect on their health”

As result of the shortage of priests, Dioceses are scrambling to figure out what to do going forward. In some cases, dioceses have brought in priests from other countries

in many cases this has worked out well even though there is a difference in culture. There are arguments to say this is just postponing the inevitable and there are mumblings among lay people about some foreign priests being hard to understand and tending to go on too long in their homilies. I often think what did the people in Africa feel about Irish priests when they went on mission.

Amalgamation

Another effort to respond to the shortage of priests has been the amalgamation of parishes in some dioceses. This is called 'Family of Parishes'. In other dioceses it is called 'Clusters of Parishes'. In others it's called 'Pastoral Areas'. But the bottom line I find is that it means more work for the priest on the ground. It is extra funerals and extra baptisms as well as all the other bits and

pieces of being responsible for looking after extra parishes and churches.

“Many priests don't have housekeepers anymore and are trying to manage cooking for themselves and doing their work”

I often feel that this is not acknowledged enough by bishops or those in authority. Many priests feel that they

are being pulled from Billy to Jack, and it is having an adverse effect on their health. Priests need to be taken care of more. Many priests don't have housekeepers anymore and are trying to manage cooking for themselves and doing their work. Granted by some, this may be by choice but for others it may be financial consideration or some other reason.

This can lead to eating at wrong times or not enough attention given to diet or exercise.

Refrain

I know the constant refrain is that we need to get lay

people more involved, but I believe that there is enough recognition that lay people have very busy lives themselves and it can be hard to get them involved or, at least, the right ones. I have heard priests saying that they find it hard to get people involved as Eucharistic Ministers and readers let alone ask them to take on more responsibility for their parish by becoming members of Parish Councils.

The result is that many priests are feeling the strain, and it can affect their health both mentally and physically.

“They asked me if I wanted to take some old pictures as they no longer had any use of them. One was of Bro. Ignatius Rice and the other was an old Sacred Heart picture”

Another change that has taken place from the time I was first ordained is the change in society.

I see this more and more in relation to schools. When I was ordained first, teachers were very much involved in the Sacramental Preparation of First Communion and Confirmation. Now I see less and less of that whether it be in the classroom or outside of it. They are less inclined to attend anything to do with

“If I am feeling the pressure, what must the bishop be feeling? That is why I would not have their job for all the tea in China”

Ministry

Exploring the challenges of being a priest in Ireland today

sacramental preparation outside school times.

Recently I went into a school, and they told me they were cleaning out an old storeroom. They asked me if I wanted to take some old pictures as they no longer had any use of them. One was of Bro. Ignatius Rice and the other was an old Sacred Heart picture. How times have changed.

Burden

Any priest I have spoken to has told me what energises them the most is the burden of administration and no matter what Parish Council you have or Finance Committee the buck stops with the Parish Priest.

There is also a certain amount of pressure that comes from the diocese. Emails about this, that or the other. Meetings about safeguarding, finance reports, boards of management, etc.

And if I am feeling the pressure, what must the bishop be feeling? That is why I would not have their

job for all the tea in China.

Still, I take comfort from the words of Jesus, "I will be with you till the end of time." And what is more important is the Lord of the work than the work of the Lord.

To finish on a positive note. I feel that people do appreciate what we do but it certainly comes at a cost. When I see my family members retired and being able to go on cruises with their wife and see many of the classmates that I went to school with also retired and able to relax in their old age looking at 75 years of age seems a long way off. And when people say, "ah sure it's different for a priest," and "what else would you be at," I can think of a lot of things I would like to be doing at that stage of my life.

Still, I come back to what I said at the start. I can say my life is fulfilled and I do not regret ever becoming a priest.

The address and name of the author for this article is known to the editor.



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Divine Mercy Conference witnesses a growth in Catholic Faith



Renata Milán Morales

The Divine Mercy Conference held at the RDS in Dublin this year saw a record turnout, with over 9000 attendees from all walks of life, including many young people. The event was sold out from early in the morning. There was a variety of stands representing different missions and apostolates across the country from religious life and lay apostolates.

One of the key themes of the conference was the call to be apostles. Stephen, a participant from Cork, shared his experience, expressing his enjoyment of the talks, particularly the one by James Blount. "I really enjoyed the conference, especially the atmosphere and the talk by James Blount," Stephen said. "It's been a time full of grace, especially during adoration."

Sophie, a childcare worker, spoke about how friends had recommended the conference to her. "I wasn't too sure of coming, but I'm glad I said yes," she said. "Seeing everyone come together, even those who don't believe in Jesus, and witnessing God's presence in the moment was beautiful. There was so much openness, and people listened to one another without conflict. I would recommend it to others." Sophie continued, "You might find something that strikes you, and you might get something out of it."

JJ Cummins, assistant with St Michael's Apostles of Prayer for Priests, spoke passionately about the importance of praying for priests. "As Catholics, we need to wake up to the fact that priests need protec-

tion. Without priests, we don't have the Eucharist. We don't have the sacraments. And without these, we can't make it through life's difficulties," he said.

Jim, a first-time attendee from Co. Tipperary, spoke about the inspiration he found at the conference. "The atmosphere here is magic. It's fabulous," Jim said. "I was really impressed by Fr James Blount and the way he preaches. The Holy Spirit is really working through him. The whole event inspired me to continue going to Mass regularly and to keep growing spiritually."

Alison, another attendee, was impressed at the turnout and the incredible energy at the event. "It's amazing to see so many people here, especially with so many young people and families," she said. "It's encouraging to meet so many full-time missionaries. People are really giving up their lives for God's work. It's incredible to see the faith alive in such a large community."

Despite the overwhelming attendance, Alison noted the challenges that come with such a large crowd. "So many people were turned away, which is disappointing. But it's a great problem to have. If the conference keeps growing like this, they might need to consider moving to a bigger venue next year or even having smaller events throughout the year in other parts of Ireland."

Speakers included Fr Pat Collins CM, Fr Brendan Walsh SAC and Fr James Blount and the final Mass was celebrated by Archbishop Dermot Farrell, Archbishop of Dublin.

The Divine Mercy Conference brought together a diverse group of people united by their faith and also offered a space for prayer and deepened commitment to the Catholic life. For many, this year's experience was a deeply enriching one.



Pictured are Srs Rose, Jacinta and Marie Benedicte from the Little Sisters of the Poor, Sybil Hill in Dublin. Photos: John McElroy.



Fr James Blount speaking at the conference.



Pictured are Jean Quilligan and Gina Delaney (3 months).



Pictured are Bonnie O' Donoghue and Connie Sheridan at the conference.



Pictured are Sean and Elaine Connolly from Co. Tipperary at the conference.



Agnvs Dei Pigott (5) at the conference on Saturday.



Pictured are Darren, Gerard, Michael, David and Shane McDonagh at the conference over the weekend.



Pictured are Caroline Holmes, Nicola Blendell, Laura Ruane, Rita Daly and Rosanne McLoughlin at the Jubilee Sacred Heart Crusade stand at the conference.



Sisters Brid, Mary and Lidwina from the Disciples of the Divine Master at their stand on Saturday in the RDS.



Photo shows the large attendance on Saturday.



Fr Seamus McEntee, Vocations Director Dublin Diocese, Bishop Phonsie Cullinan, Chairman of the Council for Vocations and Fr Willie Purcell, National Vocations co-ordinator at the vocations stand at the Divine Mercy Conference over the weekend.

Faith is on the menu at busy Belfast university chaplaincy



SU VP Favour Okpohs

Fr Gerry Clarke SJ introduces Joanne Savage to members of the UU Belfast Chaplaincy lunch where students of all faiths and none find spiritual sustenance

Best known for his directorship role at the Belfast Jesuit Centre, Fr Gerry Clarke is also a half-time chaplain at the University of Ulster's bespoke new Belfast campus, his role "concentrated around three activities, a Tuesday student lunch each week from 12.30-2pm – an opportunity to meet students and hear all their

issues, some of them faith-based".

“Not everyone who comes along to the chaplaincy looking for pastoral support is necessarily Christian and we want this to be an open space where people of different faiths feel comfortable”

Fr Clarke said: "We also do a weekly Saturday dander taking two busloads of students to areas of scenic beauty and interest around Belfast, to give international students in particular an idea of what the city has to offer – this week we are going to Divis/Black Mountain – as well as encouraging them to find a faith-oriented community that allows

them to get to know one another with 75 to 100 students coming through, and it's an opportunity to hear what kind of faith conversations they are having. We also provide a course for students called 'The Difference', all about how to engage with people of different faiths, cultures, religions, and traditions and it had three core imperatives – being curious, being present and reimagining (a rubric which was originally designed by the Reconciliation Office of the Anglican Church) – we of course think that it is massively important to have respect for people of different religious affiliations because as you can see we have Catholics here, but also Presbyterians, Hindus and so on – not everyone who comes along to the chaplaincy looking for pastoral support is necessarily Christian and we want this to be an open space where people



Fr Clarke, Vincent and Favour

“I had an uncle who was a Jesuit priest and a missionary in Zambia. When he came back every six years it was always interesting to hear his stories – they inspired me”

of different faiths feel comfortable together in each other's company.”

Advent

Fr Clarke adds: "Then during Advent we would offer students the opportunity to come to Mass at the Belfast Jesuit Centre on Mondays and Fridays. Sadly, it is not so well attended although we are always encouraging people to come along and our doors are always open.

“On Ash Wednesday – students came into the student lounge – and I celebrated small liturgies with small groups which was very well received on campus to get people thinking about Lent”

"Most students have jobs, they come to college, attend their lectures, do their assignments and then go to work so that they

don't have a great deal of time for extra-curricular activities and we can't chide them too much then for oftentimes not having the time or energy to maybe fully practice their religious beliefs where their schedules and all the manifold pressures of student life not so overwhelming for them, much of the time,

"On Ash Wednesday – students came into the student lounge – and I celebrated small liturgies with small groups which was very well received on campus to get people thinking about Lent.”

Alumnus

The director of the Belfast Jesuit Centre, who is an alumnus of UCD where he studied arts including reading the Old Testament in Latin and Greek, as well as Homer, Herodotus, Sophocles and Aeschylus. He became a Jesuit priest at the age of 24 in 1986. "I had an uncle who was a Jesuit priest and a missionary in Zambia. When he came back every six years it was always interesting to hear his stories – they inspired me." Learning

prayer, learning imaginative prayer – which is the Ignatian way of spirituality – also guided me. After college it was a choice after a few years studying law. He went on to complete his Masters in theology at a French-speaking university which then allowed him to spend many years working for the Jesuit Refugee Service, notably founded by Fr Pedro Arrupe, in various French-speaking countries in Africa including the Democratic Republic of Congo, in Chad and in the Middle East.

“The chaplaincy team made us all welcome, gave out Bibles, and made us feel at home here even though we had come from a far away place”

At the thriving UU Belfast chaplaincy Fr Clarke works alongside Presbyterian Minister the Rev Cheryl Meban, and Chaplain Gayle Mercer who represents

People walking through
Queens University,
Belfast. Photo: iStock



those from the Church of Ireland and Methodist congregations, but the three of them work at the service of students of all faiths and none.

Do many students come to Fr Clarke to discuss the questions they might have about their Christian faith?

"Very few, very few," Fr Clarke confesses, regrettable as this is he maintains his ironclad sanguine equanimity - qualities that clearly make him an easy friend in faith to all students attending the Belfast UU Chaplaincy, who chat to him with total ease. There are a lot of staff dedicated to the pastoral care of students at UU - perhaps one of the reasons why UU was awarded best university in the UK 2024, and Fr Clarke thinks part of this is down to the Belfast welcome and the friendly environment that the city is now arguably renowned for. Amensinor Favour Okpohs is vice-president of the student's union, 31, and hails from Nigeria. She said: "I have met people through the chaplaincy from many different places around the world and students of different faiths to my own. The chaplaincy team made us all welcome, gave out Bibles, and made us feel at home here even though we had come from a far away place. It is lovely to come

together with people who share your faith but also to meet those of faiths that are different to your own. The chaplaincy gives us a space to discuss what we believe in, and God matters a great deal for me. My relationship with God is something I take with me wherever I go. When people come together in faith and share a meal you are guaranteed good vibes."

“There is no doubt that faith and faith communities are being challenged in western Europe for relevance today”

Fr Clarke is not dismayed by the low numbers of students at Mass and simply feels that the church must find new and innovative ways to engage with young people and to find a balance between protecting its traditional institutional practices and moving with the signs of the times. "There is no doubt that faith and faith communities are being challenged in western Europe for relevance today," Fr Clarke considers. "Our churches have to orientate towards the world, one of the issues of the synodal way Pope Francis is proposing is a way of making decisions in

our churches that moves by consensus, that is prayer-filled and prayerful and scripture-based. We have to move forwards with respect for tradition while not fearing innovation where we find it necessary."

Hindu

Sorya Prahassith, 25, studying Business Administration, is from India and enjoying his lunch at the chaplaincy gathering. He is a practising Hindu. He said: "But some of my best friends are Christians and Muslims and all of this has enriched my life superbly." He worships at the Gurudwara in Duncairn Gardens and recommends that people interested in this faith grab a copy of the Baghavad Gita. "To me it is a harmonious faith and I am most interested in what unites people of different faiths as opposed to what divides them," says Sorya. "I find people in Belfast very friendly and am delighted to be studying here. At the chaplaincy I have met so many people who have completely added wisdom and colour to my life, and that includes Fr Gerry."

Aswathy Kottaiathil Anand, 28, studying for a BA in Arts and Design is happily Hindu and her friend Anjana Baby, 26, also from Kerala, is a student of peace and conflict studies,



Fr Clarke, Aswathy and Anjana

and a devout Christian. Both of them find peace in their respective faiths, a sense of being spiritually tethered and centered in an all too often fragmented and turbulent world. In a Christian church or in a Hindu temple, they are both pursuing a prayerful tranquility of the mind and a way to manage the manifold stresses of being an undergraduate on a busy Belfast campus. Besides their studies, honouring the commitments of their faith, and making many friends

at the chaplaincy, they both support themselves by working in Burger King.

Complex

Osas, also from Nigeria, and studying a complex degree involving energy power the logistics of which were way over the head of this writer, gave me some fabulous lines: "The idea of God is so important to me and my Christian faith is the lens through which I view the world. It sustains me and helps light up the road ahead."

Vincent Onuh, 30, from

Nigeria has completed an MSC in Peace and Conflict Studies. "Coming here is about experiencing the beauty of a vibrant community with people who believe in different faiths and come from different cultures - it's an international mix. I'm a Catholic and I'm proud of my faith, it is very important to me, but I am also interested in learning about and befriending members of other faiths and none because I think that is the way towards global or international unity, or a world that accepts religious pluralism."

Out&About

Carlo Acutis blessings in Kerry



KERRY: Prior Fr David McGovern OP and Fr David Walker OP blessed each person that attended Mass in Blessed Carlo Acutis' honour at Holy Cross Dominican Church, Tralee on February 17 with the future Saint's relics. Photo: John Cleary.



CARLOW: Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin celebrated the confirmation of 27 young people in Hacketstown. "All inspired by the life and witness of Blessed Carlo Acutis," the bishop said. This is the first 2025 Confirmation celebration in the Diocese.



CAVAN: Alan and Karen Clarke and Paul and Fiona Marron at a St Valentine's Mass at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Kingscourt.

IN SHORT

A Church of Ireland service said in a Catholic church in Mayo

A service for the Church of Ireland community was offered on February 16 in the St Mary's Roman Catholic Church in Westport, Co. Mayo as the Holy Trinity Church is currently closed due to storm damage.

A month after the 'Christian Unity Week', the Church of Ireland Bishop of Tuam, Limerick and Killaloe, Michael Burrows celebrated Sunday Service in the Catholic church for the first time in history, in an occasion outlined by the saying: 'United in Spirit, Together in Prayer'.

The bishop and Rev. Suzanne Cousins, Rector of Holy Trinity Church were received in St Mary's Church by Westport Parish Adm., Fr John Kenny.

