

# The Irish Catholic

## LOURDES – 160th ANNIVERSARY

A place of peace and healing Pages 11-22

## MARY McALEESE

Vatican objects to former President  
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# Rural Ireland is dying: priests

## Government plans could undermine communities even further

**Susan Gately**

The National Planning Framework plan currently under discussion by Government could undermine life in rural Ireland a well-known priest-activist has warned, with other priests insisting that rural Ireland is dying as a result of policymakers' neglect.

Fr Harry Bohan told *The Irish Catholic* he believed that the framework was a rehash of earlier plans which did lead to growth but the growth was not spread around.

The Planning Framework plan, which focuses on infrastructural investment over the next 25 years, has been criticised for favouring urban development over small towns and villages.

### Depopulation

In West Donegal, Fr Eddie Gallagher said he sees rural Ireland "dying on its feet" with alarming depopulation, as evidenced by school enrolment figures. He is parish priest of Kilcar which has lost

four teachers. Twenty years ago, he said, 218 children were at Scoil Chartha Naofa, today there are just 118. The nearby Cashel primary school in Glencolmcille had 166, today it has 68. "Meenaneary National School had 58 – now it has 17," Fr Gallagher said.

Fr Gallagher believes there needs to be decentralisation which should be aimed at small towns the size of Donegal for example (current population around 2,600). "If you can put a university or industry in it, that would help the whole hinterland around it," he said.

In Louth, Fr Paul Clayton-Lea is parish priest of the growing village of Talinstown, where he baptises around 50 babies each year. Situated between the M1 and M2 arteries to Dublin, many people make the hour plus commute to work in the capital.

"Some parents of young families that I know of would

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## Papal Nuncio's blessing in Derry



Papal Nuncio to Ireland, Archbishop Jude Thaddeus Okolo, pictured at St Eugene's Cathedral in Derry during a ceremony in which he gave a blessing to babies and children from the parish. Photo: Stephen Latimer

**NUALA O'LOAN**

**Will we vote to protect future generations?**

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**DAVID QUINN**

**Reconciling suffering with a loving God**

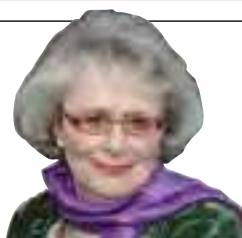
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# Does Pope Francis have a blind spot on abuse?

**T**here is growing disquiet within the Church about Pope Francis' handling of allegations of clerical sexual abuse. Shortly after his appointment, Francis won widespread praise for setting up the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors. It was a bold statement of intent that the Argentine Pontiff was intent on ensuring that the global Church had robust procedures for the safeguarding of minors.

Now, the Pope has allowed that body to go into abeyance and has not yet indicated what he intends to do in the future.

At the same time, Francis sailed into choppy waters recently when he accused people who have made allegations of abuse against a Chilean cleric of "calumny". The Pope did apologise for the hurt and offence that this remark caused and quickly had to send one of the Church's top specialists on abuse to Chile Archbishop Charles Scicluna to investigate.

## Headlines

It was not a good news story for a Church that has often attracted negative headlines for tardiness when it comes to responding to and handling allegations of abuse against clerics.

Now, it has emerged that the Pope had received a letter detailing abuse allegations despite his claim that he



## Editor's Comment Michael Kelly

had no knowledge of the allegations (see page 25). To give Francis the benefit of the doubt, it's possible that he had forgotten about the letter or passed it on to Vatican officials for investigation. It's hard as Pope to keep on top of everything, but he urgently needs to grasp the nettle on this issue to end the perception that he has a blind spot on the issue of abuse.

**“Chaotic attempts to minimise the harm done to children...has done immense damage to the Church's ability to carry out its mission”**

The Church in Ireland and many other countries is now acknowledged to have extremely robust safeguarding procedures. It has been a hard battle, but the Church has slowly reclaimed some moral authority on the issue due to vigilance and rigorous implementation.

But, Francis needs to be careful. All that could change in a heartbeat

– and, so far, the Pope appears unperturbed.

No one who takes these things seriously can be in any doubt that the Catholic Church has learnt painful lessons from the mishandling of past abuse claims. Across Ireland, there is a veritable army of volunteers in parishes and Catholics groups ensuring that stringent child protection policies are implemented and followed to the letter.

If the Church has learnt anything from the child abuse crisis it must be that it cannot go it alone. Chaotic attempts to minimise the harm done to children and the impact on the wider community in the past have not only compounded the abuse but has done immense damage to the Church's ability to carry out its mission.

Any weakening of resolve on this vital issue would be a betrayal of those who have suffered and a kick in the teeth to good Catholics working for authentic renewal in their Church. The Pope must urgently show leadership and re-establish the commission and stop resisting those who say they have been abused by priests and religious.

## Government plans may undermine communities

» Continued from Page 1

be setting out to get to work at 5.30am and returning later in the evening at 6pm or 7pm.

"For young families that is a lot of pressure," he told *The Irish Catholic*.

In the National Planning Framework, Dublin is predicted to grow by 25%. While this will benefit Tallans-

town, Fr Clayton-Lea wants to see more done to encourage people to stay and work in rural areas.

"In justice I think it would be right that the funding should be spread out as fairly as possible so people in rural areas are at least given encouragement to stay where they are because a lot of older people are running farms and

there's not going to be another generation to run them unless there are incentives to [help them] make their homes in the area," he said, adding "and they do want to make their homes in the area."

"If the government don't invest in these rural areas, they will empty them."

Reiterating words of Bishop Jeremiah Newman,

Fr Bohan said he feared for a future where Ireland might be a "prosperous nation, with a favourable balance of trade and little emigration but with its people packed into a few huge cities and the countryside a prairie, haunted by the ghosts of dead towns and villages".

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# Vatican McAleese ban seen as 'wrong but understandable'

## Staff reporter

A prominent theologian and advocate for Church reform has said the Vatican decision to bar former President Mary McAleese from speaking at a conference is "understandable".

However, Dr Massimo Faggioli, Professor of Historical Theology at Villanova University in the US believes that "whoever barred Mary McAleese from taking part in a major international conference on women's rights in the Vatican made a mistake".

It emerged late last week that the organisers of a forthcoming conference in Rome had to move the venue from the Vatican after Cardinal Kevin Farrell objected to Mrs McAleese and two speakers.

## Prejudice

Prof. Faggioli believes that at least some of the suspicion of Mrs McAleese in Rome is rooted in prejudice. "It is clear that a very powerful woman like her annoys some clerics in the Vatican, for many reasons. Some of them are bad reasons, such as sexism, but other reasons are more understandable."

According to Prof. Faggioli, a prominent voice for reform in the Church, some senior officials in the Vatican might "perceive it as unfair

for a powerful politician and stateswoman to use her political visibility in order to push an agenda in matters that are perceived as the internal affairs of the Church".

He cited the examples of other prominent Catholic political figures such as John Kerry in the United States or Roman Prodi in Italy who "have ideas about what is wrong in the Catholic Church – their Church – but they don't use their political visibility to push a theological agenda".

Referring to Pope John Paul II and the former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, Prof. Faggioli pointed out that "there were some differences between Mr Kohl's German Catholicism and John Paul II's view of the Church".

However, he said that Mr Kohl "never tried to lecture the Vatican about theological issues and not because he did not have opinions about Catholicism".

Prof. Faggioli said it is important to point out that former heads of state and prime ministers who are Catholic "are not exactly 'lay Catholics' like all other lay Catholics, and the Church reasonably expects of them a certain *savoir faire*."

He insisted that "Catholic politicians speak with an investiture and legitimacy

that is different from the one of a theologian or an ordinary lay Catholic."

Referring to Mrs McAleese's reaction to the

Synod of Bishops which tackled complex issues facing the family, Prof. Faggioli said "labelling those who did not agree with her as 'conserva-

tive dogmatic theologians' is not what the Vatican expects from a former head of state.

"Having a degree in theology or canon law does not

change this perception that a politician is using his or her political persona to advocate an agenda in the Church," he said.

## Glenamuddy's Ashes 'Drive Thru' to return



Sacristan Bridie McLoughlin, Fr Paddy Mooney PP, and Pastoral Council members Breda Keaveney and Padraic Keady pose outside their church to publicise their 'Drive Thru' Ashes initiative from 8am-9.30am at Glenamuddy Church on Ash Wednesday, February 14. It aims to facilitate people who are sick, advanced in years or with very young children as well as people on their way to work, hospital appointments etc.

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Padua



# Pope's call for 'good readers' refocuses attention on lectors

Susan Gately

People who read at Mass are not reading from a newspaper, they are "proclaiming the word of God" and they need training, Fr Danny Murphy from the National Centre of Liturgy in Maynooth has said. Fr Murphy, told *The Irish Catholic* that parishes and dioceses "need to be facilitating getting people trained" who can then go back and in their turn train others.

He was speaking after Pope Francis called last week for good lectors in church. "We must look for good readers, not those who mutter and nothing is understood. They must be prepared and rehearse before the Mass in order to read well. And this creates a climate of receptive silence," he said at Wednesday's audience.

day's audience.

"The Word is real presence of Christ," said Fr Murphy, Secretary of the Bishops' Council for Liturgy. "When the person proclaims the word of God well, going slowly, knowing what they are doing, the effect is powerful. The reader hasn't stood in the way but has enabled the Spirit to work through them."

For that reason, he said, discernment was needed in selecting readers. It's not a case of "anyone will do without putting [them] through formation."

## Generosity

The Director of the Diocesan Liturgical Resource Centre in Dublin agreed: "Sometimes the pool of people who volunteer is small and it doesn't seem right to turn down

generosity, but going with that has to be some kind of training because some people think you can just stand up and read straightaway without looking at it and preparing it," Fr Pat O'Donoghue told *The Irish Catholic*.

"You'd want your best people to proclaim the word of God," he said, suggesting that parish priests or parish council members should use their "local wisdom in the parish" to select possible readers. Fr O'Donoghue advised Lectors (readers) to prepare their readings a week in advance, and to pray with the readings.

Both the Diocesan Liturgical Resource Centre in Dublin and the National Centre of Liturgy in Maynooth, will provide training for Lectors on request. The Dublin Liturgical Resource centre provides

input on the meaning of scripture as well as coaching on the use of microphones and vocal technique.

## Small staff

"There is a call out for [training] around the country," said Fr Murphy from Maynooth, "but we are a small staff to get around the country, whereas [it would be better] if we have people who are trained [here] and let them go out."

Fr Murphy stressed the need to read slowly. "In proclaiming from the ambo, we must be conscious of the space that sound has to go out to – the back wall – and come back and if it is [read] too quickly, the sounds will crash into each other." Reading is more than a matter of elocution. Lectors need a "realisation that God is

speaking through them, they are an instrument – and then they need a certain amount of techniques".

He pointed out that in times of persecution the Church survived "where there were lay catechists who spoke the word and teased out the Bible".

There is great emphasis on the Word in Protestant churches. By contrast, Catholic lectors tend to read more quickly.

"I think that might be part of the notion that can be around that mass is long so maybe readers feel they don't want to make it longer," commented Fr O'Donoghue, adding: "When you read slowly, you get the opportunity to pray the word as you go along as well as proclaim the word."

## Bishop says schools must impart Christian vision

Rian Wood

While Catholic schools must be inclusive, the Church has a "right and the responsibility to impart the Gospel vision" to students Bishop Fintan Monahan has warned.

Speaking at Mass to mark the conclusion of Catholic Schools Week, the Bishop of Killaloe said the success of the Catholic system is a result of its open and comprehensive nature calling it "inclusive, outward looking, anxious and thoroughly exciting to share the Good News with all the sundry!"

He said that while "other more technocratic paradigms of education might emphasise utility", Catholic education focuses on matters with an emphasis on the "wellness of body, soul, mind and spirit."

## Challenging

Dr Monahan expressed concern about the increasingly challenging times that young people face referencing "the intense competition for places and courses, the struggle with online bullying, substance abuse, threat of suicide, the pressure to conform in so many ways and the lure of the many pleasures of the world".

The bishop reminded people that "we have the right and the responsibility to impart the Gospel vision as gift and invitation, not imposition, of course. We do this with joy and delight and a sense of pride and privilege."

## Distribution of ashes outside Starbucks – not yet

In New York, some priests distribute ashes outside Starbucks on Ash Wednesday. But the priest behind Confessions in Skycourt mall, Shannon, while welcoming the US initiative, has no plans to follow their lead. However at the chapel in the Skycourt Town Centre, ashes will be available all day on Ash Wednesday. The ashes will be blessed at the 7.20am prayer service, and distributed during the morning and lunchtime masses. "If you call in outside those times it'll be self service for the ashes, which is totally allowed," said Fr Tom Ryan.

