

# The Irish Catholic

## ARE STRICT CHILDHOODS A THING OF THE PAST?

Mary Kenny  
Page 5



## HOMELESS SUPPLEMENT 2024

Fighting for the vulnerable  
and forgotten  
Pages 11-18



## WOMEN AND MEN WALKING SIDE BY SIDE FOR JUSTICE

Nuala O'Loan  
Page 9



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# 80% of NI identify as Christians 'Distinct' role of faith must be respected in policy

Ruadhán Jones

The distinct role faith plays in the North must be respected in policy bishops and experts have said as a new poll shows that 80% of people in the North identify as Christian – compared with just 46% in England and Wales and 74% in the Republic.

The poll also shows an overwhelming majority of Northerners (65%) believe faith should have an impact on public life, while 57% strongly believe faith plays an important role in education. This comes at a time when Westminster is seeking to impose teaching about access to abortion on Catholic schools and parties in the North push for state-run education in place of ethos-based schooling.

"It's important to recognise the distinct place that Northern Ireland is," Bishop Donal McKeown told *The Irish Catholic* in response to the figures from the Evangelical Alliance's poll.

"Education needs to reflect who we are as a society not driven by ideologies imposed on us with the assumption that everywhere should be like this.

"The role attributed to faith and values is important, even for people who are not church-goers themselves," the bishop of Derry continued. "There is a desire for education that doesn't avoid talking about morality and faith issues."

Some 50% of Northerners describe themselves as practicing Christians, the poll conducted by Savanta ComRes shows, with an estimated 450,000 people attending church weekly in the North including 28% of Catholics.

Just over a third of people surveyed (35%) said they pray weekly, while 13% read the Bible weekly.

» Continued on Page 2

## Family fun at Divine Mercy



The Jennings and Curran families enjoy the Divine Mercy Conference, which took place in the RDS in Dublin on February 24 and 25. Photo: John McElroy.

## TIME TO SOUND ALARM BELL FOR YOUTH

Michael Kelly  
PAGE 7



## UNREALISTIC BEAUTY STANDARDS FORCE STRESS ON GIRLS

Wendy Grace  
PAGE 10



## US COURT RULING LEADS TO 'THEOCRACY' SCARE-MONGERING

David Quinn  
PAGE 8



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The Irish Catholic



## 80% of NI identify as Christians

» **Continued from Page 1**

These figures “remind us that those seeking to understand Northern Ireland must not neglect the role of religion – either in politics or in everyday life”, according to sociologist Dr Gladys Ganiel.

The Professor in the Sociology of Religion at Queen's University Belfast expressed surprise at “such high rates of religious practice”.

Catholics were significantly more likely to consider themselves to be practising Christians (62%) than Protestants (46%), while 38% of Protestants have never considered themselves to be a practising Christian, compared to just 22% of Catholics.

The report says it is “clear that religious identification

is much higher in Northern Ireland than in other parts of the UK”, while in the South the numbers identifying as Christian hover around 70%.

All Christians agreed or strongly agreed that more effort is needed to encourage peace and reconciliation in NI (82%) and that the assembly must be reformed to bring more stability and accountability (81%).

Some 77% of Catholics believe there is an urgent need for “radical action” on climate change, compared with 64% of Protestants, while 64% of Catholics believe that asylum seekers, refugees and other newcomers should be supported in practical ways and made to feel welcome in our communities, compared with 47% of Protestants.

## Experience of grief profoundly impacted during Covid, report finds

Staff reporter

The Time to Reflect survey, commissioned by Irish Hospice Foundation to explore the impact of Covid on the experiences and perceptions of the Irish population in relation to dying, death, and bereavement during this time found that the Covid pandemic had a profound impact on people's experience of death, dying and grieving. A total of 2,259 participants completed the national survey from November 2021 to February 2022.

Over half (54%) had experienced the death of someone close to them. More than 6 in 10 (64%) of those bereaved said their ability to grieve was negatively affected, while 7 in 10 (70%) people reported that family and friends were excluded from funerals because of public health measures.

Some 67% of people said they have greater awareness of grief since the pandemic. Almost half (47%) have given more thought to their own end-of-life wishes. Over half (54%) stated that people in their community found other ways, in the absence of traditional ones, to honour the person who had died.

Some 4 in 10 (40%) people revealed that they did not receive the support they needed following the death of a loved one. Only half (54%) reported that their loved one received the level of care they needed at end of life.

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# Bishops signal support for 'No, No' votes in care and family referenda

Brandon Scott

The Irish Catholic bishops' conference has said the upcoming referenda relating to the definition of family is “likely to lead to a weakening of the incentive for young people to marry” and has urged people to oppose the two proposed amendments to the Constitution in the March 8 referenda.

In their statement, the bishops said the family amendment to Article 41 would

diminish the unique importance of the relationship between marriage and family and was likely to lead to a weakening of the incentive for young people to marry.

Marriage, they noted, entailed a public and legal commitment, but the term “durable relationship” was shrouded in legal uncertainty and open to wide interpretation.

“It does not make sense that such an ambiguous reality would be considered ‘antecedent and supe-

rior to all positive law’ and acquire the same ‘inalienable and imprescriptible’ rights as those ascribed to the ‘family founded on marriage,’” the bishops said in a statement.

The care amendment to Article 41.2, they warned, would have the effect of abolishing all reference to motherhood in the Constitution and leave unacknowledged the particular and “incalculable societal contribution” that mothers in the home have made and

continue to make in Ireland.

“The role of mothers should continue to be cherished in our Constitution,” they said. “What benefit would it be to Irish society to delete the terms ‘woman’ and ‘mother’”, they asked.

The bishops underlined that the present constitutional provision “emphatically does not state” that “a woman's place is in the home”. Neither does it excuse men of their duties to the home and family.

Rather, in contemporary society there now exists a welcome co-responsibility between women and men for every aspect of domestic life, including the provision of care in the home, they said.

The State, they said, has to date failed to financially acknowledge the role of women in the home and there was no indication there would be provision for the adequate financial remuneration of carers.

## Young men on a mission...



Young members of Termonmaguirc parish enjoy the parish Camino around the lough in Loughmacrory, Co. Tyrone, as part of the parish mission on February 24.

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## Tánaiste Martin: GAA must do more to encourage Catholics to join PSNI

Ruadhán Jones

Tánaiste Micheál Martin has said the GAA must do more to help boost the number of Catholics joining the PSNI. The Fianna Fáil leader told *The Irish News* that the sports and cultural body needed to be more vocal in encouraging Catholics into the police service's ranks.

He was speaking after meeting the Catholic Police

Guild of Northern Ireland (CPG), whose chairman said the GAA's engagement with his organisation to date had been “measured”.

The Tánaiste said the PSNI was “not getting the support in the community”. “The GAA can do more there; the GAA should be in lockstep to support Catholics going into the PSNI, because we need to follow through on Patten and the principles of Patten,” he said



# Catholic charities paved way to help chronic homeless – Housing First director

Chai Brady

Catholic-founded charities helped pave the way to assist the most vulnerable who were being rejected by local authorities for housing, according to the National Director for the 'Housing First' initiative in Ireland.

Rob Lowth told *The Irish Catholic* that Fr Peter McVerry, who founded the Peter McVerry Trust, saw from a "very early time" the need for the Housing First programme, which prioritises providing immediate housing to individuals experiencing homelessness, regardless of their background or circumstances, with a focus on those facing severe challenges.

Mr Lowth, who was the former

Head of Homeless Services for Limerick City and County Council, said: "I think Peter saw himself in Housing First from an early time, the benefit of it, and the understanding that it was the right direction to go in. Because he was seeing a lot of these younger people from a very early age and he has seen, and I guess I would have seen it working in a local authority, the multi-generational side of homelessness.

"When I was in a local authority, I was inducted into the idea that somebody has to be sober before they get a house, they have to have a history of housing before they are given a house. And that was the holy grail of local authority housing at the time. The

people we're dealing with now on Housing First never stood a chance," he said.

There were almost 1,000 Housing First tenancies created by the end of December, focusing on those who may have behavioural, addiction, mental health issues and more. The Government aim to expand that by 2,000 by 2026.

The Peter McVerry Trust and Focus Ireland, founded by Sr Stan, have been two of the biggest providers of tenancies under the Government's Housing First initiative. Last year the Peter McVerry Trust reported working with 590 active tenancies across 14 local authority areas, with the success rate of these tenancies at 89%.

See Page 14

## Decisions have to be made on parish structures says Bishop Cullinan

Ruadhán Jones

Decisions "have to be made" on the future structure of parish life, Bishop Alphonsus Cullinan has said, as his diocese mulls alternating Mass venues, changing schedules and closing churches.

In a letter to parishioners, the bishop of Waterford and Lismore warned that

"we cannot avoid change" in parish identity, as there is a "lot more mobility of people nowadays".

"With the decline in the number of priests and priests' age and state of health, the current Mass schedule cannot be sustained," he said.

Dr Cullinan invited parishes to consider seven proposals regarding the arrangement of Masses:

alternate Mass venues, six months in one church, six in the other; rotating churches each weekend; reducing the number of weekly Masses; organising hub and satellite churches; closing a church; changing Mass times. He finished by raising the issue of a priest being sick or on holiday.

Responding to the letter, Fr Ned Hasset told parishion-

ers that Abbeyside parish's pastoral council felt the bishops' focus was "a bit narrow" by focusing on the decline in clergy.

"The council recommended that we broaden the scope of the consultation and see the crisis as an opportunity to encourage and promote great lay participation in ministry and leadership in parishes," he said.

## Director of 'Barbie' plans big and bold 'Narnia' reboot



Director Greta Gerwig. Photo: OSV News/ Mike Blake, Reuters

### Staff reporter

The director of award winning smash hit *Barbie* is planning for a "bigger and bolder" adaptation for *Narnia* series by Christian writer CS Lewis, *Netflix* have announced.

Greta Gerwig's adaptation of the Christian classic will be "rooted in faith", according to *Netflix* CEO Ted Sarandos.

"It won't be counter to how the audience may have imagined those worlds," he told *Time*, "but it will be bigger and bolder than they thought."

In the same interview, Ms Gerwig said she was drawn to the "euphorically dreamlike" quality of Lewis' writing.

"It's connected to the folklore and fairy stories of England, but it's a combination of different traditions," she said. "As a child, you accept the whole thing - that you're in this land of Narnia, there's fauns, and then Father Christmas shows up."

"It doesn't even occur to you that it's not schematic. I'm interested in embracing the paradox of the worlds that Lewis created, because that's what's so compelling about them."




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## In memory...



A member of the Ukrainian Catholic community lights a candle in remembrance of Ukrainian soldiers killed in the war with Russia at a ceremony in Our Lady of Consolation, Donnycarney, Dublin, to mark the second anniversary of the beginning of the war on February 24.



## Senator Rónán Mullen

A view from the Seanad



# Bishops do their bit in calling out referenda ... now parishes must follow

**T**he statement from the Catholic bishops on the referendums on 'Family' and 'Care' on March 8 is covered elsewhere in these pages, but I'd like to offer a couple of observations. Bishops, these days, are slow to say 'Vote Yes or No' to anything. They rightly judge that any direct exhortation can be seized on and portrayed as 'episcopal diktat' by political forces opposed to the Christian vision of society.

But the bishops have not gone missing. Their statement highlights the demotion of motherhood and life in the home entailed in the 'Care' referendum. It warns about the weakening of the incentive to marry that would flow from the 'Family' referendum with its importation of the unknown quantity that is 'durable relationships' as the equal basis for family life and Constitutional rights. It is clear where the bishops stand and the statement is worth reading

in full.

In producing a top-quality, humdinger of a statement on the referendums, the bishops have done their bit. But can parishes help by getting the word out? There was no mention of the statement, just hot off the presses, at the Mass I attended on Sunday. I'd understand if it was a case of an email not being opened yet.

But hopefully there isn't apathy, reluctance or fear about mentioning a voting matter. "This is a good statement that will interest people." I'd encourage clergy, religious and lay people of faith – anyone with a congregation, an audience or an email or social media network – to draw people's attention to the Bishops' statement and make it available for people's consideration before they vote. That is civic participation at its best.

One last point on the Referendum. The proposed deletion of mothers, i.e. women who have children, was not necessary to make

the Constitution more directly inclusive of men as fathers. The Government could easily have put in a reference to fathers and their duties in the home. That would have been very timely given all we know about the importance of fathers in children's upbringing and the sad consequences that often flow from their absence.

But our political establishment – elements within the Government, civil service, health establishment and NGOs – are on a different track. Mothers are seen as necessary casualties in the ongoing war on biological reality.

Nothing that distinguishes between biological women and biological men in the ordering of our common life is to be tolerated. So the elimination of 'mother' from the Constitution is, among other things, about smuggling in this strange and destructive political agenda.



Irish Bishop Denis Nulty of Kildare and Leighlin raises the St. Brigid relic after removing it from its box at the beginning of Mass at St. Brigid's Church in Kildare January 28, 2024. Photos: OSV News/John Mc Elroy

## The age of the Independent?

**H**ow do we speak up about all the bad things going on in the world while recognising the good in people and showing the reasons for hope at the same time? That is a perennial challenge for Christians in and out of politics. I've been thinking about it lately because there are a lot of destructive policies coming at us from our Government. Think of the anti-life sentiment, the proposed restrictions on free expression, the attacks on school curricula, the war on women-only spaces, and the poorly thought-out policies on migration (it needs to be generous but structured and there can be no censoring of the hard questions).

Add to that the mismanagement of uncontrollable spending in the health sector, growing homelessness despite exchequer surpluses, and it looks like we have a Government strong on ideology but weak on people's day-to-day struggles.

I don't say that every politician in the Government agrees with the destructive cultural nonsense being shoved our way, but it is clear that the cat has got the tongue of many political leaders whom we might think should know better. "The best lack all conviction, and the worst are



A picture of independent TD Mattie McGrath. Photo: Gareth Chaney/Collins

full of passionate intensity," Yeats wrote.

And, yes, it does seem that a combination of unprincipled political ambition, misuse of the party whip system, excessive media consciousness and the conditioning of political minds by international consensus are all contributing to bad policies coming from the top.

While I get it that we need political parties and some element of party discipline to maintain overall policy coherence, I am glad to be an Independent right now. This past year it is mostly the Independents, as well as

Peadar Tóibín and Aontú, who have resisted the supposedly 'progressive' push on gender policies, the attempts at restricting free speech in the Hate Speech legislation, so-called 'safe access' zones legislation that seeks to crush dissent on abortion – and the rest.

The main political parties have been captured by their ideologues within and the NGOs backing them up. And that suggests to me that we need more Independents, not less, for the foreseeable future.

I would say that, wouldn't I?

## A party man who kept his principles

**I**n contrast to all I have said here about the sometimes stifling impact of party thinking, we saw in the late John Bruton a politician who was deeply committed to his party and its policies (which I did not always agree with), and who was highly pragmatic. Yet, faced with the big questions about meaning of life and the cause of protecting life, he came up trumps.

In the mid-1990s an RTÉ journalist asked the then Taoiseach whether his government would introduce legislation for the X-case. "No" was the answer. "Why not?" "Because that would have the effect of bringing abortion into Ireland."

**i** Rónán Mullen is an Independent Senator and barrister.

No equivocation. No destructive ambiguity or proposal to put the matter to a committee. Just a straightforward commitment to protecting human rights and cherishing human life. The type of commitment we still need.

I was honoured as were, I suspect, many others to get John's support and encouragement from time to time. A few weeks after Christmas I received a short handwritten note in response to a card I had sent. Words of encouragement. Then "My health is volatile. I'm good today".

May John now enjoy eternal good health, where every tear is wiped away.



# Are strict childhoods a thing of the past?

**S**o, my cousin and I fell to talking about how differently children are brought up these days in contrast to our childhood, or even to our time as younger mothers – a perennial topic among grandmothers.

Modern parenthood focuses on giving children choices, and letting them voice their needs freely. Children should not be coerced in any way – none of this ‘you must’ do this or that, so different to the rules of our youth when ‘if you don’t eat your supper you’ll have it for break-



**Mary Kenny**

fast’ was not unusual.

## Forced

I was once forced to eat a plate of tripe, visiting a – normally kindly – aunt, on the principle that a child should be grateful for what is put in front of them.

I was thoroughly sick and have never been able to look at tripe – a delicacy in France

– ever since. This would be called child cruelty now.

In her book about parenting, *Making Babies*, the author Anne Enright remarks on how parents used to disparage their children, with phrases like ‘you’re a little monkey’ or even ‘you’ll put me in an early grave’. But ‘positive parenting’ encour-

ages families to praise and encourage youngsters, bolster their self-esteem, and respect their autonomy.

One of the disparaging remarks made to misbehaving kids was that ‘you’re only looking for attention’. Recently, I heard a therapist say that “a child who is looking for attention should get it”.

## Concluded

We concluded that there were some aspects of ‘positive parenting’ were good. To encourage seems kinder than to scold; to consider the child’s needs seems more thoughtful than

adhering to rigid rules, or squashing youthful spirits.

**“Young people are ‘sicker, sadder and more afraid to grow up’, and depression is almost an epidemic among the young”**

But would highlighting a child’s individual needs lead to selfishness and lack of consideration for others? Would allowing a child whatever he or she chooses produce what used to be called a ‘spoilt brat’? What about all the focus on ‘feelings’ rather than duties?

And now here comes a book by a child psychologist, Abigail Shrier, who claims that too much positive parenting has produced a generation of young people who are lonely, fearful and lacking in resilience.

In *Bad Therapy*, she claims that mental health issues, over-diagnosis of ADHD

(attention deficit disorder) and social anxiety have greatly increased because parents haven’t let children take the ordinary knocks and setbacks of life.

Young people are “sicker, sadder and more afraid to grow up”, and depression is almost an epidemic among the young. Over-emphasis on “feelings” can distort reality.

## Work

This week a British report from the Resolution Foundation claimed that young people between 18 and 34 are the most likely to quit work because of “mental health issues” – the number of young people signing off sick with mental issues has doubled in the past decade.

This generation seems to be experiencing more depression and anxiety than ever before.

Better diagnoses of depression and anxiety – or methods of upbringing which ill-prepared young people for the fact that life can be tough and sometimes you just have to get on with it? Fodder for another conversation, no doubt.

## The Trump dynasty



Lara Trump (centre) attends a pro-Trump rally with her husband Eric and Rudi Giuliani. Photo: CNS/Reuters

**I**regard the American presidential election as the American voters’ business – but naturally all the world is riveted. And a compelling aspect of the Trump show is the emergence of an old theme – dynastic dynamics.

Get ready for the interlocking relationships of the Trump clan: Ivanka and Jared, Donald Jnr and Eric, Tiffany, and the enigmatic Melania, who

started life in a Balkan Communist state and maintained some dignity, mainly through silence, as First Lady.

And the limelight is now about to fall on Lara, the 5 foot 11 inches-tall wife of Eric Trump. She’s a committed Republican, fully behind MAGA, and ready to play her part in what looks like a new Trump presidency.

It’s reported that while daughter Ivanka tries to soften Donald Trump’s

views, Lara supports them even more robustly. Heigh-ho!

Old Europe was historically ruled by dynasties. America was founded on each individual’s entitlement to succeed in his/her own right. But dynasty so often re-appears in some form, and women usually play a leading role in the dynastic constellation. (In the Trumpista case, mostly blondes!)

**I**t’s very regrettable news about the forthcoming closure of Veritas. I thought the shop in Dublin’s Lower Abbey Street bright, well-stocked and thoughtfully diverse in books and artefacts. But I wonder if part of the problem, for the store, is the

location? The Lower Abbey Street site closely borders with O’Connell Street, which many people seem to shun – it’s seen as tatty, grotty and druggy.

When I suggested visiting the Savoy cinema there last year – once a hub of film-star glamour, where

Hollywood stars appeared for opening nights – I literally couldn’t find anyone who would come with me. “O’Connell Street – no way!” was the response. The decline of Dublin’s once-splendid boulevard is also regrettable.

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# Politicians keep withholding inconvenient truths about abortion



Information about the negatives of abortion law not so free-flowing, writes Eilís Mulroy

**E**arlier this month, former Attorney General, Tánaiste, and Minister for Justice, Senator Michael McDowell revealed that his request to access 64 pages of notes and minutes by the government's Interdepartmental Group considering the implications of the proposed family and care amendments to the constitution was refused until after the referendum.

Senator McDowell dismissed the government's excuse that publishing the notes would be "premature" and might impact on "the integrity and viability of the referendums" as an effort to suppress information which voters are entitled to know before they vote on March 8.

Whilst this was concerning, it's not an isolated case. On the abortion issue, numerous recent Freedom of Information requests have been rejected on spurious and explicitly partisan grounds, such as that the release of the information could generate opposition to abortion.

## Rejected

An FOI request to the Ireland East Hospital Group on November 21, 2023 sought the number of abortions carried out by the group since abortion legislation was enacted in 2019. The group rejected the request in December on the basis that releasing it would cause harm to the hospital and women having abortions.

It said: "Since this legislation was enacted, opposition to it has been evident through protests outside hospitals and articles written on various platforms which include print, broadcast and social media channels" and that "Such actions can act as a barrier for service users in accessing abortion services".



Irish Senator Sharon Keogan and Conor O'Dowd from Dundalk, who has Down syndrome, react after speaking on stage at the All-Ireland Rally for Life in Dublin July 1, 2023. Photo: OSV News/Cillian Kiely

How is it transparent to refuse access to information on the grounds that there could be criticisms made in print, broadcast and social media? Surely if the release of the refused information were to prompt a public debate or heightened opposition, it points to the relevance of this information in the public interest? We live in a democracy where people have a civil right to express their opposition to legislation and public policy, including in the forms identified by the author.

**“Breaking down the numbers in the manner you have sought could adversely affect those seeking to avail of this service and cause both the hospital and the service user harm”**

In fact, a number of hospitals like the Rotunda, Holes Street and the Coombe already confirm the number of abortions carried out

on their premises in their annual reports. So a precedent has already been set, and the issues pointed to in the refusal by the Ireland East Group do not arise. Why not supply this data for all hospitals? Is it because the cumulative number of hospital abortions might raise further questions?

## Safe Access Zones

The FOI refusal also irrelevantly raised 'Safe Access Zones' legislation (legislation which aims to ban assembly within 100 metres of GP surgeries and hospitals) to justify refusing the request. It further claimed, "breaking down the numbers in the manner you have sought could adversely affect those seeking to avail of this service and cause both the hospital and the service user harm. It has been evident through the various media outlets that not only does this impede those seeking the services, but also other patients who may require care delivered at hospitals which provide the service".