St Mary's will also accommodate the Holy Trinity fundraising recital by Dublin Choral Union on March 2, after the Holy Trinity service in St Mary's Church.

Down and Connor 'Called and Gifted'

A group of lay leaders and clergy in the Diocese of Down and Connor recently gathered for a 'Called and Gifted' discernment process training, which was developed and licensed by the St Catherine of Siena Institute.

Fr Damian McCaughan, one of the Diocesan Licensed Facilitators was the guest speaker for the launch evening of the 'Small Discernment Groups'. He shared his practical experience and wisdom in helping The Pathways to plan and recognise the opportunities to begin to experiment with their chosen charism.

Organised by The Pathways to the Future, Down and Connor Diocese's programme of renewal, this is a process that invites the participants to learn about the characteristics of a charism and to prayerfully discern where God is calling them to use their charisms and gifts.

"'Called and Gifted' is a powerful form of spiritual discernment, supporting and accompanying the baptised to recognise their spiritual gifts, and discern how they are being called to use them to serve God and His people," said Jackie Kerr, Pathways to the Future Project Manager.

Ms Kerr said, "Pathways to the Future's plan is to deliver 'Called and Gifted' to all Families of Parishes across the diocese, and in so doing, to create a body of intentional disciples serving as lay ministers and volunteers in their parishes."

Edited by Renata Steffens
Renata@irishcatholic.ie



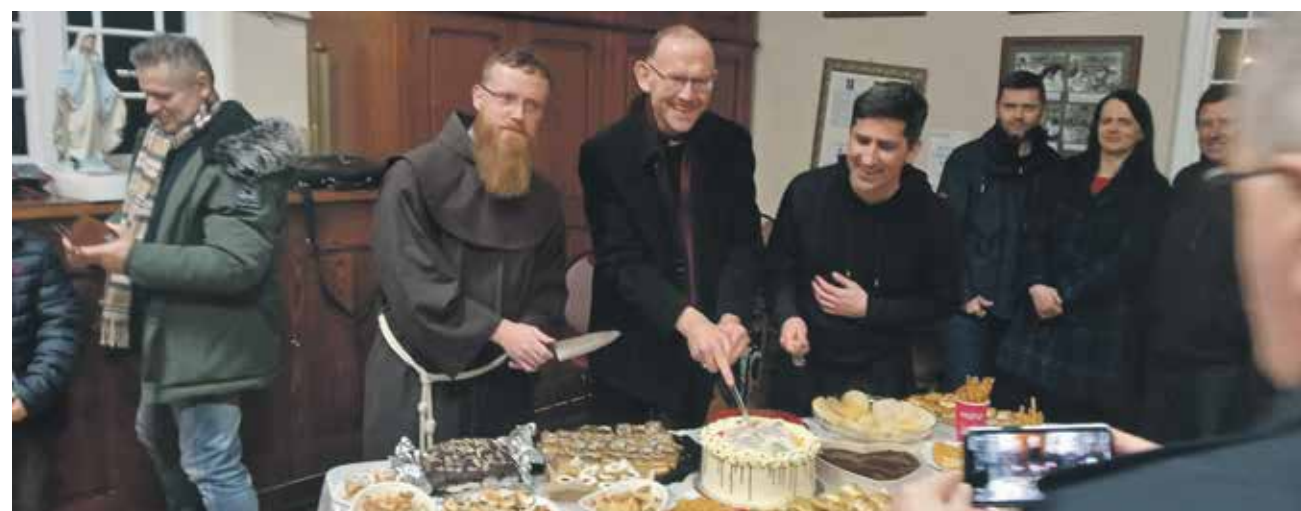
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CAVAN: Annette O'Rourke, Chairperson of the Kingscourt Parish Assembly, with Paddy and Maureen Roddy and Sean and Eileen McDaniel marking their respective diamond jubilees of marriage at the St Valentine's Mass at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Kingscourt.



CARLOW: Fr Brian Maguire will take a six-month sabbatical break and had a farewell Mass at the Church of the Most Holy Rosary, Tullow followed by refreshments in Tullow Parish Centre on February 16. Fr Gerard Ahern has been appointed as PP of Tullow.



CLARE: A reception took place after Mass with Polish Community in the Chapter Room, Cathedral of St Peter and Paul, Ennis. (L/R) Fr Roch OFM, Ennis Friary, Bishop Fintan Monahan, Fr Jarek OSB, Glenstal.



MAYO: Archbishop of Tuam Francis Duffy with Dames and Knights of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem following the celebration of Mass in the Apparition Chapel, Knock for the Annual Pilgrimage of the Order to the International Eucharistic and Marian Shrine in Knock.



CARLOW: Recently, the Parish of Graiguecullen/Killeslin celebrated St Valentine's Day Mass 2025 with cake and a good time. Photo: Jackie Malone



MONAGHAN: The Rice family who presented Fr Tom Smith with the proceeds of a fundraiser for his Missionary work in Uganda after Mass in St Patrick's Church, Bawn.

ANTRIM

A vocations retreat takes place in Drumalis, Larne from March 7 to 9. This 'no pressure' retreat can help you to make sense of God's plan for your life. For more information contact Fr Barry Matthews at barrymatthews@gmail.com.

CAVAN

'5k Fun Run and Walk' in aid of Virginia Cancer Care and Irish Heart Foundation takes place on March 15 at 5pm at Killinkere Leisure Centre, A82 H9F6. Free registration. Donation box on the evening. Refreshments in Lounge afterwards.

DERRY

'Pro-Life Day' with Bernadette Smyth and the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal takes place on March 15 from 10am to 4pm at St Padre Pio House, Galliagh, 5 Fairview Road. There will be Mass, adoration, talks and prayer. Bring your own lunch.

DONEGAL

David Parkes, Owen Mac and guests in a concert on March 7 in the Great Northern Hotel, Bundoran. Door opens at 7pm and concert starts at 8.15pm. Raffle on the night. This is a fundraising event to aid Fr John Keane in his mission work with assisting the youth on the Pilgrimage to Medjugorje. Admission €20.

GALWAY

'Poor Clare Galway Monastic Experience Day' for women aged 18-35 happens on March 15 from 10am to 5pm. For more information contact events@poorclares.ie.

KERRY

The next Mass for the Relics of Blessed Carlo Acutis will be on the March 18 at 7.30 pm at the Holy Cross Dominican Church, Tralee.

LIMERICK

Lecture by Sr Jane Dominic Laurel on 'Suffering and the Narrative of Redemption: Why God allows us to suffer', takes place on March 10 at 7pm in St Saviour's Parish Hall. Lecture is free. Register on thomisticinstitute.org.

MAYO

Ballina Killaloe Men's Shed are hosting a free workshop on First Aid, CPR and Defib on March 12 and 26 at 7pm in Ballina Parish Hall. Open to all men aged 18+. Non-members are welcome free of charge. To register contact Jerome on 0861773939.

MONAGHAN

To mark the closure of the Sisters of St Louis Motherhouse Convent, Mass of Thanksgiving will be celebrated on March 2 in St Macartan's Cathedral at 3pm followed by light refreshments in the Hillgrove Hotel.

ROSCOMMON

'Oran Parish Lenten Journey'. Stations (way) of the cross in St Patrick's Church, Cloverhill begins on March 7 at 7pm and continues for six consecutive Fridays throughout Lent. Led by Fr Victor Samugana. All welcome.

TIPPERARY

Thurles Parish Young Adults' meeting in Bohernanave Church takes place on February 28 at 8pm. All 18 to 35-year-olds looking for a Catholic Community are welcome. Come for friendship, faith, adoration and more. For more information contact Thomas on 0870646637

WATERFORD

Eucharistic adoration continues each Monday in the Holy Family Church after 11am Mass until 4pm. An invitation to respond to the invitation of the Lord Jesus to come and spend some quiet time with him.

'Enlighten' Lectio Divina for young adults aged 18-35 with the Sisters of Mary Morning Star takes place on February 28 and March 28 at 8pm at The Friary (Chapel), Lady Lane.

WICKLOW

Kilaveney Parish Mission 2025 led by Fr Laurence Gallagher takes place from March 2 to 5. Join for a time of prayer, reflection and renewal. This is an opportunity for healing, spiritual growth and deepening your connection with God. The themes are 'Baptism, Healing, Compassion and Ash Wednesday'. All welcome.

THE SYNODAL TIMES

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

The call to conversion and structural change



Luca Attanasio

In January 2022, as a way of actively participating in the Synod process on synodality, Cardinals João Braz de Aviz (Prefect of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life) and Mario Grech (Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops) sent a joint letter to all the general governments that are members of the USG (Union of Superiors General) and UISG (International Union of Superiors General), inviting them to “reflect on the exercise of governance within institutes and the relations between the various institutes.”

In fact, from October 2021 until April 2022, the general governments of the various institutes and societies of apostolic life carried out their own processes of dialogue and prayer, sometimes involving members of the Curia, provincial governments or even the entire congregation.

224 congregations participated, 169 female (75%) and 55 male (25%). Starting in

April 2022, a commission prepared a summary of the contributions received, which was then presented to the USG Assembly (May 2022) and the UISG Online Assembly (July 2022). Of such commission, besides, Gemma Simmonds CJ, José Cristo Rey García Paredes CMF, and Orlando Torres SJ, Maria Cimperman is also a member.

Sr Maria is a Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Professor of Theological Ethics and Consecrated Life and Founding Director of the Center for the Study of Consecrated Life at Catholic Theological Union (Chicago, USA). In September 2023 she also joined the UISG staff as the Synodality coordinator, a new initiative which aims to support the members of UISG in living that synodal commitment. We met her at the UISG headquarters in Rome.

Sr Maria, it is now two and a half years since the beginning of this complex and revolutionary process, are some fruits already visible?

‘I think a most important achievement was to create a discernment process that involves everyone and in which the pastor, in this case the Pope, is part of the process. At the end of the whole Synod Assembly process, after the final document was voted upon and passed by the Assembly delegates, many thought that what would follow months later was an Apostolic Exhortation. This is what usually happens. However, in this case, after

also participating in the Synod Assembly process, Pope Francis approved the document in full. The document is now part of the Church’s teaching. This is a significant example for bishops and pastors as well as lay people of how discernment could be done. It is an act of trust in the people of God coming together, praying, dialoguing, learning together, and discerning. This is definitely a fruit of the Assembly process! I think that the Pope had long felt an urgency for renewal and the Synod, which asks, “How to be a Church in Mission?” is part of a process that had begun several years earlier. You can see in Pope Francis’ writings, from *Laudato sí* to *Fratelli Tutti*, a vision of the world and a vision for the Church with the Holy Spirit as the protagonist. Pope Francis has said that “Synodality is a style, it is a walk together, and it is what the Lord expects from the Church of the third millennium.” He was helping us have this experience, and now is calling the entire Church, the whole people of God, to this as well.

“Allowing for vulnerable sharing also is a fruit of the Synod, one not to be forgotten”

I also see as tangible results naming more women to positions to the Synod Council or leadership in Dicasteries. The document calls for more lay participation in ecclesiastical decision-making. It calls for more women in leadership roles. It is meaningful as well that Pope Francis has called for accountability, asking the bishops to report on



Maria Cimperman, a religious sister of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Professor of Theological Ethics and Consecrated Life.

“He was helping us have this experience, and now is calling the entire Church, the whole people of God, to this as well”

their local synodality efforts in their next *ad limina* visits. At the same time, I sense it is meant to give opportunities for the bishops to share the challenges and perhaps the assistance they need. Allowing for vulnerable sharing also is a fruit of the Synod, one not to be forgotten.”

UISG & USG have been invited to be protagonists and work together, what sort of experience has been?

‘This is a very interesting element. The two Unions were each invited to select 5 members from their organisations to participate as voting delegates in the Synod. This was a

first. When requests for responses to questions are made to Bishops’ Conference, UISG and USG are now also asked to submit their responses. The voices of religious women and men are seen as important for the Church, now and into the future.

I was invited to the Synod Assembly both years – as an expert facilitator and theologian. I facilitated the table conversations using the method of Conversation in the Spirit, and I saw transformation happen. It was such a gift to see, and to know that the Spirit was moving among us in the discernment process and that people were open to listening

and responding. There were many important moments in both Assemblies.

“It was an experience of great communion and unity that led to syntheses”

Between the two Synod Assemblies, both UISG and USG participated in another call, this time for responses to the First

“I think a most important achievement was to create a discernment process that involves everyone and in which the pastor, in this case the Pope, is part of the process”



Pope Francis shakes hands with Indian Archbishop Raphael Thattil, the major archbishop of Ernakulam-Angamaly, during a meeting with bishops, priests and faithful from the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church at the Vatican, May 13, 2024. Photo: CNS/Vatican Media.

Synod document, offering our contribution and experience to questions about how we manage unity in the midst of diversity, how we bring together participation, authority and governance, and more. I had the privilege of reading and seeing what emerged, being part of yet another small group of theologians who offered a synthesis from UISG-USG that was part of the contributions toward the 2024 *Instrumentum Laboris*. It was an experience of listening from all over the world, and working together with another small team. It was an experience of great communion and unity that led to syntheses that were useful to many."

Once the sessions are over comes the most complex time for the Synod, the implementation. What are the tools that facilitate the universal Church and the local churches in the process towards the implementation of what the Synod stands for? And what is the future of the Synod on synodality? 'I remember that many people, upon hearing the news of this Synod being

called, said nothing new would happen. However, this time, it soon became clear to everyone that something very new was being offered, a consultation in which the people, all of God's people, were being heard. I believe that the Synod calls us to a spiritual renewal first of all, and this is then reflected in the reform of the structures'.

But isn't there a risk that the renewal of structures and canon law are all late and slow? Aren't we still talking about parish pastoral councils which were mandated at Vatican two?

'Yes, it is true, already with *Lumen Gentium* and with Vatican II as a whole, certain issues calling for renewal were addressed or at least named. I see, however, that Pope Francis is working to fulfil the mandate of *Lumen Gentium* and to fully realise the

Church as People of God – for this time in which we are living. We are not trying to go back 60 years. We are being called to be this time. Communion, participation and mission are key calls in the Synod. The calls of Vatican II continue, reminding us that baptism (not ordination) is foundational and leads us to co-responsibility. Cardinal Hollerich, the Synod General Rapporteur, at one point reminded us that the baptismal dignity of women is equal to that of men. We are all called. Yes, it is true, in a way we are late and slow, but this is still a good time to begin!"

What are the main problems encountered in the implementation of the Synod?

"Letting all people see this Church is theirs, through baptism, is still something that needs to be understood. It will be important to have all

“During Lent read the Synod’s final document, five parts divided into five weeks. Read and discuss its calls and implications with others. There is a need to deeply understand there is another way forward”

people, and particularly lay persons, read the final document, recognising that they have agency and are called to missionary discipleship – actually co-responsible discipleship. We need to together read the document, as part of our ongoing formation. To read and reflect together – lay, religious, ordained. The document calls loudly for shared formation. This is one way to do so. In light of this I have a suggestion: During Lent read the Synod's final document, five parts divided into five weeks. Read and discuss its calls and implications with

others. There is a need to deeply understand there is another way forward.

What, instead, are the paths that are moving fast, with fewer hindrances?

"We are seeing more online conversations about the Synod; different groups are taking initiative to speak about the Synod and its implications. Another example is news that the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference (FABC) are speaking about creating an "Office for Synodal Transformation" whose aim is to sustain the synodal impulse of the Church.

Beyond the practical changes in the organisation of ecclesial bodies from the smallest to the largest, beyond the call to a global conversion, to a greater confrontation and collegiality, for a less hierarchical and more people-oriented Church, what do you think is the main, I would say epochal,

message that the Synod gives to the Church and the world?

"All of the above are key factors. Baptism as the foundation. We can have unity and diversity, and, especially, another way forward is possible, with dialogue, with discernment. Key is that we are learning as a Church to discern. The Synod was a School of Discernment for the Church. I think that the call to conversion and structural change is paramount. Even the definition of Synodality in the final document announces this: "Synodality is a path of spiritual renewal and structural reform that enables the Church to be more participatory and missionary, so that it can walk with every man and woman, radiating the light of Christ" (No. 28). This is the key! It's never too late for the Spirit to move – everything and everyone."