## Strong appetite for change in Killala diocese

Almost 200 people gathered for the launch of a diocesan listening process in Killala diocese last week. 'Placing hope in faith' will gather insights through a survey, to be widely distributed, in January and February. "We are trying to survey people, from those who are very engaged to those not engaged at all," said Moderator, Fr Brendan Hoban. The proposals which emerge from the Listening Process will be put to a 300-delegate Assembly in June, where the proposals will be voted on.



First year students from Coláiste Pobail Bheanntaí (Bantry Community College) were all smiles after making St Brigid's crosses to mark her feast day last week.

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## Homeless charity to expand

Peter McVerry Trust, the national housing and homeless charity, has announced plans to double its own Housing First work this year.

The charity, which was an early adopter of the internationally recognised approach to ending homelessness that focuses on providing both housing and intensive case management simultaneously, is set to expand its delivery of the model outside of Dublin to include counties Kildare and Limerick in 2018.

## Flagship

Pat Doyle, CEO of Peter McVerry Trust, said: "In 2018 the charity will mark 35 years in existence and to coincide with that occasion we will expand our flagship Housing First programme by a further 35 individuals. This means the programme will expand from 25 to 60 participants."

He added that the charity hopes by the end of 2018 that they will have a cohort of 10 individuals in Limerick and a further 8 in Kildare.

It plans to target specific groups, such as those exiting State care and other institutions including hospitals and prisons.



# Healthcare and abortion: the ongoing studies

Some years ago, I attended a medical conference in London at which Prof. Joel Brind spoke. He has the chair in biology and endocrinology at New York's Baruch College, and he is the leading exponent of the thesis that there is a link between breast cancer and induced abortion. Prof. Brind spoke as a scientist who had devoted much time and research to his subject.

What I took from the lecture was that the onset of pregnancy increases the supply of the hormone estrogen, and thus lactational breast lobules begin to multiply. If a pregnancy is then terminated, the hormonal lobules are cut off mid-stream, as it were, and this could be a source of subsequent cancer cells. Moreover, there was a statistical correlation between the rise of breast cancer and the frequency of abortion in the United States.

I sought a second opinion by contacting a leading breast cancer consultant at London's Marsden Hospital. He dismissed Prof. Brind's research and said it would be irresponsible to give it publicity. It was wrong to go around frightening women with a theory that was not accepted by the medical establishment.

## Not endorsed

It is indeed the case that Joel Brind's abortion-breast cancer link is not endorsed by the medical establishment: the prestigious *American Journal of the National Cancer Institute* says the research is marred by "selection bias". And yet according to an article in the current edition of the *Human Life Review*, it



Mary Kenny



remains an ongoing subject for enquiry. There are now 110 studies, world-wide, on the possible abortion-breast cancer link: of these, 81 (73.6%) find that there may be a link between abortion and breast cancer, while 29 (26.4%) do not establish such a link.

**“There are now 110 studies, world-wide, on the possible abortion-breast cancer link”**

The jury is still out, but while the studies supporting Brind are considerable in number, the mainstream American, Canadian and British cancer institutes still affirm there is no connection.

I agree that health anxieties of any kind should be treated with circumspection, and the abortion-breast cancer thesis should never be used as a polemic or a scare tactic. It should be pointed out that there are studies which support it, and there are studies which deny it.

Besides which, women who have never been pregnant, or who are virgins, are also at risk of breast cancer. But there's a medical question just the same.

The *Human Life Review* – published in New York and meticulously careful about citing data – refers to two other issues relating to women's health and abortion. There are 139 studies which find that induced abortion increases the risk of prematurity and low birth rate in subsequent births, and 22 published studies find a link between abortion and depression.

Interestingly, a pro-choice feminist, the Canadian Punam Kumar Gill, has brought these topics together in a documentary called *Hush*, which examines whether legal abortion has adverse health risks for women.

Medical studies differ. All should be examined fairly. But in light of the claim that abortion is “health care”, then the data should be, surely, open to discussion – not hushed.

## Snub of former President is wrong

The apparent exclusion of former President Mary McAleese from speaking at the Vatican on International Women's Day seems to me to be a public relations disaster.

It also looks like a snub to a woman who has held the office of the Eighth President of Ireland, and should be accorded some dignity.

With the Vatican there are always

wheels within wheels, and you may not know what is going on until decades later. But it seems as though the Irish-American Cardinal Kevin Farrell thinks that Mrs McAleese is something of a loose cannon on LGBT issues.

She certainly speaks with a mother's protective passion to defend her gay son. The Vatican doesn't have to agree with her point of view by allowing her to speak.

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# Ireland at the crossroads: future generations?

There are a lot of questions about the forthcoming abortion referendum and the country's response to it.

Perhaps the first question is: does everyone know what the Eighth Amendment actually says? An important question, when the people are about to vote about whether it stays or is gone.

It's not just about the right to life of the unborn child, rather it recognises the complexity in the situations which may evolve in the course of a human life. It says: "The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right."

So, the first question for the people of Ireland must be whether the country would be better served by a consti-

## Nuala O'Loan The View



tution which recognises and affirms the right to life of both mother and child, or whether the child's right to life is to be capable of being extinguished as a consequence of a positive response to the repeal the Eighth campaign. Therein lies the real question. The place where an unborn child should be safest is in its mother's womb. Will the people of Ireland decide that there is to be no safe place for an unborn child?

That is the primary question for the people of Ireland. No one knows at this stage what any law permitting abortion might say.

In Britain, currently a child can be aborted up to 24 weeks

of gestation, or right up to birth if the mother's life is at risk or the baby has a serious disability. Babies are routinely aborted because they have cleft palates or because they have Down syndrome or even because they are little girls or boys and the mother does not want a child of that sex.

Normally, sex-selective abortions are carried out on baby girls, because there are societies in which boys, for a variety of cultural reasons are seen as preferable to girls. Such abortions should not happen, but they do.

Now there is a campaign to extend the right to abortion right up to birth.

Abortions happen there,



and would happen here for a myriad of reasons: because that child is surplus to the requirements of that particular mother, because it is not the 'right' kind of child, or it is not convenient, now, to carry the child safely through pregnancy, or perhaps because the baby has a condition which means that the mother should be able to decide to terminate its life.

To describe it thus is not to minimise the distress of any woman who is unable to bear the reality of pregnancy but to state the facts baldly.

**“If Ireland as a country decides it wants to abandon the Eighth Amendment, who is going to carry out the consequential abortions?”**

Does Ireland wish to be a country which provides care and compassion for both mother and children in these circumstances, or one which says the life of the child in the womb has no value, and can be terminated?

Whatever happened in the past, and whatever criticisms we may rightly make of the culture of the past, we have to recognise that killing babies before they are born may seem to some to be an easier option than caring for

them until they can care for themselves, but it isn't.

At least for the little child in the womb it is a painful and terrible end to a very short life no matter how that is achieved.

And if a baby is born living after an abortion, as happens, will he or she be left to die, uncuddled, unloved, unwanted.

The second question might be if Ireland as a country decides it wants to aban-

there would be a right of conscientious objection. So it was at first – then gradually, all that changed. Now in Britain medical practitioners are only allowed to refuse to engage personally with the removal of the baby from the womb, the actual killing of the unborn child. They must do everything else.

### Medical practice

For the nurse who chooses to go into obstetrics and gynaecology because it was an area of medical practice which is life-affirming, and wonderful, there is now an obligation to participate indirectly in the killing of the baby in the womb.

People have lost their jobs and been unable to apply for jobs because their conscience tells them that it is wrong to kill the child in the womb.

We know that in England and Wales doctors and nurses leave the country to practice elsewhere, rather than be forced to engage with that which they believe to be wrong.

**“Doctors, nurses, pharmacists and GPs do not become medical professionals to kill. They become medical professionals to care”**

We know too that there are those whose engagement with the process of abortion



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# will we vote to protect



is not voluntary, but a matter of holding onto a job.

Last month I introduced into Parliament a Conscientious Objection (Medical Activities) Bill aimed at pro-

viding protection for those who are unable for reasons of conscience to participate in abortion, in the destruction of embryos under the Human Fertilisation and Embryology

Act and the withdrawal of treatment at the end of life. Welcomed by some, it was roundly rejected by others who said that they fear that the NHS will not be able to

provide the services required. The Bill is now making its way through Parliament.

The dilemma seems to come down to this – those who would provide abortions

may provide some protection for conscience, yet force people to do things which they hold to be wrong, such as telling somebody else to take part in an abortion. It cannot be right to make people do things they believe to be wrong.

**“There is surely an obligation on everyone to talk about what it actually means – the termination of the life of a little baby”**

If I, in conscience, cannot abort a baby then I will be unable to tell someone else to do it. If I do delegate the carrying out of the act to someone else, I do not escape moral responsibility, and I will know that.

Doctors and nurses are not functionaries or robots who will carry out any form of treatment directed. Rather, at each moment of the day they

are making moral judgments about the care and treatment of patients.

No civilised state should require medical practitioners to act against their conscience in matters of life and death. In these circumstances it is vitally important that every person exercises their right to vote in the coming referendum.

For me it is a matter of conscience too. It would be wrong to stand by and not vote, not attempt to influence the national debate.

So, as the referendum campaign gets underway, there is surely an obligation on everyone to talk about what it actually means – the termination of the life of a little baby, the killing of a child in the womb, and to do everything they can to protect Ireland's future little boys and girls, and to allow them to live the lives and make the contribution for which God formed them in the womb.

This is the most vital question Ireland has faced or will face. Will it protect all its children?

## These POWERFUL billboards are making a huge impact. Please help us to do more.



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or CALL 01 873 0465 to donate to this crucial campaign right now and help save lives by saving the 8th! May God bless you for your generosity.

#SAVE THE 8TH





# Green party Cllr tries to censor pro-life billboards

Chai Brady

The Green Party have claimed a pro-life group's billboards which say one in five babies are killed by abortion in Britain are "untruthful".

A war of words sparked between the two groups after Dublin North Inner City Cllr Ciaran Cuffe publicly lodged a complaint to the Advertising Standards Authority of Ireland (ADAI). This led to the Savethe8th pro-life campaigners accusing the Green Party counsellor of attempted censorship.

The billboard says, "In Britain, 'Limited' Abortion kills 1 in 5 Babies. Don't let that happen here" and features the image of a baby.

Spokesperson for Savethe8th Niamh Uí Bhrian said it was essential the public receive accurate information.

"In this debate, it is essential that the public has access to the facts about the conse-



Savethe8th campaigners at the launch of their national billboard campaign.

quences of the decision they are being asked to take. We are being asked to endorse a UK style abortion regime, and the facts about abortion in the

UK are therefore very relevant to the debate," she said.

"Mr Cuffe's attempt to censor our message, which will not succeed, is utterly shame-

ful," she added.

However Cllr Cuffe said the message is "untruthful" and that the image of a baby carried with the billboard is misleading as it "suggests that fetuses or embryos are babies which is not the case in the vast majority of cases". He added that he has made a formal complaint to the ADAI saying the billboard breaches the Code of Standards for

Advertising, Promotional and Direct Marketing in Ireland.

## Campaign

Savethe8th launched their billboard campaign last week. It includes another poster featuring Joseph Cronin, a boy from Donegal with Down syndrome, with the caption: "In Britain 90% of babies with Down syndrome are aborted. Don't let that happen here".

## Repeal places power in politicians hands – PLC

Repealing the Eighth Amendment would give politicians "exclusive power" in relation to future legislation on abortion, according to a Pro-Life campaign spokesperson.

Caroline Simons, the legal consultant to the Pro Life Campaign, said that the public are being asked to trust politicians who "change their mind on a whim".

Speaking at a conference in Dublin she said: "What the referendum to repeal the Eighth Amendment is concerned with is not any specific legislation that the Government may have in mind but instead it's about handing power to politicians to decide in future who should be deemed worthy of having their life protected in law and who should not."

She said that it was "not credible" to separate the referendum and legislating for abortion on demand.

"The two issues are inextricably linked. It is not credible for politicians to say they are in favour of repeal but against abortion on demand," Ms Simons said, adding that regardless of a person's position on abortion the removal of the Eighth Amendment "would result in abortion on demand in the short to medium term".

## THE QUESTION IS HOW TO THRIVE, NOT SURVIVE.



This new edition of *Tomorrow's Parish* sets out the priorities for the parish as the Church enters a new phase of both challenge and opportunity, particularly highlighting the role of the family with the celebration of the World Meeting of Families in Ireland.