The refusal letter reads more like a press statement from an activist NGO than a considered response to a

statutory protected right to information from a member of the public. This and other similar refusals have been appealed and the outcome is awaited.

**“Stephen Donnelly has refused to say how many zones would be created, yet he expected politicians to vote blindly in favour of this extreme Bill”**

Senator McDowell wrote that his request's refusal "perverts the democratic process which requires giving the people all the facts before they vote in a referendum".

On issues of importance, the public must be given as much information as possible to make informed decisions. Parliamentary Questions from TDs to government ministers can also produce misleading answers, such as regarding the 'Safe Access Zones' legislation.

Stephen Donnelly has

refused to say how many zones would be created, yet he expected politicians to vote blindly in favour of this extreme Bill. In February 2023, Michael Collins TD asked Minister Donnelly to list "all informal and formal meetings or engagements held with groups or individuals by him or his Department on the subject of abortion exclusion zones".

This list included 5 meetings with the Attorney General between October 5 2022 and January 16 2023. When asked the same question, seeking updated information, by Seán Canney TD in July 2023, Minister Donnelly provided a new list which did not include any reference to meetings with the Attorney General.

## Conclude

One can only conclude that that it was considered acceptable to give the dates of the meetings with the AG on the issue in February but after attention was drawn to the implications of these meetings (e.g. constitutional difficulties with the exclusion zone legislation, the costs of this advice, the overfocus on a non-issue),

the Department adopted a policy of concealing the meetings with the AG's office.

**“Suppressing facts because their release might generate opposition is like telling the public they can't handle the truth”**

They don't even say that the information is redacted, it's simply erased from the record as if it never happened. Scrubbing records, giving misleading data, and refusing to provide full information to the public and even elected representatives is very serious.

Suppressing facts because their release might generate opposition is like telling the public they can't handle the truth. In a mature democratic society, the public should not be kept in the dark. This is even more important when human lives are being ended.

**✎ Eilís Mulroy is Chief Executive Officer and spokesperson for the Pro-Life Campaign.**



# The kids are not okay...and it's time to sound the alarm bell



Loneliness is as bad for you as smoking and it's something our parishes can tackle, writes **Michael Kelly**

**T**wo neighbouring parishes that I am aware of recently carried out a survey of younger parishioners. Organised through the local secondary schools, the research sought to gauge the general interest and engagement of young people aged 13-15 in the life of the parishes.

Perhaps encouragingly for this age group, 73% in the anonymous described themselves as Mass-goers, 91% of respondents said that they prayed, with 55% saying they pray either every day or almost every day.

When asked if they felt a sense of belonging in their parish, 83% said that either agreed or strongly agreed.

When asked the main issues facing young people today, almost half (47%) cited mental health while a third (32%), said social media was one of the main issues of concern to young people.

This age cohort, 13-15-year-olds, are at the tail end of what demographers call 'Gen Z' and all the indications are that worries about mental health are of considerable concern to this generation.

Of course, the parochial research that I cite here doesn't delve in to how the young people involved think their mental health is, or how their religious affiliation may be aiding them. But here's the good news for parishes: regular religious practice is associated with positive mental health benefits.

## Anxiety

In fact, the great untold story of this age of anxiety that we occupy is that people who profess a religious faith live happier, healthier and longer lives.

Sociologically, religion is associated with the higher rates of marriage, lower rates of divorce, higher rates of fertility (as we head into a demographic



crisis), improved mental health, lower rates of crime, lower rates of substance abuse, higher levels of charitable giving and voluntary work.

This week, new research from our nearest neighbour found that British people in their early 20s are more likely to be not working due to ill health than those in their early 40s.

**“Young people now have the poorest mental health of any age group – a reversal from two decades ago when they had the lowest incidence of common mental disorders”**

This is “radically different” from the past, the Resolution Foundation said, when the older you were the more likely you were to not work due to sickness.

Poor mental health among young people is on the rise, official figures show. The report's authors say this can hamper their education and lead to them being in lower-paid jobs or unemployed.

According to the report, young people now have the poorest mental health of any age group – a reversal from two decades ago when they had the lowest incidence of common mental disorders.

In 2021/22, 34% of young people aged 18 to 24 reported symptoms of a mental disorder, such as depression, anxiety or bipolar disorder.

In 2000 that figure stood at 24%.

As a result, more than half a million 18- to 24-year-olds in Britain were prescribed antidepressants in 2021-22.

Louise Murphy, senior economist at the Resolution

Foundation, said attention had more often been on mental health in higher education, but “what should most worry us is when poor mental health comes together with poor education outcomes”.

“The economic consequences of poor mental health are starkest for young people who don't go to university, with one in three young non-graduates with a common mental disorder currently workless,” she said.

Of course, from a Christian perspective we see people as more than mere economic units to have their productivity measured. But having a job is also associated with higher levels of self-worth and overall human flourishing, something that people of faith should be concerned about.

## Isolation

Loneliness and isolation are also key factors affecting mental health, with research last year revealing that Ireland now has the highest levels of loneliness in Europe.

Findings show that on average, 13% of respondents reported feeling lonely most or all of the time, while 35% reported being lonely at least some of the time.

In the US, which has experienced a similar growth in loneliness, researchers said this is due to a decline in nearly all voluntary institutions and Church attendance, as well as increasing time spent indoors and norms shifting towards greater privacy and individualism.

Dr Vivek Murthy is the US Surgeon General. Last year he released an 85-page advisory declaring loneliness a new public health epidemic in the United States.

He wrote: “Our epidemic of loneliness and isolation has been an under-appreciated public health crisis that has harmed individual and societal health.

“Our relationships are a source of healing and well-being hiding in plain sight – one that can help us live healthier, more fulfilled and more productive lives,” he said.

The findings show that loneliness is as bad for you as smoking and has profound effects on mental health, increasing the risks of heart disease, stroke and dementia.

Dr Murthy cites the antidote to this crisis as a need to rebuild the social fabric of this country through social connections.

So, where does the Church fit in here and how does it find a place in a society like this? More importantly, how can it heal this broken society?

## State-building

Over the last 200 years, the Church in Ireland has been involved in State-building. That's no longer the case, Church and State have gone their separate ways. But as an institution we have been slow to appreciate the space that the re-alignment has created for us.

And the space that it has given us to not so much concentrate on State-building or providing infrastructure and concentrate more on creating authentic Christian communities of intentional disciples – people committed to the Gospel who want to share it with others.

And this is of the essence of synodality – a grassroots project that involves lay-

people reaching out to other laypeople.

So much of what we focus on in the Church in Ireland is lamenting the fact that the Church can't be as present in society as it was in the past because of a falling number of clergy.

But the Church has an army of committed volunteers who could take on the vital ministry of friendship in their parishes and communities.

Approximately 100,000 people in Ireland attend daily Mass. Not all of them will feel the capacity to volunteer to spend time with those who are lonely or invite them for a cup of tea, but many will.

This could be an important new ministry within the Church in Ireland that will be first and foremost about service, hospitality and friendship.

After all, the essence of true evangelisation is to draw near to people and accompany them.

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# US court ruling leads to 'theocracy' scare-mongering



Without God the foundation of human rights starts to crack, writes David Quinn

A court ruling last week in the US state of Alabama has set the cat among the proverbial pigeons by declaring that unborn children are exactly that – children. Therefore, they must be treated with care by IVF clinics and not thoughtlessly destroyed if no longer needed, which is what these clinics routinely do.

The case has been denounced by pro-choice campaigners as an act of religious fundamentalism and 'theocracy' because one of the judges in the case, Chief Justice Tom Parker, repeatedly invoked God in his concurring opinion with the ruling.

The case was taken by a group of parents whose frozen embryos had been destroyed in an accident. Did those embryos have any rights under law? IVF clinics evidently think not.

These embryos are non-persons, not human beings, non-children, so what does it matter if they are destroyed? The parents in the case said that what happened to their embryos was a case of "wrong death", and to cut a long story short, the Alabama Supreme Court ended up agreeing with them.

## Outraged

This instantly outraged the pro-choice lobby, which wants human embryos to be treated as moral non-entities possessing no rights at all. Anything which suggests unborn human beings have rights incenses them.

Chief Justice Parker in his opinion declared that human life "cannot be wrongfully destroyed without incurring the wrath of a holy God, who views the destruction of his image as an affront to himself."

For opponents of the ruling, this only added insult to injury. It is now considered in poor taste at best, and a threat to democracy and rationality at worst to directly invoke God in a legal, or other similar setting.

So really there are two issues at stake in this case. The first is the moral status of the human embryo and the second is the charge of 'theocracy'. Arguments around these matters are obviously highly relevant to Ireland.

First, let's do a little recap on how IVF works because it is pertinent to the debate. Many people, and even many Catholics, cannot think what the moral objection to IVF might be.

**“Are the ‘spare’ embryos left frozen indefinitely? Are they passed on (or sold) to labs for experimentation? Or are they simply destroyed?”**

Isn't it pro-life to support couples having children? But that depends on the means used to achieve the end.

IVF works by fusing an egg with sperm and then attempting to implant the fertilised egg in the womb in the hope that it will result in a successful pregnancy. Very often, it does not.

What generally happens is that IVF clinics produce lots of embryos, so if any attempt at pregnancy does not succeed, a second attempt can be made using the embryos on stand-by.

If there is eventually a successful pregnancy, some embryos might be left over. What happens to them if a couple has no further use for them? This is the key question.

Are the 'spare' embryos left frozen indefinitely? Are they passed on (or sold) to labs for experimentation? Or are they simply destroyed?

One way or another we can see that the embryos are not treated with the respect due to human beings, but obviously allowing embryos to be

experimented on, or destroying them, is far worse than freezing them.

In response to the court ruling in Alabama, some IVF clinics in the state have paused services to couples while they assess it. But in Ireland prior to the repeal of the 8th amendment, IVF clinics could not destroy 'spare' embryos. They had to freeze them indefinitely because in Irish law unborn children still had rights.

But the point is that the IVF industry in Ireland could still provide services to couples despite not being allowed to destroy embryos.

In fact, when you think about it, why should a requirement that you not destroy 'spare' embryos in any way impede dealing with infertile couples?

The IVF industry in Alabama is probably suspending services mainly to create outrage among the general public who do not really understand how the business operates.

As mentioned, the second aspect of the case to cause outrage in certain quarters was the invocation of God by Chief Justice Parker.

## Separation

Rachel Laser of Americans United for Separation of Church and State said: "Now we're in a place where government officials feel emboldened to say the quiet part out loud, and directly challenge the separation of Church and state, a foundational part of our democracy".

This, of course, depends on what you mean by Church/state separation. In America it has traditionally meant that there should not be an established Church like the Church of England which, back when the United States was founded, was given an extremely privileged position compared with all other Churches, and particularly the Catholic Church, which was still suppressed by penal laws.

But Church/state separation was never supposed to mean that God or the Bible could not be invoked in public life or quoted by a judge in a court room. Judge Parker's comments were in the form of



Embryologist Ric Ross removes a vial of frozen embryos from a storage tank at the Smotrich IVF Clinic in La Jolla, California, USA in this 2007 file photo. Photo: CNS

an opinion, not part of a legal precedent.

**“The American Declaration of Independence refers to the ‘Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God’”**

Critics of the invocation of God seem to have forgotten that American dollar bills contain the motto, 'In God We Trust'.

The American Pledge of Allegiance reads: "I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty

and justice for all."

When an American president takes the Oath of Office, he swears on the Bible. You could object to this but the point is that is a very well-established tradition in the United States and was never considered to violate separation of Church and State.

The American Declaration of Independence refers to the "Laws of Nature and of Nature's God".

## Interesting

This is very interesting from the point of view of Judge Parker's comments. Where do laws ultimately come from? We may say from legislators and courts but is there a law above them? Martin Luther King was in doubt no that a

man-made law was unjust if it was not in conformity with the law of God.

He believed, like so many others before him, that human rights were ultimately grounded in a belief in God. Get rid of God, then man-made law is ultimate no matter how unjust it is in practice.

Abortion 'rights' are based on the total devaluation of human life before birth, but the devaluation of human beings in the end comes from losing sight of the fact that we are all made in the Image and Likeness of God.

When that goes, the very foundation of human rights starts to crack and that is what is happening in Western societies as we secularise.



## Nuala O'Loan

### The View



# Women and men walking side by side for peace, justice and equality

**A**s International Women's Day approaches there is much focus on the current status and situation of women across the world. There will be much celebration about what has been achieved in so many countries.

I spent last Saturday in Paris at an International Women's Day event organised by the National Council of Resistance of Iran. It was entitled 'Iranian Women in the Resistance Leading the Way for Freedom and Equality'.

It was an extraordinary and very humbling event, as we heard of and observed the courage of so many women, and of the men who continue to resist the oppression of the regime led by Khamenei and brutally enforced by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (the IRGC).

Iran is a dangerous place to live. It is particularly dangerous for women, whose lives are terribly restricted and who face terrible physical punishment, imprisonment and even death for opposing the regime and its repression.

The president elect in exile of Iran, the leader of the National Council of Resistance is a small, courageous and immensely able woman called Maryam Rajavi.

After the revolution in 1979 which led to the deposition of the Shah of Iran, the freedom which was expected did not materialise. Instead there rapidly grew a regime which imposed the most draconian laws.

### Destroyed

Tens of thousands have fled, thousands have been executed, more than 800 in 2023 alone, millions of lives have been destroyed.

Maryam Rajavi has known these things: one of her sisters was killed by the Iranian secret police, the other executed in 1982, while she was pregnant.

She is a woman of great courage and has dedicated her life in exile to the creation of a free Iran. The situation of women lies at the heart of this and she has a 10 point plan seeking rights and freedoms for women in Iran ([www.maryam-rajavi.com/en/view-points/plan-for-future-of-iran](http://www.maryam-rajavi.com/en/view-points/plan-for-future-of-iran)).

The rights and freedoms which she seeks are things



Women take part in a rally in Beirut September 21, 2022, days after the Iranian authorities announced the death of Mahsa Amini, who died after being arrested in Tehran for allegedly wearing a hijab headscarf in an 'improper' way. Photo: CNS/Mohamed Azakir, Reuters

which we in the west have, for the most part, long known – the right to elect and be elected, the right to employment, the right to benefits during pregnancy, childbirth and to infant care, the right to travel freely, the right to choose their own clothes, rights of association, the right to choose their own partners and whether they will be married, and so the list goes on.

**“In the 40 years of the Islamic Regime they have faced terror which for many of us would be indescribable and unimaginable”**

Basically women in Iran need to be free from oppression, discrimination and coercion, they need equality and to be viewed as equal citizens not commodities. Some 27 million of them are economically inactive, not by choice.

In the 40 years of the Islamic Regime they have faced terror which for many of us would be

indescribable and unimaginable. In 2022 a healthy 22-year-old law student, Mahsa Amin was arrested for not wearing a hijab and taken in a van to a police station.

It is reported that she was tortured in the police van. Two hours after being arrested she collapsed in the police station. Two days later she died.

Her death led to widespread protests which resulted in hundreds of people being killed and some 22,000 being detained. Yet still the fight for freedom goes on.

### Imprisoned

In 2023 the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the imprisoned Iranian human rights activist Narges Mohammadi, who helped imprisoned activists, campaigned against the death penalty and criticised the regime's use of torture and sexualised violence.

Those who oppose the Islamic Government are subject to assassination and attempted assassination across the world.

Despite all this, Maryam Raja spoke with her customary clarity and determination about women's lives in Iran

today, about the courage of those who continue to protest drawing global attention to their situation, knowing that when they go out to protest they may not come back alive or uninjured.

**“Between 2009 and 2011 I was a Special Envoy for Ireland for 'Women, Peace and Security' and worked with women from Northern Ireland, Ireland, Timor Leste and Liberia”**

Yesterday in Paris 35 distinguished women from across the world – former presidents, vice-presidents, government ministers, a Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, politicians, judges, lawyers, from Ireland, France, Colombia, Ecuador, Latvia, Liberia, USA, Canada, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Poland, Italy, Germany and many other countries gathered, to speak about Iran, and of their own struggles as women in situa-

tions of conflict in their own countries; of their support for the women of Iran in their fight for life and for freedom.

Common to all these women was the recognition that their fights and campaigns were not fought by women alone, but by brave and dedicated men who travelled with them on their journeys.

Between 2009 and 2011 I was a Special Envoy for Ireland for 'Women, Peace and Security' and worked with women from Northern Ireland, Ireland, Timor Leste and Liberia on a project which brought together women who had lived through and survived conflict, and facilitated them in identifying the strategies which they had evolved which enabled them to survive.

### Fought

As I wrote in the report we produced, “We learnt how they fought to prevent and deal with the terrible consequences of gender based violence, which in some cases included the use of rape as a tool of war. We learned of their initiatives to help to secure a sustainable peace and to build new structures

in fragile post conflict states... we contemplated the inadequacies of justice and security processes in conflict and post conflict areas...”

**“No longer men in front and the women at the back. Together we will walk, side by side, side by side”**

It was an extraordinary privilege to walk with these women as they recounted their stories and spoke of the struggle to protect their children from being taken for camp wives and boy soldiers (Liberia); fought desperately to feed and clothe the men who were fighting from the mountains against the Indonesian occupiers, to keep their children alive and to survive in a country which was brutally oppressed for 25 years and was left in 1998 with virtually no doctors, dentists, physiotherapists, engineers etc., no real infrastructure or housing (Timor Leste); struggled to maintain normality through the long years of the Troubles with their endless bombings, shootings, death and destruction, to keep their families together and to survive the wrenching, terrible trauma of so many atrocities (Northern Ireland).

All of them spoke too of the battle to keep hope and joy alive, to engage in politics, to take their rightful place in the countries and communities in which they lived.

Many of them had a great sense of humour, and they came together at the end joining in a song they learned from the Liberians – the chorus was “No longer men in front and the women at the back. Together we will walk, side by side, side by side.”

Returning to Northern Ireland from Paris, reflecting on Iran and on Northern Ireland, and thinking back to those days in Dili, Monrovia and Belfast, I pondered on how the work of peace keeping is never done, and how vital it is that women and men work together constantly as equals to build a society in which they are equally protected and respected; a society based on the rule of law in which justice, integrity and truth are the fundamental pillars on which all else rests.



# Unrealistic beauty standards forcing stress on young girls



Wendy Grace

In recent years, maybe you, like me, have spotted teens and tweens alongside you in the anti-aging product aisle, and realised they weren't shopping for their mom. Lately there has been a huge upsurge in young adults obsessing over skin care regimes at an age when they don't need one at all.

When I was in my first few years of secondary school, I wasn't dissimilar to most of my peers, our interest in our appearance was not yet on our list of priorities, and anti-aging was something for our moms to be worried about.

My first memory of make-up was probably at around 13 when the height of cool was glitter gel eyeshadow and dousing myself in pretty pungent 'Impulse' spray deodorant. My skincare routine was slapping on a bit of Nivea. A lot has changed since then. Recently, the skin-care brand *SpoiledChild* released an anti-aging line specifically targeted at Gen Z with the slogan: "GETTING OLD IS GETTING OLD".

I'm a Millennial, (28-43) which is the generation preceding the current Gen Z'ers (12-27). The latter generation has a whole new set of lingo, from "baby botox" to "pre-juvenation" - preventing aging before it even starts.

## Social media

I will be the first generation to grow old on social media, where Gen Z has grown up on it. What teenage girl could ever be emotionally ready for 24/7 social media pressure, it's an entire world away from comparing yourself to celebrities in *Top of the Pops* magazine.

The anti-aging industry is a multi-billion dollar one, and it hasn't taken them long to figure out that marketing their products to tweens and teens is a money maker. The message is clear, your youth and how attractive you are is what makes you valuable. You might say that messaging is nothing new, but what is new is how relentless it is and the age at which this



pressure is felt.

Access to the online world is fuelling much of this troubling phenomenon. Children as young as seven are taking part in Tik Tok trends like GRWW (Get Ready With Me) where we see young girls going through their lengthy beauty routines before they head off to school. It's a world where it's hard to tell what a real face looks like, instead girls' faces are frozen without emotion or expression.

**You can also find young women documenting medical procedures, like 25 year old Adrien Davidson sharing her experience of having botox"**

You will easily come across popular influencers like Carson Bradley, who looks like a pretty normal innocent faced, braces-laden 14-year-old. Once the video plays, a different reality is revealed. She documents her 4 am wake-up call when she starts her skin-care routine which

includes serums, glycolic and salicylic acid, and two types of moisturizer, because, as she explains to her viewers, "it plumps your skin".

Another trend is 'Sephora Kids' where social media users are documenting tweens in the popular beauty store, desperate to buy skincare that is made for skin that is at least a decade older.

You can also find young women documenting medical procedures, like 25 year old Adrien Davidson sharing her experience of having botox, or Kylie Jenner, celebrity idol to young girls admitting to having lip fillers at 17. Another Kardashian, daughter of Kim, is nine-year old North West who last year shared a video of her elaborate skincare routine which included serums, cleansers and toners, and that was before she moved onto her makeup routine, and there are many more similar aged girls mimicking her.

## Tweakments

It's no surprise then that Gen Z are also spending more on skincare than any other generation and the latest statistics from the American Academy of Facial

Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery show that Gen Z'ers are quickly becoming the biggest consumers and fastest growing market of cosmetic treatments or 'tweakments'.

What is most concerning is that in tandem with this increasing obsession with perfection and eternal youth is what has been described as an 'epidemic of sadness' with a recent piece of research revealing that 57% of teen girls in the United States had 'persistent feelings of sadness and hopelessness'.

**I was hearing stories of 7 year olds crying to their parents because they wouldn't let them use retinol"**

Author of *'Beauty sick: How the cultural obsession with appearance hurts girls and women'*, Renee Engeln, says "Beauty products sell best when they create a feeling of fear and vulnerability". In my day the focus was on clear skin and avoiding acne, now the new

enemy is fighting wrinkles that don't exist.

When speaking to Jennifer Rock of the Skin Nerd she explained that after a television interview on this topic went viral, she had parents, teachers and guardians getting in touch from across Ireland saying this was an issue; "I was hearing stories of 7-year-olds crying to their parents because they wouldn't let them use retinol".