“Something very new was being offered, a consultation in which the people, all of God’s people, were being heard”



World Report

IN BRIEF

By sending anonymous letter to Rome, Buffalo diocese says priest 'illustrates lack of courage'

● The Diocese of Buffalo in the US has said a priest who anonymously wrote to the Vatican to request an apostolic visitation to investigate the state of the diocese "illustrates a lack of courage" with his decision to pen a letter and not go to Bishop Michael Fisher directly.

"The fact that an unnamed priest has authored a letter to the pope that cannot be responded to personally illustrates a lack of courage," the diocese said in a January 21 statement, noting that Bishop Fisher has encouraged collaboration with both laity and clergy since he arrived in 2021. "It is unfortunate that the author of the letter has not accepted the ongoing invitations of Bishop Fisher to priests to meet."

Catholic charities serving war-hit Sudan affected by US funding freeze

● One of the nations being affected by the USAID funding cut is Sudan, which is undergoing a civil war. Howard Mollett, Head of Humanitarian Policy at the Catholic aid agency CAFOD – the international aid agency of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales – says international aid is very critical to help the population as the UNOCHA and UNHCR launch an appeal

for the country.

"The UN appeal comes at a critical time. Over 40% of global funding for life-saving programs in Sudan came from the US government until now. Given the chaos caused by the US administration's decisions to shut down USAID, we desperately need other governments step in. There are millions of people in Sudan facing famine, extreme hunger and suffering," he said.

Catholic-backed prison nursery offers incarcerated moms 'family-oriented' space for babies

● A prison nursery program in the US that has drawn support from local Catholic leaders is offering mothers a supportive 'family-oriented' place to bond with their newborn babies while still incarcerated.

The nursery program at the Women's Eastern Reception, Diagnostic, and Correctional Centre (WERDCC) in Vandalia, Missouri, US is offering "a great opportunity to reach a lot of moms" who might otherwise be separated from their very young children, program manager Kim Perkins told CNA.

Perkins said the facility came about after the Missouri Legislature in 2022 passed a bill creating the "Correctional Centre Nursery Program," which "requires the Department of Corrections to establish a correctional centre nursery" in at least one of the state's women's prisons by July 2025.

The program "allows eligible inmates and children born to them while in the custody of the department to reside together in the institution for up to 18 months post-delivery," the measure said.

In his native Argentina, people praying for the health of Pope Francis

● If the news concerning Pope Francis's health problems is concerning Catholics all over the globe, in Argentina it is especially troubling.

There has been a 'wave of love' to the Pontiff – as a bishop call it – over the past few days in the South American nation.

Gatherings and rosary prayers for the Pope's recovery have been promoted all over Argentina, and everything was organised very quickly.

The Bishops' Conference released a statement on February 17 asking "all communities to gather in prayer for Pope Francis's health, asking the Lord to grant him a fast recovery."

"It was a matter of only 12 hours or so. The next day, Masses were being celebrated in distinct parts of Argentina with that intention," Fr Leonardo Sileo of the Diocese of Merlo-Moreno – on the outskirts of Buenos Aires – told *Crux*.

Sudanese bishops urge tax exemptions amid conflict and economic turmoil

As conflict and economic hardship continue to plague Sudan and South Sudan, the Catholic bishops are calling on the governments of both countries to exempt the Catholic Church from taxes, in order to enable it to accomplish its missions more effectively.

In his opening remarks at the start of the meeting of the Episcopal Conference of Sudan and South Sudan (SSS-CBC), president Cardinal Stephen Ameyu Martin Mulla addressed the ongoing conflicts in Sudan and parts of South Sudan, the economic hardships both countries face, and the social divisions that require a "robust" response from the bishops as leaders.

"As we navigate the financial challenges facing our church, advocating for the exemption of the Catholic Church from taxation is essential," Ameyu said February 18.

"This exemption will enable us to allocate more resources towards our pastoral activities and community services. The church must remain a vibrant presence in our communities and financial burdens should not hinder our mission," he explained.

In Sudan, conflict erupted on April 15, 2023, between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the powerful paramilitary group known as the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), led



Catholics attend a procession during the National Eucharistic Congress in Juba, South Sudan, November 22, 2024, following a night of gunfire after security forces moved to arrest the former head of the intelligence service. Photo: OSV News/Samir Bol, Reuters.

by General Mohamed Hamed "Hemedti" Dagalo. Both leaders are fighting for control of the state and its resources.

According to the Global Conflict Tracker, approximately 15,000 people have been killed. Over 8.2 million people have been displaced, with nearly 2 million Sudanese fleeing to unstable regions in Chad, Ethiopia, and South Sudan. The United Nations reports that more than 25 million people now require humanitarian assistance, and worsening food security risks are triggering the "world's largest hunger crisis."

Reflecting on these crises,

Mulla said the Church needs to offer "a robust response."

"As we reflect on the current situation in Sudan and South Sudan, we must acknowledge the many challenges that confront us. The Church is not only a spiritual beacon but also a crucial player in the social economic landscape of our communities," the cardinal said.

"Our commitment to education, moral formation, and inter-religious dialogue is paramount in fostering peace and unity among our people," he said.

The bishops said they believe that it would be hard for the Church to overcome such challenges if its

agencies continue to be burdened by taxes.

"The Catholic bishops are concerned about the taxation levied on the missionaries and the services the Church offers in the country," said Fr John Gbembeyo, Pastoral and Social Communication Coordinator in the Sudan Catholic Bishops' Conference.

In comments to *Crux*, the priest said that "all projects, services, and programs being implemented in the country are based on the kind donations of the Church partners, and those donations and projects are offered to help the vulnerable members in the respective dioceses within the country."

European bishops urge investment in peace, rebuilding in Syria

With the European Union poised to ease sanctions on Syria following the ouster of its former governing regime last fall, Europe's bishops have urged the protection of persecuted communities and investment in rebuilding.

In a February 19 statement, Bishop Mariano Crociata of Latina and President of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE), lamented the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Syria after over a decade of war, and called for European institutions to invest in peacebuilding.

He highlighted four key priorities for EU institutions and leaders as things move forward, including the sustained provision of humanitarian support; investment in economic recovery through the easing of sanctions and support of the private sector; fostering equal citizenship by providing constitutional protections for minority groups; and promoting efforts in dialogue, healing and reconciliation.

Bishop Crociata said Syrians regardless of religious or ethnic background "have faced unimaginable hardships" such as poverty, displacement, and the destruction of

their homes, communities and livelihoods.

The responsibility to safeguard the population and especially minority communities, Bishop Crociata said, is one that goes beyond initial humanitarian needs and prioritises long-term strategies for rebuilding and reconciliation in the population.

To this end, Bishop Crociata called on the EU and its member states to provide "sustained and adequate funding" to partners in a bid to ensure that basic necessities such as food, shelter, education and healthcare, including psychological treatment and healing from trauma, are met.

Collapse of historical church's ceiling sparks fear of new accidents in Brazil

Since the ceiling of a historical church in Salvador, Bahia state, fell and killed a tourist on February 5, government agencies have already shut down 12 churches in the city under risk of collapsing.

Definite solutions for

the crisis of conservation of ancient churches in the city, however, are not visible yet.

The incident at the Church of St Francis, a 17th-century church connected to a monastery which is known as the so-

called Golden Church – due to the internal decoration with golden linings – killed 26-year-old tourist Giulia Righetto and wounded five other people.

According to reports, the church had been showing

signs of structural problems since 2013, with percolation of water, elements of the ceiling falling down and uneven floor. The police are currently conducting an inquiry in order to determine the responsibilities for the tragedy.



Edited by Renata Steffens
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Together in prayer



Nuns pray next to the statue of St John Paul II outside Rome's Gemelli Hospital on February 20, 2025, where Pope Francis is admitted for treatment for a respiratory infection. Photo: OSV News/Guglielmo Mangiapane, Reuters.

Ukrainian Major Archbishop visits US, urges politicians to ignore pro-Russian propaganda

As US President Donald Trump backs Russia in its war against Ukraine, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church is visiting the United States.

Speaking on his social media platform Truth Social, Mr Trump called Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky a "dictator."

"He refuses to have elections. He's low in the real Ukrainian polls. How can you be high with every city being demolished?" Mr Trump said.

Mr Trump claimed the president only had a 4 percent approval rating, but a BBC poll shows he has the support of 57% of Ukrainians.

The president also appeared to blame Ukraine for the war, saying "you should have never started it. You could have made a deal."

Visiting the United States, Archbishop Shevchuk supported his country's leader and warned against propaganda, such as claims Russia had to act against the expansion of NATO.

"If someone believes that NATO expansion is the cause of the war, they are blindly following Russian narratives and propaganda. NATO did not exist in the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries, nor were security concerns an issue for the Soviet Union during the Holodomor," the

major archbishop said in Washington DC on February 18.

Between 7 and 10 million Ukrainians died of starvation between 1932 and 1933 in the then-member of the USSR after the Soviet Union took much of its grain and introduced disastrous modifications to the area's grain industry.

Many scholars say Joseph Stalin was trying to end the Ukrainian independence movement through his policies, which would make the Holodomor a genocide.

"I am neither a politician nor a public figure; I am a clergyman entrusted with the custody, prayer, and guid-

ance of God's people—the suffering, yet dignified children of God who seek peace and demand justice," Archbishop Shevchuk said.

Metropolitan Borys Gudziak of Philadelphia was at the meeting in Washington and urged everyone to trust in God.

"Don't worry about politicians. Don't worry about meetings somewhere far away. Believe that the Lord is where it hurts. He wipes the tears of those who cry. He supports those who are persecuted. God's truth will prevail. We, Ukrainians, have experienced too many miracles not to believe," he said.

Vatican praises Burkina Faso for fight against terrorism

Cardinal Pietro Parolin has praised authorities in Burkina Faso for their effort to regain control of the country, which has suffered attacks by Islamist terrorism.

The Vatican's Secretary of State was speaking last week after discussions with the country's Transitional Leader, Captain Ibrahim Traoré.

The Vatican's top diplomat met with Mr Traoré marking 125 years of evangelisation in Burkina Faso, but their dis-

cussions went beyond that event.

"We have good relations between the Holy See and Burkina, based on mutual respect, tolerance and fraternity, which also leads to common actions in favour of the population, especially the most vulnerable, and to meet the material and spiritual needs of the population," Cardinal Parolin said.

Burkina Faso is located in Africa's Sahel region, which separates North Africa from Sub-Saharan Africa. The

country has one of the largest Christian populations in the Sahel, making up nearly a quarter of the population.

The Vatican cardinal said that the Universal Church and the Holy See are ready to stand with Burkina Faso in ensuring that citizens get a more dignified life, acting through the local Church.

"We support the local Church in its engagement in the different areas of life and activities, especially in terms of health and education," he said.

Vatican roundup

Pope to deacons: Continue with joy and love

● "I urge you to continue with joy your apostolate and – as today's Gospel suggests – to be a sign of a love that embraces all, that transforms evil into good and generates a fraternal world."

Pope Francis gave this encouragement to deacons worldwide, in his Angelus address on Sunday, February 22.

Following his hospitalisation at Rome's Gemelli Hospital for double pneumonia, the Holy Father did not pronounce the address, but requested the Holy See Press Office publish the address, to be at the disposal of all the faithful.

In the address, the Holy Father recalled the Jubilee of Deacons underway in the Vatican, and in particular, that Mass was celebrated on Sunday, February 23 in St Peter's Basilica, which included the ordination of several deacons.

Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue and WCC reaffirm common commitment

● The Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue (DID) and the Office of Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation (IRDC) of the World Council of Churches (WCC) concluded their annual meeting in Rome, held from February 17 to 20.

The gathering, which took place at the Dicastery's office, provided an opportunity to assess past initiatives, review ongoing interreligious activities, and explore future collaborations. A key

focus was preparing for the 50th anniversary of cooperation between the two institutions, which will be marked in 2027.

In their discussions, both delegations reaffirmed their dedication to strengthening interreligious dialogue. They acknowledged religious diversity as an ever-present reality in the contemporary world and emphasised the importance of fostering understanding and cooperation among faith traditions.

Pope calls Gaza parish from hospital every night, pastor says

● Despite his ongoing hospitalisation for treatment of what the Vatican has said is a polymicrobial respiratory infection, Pope Francis has continued calling the Catholic parish in Gaza nightly, its pastor has said.

Speaking to *Vatican News*, the Vatican's official state-run information platform, Fr Gabriel Romanelli, pastor of Holy Family parish in Gaza, said "the Holy Father called us the first two nights he was admitted."

Parishioners and others sheltering there awaited the pontiff's call at 8pm local time as usual, he said, saying that despite an area blackout throughout Gaza City, "he insisted and was able to contact us by video-call."

"He asked us how we were doing, how the situation was, and he sent us his blessing," Fr Romanelli said, saying the families at the parish "expressed their closeness, and he thanked them and gave them his blessing."

Synod: Coordinators and secretaries of the ten Study Groups hold meeting

● A meeting was held early last week with representatives of the groups set up by the Pope to address issues that emerged during the First Session of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

According to a statement following the meeting, each coordinator presented an update on their group's work, focusing on the methodology used, those involved, the expected timeline for submitting reports, challenges encountered, and any outstanding questions. The meeting opened with a prayer for the Pope's recovery.

Ukrainians want quick negotiations and peace at last

People in Odessa report on everyday life which is now the fourth year of war

KNA

The Russian attack on Ukraine began on February 24, 2022. Three years later, there is still no peace in sight. Those affected in the port city of Odessa talk about how they are dealing with the ongoing threat.

"Everything is fine with us," Tatjana Gura reads from a message from her family. She knows that's not true. The 68-year-old Ukrainian fled from Lisichansk in the east of the country to Odessa, 750 kilometres away, in March 2022 - just a few days after the Russian invasion. Her old home is now occupied by the Russians.

Many of Gura's family members have stayed. But she does not want to live under Russian rule. She keeps in touch via a relative who has a mobile phone with a Ukrainian SIM card. He has found a place in the forest in the occupied area where the Ukrainian network is still accessible. He sometimes makes calls from there. Because the calls are tapped, he usually only talks about trivial things.

Nevertheless, Ms Gura knows how Lisichansk is doing: "There is no gas, no heating, only one doctor for the entire population." But there are new shops. "And they sell things that have been looted from empty houses." Ms Gura is glad that her 50-year-old daughter lives in Germany with her 20-year-old son. Both left Ukraine shortly before the war began.

Somehow the refugee manages to make ends meet; with her pension of the equivalent of €130, she lives rent-free in her daughter's abandoned flat. What

“But what are six psychologists to a society in which almost everyone is traumatised,” he complains in frustration”



A church destroyed by a Russian attack on the village of Bohorodychne in Ukraine's Donetsk region is pictured February 13, 2024. Photo: OSV News/Vladyslav Musienko, Reuters.

will happen next? She would like to see an end to the war - no matter how, preferably through quick negotiations. "On the other hand," says Ms Gura after thinking for a while: "I want to go back to my Lisichansk. But to a Lisichansk where there are no Russian soldiers."

Roof torn off over their heads

Lyudmilla Belozizenko no longer has any intact accommodation. Anyone who visits the 87-year-old

in her two-storey house on the outskirts of Odessa sees a picture of devastation. "I apologise that my flat looks so messy," says the former seamstress in greeting. "A Russian air raid tore the roof off my head here a few weeks ago." Where the ceiling used to be, only a wooden shed now offers protection from the weather. A few glazed window frames stand in front of the front door.

“I live here like on a powder keg”

"I'm hard of hearing. And that's a good thing. That's why I can't hear the sirens and the impacts at night. Unless it hits right next to me," says Ms Belozizenko about her everyday life. "I live here like on a powder

“There is no gas, no heating, only one doctor for the entire population.’ But there are new shops. ‘And they sell things that have been looted from empty houses’”

keg," she continues. "That's why I want negotiations to end the bloodshed." A wish that is also shared by her friends.