Donal Harrington's book is for anyone who has an interest in the future of the Church. It will be of particular importance to those involved in parish ministry and parish pastoral councils, offering a fundamental resource for their formation and organisation in a new context.



Caroline Simons (left) alongside Cora Sherlock speaking at a press conference held by the Prolife Campaign. Photo: John McElroy

## Lack of consultation grinds GPs gears

Members of Ireland's largest association of GPs said they were "outraged" by the lack of engagement from the Minister for Health in relation to proposed abortion legislation, which would make it a GP led service.

"The NAGP (National Association of General Practitioners) strongly objects to the assumption that this will be a GP led

service. Its members are outraged that there has been no consultation," the association of 2,000 GPs said in a statement.

Representative Dr Andrew Jordan said on RTE's Morning Ireland that some GPs were concerned whether conscientious objection would feature in legislation.

However, (NAGP) were told by Minister Simon Harris that there would be

grounds for conscientious objection in any abortion legislation, which would potentially allow GPs to decide whether to provide terminations at their practices.

Dr Jordan added that the NAGP do not want to influence the result of the referendum in any way, and that he could not speak for the organisation in relation to their stance on the issue.



# Finding God in the midst of pain and suffering



Suffering is the flipside of love, writes **David Quinn**

Everyone at some point in their lives has to confront the awesome reality of suffering. It may come in the form of ill health, job loss or the breakup of a marriage. These things are bad when they happen to us personally but are often even worse when they happen to those closest to us, especially when we watch a child go through terrible challenges, or worse, when a child dies.

For all of us suffering is hard to endure, but for an atheist it is fairly easy to explain; in a random, purposeless universe bad things happen and we simply have to learn to live with that.

But for me, I cannot accept that as the final answer. I do not believe everything came from nothing, which is ultimately what an atheist must believe. The idea that nothing made everything is for me far less plausible than the idea of a Creator.

This does not mean, however, that the existence of suffering is not a profound challenge for religious believers. We Christians still must ask ourselves how a good God can let awful things happen? This is the age-old question, and frankly, there is no absolutely comprehensive and satisfactory answer to it that I have ever come across. But there are indications of a satisfactory answer.

## Choice

One is that God gave us free will, meaning people can choose to do good or bad things. When people do bad things, the price will often be paid in suffering, either the suffering inflicted on others by the bad deed, or by the evil-doer on themselves by that same deed, or by many such deeds. How many bad people are happy?

This doesn't explain physical suffering, however, the suffering caused by something like cancer, for example. Why did God create a world in which cancer exists? This is a completely



legitimate question to ask, and as I say, I have never seen a truly satisfactory answer to it. It may have to wait until we are face-to-face with God ourselves.

In the meantime, the challenge is to find ways of coping with pain, of tracing it to its sources, of seeking ways to learn from it and become better as a result of it, rather than bitter due to it.

One of the profoundest meditations on suffering I have ever come across is, curiously enough, *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley.

In his futuristic novel, Huxley imagines a world in which suffering has been more or less eliminated. How has this been accomplished? The answer is by removing all strong attachments. In *Brave New World* there is no politics because politics can unleash strong, dangerous passions. There is no religion either because religion can also unleash strong, dangerous passions.

**“We suffer most when something bad happens to those we care about most”**

Above all, there are no familial ties and no love. We suffer most when something bad happens to those we care about most. We might feel regret when we read about how the loved one of a stranger has died, but it does not compare with the pain we feel when something awful happens to someone close to us.

If we love no-one then

we have gone a long way towards immunising ourselves against the suffering of others. This is why the family has been abolished in *Brave New World*. The only ties people in this world have are light, casual friendships.

As for physical suffering, in *Brave New World* euthanasia is there for anyone who is suffering from an incurable illness.

Pope Benedict, echoing Huxley and many others, has observed that in order to eliminate suffering, the first thing that has to go is love. He has written: “Anyone who really wanted to get rid of suffering would have to get rid of love before anything else, because there can be no love without suffering, [love] always demands an element of self-sacrifice... it will always bring with it renunciation and pain.”

He states: “Anyone who has inwardly accepted suffering becomes more mature and more understanding of others, becomes more human. Anyone who has consistently avoided suffering does not understand other people; he becomes hard and selfish.”

Why does consistently avoiding suffering make us hard and selfish? It is because one of the best ways to lead a life without any pain is to avoid becoming too close to anyone. In that way we are less likely to feel pain when someone else is feeling pain.

## Selfish people

Suffering can make us bitter at the world, but it can

more inclined to help them because we know what they are going through.

The mere fact that we feel pain when someone else suffers is almost certainly because we love that person and it is that love which draws us out of ourselves and make us less selfish. The best response to the suffering of others will always be a triumph of love.

**“Even in a world without physical suffering, we will still witness our loved ones do stupid or selfish things”**

In the end, God prefers that we become better, more loving people than that we have a life of ease, much as we might want that. Love and suffering are two sides of the same coin because even in a world without

physical suffering, we will still witness our loved ones do stupid or selfish things that inflict pain on themselves and the people around them.

We immunise ourselves against that by not loving them and thereby we become hard. We become better people by finding a way to make them better people. Suffering is horrible, but it is also the price of love and it can make us more loving, because more empathetic, more likely to help others.

Huxley shows us a world in which suffering has been almost eliminated, but it is not really a human world at all, because no-one loves anyone else, and that is inhuman.

**i** David Quinn's new book is *How we Killed God* (and other tales of modern Ireland) from Currach Press. [www.currach.ie](http://www.currach.ie)

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# WMOF2018 catechesis launches in five languages



Chai Brady

The catechesis for the World Meeting of Families 2018 is now available on the Vatican's website in five languages.

On the Feast of the Lord's Presentation in the Temple the catechesis was posted in Italian, English, Spanish, French and Portuguese.

There will be seven catechises, one for each month leading up to the WMOF18.

Each of them will be accompanied by musical itineraries and videos of music which are built around the Gospel narrative of the loss of the 12-year-old Jesus and his recovery in the Temple.

There will be threads woven between the text of *Amoris Laetitia* – which inspires the Dublin meeting – and the unique story of the Holy Family of Nazareth that reveal how timely and prophetic the proclamation of the Gospel of the family is, according to the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life.



Fr Jim Fegan, diocesan coordinator, thanks Bishop Brennan, clergy and faithful for their devotion during the short stay of the Holy Family Icon, at the Church of the Assumption, Bride Street, Wexford.

Cardinal Kevin Farrell, Ireland's highest ranking prelate, is in charge of the WMOF18 and explained the seven cat-

echesis by saying: "We start from a concrete look at today's families (first), indicating the relevance of the word of God

which can illuminate the family's daily life at home (second) to reach the great dream that God has for every family (third), even where fragility and weakness seem to break it (fourth). All this makes the family generate a new culture in the world, that of life (fifth), of hope (sixth), and of joy (seventh). Each cateche-

sis – he added – opens with a prayer and concludes with some questions that may be shared in the family or in the ecclesial community."

The catechesis can be found at <https://www.worldmeeting2018.ie/en/Connect-With-Us/Blog/International-Catecheses-Released!-Click-here>

## Parish Pancake Party at Prosperous!

Susan Gately

Bishop Denis Nulty will be flipping pancakes at a party at the primary school in Prosperous on Shrove Tuesday, February 13.

"There are two reasons for the party – we're preparing to start our parish conversations on Faith and Family over the Sundays in Lent, following the course provided by the WMOF and we thought we'd like to have a launch for that," Fr Bill Kemmy, curate at Prosperous told *The Irish Catholic*. "But then the party is an event of itself as well, a chance to celebrate families together. Shrove Tuesday is something that people really do mark and celebrate."

At the pancake party, which runs from 6.30pm, music and dance will be provided by the local schools and Bishop Denis Nulty is expected to be flipping pancakes and handing out Valentine vouchers.

The 'Faith and Family' *Amoris* conversations begin on Sunday, February 18, and run for the six weeks of Lent. "Like the World Meeting of Families, the course is for family and everyone is a family whether you're a father and mother, a child, or an auntie or an uncle – it's for everyone and everyone is welcome," Sarah O'Brien from the Prosperous *Amoris* team said.

To highlight the value of this course, the main 11.30am mass in Prosperous has been moved to 10.30am. The 'conversations' will run from 11.30am to 1.00pm for the adults, while the children enjoy parallel programmes built around workshops in art, music, dance and drama.

"So for example, the drama is going to be based on the six faces of the *Amoris* Cube," Declan O'Brien said. "We're going to act them out, so the older children will do that maybe differently to the younger children and so on, because we thought that some families wouldn't be able to go if they had no-one to mind the children."

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## Amoris Training Day empowers participants

Susan Gately

'Enthusiastic' and 'committed' were some of the words chosen to sum up the feelings of delegates at the end of a diocesan training day on the *Amoris* 'Let's Talk Family – let's be family' course. Over one hundred representatives of parishes in the Kildare and Leighlin diocese attended the day at St Patrick's, Carlow College on January 27.

Early in the day, representatives shared with each other the initiatives that had already been undertaken in their parishes in view of WMOF18 from displaying the icon and candles, to blessings of pets, cars, families and – in rural areas – farm machinery.

But for many, concerns remained. "Is Pope Francis coming?" was a frequent question. Some voiced the concern that the lead up to the WMOF would only impact "the usual suspects" and concerns over the challenge of involving young people. A priest spoke of being led by the Holy Spirit to begin Eucharistic Adoration in his parish and how 30 people had immediately signed up for it.

In the afternoon, Fr John Cummins and Anne Marie Grant acted out a typical session of the *Amoris* programme for the delegates – playing the DVD clips, facilitating buzz and discussion sessions and taking down feedback. Afterwards delegates expressed their new enthusiasm and sense of empowerment to deliver the 'conversations' at parish level.

**Please contact World Meeting of Families correspondent Chai Brady with photos, news or articles relating to your parish or diocese's WMOF2018 preparations and events for inclusion in the weekly update:**

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# Lourdes – a place of quiet miracles



**T**his year marks the 160th anniversary of when Bernadette Soubirous announced to fellow villagers in the French town of Lourdes that she was experiencing visions of the Mother of God. An understandably sceptical local community at first didn't believe the girl who would go on to be known the world over as St Bernadette of Lourdes.

Today, Lourdes is one of the most prominent sites of pilgrimage across the world. Tens of thousands of Irish people go there every year to experience the transformative power of the shrine.

Lourdes is a place of miracles – many people who were suffering from chronic or terminal illnesses have reported that they were cured while there – and a place where people find consolation and the fortitude to keep going.

Perhaps, the true essence of Lourdes are the countless small miracles that happen there on a daily basis. Time and again one will meet people who come to Lourdes



expecting a physical cure, and find instead peace and serenity.

One pilgrim reflected recently on his experience of knowing Lourdes to be a place where those who arrive fit and able are often those who leave the most transformed having experienced their need of God.

Lourdes is above all associated with the sick and the unwell – it's for this reason that the Feastday of Our Lady of Lourdes is also World Day for Prayer for the Sick – a celebration that assures people experiencing illness that they are central to the concerns of the Christian community.

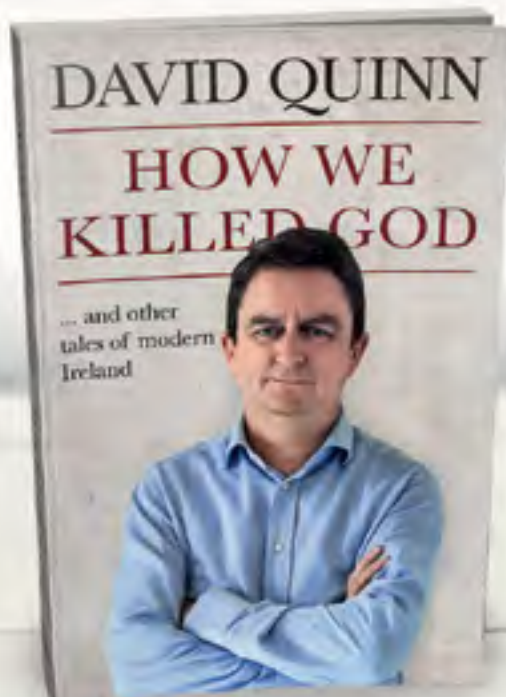
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# More than just a place, Lourdes is a source of transformation



The Assumption of Mary is represented above an altar in the Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary in Lourdes.



Caregivers push pilgrims at the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes.



Lourdes today.