## Advice

Her advice to parents was to introduce skincare routines in a positive and age appropriate way. "There is no harm in using an SPF moisturizer for a child enjoying their day, playing camogie, having childhood. But applying retinol or peptides has ramifications for a child's skin, it's not what their skin needs at that stage, it can cause harm to their skin."

This point of view was recently echoed by the British Association for Dermatologists who warned that using these types of products could leave children with irreversible skin problems.

Children having such enormous anxiety around their appearance is heartbreaking, much of it being fuelled by

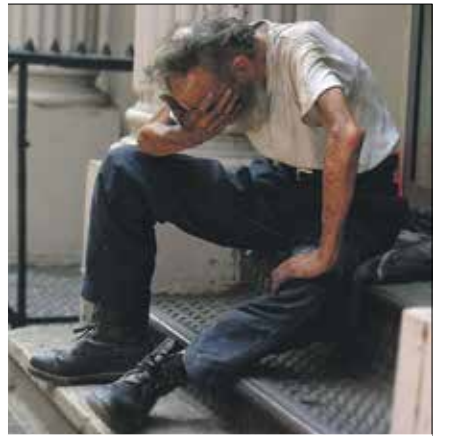
access to social media. My last article in *The Irish Catholic* focussed on the need for collective cop-on in managing devices and screen time. For me, this is just another reason to be aware of the impact of access to social media and of the powerful algorithms that are harmful to our children's wellbeing.

**As Catholics, we have an alternative point of view to instil in our children that they are of infinite value, made by God"**

Childhood is slipping away at an earlier and earlier stage, children shouldn't be worrying about skincare routines, but enjoying that brief and wonderful period of life of being carefree. As Catholics, we have an alternative point of view to instil in our children that they are of infinite value, made by God. For me, that will be one of the most powerful teachings in my parenting toolkit.

**Wendy Grace is MD at Compass Communications and a broadcast journalist.**





# HOMELESS SUPPLEMENT 2024

FIGHTING FOR THE VULNERABLE AND FORGOTTEN





# Housing crisis: a timeline

Every month the news is the same – record numbers of homeless in Ireland, rough sleepers multiplying, dynamics shifting so that even those with jobs are now in danger.

As the timeline below shows, this problem has been a long time in the making.

Successive governments have made a lot of noise but failed to deliver any positive change, meaning homelessness charities – many founded and run by religious and priests – like the Capuchin Day Centre, Cork Simon and Merchants Quay Ireland have to work overtime to meet increasing demands.

Many of the charities have, for the last decade, responded to the mounting crisis through

the ‘housing first’ model.

Paul Sheehan of Cork Simon explains why: “We find that once a person is housed and there’s a secure roof over their head, all of their energy can go into focusing on the issues that pushed them into homelessness in the first place.”

“Without that security, all your energy goes into where is my next bed going to be, when is my next meal going to be, how am I going to get through the day, but take that out of the equation, people start focusing on the issues that push them into homelessness and it can be very successful.”

For charities, the difficulty remains however that without an increase in supply, pathways out of homeless are few and far between.

Then Minister for Housing Simon Coveney launches the Rebuilding Ireland scheme in 2016.



## Late 1990s - Early 2000s:

Ireland experiences an economic boom, the Celtic Tiger, leading to rapid economic growth, increased immigration, and high demand for housing.

## 2002

The introduction of the Local Government (Planning and Development) Act removes the requirement for developers to obtain planning permission for housing developments in certain designated areas, fuelling a construction boom.

## 2008:

The global financial crisis hits Ireland particularly hard, resulting in a severe recession, collapse of the construction sector, and a housing market crash. Many properties become vacant or are left unfinished.

## 2016:

Simon Coveney is appointed Minister for Housing and launches the ‘Rebuilding Ireland’ programme, aiming to address housing supply shortages, homelessness, and other housing issues through a mix of strategies including increased construction, social housing provision, and homelessness prevention. Homelessness reaches record levels, with over 7,000 people homeless.

## 2014:

Rising rents and house prices in urban areas, particularly Dublin, lead to concerns about affordability and access to housing for low and middle-income households.

## 2011:

The Irish Government establishes the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) to manage and sell off distressed property loans and assets from bailed-out banks.

## 2017

Eoghan Murphy is appointed Minister for Housing. Housing crisis intensifies as demand continues to outstrip supply, particularly in urban centres, leading to further increases in homelessness, rents, and house prices.

## 2018:

The Government launches the ‘Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan Scheme’ to help first-time buyers access mortgages with low deposit requirements and fixed interest rates.

## 2019:

Public dissatisfaction grows over the Government’s handling of the housing crisis, with increased criticism of the insufficient investment in social housing, slow planning processes, and over-reliance on the private sector.

## 2022:

Despite some progress in increasing housing construction and social housing provision, challenges persist, including delays in planning approvals, shortage of skilled labour, and constraints on public spending.

## 2021:

Housing crisis remains a top political and social issue, with continued pressure on the Government to take more decisive action to increase housing supply, improve affordability, and address homelessness. The pandemic continues to slow progress.

## 2020:

Darragh O’Brien is appointed Minister for Housing (incumbent). Covid-19 pandemic exacerbates existing housing issues, with lockdown measures impacting construction activity and exacerbating unemployment and financial hardship, leading to concerns about a potential wave of evictions and homelessness.

## 2023:

Public frustration continues to mount as housing affordability deteriorates further, with young people and low-income earners facing increasing difficulties in accessing homeownership or affordable rental accommodation. A new record is hit with more than 13,000 people in homelessness.

## 2024:

Housing crisis remains a prominent issue in national elections and public discourse, with competing political parties proposing various solutions ranging from increased Government intervention in the housing market to reforms of planning regulations and taxation policies.

## Present:

Ireland’s housing crisis persists, characterised by a shortage of affordable housing, high rents and homelessness. With ongoing debates over the most effective strategies to address these complex and interconnected issues, it will be a hot button issue in the next General Election.



# Haircuts and hot meals – the Capuchin Day Centre at work



**Brian Friel**

**T**he Capuchin Day Centre for Homeless People is located on Bow Street in Dublin 7 at the rear of the Capuchin Friary on Church Street. It is an initiative of the Irish Capuchin Franciscan Friars who first came to Ireland in the early 1600's and have stayed with and supported the Irish people in some of the most difficult times in its history.

The current Capuchin Director of the Centre, Fr Kevin Kiernan OFM Cap., has a keen sense of the role of the Capuchin friars in Irish life and history: "Through persecution, famine, poverty, and pain the friars have always tried to be a comforting and healing presence. They have a long history of advocating for religious freedom and cultural expression and have been a consistent voice for the relief of the poor."

That voice continues to be heard today through the work of the Capuchin friars across a range of activities in Ireland including hospital chaplaincies, parish work, reflective retreats, an embryonic ecological project and, of course, in and through the work of the Capuchin Day Centre for Homeless People in Bow Street, Dublin.

## Hallmark

Fr Kevin and a number of other Capuchin friars provide a pastoral presence that has been a hallmark of the Centre since its foundation.

Much has changed over the 400 years that the Capuchin friars have been in Ireland, but the values that underpin their life and work have remained constant and continue to be expressed in the way they provide services to the people who come to the Capuchin Day Centre.

The Centre was founded in 1969 by one of the Capuchin friars, Bro. Kevin Crowley, as a response to seeing homeless men eating from rubbish bins.

While Bro. Kevin has recently retired, the central role of the Capuchin friars continues unabated. The founding principle of the centre is "to relieve the hardship endured by homeless people".

Over the course of the last 55 years, the Centre has developed in response to the needs of the homeless population and now offers not just two meals per day, Monday to Saturday, but also food parcels, clothing, showers, as well as a growing range of family services, medical and dental services, and an informal advice and information service.

**“This unique openness has led to the service becoming a bedrock of homeless services in Dublin and a reliable safety net for some of the most vulnerable in society”**

Fr Kevin Kiernan is passionate about the work of the Centre: "Core to the Day Centre's mission is the absolute unconditionality of access to the majority of services irrespective of age, race, gender, nationality and religious or political beliefs."

"Those who come to the Centre are not asked for any personal information, or about their reasons for accessing services."

This unique openness has led to the service becoming a bedrock of homeless services in Dublin and a reliable safety net for some of the most vulnerable in society.

Many people would be unaware of the sheer scope and scale of the services provided by the Capuchin Day Centre.

Last year the Centre provided 117,603 hot breakfasts, 195,857 full dinners and distributed 73,527 food parcels. Its family services provided 12,863 packets of nappies and 10,378 containers of baby milk formula alongside 8,926 onsite meals to families.

This programme also provides resources to support children to continue their education providing school bags, supplies such as copies, pens, and uniforms to support the education of children in need to build their resilience and to offset the long-term impacts of poverty on children's educational opportunities.

The Capuchin Clinic Service in partnership with SafetyNet delivers essential services to support the health and well-being of homeless people through a multi-disciplinary medical team of professionals on site at the Centre including a doctor, nurse, chiropodist, optician, dentist, cancer screening, children's vaccinations, and a diabetic clinic.

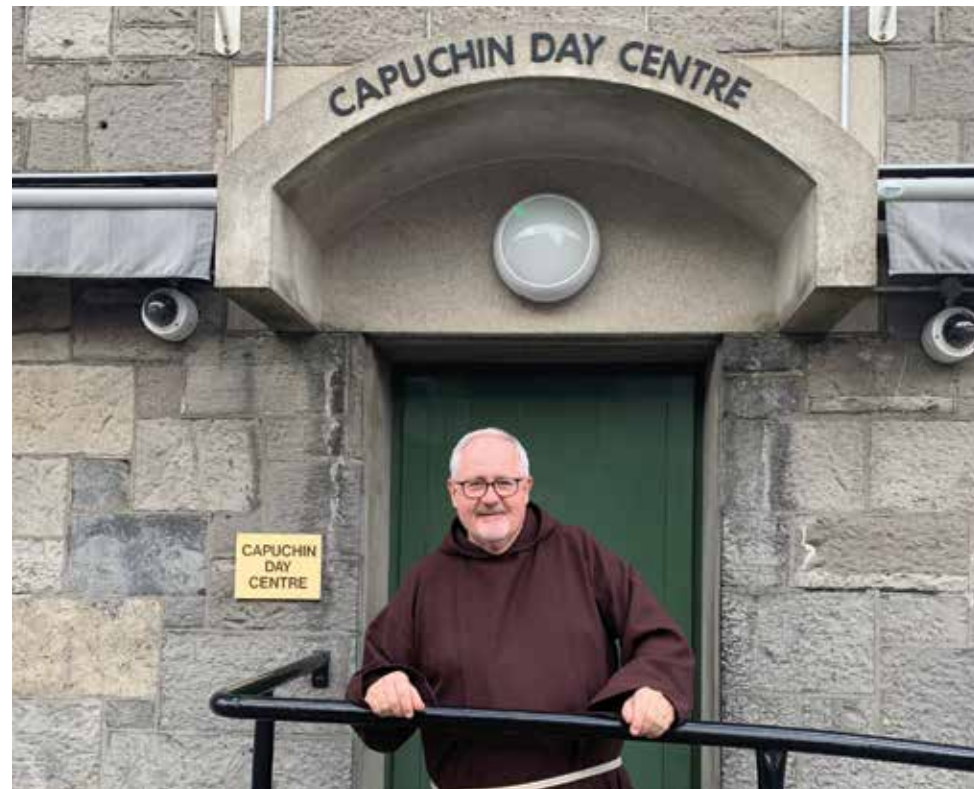
Last year this service supported 3,933 people. The Centre also provided for 7,123 showers for rough sleepers and 380 onsite haircuts with the voluntary support of Haircuts for the Homeless.

## Foundations

When asked how the Capuchin Day Centre manages to keep this level of service going, Fr Kevin points to what he believes are the foundations of what happens at the Centre.

"Firstly, our values are our North Star," he said. "Client-centred, respect and dignity, caring, pastoral, holistic, non-judgemental and responsive to client needs."

"We have a fantastic team of professionally managed



Fr Kevin Kiernan OFM Cap., director of the Capuchin Day Centre



staff to ensure that the high volume of services provided are co-ordinated consistently throughout the year and the Centre has also always relied upon the time, energy and commitment of a group of incredible volunteers who support the day-to-day operations of the Centre.

"Of course, we could do nothing without the ongoing support and commitment of our donors who provide the resources that enable us keep

going," Fr Kevin added.

"We very much see ourselves as acting in the role of agents on behalf of our donors and supporters. We know how busy the world is today.

## Pressure

"People are under pressure from many sides and not only money, but also time, can be in short supply. For that reason, we see ourselves as acting on their behalf and doing what they would like to do,

but simply don't have the time or capacity to do.

"They are essentially expressing their own values through the work of the Capuchin Day Centre that they support through their donations. That alignment of values is essential in enabling us to do what we do and we are extremely grateful for it."

**i** Brian Friel is the CEO of the Capuchin Day Centre in Dublin.



# Paving the path to freedom for the most challenged homeless



**Housing First focuses on the most vulnerable in homelessness, those who never stood a chance of being housed by local authorities, **Chai Brady** writes**

A person that can retreat to a place they call home, where they feel safe and secure, will undoubtedly be in a better position to seek support to help themselves out of a spiral of mental health, addiction or other related issues.

Ireland now has more than 13,500 people who are homeless, which includes almost 2,000 families who are in emergency accommodation, according to the Department of Housing's most recently released tally last week.

Within this colossal figure are the long-term rough sleepers, or the 'chronically homeless' (many of which do not appear in the Government's statistics). They are suffering from a myriad of problems that prevent them from potentially ever receiving the supports necessary. These are the people the 'Housing First' initiative aims to assist.

The Housing First programme prioritises providing immediate housing to individuals experiencing homelessness, regardless of their background or circumstances, with a focus on those facing severe challenges. By offering stable housing as a foundation, Housing First aims to support individuals in addressing their underlying needs and facilitating their path towards recovery and integration into the community.

In March 2022 the Housing First office was launched by the Government's Housing Agency. Rob Lowth, former Head of Homeless Services for Limerick City and County Council, was announced as the National Director of the programme. There were almost 1,000 Housing First tenancies at the end of December – a large number when accounting for the fact those who are involved in the programme are the most vulnerable in society, who may have behavioural, addiction, mental health issues and more, and have been overlooked for many years.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Mr Lowth said: "We're involved in eve-

rything across from the health side to the housing side to the community side, which is a really big part of Housing First.

"It is reconnecting people with their communities, because a lot of the time people actually forget that our tenants in Housing First came from these communities, and at the end of the day they belong to those communities and we're trying to repair the damage. There is a huge stigma with homelessness, addiction and mental health and it is tough for individuals to get back to where they came from as well," he said.

Working for the local authority in Limerick, Mr Lowth saw first-hand the positive impacts Housing First can have regarding the case of a woman who struggled with homelessness and addiction for 16 years. He said she had been in the revolving door of hostels and the health system as "her health was deteriorating from rough sleeping to time in hostels, to just a prolonged addiction", but had successfully rebuilt her life.

## Commitment

At the core of Housing First is a commitment to individualised support and care, with Mr Lowth saying: "I feel fortunate that I can tell that story, but Housing First actually has become about the 991 stories and the case studies of each of them, because they are all so different, they are all so unique. You are taking people at face value and meeting them with their choices.

"So, if they choose to drink one bottle of something less this week or take one part of a drug less this week of this day, that is a success. It's measuring the small successes in life and working on them, to get to the next step."

Under the initiative one-bed housing is the ideal for individuals with complex needs but this is almost impossible to find in the current housing climate. Mr Lowth said: "We try to focus on one-bed accommodation in scattered sites and that is not available in Ireland. We seem to have lost the value of a one-bed property. If you were an individual professional and you wanted to say: 'OK, I'll go rent myself a one-bed, I'd like to live alone,' trying to find one is difficult.

"Of the total housing market in Ireland, the breakdown of one-beds is only 6% of the housing stock for the last census. That is tiny. It's been difficult to try and change the narrative with planners who need to allow planning permission, and encourage one-beds... but it is almost the same price to develop a two-bed as it is a one-bed. While that may seem like a logical thing to do, on something like Housing First or housing specifically for elderly, or housing specifically for people with disabilities, it's something that we need to address a little bit better in the country," he insisted.



He added that when looking at local authority housing waiting lists, the demand for one-bed accommodation is still the highest demand. The aim is to reach the Government's target of 2,000 tenancies under the programme by 2026, but they are "driving to surpass that".

However, Mr Lowth said there is a need to provide more supports to those who enter into the Housing First programme as they may not have engaged with health services, in particular, for a very long time. This part of the reintegration into their community.

**“It's all about realising the recovery potential in somebody, because everybody has that recovery potential and that is the premise that we operate on”**

He said: "So when somebody comes into Housing First, they may not be in the frame of mind to make appointments and that's where we can have clinical supports visit them, but the ultimate goal, as part of their recovery, would be to integrate them back into mainstream services and get them to that point where they realise 'OK I have an appointment, I need to make that appointment, that's part of my normal life now', and that is happening.

"Some people will never get to that point and we acknowledge and we realise that, and that's where we have the clinical teams to deliver that type of service. It's all about realising the recovery potential in somebody, because everybody has that recovery potential and that is the premise that we operate on – that we hopefully get them to that

point in the future where they are taking more responsibility. It is a harm reduction approach like in terms of an addiction, but it's where small incremental changes will make a difference to somebody's life."

Mr Lowth cited a study of four Housing First tenants in Cork which compared the number of times they presented to A&E three years before they entered the Housing First programme (74 times) and the three years after (4 times). Regarding this he said: "We're trying to get it out there into the health service as well to let them see that there is a lot of positives from Housing First and if you support us working with our tenants as well you will see that knock-on benefit."

## Fidelity

There is a term known as the 'fidelity' of Housing First, which basically means the funding is aimed at the most vulnerable.

Mr Lowth explains: "When I was in a local authority, I was inducted into the idea that somebody has to be sober before they get a house, they have to have a history of housing before they are given a house. And that was the holy grail of local authority housing at the time. The people we're dealing with now on Housing First never stood a chance. That is where we are trying to protect that fidelity of Housing First, because there is such a demand on housing in a housing crisis."

Speaking of the role of the Church in the provision of homelessness services and even being at the vanguard of Housing First, Mr Lowth said: "There's so many great services that have their origins in the Church. I went to school in Gormanston College and I was very fortunate that my parents... sent me to the Franciscans, so that gave me a sense of empathy from a young age... it's what your parents

give you, and their beliefs, and what you learn at school I think can set you up for making good in the world and trying to do something a little bit differently.

**“The amount of people he has helped over the years... I think that is the difference in terms of impacting on people's lives to see the positive outcomes”**

"It's the same in terms of the organisations that were set up by the Church, I think the State is more involved now, and starting to get better at understanding of the needs of individuals who need social services and we definitely have become a lot more professional in that sense. But I think these organisations were set up by a lot of, not just Catholic organisations, Christian organisations, for the right reasons and I think that does need be acknowledged, there's no two ways about it. From that perspective it's a legacy and I know it's often talked about as a legacy in a negative sense but I think even what Peter McVerry himself has done has been phenomenal. The amount of people he has helped over the years... I think that is the difference in terms of impacting on people's lives to see the positive outcomes.

"I think Peter saw himself in Housing First from an early time, the benefit of it, and the understanding that it was the right direction to go in. Because he was seeing a lot of these younger people from a very early age and he has seen, and I guess I would have seen it working in a local authority, the multi-generational side of homelessness, and that is a horrible thing to see..."



# The chinks of light in an embattled rental market



Renters in Ireland still face a tricky landscape, but there are silver linings on the horizon, **Jason Osborne** hears

**A**t this stage, everyone is well-familiar with the trials and tribulations of those grappling with Ireland's housing situation. Whether you're looking to buy or to rent, the plain fact of the matter is that there aren't enough houses out there for everyone.

Put simply, this is a thorn in the side of all looking to put a roof over their heads. More seriously, though, the lack of houses on the market is resulting in very difficult situations for those whose lives are bound up in the private rental sector. Nobody knows this quite so well as those who work to alleviate the difficulties, such as Threshold CEO John-Mark McCafferty.

Speaking with *The Irish Catholic* newspaper, Mr McCafferty outlined a difficult situation for renters, but not one without some cause for optimism. In the past decade, he says, renters will have faced rent hikes, a crunch in the number of houses on the market and, more recently, the uncertainty of the Covid pandemic followed by a "ramping up in the ending of tenancies by landlords who are selling their properties".

Offsetting this, he says, we've seen an uptick in homebuilding and the introduction of the cost-rental scheme.

## Unprecedented

"I suppose in the last, say, five years there has been a ramping up in home building both by private developers but also I think it's noteworthy that approved housing bodies...the big ones have been building, they've had an unprecedented level of output in recent years. That's been very, very positive in terms of supply to social housing, but also over the last couple of years then, the advent of cost-



rental housing, so this below-market rental housing tenure.

"Again, some of the big approved housing bodies have started to develop and deliver. That's a welcome development," Mr McCafferty says.

As well as these, the 'Tenant in Situ' scheme has been, if not quite a "panacea", a big help.

**“It's important to say that anyone – regardless of age, demography, income – they come to us because they're renting and they're worried about something in their tenancy”**

"The other chink of light on the horizon was the fact that Government created this Tenant in Situ scheme, where, if a landlord was prepared to sell to the local authority or an approved housing body, they would sell that property to that body and the family would then stay in that home. They would move from being private renters to renters of, I suppose, social housing or renters of cost-rental housing.

"There have been a number of success stories in relation to families in households who've been able to stay in their rented home, with if you

like the owner changing hands, from a small, private landlord to AHP or a local authority and that is a positive."

Despite these positive developments, there are specific groups of people that the adversities of the private rental scene are hitting harder than others, who are at risk of being left behind. Threshold is working to ensure that doesn't happen.

"It's important to say that anyone – regardless of age, demography, income – they come to us because they're renting and they're worried about something in their tenancy, or they're worried about losing their home or they're facing a tenancy termination and notice of termination from their landlord," Mr McCafferty says.

## Affect

"That can affect anyone regardless of geography, income, demography. It's the first important point. That said, we tend to spend more time with people facing tenancy termination because it's a question of holding onto your home or losing your home. The tenants that require most support are usually tenants for whom English isn't a first language. They aren't from Ireland and they're struggling to navigate if you like the policy environment, the public government environment that I suppose most of us are more familiar with, for those who've grown up in Ireland, so there are particular needs there for people for whom English is a second language or

they're struggling with English."