The war has traumatised people

"This war has traumatised people. Many suffer from heart disease, depression, anxiety attacks and strokes," reports Vitali Mykhayluk. He runs a rehabilitation centre run by the German Evangelical Lutheran Church in Odessa. His centre has employed several psychologists to help those affected. "But what are six psycholo-

gists to a society in which almost everyone is traumatised," he complains in frustration.

“We have not received any funds from the state”

Nevertheless, the church centre tries to provide as much help as possible - not least through connections abroad. "We have good contacts with a church community in Regensburg. And this congregation has helped us

to accommodate a number of families in Bavaria," says Mr Mykhayluk.

In general, the willingness of the churches to help in the ongoing war is great. Different denominations do not play a role here. Cooperation is working better than ever. It has been possible to distribute around 1,000 aid packages to the population every month. However, this pride is mixed with disappointment at the lack of support from the government. The centre manager emphasises: "We have provided all of this aid without the state. We have not received any funds from the state."

Letters

Letter of the week

A papacy of engagement, reform, and inclusion

Dear Editor, As Pope Francis nears the end of his papacy, his legacy remains a topic of debate. While some have found him controversial, it is undeniable that he has been a Pope committed to reform, transparency, and outreach. His leadership has challenged the Church to face difficult questions and to become more open to those who have felt excluded.

One of his most significant efforts has been in the area of reform and accountability. He introduced financial transparency measures in the Vatican, cracking down on corruption and ensuring greater oversight of Church funds. He also strengthened policies on clergy abuse, holding bish-

ops accountable in ways that previous popes had hesitated to do. His commitment to justice within the Church signalled a determination to make it a more trustworthy institution.

Pope Francis also sought to elevate the role of women in the Church. He appointed women to high-ranking positions within the Vatican, including in the Dicastery for Bishops, and opened discussions on expanding their roles in governance and ministry. While some argue he did not go far enough, his actions represented a significant shift toward greater inclusion.

Perhaps most strikingly, Francis worked tirelessly to reach out to those

who had drifted from the Church. His willingness to welcome divorced and remarried Catholics back to the sacraments through *Amoris Laetitia* was a major moment in pastoral care. He also made a point of visiting refugees, prisoners, and those on the margins, embodying the Church's mission of mercy.

While his papacy has sparked debate, Pope Francis' legacy will be one of engagement, reform, and inclusion. Whether the Church continues on this path or retreats from it remains to be seen.

Yours etc.,
Harry Kelleher
Firhouse, Dublin 24

We must be ready when the pendulum swings back

Dear Editor, Fr Pat Collins' recent comments on the dangers of secularism highlight a growing crisis in Ireland [*The Irish Catholic* – February 20, 2025]. As faith continues to be pushed to the margins, we are witnessing a moral and spiritual emptiness that no amount of progress or individual freedom can truly satisfy. Society has embraced a worldview where God is forgotten, moral boundaries are rewritten for convenience, and objective truth is dismissed in favour of personal preference. This has not led to the utopia many expected but instead to rising anxiety, division, and despair.

However, history shows that when societies drift too far from God, there comes a point when they must turn back. Secularism, when taken to its extreme, leaves people lost. The human soul was made for something greater than material success or self-indulgence—it longs for meaning, purpose, and truth. As the cracks in secularism become more visible, we may yet see a renewed hunger for faith and a return to God.

The Church must be ready for this moment. Rather than compromising with the culture or watering down its teachings to stay relevant, it must stand firm in truth while extending mercy to those seeking their way back. Faith must not become just



Fixated on shutting down Dáil's short Christian prayer

Dear Editor, The Dáil prayer must not be scrapped. Christianity is embedded in our culture and belongs to the

another option in a marketplace of beliefs but the guiding light that offers what the world cannot—hope, meaning, and salvation.

There are difficult times ahead, and the Church may continue to face resistance. But the darkness of secularism will not last forever. The pendulum will swing back, and when it does, we must be ready to welcome those who come searching for the truth they once ignored.

Yours etc.,
Fiona Duggan
Naas, Co. Kildare

history of our Christian nation.

The Dáil prayer has been said for almost 80 years now, in both our languages, English and Irish.

However, the radical left in the Dáil, who want to wipe out Christianity, want it axed. Having lost two constitutional referendums, they have fixed their attention on shutting down this short Christian prayer now.

It is almost as if history is repeating itself. The Catholic religion was outlawed from the reformation of the 1500s up to the granting of hard won Catholic Emancipation in 1829. It survived persecution and left martyrs, to emerge as strong as ever,

thanks to those who clung to prayer and religious worship in secret, when all else seemed lost.

This time, Christian prayer is a cause of anxiety to the extremists, who want neither sight nor sound of it in the Dáil.

We must not be ashamed of the Christianity that has been ours for the best part of 2000 years, which includes respect for the public utterance of a Christian prayer. This short Dáil prayer must be allowed to continue and must not be silenced, to placate these godless activists of the hard left.

Yours etc.,
Mary Reynolds
Rathmines, Dublin 6

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.

People are not forgetting, they are ignoring God

Dear Editor, Further to your article of February 20, 2025, I am sure there are many reasons why some Catholics have lapsed from the Church – perhaps due to unpleasant experiences with the clergy, the laity, and of course the sex abuse scandals within the Church.

In my view it is not just a case of 'forgetting' God, but rather ignoring God. Overwhelmingly some Catholics, after reception of the Sacraments of Christian Initiation, did not see the need to continue to nurture their faith, and consequently many have drifted away and now appear to have found some fulfilment in the secular community. Remember also that Ireland has become very affluent over the last 20-40 years; thus the need for God ceased to exist for some people. Obviously they neglected their prayer life and going to church.

Regardless of the reason

for lapsation and abandonment of the Church, and ignoring God, we the Church community have got a responsibility to pray for the conversion of these people. I am sure that there are many prayers for this purpose, but I would suggest the following short prayer which the Angel of Peace gave to the three children at Fatima in the spring of 1916:

"My God, I believe, I adore, I hope and I love you. I ask pardon of you for those who do not believe, do not adore, do not hope and do not love you" (See P15 from 'the Message of Fatima').

From this prayer, it is obvious that God was/is concerned about those who have abandoned the Church, and it is expected that we, the Faithful, will continue to pray for their conversion.

Yours etc.,
Jim McCarthy
North London, England

Future of synodality depends on the Church's new pope

Dear Editor, As Pope Francis nears the end of his papacy, one of the greatest questions facing the Church is whether his vision of synodality will endure. His push for a more listening, participatory Church has sparked both hope and resistance. If embraced fully, synodality could bring about a real renewal but much will depend on his successor.

At its core, synodality is about walking together as the people of God—laity, clergy, and bishops alike—discerning how the Holy Spirit is guiding the Church. Francis has emphasised that this is not about changing doctrine but about changing how the Church engages with the world. A synodal Church listens, dialogues, and makes decisions through communal discernment rather than top-down authority alone.

If done properly synodality can help the Church face its deepest challenges. It can

rebuild trust with those who feel unheard, whether they are young people, women, or those who have drifted away from the faith. It can strengthen local churches. Most importantly, it can renew the Church's missionary spirit, making it less about rigid institutional structures and more about accompanying people.

Some fear it will lead to division, while others worry it could weaken Church teaching. If the next pope does not share Francis' commitment to this path, the process could stall, or worse, be abandoned altogether.

The future of synodality depends on the Church's new pope, and a willingness to trust the Holy Spirit and continue the journey Pope Francis has started. If embraced with faith, it has the potential to bring about a lasting renewal.

Yours etc.,
John Donnelly
Portarlington, Co. Offaly

Letters to the Editor

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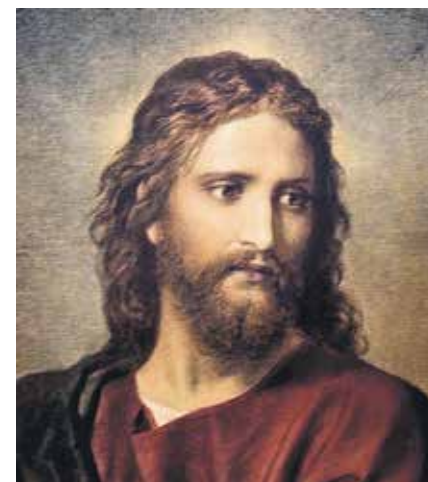
Your Faith

Focus on
what matters
most

Deacon Greg Kandra

Page 33

The Irish Catholic, February 27, 2025



From the skies towards the altar



I am Oman Ashraf, originally from Pakistan, and I am currently a novice with the Augustinian Order (OSA). My journey toward religious life has been one of faith, transformation, and a deep sense of calling—a path I never expected to take.

Growing up in a strong Catholic family, I never imagined becoming a priest. It was simply not something I had considered because my dream was to join the Pakistan Air Force (PAF). In fact, I had already received my joining letter for PAF, and I was ready to pursue that career. At school, I was known for being one of the most mischievous students—energetic, full of life, and always involved in extra-curricular activities. Whether it was academics, sports, or parish events, I was active in everything. But God had a different plan for me.

Scarcity

My vocation story began on a Pentecost Vigil when I heard a priest preach about the scarcity of vocations. He spoke with urgency and passion, quoting the words of Jesus:

“The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few” (Matthew 9:37). Those words struck me like lightning. For the first time, I asked



It breaks my heart to see our brothers and sisters losing their Faith, Bro. Oman Ashraf OSA

myself: “What if God is calling me? What if I am meant to be one of those labourers?”

“My mission as an Augustinian is clear: to reach out to young people, strengthen their faith, and invite them to rediscover the beauty of the Church”

I did not make a hasty decision. Instead, I spent two years discerning whether I was truly being called to the priesthood. After much prayer, reflection, and guidance, I finally took the leap of faith and entered religious formation.

One of the deepest motivations for my vocation is my desire to serve young people and bring them back to the Church.

In Pakistan, many Christians face forced conversions to Islam, and it breaks my heart to see our brothers and sisters losing their faith under pressure. My mission as an Augustinian is clear: to reach out to young people, strengthen their faith, and invite them to rediscover the beauty of the Church.

Formation

In 2023, I spent my pre-novitiate year in Drogheda, preparing for the next step in my formation. Then, on August 24, 2024, I officially began my novitiate in the Augustinian Priory in Galway Ireland. It has been a time of deep spiritual growth, community life, and discovering the richness of the Augustinian charism.

Religious life is not a solo journey—it is a communal search for God. While each of us comes from different backgrounds and experiences, our goal remains the same: to love and serve God.

The Augustinian charism of community life has been a blessing for me, as it allows me to grow alongside my brothers, supporting and encouraging one another.

I am also actively involved in Church activities and helping children prepare for their First Holy Communion. Working with young people brings me immense joy and reinforces my call to the priesthood. God willing, I look forward to making my first profession in August this year.

Many people think religious life is easy, but in reality, it demands sacrifice, discipline, and commitment. However, I have come to realise that once

we embrace these sacrifices with joy, we begin to truly love our vocation.

Novitiate

Novitiate is a once-in-a-lifetime experience—a time to lay the foundation for a lifelong commitment to Christ. Many who have walked this path before us cherish it as one of the most beautiful and transformative times of their lives.

I humbly ask for your prayers as I continue discerning my vocation toward the priesthood. Please know that I also keep you all in my prayers.

May God bless you!

A gift of God

Bro. Mark Murphy OP

Religious life is something which should be primarily seen as a gift of God. It is a gift of grace which calls men and women to give their whole lives to the love and service of the Lord Jesus, through the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. I have been in religious life for over five years and overall, during

these years I have experienced a great sense of peace and fulfilment in living this way of life. Through the elements of Dominican life, through living in community, through prayer, through study and preaching, I have come to a deeper knowledge of the great mystery of God's love, and it has been a great joy to be able to witness to this love and to share it with others through various forms of preaching.

Pope Benedict XVI: Hope, Politics, and the Last Judgement



Jason Conroy

What are you looking forward to right now? What got you out of bed this morning? It's undeniable: we need something to hope for as much as we need food and water. In his masterpiece encyclical on Christian Hope, *Spe Salvi*, Benedict XVI starts by comparing the plight of the pagans of St Paul's time with an example of how a bleak and hopeless life is transformed by meeting Christ: the story of Josephine Bakhita.

The pagans before Christ, like those without Faith today, lived "without hope and without God in the world." For a pagan, the world was ruled by impersonal cosmic forces - the gods, the empire, the forces of nature and sociology. All these were indifferent to one person's little, fragile life. There was little basis for hope. People today, who live without God, face a similar situation: demographic decline and international conflict cause a recession, and you lose your job; a natural disaster or a war breaks out, and you lose your home. Even if it's not a cruel cosmos, it is indifferent. And eventually you'll kick the bucket. Hard to keep hope alive in such conditions, isn't it?

Kidnapped at age nine, in the late 19th century, and sold as a slave in Sudan, St Josephine Bakhita suffered constant beatings and abuse until she was eventually brought to Italy: here she came to know that kind Master, higher than all the masters she had previously

known. And this Master loved her, had died for her, and waited for her, personally, in Heaven. Josephine, now free from a past that might have determined the rest of her life, dedicated herself to this Master, becoming a religious sister of the Canossians.

Why did Josephine's life change like this? Benedict writes: "The human being needs unconditional love. If this absolute love exists, with its absolute certainty, then—only then—is man 'redeemed', whatever should happen to him in his circumstances. This is what it means to say: Jesus Christ has 'redeemed' us." The result of Christian hope is freedom: freedom from your circumstances, freedom from your past, freedom from neediness. The hand that moves the stars is kind, and He cares for you—yes, you!

Hope

What is this hope? Benedict answers with a question: "What do we really want?" He hints at an answer: "There are moments when it suddenly seems clear to us: yes, this is what true 'life' is—this is what it should all be like... the life which is simply life, simply happiness." The life we're looking for isn't endless more-of-the-same; it's more like one great timeless moment.

But then, looking more closely, we have no idea what this looks like - it's an unknown. All we know is that it does exist, because we can't help but look for it.

So, we do know some things about what we're looking for: Though the very best moments of life give us glimpses of it, it is unlike anything we've ever seen, so we shouldn't expect to find it in the things the world offers us, like the perfect relationship, or career success, or comfort.

This is all easier said than done! But fear not: Pope Benedict points us to the line



Benedict XVI during a canonisation Mass.

from Hebrews, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the proof of things not seen." If faith already IS the substance of what we're hoping for, then, if we have faith, we already have the very thing we're hoping for: eternal life. Once we have this "substance", we're like someone who's won the lottery: we're made for life!

Politics

I discovered *Spe Salvi* while looking for Catholic responses to secular ideas about revolution and utopia and activism. In this encyclical, Benedict engages with everyone from the ancient pagans to the modern Marxists, analyses the ideas behind the history of modernity, and even presents a novel argument for the Second Coming and the

resurrection of the dead.

Pope Benedict contrasts the Christian conception of hope against the hope of enlightenment and post-modern thinkers: the hope for a future utopia created by human action and human reason - the Kingdom, but without God. This secular hope promises a happiness that is forever receding into the future: "it may be a hope for a future generation, but not for me." Since everything depends on human activism, everything hinges on politics!

In contrast, we Christians can be detached from the idea of fortune. The wheel of history is constantly raising people up and throwing them down: even if fickle politics goes against us, we still have our hope, our substance, which no one can

take from us.

Since our hope is supernatural, and comes from our relationship with Jesus, we're free to be very sceptical of any leader or party who promises a 'Christian' civilisation through laws and political policies, instead of through prayer and personal conversion.

“The human race lives thanks to a few; were it not for them, the world would perish”

Our Christian hope comes from the teachings of Christ and the Church, and these anchor us in the truth, to keep us from being swept along by every tide of public sentiment and politi-

cal rhetoric.

Benedict nuances the point: When we begin to live for Jesus, we start to live for others too. "The human race lives thanks to a few; were it not for them, the world would perish." The Christians, even as a very small minority, play a role in society like the soul plays in the body. We start to do the works of our Father, who "executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and loves the immigrant, giving him food and clothing." So that's our approach to politics!