Colm Fitzpatrick

In our modern day, the word 'Lourdes' often evokes imagery of the Virgin Mary's apparitions, but the historical, geographical and social context is usually excluded from the imagination. What exactly is the history of the place where a young Bernadette Soubirous experienced the Marian visions and how did the area develop?

Before the year 1858, Lourdes was a sleepy market town known largely as a place where mountaineers on their way to Gavarnie stopped for supplies. It was situated at the foot of the Pyrenees, and is part of the Hautes-Pyrénées department in the Occitanie region in south-western France. The town was renowned for the Chateau fort de Lourdes, a fortified castle, which often provided protection against foreign forces throughout its history.

After the demolition of the parish of Saint Pierre in the 12th Century, it came to light that at the foot of the citadel stood an early pagan temple dedicated to the gods of water. This was replaced by an early Christian Church in the 5th Century which was later destroyed by a fire. The fortification that nowadays overlooks Lourdes was also developed by the Visigoths, Franks and Saracens. According to one legend the name Lourdes comes from the name of a Saracean leader who converted to Christianity and was given the name Lorus.

The Roman stronghold became the residence of the Counts of Bigorre in the 9th Century and was eventually given to England. However, in 1405, during the Hundred Years War, Charles VI eventually captured the town from the English. It was then sacked by the Huguenot troops during the religious wars of the 16th Century, and by 1607, Lourdes finally became part of the Kingdom of France. However, its emphasis as a military and state stronghold was overturned following the Marian apparitions, by which its spiritual history began.

## Apparitions

In 1858, the young Bernadette Soubirous experienced 18 visions of a lady who introduced herself as the 'Immaculate Conception', soon to be identified as the Virgin Mary.

At the time of the apparitions, the naturally occurring grotto lay outside the town, on common ground which was used by the villagers for pasturing animals, collecting firewood, and as a rubbish tip. The lady always appeared in one place, in a small niche above the main cavity of the grotto. The terrain of the apparitions was not inconsequential, as the vision gave instructions to drink water from the spring that was close by, to build a



Veronica wipes the face of Jesus in this representation of the sixth Station of Cross at the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes. Photos: CNS

chapel, and to have people come to the area in procession.

These instructions were instrumental in the subsequent development of the grotto.

The grotto and the land surrounding it was eventually purchased by a local priest, who immediately began modifying the area to make it suitable for visitors. The first of the churches also started be constructed which is now known as the Crypt.

In 1864, Joseph Hugues Fabisch was tasked to create a statue of Our Lady although he decided to conform to a more orthodox and traditional representation of the Virgin Mary, making her taller and older than what Bernadette had described.

In 1866, two years after the first local pilgrimage from Loubajac, France, a railway was built connecting Lourdes to the rest of the country and in 1874, the first international pilgrims arrived from Belgium.

**“Many of the apparitions have been compared to other visions of a similar nature”**

Today, people come from around the world to pray at the sanctuaries and visit the important sites related to St Bernadette's life and her 18 Marian apparitions. Many pilgrims also take home a bottle of water from the Massabielle grotto, where Mary showed St. Bernadette a dirty spring and asked her to drink from it.

Thirty-five water taps to the right of the spring enable pilgrims to drink the water. About 400,000 people annually immerse themselves in the water in the shrine baths and the seriously sick, in particular, wait in line for hours to reach the baths inside the chambers near the grotto. Others slide their fingers and run their hands along its damp walls smoothed by years of touching.

They also rub scarves, rosaries and written prayer attentions in the walls hoping that their prayers for Mary's intervention will be heard, and that Faith will be restored. A plaque above the 35 water spouts connected to the spring says: "Wash your face and ask God to purify your heart."

The evening rosary procession, in which pilgrims hold candles, recite the rosary and sing 'Ave Maria' while slowly processing around the sanctuaries' grounds, is a popular ritual at Lourdes. On the eve of February 11, at the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes and the World Day of the Sick, tens of thousands of pilgrims take part in the procession.

Although Mary did not specifically tell St. Bernadette in the apparitions to welcome the sick to Lourdes, the city has become a centre for those who seek healing. Many of the sick pilgrims stay at Accueil Notre-Dame, where they can be treated by a doctor.

The Sanctuaries of Our Lady of Lourdes are nestled tightly within the city. The churches are carved out of the Pyrenees Mountains, stacked above and below the grotto. Outside St Michael's Gate – the pathway connecting the sanctuaries to the rest of the city – narrow, coalescing streets are filled with shops selling Catholic trinkets.

## Intercession

The Catholic Church recognizes as miracles 69 cures attributed to Mary's intercession at Lourdes. The first recognized miracle was of Catherine Latapie, 39, who prayed alongside Bernadette on March 1, 1858, while the series of apparitions was still in progress. She suffered from paralysis of her right hand, caused two years earlier by a fall from a tree, however, after washing her hand in the water, her fingers began to move.

Many of the apparitions have been compared to other visions of a similar nature. For example, only a few kilometres away from Lourdes, some shepherds guarding their flocks in the mountains observed a vision of a ray of light that guided them to the discovery of a statue of the Virgin Mary. Two attempts were made to remove the statue to a more prominent position but each time it disappeared and returned to its original location. A small chapel was built in light of this event.

Similarly, in the early 16th Century a young 12-year-old girl apparently received a vision of the Virgin Mary near the spring at Garaison.

In one word then, the history of Lourdes can be described as "transformation", whereby a militaristic terrain became the place of a vision of peace.



# A brief life, lived faithfully



## Colm Fitzpatrick explores the short and remarkable life of St Bernadette

**A** quirky and curious pub question that may raise a few eyebrows is: "Who is the first saint to be photographed?" The answer, believe it or not, is St Bernadette Soubirous, the renowned visionary of Lourdes, whose picture was taken in 1860.

But behind this black and white photo lies a much more colourful story; one that describes the short life of a young poor French girl who encountered the Mother of God.

Born in Lourdes on January 7, 1844, Bernadette Soubirous was the first of nine children of François and Louise, a miller and his wife. Four of Bernadette's siblings died in their infancy, while she herself contracted cholera and several other illnesses as a child, being left with serious asthma throughout her life.

As the industrial revolution took hold, her father was forced to rent a smaller mill, and eventually driven to become a labourer, while her mother worked as a cleaner and Bernadette stayed at home to look after her siblings.

### Prison cell

By 1857, the family's poverty had left them living rent-free in a single room that was once a prison cell deemed too unsanitary for even prisoners.

As a result of the family's financial struggles and her frequent sickness, Bernadette missed the opportunity for a thorough education; largely unable to read or write, she knew only a little basic French – she spoke the local dialect Bigourdan – and could not attend Catechism classes so could not make her First Holy Communion with her peers.

By early 1858, however, she had begun preparations for her First Communion, and was attending as best she could a day school run by the



Bernadette Soubirous in 1861 and, above, her remains.

On March 25, during the 16th visitation, she asked the lady her name and was greeted with a smile. She repeated the question three more times and finally heard the lady say, "I am the Immaculate Conception". She saw the Blessed Virgin Mary two more times in 1858: on the Wednesday after Easter, and on the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

Although many of the townsfolk believed in her visions civil authorities tried to frighten her into retracting the accounts but she refused to retract her story. Church and civil officials rigorously interviewed her, but the accounts remained consistent.

**“The drama of the apparitions and the attention they generated contrasted sharply with the quiet cloistered life Bernadette now chose to live”**

After the Church authorities confirmed the authenticity of the apparitions in 1862, she returned to the hospice school where she had learned to read and write, primarily to remove herself from the unwanted attention she was receiving. On July 29, 1866, with 42 other candidates, she took the religious habit of a postulant under the Mistress of Novices Sr Marie Therese Vauzou. The Mother Superior gave her the name Marie-Bernarde in honour of Bernadette's godmother Bernarde, with whom Bernadette had stayed.

The drama of the apparitions and the attention they generated contrasted sharply

with the quiet cloistered life Bernadette now chose to live, spending the rest of her years in the convent working as an infirmiry assistant and later a sacristan.

During her time as a nun, she frequently suffered from ill health, but despite this adversity she never complained, and was renowned in the convent for humility and obedience.

Indeed, on one occasion a nun asked her if she had temptations of pride because she was favoured by the Blessed Mother. "How can I?" she answered quickly. "The Blessed Virgin chose me only because I was the most ignorant."

She would refer to herself as the "stupid one" and often experienced feeling of unworthiness, although this only increased the magnitude of humility attributed to her.

On many occasions the Convent gave consent for senior clergy to meet and interview Bernadette. Although this was exhausting and repetitive, she answered the questions graciously.

The perennial infirmities that had overshadowed her since she was a child began to eventually take their toll, forcing her to remain bed-ridden for months at a time. It was discovered that she had contracted tuberculosis, and she eventually died of her long-term illness at the age of 35 in the Sainte Croix (Holy Cross) Infirmary of the Convent of Saint-Gildard on April 16, 1879.

Even on her deathbed, Bernadette, while suffering intense pain, kept with the Virgin Mary's admonition of "penance, penance, penance" and proclaimed "all this is good for Heaven!" Her last words were: "Blessed Mary, Mother of God, pray for me. A poor sinner, a poor sinner."

Sr Nathalie Portat was present during Bernadette's last day and described how Bernadette was tortured by physical agony and asked for those nearby to pray for her soul.

**“On one occasion a nun asked her if she had temptations of pride because she was favoured by the Blessed Mother. ‘How can I?’ she answered”**

Following her death, with the permission of civil authorities, her coffin was transferred to the crypt of St Joseph in the confines of the convent where she had spent her later years. She was exhumed numerous times following her death and it was noted that her body appeared to be incorrupt. This was one of the miracles later cited to support her canonisation.

In 1923 Pope Pius XI published a decree on the heroic nature of the virtues of the Venerable Sister Marie-Bernard Soubirous. It stated: "This life can be summed up in three sentences: Bernadette was faithful to her mission, she was humble in glory, she was valiant under trial."

Beatified in 1925 and canonised in 1933, St Bernadette is the patroness of illness, poverty, Lourdes itself, shepherdeses and people ridiculed for their piety.

Her story is a touching one, which denotes the struggling life of an incredible woman, who in the face of suffering held on strongly to that dazzling light she had witnessed as a young girl.

Sisters of Charity and Christian Instruction from Nevers.

On February 11 she was tasked with collecting firewood with her sister Marie-Toinette and a friend, Jeanne, near the grotto of Massabielle. While the other two girls ran across the stream and past the grotto, she stayed behind to find a way across without getting her stockings wet. It was then that she glanced at the opening of the grotto and noticed "a dazzling light, and a white figure". This was the first of 18 visions of a lady she initially referred to simply as *Aquero* – 'It'.

After returning home and reluctantly telling her parents about the experience, her mother forbade her to return.

Although an obedient child, the profundity of the apparition prompted her to go back again and again. During her third visit, the lady spoke to her and said to Bernadette, "she could not promise to make me happy in this world, only in the next".

### Visions

The visions continued for several weeks, attracting large crowds, much to the embarrassment of her parents. This period became known as "holy fortnight", and throughout this duration the lady asked Bernadette to build a chapel in the vicinity, drink water from the stream and pray for the conversion of sinners.



# A place of Papal prayer

**Greg Daly details how various Popes have been linked with Lourdes from the 1850s to today**

In an 1873 letter to Blessed Pope Pius IX, St Bernadette, then Sr Marie Bernard, recalled how Our Lady had appeared to her just four years after the declaration of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, declaring herself to be the Immaculate Conception. “You could say she came to confirm the word of our Holy Father,” she wrote.

If so, this would be just the first of many links between Lourdes and Popes, with Pius IX the following year honouring what was still known as the Chapel of Our Lady of Lourdes with the title of basilica, and his successor Leo XIII in 1890 establishing February 11 as a day in honour of Our Lady of Lourdes in the Church calendar, with designated prayers, readings, and a place in the Church’s Divine Office. Leo also had a replica of the Lourdes Grotto built in the Vatican gardens.



St Pius X.

St Pius X developed the Vatican’s Lourdes grotto and extended the Mass of February 11 such that it was celebrated throughout the Church, proclaiming Lourdes “the most glorious Eucharistic throne in the Catholic universe”. In August 1913 he declared Bernadette ‘venerable’ and signed the decree for the introduction of her canonisation cause.

His successor Pope Ben-

edict XV would be the first Pope to visit Lourdes, presiding as Bologna’s Archbishop Giacomo della Chiesa over the Italian national pilgrimage to the shrine in 1913, with Pius XI also visiting Lourdes, doing so in 1921 as the newly appointed Archbishop of Milan.