**“Our service is open to everyone across the State and anyone who has a tenancy problem can approach Threshold and we will assist everyone, regardless of background”**

People who are offline, "who aren't so comfortable with using webchat services and online destinations for finding out information", are also at a disadvantage when it comes to navigating the rental market, Mr McCafferty says, using the term, the "digitally marginalised".

"So it's important that we link in with those clients through our phoneline and where we can through our face to face services. As I say, our service is open to everyone across the State and anyone who has a tenancy problem can approach Threshold and we will assist everyone, regardless of background. But I guess, people on higher income with greater social connections are better placed to navigate and negotiate the rental and housing market. People on lower incomes with less social connections, who are, if you like, digitally marginalised and for whom English is a second language or where there's low English language skills, require particular help and support, I think that's fair to say.

"People who are on Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) but have experienced a level of discrimination where a landlord won't accept someone on the housing assistance payment. That's a particular group. People who can't find the accommodation at the kind of price point that they're at, given their income, given

their resources. They're also a particular focus. We're open to all, but there are particular at-risk groups that we'll tend to spend more of our staff time and resources on."

Threshold provides free advice to people experiencing housing difficulties and campaigns for a "fairer" housing system, as well as representing tenants at the Residential Tenancies Board and the Workplace Relations Commission.

## Optimistic

Asked whether he's optimistic about the near-future for private renters, Mr McCafferty says if you're working in the housing industry in Ireland in any way, shape or form, you've got to maintain a sense of optimism.

"You have to be optimistic, you have to be hopeful about the future of housing because, as well as providing services, we also advocate for change and advocate for legislative change, policy change in relation to a fairer, more affordable, higher quality housing system with greater supply.

"That's our north star, so we're hopeful that that can be achieved. Obviously there are challenges right now that are slightly different from five years ago, ten years ago. There is a lack of supply in the private rental market. Smaller landlords are leaving. Affordability of private rental accommodation continues to be a challenge, but it appears to be softening in some regards, especially in Dublin – albeit from a very high base," Mr McCafferty says.

Regardless of the challenges, Threshold's job is to "let people know that they do have rights, that tenants have rights – and responsibilities – and it's important to exercise those rights within the context of the legislation, and the legislative protections they can avail of," Mr McCafferty says.

"We're there to provide tailored advice to tenants, to represent them in disputes where necessary, where required, where appropriate. In Threshold, our challenge is always visibility, profile, that people know that we exist and that we're there to help renters across the board and we're there to protect tenancies. We're there to advise, we're there to represent where appropriate and I think that's our ongoing challenge."

The work can only be done through the generous support of donors, Mr McCafferty says, adding that they "simply can't do that work without support from the general public".

"We know a lot of *Irish Catholic* readers have supported and do support us so I'd like to make that point as well because we are a lean organisation, extremely lean...and we are really dependent every year on the generosity of donors and individual donors in supporting our work."

**Threshold can be contacted by freephone at 1800 454 454 or by visiting their website at [www.threshold.ie](http://www.threshold.ie), where a webchat service is available.**

**“Threshold’s job is to ‘let people know that they do have rights, that tenants have rights – and responsibilities – and it’s important to exercise those rights within the context of the legislation, and the legislative protections they can avail of’”**



# A sanctuary in Winter when you're homeless and hungry:

**Merchants Quay Ireland, where 1,000 meals are served each week.**

*Imagine... you're homeless in Winter. You bedded down in a freezing doorway last night. Scared, waking at every approaching sound. Now it's daylight, but cold, wet and windy. You're exhausted, sitting down on cardboard as people hurry to pass you by.*

*It feels like all you know is darkness. You'll have to find food and warmth before night falls again.*

Merchants Quay Ireland offers kindness and compassion when there's nowhere else to go. Where you'll feel safe to come inside off the cold streets where you've been alone, hungry, dirty and shunned. A place you'll be accepted, no matter what. Where you'll be met with warmth by caring staff who'll look after you... your health, your hygiene, your hunger.

**“I wish you could see the look on people's faces, as they wrap their hands around a steaming cup of tea or tuck into a hot dinner – probably the first decent meal they've had in days.”**

Each week, Merchants Quay Ireland serves more than 1,000 nourishing breakfasts, lunches, and evening meals at their Riverbank drop-in centre to homeless and hungry people. But there's more than food on offer. There are hot showers to warm cold bones and there's dry clothes available. If they need it, they can see the doctor, the nurse, the mental health team and get help with accommodation.



Dave has been serving hot nutritious meals at MQI for 12 years.



MQI welcomes people inside for warmth, food, showers, and medical care.

**And the need is so great, it's overwhelming. That's why your donation today to Merchants Quay Ireland is so urgent.**

The power of a good meal is transformative. Linda, who works in the Riverbank, kitchen says, "The meals we give at MQI could be the first decent bit to eat people have had in days. You can see the change immediately. Suddenly they feel, 'I don't need to worry, I'm safe and I'm warm.'"

Dave, the chef here in MQI, has been cooking hot nutritious meals for 12 years. He says somewhere like MQI makes all the difference for people who may have no family or friends around them.

**“People can come in for a chat, maybe their only interaction all day. I see faces light up with a bit of human contact.”**

"My job is to make sure clients have full bellies, but people want human connection too. Clients will often take their time here and tell you about their life story and what is going on and what happened. It might be a long, long time since they've been able to talk over a decent meal."

Today, your gift comforts people who have lost practically everything. Today, your gift can fill empty bellies with hot, nourishing food. It can ease the pain of loneliness and offer companionship at the dinner table.

**“Clients will often take their time here and tell you about their life story and what is going on and what happened. It might be a long, long time since they've been able to talk things over a decent meal.”**

Ryan, Project Worker with MQI says that the loneliness of homelessness can be unbearable for people over the Winter months. "For people on the streets, it's a miserable time of year because the cold, dark weather makes everything worse. But your kindness keeps our doors open. People can come in for a chat, maybe their only interaction all day. I see faces light up with a bit of human contact. Sometimes their MQI Key Worker is the only person they have. Not to sound airy-fairy but we are like their family."



MQI serves 1,000 meals to people who are hungry and homeless each week.



**Merchants Quay Ireland**  
Homeless & Drugs Services

Please give today. Call us on 01 524 0139, go to [MQI.ie](http://MQI.ie) or scan the QR Code:





# Building trust to help people off the streets



The Franciscan spirit of hospitality is alive and well in Merchants Quay Ireland as all are treated with dignity regardless of background, Chai Brady writes

**T**hose struggling with homeless often become “closed off, guarded and secretive” in order to protect themselves, but Franciscan-founded Merchants Quay Ireland (MQI) in Dublin City Centre offer an environment in which people feel respected and safe. From a platform of trust, staff can assist people to access physical and mental health and addiction services.

As a Community Liaison Officer with MQI, Alan Dooley manages a team that go out on patrols every day to link in with neighbours, businesses and their clients, many of whom are rough sleepers. Those who are homeless and have not engaged with the service are encouraged to do

so – making that first connection.

During a tour for donors in MQI, Mr Dooley said: “A lot of clients are leading extremely difficult lives, anyone who walks through town can see the number of tents that are popping up here, there and everyone. The people who are sleeping in sleeping bags with no tents, you can just imagine what that must be like.

“It’s really important that we treat the needs of people who present here, but we’re also cognisant of the fact that we need to meet people who are out there, who may not know about our service or who may be reluctant to use our service, and encourage them to link in.”

**“To see them come in and avail of a hearty breakfast, for me as long as I’ve been working here it’s really gratifying”**

MQI offers a breakfast service from 8am-9.30am, a hot meal for lunch at 2pm and another in the evening. For Mr Dooley, meeting people at breakfast is his favourite part of the day, saying: “To see people come in at 8 o’ clock in the morning, who have slept out all night, or who have been in emergency accommodation where the services may not be great, or there’s not a lot of

support other than a bed... to see them come in and avail of a hearty breakfast, for me as long as I’ve been working here it’s really gratifying.

“It also gives us the opportunity to canvass the clients who are coming in. It’s unbearably difficult not knowing one night after another how safe they are going to be.”

After breakfast the team focus on engaging with and assisting people who take a step further by asking for help with their physical or mental health, or an addiction – sometimes all three.

## Improvement

They take them into a room and begin that process of engaging them to improve their situation, Mr Dooley said: “The system outside of here is not always set up to meet the needs of our clients promptly so people who are looking to get into treatment, looking to access more stable accommodation... it’s important we are here and have the capacity to work with people and help them on an ongoing basis.”

In order for this to happen, there needs to be a level of trust. Mr Dooley says many people become quite “closed, guarded and secretive” due to their lives on the streets and “in order to survive they have to be wary of people”.

“Over the years what has happened is even the most guarded individuals when they come through our doors, day in, day out, they are treated with respect, humanity – with someone who is prepared to



MQI Catering co-ordinator David Kinsella explains to donors what food is provided to service users.

sit down and have a cup of tea with them and check in. A lot of the conversations that happen are not around homelessness, they can be about family, they can be about sport. People can come here and there is an element of normality about the conversation before it needs to stray into some of the darker stuff, the more serious stuff, about how they are living and where they want to go. Over time the vast majority of people begin to realise ‘this place is OK, these people are OK, I can let my guard down, I can trust’, he said.

**“At this point MQI can point people towards a range of services they provide including doctors, nurses, dentists and even a hairdresser”**

“When people trust the service and the individuals, they are more likely to let you know how things are going on for them.”

At this point MQI can point people towards a range of services they provide including doctors, nurses, dentists and even a hairdresser. With more than 300 individuals accessing their service daily, it is a big task.

MQI also plays a significant role in Dublin’s efforts to combat drug addiction. Through a range of services including outreach, harm reduction, detoxification, and rehabilitation programmes, the charity

**“MQI’s work underscores the importance of comprehensive, community-driven approaches in addressing this complex issue”**

continues to support individuals grappling with substance abuse.

The operation of drug treatment centres like MQI’s has sparked debate. Despite the controversy, MQI remains committed to its mission of assisting those in need. Its services aim to provide vital support while advocating for the rights and dignity of individuals struggling with addiction.

Mr Dooley explained: “Trauma informed practice over the last couple of years has become really, really important in how we deliver our services here. It’s an understanding that for a lot of people who access services like ours, trauma has been with them. Some people who have experienced trauma will use drugs to help them cope, will use alcohol to help them cope, unfortunately some people become entrenched in.

## Addiction

“We’re not saying drug use is safe, we are most certainly not promoting drug use, we’re acknowledging the fact that it is happening on a daily basis, so rather than pulling the blinds and locking the doors and hoping it goes away, we’re offering a pragmatic response.”

The aim is that when a service user gets to a point in their lives when they feel they can do something about their

addiction, they are in the best possible condition both physically and psychologically. Mr Dooley added: “We’re not saying ‘Hey look drug use is great! Why isn’t everyone doing it?’ Quite the opposite.”

The work of the needle exchange in MQI, which constantly needs to adapt due to changing trends of drug use such as the dramatic rise of crack cocaine use in Dublin, is about ensuring those who are using drugs are doing so safely.

They offer the sanitary paraphernalia to service users depending on what drugs they are taking, this could be various sized needles, sterile water, alcohol swaps, and other chemicals that break down impurities, with Mr Dooley saying this is particularly important as “the people who are involved in the wholesale of drugs, they cut drugs with anything and everything, baby powder, laxatives, cement dust – no matter how well you grind down cement dust, you put that into your veins it’s not going to be long before your veins are thrombosed – people butcher themselves”.

As Dublin continues to confront addiction-related challenges, MQI’s work underscores the importance of comprehensive, community-driven approaches in addressing this complex issue.



Community Liaison Officer with MQI, Alan Dooley speaks to donors about the charity’s Needle Exchange. Photos Chai Brady



# Cork Simon's shelter 'packed to the rafters'



Ruadhán Jones

If there is a scale of how critical the housing crisis in Cork can be, it's at the upper end, the head of Cork Simon told *The Irish Catholic*.

The charity's shelter is "packed to the rafters" every night, says Paul Sheehan, adding that what started out as a 47-bed shelter now typically accommodates 74 people.

"Every available space we have is being used and even at that there are still people who have no choice but to sleep rough," Mr

Sheehan says.

Cork Simon has seen a sharp increase in the number of people sleeping rough in the last 12 months, a trend that has been building slowly.

Many people who use their services are vulnerable to homelessness by virtue of difficult upbringings, a lack of schooling, poor mental and physical health and sometimes substance abuse".

Now, the charity is seeing "people who aren't able to put a roof over their heads... who are trying to hold down a job while staying in emergency accommodation," says Mr Sheehan.

## Pressure

The pressure points are everywhere, he warns. The number of people presenting to their day shelter has increased, the numbers

coming to the soup run are on the rise.

"As that housing supply remains low and the cost of housing remains high, anybody stuck emergency accommodation as well is severely challenged in trying to find a way out," warns Mr Sheehan.

The issue comes down to housing, he states.

**"As the housing supply has fallen, costs have increased and the system as a whole is 'dysfunctional'"**

"If you're an adult stuck in an emergency accommodation, your fastest route out would be the private rental sector. But you're basically locked out of that

market now, it's too expensive," Mr Sheehan says.

While there is some social and affordable housing becoming available, "it's nowhere near what's needed".

"It puts huge pressure on individuals and it puts huge pressure on families," Cork Simon's CEO says.

## Pathways

The charity is still working hard to help people find pathways out of homelessness, following a 'housing first' approach for the last 10 years.

"We find that once a person is housed and there's a secure roof over their head, all of their energy can go into focusing on the issues that pushed them into homelessness in the first place," says Mr Sheehan.

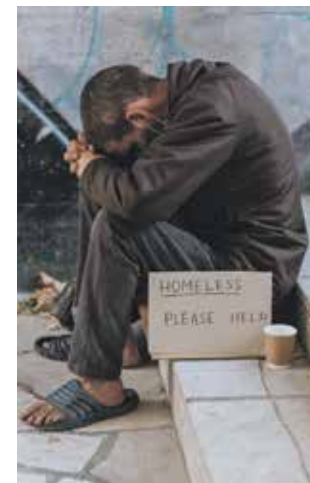
Without that security, all your energy goes into

where is my next bed going to be, when is my next meal going to be, how am I going to get through the day, but take that out of the equation, people start focusing on the issues that push them into homelessness and it can be very successful".

For Cork Simon, voluntary donations are vital to continuing their homelessness services, none of which are fully funded by the State.

"A lot of those are funded by legacies," says Mr Sheehan.

**"We know that everybody is struggling to make ends meet these days. Legacies are a way to show your support"**



Without having a significant impact now and we welcome legacies of all size big or small, every cent makes a difference."

"It's a gift to the city in many ways – homelessness is a public issue and addressing homelessness in a positive way can only be good for the city."

## I want to give everyone the home that Cork has given me.

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# THE SYNODAL TIMES



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

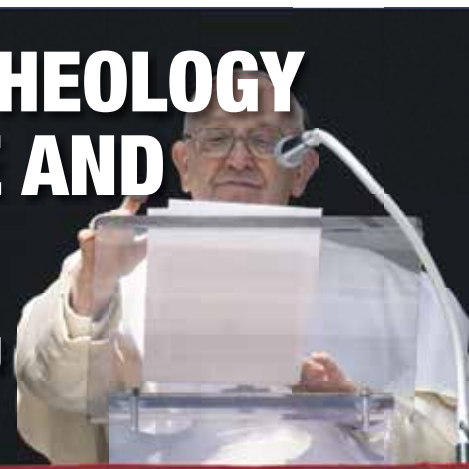
## LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

PAGE 20-21

## FRANCIS: A THEOLOGY OF WELCOME AND DIALOGUE

FR JAMES HANVERY SJ

PAGE 22



# Irish bishops to hold inaugural national synodal assembly

Staff Reporter

**T**he Irish bishops will hold the first national synodal assembly in autumn next year as part of the Irish Synodal Pathway.

Julieann Moran, general secretary of the Irish Synodal Pathway, said this will be followed by a series of assemblies addressing different themes.

In an update on the progress of the Synodal Pathway in Ireland, she said that a series of regional and online gatherings with key representatives from dioceses and religious congregations were held at the end of January in Cork, Mayo and Tyrone. A fifth meeting was held online for members of movements and associations.

These regional meetings saw the launch of a synodal leadership training programme.

The programme is based on research carried out in March last year by the Synodal Pathway's steering committee in which people expressed a desire for training and formation to provide the skills and knowledge necessary to advance as a synodal Church.

Describing the training programme as “an investment in leadership development”, it aims to equip participants to lead synodal processes locally



Those who took part in a synodal training programme in Mallow last weekend. Photo: Irish Synodal Pathway.

and facilitate dialogues in the synodal methodology of “Conversations in the Spirit”.

“This programme also represents an investment in the long-term so as to nurture a culture of synodality that extends beyond the duration of any specific initiative, into the day-to-day life and mission of the Church in Ireland,” Ms Moran said.

She said that the success of the pathway rests on consistent and contin-

ued engagement in the parishes across the 26 dioceses of Ireland, as well as the engagement of religious communities, lay movements and associations, and other Church bodies.

The teams who undertake the training “have an essential role to play on the journey ahead”, she said.

Becoming synodal will not happen overnight, she said. “There is a growing realisation that the synodal pathway is a long-haul journey. We will be walking

together for a very long time, listening to each other and discerning God's will for his people in Ireland today.”

But she underlined that synodal processes and conversations can begin to be implemented now in parish pastoral councils, in diocesan councils, in other groups and institutions.

Meanwhile, following the completion of the initial two-year term of the steering committee, a new national team will be estab-

lished for the remainder of the synodal pathway.

An application from the Irish bishops was made to the Porticus Foundation for a grant to the value of €114,000 in 2022 for facilitative leadership training. This grant was subsequently approved. The direct beneficiaries are reported to have been the people who provided leadership in the diocesan phase of the Universal Synod and other participating groups and organisa-

tions. The Irish bishops also received €260,000 for the Church in Ireland's Synodal Pathway for the same year.

The Facilitative Leadership Training Programme was launched at the beginning of February of this year. Programmes have taken place in Mallow on 23 and 24 February with further programmes set to take place in Knock on 8 and 9 March.

**i** Original Reporting taken from The Tablet.

NEXT WEEK: AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH GHANAIAN THEOLOGIAN AND SYNOD PARTICIPANT NORA NONTERAH



# Looking towards the future of religious life



Luca Attanasio

Between 27 November and 4 December, the First International Meeting on Communication for Religious Life *'Communicating Religious Life: Towards the Future'* was held at the headquarters of the International Union of Superiors General (Uisg) in Rome.

It was a very dense and intense week dedicated to Communication in Religious Life, with participation of about 500 communicators,

more than 10 training workshops, conferences reserved for communicators, round tables with the objectives of: training, networking and change.

Communication in and of religious life is becoming more and more important if the congregations want to keep being present and help lead the new generations and the congregations into the future. The scope of the meeting was raising awareness about the digital nature of the paradigm of nowadays life, both in society and in the Church: "such awareness - reads the final document - doesn't just strengthen and focus on our communication on social media, but rather on all dimensions of our life".

The sisters, considering communication as one of the missions of religious life, "one that we are encouraged to by the Holy Spirit, who guides us

to proclaim the Gospel in the Church", want to enter a new phase of communication and the week of reflection was a great boost in that direction.

To better enter this new dimension in which the Uisg is trying to position itself with increasing conviction, *The Synodal Times* turned to Patrizia Morgante Coordinator of the Uisg project *'Communicating Religious Life'*, and former head of communication office of Uisg.

**What needs did you feel at one point?**

This reflection matured within the Uisg commu-

nication office that was established in 2015. We first wanted to find a platform for communication and then we started to organise basic communication courses for sisters in presence and online.

Within the congregations we soon realised the importance of the role of digital in the mission of evangelisation and of spreading of the charisma, but also for the very existence of the congregations themselves: many candidates approach religious orders through Google.

It is precisely because of this that more and more

congregations have begun to think that some sisters should dedicate themselves only to this aspect, and there has been a great increase in the number of sisters in the world who have specialised.

We also found the need for communicators to come together, to take steps forward together. There are researches and reflections on communication in the Church but absolutely nothing for the communication of religious life and even less for women's religious life.

Plus which, although there are fewer male religious, they

have a lot of space, while it is more difficult for female religious, who are not yet used to writing and communicating themselves, it was like if we heard a call: learn! You are the voice of yourselves.

**Did the Pope's reinforcement of the sphere of communication, with the establishment of an ad hoc dicastery, which, by the way, is the largest dicastery of the Roman Curia, also contribute to this path?**

Yes certainly. Together with the internal reflection within the Uisg, there was an advance in the recognition of the importance of the theme of communication precisely thanks to the establishment of the Dicastery for Communication.

Then the project *Pentecost* started from there, a project wanted by the dicastery precisely to offer space and voice to the sis-

**“Together with the internal reflection within the Uisg, there was an advance in the recognition of the importance of the theme of communication precisely thanks to the establishment of the Dicastery for Communication”**



**“We have to abandon the old system of communication: I teach you and you listen to me, and learn new languages, use images. One influencer told us that she is primarily a graphic designer and she uses graphics to talk about the gospel”**

ters in the world through concrete tools (*Pentecost* had three main purposes: To point out stories that have sisters as witnesses of the ‘great works of God’ to be shared through the Vatican Media; to suggest sisters who could be selected as interns for a 3-month training programme at the Vatican Media in Rome and the opportunity to subscribe to *L’Osservatore Romano* free of charge for one year, ed.)

There was an impetus in the training of nuns but also the desire to speak out, to seek greater visibility, even the launch of the hashtag #sisterstory. Then there was Covid which was a huge momentum to rediscover digital beauty.

**It is a long and complex journey of awareness and change, what were and are the greatest challenges?**

Uisg recently launched a survey entitled ‘sister communicate’ which involved 300 small congregations. The research revealed a great difficulty in recognising digital communication as a mission: it is the first obstacle due to the generational gap that makes it difficult to understand that the mission does not coincide only with the geographical province.

This generational difficulty is more evident in those who hold power, which is largely in the hands of ‘analogue’ nuns. This has generated and still generates major conflicts, a lack of dialogue, the feeling of wasting time on things that do not matter, and a disconnect with younger sisters, born in digital contexts that find it harder to understand certain ways of life.