The Last Judgment

The world is, Pope Benedict says, a place "marked by so much injustice, innocent suffering, and cynicism of power." He asks: How could God be responsible for such a world? Is He really in control?

Pope Benedict here engages with the left-wing philosopher Theodor Adorno: So many people in the past, Mr Adorno says, have suffered and died because of injustices. "Justice—true justice—would require a world 'where not only present suffering would be wiped out, but also that which is irrevocably past would be undone'."

Pope Benedict draws from this a conclusion that Mr Adorno wasn't able to accept: there must be a resurrection from the dead. "I am convinced that the question of justice constitutes the strongest argument in favour of faith in eternal life. Only in connection with the impossibility that the injustice of history should be the final word does the necessity for Christ's return and for a new life become fully convincing."

In Jesus, God has proven that he is not ignorant of our sufferings. Even the irrevocable injustices of the world are even more proof that there must be a God who brings justice in the end, at the Last Judgment. Facing the world is still daunting. Pope Benedict finishes the encyclical with the parting words of Our Lord: "In the world you will have trouble but be of good cheer: I have conquered the world."

Jason Conroy is a philosophy student from Co. Kildare, currently studying at KU Leuven, Belgium.

“Though the very best moments of life give us glimpses of it, it is unlike anything we've ever seen, so we shouldn't expect to find it in the things the world offers us, like the perfect relationship, or career success, or comfort”

The moving life of a man gone to God



Willie Walsh, Carrigaline who received the Sgt. Ben Flahive memorial award for contribution to youth at the Cork City Garda Youth awards at the Rochestown Park hotel. Picture: Eddie O'Hare



Joe Harte

Last month, we all went into shock at the news that Willie Walsh had died suddenly while having a coffee with his son in a local cafe in Carrigaline, Co. Cork, his adopted town from his native Ballyphehane in Cork city. Willie, 74 years old, was loved in Carrigaline, in Ballyphehane, in the church community which he served so well, in the wider soccer community, in his workplace which retired early from to devote himself to volunteering, and by people in general whom he encountered.

Willie's humility was demonstrated when I phoned to tell him I wanted to put his name forward for a reward of €10k. This was from an Insurance company. They wanted an extraordinary volunteer for their

community. Willie thanked me very much for thinking of him. He said he was working on his humility. He asked that I not put forward his name.

“The Devil is at all those ‘ould’ tricks of making us think we don’t have time for these (good) things. He did the study and introduced others”

It was about 10 years ago that I began to get to know Willie. His life was driven by his faith in God. One of the most extraordinary examples of that was when I asked him if he could refer anyone to study the Catechism of the Catholic Church (catechism.ie). He said yes and that he would begin by studying it himself. Although delighted with his reply, I did say to him that he did an extraordinary amount already and that I was more thinking of him referring to others. His reply: The Devil is at all those ‘ould’ tricks of making us think we don’t have time for these (good) things. He did the study and introduced others.

Because this article is on my mind, I wrote down a few sentences from the gospel at this morning's 7:15am Mass in SMA, Blackrock Road, Cork (available 6 days a week for everyone who would like to come). I wrote these sentences in particular because they reminded me of Willie: “For anyone who wants to save his life will lose it, but anyone who loses his life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel will save it.”

Giving

Could Willie have lived longer if he did not tear around the place giving to the soccer community, giving to the Church directly via being on the church bereavement committee for example, (and indirectly for the Church in all he did in my time knowing him), and basically, to every person, of faith and not of faith, that he encountered? The average age to die in Ireland is 83, so, perhaps. I just don't know. What I do know is that Willie Walsh, who lost his life for the sake of God and the gospel, has now saved it. The saving of it is wonderfully captured in a line in paragraph 1024 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church which Wil-

“His spiritual food was prayer. It inspired him to do all he did - because nothing is impossible to God. Willie was selfless. We cannot love God without loving people”

lie studied. It reads: “Heaven is the ultimate end and fulfilment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness.”

To me, the paraphrasing of that is ultimate joy forever. That's Willie's reward now.

The second sentence from God in today's gospel that I wrote thinking again of Willie was: “What gain, then, is it, for a man to win the whole world and ruin his life.” Willie Walsh was not materialistic. He could have worked on and accumulated more. He chose not to. He volunteered. He had great wit and let us know he was from Ballyphehane for a reason - that it is a working-class area. Willie lived in an ordinary house in an ordinary estate in Carrigaline. Willie has not ruined his (eternal) life by trying to gain the whole world (in this temporary life).

The third word of God that I wrote from today's gospel is: “For, if anyone, in this adulterous and sinful generation, is ashamed of me and my words, The Son of Man (Jesus) will also be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father (God the Father) with the hold angels.” There is more love in me stating there is Heaven, Purgatory and Hell than trying the false love of seeking earthly popularity of pretending otherwise. In my humble opinion, Willie Walsh is in Heaven.

Transparent

Just to be transparent, the reason I have given details of the catechism study website, and will give much more throughout this article, is because I want to witness God. Willie, in the time I

“I asked Willie if he had any fear of death. ‘Absolutely not’, was his answer and he added ‘it’s just a new address’. Last year, I had a similar chat about sharing his lack of fear of death and I added that isn’t this life very short? Willie turned and laughed saying, ‘Isn’t it fierce short?’ This is our route to eternal life”

knew him, lived his life for God. He was a daily mass goer. He was chairperson of the Cork area adoration committee and much more. His spiritual food was prayer. It inspired him to do all he did - because nothing is impossible to God. Willie was selfless. We cannot love God without loving people. Faith is dead without good works - but faith is necessary too. Willie's good works were driven by his faith.

The priest captured the shock at Willie's funeral Mass. He woke the day after wondering did this really happen. Is Willie Walsh gone from us. He turned to the Christmas tree in the church. Willie put it up with them. The star at the top was not straight. After a while, it still wasn't. Willie said it was okay and they all agreed.

I walked the area where he had died a week after. I shook the hand of a business owner and said things are not the same without Willie. He agreed. I talked with a shop assistant. She said you just expect him to come around the corner, smiling and full of energy. But, Willie, I said, was a wise man. She agreed.

“Blessed are those who die in the Lord, now they can rest forever after their work, since their good deeds go with them”

Willie spent the time I knew him being selfless, serving others. Willie was full of joy. Willie was honest. He was humble. Human Beings cannot be full of joy always. No human is perfect. Only God is. Willie would not want me or anyone to say he was perfect. It's impossible. To strive for perfection is what God wants. A Priest once referenced Catholicism as trying to do God's Will - and trying again when we fail. A 20-year-old UCC student, a daughter of a friend of mine; said something profound one day to me. She said people can only be happy if they are doing what God wants them to do. Human logic does not answer this. Otherwise, if we indulged ourselves continuously, looked after number one and were selfish, we would be happy. That is not the case. This 20-year-old answered why.

Don't anyone, please, think, that we need to do anywhere near as much as Willie Walsh did to find favour with God. The priest at Willie's funeral Mass described him as a modern day missionary. Other RIP.ie tributes follow: “Blessed are those who die in the Lord, now they can rest forever after their work. since their good deeds go

with them” and “And for now, ‘In the Lord's own house shall I dwell, for ever and ever’ (Psalm 23).”

As a son of Willie said at his funeral Mass, “a light went out in Carrigaline when his Dad died.” In my humble opinion, it is no exaggeration to say that Carrigaline will never again be the same place without Willie Walsh. He left love everywhere, true real selfless love, the love asked of by God for our neighbour and for God.

In continuing Willie's selflessness, I am organising an event that will not be about Willie. Rather, it will be about the God that inspired him, the God that Willie loved with his heart and that drove everything he did. I remember a few years ago the then parish priest of Carrigaline (now parish priest in Glanmire) saying the Willie could bring God into every conversation without upsetting anybody. He could relate so well in particular with young people - and with all ages.

In my humble opinion, what Willie would love now in his memory is if people not going to Sunday Mass went. He would love people to volunteer for a soccer club. And not necessarily Carrigaline; maybe wherever you live, you might do a little, even if only you have the ability like me to carry the water for a while with Corinthians soccer club. There's a beautiful tribute to Willie on RIP.ie from a Douglas Hall soccer club person on RIP.ie that refers to always enjoying catching up with Willie in Ballea Park (Carrigaline home pitch). He refers to Willie as a thorough gentleman.

Witness

Willie said to me that he helped in the soccer club to have somewhere additional to the church to witness God. After his passing, I asked Fr Pat Fogarty about that. He confirmed Willie said that to him too. Please see it as the ultimate selfless positive that Willie did something for everyone else. I had the pleasure of my wife's company to add to the pleasure of watching a son of ours play two days after Willie's passing - for Douglas Hall against a team from Cobh. It was absolutely freezing that day and a fierce wind and rain swept over for most of the 90 minutes in Cobh. I like soccer as well as the more important things of having my wife's company and watching our son play. I still wished away the game as I froze. What of Willie, then, who stood watching so often in such weathers with sons and daughters beyond the age of playing?

Alpha is a great way to get to understand faith. Willie helped with Alpha in Carrigaline parish. He would love if you reading this



Sean O'Sullivan, presents Carrigaline United's Willie Walsh with a Services to Football award. Also included is Luke Connolly, Heineken Ireland.

tried it. (alphaireland.org)

“If you are you going to work really hard and make a load on money, you still will die on average at 83 years old. The ambition to follow Willie Walshe's way and thus, to enjoy ultimate joy forever is the real ambition”

In a recent article in *The Irish Catholic*, Maria Steen's front heading is that scripture warns not to place trust in Princes. Rather, we place trust in God. As is confirmed all over RIP.ie, Willie was extremely positive. He was humble. Why else would he not want his name to be put forward for an award? Because Willie sought

God the trust of God.

This article is not as good as it should be. It doesn't do Willie justice. And, more to the point, it doesn't do God justice as God was Willie's motivation. But let's do it anyway. The star was not straight on the Chirtmas tree - but Willie helped do it. Let's try to follow Willie's example and, therefore, to follow what God wants of us. When we fail, let's try again. That's how every single one of us, regardless of our past to this moment, can set about a life that would lead us to join Willie with God - in Heaven, reminding ourselves that Heaven is 'the ultimate end and fulfilment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness. People ask are you ambitious. Normally, that means, as I understand the question, if you are you going to work really hard and make a load on money, you still will die on average at 83 years old. The ambition to follow

Willie Walshe's way and thus, to enjoy ultimate joy forever is the real ambition.

Fear

A few years ago, I asked Willie if he had any fear of death. Absolutely not, was his answer and he added it's just a new address. Last year, I had a similar chat about sharing his lack of fear of death and I added that isn't this life very short? Willie turned and laughed saying, “Isn't it fierce short?” This is our route to eternal life. Willie knew that and, most importantly, he got on and did things to try to reflect what his prayer guided him that God wanted.

I took Willie's example and started doing - for God - and stopped pondering and planning. Let's thank God for His phenomenal gift to us of Willie Walsh. Regardless of whether you knew Willie or not, please can we consider doing just a little - Alpha courses, going to Mass, or volunteering at anything.



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

Several years ago, a Presbyterian minister I know challenged his congregation to open its doors and its heart more fully to the poor. Initially the congregation responded with enthusiasm and a number of programs were introduced to invite people from the less-privileged economic areas of the city, including a number of street-people, to come to their church.

But the romance soon died as coffee cups and other loose items began to disappear, some handbags were stolen, and the church and meeting space were often left messy and soiled. A number of the congregation began to complain and demand an end to the experiment: "This isn't what we expected! Our church isn't clean and safe anymore! We wanted to reach out to these people, and

this is what we get! This is too messy to continue!"

“We struggle to love as Jesus invites us to love, namely, to love each other as I have loved you”

But the minister held his ground, pointing out that their expectations were naïve, that what they were experiencing was precisely part of the cost of reaching out to the poor, and that Jesus assures us that loving is unsafe and messy, not just in reaching out to the poor but in reaching out to anyone.

We like to think of ourselves as gracious and loving, but truth be told, that's often predicated on a naïve notion of love. We struggle to love as Jesus invites us to love, namely, to love each

other as I have loved you. The last clause in the sentence contains the real challenge: Jesus doesn't say, love each other according to the spontaneous reactions of your heart; nor, love each other as society defines love. Rather, love each other as I have loved you.

And, for the most part, we struggle to do that.

We struggle to love our enemies, to turn the other cheek and to reach across to embrace those who hate us. We struggle to pray for those who oppose us.

Forgive

We struggle to forgive those who hurt us, to forgive those who murder our loved ones. We struggle to ask God to forgive the people who are hurting us. We struggle to believe, like Jesus, that they are not really cognizant of what they are doing.

We struggle to be big-hearted and take the high road when we've been slighted or ignored, and we struggle then to let understanding and empathy replace bitterness and our urge to withdraw. We struggle to let go of grudges.

We struggle to be vulnerable to risk humiliation and rejection in our offers of love. We struggle to give up our fear of being misunderstood, of not looking good or not appearing strong and in control. We struggle to set out barefooted, to love without security in our pockets.

“We struggle to sacrifice ourselves to the point of losing everything for the sake of others”

We struggle to open our hearts enough to imitate Jesus' universal, non-discriminating embrace, to stretch our hearts to see everyone as brother or sister, regardless of race, color, or religion. We struggle to stop nursing the silent secret that our own lives and the lives of our loved ones are more precious than those of others.

We struggle to make a preferential option for the poor, to bring the poor to our tables, to abandon our propensity to prefer the attrac-

tive and the influential.

We struggle to sacrifice ourselves to the point of losing everything for the sake of others, to lay down our lives for our friends – and indeed for our enemies. We struggle to be willing to die for people who oppose us and are trying to crucify us.

We struggle to love with purity of heart, to not subtly seek ourselves within our relationships. We struggle to live chastely, to fully respect and not violate someone else.

Patience

We struggle to walk in patience, giving others the full space they need to relate to us according to their own inner dictates. We struggle to sweat blood to be faithful. We struggle to wait in proper patience, in God's good time, for God's judgment on right and wrong.

We struggle to resist our natural urge to judge others, to not impute motives. We struggle to leave judgment to God.

Finally, not least, we struggle to love and forgive our own selves, knowing that

no mistake we make stands between us and God. We struggle to trust that God's love is enough and that we are forever held inside God's infinite mercy.

“Only saints and those who are naïve think love is easy”

Yes, love is a struggle.

After his wife Raissa died, Jacques Maritain edited a book of her journals. In the Preface to that book, he describes her struggle with the illness that eventually killed her. Severely debilitated and unable to speak, she struggled mightily in her last days. Her suffering both tested and matured Maritain's own faith. Mightily sobered by seeing his wife's sufferings, he wrote: "Only two kinds of people think that love is easy: saints, who through long years of self-sacrifice have made a habit of virtue, and naïve persons who don't know what they're talking about."

He's right. Only saints and those who are naïve think love is easy.

Catechism of the Catholic Church



By Renata Milán Morales

The son of God became man

The Word became flesh for us to save us by reconciling us with God, who "loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins."

Our nature demanded to be healed. The Word became flesh so that thus we might know God's love: "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him."

The Word became flesh to be our model of holiness: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me." "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me." The Word became flesh to make us partakers of the divine nature.

The Incarnation

The Church calls 'Incarnation' the fact that the Son of God assumed a human nature to accomplish our salvation in it. Belief in the true Incarnation of the Son of God is the distinctive sign

of Christian faith: "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God."

The unique and altogether singular event of the Incarnation of the Son of God does not mean that Jesus Christ is part God and part man, nor does it imply that he is the result of a confused mixture of the divine and the human. He became truly man while remaining truly God. Jesus Christ is true God and true man.

Christ's humanity has no other subject than the divine person of the Son of God, who assumed it and made it his own, from his conception. We confess that one and the same Christ, Lord, and only begotten Son, is to be acknowledged in two natures without confusion, change, division or separation.

The Church thus confesses that Jesus is inseparably true God and true man. He is truly the Son of God who, without ceasing to be God and Lord, became a man and our brother.

Human nature

The Son of God therefore communicates to his humanity his own personal mode of existence in the Trinity. In his soul as in his body, Christ thus expresses humanly the divine ways of the Trinity.