## Presence

In November 1923, Pius XI published the ‘Decree on the heroic nature of the virtues of the Venerable Sister Marie-Bernard Soubirous’, observing that “there is no doubt that we are here in the presence of sanctity in the precise and exact meaning of the word”.

Less than two years later, in June 1925, Pius XI had Bernadette declared ‘blessed’ and eight years after her beatification he canonised her on December 8, 1933, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, speaking in his homily about the humility of this “ignorant girl, a simple miller’s daughter, who possessed no other wealth than the candour of her exquisite soul”.

As Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli, the future Pope Pius XII was Pius XI’s special envoy to Lourdes, for the closing of the Jubilee of the Redemption in 1935, and as Pope he approved the construction of the St Pius X Basilica in the Pyrenean town, writing in 1958, for the centenary of the apparitions an encyclical in which he spoke of Lourdes as a “new outpouring of the Holy Spirit”.

Papal nuncio to France after the Second World War, and a friend of Bishop Pierre-Marie Theas of Tarbes and Lourdes, Cardinal Arnaldo Roncalli, Patriarch of Venice, went to Lourdes on behalf of Pius XII for the consecration of the basilica, before unexpectedly becoming Pope John XXIII in October 1958.

It is believed that both Blessed Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul I had been pilgrims

to Lourdes before their pontificates, but St John Paul II would be the first Pope to visit the Pyrenean shrine as Pope.

Plans to visit Lourdes for 1982’s Eucharistic Congress had to be shelved due to the after effects of the 1981 assassination attempt on St John Paul II, but in 1983 he came to Lourdes to celebrate the feast of the Assumption.

At the end of a torchlight procession that evening he prayed for an end to the oppression and injustices of the age, speaking of hunger, war, terrorism, kidnapping, torture and other ills and singling out the persecution of people for their religions.

“Today, the day of my pilgrimage to Lourdes, I would like to embrace in my thought and with the heart of the Church, all those who are suffering persecution in our day and age,” he said, continuing, “today, to prison, concentration camps, hard labour, expulsion from one’s own country, has been added other forms of punishment less remarked but more subtle: not a bloody death but a sort of civil death; not only segregation in the prison or camp but permanent restriction of personal freedom or social discrimination.”

**“Life is a sacred gift, and no one can presume to be its master”**

St John Paul II returned to Lourdes in August 2004, on what would turn out to be his final pastoral trip outside Italy during the year that marked 150 years since Pius IX had proclaimed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

Speaking at Mass there on 15 August, the Polish Pope spoke of Mary as “a model for our pilgrim way”, noting that: “The faithful have understood



Pope Francis prays at the replica of the Lourdes grotto in the Vatican.

this. That is why they throng to this grotto in order to hear the maternal counsels of the Blessed Virgin.”

## Homily

In his homily, he noted how Mary had entrusted her message to a young girl, and called on women to be “sentinels of the invisible” and to do all in their power to ensure that every single life is respected from conception to its natural end. “Life is a sacred gift, and no one can presume to be its master,” he said.

Born on the feast of the then Blessed Bernadette in 1927, it should perhaps not

have been surprising that shortly after succeeding St John Paul II, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI made known his intention of making his own pilgrimage to Lourdes in 2008 to mark the 150th anniversary of the Apparitions. Visiting the shrine over September 13-15, the then Pope followed the Jubilee Way across the town and over three days prayed with 300,000-400,000 people.

Speaking of how “the power of love is stronger than the evil which threatens us”, the then Pope said: “It is this mystery of the universality of God’s love for men that

Mary came to reveal here, in Lourdes. She invites all people of good will, all those who suffer in heart or body, to raise their eyes towards the Cross of Jesus, so as to discover there the source of life, the source of salvation.”

He later noted that “the primary purpose of the shrine at Lourdes is to be a place of encounter with God in prayer and a place of service to our brothers and sisters, notably through the welcome given to the sick, the poor and all who suffer”, and said that at Lourdes, God’s mercy was made manifest through Mary who “comes to us as a mother, always open to the needs of her children”.

The devotion of Pope Francis to Our Lady is well known, of course, whether through his particular fondness for ‘Our Lady, Undoer of Knots’, his visits to such shrines as Fatima and Guadeloupe, or his prayers in Rome’s Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, before trips abroad. His plan – announced in 2014 – to visit Lourdes in 2015 had to be shelved, but it cannot be long, surely, before the deeply Marian first Pope from the New World visits the most famous Marian shrine in the Old World.



Pope Benedict XVI placing a crown on Our Lady of Lourdes at a Mass for sick pilgrims in February 2007.



# ‘Que soy era immaculada Concepcion’



**Greg Daly** explores the roots of the title Our Lady used at Lourdes

**I** am the Immaculate Conception,” St Bernadette was told when, on March 25 1858, the simple peasant girl asked the lady who appeared to her who she was.

Not knowing what this meant, the young girl hurried to see the parish priest, Fr Dominique Peyramale, and told him what the lady had said. The priest stood stunned, and then stammered: “Do you know what that means?”

On being told no, he asked how she could say such a thing if she did not understand the phrase. He sent her away, and wrote to his bishop that evening.

It was only later that Bernadette was told how less than four years earlier, on December 8, 1854, Pope Pius IX had formally sought the guidance of the world’s bishops and formally defined the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, stating that: “The Blessed Virgin Mary in the first instant of her conception, by a singular privilege and grace granted by God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the saviour of the human race, was preserved exempt from all stain of original sin.”

Regularly confused with the doctrine of the Virgin Birth – dramatically so by Republican congressman Matt Gaetz on CNN last month, but commonly so even in the middle of the last century, with C.S. Lewis observing in a couple of essays that whenever the average person says the former he invariably means the latter – the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception has been believed in one form or another since at the very latest the 2nd Century.

## Instituted

Indeed, since the 7th Century the Conception of the Most Holy and All Pure Mother of God had been celebrated throughout the Christian east, while in the west, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception was formally instituted in 1476, and even during the Reformation, Martin Luther himself held to this belief.

In 1527 he preached, for instance, that: “It is a sweet and pious belief that the infusion of Mary’s soul was effected without original sin; so that in the very infusion of her soul she was also purified from original sin and adorned with God’s gifts, receiving a pure soul infused from God; thus from the first moment she began to live she was free from all sin.”



‘The Immaculate Conception’ by Francisco Rizi, Madrid, 1614 – San Lorenzo de El Escorial, 1685.

Belief that Mary had been exempt from the stain of sin from the first instant of her conception had its roots in, as much as anything, an incredulity in the early Church that the flesh from which Jesus was made – flesh he had inherited from Mary and Mary alone – could ever have been tainted by sin and been what C.S. Lewis called “enemy-occupied territory”.

Following 1 Corinthians 15:45-9, which reads Christ as a new Adam, the early Church looked at the so-called ‘Protoevangelium’ or ‘First Gospel’ of Genesis 3:15 and saw our redemption as a re-enactment of Eden with the Cross as the new Tree of Knowledge, and with Mary as the new Eve. Just as Eve’s disobedience opened the way to Adam’s sin, so Mary’s obedience opened the way to Jesus’ saving of us.

**“The question was, of course, how could someone without sin need to be saved?”**

This reading is apparent in such 2nd-Century writers as St Justin Martyr and St Irenaeus of Lyons, the latter of whom was taught by John’s pupil Polycarp and was the first person we know of to describe the four Gospels – and those alone – as canonical. By the 4th Century, it was almost proverbial that Mary was the new Eve, and could hardly have been created less than her: as Eve was created sinless, so too must Mary have been.

A pointer to this is found at Luke 1:28, where the angel Gabriel salutes Mary as *Kekharitōmenē*, traditionally translated – at least since the late 4th Century – as ‘Full of Grace’, though sometimes rendered, as in the Jerusalem Bible we use at Mass, ‘highly favoured’.

In truth, Jerome’s rather more concise translation of the Greek with the Latin term *gratia plena* – ‘full of grace’ – is best understood as an elegant paraphrase that

attempts to encapsulate the wealth of meaning embodied in the highly, highly unusual grammar of the Greek original which could more fully be rendered “you who are already, absolutely, and enduringly endowed with grace”.

*Kekharitōmenē* is also the only instance we know of that an angel ever honoured any of God’s creations with a title. Being completely graced by God leaves no room for sin; this can’t be dismissed as though it just means ‘highly favoured’.

Some, of course, find it difficult to square this with the with the rest of the Bible, in particular as it might seem to suggest that Mary was somehow unique among created humanity in not needing to be saved from sin by Jesus, something which would fly in the face



‘The Immaculate Conception of Aranjuez’ by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, 1670–80, oil on canvas.

of how, for example, Luke 1:47 records her as saying that her spirit rejoiced in God her saviour.

The question was, of course, how could someone without sin need to be saved – how could Our Lady need a saviour?

The answer the Church reached was by way of analogy, recognising that there is more than one way of saving someone.

## Bruised

Imagine that you fall into a deep pit, and someone comes along and reaches down and pulls you out; the person who pulled you out would have saved you. That, the Church says, is essentially what Jesus does with us, as a rule.

However, imagine a woman should be walking along, approaching the same pit, but on the brink of it should be grabbed and pulled back and prevented from falling in; the person who did that would have saved her, and would have done so in a better way, preventing her from even being dirtied, let alone bruised and scraped from the fall. Jude 1:24 says “glory be to him who can keep you from falling”, and Duns Scotus, writing around 1300 AD, observed: “It is a greater good to be preserved from evil than to fall into it and afterwards be freed from it.”

In other words, it’s obviously better to be saved by prevention than cure, and it’s in this sense Mary was saved by Jesus: he preserved her from sin, rather than allowing her to fall into it and dragging her from the hole like the rest of us. And why wouldn’t he? He loved and honoured his mother; if he could save her by preserving her from sin, rather than allowing her to fall into sin in the first place, why would he have done otherwise?

Like the other Marian doctrines, the Immaculate Conception was a miracle the Church recognised as glorifying Jesus, the new Adam made from untainted flesh and the perfect Saviour who is able to keep us from falling.

**“The Blessed Virgin Mary in the first instant of her conception, by a singular privilege and grace granted by God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the saviour of the human race, was preserved exempt from all stain of original sin”**



# 'A great day for Ireland'

**Greg Daly** looks at the first ever Irish national pilgrimage to Lourdes



September 1913 may to most Irish people be a date forever linked with the Dublin lock-out and Yeats's poem about Dublin Corporation's failure to provide a home for the Hugh Lane paintings, but it was also the month of Ireland's first national pilgrimage to Lourdes.

It had been Derry's Bishop Charles McHugh who first proposed the pilgrimage when at a meeting of the hierarchy in Maynooth the previous autumn. Cardinal Logue gave the idea his backing, and Bishop McHugh was asked to chair an organising committee made up of priests from every diocese.

The logistics of the pilgrimage were immense, with

pilgrims being expected to travel from all over Ireland, it being hoped that the pilgrims would be in Lourdes for the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, September 8, although large scale manoeuvres by the French Army meant plans had to be postponed by a week, with most pilgrims not leaving Ireland until September 8.

Thomas Cook & Co. made all the arrangements as travel agents for the pilgrimage, with 2,187 pilgrims including doctors, nurses and ambulance attendants setting out in all, headed by Armagh's Cardinal Michael Logue accompanied by five other bishops and about 300 priests. The pilgrims left Ireland by boat from such ports as Larne,



Cardinal Logue (standing) with other clerics during the first national pilgrimage.

Dublin, and Rosslare to England, across England by train to Folkestone on the south coast, to France by boat, and finally by train to Lourdes.

First class tickets for the pilgrimage cost £15, while third class ones cost £9 6s 9d.

The 162 invalids on the pilgrimage had an especially tough journey, starting two days ahead of other pilgrims and entailing seven transfers and accommodation in special hotels in London and Paris.

One of the committee's decisions was that the pilgrims should present Lourdes with a gift, with a Celtic Cross from Waterford being chosen. Carved from Kilkenny limestone by Waterford's William Gaffney, the cross was unveiled by Cardinal Logue at the foot of Lourdes's Calvary Hill on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, with Bishop Francois-Xavier Schoepfer of Tarbes and Lourdes in attendance.

## Appeal

Speaking at the unveiling, Cardinal Logue appealed to Irish people to ignore the "awful movement" which was attempting to distract them by drawing their attention to material thoughts such that they could lose sight of their souls' salvation.

"This day is a great day for Ireland," he said. "You have come here to this valley in the Pyrenees in your thousands to make open profession of the Faith within you; to bid defiance to the scoffers...let nothing – no false doctrines, no thought of material gain – let nothing, my brethren, stand between us and our homage to God."