This, of course, is not the same all over the world, in Africa the problem is also related to the problems of connection, in Asia there is a great variety of approaches, in the Philippines, for example, there is a good level of communication and connection, in India, on the other hand, there is a big gap between nuns who live in the city and those who reside in rural areas where it is not always easy to have access.

So there are basically two problems, the generation gap and the problems related to geographical or

geopolitical areas.

**In your reflections and discussions at the meeting at the end of November, beginning of December, a new figure emerged, that of the Digital Missionary, would you like to explain what it consists of?**

It is not an idea of the UISG, it was born some time ago and stems from the conviction that in addition to physical geographic provinces, there is a need to consider a sixth continent, the digital one, and to think about appointing nuns to deal with it. And so it will be necessary to train, animate the digital literacy of the sisters and be present with one’s charisma to meet people where they are.

Statistics tell us that people spend on average almost seven hours between social networks and the internet, so if you want to meet people you have to be there. We have to abandon the old system of communication: *I teach you and you listen to me*, and learn new languages, use images. One influencer told us that she is primarily a graphic designer and she uses graphics to talk about the gospel.

**A kind of female religious life 4.0 then?**

Yes, because artificial intelligence cannot but enter into this discourse. There is therefore a need to educate to and through artificial intelligence, we can no longer deny it or pretend it does not exist. Clearly, some ethical aspects have to be kept in mind, which for a religious reality are obviously important, and it is therefore important to train ourselves in critical thinking that allows us to ‘use’ AI and not suffer it.

In a way, it is like taking an algorithmic path within ourselves to be personally aware of what you want. This is where we need to trigger a great deal of training that is not passive acceptance of AI. I repeat, using AI in an ethical manner educating at AI and educating it.

**The meeting in late November and early December ‘Communicating Religious Life: Towards the Future’ was an opportunity to take stock of the process, how far have you come?**

First of all, I would like to



A picture of Patrizia Morgante speaking at the Meeting on Communication for Religious Life.



A nun takes notes during one of the presentations.

say that in the eight years since the Uisg communication office was set up, there has been a big improvement, which comforts us. During the week of meetings, critical issues emerged but also many good practices, a varied reality that changes according to many factors.

Among the critical points I would put that still among the decision-makers within the congregations, the importance of new forms of communica-

tion is not fully recognised. The people who deal with it, then, are not trained because the importance of training is still not recognised, it is still not understood that you have to be trained to do this activity. And then, not enough resources are allocated.

Then in the so-called *Ratio Formationis*, the candidates are not trained through this digital paradigm, but through old systems. One other challenge is knowing how to com-

municate with journalists and how to communicate outside one’s own Catholic or religious enclosure: there is still the difficulty, also because of the average age, which is generally quite high, to measure oneself with those who are not Catholic or who come from other cultures.

Among the strong points we can certainly highlight the greater awareness that emerged well in the final declaration with 12 points. We

hope that in every congregation there will be people or groups of digital missionaries and, a decisive point, that they will be professionalised: we would never send an untrained person to be a nurse in a ward, the same will have to be the case for female communicators.

From what has emerged the United States and Latin America are a step ahead of the rest, Europe is advancing as is Asia but with some exceptions also because of geopolitical complexity, Africa must be supported. There are small communication networks, groups coming together even beyond confines and congregations.

**i** Luca Attanasio is a journalist based in Rome

**“We hope that in every congregation there will be people or groups of digital missionaries and, a decisive point, that they will be professionalised”**



# Francis' vision for a renewed theology



Fr James Hanvery SJ

## Characteristics of a renewed theology

The Address to the Pontifical Theological Faculty of Southern Italy identifies four characteristics of a renewed theology at the service of the Church and the world:

### I: A theology of welcome and dialogue

It is clear that so much of the papacy of Francis has been about opening up spaces of dialogue with the world and with other religions. Indeed, part of the whole process of synodality has been opening such spaces within the Church as well. Dialogue is not only the necessary pre-requisite for understanding, but also integral to reconciliation.

It is notable that not only has Pope Francis carried on the facilitation of dialogue between religions and between nations, especially where there is tensions and conflict, but he has expanded and encouraged dialogue within the Church.

It is thus no surprise that he should desire a theology of welcome and dialogue that is not engaged in apologetics or proselytising. It is rooted in God's love for the world, manifest in Jesus Christ, which illuminates an anthropology that recognises that every human heart seeks this love.

Therefore, theology is first a word of understanding love addressed as welcome. It also gives expression to the deeper theo-philosophical basis of Francis' own praxis. This

is grounded in a relational and inter-relational ontology, the '*communio*' which is built into the very nature of creation and humanity.

We can see this come to the fore most explicitly in *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti*. Proceeding from its own method, the theology of dialogue and welcome is required to move into a praxis, a lived hermeneutic. As a method of study, it grants attention to the great religious texts of Christianity and other world religions.

As a hermeneutic, it pays attention to a specific time and place and its questions, problems, and divisions. Here, theology becomes a process of discernment. It is concerned with unfolding the mystery of Jesus and tracing it in the narrative of every human life that also runs through the whole of creation (Col 1:15-22): a movement of descent and ascent, in which the redemptive figure of the cross is seen but present now in the risen and crucified Christ.

This 'dialogical' movement is a process of 'spiritual ethnography'. It allows theology to work from within the human reality and respond to it. Performed in this manner, theology rejects 'the Babel syndrome', i.e. not only the failure to understand the other, but the failure to listen to the other.

### II: A theology of welcoming is a theology of listening

The lived hermeneutic presupposes and involves a conscious listening. This is an attempt not just to 'hear' what is said, but to understand it in its context: both its history and experience. For this reason, such listening must be deeply connected with cultures, peoples and their narratives. It means attending to all generations, espe-



Pope Francis addresses visitors gathered in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican to pray the Angelus with Pope Francis February 18, 2024.

cially the young. Listening allows them to make their own contribution to the community (cf. *Christus Vivit* §65).

A theology of listening and dialogue is Christologically determined. In scripture, Christ is seen engaged in listening and in dialogue with the whole range of his culture. He is profoundly in touch with the tradition from which he draws his own self-understanding and that of his people. The encounter of Christ, and the offer of salvation, which is his, always has a dialogic structure. It is never a monologue: 'In a monologue, we all lose. All of us'.

### III: An interdisciplinary theology: The moral and spiritual requirements of theology

A 'welcoming theology' requires the capacity to interpret and discern and therefore it requires theologians who can work together in an interdisciplinary way. Here, the scope of 'theologians' includes priests, religious and lay men and women.

In their ecclesial rootedness, they are open to 'the inexhaustible novelties of the Spirit'. They know how to escape 'the self-referential, competitive and blinding logics that often exist in our own academic institutions and concealed, many times, among our theological schools'.

This theology of welcome, dialogue, listening and discernment requires moral, spiritual and human gifts as well as intellectual ones. It asks for men and women of compassion who are open to the suffering and the needs of others. Without compassion and communion with the realities of peoples' lives and the cry of life our biosphere, theology risks becoming merely an intellectual exercise.

Unless it is nourished by prayer, theology not only loses its soul, it also loses its intelligence and capac-

## “Interdisciplinary work also necessitates the freedom and the commitment to continually revisit and reconsider tradition, to keep asking questions, for tradition is the river of a living faith”

ity to interpret reality in a Christian way. It fails to see the glory and beauty of God, present and working salvifically in all things. It risks 'being swallowed up in a condition of privilege; it prudently places itself outside the world and shares nothing of the risk with the majority of humanity'.

Interdisciplinary work also necessitates the freedom and the commitment to continually revisit and reconsider tradition, to keep asking questions, for tradition is the river of a living faith.

### IV: A networked theology

'Networked' is understood as the necessary inter-disciplinary work in which theology must be engaged. However, also intended is the build-

ing of relationships and the shared expertise and visions of ecclesiastical universities which, in their own way, witness to a 'just and fraternal society'.

The Pope sees all these levels of networking as evangelical work, i.e. 'in communion with the Spirit of Jesus who is the Spirit of peace, the Spirit of love at work in creation... interdisciplinary and networking are intended to encourage the discernment of the presence of the Spirit of the risen one in reality'.

### Final part next week

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

**“Unless it is nourished by prayer, theology not only loses its soul, it also loses its intelligence and capacity to interpret reality in a Christian way”**



# Letter from Rome

## Vatican official says Pope Francis will cause 'new social dialogue' in Argentina



John Lavenburg

According to a top official with the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, the unity of the Church that would be represented on a papal visit to Argentina could help create a new social dialogue and unity in the country at a critical economic and political juncture.

"In the Church we are together. People have different perspectives, but all of us are Catholics," Emilce Cuda, the Secretary of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, told *Crux*. "That is Catholicism ... working together with the people who think differently because we are Catholics."

"So, in that sense, in Argentina the moment is absolutely critical economically and politically, and the people are saying that if Pope Francis arrives there, they represent unity and maybe they can help with a new social dialogue," said Cuda, an Argentinian theologian. Francis hasn't visited his native Argentina since his pontificate began in 2013.

Cuda added that "a papal visit to Argentina would mean a great deal to Argentinians on the peripheries of society" because "he spoke to those people, and they're waiting because the Pope represents unity that is the Church".

### Reconciliation

Cuda also said the recent meeting between Francis and Argentinian President Javier Milei, who has previously spoken ill of the pontiff, was an important showing for the world. "It was absolutely important not only for Argentinian people but for other countries how to show that a person who in the past told Pope Francis not nice words, a person who represents another point of view or the economy and the politics, and Pope Francis received him," Cuda explained. "This is important because this is Catholicism. Catholicism is reconciliation, and in that situation people both from one place and from the other take steps to arrive at a commonplace," she said. "I think that meeting was an excellent example not only for other countries, but for Catholics."

Cuda spoke to *Crux* on February 19 amid her visit to the United States. Last week, Cuda participated in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles annual Religious Education Conference. On February 19 and February 20, she met with the COPS/Metro



Pope Francis and Argentine President Javier Milei share a laugh during a private audience at the Vatican February 12, 2024. Photo: CNS photo/Vatican Media.

Alliance in San Antonio, which is a coalition of congregations, schools, non-profits, and unions that works together to improve conditions for local families.

### “Helping Latin American communities understand the importance of community organising is a current focus of Cuda’s work”

Cuda met with local parish leaders and organisers, and toured neighbourhoods that have been transformed by the work of the COPS/Metro Alliance in developing neighbourhood infrastructure, housing, health care, job training programmes, and other economic development measures.

Cuda's visit also built on a meet-

ing that representatives of the COPS/Metro Alliance had with Francis as part of delegation from the West/SouthWest Industrial Areas Foundation in 2023, where, according to the organisation, they shared the successes they've had transforming local communities through a parish-centred approach to community organising.

Helping Latin American communities understand the importance of community organising is a current focus of Cuda's work, as well as the work of the Latin American Episcopal Conference (CELAM) and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), which have started work on a "Building Bridges Organised Community" initiative.

### Community

The "Building Bridges Organised Community" initiative is the second part of Francis's broader Building Bridges initiative, which began two years ago through conversations with university students.

This second iteration of the program, Cuda explained, is to work together to find solutions to help

people in Latin American countries stay in their own countries, opposed to immigrating to either another Latin American country, or the United States.

"The idea is not only to assist people – of course they need our help – but to help advocate in the public space for better conditions for them in their own countries," Cuda said. "I think it's a pastoral activity to advocate in the sense of this pontificate's social magisterium because the idea of this social magisterium is not assistance, but to work for social justice in the sense of work opportunities, equality, etc."

### “The way to arrive to a better life is better politics, and the better politics to him is a social dialogue”

Meeting with organisations like the COPS/Metro Alliance, as well as other communities/organisations

in the United States, Cuda said, is helpful to this mission because they're able to share best practices for and approaches to community organising that can then be shared with communities in Latin American countries, especially those in Central America and the Caribbean.

Cuda said that this push for community organising is in line with the agenda of Francis. "[Francis] said the way to arrive to a better life is better politics, and the better politics to him is a social dialogue, and my work is how to help to his agenda, so to open different ways to build bridges, to start a social dialogue between people that have a different interest and different necessities," Cuda said.

"So the idea is how to, in this case, how to return to that time where the people had the opportunity to organise themselves in a community and start to advocate for their rights," Cuda continued. "How can we return to that time? This is my challenge."

John Lavenburg is an American journalist and the national correspondent for *Crux*.





# World Report

## IN BRIEF

### Pope Francis accepts resignation of Polish archbishop accused of ignoring abuse

● Pope Francis has accepted the resignation of Polish Archbishop Andrzej Dzięga, who has faced allegations that he ignored abuse cases in Poland.

Neither the Apostolic Nunciature of Poland, which announced the resignation on February 24, nor the Holy See Press Office provided a reason for Dzięga's resignation. The 71-year-old prelate, who has led the Archdiocese of Szczecin-Kamień since 2009, will not turn 75, the age at which canon law requires a bishop to submit his resignation to the Pope, until 2027.

Archbishop Dzięga published a two-page resignation letter on February 24 in which he apologised to his "brother priests," saying, "if my weaknesses, including incomplete understanding of specific circumstances, and sometimes even my ordinary human fatigue became the cause of your anxiety, I am sorry".

### Texas attorney general targets Catholic NGO

● Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton is trying to shut down a Catholic nonprofit organisation in El Paso based on allegations that the group may be facilitating illegal immigration, harbouring immigrants who entered the country illegally, and engaging in human smuggling.

Mr Paxton filed a lawsuit against the nonprofit Annunciation House, which has operated in the state

for nearly 50 years. The lawsuit asks the District Court of El Paso County to revoke the organisation's nonprofit registration, which would prohibit it from continuing to operate in Texas.

In response to the lawsuit, Annunciation House issued a statement that called Paxton's actions "illegal, immoral, and anti-faith" and his allegations "unfounded".

### Priest discovers chalice poisoned with bleach at Mass in Italy

● A Catholic priest in southern Italy was the victim of a February 24 poisoning attempt involving bleach mixed in with the water and wine used at Mass, in what many observers believe was a mafia-related attempt at intimidation.

Fr Felice Palamara, pastor of San Nicola di Pannaconi parish in Cessaniti in the southern Italian region of Campania, told police that when he prepared to drink from a chalice in which he had placed the consecrated water and wine for a Sunday vigil Mass on Saturday evening, he detected a strange odour and interrupted the liturgy.

Laboratory analysis later confirmed the presence of bleach in the chalice, according to local media reports, triggering an investigation by the carabinieri, Italy's military police.

The risks to Fr Palamara from the attempted poisoning were especially serious, sources said, given that the priest suffers from both asthma and a heart condition.

### Mozambique bishop warns jihadist anti-Christian violence being ignored

● Amid spiralling violence and what he describes as a "population exodus" due to a jihadist campaign mostly targeting Christians, the Catholic bishop of northern Mozambique is warning that the deadly conflict and humanitarian crisis risks being ignored amid global focus on other hotspots such as Ukraine and Gaza.

"The biggest risk is that [the victims] will be forgotten due to other wars in the world", said Bishop António Juliasso Ferreira Sandramo of Pemba in the northern Cabo Delgado province of Mozambique.

## Over a dozen killed in attack on Catholics at Mass in Burkina Faso

At least 15 Catholics were killed in an attack during Mass on Sunday in the Burkina Faso village of Essakane in the country's Oudalan province in the northeastern region, a jurisdiction of the Diocese of Dori.

In a statement, Fr Jean-Pierre Sawadogo, the vicar general of the Dori Diocese, called the February 25 incident a "terrorist attack" and appealed for prayers for the souls of those who he said "died in faith". He also called for spiritual solidarity with those in need of healing and consolation.

"In this painful circumstance, we invite you to pray for those who died in faith, for the healing of the wounded, and for the consolation of grieving hearts," Fr Sawadogo said.

"May our efforts of penance and prayer during this blessed season of Lent obtain peace and security for our country, Burkina Faso," he added.

According to Fr Sawadogo, 12 worshippers were killed at the scene of the attack while three succumbed to their injuries while receiving treatment. Two others were being treated at a hospital.

The village of Essakane is in the 'three borders' zone near the borders of Burkina Faso with Mali and Niger in the vast Sahel region. The Sahel region spans some



Ibrahim Traore, Burkina Faso's self-declared leader, is escorted by soldiers as he arrives, standing in an armoured vehicle, in Ouagadougou. Photo: CNS/Vincent Bado, Reuters

3,355 miles and stretches from the Atlantic Ocean eastward through northern Senegal, southern Mauritania, the great bend of the Niger River in Mali, Burkina Faso, southern Niger, north-eastern Nigeria, south-central Chad, and into Sudan.

The attack is the latest in a series of atrocities blamed on Islamist terrorist groups linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State reportedly active in the Sahel region, which have taken over long

strips of land and contributed to the displacement of millions of people in the region.

Last year, Bishop Laurent Birfuoré Dabiré of the Dori Diocese expressed his solidarity with the people of God in Burkina Faso who no longer attend Mass for fear of jihadist attacks. In an interview with the pontifical charity foundation Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) International, Bishop Birfuoré made ref-

erence to the large number of Catholics skipping public worship, saying: "We understand them and do not ask them to go beyond their courage".

He confirmed reports that 50% of the west African country is occupied by terrorists and many Catholic parishes have been left abandoned as their members stay away for fear of attacks.

## Retired Australian bishop charged with 19 abuse offenses

Christopher Saunders, the bishop emeritus of Broome, Australia, has been arrested and charged with rape and other charges based at least in part on the findings of a Vatican investigation into allegations he abused vulnerable young men.

Authorities announced last Thursday that they were charging the 74-year-old prelate with two counts of rape, 14 counts of unlawful and indecent assault, and three counts of indecently dealing with a child as a person in authority, which reportedly occurred in the towns

of Broome, Kununurra, and the Aboriginal community of Kalumburu between 2008 and 2014.

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation reported that Bishop Saunders will plead not guilty to the charges brought against him. Saunders was released on bail on a AU\$10,000 (\$6,500) bond on Thursday and has been ordered by the Broome Magistrates Court to reside at this home until the initial hearing in June.

Australian news outlet 7NEWS in September 2023 obtained the investiga-

tive report, which detailed a pattern of grooming young men and occasions of coercing young men to undress and perform sexual acts. The report also noted that Saunders held "bunga-bunga" parties, which were attended only by young men.

The bombshell report stated that Bishop Saunders "spent hundreds of thousands of dollars grooming vulnerable young Aboriginal males by supplying them with gifts of alcohol, telephones, cash, and travel".

## Pope's theological advisor closes new door to Masonry

Just days after a prominent cardinal called for a "permanent dialogue" with Freemasons, suggesting that "an evolution in mutual understanding" has taken place over the last half-century, a top theological advisor to Pope Francis has reiterated the fundamen-

tal incompatibility between masonry and Catholicism.

Bishop Antonio Staglianò, President of the Pontifical Academy of Theology, also confirmed a November 2023 Vatican ruling that Catholics who join Masonic lodges are in a state of "grave sin" and

may not receive communion.

"Within Freemasonry, plots of occult power develop which are in contradiction with Christian action," Bishop Staglianò told *Vatican Media*. "In short, when we talk about irreconcilability, we are referring to

profound contradictions."

The comments came in the wake of a February 16 conference in Milan that brought together leaders of Italy's major Masonic lodges and senior Catholic officials, including Archbishop Mario Delpini of Milan.





Edited by Brandon Scott  
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## A strike to the heart of a nation



Smoke rises from the site of a Russian airstrike that hit a water purifying station amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Kramatorsk, Ukraine, February 20.

## Haitian bishop in 'stable' condition after explosion in Port-au-Prince

Bishop Pierre-André Dumas of the Diocese of Anse-à-Veau/Miragoâne and vice president of the Haitian Bishops' Conference is reportedly in stable condition after being caught in an explosion in the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince last week.

A communiqué sent out by the Conference of Catholics Bishops of Haiti on Monday

announced that Dumas "was affected yesterday evening by an explosion which reached the house where he is accommodated during his stay in Port-au-Prince".

The press release noted that the bishop is 'stable' but did not provide additional details on the explosion or the bishop's condition.

In a sign of solidarity with the bishop and the Church

in Haiti, the Bishops Conference of Mexico (CEM), wrote on X: "We join in prayer and solidarity with the Episcopal Conference of Haiti in the face of the suffering of its people and the incident that affected Monsignor Pierre André Dumas".

"We are aware of the difficult situation of violence and insecurity that Haiti is suffering. We admire the strength

and firmness of the pastors of the Haitian Church who, despite the terrorist acts they have suffered, do not give up in their evangelising mission," the CEM's full press release continued.

This is the latest incident to hit the Catholic community in the Caribbean island that has been rocked by gang violence, murder, and political instability.

## US bishop prohibits blessings for those in 'irregular situations'

Bishop Liam S. Cary of Baker, Oregon, said he has asked the priests of his diocese "not to bless known co-habiting couples, of the same sex or both sexes" because he does not believe that blessings for couples in such situations could be carried out in a "scandal-free" manner in his diocese.

"If a co-habiting heterosexual couple or a same sex couple were to ask a priest to bless them, they would be seeking an official sign of approval for behaviour that the Church teaches is sinful in God's sight," he wrote in a statement.

He noted that, despite this language, following the release of *Fiducia Suppli-*

*cans*, images of "pre-planned same-sex ceremonies filled computer screens around the globe" with priests giving blessings the document actually prohibited. "Mass media quickly spread the news worldwide: the Catholic Church has changed her mind; she now approves of same-sex unions," he wrote.

## Vatican roundup

### 2024 International Congress of Families to be held in Mexico

● With the theme 'All Families Can Be Better', the city of Guadalajara in Jalisco state, Mexico, will host the International Congress of Families (CIFAM) from March 1-3.

CIFAM 2024, an opportunity for meeting, learning, and intersectoral and interreligious collaboration, seeks to unite and equip leaders, organisations, and families to affirm, celebrate, and strengthen the family institution as the natural foundation of society.

The purpose of the event is to give continuity to the experience lived at the XIV World Congress of Families held in Mexico City in 2022.

### Prefect of the Vatican Apostolic Archive retiring

● The longtime prefect of what is now named the Vatican Apostolic Archive, Archbishop Sergio Pagano, is set to retire later on this year, and is revealing some of the secrets he has uncovered in the 45 years he has worked in one of the world's most important, and unusual, repositories of

documents.