The human soul that the Son of God assumed is endowed with a true human knowledge. As such, this knowledge could not in itself be unlimited: it was exercised in the historical conditions of his existence in space and time.

But at the same time, this truly human knowledge of God's Son expressed the divine life of his person. The Son in his human knowledge also showed the divine penetration he had into the secret thoughts of human hearts.

The heart

By its union to the divine wisdom in the person of the Word incarnate, Christ enjoyed in his human knowl-

edge the fullness of understanding of the eternal plans he had come to reveal. Christ's human will "does not resist or oppose but rather submits to his divine and almighty will."

At the same time the Church has always acknowledged that in the body of Jesus "we see our God made visible and so are caught up in love of the God we cannot see." The individual characteristics of Christ's body express the divine person of God's Son.

He has made the features of his human body his own, to the point that they can be venerated when portrayed in a holy image, for the believer "who venerates the icon is venerating in it the person of the one depicted". Jesus knew and loved us each and all during his life, his agony and his Passion, and gave himself up for each one of us. He has loved us all with a human heart.

i From paragraphs 456 – 478.

Focus on what matters most

Sir 27:4-7
Ps 92:2-3, 13-14, 15-16
1 Cor 15:54-58
Lk 6:39-45

For the last couple weeks, the Sunday scriptures have given us a healthy dose of what is commonly called 'The Sermon on the Plain' - Luke's version of the more famous 'Sermon on the Mount' found in Matthew's Gospel. The lessons have been familiar - but strikingly direct.

What we hear is Jesus speaking directly to his disciples - the word "you" pops up a lot - while giving explicit instructions on how to live as his disciples. It's not easy listening.

Jesus has advised to love your enemies, pray for your persecutors, give away your cloak. This Sunday's excerpt adds to that a lesson against hypocrisy: "Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own... You hypocrite!" And he concludes: "A good person out of the store of goodness in his heart produces good."

Summation

We get a sense of a summation here - a broad but incisive conclusion - and maybe the Church has given us these readings at this moment for a significant reason. The time we call 'ordinary' is ending. Wednesday, we begin Lent. A journey of prayer, fasting and almsgiving is about to start.

You might consider these Gospel readings as lessons for the road.

Have we been paying attention? What we've been hearing these last few weeks is something more

The Sunday Gospel

Deacon Greg Kandra



than filler, biding the time between Christmas and Lent. These teachings are foundational - and among the most challenging for anyone who might claim the label 'Christian'.

“Lent is a good time for taking stock - and taking a fearless inventory of our own shortcomings”

There have been lessons about mercy and compassion, about forgiveness and understanding. We've heard warnings about material success and living in physical comfort. And this Sunday, the disciples hear about the hazards of judging others. There's been a lot to absorb, and much to leave listeners both inspired and convicted. A prevailing message is this simple but necessary reminder: being a disciple isn't easy.

Be prepared to be challenged.

Be prepared to need to change.

That seems a very good theme to carry with us as we get ready to have our brows stained with ashes. These are ideas we should all carry with us in prayer as we begin the walk toward Calvary and, beyond that, to Easter.

The weeks ahead will be days for reflection, for sacrifice, for giving and for forgiving. Lent is a good time for taking stock - and taking a fearless inventory of our own shortcomings. Weeks before spring actually arrives, it's an opportunity to begin some spiritual spring cleaning - to examine our consciences, measure our days, give up bad habits and sinful attachments and, ultimately, give more of ourselves to those in need.

If you're looking for some robust spiritual reading for Lent, look no further than the Gospels we've encountered these past few weeks from Luke. 'The Sermon on the Plain' can serve as a handy reminder of what we are called to do, and who we are called to follow - Jesus even advises us to work to "be perfect as the Father is perfect!"

Marked

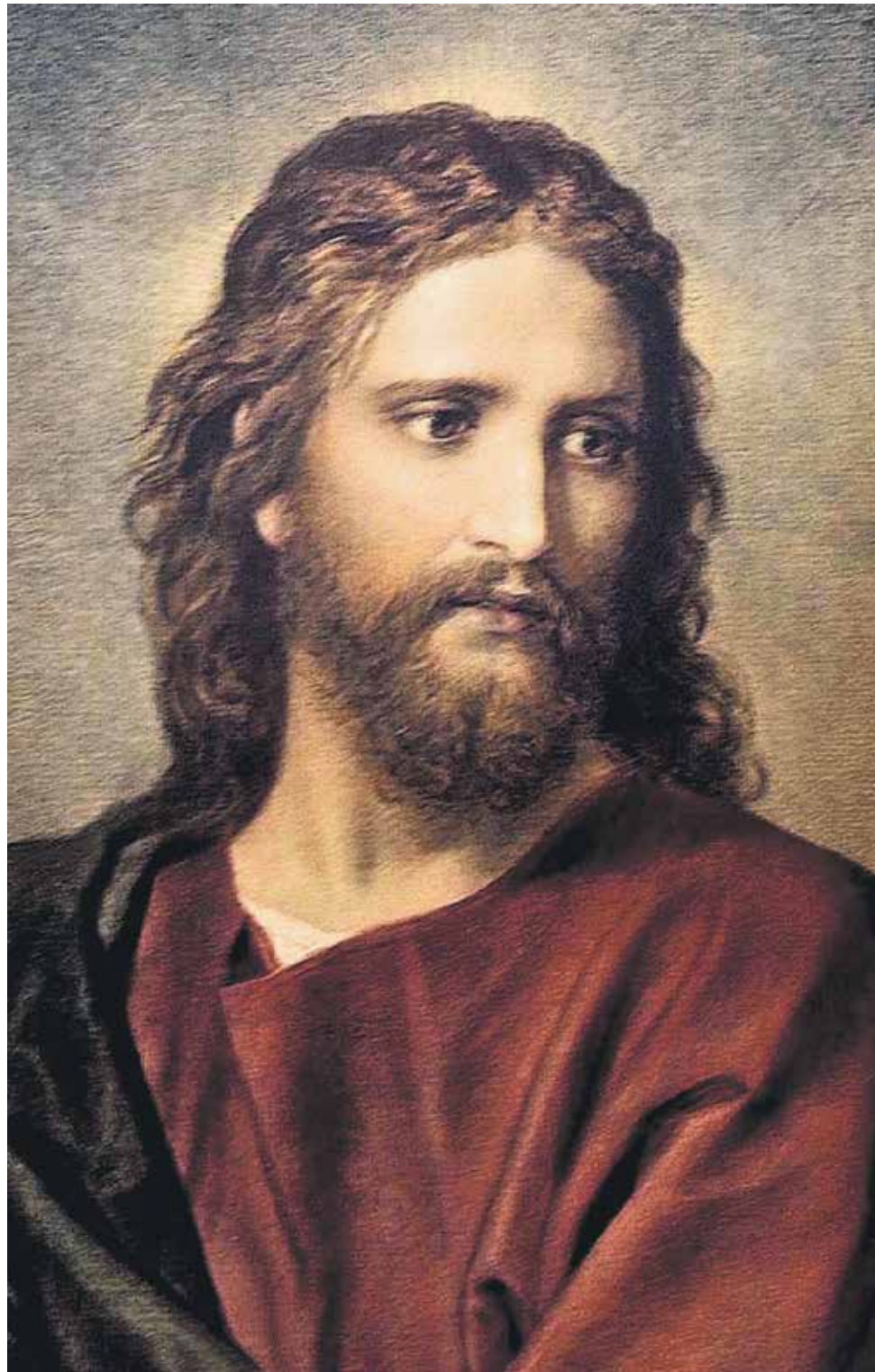
In a few days, we will present ourselves to be marked, to declare to the world that we are fallen people in need of redemption, imperfect and sinful souls embarking on a project to be better, to do better, to live better, to love better - all in anticipation of the most important event in human history, Easter. We work to be prepared. We pray to be ready. We know we can never be worthy.

But we can try to get there.

As we turn the page on Ordinary Time and prepare to enter the extraordinary season that is Lent, Jesus has been giving us pointers for the days to come. Things to look for. Pitfalls to avoid. Attitudes to adjust.

Have we been paying attention?

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



Representation of Jesus Christ, extracted from the painting 'Christ and the rich young ruler', Heinrich Hoffmann.

Saint — of the — week

By Renata Milán Morales



St Katharine Drexel

St Katharine Drexel: Care for the common good

St Katharine Drexel was born in Philadelphia on November 26, 1858, the second daughter of wealthy banker Francis Anthony Drexel and his wife, Hannah Langstroth. Her mother passed away shortly after Katharine's birth, and her father remarried Emma Bouvier in 1860. Katharine and her sister Louisa received an exceptional education through private tutors and travelled extensively in the United States and Europe. The Drexels were devout Catholics, embodying the spiritual and corporal works of mercy by caring for the poor and visiting those in need.

Despite being part of a wealthy family, St Katharine remained grounded in her faith and believed that material wealth should be used for the common good. After witnessing her step-

mother's painful battle with cancer, the saint became deeply moved by the realisation that no amount of money could shield anyone from suffering. This sparked a deep desire to serve others, particularly Native Americans and African Americans.

In 1884, during a family visit to the Western United States, Katharine saw the dire conditions of the Native American communities and felt a calling to help. She worked closely with Fr James O'Connor, a priest in Philadelphia, who gave her spiritual guidance. When her father died in 1885, he left part of his \$15.5 million estate to charity, including missions to Native Americans. St Katharine and her sisters contributed to the St Francis Mission in South Dakota and soon recognised the need for missionaries

to support their work.

In 1887, during a visit to Europe, Pope Leo XIII suggested Katharine herself become a missionary. Inspired by his words and after discussing with Fr O'Connor, Katharine decided to devote her life and inheritance to God, focusing on the education and welfare of Native Americans and African Americans. She began her postulancy with the Sisters of Mercy in Pittsburgh in 1889 and, in 1891, took her first vows as a religious sister, adopting the name Mother Katharine.

She founded the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians, dedicated to serving these communities. St Katharine's first major project was opening St Catherine's Indian School in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in 1894. She expanded her efforts, establishing

more schools and missions for Native Americans and African Americans across the United States. In 1915, she founded Xavier University in New Orleans, the first Catholic university for African Americans in the US.

By her death in 1955, Katharine had built a legacy of over 500 Sisters working in 63 schools and 50 missions across 16 states. Though the Drexel fortune supporting the order was lost after her death, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament continue her mission. St Katharine is remembered for her dedication to racial justice, education, and philanthropy.

Katharine Drexel died on March 3, 1955 at 96 years old. She was beatified in 1988 and canonised by Pope John Paul II in 2000. She is the patron saint of racial justice and philanthropists.

More than just a title: embracing godparenthood



Pedro Esteva

“Are you ready to help the parents of this child in their duty as Christian parents?”

“We are”

Recently, I was made the godfather of my girlfriend's nephew. When her sister and brother-in-law asked us to be godparents, I'll admit I was both surprised and deeply honoured. The request made me curious though – what exactly are the responsibilities of a godparent? And more importantly, what can I do to help ensure my godson grows into a faithful and virtuous person?

Importance

In a previous article for *The Irish Catholic*, Cardinal Timothy M Dolan addressed the importance of a timely baptism. He compared it to a child's first visit to the paediatrician to receive their proper vaccinations to provide protection. Baptism, he argued, is similarly foundational. “What are these benefits? Yes, the cleansing from original sin, but also the recognition of

divine adoption, the welcome of the baby into the supernatural family of the Church and the graces of protection and interior strength of the tiny infant. The little one is fragile, helpless, unaware of the mystery and majesty of the Sacrament. That's fitting, since it's all pure, unmerited gift. We're all ‘little ones’ in God's eyes.”

His words remind us that baptism is not merely a cultural rite of passage or a box to be checked. It is a supernatural gift, a moment when a person – infant or adult – is welcomed into the Church and receives the graces needed for a life of faith.

“Though the official requirements to be a godparent are minimal, the call is anything but trivial. Taking this role seriously means accepting lifelong commitment, much like the Christian life itself”

But what does this mean for me, as a godparent? Am I just a witness to the ceremony, a token figure in my godson's life? The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that godparents should be “firm believers, able and ready to help the newly baptised – child or adult – on



Pope Francis baptises a baby during Mass in the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican January 12, 2025, the feast of the Baptism of the Lord. Photo: CNS/Vatican Media.

the road of Christian life.” (CCC 1255) The Code of Canon Law expands on this, stating that “insofar as possible, a person to be baptised is to be given a sponsor who assists an adult in Christian initiation or together with the parents presents an infant for baptism. A sponsor also helps the baptised person to lead a Christian life in keeping with baptism and to fulfil faithfully the obligations inherent in it.” (Can. 872)

Trivial

Though the official requirements to be a godparent are minimal, the call is anything

but trivial. Taking this role seriously means accepting lifelong commitment, much like the Christian life itself.

“Both of them did not just talk about faith – they lived it. In doing so they gave me an example to follow by being present and intentional”

Throughout this whole process I've been thinking about my own godparents and what they mean to me. My godmother, despite being an ocean away, still prays for me and checks in on me. Throughout my life she always made an effort to spend time with me, asking about my faith and my life in

general over a slice of pizza. I remember as a teenage being a bit annoyed by this, preferring in those days to have been playing video games than socialising, but now I look back with fondness on her effort to break through my teenage awkwardness.

On the other hand, my confirmation sponsor – who, in many ways, has been a godfather to me – has encouraged me through mentorship, prayer, and conversations. I remember meeting up with him and talking about life over a bowl of ramen. Each time we met he would give me a book to deepen my spiritual understanding. And in those conversations, he would sometimes offer certain challenges or difficult questions for me to think about. Both of them did not just talk about faith – they lived it. In doing so they gave me an example

to follow by being present and intentional.

An article on *Catholic Answers* outlines practical ways to be a good godparent – many of which I've seen in my own godparents' example. In the article they list remembering spiritual milestones (baptism, first Communion, confirmation), encouraging devotion to a patron saint, helping build a spiritual library, and serving as a mentor and prayer companion. Above all, the heart of godparenthood is an intentional relationship grounded in faith.

Ultimately, a godparent is called to safeguard and defend the faith of the newly baptised, which also means continually growing in their own faith. This responsibility is not something we take on by our own strength but through an overflow of God's love. Maybe this is an answer to the prayers – ‘Lord, increase my faith.’

Mission

In a 2012 homily, Pope Benedict XVI spoke directly to godparents about this mission: “The children who are about to be baptised must walk in this light throughout their lives, helped by the words and example of their parents and their godparents. The latter must strive to nourish with their words and the witness of their lives the torch of the children's faith so that they may be a shining example in this world of ours, all too often groping in the darkness of doubt, and bring it the light of the Gospel which is life and hope.”

That is the heart of godparenthood: to be a torchbearer of faith, lighting the way for another. And that, I realise, is both a humbling challenge and a beautiful privilege.

“The children who are about to be baptised must walk in this light throughout their lives, helped by the words and example of their parents and their godparents”

Welcoming others into an eternity with God

Effie Caldarola

I recently attended the baptism of my first grandchild, 3-month-old Charlotte. I must say, Charlotte is adorable. So, with that impartial assessment out of the way, I offer some reflections that Charlotte's baptism brought to mind.

My parents were in a huge hurry to baptise us. It was the before the Second Vatican Council, when people feared that an unbaptised child would go to ‘limbo’ if he or she died.

It worried my dad, and so, barely out of the hospital, my mom planned our baptisms, as well as the family receptions that followed, complete with linens and the good silver. These days, for most Catholics, limbo hardly fits the concept of a merciful God.

The beautiful words of the Catechism of the Catholic Church describe this sacrament as we should see it: “Holy baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit... and the door which gives access to the other sacraments.”

That's powerful stuff – “the gateway to life in the Spirit.”

Baptism, by the Church's definition, anticipates for Charlotte a life of grace. It initiates her into the Christian community. It prepares her to be a follower of Christ, destined to live for the kingdom of God. It opens a beautiful door.

These words are my favourite part of every baptism ceremony: “And when Christ returns may you go out with all the saints to meet him.”