After the speech, the pilgrims lingered at the cross and burst into song, singing 'God Save Ireland', 'The West's Awake', 'A Nation Once Again'

and 'O'Donnell abú'.

Still standing in Lourdes, the Cross bears an Irish inscription, with a French and Latin version on the reverse, which can be translated: "Humility, from the Irish people, to Mother Mary, in Lourdes, Irish Pilgrimage, 1913, let us stand by the cross with you."

In the aftermath of the pilgrimage reports spread of a miraculous cure for a Longford man who had taken part.

Patrick Casey, a blacksmith from Lanesboro, Co. Longford, had suffered from a serious inflammation of his joints and a paralysis of the legs, and so

The following day, however, things were very different for Mr Casey.

"When I went up to the train this morning I heard a great commotion," Mr Glynn continued. "People were shouting that a miracle had been wrought. 'Where are your crutches?' I asked. 'I have asked the Blessed Mother to take them,' he said. 'Now I don't want them any longer.' And then he walked away easily to his carriage."

Subsequently there were other reports of how another pilgrim, Grace Maloney from Co. Clare, was cured of a tubercular femur during the

*Evening Herald* at the time, it included scenes of pilgrims breaking their journey in London and boarding the train to the coast at Victoria Station, Mass in Paris, pilgrims arriving in Lourdes and travelling by tram to the basilica, processions in Lourdes, and views of the grotto and St Bernadette's home.

**"I assisted this morning at the baths. He could not walk. He had to be wheeled to the Grotto"**

In Dublin interest in the film was drummed up by presenting viewers with a puzzle, with *The Irish Times* writing: "Unique interest attaches to the film in that it shows an unknown lady, who experienced a cure, looking from a railway carriage window, and the management invite the co-operation of the public in identifying her."

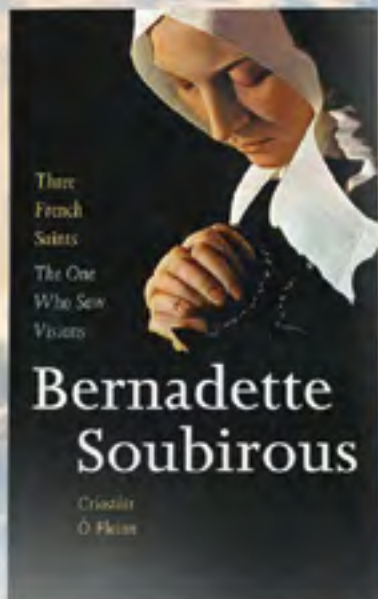
Curiously, *The Irish Catholic* never reported on the film at all, instead devoting its lead stories of October 4 and 11 to medical confirmations of the cures. Indeed, press coverage of the pilgrimage at the time was focused mainly upon the cures associated with Lourdes.

Another national pilgrimage was planned for 1916 but with Europe embroiled in the Great War that year, plans were shelved. It was not until 1924, in the aftermath of Ireland's War of Independence and Civil War that a second Irish Pilgrimage eventually set out for the Pyrenean shrine, this time presenting the Rosary Basilica with the gold cross and crown that surmount it as gifts on behalf of the people of Ireland.

## Bernadette Soubirous

### Get to know the one who saw visions

Famous for her visions of the Immaculate Conception in Lourdes, Bernadette Soubirous was canonised in 1933 by Pope Pius XI. Discover the full account of her life and how the apparitions of Our Lady of Lourdes led her to sainthood.



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The gold crown at the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in Lourdes.

had been unable to travel to Lourdes without help, being carried by medical attendants from boats and trains to his hotels at Paris and at Lourdes.

After going to the baths in Lourdes however, it was reported that he had started to walk, with J.A. Glynn, the chairman of the Irish Insurance Commissioners, saying he had witnessed this.

"I assisted this morning at the baths. He could not walk. He had to be wheeled to the Grotto. Myself and a Frenchman had to lift him out of the chair to the baths. We had to lift him back again, and when I saw him safe in the chair I left him to be wheeled back to the hospital," he said.

national pilgrimage.

The pilgrimage had also raised a large amount of money, such that with the Dublin lock-out biting during and after the pilgrimage, the following month Dr McHugh wrote to Dublin's Archbishop William Walsh offering him £2,000 from the profits of the pilgrimage to assist the Dublin Children's Distress Fund.

October also saw showings in Dublin's Rotunda of *A Pilgrimage in Picture*, a film about the pilgrimage that ran for the best part of an hour, rather than, as cinemagoers might have expected, the five to 10 minutes of a newsreel.

The film is now believed to be lost, but according to the *The*





Irish cross and crown in Lourdes.



Fr McCabe with Kevin, a foreign legion soldier who was baptised in Lourdes after sustaining injuries overseas

# Healing wounds and warming hearts

## Fr Robert McCabe reflects on his Lourdes pilgrimage experiences

**A** visual harmony of architecture impresses pilgrim and tourist alike who make their way to the Grotto of Massabielle. The spires, mosaics and statues which surround the golden cross and crown provide a welcome relief and spiritual focus after the distraction of bright bars, souvenir boutiques and cosy cafés in the town.

The muffled murmur of pilgrims passing each other in Rosary Square is pierced by a clear instruction “if you please...do not move...on the count of three...one, two three...thank you...and another if you please!”

As a diocesan cheer and applause subsides, the photographer emerges from below his old-style blanket and is helped down his ladder. Another roll of film is on the way to a local photo studio. The large prints will soon find their way into many corners of the world – schools, nursing homes, factories, local diocesan archives and even to *The Irish Catholic*. For many in these pictures these days in Lourdes are a dream come true – particularly if they are recovering from ill health or a family bereavement.

Meanwhile, a platoon of College and Transition Year



Fr Brendan McCabe with Patrick, one of the maintenance crew at the grotto.

students are busy improving their three-point turns and their wheelchair techniques so that they can bring pilgrims back to Accueil Notre-Dame. Like all young helpers in Lourdes they are placing others' needs before their own.

### Chariots

One young pilgrim is delighted with the unbroken line of chariots and brings a smile to all the helpers with his suggestion that they are like a line of baby elephants holding tails and trunks!

With the recent reordering of the grotto area and the relocation of the water taps and candle shrines, visitors can enjoy a more prayerful journey towards the heart of Lourdes. The new installation

of maturing trees calms pilgrims and tourists who wait to pray before the statue of the Immaculate Conception and to admire a candelabra which warms, comforts and inspires.

**“The new installation of maturing trees calms pilgrims and tourists who wait to pray”**

Changes and renovations are not a novelty in this Sanctuary but a necessity. The current project led by Bishop Brouwet of Tarbes and Lourdes, is a seamless continuation of hopes of his predecessor Bishop Laurence in the early 1860s.

Like successive parish priests of Knock – particularly Msgr James Horan – Dr Laurence and Abbé Peyramale (the local parish priest) and other diocesan authorities showed great practical foresight once the apparitions of Our Lady had been authenticated.

Files in the diocesan archives describe the plans of Dr Laurence to purchase the title deeds of the grotto area in 1861 for 971 francs and 44 centimes. It is noted that a portion of this amount went towards the filling-in of potholes between the town and the grotto! Title deeds were formally transferred to the Bishop of Tarbes and his successors in September 1861 following Napoleon III's signature of the paperwork from his camp at Châlons.

### Access routes

Abbé Peyramale immediately set to work improving the access routes for large groups who wished to visit the grotto and to collect water from the miraculous spring. The zig-zag path was completed in 1863. The river was channelled away from the grotto area to facilitate larger gatherings.

Diocesan archives record the “bold and daring decision reached by Dr Laurence after much reflection, consultation and prayer” to build directly above the Grotto. The foundations were set in place for the crypt and the upper church. Bernadette's father François joined his fellow labourers in this work and was paid the daily rate of 1 franc 50 centimes. Stonemasons and other skilled labourers received two francs per day.

42 square metres of mar-

ble paving stones were added to the Grotto area in 1866. Meanwhile, Dr Laurence was arranging for the purchase of the Domaine de Savy – the present-day Rosary Square and Esplanade Rosary Basilica – which would be developed in 1908.

The verse of the Lourdes Ave which runs “Come here in procession / to praise God and sing. / To wash in these waters / and drink at this spring” reminds pilgrims of the immense work completed by diocesan authorities in Lourdes so that the conversion of heart desired by Our Lady might continue across the generations.

In the reconfiguration of the pathways, fields and streams around the grotto we certainly could perhaps identify a visible proclamation of Isaiah and John the Baptist's call to make “the crooked straight and the rough places plain”.

The terrain has certainly changed since Bernadette made her journey to Massabielle to gather firewood with her sister Toinette and friend Jeanne.

Her faithful transmission of Our Lady's requests have ensured that countless pilgrims – including two Popes – have been able to enjoy the peace of the grotto and to renew their faith as they seek to find, follow and fulfil God's plan for their lives.

Neither Bernadette, Abbé Peyramale nor Dr Laurence could have imagined the construction of the underground basilica, the descent of soldiers by parachute near the grotto, the jumbulances or the purpose-built hospital.

Neither could they have imagined that almost 15,000 military personnel would gather around the grotto in prayer for peace and reconciliation every month of May.

Fieldcraft and camouflage skills which were honed in basic training will be reversed for this week. The shapes, shine, shadows, surfaces, silhouettes and sounds of the grotto will allow young sol-

diers from Ireland to join with men and women of good will from 34 different nations to pray God's blessing on the years ahead.

Some will carry intentions of prayer for relations or will be lighting a candle for a grandparent or a relation who has been given the ‘all clear’. Others will accompany the children from the Curragh Group in the Torchlight Procession and steer them behind the Pipe Band in the parade towards the Grotto.

They certainly showcase the ‘field hospital’ image which is so favoured by Pope Francis, for instance when saying: “The thing the Church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the Church as a field hospital after battle.”

**“Changes and renovations are not a novelty in this Sanctuary but a necessity”**

As we mark 160 years since the meetings between St Bernadette and Our Lady of Lourdes, I thank God for the many friends of Lourdes who have helped me to discover the transforming message of Massabielle. Fr Michael Casey OP at Maynooth, the distinctly different voices of Brother Gregory and Père Décha to the ongoing improvisations of Brother Jean-Paul Lécot; the caring nursing role of Sr Patrick, Sr Mercedes and her team of sacristans; Sr Thérèse Marie and the Poor Clare Community; diocesan and Defence Forces colleagues, tour guides all whose photos, prayercards or good example have nourished my visits to Lourdes every year.

**1** Fr Robert McCabe served as a Defence Forces chaplain until February 2016. He is a priest of the Diocese of Meath and an honorary chaplain to Lourdes.





## Greg Daly talks to Ireland's man on Lourdes's international medical bureau

**B**elfast doctor Michael Moran, the first Irishman to serve on the International Medical Committee of Lourdes, has been a regular pilgrim to the shrine for over 20 years.

"I think I was there as a child with Mum and Dad on holiday, but I wasn't really doing anything," he says, explaining that he only began volunteering at the shrine when he was 16.

"The way it came about was a place became available at the last minute, and though I wasn't actually in the planned youth team that was meant to go I ended up basically getting a cancellation, so it sort of almost happened by accident," he says.

"From that point on I went with the Down and Connor youth team," he continues, explaining that while he didn't go every summer during his university years, owing to spending summers in the US and elsewhere, there was "a kind of thread of Lourdes volunteering" over the next eight years.

### Director

A year after qualifying as a doctor Down and Connor's pilgrimage director told him the diocesan medical team was short of people, and asked whether he would be happy to switch to that team instead.

"That was 2005," he says. "Since then I've basically gone every year, initially as a junior doctor and in recent years as the chief medical officer with Down and Connor."

It was really only as chief medical officer that he became aware of how varied approaches to Lourdes pilgrimages are across Ireland, and how there is a real potential for doctors to work together, as the Italian committee president Alessandro de Franciscis pointed out to him.

"Essentially, we were having a chat about it and he said Ireland's an ideal country to focus on because it's a small population-wise, and it has a very organised pilgrimage structure, in the sense that the planes land and take off in succession, so you have Clogher diocese landing and then Down and Connor takes off," Michael says.

"So he said you essentially have

# Grace building on great practice



Dr Michael Moran with the Down and Connor medical team last year. Back (l-r): Dr Denise McKeegan, Dr Michael Moran and Dr Emma Toner. Front (l-r): Dr Clare Wilson, Dr Anne-Marie Beirne and Dr Karen Tumelty

a train of pilgrimages throughout the season, but you don't really talk to each other. The directors will be talking to each other in terms of priests, but not in terms of logistics and that side of things," he continues, explaining that Ireland could build a network of doctors and nurses who could share experiences, guidelines, and practice.