In a new book-length interview titled *Secretum*, published February 20, Pagano divulges some of the unknown, lesser-known and behind-the-scenes details of well-known sagas of the Holy See and its relations with the outside world over the past 12 centuries.

### Pope Francis close to families and victims of deadly Valencia fire

● Pope Francis is "closely following the news of the terrible fire in an apartment building in Valencia's Campanar suburb in eastern Spain, in which lives have already been lost" and he assures all those affected of his spiritual closeness and prayers.

The Pope's words of concern and closeness came in a telegram on Friday, February 23, signed on his behalf by Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin, and addressed to the Archbishop of Valencia, Enrique Benavent Vidal.

Four people have been confirmed dead and 14 others are still missing following the fire that broke out at the 14-storey residential complex last Thursday.

### Pope cancels Monday audiences due to 'mild flu' symptoms

● The Holy See Press Office last Monday announced that Pope Francis' audiences for the day had been suspended as a precautionary measure due to the Holy Father's persisting flu symptoms.

The Monday morning telegram sent out by the Vatican noted that while the Pope's "mild flu symptoms persist", he did not have a fever. The Holy See Press Office did not provide further details on the Pope's condition nor hint at whether he would continue with his activities for the week.

On Saturday the 87-year-old pontiff cancelled his meeting with the transitional deacons of the Diocese of Rome, who will be ordained to the priesthood in April, due to "a mild flu-like condition".



# Letter from Greece



Jonathan Luxmoore

Greece's minority Catholic Church has deplored a parliamentary vote to allow same-sex marriage and child adoption, the first in a predominantly Orthodox country.

"Our reaction is clear - the Church doesn't accept same-sex marriage, and we're surprised the government pressed ahead so quickly with this measure," said Archbishop Josif Printezis of Naxos, Andros, Tinos and Mykonos, secretary-general of Greece's Catholic bishops' conference.

"I don't know whether there was some great demand from people in metropolitan Athens. But those living elsewhere in Greece aren't comfortable with it, and it will cause us a lot of problems when it comes to baptisms and access to sacraments," he said.

The archbishop spoke as the first same-sex weddings were conducted following February 15 approval of the bill sponsored by Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis' centre-right government, which was signed into law a day later by President Katerina Sakellariopoulou.

In an *OSV News* interview, the archbishop said the Mitsotakis government had previously supported Christian teaching and maintained good ties with Greece's predominant Orthodox Church, which vigorously opposed the legislation, but was widely believed to have been pressured by the European Union to introduce the reform.

He added that he and other bishops would advise Catholic parishes how to deal with same-sex couples, but would resist demands to endorse 'marriage equality'.

"Catholics believe in equality - in our Church too, some argue that everyone should have equal rights to a partner and family," Archbishop Printezis told *OSV News*. "But for now this is all in the realm of theory. When it comes to practicalities, I don't know whether Catholics will be so accepting of same-sex couples seeking to play a part in Church liturgies."

## Redefine

Legislation to redefine marriage as the union of 'two persons of the same or different sex' was announced by Mitsotakis after his New Democracy party was re-elected in June 2023, and tabled in February in the Hellenic Parliament, with backing from left-wing MPs.

The measure, an amendment to the Civil Code, was backed by 52% of Greeks in a December 2023 Pulse poll for the Skai media group, with 33% against and 15% undecided or indifferent, although



Members of the LGBTQ+ community and supporters celebrate in front of the Greek parliament in Athens February 15, 2024, after the vote in Favor of a bill which approved allowing same-sex civil marriages. Photo: OSV News/Louisa Gouliamaki, Reuters

same-sex adoption was supported by just 42%, with 47% opposed.

**“This proposal is a setback to our legal culture, to morals and culture in general – it marks a point of decline for Greek society”**

In a January 12 declaration, Greece's Catholic bishops said "changing the definition of marriage and family" would "affect all Greek society," and they rejected claims by pro-change campaigners that marriage was 'simply a legal construct'.

"This proposal is a setback to our legal culture, to morals and culture in general – it marks a point of decline for Greek society," the bishops said.

Meanwhile, the Orthodox Church of Greece, which claims the spiritual loyalty of most of the population of 10.3 million, "categorically rejected" the legal change in a January 30 open letter to MPs as 'a

deviation from Christian marriage and the established framework of the traditional Greek family.

"Existing rights for same-sex couples in Greece are adequately addressed through civil unions – there is no constitutional or international obligation to establish same-sex marriage and parenting," the Church's governing Holy Synod told legislators.

## Repercussions

"The repercussions of this legislation, far from abstract, will affect Greek society's fundamental well-being, transforming parents from traditional fathers and mothers into neutral guardians, and prioritising the rights of homosexual adults over the interests of future children," Orthodox leaders added.

Approval of the bill by 176 votes to 76 after a heated two-day debate in the 300-seat Athens parliament was welcomed by gay rights groups and by the government leader Mitsotakis, who said in a February 15 social media post it marked "a milestone for human

rights" and reflected "today's Greece: a progressive, democratic country, committed to European values."

**“The decision of MPs to defy the predominant Orthodox church suggested the Church's influence was waning in Greece, but added that Orthodox leaders could still pressure local government bodies not to allow same-sex marriages”**

However, the reform was opposed by member of the prime minister's governing party, and protested at Orthodox demonstrations in Athens and other cities, include a pre-vote prayer rally in the capital's Syntagma Square on February 12, led by Greece's Orthodox presiding archbishop, Ieronymos II, who

warned it would place supporters "outside the Church".

The vote makes Greece the 16th of the European Union's 27 member-states to allow same-sex marriage and the 37th worldwide, as well as the first of Europe's 10 traditionally Orthodox countries to enable the practice.

In his *OSV News* interview, Archbishop Printezis said the decision of MPs to defy the predominant Orthodox Church suggested the Church's influence was waning in Greece, but added that Orthodox leaders could still pressure local government bodies not to allow same-sex marriages.

He added that joint opposition to the new law had brought the Catholic and Orthodox Churches together, but said he doubted cooperation would extend into other areas.

"When the discussions about this legislation started, the Orthodox church urged us to stand with them – and we did," the Catholic bishops' conference secretary general told *OSV News*.

"Meanwhile, some Orthodox priests and bishops have also applauded our Church's statements, with many prominent figures also praising their pastoral clarity. But while we hope this could signal an opening in the curtain, some Orthodox leaders hold strict views against ecumenical cooperation," he added.

**“Some Orthodox priests and bishops have also applauded our Church's statements, with many prominent figures also praising their pastoral clarity”**

*Jonathan Luxmoore writes for OSV News from Oxford, England.*



# Letters

## Letter of the week

### Better to be safe than sorry, 'Vote No'

**Dear Editor,** A USA lady bravely faced applause when she declared she sleeps with Bill Clinton every Christmas. She brought to mind people having a similar 'durable relationship' with our very own Taoisigh. All of this gains fresh relevance as our Government asks us to vote in a referendum, March 8.

They say existing definition of 'family' is insufficient; that amendment of the Constitution is the only way forward. Insert a new clause containing the buzz-words 'durable relationship'

and all will be well. But, those buzz-words comprise a legal term – the meaning of which remains so uncertain.

Lately, our Supreme Court has deemed an un-married man to be entitled to widower's allowance on the death of his long-time partner, the mother of his children. This is but one example of why a durable relationship does not require amendment to the Constitution for justice is to be served. Because the Constitution has already

promised us equality of treatment before the law. Moreover, the proposed formal introduction of a virtual alternative definition of 'family' could open a Pandora's Box. How it will impact tax, inheritance, and, controversially, immigration, we know not.

Better be safe than sorry. We had best vote 'No'.

*Yours etc.,*

**Cathal Ashbourne-Loftus**  
Ashbourne, Co. Meath

### The thin veil between the spiritual and physical world

**Dear Editor,** Years ago, I heard a story which intrigued me. A family just had a new baby and her older brother, still very young himself, was always trying to be with the baby. The reason was revealed thanks to a bit of technology. They had an intercom set-up in the baby's room in case she woke up and they would be able to hear her cries from the living room or bedroom as there were speakers there.

One evening as the parents sat in the living room, they heard their son talking to the baby through the intercom and he said to his baby sister "tell me what God is like; I can hardly remember".

It was the word 'remember' that caught my attention. It points to the intimacy of the act of creation; like in Jeremiah 1:5: "Before I formed you in the



womb I knew you."

And in the Psalm 139:13 and 16: For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. and your eyes saw my unformed body.

I wonder, as our Father created our immortal soul and incorporated body and soul, did we catch a glimpse of him? Did he pause to gaze on his handiwork as he loved us into existence for his own purposes?

The veil between the spiritual world and the physical is thin but quickly becomes blurred. I know of a family who when they used to pray the rosary together the toddlers could see their guardian angels but as they grew older their vision of the invisible world was lost.

The ache in the human heart to return to God is helpful as it is unsettling. It points to the possibility of union or reunion

with our heavenly Father, with the one who made us.

With open, persevering hearts, all of us can be made new, and we can grow in the experiential knowledge that we are truly his sons and daughters, beloved and precious to him and utterly dependent on him.

*Yours etc.,*

**Stephen Clark**  
Malate, Manila, Philippines

## A trajectory to extinction

**Dear Editor,** Many of those calling for us to change the Constitution, claim the existing wording is sexist and out of date. It's their trump argument and a conversation stopper!

Article 41.2 requires the State to "endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home". Thus, it seeks to avoid the neglect of children, etc. due to financial pressures.

For anyone who finds the inclusion of the word 'duties' objectionable, it is also found in the section of the Constitution dealing with children, where Article 42a.2

tells us that parents have 'duties' to their children. In the first instance these are met in the home.

Éamon de Valera – the main architect of our Constitution – had personal reasons for putting this provision into the Constitution. Born in New York and without financial help from his father, his mother found that she was unable to simultaneously go to work and care for him. So, in spite of his pleading, he was sent to be reared by relatives in Ireland.

Across the world, societies which have become so focused on economics that they have neglected home and family life, are slowly waking up to the consequences.

Recently the South Korean president said that their plummeting birth rate was their top priority as current figures suggest that the Korean people are on a trajectory to extinction.

Perhaps those who drafted our Constitution all those years ago, had the enlightened foresight to realise that if we do not take care of the human ecological basics, so essential for the next generation to flourish, then we will no longer exist as a people?

*Yours etc.,*

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

## Letters to the Editor

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

We regret that we cannot give prior notice of a letter's publication

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

### Protecting adults and children with a right to housing

## The Irish Catholic

**O**ver the last 20 years, the way in which homeless services are provided in Dublin and beyond has gone through significant change. We have moved from a position where a number of voluntary homeless service providers operated in relative independence from each other with limited co-ordination of effort and resources, to a position where the combined efforts of voluntary and private homeless accommodation providers are more centrally co-ordinated by the Dublin Region Homeless Executive and other local authorities by way of a Central Placement Service and utilising the Pathway Accommodation and Support System (PASS).

PASS is an online shared system utilised by every homeless service provider and all local authorities in Ireland. The system provides 'real-time' information in terms of homeless presentation and bed occupancy across the Dublin region. It facilitates highly effective bed management practices to maximise the use of limited bed capacity across all homeless accommodation services. Alongside these developments, the adoption of common assessment tools and care and case management practices coupled with the increasing professionalisation of the workforce and financial commitment from central government are clear indications that we have come a long way. These are welcome developments designed in the context of a plan that saw the solution to homeless as curating a process: prevent homelessness in the first instance and where it does occur provide emergency accommodation while working to secure progression into the most appropriate longer term housing option in the shortest time possible. From 2011, this approach was complemented with the adoption of the highly successful Housing First Model based on the common sense principle that if housing was offered as the first response to homelessness, the stability and security it provided would make other issues such as physical health, mental health, addiction and behavioural issues much easier to address. It is stating the obvious to say that none of the Trojan efforts outlined above are of any use without

the key ingredient: housing. The absence of housing as either the first or last step in the response to homelessness creates a bottleneck that leads to a blocked process the failure of which is measured by the increasing number of adults and children in emergency accommodation. In such a landscape, and in the context of an overall objective of ending homelessness, voluntary homeless providers are faced with a number of options: continue to grow emergency homeless accommodation insofar as their capacity allows, increase their advocacy for more rapid housing provision by the State, become direct providers of housing themselves, or some combination of all of the above. Continuing to grow emergency capacity may be viewed as an unavoidable necessity to minimise the need for rough sleeping and simultaneously as a retrograde step that perpetuates an outdated systemic response that lets the state off the hook on housing. It may also be unfeasible for voluntary providers to grow capacity any further and it is unsurprising that reliance on private providers of emergency accommodation has increased in recent years. When deficits in housing provision impact on a very small minority of vulnerable people it has tended to remain a fringe political issue, however, when it grows to the extent that it has more far-reaching impacts on society at large and begins to constrain economic growth and development it takes centre stage in political life and becomes a touchstone of governmental success or failure. Enlightened self-interest for the State would suggest that homelessness, that is, lack of housing in any degree, should be considered not only as a personal catastrophe for the citizen that must be prevented and as an unwanted social ill, but also as a canary in the coal mine warning of a risk to future economic prosperity for all citizens.

The Housing Commission's deliberations should be informed by an understanding that a right to housing not only protects the welfare of each individual adult and child citizen, not only facilitates social cohesion and inter-community harmony, but that it also makes sound economic sense.



# Sr de Pazzi Finn – eight decades preparing children for life

Michael O'Driscoll

**A**t 80 years of age, having left school over 62 years ago, it's fair to assume that most of my teachers have, by now, passed on. There is one, however, who is still hale and hearty, whom I feel so privileged to have been taught by and whom I still speak with regularly.

And the incredible fact is that this particular teacher was the very first adult whom I met in my life, apart from my parents. And, as they say, boy was I lucky to have done so.

The memory of meeting her has never, ever left me. It is only as I grow older I realise the huge impact Sr de Pazzi Finn, former principal of Scoil Aiséirí Chríost in Cork, has had on my life. I may have only been an infant but there were subliminal seeds being sown and effects being set in motion which would only become apparent many years later.

Here was a young woman who had decided to give her life to Christ, and follow in the footsteps of Nano Nagle, and become a teacher. In my case she was truly following in Nano Nagle's footsteps. My family was extremely poor.

**“Over 70 years of influencing, for the good, the children – and not just the children – fortunate enough to have met her. What a zest for life!”**

If there is any truth in the old Irish saying, *tosach maith leath no hoibre*, I certainly got a great start by being in Sr de Pazzi's class as an infant. As a preparation for life I had won the lottery.

I am pretty certain that I am not the only one who has been positively influenced by coming under the 'de Pazzi' magic. I visited her in the convent in Farranree, in Cork, six years ago where she was living at the time. That was the first time she and I had met to have a conversation in all those years.

By then more than 70 years had elapsed since she and I had first come in contact. At that time, she was still teaching the children who were preparing for First Communion the hymns they



Sr de Pazzi Finn, former principal of Scoil Aiséirí Chríost in Cork, turned 100 on Thursday, February 29, and is pictured with former student Michael O'Driscoll.

would sing at the communion ceremony. She was 93.

## Message

Over 70 years of influencing, for the good, the children – and not just the children – fortunate enough to have met her. What a zest for life! She was still imparting the Christian message, in her own gentle way, to all lucky enough to have come to know her.

She equipped me with the capacity to face life, to be forgiving, to try to see the other person's point of view, to be a better Christian. I was too young to know any of this

was happening at the time Sr de Pazzi had me in her classroom.

**“Triangles, cymbals, drums, wow, the fun we had belting away. Who wouldn't enjoy such classes?”**

But, as I look back now, I am realising more and more how privileged I was to have been in her class. It was a

magical time and a tremendous privilege. All of this 'magic' was achieved by her presence alone.

## Love

She exuded Love. She made us feel safe and happy. It was fun to be taught by her. Indeed, no one will ever convince me that Sr de Pazzi did not turn her class of infants into a group of young doe on one particular day and had us all cavorting and galloping happily around her classroom.

And she then, just as quickly, turned us all back again into young infants. What a day that was. And then there was the

percussion band. Four- and five-year-olds being taught how to bring order and rhythm to noise and, dare I say it, perhaps even some appreciable music.

**“I will be eternally grateful that Sr de Pazzi's and my path crossed at such an influential time in my life”**

What a woman! Triangles, cymbals, drums, wow,

the fun we had belting away. Who wouldn't enjoy such classes? All down to Sr de Pazzi. When I progressed to the local Christian Brothers primary school Sr de Pazzi brought me back on a number of occasions to pass on my knowledge of the instruments I had the pleasure of learning how to play, to the new infants.

If I were to question her seeming infallible wisdom that would be one area where I would do so.

Sr de Pazzi was, indeed still is, also a highly talented artist along with her musical talent.

Through the first lessons Sr de Pazzi gave us 75 years ago, I suspect even she was unaware that she was really preparing us for life. With the wisdom of years I cannot think of anyone who might have done it better or with greater fun. We really were a lucky bunch of infants.

Sr de Pazzi is now in her 100th year. She has been a Presentation nun for 81 years. My memory of first meeting her has always remained with me. She had a tremendous impact on my life.

I probably was only barely a little more than four years old when I was placed in her infants' class. I was very fortunate in my educational life and, looking back, realise just how fortunate I was with the teachers I encountered.

I actually enjoyed my school life even though corporal punishment prevailed at the time, and the fear of it was always present. I met some really great teachers both at primary and secondary school.

But I will be eternally grateful that Sr de Pazzi's and my path crossed at such an influential time in my life.

## Boherlahan

Sr de Pazzi hails from the village of Boherlahan (the wide road), near Cashel, in Co. Tipperary. This village, present population 299, with some additional players from other parts of Tipperary but representing the county, won the All-Ireland hurling final in 1916 beating Kilkenny, represented by Tullaroan, on the score 5-4 to 3-2. I'm sure Boherlahan is very proud of that achievement.

In my opinion it should be equally, if not more, proud of the fact that Sr de Pazzi hails from the village. She is, as Tina Turner would say and maintaining the musical theme, simply the best.



# Your Faith

The Irish Catholic, February 29, 2024

## Lean Lent

Why giving up things for Lent still Matters

Page 31



## Stations of the Cross help us make sense of suffering

**C**hristians know the life of a disciple will not be easy. Christ did not mince words about this - telling his disciples they must take on life's sufferings as in the form of capital punishment that would later be used to take his life: "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Lk 9:23).

### Suffering

How do Christians make sense of the crosses they bear? The question of why suffering exists finds its answer in Christ's transformation of suffering through love. Christ's cross makes sense of our own, hence the universal appeal of popular devotions like the Stations of the Cross.



**Christ's cross makes sense of our own, hence the universal appeal of popular devotions like the Stations of the Cross, writes Michael R. Heinlein.**

The Stations of the Cross finds its roots with the Franciscans who helped rebuild the Christian sites of the Holy Land following the medieval Crusades. Given the prominence of Christ's passion within Franciscan spirituality, the order encouraged pilgrims in Jerusalem to journey along Christ's way to Calvary.

While it began as a pious devotion, its enduring relevance in the Christian life, however,

caused the devotion to spread. Over time, the Pope gave Franciscans the prerogative to erect 'stations' of the cross for popular devotion in parishes the world over. Eventually, the role of the Franciscans was eliminated, and yet it is hard to find a parish building or complex that does not have the Stations of the Cross.

The universal reality of suffering makes devotions inspiring meditation on the passion and

death of Jesus particularly relevant in Christian life. Such prayer forms like the Stations of the Cross are popularised particularly in the season of Lent.

### Purpose

They should not necessarily be restricted there alone, however, since the Stations of the Cross have become a primary opportunity for the faithful to learn the purpose of their crosses.

Through fostering communal celebration of the Stations of the Cross, priests have the privilege of accompanying their flocks in this understanding. Assisted by praying with the Stations of the Cross, the faithful enter into the experience of Christ and others - such as Pilate, Mary, Simon, Veronica, the women of Jerusa-

lem or those who crucified the Lord. In this way, devotions like the Stations of the Cross assist the faithful in appropriating the fruits of Christian suffering.

It makes sense, then, that those who have 'put on Christ', becoming members of his body through baptism - a bond renewed and strengthened in each reception of holy Communion - should expect nothing less than a share in Christ's own passion and cross.

In light of Christ's passion, it likewise makes sense to understand suffering's purpose as rooted in love. "If you really want to love Jesus," St Gemma Galgani said "first learn to suffer, because suffering teaches you to love".

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that





everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life" (Jn 3:16).

## “Each man, in his suffering, can also become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ”

God is love, and love is the source of all that is. “Love is also,” Pope St. John Paul II wrote in his encyclical on suffering, *‘Salvifici Doloris’*, the fullest source of the answer to the question of the meaning of suffering. This answer has been given by God to man in the Cross of Jesus Christ (No. 13).

Out of love, Christ gave of himself completely, even unto death - handing over his spirit out of obedience to the Father's will (see Lk 23:46).

Christ's own suffering and death has untold value and immense purpose - whereby God bought us back from the slavery of sin and death. So, too, does ours, because, as St John Paul II described it, ‘Each man, in his suffering, can also become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ’ (*‘Salvifici Doloris’*, No. 19).

Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen wrote: “The great tragedy of the world is not what people suffer, but how much they miss when they

suffer.

“Nothing is quite as depressing as wasted pain, agony without an ultimate meaning or purpose”. The Stations of the Cross make real every imaginable aspect of human suffering that was on full display at Christ's passion. And they teach us to see the fruit of suffering.

### Transformation

On his way to Calvary, Christ experienced the sufferings ordinary men and women experience every day throughout the world. He showed not only how to deal with them, but through the power of love, how to transform suffering's destructive power into something life-giving.

In Christ's passion and death, St John Paul II wrote that Jesus “has taken upon himself the physical and moral sufferings of the people of all times, so that in love they may find the salvific meaning of their sorrow and valid answers to all of their questions” (*‘Salvifici Doloris’*, No. 31).

Meditating on the Stations of the Cross exposes Christ's suffering heart - ‘sorrowful even to death’ (Mk 14:34). In his condemnation to death, Christ teaches that we have the freedom to accept life's sorrows.

Christ falls three times on the way to Calvary. The sufferings due to sin in our lives continually cause failure. In falling himself,

Christ shows that, despite suffering's tendency to bring us down, discouragement can be overcome by dependence on God's grace.

Christ teaches us how to persevere through the failure and exhaustion through which our suffering inevitably leads and be of one heart and mind in pursuit of the Father's will. Such is redemptive suffering - as the old saying goes, ‘no pain, no gain’.