I think of Charlotte, walking someday with the community of believers to meet Jesus.

Years ago, I attended the baptism of a child in foster care through a Catholic agency in our Alaskan city. The foster mother desired his baptism. He was sick and destined to die soon. Yet the priest at her parish was concerned with bureaucratic details.

He wanted the birth mother found to provide consent, a nearly impossible mission. A priest at the chancery quietly intervened. Bring him to the regular Friday chancery Mass, he told the foster mom. My husband, who worked for the archdiocese, was the godfather and the foster mom, the godmother. There wasn't a dry eye in the conference room, filled with

chancery employees.

“In the eyes of the world, this child means very little,” the priest told us that day. “But in the eyes of the Church, this child's life is very important.”

All baptisms are touching. Charlotte's was moving to me, as she is named for my mother, and wore the baptismal gown my mom made for me so many years ago.

Yet, of all the baptisms I've witnessed, the long-ago baptism of that little boy at the chancery may have been the most powerful of all, as a community to whom he was a stranger welcomed him as a child of God.

TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



Looking at both sides of the coin

The worlds of religion and politics are often dominated by major figures, characters and leaders with big personalities – some of them will feature here.

And so it was that Pope Francis was one of those giants that figured large in the media last week. Watching **ITV News** last Wednesday I was conscious, during Ellie Pitt's report from outside the Gemelli Hospital in Rome, of another vigil – that in St Peter's Square when Pope John Paul II was on his deathbed. I was reminded of Wordsworth's lines: "And many thousands now are sad, wait the fulfilment of their fear." However, the report was upbeat too, including a mention of the visit of Italian PM Giorgia Meloni to the pontiff. She said he was in good form and joking with her. Papal biographer Austin Ivereigh thought the Pope would be good humoured, stubborn but compliant when his medical team laid down the law. **Nine News** (RTÉ) that night showed archive footage of the Italian PM and the Pontiff laughing together at another meeting.

By Friday's **Times Radio Drive** one of his doctors was saying that the Pope's condition wasn't life threatening, that he was doing fine and that he had asked the doctors to give the media updates on his



People pray in the courtyard around a statue of St John Paul II outside Rome's Gemelli hospital February 23, 2025. Photo: CNS/Pablo Esparza.

condition. By Saturday he was reported as being "critical," by Sunday "tranquil." On **The Pat Kenny Show** (Newstalk, Monday) Elise Allen of the Crux website was reporting that he was still "very much in charge," sitting up, engaging with his officials. He had

issued a statement describing the war in Ukraine as "painful and shameful." Nevertheless, he has a serious condition for a man of his age, so ongoing prayer is in order! At the time of writing, he is still hanging in there, I just hope it's the same or better at the time of

publication.

On **The Politics Hub** (Sky News, Wed) a guest suggested that the aforementioned Ms Meloni should be the one sent to lobby President Trump as he is believed to admire her. On the same show presenter Sophie Ridge made an interesting opening statement: "In journalism it's important to reflect both sides of an argument, to listen and try understand nuance and different perspectives, to be aware of your own bias, but it's also important to call out and state the facts and to call out facts that are simply untrue." Untrue facts? And who judges? I can see where she is coming from, especially with the bizarre Trump statement that appeared to blame Ukraine and President Zelenskyy for starting the war!

The spectre of death hangs over many of these events, but it was very much to the fore in **Heart and Soul** (BBC World Service, Friday). It was based on the very personal and engaging audio diaries of performer and writer Rochi Rampal. Her thoughts had turned to reflecting on death after attending ten funerals in 2019, including that of her mother, with whom she was very close. The prospect of death came closer to home when she received a cancer diagnosis. Her father was Hindu and her mother Christian – she felt she "fell

PICK OF THE WEEK

HOUSE OF DAVID

Amazon Prime (on demand, from Thursday February 27)

The once-mighty King Saul falls victim to his own pride, as an outcast shepherd boy, David is anointed as the second king.

SUNDAY MORNING LIVE

BBC One Sunday March 2, 10:30am

Last episode in the current series of the religion and lifestyle show.

EVERYBODY LOVES RAYMOND

Channel 4 Monday March 3, 7:45am

The Sister: Debra's hippy sister shows up unexpectedly and announces that she's decided to become a nun. Funny and moving.

through the cracks of organised religion." While describing herself as a spiritual person, she felt she had only vague understanding with no deep connection. She now sought to have a faith, with its beliefs and "trusted rituals."

Among those she spoke to was Kevin Toolis, a Scottish man with Irish ancestors who had written about Irish wakes and the sense of dying in a community. He described how a decade of the Rosary helped at a particularly difficult deathbed moment. Curiously he referred to "verses" and the "chorus" of the Rosary. In terms of coping, he also had the unusual idea that we should teach our children how to die. Ms Rampal's

chief concern was indeed her children as she followed her cancer through diagnosis, cure or remission and recurrence. She felt that the more she talked about death for the documentary, the more she learned how to live. The journey, both medically and spiritually, continues.

It might seem less important by comparison, but last week's decision of Coimisiún na Meán to reject complaints against an RTE investigates documentary broadcast a year ago is awful. It was one of the most biased pro-abortion programmes ever shown on Irish TV (and there's lots of competition). I feel that the Commission has taken a severe blow to its credibility.

Film

Aubrey Malone



Riotous exposition of French convent life

Have you ever seen a convent of nuns that comprises a former beauty queen, a drug dealer whose life was – literally – saved by the Bible, a nun who wears a tattoo, one who swears, one who jokes about the decapitation of John the Baptist, one who sways her hips as she dances to pop music on a table, one who likes getting tipsy on wine, and one isn't averse to a wee bit of sabotage to beat a childhood rival in a race?

The comedy *Oh My Goodness!* Is cheerfully irreverent for most of its running time, especially in the scenes featuring "funky" would-be postulant Gwendoline (Louise

Malek) who's slow to adapt to the strictures of convent life – especially the vow of silence – but, like the film itself, has a good heart.

There's a core of spirituality to it which it wears lightly enough not to make it a work of two dissonant halves. We get to know these nuns as people rather than purveyors of piety. That, I think, is the key to its charm.

It's set in the picturesque Jura region of France and features many pastoral shots of this. As it begins, a group of five Benedictine nuns set plans in place to embark on a bicycle race with a prize of 25,000 euro for the winner. Hoping to use it to renovate a run-down nursing home, they



A scene from the film *Oh My Goodness!*

aren't averse to "doctoring" some photos of the patients to make them look more incapacitated than they are and thereby whip up public sympathy for them. They also use what they dub "The Catholic Church's greatest gift."

"Prayer?" enquires

an interlocutor. No, he's informed, "Guilt." Yes, it's that kind of film.

It intersperses Scriptural asides with the increasingly quirky figures of a mostly eccentric cast – including an injured nun who's been in the convent since, we're

informed, World War II. No, really.

It mainly deals with the rivalry between Benedictine Mother Veronique (Valerie Bonneton) who dispels any notion that she was once "stuffy" to the visiting priest Fr Pierre (Francois Morel) as she embarks on a series of subterfuges to scoop the prize, including one involving a pothole, to outwit Redemptorist Mother Josephine (Sidse Babett Knudsen) and her more exquisite band of cyclists from a nearby convent. (They perform ensemble quartets on one wheel to the background of 'The Blue Danube').

Director Laurent Tirard isn't shy to feature satires of

exorcisms and other religious rituals as he ranges from hysteria to farce with equanimity. The two Mothers admit they're behaving like nine-year-olds at one point, but we don't mind. It's Tirard's poetic licence to carry home his message that life should be about joy rather than dourness even (or especially?) in the cloisters.

Will 'mere' Veronique scoop her booty and, as a result, realise an ambition of meeting Pope Francis? Will 'Gwendol' develop some discipline to entitle her to 'wear the veil'?

Sit back and enjoy this high energy divertissement dripping with bonhomie.

BookReviews

Peter Costello



What we can really learn of the future from historians

A Tract for Our Times: A Retrospective on Joe Lee's Ireland 1919-1985, editor Miriam Nyhan Grey, with contribution by eight others (Glucksman Ireland House, NYU / UCD Press, US\$50.00 / €40.00)

Peter Costello

Historically minded readers should not be alarmed by the title to this *festchrift*: it seems to be intended as merely a fancy piece of styling, and is not in any way intended to have reference to the original *Tracts for the Times* published in the 1830s with which the then Anglican John Henry Newman was greatly involved.

The book being celebrated in this collection of essays is Professor J. J. Lee's *Ireland 1912-1985* (Cambridge University Press, 1989) which ran to 754 pages (and more in later editions), and was very far indeed from any definition of a mere 'tract' in the sense of a short pamphlet.

The then Professor of Modern History at Cork University had published, back in 1973, a much smaller book with an Irish firm. This was *The Modernisation of Irish Society 1848-1918*, part of a series surveying selected periods of Irish history.

That book was a local success, but in a limited way. Nothing prepared the country - or even the author and publisher it seems - for the phenomenal success of *Ireland 1912-1985*, when it appeared towards the end of 1989.

In the earlier book he noted that post-Famine Ireland was "one of the most advanced political cultures in the world during that time." In the larger book he set out to explore this idea in detail through the earlier part of the 20th century.

The book "sold out due to overwhelming demand" Cambridge revealed a little later and it was reissued at once. It had been called in a review by Owen Dudley

Edwards "one of the great books of our time"; which indeed it was.

In the spring of 1990, surprised by the success of the book, Cambridge not only reprinted it twice, but also mounted a completely fresh publicity campaign with new advertisements for the book in daily newspapers and popular magazines in both islands.

(One Irish bookseller, reportedly, was so excited by the sales possibilities of the book, that he sent in his large order without clearly informing Cambridge where to send the books! Or so a publishing trade journal claimed.)

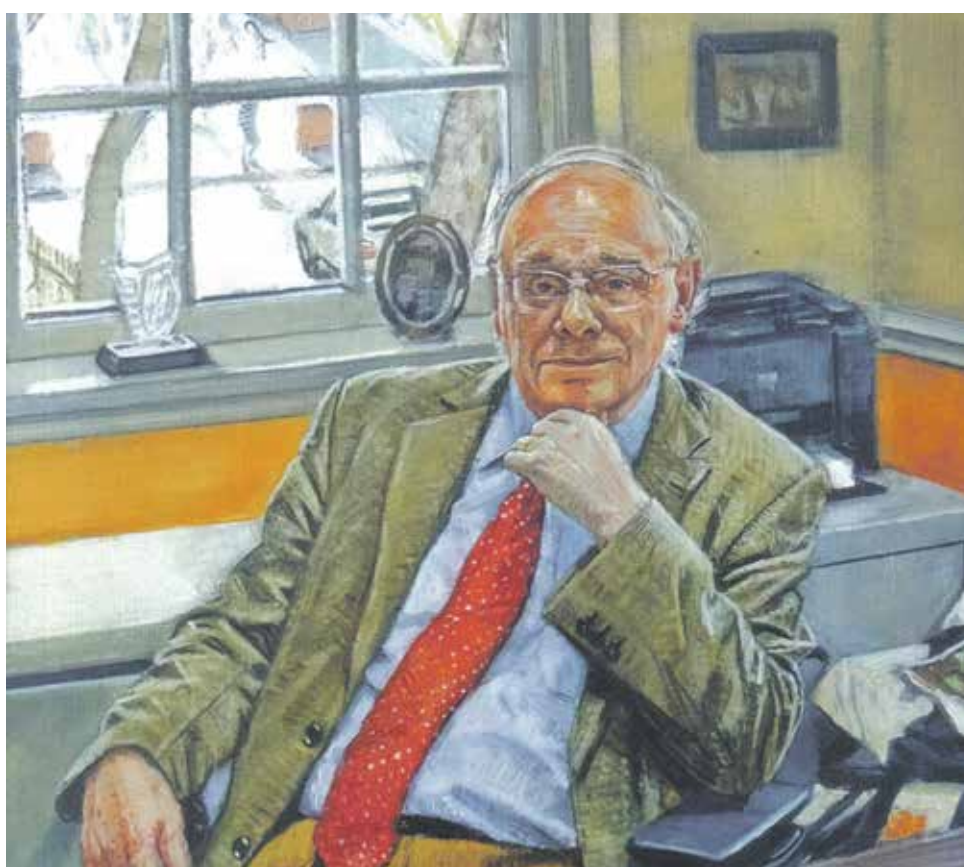
Prof. Lee's history was reprinted regularly after that, and by 2008 was in its eleventh edition. At one bound it had become established as an essential book.

“A Tract for Our Times is a worthy tribute to Professor Lee's achievement by some ten of his colleagues and admirers”

Professor Lee moved on from Cork to an extraordinary career as a "peripatetic professor", which culminated in the directorship of the Glucksman Ireland House in New York City. This is an active centre of Irish cultural activities of all kinds, where his research interests have now moved on to Irish-American history, though he has not lost sight, however, of the intricacies of Irish nationalism in the figure of Michael Davitt.

A Tract for Our Times is a worthy tribute to Professor Lee's achievement by some ten of his colleagues and admirers.

The book in its magisterial treatment was a sharp contrast to what had gone before. He provided readers with a well resourced and well informed account of some eighty odd years in Ireland,



Professor John Joseph Lee in a rare moment of private leisure at home, painted by Mick O'Dea in 2015

written in an authoritative but accessible style.

Contrast

The whole enterprise was in sharp contrast to what had gone before. The truth is that until then there had been no scientific history of modern Ireland at all. Indeed it seemed to be a dictum of some Irish academic historians that "modern history" was not history at all, but mere politics, and much of that was gossip. Other works, by FSL Lyons and RF Foster covered much longer periods, and so diluted the treatment of this shorter recent period.

For the general reader there was a work like Rev. John D'Alton's multi-volume history of Ireland, reissued long after his death in 1908 and again in 1929, becoming in the process a sentimental national saga. Others narratives were *The Story of Ireland of Ireland* by AM Sullivan, *The Irish Republic* by novelist Dorothy Macardle, and other

contentious partisan accounts, intended to cheer rather than inform. Much that was written about the war of independence, much of it by journalists, was, in the opinion of the British historian Edward Norman in 1971, little more than fiction.

“Professor Lee provided to two generations of Irish readers what they had longed for, an impartial, richly detailed history that was in the best way non-partisan”

The important books of Irish historians had avoided the more recent decades, the very one about which the citizens, confused by the claims and counterclaims of people claiming to be patriots, needed clarity and authority, Professor Lee provided them.

Professor Lee provided to two generations of Irish readers what they had longed for, an impartial, richly detailed history that was in the best way non-partisan.

The book in fact is a counter-

part to *The History of Germany Since 1789* by Professor Golo Mann, that had appeared in 1968 translation in which the son of one of Germany's most important writers explained to a young rising generation of Germans the achievements and failures of their fathers and grandfathers in an historical context ending with "the darkest chapter" of the Third Reich little more than decade before.

In the same way Prof. Lee's book provided for Irish citizens and students what had been lacking for many decades, an authoritative, detailed and clear sighted view of what had happened in Ireland in the previous eight decades, which had seen the troubled foundation of a new state with a still troubled politics and uncertain future.

Begrudgery

Professor Lee in the summer of 1989 speaking at a conference on the Ireland Funds, said that "we were a nation riddled with begrudgery and carried the begrudging heart from the womb," a sentiment his history had forcefully expressed.

But there was nothing begrudging about the reception of the book. It will for some time remain an important resource for the past. But all that said, we

perhaps have to keep in mind there is a limitation to what a historian can do for us.

They can tell us, as certainly Prof. Lee did, about the past in detail. But what of the future? The emergence of the historian as the ideal "public intellectual" has been a strange phenomenon. They can tell us about the past, often in great detail; but are not perhaps able to point to what is to come.

“We need to be aware of the limitations of history and what it can tell us about where we are going”

In France, for instance, the "public intellectual" is likely to be a philosopher (but then they teach philosophy in French schools), a psychologist, an anthropologist, a poet, or even a theologian.