The upshot of this, he says, was Seirbhís, which held its initial conference of healthcare professionals in Maynooth in March 2014.

It is important for Ireland's medical professionals to liaise with each other, he says, especially given how different Irish pilgrimages to Lourdes can be.

"You have totally different models of pilgrimage across Ireland but essentially what we're doing is similar, so you might have for instance Franciscans who will go and have an all-Ireland pilgrimage, similar to the Irish Pilgrimage Trust, and then you have geographically based pilgrimages, like dioceses. Some dioceses you'll have one doctor with 500 people, others like down and Connor you will have six doctors the 500 people, and then in Dublin diocese you'll have a different model again," he says.

"Essentially what I would focus on is that we want to make sure

good practice elements were being shared because what we do there is often not what we would do in our day-to-day lives – it's almost as though we're doing a different type of medicine for one week of the year in comparison to the medicine that you do day to day," he continues, pointing out that he is a surgeon and Ear Nose and Throat specialist, but that when volunteering in Lourdes he is effectively volunteering as a general practitioner.

**“We need to make sure that the structures that we have are safe and supported”**

"So we decided to regulate ourselves and have conversations about what we should and shouldn't be doing and how we interact with the French healthcare system when we're there and very practical stuff," he says, adding that such structures are especially important given the diversity of pilgrims that could be on a plane to Lourdes.

A typical flight, he said, could include people who are old and infirm, others who are going on to Majorca, and a high preponderance of sick people, some long-term and stable, and some who are

almost 'bucket list' people who had learned some months before the pilgrimage that they had a terminal illness.

Having a proper medical structure is necessary even for insurance purposes, he explains, adding: "I guess the special part of that for us is the role of Lourdes as a sanctuary differentiated say from Fatima, Knock and those sorts of places is that it's a place where the sick and disabled are really the focus of all attention."

Medical volunteers are also needed, whether doctors or nurses, he says, adding that the younger ones are valuable not least because they can be especially mindful of medical-legal aspects.

"We need to make sure that the structures that we have are safe and supported so that in 10 years' time if it's me with a terminal illness or my dad, then I know that I can have faith in my head than on any given Tuesday in the season a plane will be taking off that will be medically supervised and that I'll know that there's still that ethos of care that's been there since 1858, and we want to continue on for the next number of years," he says.

An important principle of Church teaching around the miraculous is that grace builds on nature but doesn't replace it, and it seems clear that at Lourdes

excellent medical care is expected.

"We have to be really conscious of the fact that there are sceptics out there and we have to be very firm in our practice in the sense that the care that people receive in Lourdes, be it ongoing respite care or more acute care in the sense of someone who is terminally ill, must be at least as good at what they're getting at home otherwise we shouldn't be doing it," he says.

**“I feel that I'm giving something back but at the time it was like a bolt out of the blue”**

His nomination to the international committee followed shortly after he set the wheels in motion for the creation of Seirbhís, and was, he says, a complete surprise.

"The appointment came out of the blue by email to say would I accept a nomination if I was proposed and then the formal letter came from the Bishop of Lourdes," he says, adding that until that point there was no one on the committee from Ireland despite the country's long tradition of sending pilgrims to Lourdes, adding that "it was almost as if they were overlooking Ireland".





'Our Lady of Lourdes Healing the Sick' in a stained glass window.



Dr Michael Moran at work.

"It totally blew me away at the time in the sense that I didn't feel ready," he says, explaining, "now I feel that I'm giving something back but at the time it was like a bolt out of the blue and I didn't feel I was the right person straightaway".

Medical careers, he points out, are highly hierarchical and at the time he had been a relatively junior doctor.

"There were a lot of people who were probably more senior than me medically speaking – and academically – who might have been what you would consider the natural choices," he says, adding "whatever decision they had made behind the scenes I wasn't aware of at the time but for whatever

reason, design or otherwise, the finger came and pointed at me".

While describing himself as "obviously very honoured and happy to have taken on the role" he says that around the time of his appointment he said he felt he wasn't the right choice but was "fully committed to making sure that (he) would develop into the role".

"It felt like a very big responsibility, and I said I'd take it on fully and would give it everything I've got," he says.

### Online

Much of his work around Lourdes concerns encouraging young Irish doctors to come to the shrine, he says, but in terms of the committee most work is conducted online.

"It really just involves some email traffic back and forward, occasionally meeting up with people face to face, like with somebody who claimed to be cured just last year, so we do a kind of deep dive into individual cases," he says.

"And then at the meeting itself which is usually in autumn/winter we meet and discuss cases in detail and have a multidisciplinary discussion with a panel of surgeons, oncologists, psychiatrists, general practitioners every kind of speciality you can imagine. It takes place in a multilingual setting that's

being simultaneously translated so it gives everyone a chance to discuss things," he says.

**“There’s no rush in terms of making decisions, anything that comes out of the committee is always very well analysed”**

Tasked as it is with establishing whether cures cannot be explained medically – it's for the Church to decide whether such cures should then be considered miraculous – the committee acts in a slow and methodical fashion.

"One thing I'd say about it is that it's very bureaucratic, so if there's anything that's in doubt or that needs to be clarified, the committee is quite happy to push it on to next year for action again," he says.

"There's no rush in terms of making decisions, anything that comes out of the committee is always very well analysed and it has to almost have unanimous support because of the nature of what we're saying," he continues.

"It is a very dry medical discussion that we have in terms of the occurrences, trying to leave the belief side of it apart although

many of us do of course come at it from a Faith perspective, when we are dealing with it as a committee, it's very much a dry, medical – almost sceptical 'Devil's advocate' – thing."

The committee is certainly kept busy with a steady flows of claims to consider, he says.

"I did a study for the sanctuary last year, and you get about 30 a year. The season runs from about Easter until around about October, and essentially that's about one claim a week, which is quite a high volume," he says, although many of these cases aren't really capable of being tested.

"A lot of people who think that something happened to them in the context of a short trip to Lourdes go straight home and it's not until the following year that they actually report anything, which means that going through the process about the miracle for affirmation or otherwise is difficult because you don't have evidence at the time," he says.

**“The season runs from about Easter until around about October, and essentially that’s about one claim a week, which is quite a high volume”**

"It's really important that people – if something happens – that they flag it to the sanctuary immediately," he begins to add, but pauses. "Well, it's important if you think that's important to you. If a person has been healed in any way, be it psychological or spiritual, they don't need to report it if they don't want to. It's an absolutely personal and private thing, but if they do want to go through the whole process of authentication and verification, then the detail that we need is quite intense and the timing of investigations and examinations is absolutely crucial."

One topic of debate in the committee is the black-and-white nature of committee verdicts, he says, pointing out that in reality there are three types of claims put forward.

The first, he says, are "inexplicable cures where we say we cannot explain medically any reason for the cure and that's when we pass them back to the realm of the Church and the person's bishop".

Then, he says, "there are the ones where there's no evidence to substantiate it, which doesn't necessarily mean that it's a claim without any foundation, but often there's not enough evidence to support it and therefore we can't really comment on it – it might be a really convincing story, but we just don't have enough evidence".

Finally, he says, there is a middle ground "where there's quite a lot of very remarkable cures where for example we might have some really barn door evidence in

support of spontaneous remission of an illness in the context of Lourdes, but maybe the person didn't have a biopsy or a CT scan soon enough before their trip to Lourdes for us to say well we can't really prove that it happened that week".

There are, he says, "loads" of such stories, and that they can be known in Lourdes and across Ireland and throughout the world, but they simply cannot be registered by the committee.

"The current tone is that remarkable shouldn't be discussed at all because it's not good enough, so there are only two categories – either they're inexplicable or we can't comment. I do believe in the grey area in the middle, but from a medical point of view the committee's current position is that it's black or white," he says.

The number that are deemed inexplicable is, he said, "perishingly small", currently standing at just 69, though he adds that another case was voted on last year and is currently in the hands of the pilgrim's local bishop.

"It's very difficult to get any healing to fit the categories, and there's an argument that we need to revamp the criteria – it's a source of controversy among the committee itself," he says, pointing out the criteria that are used for adjudicating date back to the 18th Century, when, he says, "the standard probably would have been lump and then no lump".

With the numbers formally deemed inexplicable at odds with the popular perception – bolstered by numerous remarkable cures that have not been formally approved of – he says some can wonder why doctors try to bring science into play to adjudicate in these matters, and he admits that there's something to that.

### Explanation

"It goes back to the Lourdes quote, which I think St Bernadette said, about how for those who believe no explanation is required, for those who do not believe no explanation is possible," he says, adding "if you're a faithful person from Ireland it probably wouldn't matter to you what we say, because ...you'll have had more of an experience".

One thing that always strikes him about those believing they have been healed, he says, is a distinct sense of unworthiness.

"People who have been cured by miracles – the one thing they have in common is a very, very obvious sense of 'why me?' They always feel like it should have been the person beside them that day, and why they didn't really go asking for healing and yet this happened so the question becomes 'what should I do now?'"

It is, he says, "a very overwhelming thing for them to take on board".

**Medical professionals interested in volunteering at Lourdes can contact Michael through seirbhis. wordpress.com**





## Lourdes poses serious challenges for honest inquiring minds, writes Greg Daly

**T**here is something inexplicable about the miracles of Lourdes, according to the Nobel-prize-winning doctor who was one of three scientists credited with having discovered HIV.

A non-believer, Prof. Luc Montagnier is currently based at Shanghai Jiao Tong University in China, but was many years a researcher at Paris's Pasteur Institute where he first isolated the virus that is the cause of AIDS, being honoured for his achievement with the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 2008.

In the 2009 book *Le Nobel et le Moine* ('The Nobel [Laureate] and the Monk') he discussed this subject among others with the Cistercian Michel Niassaut, with Bro. Michel asking Prof. Montagnier what he thought – as a non-believer – of the remarkable healings at Lourdes.

"When a phenomenon is inexplicable, if it really exists, then there's no reason to deny it," he said, maintaining that such phenomena should be studied rather than denied.

"In the miracles of Lourdes, there is something inexplicable," he said, criticising those scientists who, he said, "commit the error of rejecting what they don't understand."

"I don't like this attitude," he continued, adding, "I frequently quote the astrophysicist Carl Sagan, 'the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence'."

He continued: "As far as the miracles of Lourdes that I've studied, I believe it really is something inexplicable. I don't have an explanation for these miracles, and I recognize that there are healings that are not included within the current limits of science."

### Miracle

Prof. Montagnier has not converted in the face of the miracles of Lourdes, though they clearly challenge him, but others have had their whole worldviews changed by Lourdes, not least Prof. Montagnier's Nobel-prize-winning predecessor Alexis Carrel.

Carrel, who was awarded the

# A scandal for sceptics



Carrel pictured with some French surgeons during World War I.

Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1912 for pioneering vascular suturing techniques that helped pave the way for organ transplants, was an agnostic by the time he began college, despite having been raised in a Catholic family in a small French town, been educated in Jesuit-run schools, and having regularly attended Mass.

As an agnostic, he was not sure if God existed, and rejected Catholicism in its entirety.

In 1902, however, he and a fellow doctor took a train to

Lourdes to see for themselves what he regarded as the hysteria around the shrine, the French medical establishment of the day having been utterly opposed to the notion that there was anything supernatural about Lourdes.

On the train he encountered a girl named Marie Bailly, who had a fatal disease called tuberculous peritonitis that had left her only half-conscious with a swelled belly. Carrel gave her morphine in an attempt to help, but he said doubted she would live even to

make it to Lourdes, with other doctors on the train concurring.

**“He knew that...his career would be ruined if he was publicly to state that he had witnessed a miracle”**

Despite this, Marie survived to reach the station in Lourdes, where her friends took her from the train and carried her to the grotto. There they began to pour water – three pitchers full – from the shrine onto her, and with each pour she felt, she said, a searing pain throughout her body. Her belly started to flatten to a normal size, amazing the doctors who were watching, and her pulse also returned to normal.

She was so much better that evening that she was able to eat a normal dinner.

Carrel was left baffled by what he had witnessed, as what he had seen seemed to confound his medical knowledge, such that it was hard to deny that something supernatural – even miraculous – had happened.

At the same time, however, he knew that given the views of France's medical establishment his career would be ruined if he was publicly to state that he had

witnessed a miracle, and so opted to maintain a discreet silence around the affair, even playing down the fact that he had travelled to Lourdes.