Christ's way to Calvary illustrates, too, how God graces us with models of love in the midst of our suffering. But like Christ, we must be attentive and receptive to them. The compassion, cooperation and generosity of others - such as Christ experienced in the fourth, fifth and sixth stations - are examples of how love is returned to love. And when unburdened by our own sufferings, through love, each of us can be channels of God's love through service, like Mary, Simon and Veronica.

“In the face of evil, suffering and sin, the only response possible for a disciple of Jesus is the gift of self,

even of one's own life, in imitation of Christ; it is the attitude of service,” Pope Francis said during World Youth Day in Poland in 2016.

Since life's road must pass by way of Calvary, this journey of love ultimately entails that we strip ourselves of all that keeps us from God and his will. At the end of his road to Calvary, Christ shows that abandoning ourselves to the hands of providence comes with detachment from all earthly power, pleasure, wealth and honour.

### Meditation

The Christian must be unhesitant to cast aside anything necessary to advance the kingdom of God. In this way suffering is a gift that enables us to focus on the new life in Christ that awaits believers. Through the pain of suffering we gain the joy of heaven itself - eternal happiness with God - the gates to which Christ opened for ‘the many’.

In meditating on Christ's passion and death, through devotions like the Stations of the Cross, comes the

realisation that life's sufferings can be joined to Christ's - by which one learns that love forms suffering's foundation.

## “In other words, he must be truly resolved to suffer willingly for the love of God in all things”

“The road is narrow,” St John of the Cross said. “He who wishes to travel it more easily must cast off all things and use the cross as his cane.” In other words, he must be truly resolved to suffer willingly for the love of God in all things.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, weeks before he was elected pope following the death of Pope St John Paul II, referenced this when he said that Jesus not only taught us how to pray the Stations of the Cross, but also their meaning. “The Way of the Cross is the path of losing ourselves,” he said, “the path of true love”.

Suffering expresses love's total self-emptying required of the disciple. “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it” (Lk 9:24).

Michael R. Heinlein is editor of Simply Catholic.

## “He does not let condemnation be levied upon him, but rather he chooses it out of love. Taking up his cross, Christ models how to accept suffering as an act of love in obedience to God's will”



# Why giving up something for Lent still matters



Tatiana Araujo de Sirqueira, 33, uses a cell phone in her home set up on land near Planalto Palace during the coronavirus pandemic in Brasília, Brazil, March 3, 2021. Photo Credit: OSU/Reuters



Scott P. Richert

Every year, for over 40 years now, I have given up watching TV for Lent. I know it's no longer fashionable to give something up for Lent; instead, we are urged to 'do something positive', something that will make a difference in our spiritual life or (preferably, it seems) in the corporal life of others.

From the first time I heard that argument, it struck me as a false dichotomy: How am I to have more time to pray, or more time to volunteer to help others, unless I first give up something to which I am overly attached? To be, as Christ told us we should be, in this world but not of it, we must deny ourselves,

take up our cross and follow him.

This year, in place of watching TV, I will spend a portion of my time meditating on *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers*, a four-volume set of commentary on the Gospel readings for each Sunday in the traditional lectionary of the Church.

Reading the exegesis of the Fathers of the Church is valuable because it puts us in a very different mindset from that of the modern world. To see how they interpreted Scripture is to realise, among other things, that the transformation Christ wrought in this world is the result of sacrifice, and not simply - as we modern men and women too often think - by providing an example for us to follow.

## Miracles

Even the miracles that Christ wrought (the Fathers of the Church declare) were not an end in themselves but served the end

of preparing the disciples to accept his teaching. Thus, in a sermon for Quinquagesima Sunday (the final Sunday of the traditional pre-Lenten season, the Sunday before Ash Wednesday) St Gregory the Great notes that the purpose of Christ's healing of the blind man Bartimaeus on the road to Jericho was that the disciples - 'still carnal men' - Would be strengthened in faith through heavenly deeds' because they 'could not grasp the words of the heavenly mystery' that he had just revealed to them: that the Son of Man, as Luke says in his Gospel, "shall be delivered to the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and scourged, and

spit upon: and after they have scourged him, they will put him to death; and the third day he shall rise again" (18:32-33).

**“He is urging the disciples to keep their faith even as the events of his Passion begin to unfold”**

*The healing of Bartimaeus, of lepers, of the paralytic; the multiplication of the loaves and fishes - all of these miracles Christ wrought so that his disciples might understand that the words he spoke were true.*

Clearly, the healing of

**“The healing of Bartimaeus, of lepers, of the paralytic; the multiplication of the loaves and fishes - all of these miracles Christ wrought so that his disciples might understand that the words he spoke were true”**

the blind man is a very good thing for Bartimaeus, but the miracle serves, for both Bartimaeus and the disciples, as a sign of the truth of the mystery of our redemption that Christ had revealed to his disciples on the road to Jericho.

Thus, when Christ tells Bartimaeus that 'thy faith hath made thee whole', he is urging the disciples to keep their faith even as the events of his Passion begin to unfold. Alas, even restoration of sight to the blind - a sign of the spiritual enlightenment that our participation in the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection brings us - was not enough to keep his disciples by his side from his arrest on the evening of Holy Thursday through his crucifixion and death on Good Friday. In the moment, they chose personal safety rather than sacrifice.

## Mystery

The healing of Bartimaeus, of lepers, of the paralytic;

the multiplication of the loaves and fishes - all of these miracles Christ wrought so that his disciples might understand that the words he spoke were true. 'Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins' - he then said to the paralytic, 'Rise, pick up your stretcher, and go home' (Mt 9:5-6).

All the signs, in other words, that Christ wrought were meant to draw his disciples (and us) further into the mystery of his sacrifice. We participate most fully in that mystery when we receive the Body and Blood of Christ at Mass.

But we can unite ourselves to it in little ways every day, through our small sacrifices - even when we give up chocolate or fizzy drinks or watching TV during Lent.

Scott P. Richert is publisher for OSV.



# Don't wait too long to baptise your baby



**Cardinal Timothy Dolan**

**I** just celebrated my birthday. Twenty days after I entered the world, I was carried by my godparents to Immaculate Conception Parish in Maplewood, Missouri, to be baptised by the pastor, Fr John Ryan.

Mom told me she and dad were nervous because they had waited almost three weeks instead of the expected two, and feared they would be scolded!

## Expectation

How things have changed! Now, we priests are christening 'babies' sometimes a year old. While I hardly propose returning to the two-to-three-week expectation - as laudable as I consider that - I do wonder if

we are now waiting way too long to baptise our babies.

We're beyond, happily, the fear that came from worrying the baby might die before the Sacrament and thus be denied heaven. That's not the healthiest reason to expedite baptism. But, considering the infinite value of this powerful Sacrament, shouldn't we make the Baptism of a baby a high priority, at least within the first two to three months after birth?

**“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”**

Parents certainly don't postpone visits to the pediatrician and proper vaccinations for the bodily health of our treasured new life. That's good. Shouldn't we be eager to have our babies receive the immense spiritual gifts of the treasured little baby, as soon as possible?

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.

I recognise that Baptism is also, beautifully, a time of family celebration and gathering, and that, these days, since families are scattered, it can take a while to gather everybody. But we shouldn't wait too long!

## Rejoice

During Lent, we recall our own Baptism, and rejoice that tens of thousands of adults throughout the country, catechumens and candidates, are in the final preparation for their initiation into the life of Christ at the Easter Vigil, when we all renew our promises. But these are adults ... let's not wait so long for babies!

A pastor told me of a call from a parent wanting to register her 2-year-old in the parish's popular and crowded school. The pastor asked if the child were christened. 'Not yet,' replied the parent. 'Well, first things first,' the pastor replied. 'Let's take care of the Sacrament.'

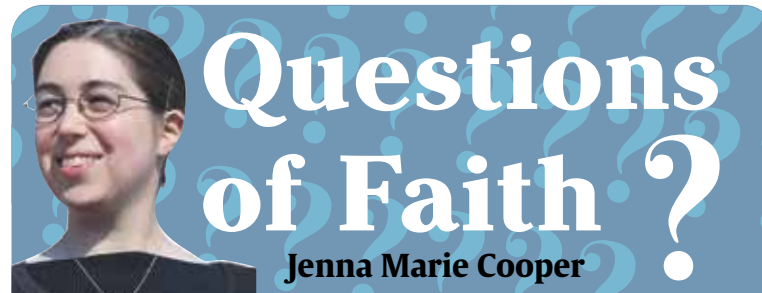
No, I'm not saying we should ever deny a child at any stage this epic Sacrament. God forbid! But, it does rattle me when the 'baby' can walk up to the baptismal font!

**i** Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan is the archbishop of New York.

**“I recognise that Baptism is also, beautifully, a time of family celebration and gathering, and that, these days, since families are scattered, it can take a while to gather everybody. But we shouldn't wait too long!”**



Pope Francis baptises a baby in the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican January 12, 2020.



## Questions of Faith?

Jenna Marie Cooper



## Did Pope Benedict XVI validly resign?

**Q: Did Pope Benedict XVI validly resign even though he did not renounce the munus?**

**A:** As many of us will recall, on February 11, 2013, Pope Benedict XVI surprised the world when, after noting his advancing age and declining health, he announced: "... For this reason, and well aware of the seriousness of this act, with full freedom I declare that I renounce the ministry of Bishop of Rome, Successor of Saint Peter, entrusted to me by the Cardinals on 19 April 2005, in such a way, that as from 28 February 2013, at 20:00 hours, the See of Rome, the See of Saint Peter, will be vacant".

The 1983 Code of Canon Law had already accounted for the possibility - however theoretical it might have seemed at the time of the drafting of the code - for a pope to step down.

As Canon 332, Paragraph 2 tells us: 'Should it happen that the Roman Pontiff resigns from his office, it is required for validity that the resignation be freely made and properly manifested, but it is not necessary that it be accepted by anyone'.

Thus, canonically only two elements are necessary for a papal resignation to be valid: 1. That the resignation come about as a result of a truly free choice on the part of the Holy Father - e.g., a resignation made under threat of violence would not 'count' - and 2. That this resignation be 'properly manifested'.

This latter aspect means that it should be public and obvious what the incumbent Pope intends to do. Or, in other words, the Pope privately expressing a wish to resign to a handful of close confidants would not effect a valid resignation; nor would a papal resignation take effect if the only evidence of it were rumours or second-hand accounts.

As far as anyone can reasonably discern, Pope Benedict XVI's resignation plainly fulfilled both of these criteria. There was no evidence

that Benedict was coerced or pressured to resign, and he specifically mentioned that he was making this choice 'with full freedom'. And Pope Benedict clearly manifested his intention to step down; his resignation announcement was made at a meeting of the College of Cardinals and in front of several journalists.

At the time, different people had different feelings on the appropriateness of a contemporary pope deciding to abdicate for reasons of physical infirmity and old age. However, the general consensus among canon lawyers was that this resignation was nevertheless lawful and effective. Still, as you note, there was some limited speculation that Benedict XVI might not have resigned validly.

One such argument was that the resignation was invalid because Benedict supposedly did not resign the 'munus' a Latin term that, depending on the context, can be best translated into English as 'office' or 'duties' - of the papacy explicitly.

But, as I see it, this argument doesn't hold water because the papacy is technically nothing more than an 'office' (albeit a deeply significant one). That is, unlike priestly or episcopal ordination, which can be primarily understood as a personal, sacramental configuring to Christ independent of any 'job' or 'position' that a priest or bishop might eventually hold, at the end of the day the role of pope is in some sense "just a job." There is no Sacrament that makes a bishop into a pope; a newly elected pope essentially just accepts a new position as the head of a new diocese, the Diocese of Rome.

Therefore, if a pope is announcing his resignation from the papacy, it's already very strongly implied that he intends to renounce the papacy as an office or 'munus', even if he doesn't specifically use the exact word 'munus'.

**i** Jenna Marie Cooper is columnist for OSV News.



# I hate mindless crowds



Los Angeles school workers protest in front of their district headquarters during a walkout over contract negotiations in this file photo from March 2023. Photo: OSV News photo/Aude Guerrucci, Reuters

I hate crowds, at least most of them. I'm okay at football games, where a crowd has bracketed its sanity for a couple of hours for a cathartic release.

But I hate those crowds that are caught up in a fever that feeds off group think, be that a cultural fad, a political ideology, a religious fundamentalism, an unconscious racism, a misguided nationalism, or hype of any kind.

I fear such a crowd because, irrespective of whether its voice is coming from the right or from the left, conservative or liberal, one hears in it echoes of intimidation, crucifixions, lynchings, holocausts, assassinations, wars, suppression of other voices, and (today) teenage suicides from cyber bullying.

## Modalities

Crowds take various modalities, but their bent and their energy are invariably the same.

One of my favourite authors is Czech novelist Milan Kundera who, like me, hates crowds. In them, he sees something he calls "the great march", namely, a blind, mindless march toward a totalitarianism of some kind or other. Crowds with an ideological intent always end up there.

But this raises a question: What about crowds (marches, demonstrations, strikes, sit-ins) that have led to helpful social, political, and even moral change?

What about the crowds Gandhi inspired? What about the crowds that followed Martin Luther King?



Fr Rolheiser

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

What about the crowds that helped end apartheid in South Africa?

What about the crowds that gather around Black Lives Matter? What about the folks that gather round a just cause and go to prison for their actions? Aren't those good crowds?

**"You do see hatred and violence even within these crowds because a crowd by the very fact that it is a crowd will invariably have its rogue elements"**

Yes, they are, but they are good precisely to the extent to which they are mindful and

not mindless; that is, they are good to the extent that they are not caught up in a fever of group-think and their focus is on healing a sick situation as opposed to hating and crucifying whatever opposes them.

That is why in such a crowd, both in its leader and in its overall ethos, you don't see hatred and violence.

Admittedly, you do see hatred and violence even within these crowds because a crowd by the very fact that it is a crowd will invariably have its rogue elements.

## Representative

But the hatred, violence, and anarchy you see then is not representative of that overall crowd. The Gandhis, the Martin Luther Kings, the Nelson Mandelas, and the Dorothy Days

are the real face and ethos of any crowd which is genuinely bent on moral change.

**"Crowd energy is fickle and mindless. That is why crowds are to be feared, irrespective of whether they are idolising you or hollering for your crucifixion"**

But not all crowds are mindful and so it's hardly a surprise that Jesus' crucifixion was incited by a crowd (ironically by the same one who just five days earlier was chanting that he should be their king).

Crowd energy is fickle and mindless. That is why crowds are to be feared, irrespective of whether they are idolising you or hollering for your crucifixion.

I'm not much of a poet, but sometimes something just lends itself to a different kind of language. So, stealing some lines from an old (mindless) Christmas song and adding my

own little commentary, allow me to express my feelings about crowds in an attempt at a poem - which in good conscience you may disagree with.

## Reindeer Games

Rudolph, the red nosed reindeer  
Had a very shiny nose  
And if you ever saw it  
You would even say it glows.  
All of the other reindeer  
Used to laugh and call him names.

They never let poor Rudolph  
Join in any reindeer games.  
Then one foggy Christmas eve  
Santa came to say:  
Rudolph with your nose so bright

Won't you guide my sleigh tonight?

Then all the other reindeer  
Loved him  
As they shouted out with glee ...

Rudolph smiled ...  
and then  
said reflectively:  
Forgive, dear friends, my reluctance  
To see this affection  
Separate from the cruelty  
Mock difference - Crucify him!  
Exult triumph - Make him king!  
Hype is hype  
Hysteria  
Mindless and blind  
Self-serving  
A reindeer game  
With the crowd forever  
amazed and chanting  
Whether for a coronation Or a crucifixion.

**"The hatred, violence, and anarchy you see then is not representative of that overall crowd. The Gandhis, the Martin Luther Kings, the Nelson Mandelas, and the Dorothy Days are the real face and ethos of any crowd which is genuinely bent on moral change"**



# Food for the Lenten journey



An actor dramatises the Stations of the Cross as penitents travel in boats along Cocibolca Lake in Granada, Nicaragua.

Ex 20:1-17  
Ex: 20:1-3, 7-8, 12-17  
(alternate)  
Ps 19:8, 9, 10, 11  
1 Cor 1:22-25  
Jn 2: 13-25

## The Sunday Gospel

Deacon  
Greg  
Kandra



**I**ncredibly, we're already entering the third week of Lent. The ashes are a distant memory. We've gotten used to grilled cheese and Filet-o-Fish sandwiches on Fridays and we've mustered the self-control to resist having that chocolate bar at 3pm.

Maybe we've settled into the rhythm of Lent and become used to it. But have we yet embraced what it's really about?

### Reminder

If we needed a reminder, the reading from Exodus lands like an elbow to the ribs. The first command from God should make all of us sit up and take notice: "I, the Lord am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of

slavery. You shall not have other gods besides me".

With that, suddenly, we are shocked back to reality. You want a summary of what Lent is all about? This is it.

**“And so this week, just when a lot of us might need it, we hear once again God's commandments - challenging us, humbling us, maybe even convicting us”**

It's about remembering our priorities. This is a time of purification and penance, of prayer and

fasting, of giving alms and giving of ourselves, of doing without and turning away from the distractions of life to rediscover what it means to love God and love our neighbour - all in anticipation of the greatest feast on our calendar, Easter.

And so this week, just when a lot of us might need it, we hear once again God's commandments - challenging us, humbling us, maybe even convicting us. The first commandment we hear should have all of us wondering: "Wait. 'Other gods?' I don't have other gods in my life. Do I?" Well, maybe. Think about it.

### Mountaintops

Maybe those other gods don't speak from mountaintops. Maybe they're closer than that. Maybe we're hearing them in the next cubicle, in the elevator or in emails and texts that arrive after hours. Maybe we're

worshipping our careers, or we're enamoured with status and influence. Maybe we've carved mythical statues in tribute to our own success, or we worry too much about the opinions of others.

**“Lent is a good time to ask whether we need to turn away from those empty gods and turn toward the God who loves us”**

The other gods that clutter our lives can even be closer than that - in the kitchen, in the bar, in the garage. What takes up our time and attention, and pulls us away from our walk toward holiness? Lent is a good time to ask whether we need to turn away from those empty gods and turn toward the God who loves us,

comforts us, uplifts us, redeems us.

It's fitting that this reading from Exodus is paired with the gospel account of Jesus cleansing the temple - spilling the coins of the money changers and overturning their tables. He wanted to rid his Father's house of the mercenary distractions that cheapened that sacred space. Well, Lent is a moment for us to turn over the tables of our lives and stand before God as penitent people, seeking to be made new.

### Zeal

How is that going? Are we consumed with zeal for him -- or are we obsessed with other things, other distractions, other gods, instead?

It can be tempting amid the busy-ness of daily life to lose sight of what really matters, and to forget The one who makes it all

matter. This week, as we near the halfway point of Lent, we can take a breath and take stock.

Are we making the most of this season of opportunity and introspection, this time of self-examination and self-discovery? It's alright to ask ourselves if we're doing all we can to (as we heard on Ash Wednesday) "repent and return to the Gospel".

The gospel reading is more than simply a dramatic confrontation in the temple. It's a call to action -- to drive out the things within us that might be keeping us from drawing closer to God.

Because, whether we realize it or not, every now and then we need to flip over the tables in our own lives.

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



# TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



## Finding belief in God in a time of war

Last weekend saw the second anniversary of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and it's depressing to see that peace doesn't seem to be anywhere close.

On **Witness** (RTÉ Radio 1, Friday) Ksenia Trofymchuk from a Protestant theological college in Ukraine pointed out that Ukrainians were somewhat used to war since earlier Russian incursions in 2014. Yes, the war had disrupted theology studies especially since February 2022.

She told how the challenges of war had brought people of various Christian faiths more together – she was involved in cooperation with Catholic and Orthodox communities.

Suffering was particularly bad in the frontline areas and not everyone could leave. Many clergy stayed behind to look after their people, offering humanitarian help and shelter in churches, despite the dangers they faced.

They try to protect and preserve what they can, as well as documenting losses. She saw that some Protestants had pacifist views before but had then eventually had joined the army.

Fr Vasyl Kornitsky came to Ireland around 11 years ago, but his Ukrainian congregation in Ireland had risen from about 15,000 to around 80,000 in the last two years.



A destroyed church is pictured following a Russian attack in the village of Bohorodychne, Donetsk region, Ukraine, February 13. Photo: OSV News/Vladyslav Musiienko, Reuters

He was glad to be able to minister to them in his Donnycairney parish.

He stressed how war and evil create divisions and separations. Many of the refugees he dealt with were still traumatised. He found that, among the refugees, people who had didn't attend church at home were now practicing, and some were attending Confession for the first time.

They were finding something solid in their belief in God. War, he said, changes people's priorities.

The welcome and support

Ukrainian refugees found in Ireland was the theme of all episodes of **Nationwide** (RTÉ One) last week. Many were integrating well, even saving small schools from closure by adding to the pupil numbers and enhancing local communities in many ways, like participating in Tidy Towns initiatives, setting up new businesses.

The Wednesday programme for example focused on welcoming efforts in Donegal and Cavan, with many local volunteers teaching English to the newcomers, but

also learning from Ukrainian culture.

On **Sunday** (BBC Radio 4) Edward Stourton spoke to Protestant pastor Genadiy Mokhnenko, head of the 'Chaplains' Battalion', who supported troops on the frontline.

He said he had never cried so much as he had done in the last two years. From Evangelical Bishop Ivan Rusyn we heard again of churches being used as refuge support centres and the importance of faith communities in the identity of Ukraine.

Speaking of churches, the buildings at least, they figured large in **Monty Don's Spanish Gardens** (BBC Two, Friday). Many of the gorgeous gardens visited were originally monastery gardens.

One had striking plant structures weaving in and out of the old ruins, while the original cloisters were still intact. Of course, I'd prefer if these institutions were still thriving as centres of faith and prayer, but that's history and new generations must find creative ways to keep faith practices alive and renewed.

One of the standout locations was El Escorial in Madrid, built by King Philip II, who brought plants from all over the Spanish Empire. His palace was surrounded by beautiful roses; he wanted them to be like a heavenly cloud for the palace to be

### PICK OF THE WEEK

#### SONGS OF PRAISE

**BBC One Sunday, March 3, 1.15pm**

To mark the 200th anniversary of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, the Rev. Canon Kate Bottley joins the lifeboat crew in Scarborough to reflect on the Christian values at the heart of saving lives at sea.