The intellectual discourse in the Hexagon is all the richer for these contributions. They are broader and deeper being based on the nature of the living person rather than the past events of history.

We need to be aware of the limitations of history and what it can tell us about where we are going. Who a decade or two ago would have thought that we would live to see the extraordinary implosion of democracy in the United States that we are witnessing on a daily basis.

There, largely through the impact of social media, those "begrudging hearts" to which Professor Lee referred. Now have free reign. Those of us used to the amenities of debate as seen in the 'L and H' or 'The Hist', or carried on in the Irish courts of law by the denizens of the Law Library, would never have thought this outcome possible.

Society changes continually due to technical changes - we have seen these in action in the last generation. But no historian could have foreseen just how those technical changes have transformed society. This moment in time presents us here in Ireland with challenges which little in our history, or in the accounts of that history, could have prepared us.

Doubtless there will be a Professor Lee of the future to describe how Ireland gets through it.

“Who a decade or two ago would have thought that we would live to see the extraordinary implosion of democracy in the United States that we are witnessing on a daily basis”

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.

An important 'Lost Film' on Abraham Lincoln from 1915 with Irish connections



General Lee surrenders at Appomattox Court House 1865.

Peter Costello

In 1915 the United States was passing through a period of recollection marking the 50th anniversary of the end of Civil War, also known, depending on one's point of view as 'The Great Rebellion' or 'The War Between the States', which had ended with the surrender of the Confederate leader General Lee at Appomattox Court House on April 9 1865. In the USA today this conflict is by no means a faded issue, as controversies about the war and its commemoration North and South are still very much alive in the administration of President Trump. Indeed, he has sometimes been seen to exploit them on his way to re-election.

Hollywood

In spring of 1915, in those very early days of the movie business in Hollywood, the Civil War was the subject of several films, the most famous of which was DW Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, which celebrated the Klu Klux Klan, with

scenes of the vengeful men in hoods setting about restoring "the honour of the south" by attacking Blacks and Reconstructionists.

The scenario was based on a novel, *The Clansman*, which had also been a successful play. Griffith had no apologies about the pro-Southern outlook of the film - in which the parts of Blacks were played mostly by white men in make-up - real Blacks however did appear in some of the political scenes.

“He showed Lincoln as an almost Messiah-like figure of history, the great liberator of the Blacks and the man who saved the Union”

The film was the first film ever to be shown in the White House, being screened especially for President Woodrow Wilson and his family. The techniques the director introduced had a lasting effect on the development of the

film - another example of how effective art does not always equate with the actual truth.

But also made that year was *The Heart of Lincoln*. This was created by a young man called Frank Ford along with his younger brother John, the now much celebrated John Ford, the Irish-American creator of that other cinematic gem *The Quiet Man*.

Frank Ford's *The Heart of Lincoln* was a complete contrast, the part of Lincoln being played by Frank Ford himself. He showed Lincoln as an almost Messiah-like figure of history, the great liberator of the Blacks and the man who saved the Union.

As the younger brother John Ford played a small role in the film, we can perhaps detect in the film some of the attitudes that later emerged in his own films later on, notably *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Admiration

But the love of the 'people's Liberator' must come in part from the Fords' Irish background and the Irish admiration for Daniel O'Connell.

The Heart of Lincoln saw

the martyred president as a great and much loved leader. It stood in stark contrast to Griffith's film and a few other shorter films made the same year.

“It was, he told his boss, a remarkable discovery. It is now being restored, and will be re-released with a new music score to recreate the feel of film in the silent era”

Between 1912 and 1929, when the 'talkies' came in, some 11,000 films were made in the United States of which only some 3,300 survive. Among the 7,200 'lost films' was *The Heart of Lincoln*.

However, quite by chance in the course of 2024 a young film enthusiast working as an intern in a Long Island private film archive came upon a set of six film cans, which he found held a 16mm version of the complete Lincoln film.



John Ford about 1915.

It was, he told his boss, a remarkable discovery. It is now being restored, and will be re-released with a new music score to recreate the feel of film in the silent era.

The family name the Fords was in fact Feeny, but the boys purloined the name of the car maker as it perhaps sounded more truly American.

Their father was from Spiddal - their mother, Barbara Curran, was from Kilronan on Inishmore. She was connected in some way with the Morris family of Spiddal - the family of the late Lord Kilannin. The Feenys, now Fords, claimed to be cousins of the author of Liam O'Flaherty, whose novel *The Informer* John Ford later filmed.

Attitudes

Irish attitudes to the South and to the slave regime there is a complicated matter. John Michel, a great patriot in Ireland, was a supporter of slavery in the American context.

In a later article I will return to this theme with a discussion of the Irish elements that dominate in Margaret Mitchell's saga of the ruination of "Southern civilisation" in her novel *Gone with the*

Wind (1936) and the hugely successful film version (1939), which starred Clark Gable as the male lead and presented Vivien Leigh in the role of the heroine Scarlett O'Hara, left to the end of both book and film to struggle on to preserve the family plantation at Tara.

“Frank Ford's positive view of Lincoln belongs in the different stream of thought and feeling, one well worth exploring”

Though Irish writers have been interested in creating novels set in northern cities and in the West of America, they seem to balk at attempting a true presentation of Irish attitudes to slavery and the South. Frank Ford's positive view of Lincoln belongs in the different stream of thought and feeling, one well worth exploring.

A final note: Frank Ford appears briefly in *The Quiet Man*, as the old man who rises from his sick bed dressed only in his night-shirt to follow after the epic fist fight down the village street.

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– Pope St Pius X, June 4, 1912

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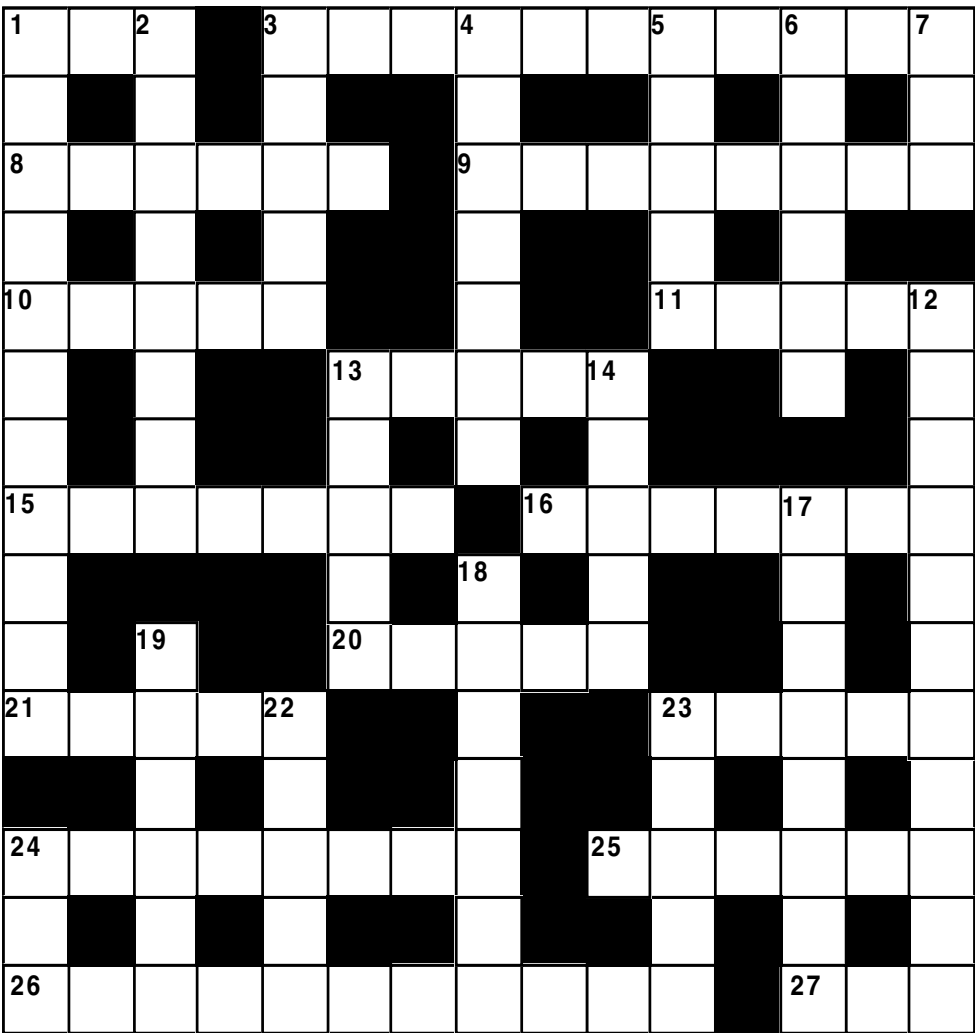
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Leisure time

Crossword

Gordius 704

- Across
- 1 Part of a tennis match (3)
- 3 The world's most famous one is at Stonehenge (5,6)
- 8 Seldom (6)
- 9 Haughty (8)
- 10 Versatile Mediterranean fruit (5)
- 11 Pry (5)
- 13 He led the Jews out of Egypt (5)
- 15 School, college (7)
- 16 Tread heavily (7)
- 20 Taking legal action (5)
- 21 Neck-warmer (5)
- 23 Hot breakfast (3-2)
- 24 Monument (8)
- 25 Fiddle (6)
- 26 Factual programme (11)
- 27 Definite article in grammar (3)
- Down
- 1 Stone coffin (11)
- 2 Mexican flatbread (8)
- 3 Ointment (5)
- 4 Closest (7)
- 5 Golf clubs of a certain type (5)
- 6 Colouring stick (6)
- 7 Amphibian (3)
- 12 Mass contributions for the Pope (6,5)



- 13 Childhood illness (5)
- 14 Piece of foliage (5)
- 17 One who can speak several languages (8)
- 18 Vest (7)
- 19 Road surfacing material (6)
- 22 Ancient Roman marketplace (5)
- 23 Peter Pan's Tinker Bell, for example (5)
- 24 Insane (3)

SOLUTIONS, FEBRUARY 20

GORDIUS No. 703

Across

- 1 Aid 3 Crystal ball 8 Abroad 9 Fast food 10 Stole 11 Swamp 13 Straw 15 Eyebrow 16 Antibes 20 Ditch 21 Chair 23 Tenon 24. Lucidity 25 Cymbal 26. Antioxidant 27 Say

Down

- 1 Anaesthetic 2 Dormouse 3 Crave 4 Suffers 5 Lotus 6 Amoral 7 Lad 12 Passion play 13 Stood 14 Winch 17 Barnabas 18 Strayed 19 Mascot 22 Rodeo 23 Tryst 24 Lea

Sudoku Corner 572

Easy

	5			2		6		
			1	9	6	7		
							3	2
2		6			8		9	3
			6		5			
3	4		2			8		1
8	1							
		4	7	5	1			
		7		4			2	

Hard

				4			3	5
					7		8	2
			3			1		9
3		2	9					
6			8		5			1
					1	9		7
4		3			8			
9	6		2					
7	5			1				

Last week's Easy 571

4	8	6	5	3	9	2	7	1
9	2	3	1	7	8	4	6	5
1	5	7	6	4	2	9	8	3
7	6	1	9	8	4	3	5	2
3	9	5	2	1	6	8	4	7
2	4	8	7	5	3	1	9	6
8	7	2	3	9	5	6	1	4
5	3	9	4	6	1	7	2	8
6	1	4	8	2	7	5	3	9

Last week's Hard 571

1	7	3	6	4	5	8	2	9
5	8	9	7	3	2	1	6	4
6	4	2	8	9	1	7	5	3
4	9	6	1	5	7	3	8	2
3	1	7	2	8	4	6	9	5
8	2	5	3	6	9	4	1	7
9	5	1	4	7	8	2	3	6
2	6	4	9	1	3	5	7	8
7	3	8	5	2	6	9	4	1

Notebook

Fr John Harris



Lent in the Jubilee Year of Hope

A Cambridge theologian I once heard asked her audience to consider the importance of the forty days, weeks, years - be it for Christ, 40 days, or Moses and the people of Israel, 40 years. She told us that it was seen in the ancient world as the period of gestation for a human baby in the womb. From this perspective the 40 days of Lent are not to be seen as an obstacle course to be endured by force of our own wills but rather this holy season of Lent is about the growth of new life. As a mother caring for the new life in her womb we must care for the life of grace in our own souls. Over these 40 days we are to allow the holiness that is ours through baptism to flourish.

Since listening to that lecture over ten years ago, I have a much more positive attitude toward Lent, no longer wishing it to be over, or seeing it as an endurance test. I now see it as allowing that supernatural life of grace, my friendship with God, to take a more central place in my attitudes and for me to focus on that call to holiness, the perfection of charity.

In this Jubilee Year when the Pope has asked us to be Pilgrims



A crucifix and Bible are pictured on purple cloth during Lent at Jesus the Good Shepherd Church in Dunkirk, Maryland, US on April 7, 2022. Photo: OSV News/Bob Roller, Reuters.

of Hope we can live this Lent as a time of growth and hope and not as a time of pain and suffering. This Jubilee Year let us see these 40 days as a spring season, a time

when there is growth after the cold and dead soil of winter. The soil is becoming warm again and there is new hope of life. Our facing of our sinfulness and weakness is not

a matter of how far we can push ourselves and get ourselves on the right path again. Rather this time is a hopeful 40 days of renewal and fresh beginnings. Indeed, a time to stop the old ways of selfishness and self-centredness, the ways of the cold earth and to allow the love of God to warm the soil of our hearts and allow God's grace to bring hope into our world with Easter joy.

Rather than focusing on our fasts and penances this Jubilee Year of Hope allow God to warm the soil of our hearts. We begin by acknowledging that we do not live for the passing entertainments of this world but our relationship with God. God should be central in our lives; He is our Hope. We must worship the Lord and serve him, not expecting God to be our plaything who dances to our tunes. God invites us into his world and his ways of acting. Worshipping God involves us not putting God to the test but trusting in Him.

These 40 days of Lent are days of Hope, when we acknowledge the great things God is doing in our lives as we grow deeper in loving friendship.

A renewed translation

While I tend to stick with the traditional translations of the Bible I was struck recently by a preacher's attempt to make the 'Beatitudes' more relevant. He said that we could understand the "Blessed are you" or "Happy are you" as "How lucky are you when you know your need for God". And he contrasted the "Beatitudes" with the "Woes" in St Luke's Gospel on the plain as "How unfortunate are you who are happy now with the passing entertainments of this world". His words might help us during the Lenten Season to count our blessing as believers.



Sr Diane OP at 100

Many of you will have visited our Dominican Nuns in Fatima at the monastery of Pope Pius XII. On February 5, Sr Diane celebrated her 100th birthday. She is the last surviving founding member of the monastery. I visited with her last July and while she is frail she has lost none of her profound sense of God, her lively sense of humour and deep devotion to Our Lady of Fatima. It is always a delight to be with her. I first met her over 50 years ago when I was an altar boy and she was passing through Limerick. I wish her a wonderful birthday and I thank her for her prayers and words of encouragement over all these many years.



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Some time ago, our Association was pleased to be able to assist Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) in their vital medical work in many places in Sudan. As Pope Francis has often reminded us, a forgotten tragedy has been unfolding away from the eyes of the public. Civil war has devastated the health care system and left millions of children and adults in desperate need of medical care. Over 4 million children have fled from their homes.

In South Darfur, MSF is seeing one of the worst maternal and child health emergencies in the world. "Thousands of children are on the brink of death and starvation," writes MSF. "Newborn babies, pregnant women, and new mothers are dying in shocking numbers. And so many of these deaths are due to preventable conditions, but almost everything has broken down. The scarcity of functioning health facilities and unaffordable transportation costs mean many women and children arrive at hospital in critical condition. With the conflict now well into its second year, the needs remain enormous."

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PLEASE BE AS GENEROUS AS YOU CAN, AND PRAY FOR THE PEOPLE OF SUDAN. THE NEEDS ARE IMMENSE.



"Jesus wills that we give alms to Him as to one poor and needy. He puts Himself as it were at our mercy; He will take nothing but what we give Him from our heart, and the very least trifle is precious in His sight." - St Therese

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