#### LENT – A SEASON OF GRACE

**EWTN Monday, March 4, 9.30pm**

Prayer is our lifeblood as Christians – exploring this simple communication, practicing praise and silence in order to be immersed and illumined by God.

#### THE LAST PRIESTS IN IRELAND

**RTÉ One, Wednesday (night), March 6, 3.25 am**

Actor and comedian Ardal O'Hanlon examines the role of Catholic priests in Irish life, from earliest times to the present day, to see how they shaped Irish lives. (Repeat)

seated on.

Monty got privileged access to one private garden – he wasn't even allowed to be specific about where it was located. Because of its history there were Christian and Arabic influences in the garden styles, here and elsewhere.

He pointed out an Islamic style garden pathway with a mini-canal flowing through in rills – all leading to ... a crucifix. He saw it as fusion rather than contradiction. If religious differences can co-exist in a garden, it's a pity they can't do so in civic discourse and in the political world.

In that world, a few items on the upcoming referenda are worth listening back to.

On **The Anton Savage Show** (Newstalk, Sunday) Senator Michael McDowell said of the Catholic Bishops' statement that none of their legal reasoning was wrong – "it's correct". He was confident the referendum proposals would be defeated.

On **This Week** (RTÉ Radio 1, Sunday) there was a reasoned debate between Professor Louise Crowley of UCC and former barrister Maria Steen, while **Saturday with Colm Ó Mongáin** (RTE Radio 1) devoted over 40 minutes to detailed discussion.

Some say 'If in doubt, leave it out'. I say 'If in doubt, find out!'



Pat O'Kelly

# Music

## A composer with profound sense of the sacred

Two recent performances at the NCH gave me considerable satisfaction. The first, with the NSO conducted by Dubliner Killian Farrell, currently general music director of the state theatre in Meiningen, had Finghin Collins as the brilliant interpreter of Stanford's 2nd Piano Concerto – a piece demanding verve and virtuosity supplied with breathtaking dash by Mr Collins. But the work also has passages of filigree delicacy that found the intrepid soloist equally refined.

The second event was UK composer John Tavener's eight-movement reflections on the Blessed Virgin – *The Protecting Veil*. Dating from



John Tavener

1988, this cello concerto in all but name, was the main work in the visiting Britten Sinfonia's strings only programme directed by first

violinist Thomas Gould with outstanding Guy Johnston as the sympathetic soloist.

Although reared a Presbyterian and being organist in St John's Church in London's Kensington for 14 years, Tavener's fascination with Roman Catholicism resulted in several works in the 1970s including *Ultimos Ritos* (Last Rites) in 1974 – a choral meditation on texts by St John of the Cross. The Spanish Carmelite's metaphysical concept of 'dying to oneself' strongly impacted on Tavener.

He was also inspired by the life of the Little Flower, and his opera *Thérèse*, composed for London's Royal Opera House was produced

there in 1979. The Dublin International Organ Festival commissioned Tavener's *Mandelion* – meditations on the Lord and the Mother of God – which was premièred by the late Peter Sweeney in St Patrick's Cathedral in 1982.

But, it was Tavener's reception into the Russian Orthodox Church in 1977 that filled him with, he said, "a sense of homecoming" and culminated with his *Akhmatova Requiem* (1980), for soprano, bass and orchestra.

Tavener suffered a stroke in 1980, which he believed shifted his creative outlook and helped him unify his faith with his music. The death of his mother in 1985 affected

him deeply but he found solace in Greece at the shrine of St Nektarios of Aegina.

It was also around this time that Russian-born Mother Thekla Sharf, founder of the enclosed Orthodox Monastery of the Assumption in Whitby, North Yorkshire, became a significant influence on Tavener's life.

He referred to her as his 'spiritual mother' and she supplied the texts for a number of his works including *The Apocalypse* (1993), a massive piece for soloists, chorus and orchestra as well as his choral *Song for Athene*, sung at the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales, in Westminster Abbey in 1997.

Roman Catholic inspired works were renewed with the Mass, *Sollemnitatis in Conceptione Immaculata Beatae Mariae Virginis* (2006), and his large scale *Requiem* first performed in 2008. Tavener explained the essence of this work was contained in the words "Our glory lies where we cease to exist".

Tavener had a penchant for the writing of WB Yeats not least his *To a child dancing in the wind*. The composer admitted he was inspired with the frailty, tenderness, and spiritual transparency of Yeats' poetry, which he considered had "a profound sense of the loss of the sacred and primordial tradition in art".





# BookReviews

Peter Costello



## The ever-changing American Irish

**Becoming Irish American: The Making and Remaking of a People from Roanoke to JFK,**  
by Timothy J. Meagher  
(Yale University Press,  
\$30.00/£25.00 / €29.00)

Mark Holan

**T**his year's fraught US presidential campaigns has have got many Americans wondering what has become of the once powerful 'Irish vote'?

This problem comes into even sharper focus with this recently published history of the Irish American strain by Prof. Timothy J. Meagher. Meagher was once associate professor of history at Catholic University of America and the curator of American Catholic History Collections.

His new book makes something of a contrast with an ill-fated book of 60 years ago by journalist William V. Shannon, which was an epitome of Irish America at the time of John F. Kennedy.

The powerful Irish American political machine – from Tammany in New York to Daley in Chicago – that dominated many American cities up to that day was about to disappear.

Meagher describes JFK's election and martyrdom as the passage from outsider to insider status for Irish American Catholics. But there are limits to "a simple dichotomy between assimilation and ethnic persistence," he writes. Shannon's book, *The American Irish* came out as 1963 turned into 1964. Its concluding chapter about Kennedy had been written, edited, and printed before the assassination in Dallas less than two months earlier.

### Significance

Kennedy's election had been "charged with a special significance for the American Irish," wrote Shannon, then a Washington correspondent. "The winning of the presidency culminated and consolidated more than a century of Irish political activity."

**“While some old stereotypes linger, once familiar shades of green are fading and blending on the contemporary palette”**



President Kennedy greeted by crowds in Dublin 1963

It seemed to wipe away the bitterness and disappointment of Al Smith's 1928 defeat as the first Irish American Catholic presidential candidate. It "removed any lingering sense of social inferiority and insecurity" from immigrants and their offspring, too long caricatured as ditch-diggers and housemaids.

Kennedy, Shannon wrote, was "not Irish in most of the obvious ways. (He was a Harvard graduate without a brogue, whose wealthy father had been US Ambassador to Britain)".

Yet he was "in accord with Irish political experience and with the Irish past in other, more fundamental ways," notably his Catholicism. JFK's combination of characteristics

helped make him the avatar of the American Irish future.

Shannon's finished his book on March 27, 1963, three months before Kennedy's historic stop in Ireland, the first by an American president while in office, though not JFK's first visit to his ancestral homeland.

### Tragedy

This triumph, like the tragedy of November 1963, is also absent from Shannon's book – a copy of which Lyndon Johnson gifted to the American-born Irish President Éamon de Valera during his May 1964 visit to the White House.

The Shannon book was generally well-received by US reviewers, though *The Washington Post* reviewer

suggested that "Despite the emergence of an Irish aristocracy with Kennedy, the assimilation of the common, garden-variety Irish in America remains an unfinished process."

**“As the Irish moved from big city wards to the suburbs, Shannon noted in a new edition of his book that ‘it weakened the old stereotypes of the Irish political boss’”**

The writer astutely observed that Shannon neglected to address this, much less ask why. This meant "the definitive history of the Irish in America is therefore yet to be written."

In attempting to answer the assimilation question, the author described "a waning, yet persistent sentiment" among Irish American Catholics of still being targets of discrimination, even as they

helped set a "path-breaking" example for the success of other marginalised groups.

As the Irish moved from big city wards to the suburbs, Shannon noted in a new edition of his book that "it weakened the old stereotypes of the Irish political boss" and opened the way for new opportunities, which have been realised since the 1960s by politicians, professionals, even "common, garden-variety" Irish Americans.

### Reinvented

In the book to hand Meagher makes a few nods to Shannon, later a US ambassador to Ireland. Irish America has "changed and changed again, invented and reinvented" itself in many ways up to and since Kennedy. The six decades since Dallas have brought "dramatic and fundamental" changes to this high-profile cohort.

"Institutions and alliances which were the very foundation of Irish American Catholic ethnicity have crumbled or withered." Today, more than 31 million Americans claim Irish ancestry, nearly 10% of the population. Like

JFK, many are "not Irish (American) in most of the obvious ways."

**“The definitive history of the Irish in America is always being remade and rewritten”**

But African Americans, LGBTQ people, the non-religiously affiliated, and other groups are exploring their Irish heritage and culture in new and distinctive ways. Among the US electorate, they were (and are) as likely to vote for Donald Trump as for Joe Biden, the second Irish American Catholic president.

While some old stereotypes linger, once familiar shades of green are fading and blending on the contemporary palette. The definitive history of the Irish in America is always being remade and rewritten, no matter the marker of any news event.

**i** Mark Holan is a journalist based in Washington DC. Visit his work at [markholan.org](http://markholan.org)



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.

# Angela Merkel and the mystery of national unity



Chancellor Merkel meets President Putin

**The Chancellor: The Remarkable Odyssey of Angela Merkel,** by Kati Marton (William Collins, €15.40 / £14.99)

Peter Costello

**I**n the politics of recent times the German Chancellor stands out for her major efforts to sustain the unity of Europe. This may well be because her own life grew out of an experience of what happens when nations are divided.

When, in the aftermath of World War II, Germany – an historical unity only since the creation of the modern German Empire in 1871, after the defeat of the French at Sedan – was divided by the Iron Curtain into two states, the Federal Republic of Germany in the west and the Democratic Republic in East Germany.

## Duty

Merkel's father was a Lutheran pastor, and sensed that it was his Christian duty to move to the East to help the people living under the new Communist regime to maintain their historic Christian faith. It was for him a necessary choice, for his family a hard one. The call of duty marked his daughter for life.

But from this childhood a

remarkable woman emerged. What is immediately striking in this book are a few episodes of interest for a reader to whom the too-ings and fro-ings of politics in Germany and Europe are of secondary interest. Among them are the relations Angela Merkel had with, on the one hand Donald Trump, and on the other with Vladimir Putin.

**“Putin met his match. More than merely speaking his language, Angel Merkel had experienced a Russia few heads of state see”**

Neither are men who have much time or respect for women in leadership roles, though Trump's disdain is expressed with his characteristically crude language. They both admire, of course, strong leaders, so for both of them to encounter a strong leader who was female was a jolt to their views of the world.

The effects of the encounters are interesting though. “In Angela Merkel,” Kati Marton writes, “Putin met his match. More than merely speaking his language, Angel Merkel had

experienced a Russia few heads of state see.”

Her trip to Moscow in her early teens to receive a prize in a Russian language competition left a deep impression. There was the huge size of the country as a whole, the heroic quality of Moscow's public buildings. But then there was also the daily regime of over-surveillance. This had provided the immediate model for the strict regime of East Germany she lived under growing up.

She also hitchhiked in Russia as a student, and had the experience of being arrested and made by the police to write an essay on ‘Why I broke the law, even though I have a university degree and know the law’.

The next time she visited Russia, she came as Chancellor. She talked to Putin in his native Russian, heard out his stream of complaints against the West. Then she said: “Look, Vladimir, this is not how the rest of the world sees things. This is not in your interest.”

## Daunting

In Merkel Putin met a woman of education who knew and admired Russian culture and literature in a way he could not. She had a daunting personality.

If Merkel was the only head of state Putin respected, with Trump things were different.

She was warned by his staff not to lecture him, not to have too many details. She was told he had a low attention span. He was “a half-page man”.

But her quiet-spoken authority impressed him nevertheless. Mrs Thatcher had annoyed him; later he said he could “listen to Angela all day”. Chancellor Merkel was a woman who could certainly handle difficult men. She was her father's daughter.

All this is fascinating, and still very relevant to how we are today. But behind her great success as a leader we have still the child of a broken nation, as some saw it. When the East German regime disappeared, there was a choice: let it continue as a separate entity, taking its own time to come to the level of West Germany, or be at once united with the rest of Germany.

Many Irish readers will seize upon this situation as one with great relevance to this island as a whole today. It would be as well if we thought more about the matter of Irish unity, warned by the events in Germany, which led to lasting resentments in the East. We need ourselves to study and understand such models of reunification, and not see our problems as easy to solve, just as was claimed for Brexit.

# A book to enlighten your Lenten reading



Fr Timothy Radcliffe OP speaks at the Synod in Rome. Photo: OSV News

**Why Go to Church? The Drama of the Eucharist,** by Fr Timothy Radcliffe OP (Continuum, £13.99 / €16.50)

Peter Costello

**R**ecently Fr Timothy Radcliffe OP was in Dublin to give the annual Patrick Finn Lecture at St Mary's, Haddington Road. It was an opportunity which many took to hear one of the more influential Catholic theologians of today. It was judged by those who attended to have been a great success.

Those who might wish to continue their encounter with the thoughts of Fr Radcliffe, or perhaps even to encounter him for the first time might like to search out this Lenten book, which comes with a foreword by Dr Rowan Williams, the Church of Wales bishop who is a former Archbishop of Canterbury. (His term ended in 2012.) So the book is a general statement of the nature of the Eucharist that all Christians can come together on.

Last October Pope Francis selected Fr Radcliffe, a former Master of the Dominican Order, to (in the words of America magazine) “set the tone for his Synod on Synodality, which has been under attack in some corners of the Church”.

So he is a man very much of this historic moment in the Church's life. Thus this book will be of some special interest to readers.

Fr Radcliffe sees the Eucharist as a three part drama, which shapes the Christian approach to faith, hope and love – those primary tenets of the faith.

So in this book, conceived as a Lenten book, he examines exactly what it means “to celebrate the Eucharist”. This is an important matter. How disturbing it is to see the few young people who are still taken to Mass, seem to have so little engagement or

understanding of what they see being performed.

In their boredom lies the germ of decay for the Church. So what is being addressed in this book is an important matter, I suspect, for parents, who are in a quandary, expecting the teachers to teach the children, where they feel they are not equipped to do so. This book then may be an asset to many families.

Fr Radcliffe notes that many find the service boring and pointless. This is because it is seen so often outside the content of what appears in scripture about the Last Supper (Luke 22: 7-23) and at the Crucifixion (Mark 15:24, Luke 23:33, John 19:18, Matthew 27:35).

The events of Easter Week so central to the matter are what are being enacted in a dramatic way. This is, in a ritualistic way, the play of salvation. That is the Christian teaching that is being explored in these pages. He attempts to answer the challenge of faith for people today.

Fr Radcliffe lays out his insights in three sections, three acts in fact, of Faith, Hope and Love, which move part by part through that drama.

The querulous query he seems to answer is that which those bored young people we see might pose to their own family: why go to Church? In other departments of their lives they easily become involved in dramas in which a hero struggles, and in the struggle dies for his followers, or for everyone. But to see this in the context of the Eucharist is the matter that Fr Timothy Radcliffe unravels and reveals. Here, he says, as much as in any secular drama, “We are sent on our way, especially in receiving Communion, we are formed as people who are capable of love.”

Fr Radcliffe has left Dublin to return to Blackfriars in Oxford. But he has left Christians in his book insights available to all who care to take them up and read.



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Leisure time

Crossword

Gordius 652

- Across
- 1 Ignited (3)

3 Reporters (11)

8 Disorderly, lawless (6)

9 In twenty-four hours time (8)

10 Of considerable weight (5)

11 Brown shade seen in old photographs (5)

13 Pretty in Scottish dialect (5)

15 A report from a firearm (7)

16 Racecourse in Kildare (7)

20 Straw, leaves etc spread to protect vulnerable plants (5)

21 Bullock (5)

23 A snap (5)

24 Covered area in a monastery suitable for contemplative strolling (8)

25 Dog-like (6)

26 Show, or engage in a protest (11)

27 Garden implement (3)

1		2		3			4			5		6		7
8							9							
10										11				12
						13				14				
15									16				17	
		19				20								
21					22						23			
24										25				
26													27	

Down

- 1 Early dental anaesthetic (8,3)

2 Variety of herb (8)

3 Wobbly desert (5)

4 Variety of Greek drink (7)

5 Midlands county (5)

6 Band of colour (6)
- 7 Stitch together (3)

12 Important ecclesiastic area (11)

13 Besom (5)

14 Immaturity, or a person not quite at adulthood (5)

17 Scold (8)

18 More easily understood (7)

19 Change one's habits greatly for the better (6)
- 22 Sticky substance from trees (5)

23 Location (5)

24 Variety of seafish (3)

SOLUTIONS, FEBRUARY 22

GORDIUS No. 651

Across - 1 Basket case 6 Biro 10 Amber 11 Promotion 12 Pageant 15 Tramp 17 Aria 18 Raid 19 Grant 21 Leakage 23 Swede 24 Scan 25 Ajar 26 Worst 28 Darling 33 Red setter 34 Naive 35 Sure 36 Stonehenge

Down - 1 Bear 2 Submarine 3 Eerie 4 Capon 5 Soon 7 Ibiza 8 Omnipotent 9 Hostage 13 Aide 14 Tankard 16 Crosswords 20 Ascension 21 Leather 22 Gear 27 Rider 29 Apron 30 Lunch 31 Stet 32 Here

Sudoku Corner

521

Easy

4								3
		9	4		7	5		
	7		3		9		6	
5	6						1	7
	4	7		1		3	2	
8	3						9	4
	5		8		2		3	
		3	1		4	2		
7								9

Hard

	7				5	8		
2					8	4		
3					1	2		
	1			6			3	
	9						5	
	8			2			6	
		6	4					7
		1	3					9
		5	8				2	

Last week's Easy 520

4	5	1	3	2	7	6	8	9
6	9	3	4	5	8	2	7	1
2	8	7	9	6	1	4	3	5
1	3	8	2	7	4	9	5	6
7	2	5	6	8	9	3	1	4
9	4	6	5	1	3	7	2	8
3	6	2	8	4	5	1	9	7
5	1	9	7	3	6	8	4	2
8	7	4	1	9	2	5	6	3

Last week's Hard 520

6	5	4	7	2	9	1	3	8
9	7	1	8	4	3	6	5	2
3	8	2	6	5	1	7	4	9
5	2	8	3	1	7	4	9	6
7	1	9	4	6	8	3	2	5
4	6	3	5	9	2	8	1	7
1	3	5	9	8	6	2	7	4
2	9	6	1	7	4	5	8	3
8	4	7	2	3	5	9	6	1



Notebook

Fr Bernard Cotter



# A total ban on funeral eulogies seems cleaner

**It's probably the wrong thing to say,** but I really enjoyed the State funeral of the late John Bruton, RIP. It was an occasion of deep sadness for his family and I did pray for them during the Mass, but I was also moved by the rituals of Church and State, so beautifully executed for us TV viewers.

Three things I noted in particular: the excellent homily and the no-eulogy ban in Meath, the local parish priest presiding at the liturgy and the respect shown to the national flag, compared to that sometimes given to the pall (baptismal garment).

First things first: what an excellent homily Fr Bruce Bradley SJ preached at the Mass, the homily to politicians John himself might have liked to have given. Fr Bruce's words of praise quickly gave way to challenge on the importance of spirituality in national life, even for politicians. I hope the challenge was heard and taken to heart.

**Impressed**

I was also impressed to see how firmly the no-eulogy statute in the Diocese of Meath is adhered to. I gather Bishop Smith instituted the ban; I believe it was a wise



move. The oration at the graveside was appropriate and firmly in the Irish republican tradition. In the church, however, God's Word was paramount, as it should be.

In my neck of the woods, eulogies are permitted, as long as they take place at the start of the Mass. Our diocesan policy states there should be no more than one, lasting no longer than five minutes. But most pastors will not want to get into a fight with the grieving, so they put up with variations on that policy, often witnessing several such talks of various lengths and contents. A total ban often seems cleaner. Well done, Diocese of Meath.

I was also impressed to see

my classmate Fr Patrick O'Connor presiding at the funeral Mass. Sometimes ecclesiastical higher-ups muscle in on such liturgies; I was glad that this did not happen here. The local parish priest is usually best placed for such a ceremony; he 'knows the score'. Bishop Tom's participation in the words of commendation seemed a suitable counter-balance (and didn't he do well: Corkmen often do!).

**Respect**

Lastly, I was impressed with the respect given to the national flag, and compared it with how the pall, the baptismal garment, is sometimes treated. Readers may not be familiar with the latter, but

anyone who views a funeral in the US will recognise this large white garment in which the casket is clothed.

In the US, the placing of the pall takes place at the church door; the family gather round and lovingly drape the body of their loved one in white, as was first done first at their late relative's baptism.

Where the pall has become part of funeral practice in Ireland, varying patterns are seen. The coffin is usually carried to the altar and the pall added there. The pall is then removed there also, even before the commendation, "in case the holy water wets it". And right through the Mass, the pall is a backdrop to other items, a wreath, a photo etc. placed on top.

Compare this with how the national flag was treated in Dunboyne. John Bruton's coffin was wrapped in it when it arrived in the church. Placed before the altar, nothing was placed on top of the flag, no wreath, no photo, no other symbol. The flag stood out, as should the pall.

Congratulations to all whose hard work made this State funeral memorable, instructive and beautiful. May John Bruton rest in peace.

**Lent is a humbling period...**

One Sunday, I got up on the altar and announced that "We have decided..." to make some change or other. I was accosted after Mass: "Who is this 'we' you're talking about?" I had to sheepishly admit that the "we" was just me.

I had used the 'royal we', always a PP's temptation. Another danger in pastoral leadership is to ascribe one's opinions to someone else - like when I wrote that Confirmation was becoming a dead duck in parish life. I failed to take responsibility for my personal opinion. Mea culpa.

No prizes for guessing what I am doing for Lent...



## A bishop in southern India looks to The Little Way Association for vital aid for many suffering from flooding

Bishop Antony Samy of Palayamkottai in south-east India has written to The Little Way Association in the aftermath of severe floods which have ravaged parts of Tamil Nadu including his diocese. He says "Many groups of people, including expectant mothers, children, the disabled, aged and sick have been left in a state of acute distress. Many have lost their employment and daily wages, significantly affecting their food security and health. Households have been particularly badly-hit, losing essential items such as cooking vessels, clothing, livestock, and more.

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Sadly, the mother of these three children has lost her husband. Her home has been severely damaged in the flood, leaving her in a dire situation.



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