His discretion availed him little in the end, as Marie's cure was reported throughout France, with news outlets revealing that Carrel had been present but that he did not believe there was anything supernatural or miraculous about the cure.

Carrel, then, felt obliged to correct the record, and published a public response. Taking religious believers to task for what could be a gullible eagerness to claim as miraculous matters that were merely unusual, he also challenged his peers in the medical profession for their stubborn prejudice against the possibility of miracles, saying that Marie's cure might indeed have been miraculous.

**“Though Carrel was sceptical of the wisdom of so doing, he met and became friends with the Trappist monk Alexis Presse”**

Predictably enough, Carrel's comments caused a public scandal, with the medical establishment outraged that an accomplished doctor with the extensive scientific education Carrel had had could have ventured such an outlandish view, and with his career in France effectively over, he moved to Canada in 1903, before relocating to Chicago in the US.

His pioneering work with Jean-Claude Guthrie would win him the Nobel Prize for medicine in 1912, by which point he was based in New York's Rockefeller Institute of Medical Research, where he would spend the rest of his career.

The following decades saw Carrel drawn towards eugenic ideas, with him attending rallies of the French Popular Party (PPF) in the late 1930s, while he became firm friends with American hero turned fascist sympathiser Charles Lindbergh. All this time, though, he grappled with the reality of what he had witnessed at Lourdes, knowing that what he had seen had implications if only he would face them.

After decades of pondering the issue, in 1939, he was advised to meet the Trappist monk Alexis Presse, and though he was sceptical of the wisdom of so doing, he did so and became friends with the priest.

Two years later, in 1942, he had finally reached a point where he could in conscience say: "I believe in the existence of God, in the immortality of the soul, in Revelation and in all the Catholic Church teaches."

Two years later, in November 1944, he died, but not before Fr Presse had come to his bedside to administer the Last Rites.



Alexis Carrel.



Prof. Luc Montagnier.



# Devotion overcoming doubt

**Greg Daly** writes of how Lourdes surprised two famous Catholic writers

**A**t Lourdes in May 1936, just a few weeks before his death, G.K. Chesterton commented of the crowds at the torchlight procession: "This is the only real League of Nations."

The English author had in fact been reluctant to visit Lourdes, perhaps – according to Maisie Ward, author of his authorised biography – because he was worried the Pyrenean shrine might be spoiled for him by too much commercialism and tackiness, although he had previously opined that such things show the wisdom of the Church.

"The whole thing is so terrific that if people did not have these let-downs they would go mad," he had said.

In the end he found that the shrine was not especially commercial, but was, rather, a good place for ordinary people like himself, and somewhere he found fascinating. Over the course of a few days there he attended the torchlight procession three times, and likewise visited the Grotto three times, as well as joining in a procession of the Blessed Sacrament and blessing of the sick.

On the way back to England he seemed, in the main, better than he had been, and according to his secretary Dorothy Collins responded to her request "Gilbert, sing us something" by singing – badly – and joking as she drove 150 miles through the lanes of France.

Chesterton was not the only 20th-Century Catholic literary giant to have been wary of visiting Lourdes, only to be surprised by the shrine on his arrival.

## Reputation

In 1957, one Katie Semmes, a cousin of Flannery O'Connor's mother, heard of a Lourdes Centennial pilgrimage being organised for the following year by the diocese of Savannah, Georgia, and knowing of Flannery's worsening lupus and the shrine's reputation for cures, insisted on paying for both Flannery and her mother to go.

The trip grew with the planning, as over 17 days it grew set to include stops in London, Dublin, Paris, Barcelona, Rome and Lisbon, as well as Lourdes itself, such that Flannery observed to a friend that "by my calculations we should see more airports than shrines".

However, a deterioration in her hip that appeared to be due to her



Flannery O'Connor.

lupus led to the trip being scaled back to a rather gentler schedule even if, as she put it: "It is cousin Katie's end-all and be-all that I get to Lourdes and if I am dead upon arrival that's too bad but I still have to get there."

**“She dreaded the possibility of cure in those circumstances; I didn't think she had to worry”**

Her wry writing masked a genuine gratitude to Katie, but she retained mixed feelings about the trip ahead of time, writing to her friend Betty Hester in December 1957, for example: "About the Lourdes business. I am going as a pilgrim, not a patient. I will not be taking any bath. I am one of those people who could die for his religion easier than take a bath for it."

Adding that she suspected that

"if you've seen one shrine you've seen them all" and that "aside from penance being a good thing for us, I'm sure religion can be served as well at home", she returned to the subject of the baths.

"If there were any danger of my having to take one, I would not go. I don't think I'd mind washing in somebody else's blood...but the lack of privacy would be what I couldn't stand," she wrote. "This is neither right nor holy of me but it is what it is."

## Heavy hand

In the end, however, she seems to have enjoyed her visit despite herself, writing to her friend Ashley Brown: "Lourdes is a beautiful little village pockmarked with religious junk shops."

"The heavy hand of the prelate smacks down on this free enterprise at the gates of the grotto, however. This is always full of peasants milling around and of the sick being wheeled in on stretched. Mauriac wrote somewhere that

the religious-goods stores were the devil's answer there to the Virgin Mary. Anyway, it's apparent that the devil has a good deal to answer to."

She visited the baths on the morning of May 2, largely at the instigation of Sally Fitzgerald, wife of the poet Robert Fitzgerald and in time Flannery's editor and the pre-eminent scholar of her work.

"No credit is owing to me for taking the bath at Lourdes," Flannery wrote. "Sally went along with us and she was determined that I take it and gave me no peace. She made the arrangements. If she hadn't been there, the arrangements would never have been made. She has a hyper-thyroid moral imagination. If I hadn't taken it, she said it would have been a failure to cooperate with grace and me, seeing myself plagued in the future by a bad conscience, took it."

## Waters

Sally later noted that she was sure Flannery would later feel she had

disappointed the elderly Katie if she returned home without taking the waters, and that she suspected the reason Flannery had asked for her company on the pilgrimage was to ensure she took part.

"She dreaded the possibility of cure in those circumstances; I didn't think she had to worry. She was annoyed, briefly, but her irritation faded," she wrote.

Writing to her friend Elizabeth Bishop a few weeks later, Flannery wrote that Lourdes had not been as bad as she feared.

"Somebody told me the miracle at Lourdes is that there are no epidemics and I found this to be the truth. Apparently nobody catches anything. The water in the baths is changed once a day, regardless of how many people ... get into it," she wrote, pointing out that it had been clean when she joined "a long line of peasants" in visiting the baths early in the morning.



A sketch of G.K. Chesterton.

"They passed around a thermos bottle of Lourdes water and everybody had a drink out of the top. I had a nasty cold so I figured I left more germs than I took away," she continued. "The sack you take the bath in is the same one the person before you took off, regardless of what ailed him. At least there are no society trappings along with the medieval hygiene. I saw nothing but peasants and was very conscious of the distinct odour of the crowd. The supernatural is a fact there but it displaces nothing natural; except maybe those germs."

Afterwards, however, she would later confide that while in the grotto, "I prayed there for the novel I was working on, not for my bones, which I care about less".

When she finally sent off her manuscript for *The Violent Bear It Away* she wrote that she attributed her completion of this to Lourdes far more than she did her surprisingly recalcifying bones; in time, though, she would wonder if the latter remarkable though sadly short-lived improvement was also a fruit of Lourdes.

Whether it was due to Lourdes or somebody's prayers, she later remarked, it was "something to be grateful to the same Source for".

**“The sack you take the bath in is the same one the person before you took off, regardless of what ailed him. At least there are no society trappings along with the medieval hygiene”**



# A saint on the silver screen



The DVD cover of the 1961 movie *Bernadette of Lourdes* featuring actress Daniele Ajoret and, left, a scene from the film.

Not too many people are aware that films about Bernadette Soubirous go back to the beginning of the film industry. In 1909 there was a short French feature made about the miller's daughter, *Bernadette Soubirous at les Apparitions de Lourdes*, directed by Honore de Sablais. In 1926 a director called Bernard Simon made *Le Miracle de Lourdes* with Pierette Lugand as Bernadette. Three years later George Pallu directed *Le Vie Marveilleuse de Bernadette* with an actress simply called Alexandra playing her.

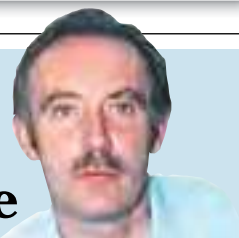
Most people have seen Henry King's 1943 Hollywood version of the Lourdes vision, *The Song of Bernadette*, which won Jennifer Jones an Oscar. She had a double reason to celebrate as it was on the night of her birthday that she won. Ingrid Bergman was the favourite that year for *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, the Spanish Civil War drama based on Ernest Hemingway's brilliant novel. Jones had the good grace to apologise to her for her disappointment on the night.

## Innocence

Some viewers felt the film commercialised the story – it was a familiar 'sin' of Hollywood – but most people's reservations were quashed by its overall sense of purity and innocence. Some people also felt its length (156 minutes) would come against it but this too proved an unfounded fear as the story grew in power as it went on.

George Seaton adapted the screenplay from Franz Werfel's acclaimed novel, which had been on the *New York Times* bestseller list for over a year. It had been a Broadway hit as well before King optioned it for Hollywood.

## Lourdes is a constant cinematic subject, writes Aubrey Malone



Another Oscar was won that night by Arthur Miller, the cinematographer who lit Bernadette so atmospherically in a film in which light was so important. (He put a spotlight behind her head to create the effect of a halo). An unbilled Linda Darnell played the Virgin Mary. The film also weighed in with a host of other nominations – Best Picture, Best Director, Best Score, Best Art Direction, Best Supporting Actor (Charles Bickford as the Abbe Dominique Peyramale) and Best Supporting Actress twice – Anne Revere as Bernadette's mother and Gladys Cooper as Marie Therese Vauzou, the Mistress of Novices where Bernadette joins the Sisters of Charity as a postulant.

**“One of the most highly regarded – and spiritually sensitive – films was Jean de Lannoy's *Bernadette*”**

The film wasn't honoured only at the Academy Awards – 1944 saw the first ever Golden Globes ceremony with *Song* taking home three trophies, one for Jones as Best Motion Picture Actress, one for King as Best Director – Motion Picture, and one for the film itself, which won the award for Best Motion Picture – Drama.

It was many years before

another version of the story was filmed. That was on the small screen when CBS undertook the similarly titled *Song of Bernadette* with Pier Angeli as the saint this time.

Sadly, Angeli would commit suicide some years later when her marriage broke down and depression took hold of her.

## Vision

In 1961 Hans Quest, a German director, made *Bernadette Soubirous*, a TV movie with Kornelia Boje as the young peasant girl witnessing the vision. Also that year, Robert Darene directed *Bernadette of Lourdes* with Daniele Ajoret as the devout 14-year-old. Later in the decade there was a French TV movie called *L'Affaire Lourdes* directed by Marcel Bluwal with Marie-Helene Breillat as Bernadette.

One of the most highly regarded – and spiritually sensitive – films about the circumstances surrounding the Lourdes vision was Jean de Lannoy's *Bernadette*. (A later adaptation amended the title to *The Passion of Bernadette*.) This was a Swiss/French co-production made in 1988 with Sydney Penny as Bernadette. It still plays in a small movie theatre every day in Lourdes. It's often been praised for its freedom from any of the commercialism that many associated with Henry King's version so if you're visiting Lourdes

it would be well worth checking out.

In the new millennium, a flood of films about Bernadette were released, each one attempting a novel approach to the theme while preserving the germ of the original scenarios. The story was set to music in 2002 with *Vision*, co-directed by Jonathan Smith and Dominic Hartley. 2007 saw the release of the Indian film *Our Lady of Lourdes* directed by V.R. Gobinath with Asna Noiseux as Bernadette.

In 2009 an Austrian director called Jessica Hausner made *Life of Bernadette*, a joint French/Austrian/German venture about a girl called Christine who goes to Lourdes in the hope of being cured of multiple sclerosis. In the circumstances, the title is something of a misnomer. The following year saw *Life of Bernadette: La Sainte de Lourdes*.

In 2011 we had *Je m'Appelle Bernadette*, a moving French film with

Katia Miran as Bernadette. This is difficult to find on Amazon but it can be ordered from contact@hotelsantsauveur.com. The same year brought the release of *St Bernadette of Lourdes*, directed by Jim Morlino and featuring his daughter Genevieve as Bernadette.

It drew on two books for inspiration, *St Bernadette Soubirous* by Abbe Francis Trochu and *The Appearances of the Blessed Virgin Mary at the Grotto of Lourdes* by Jean-Baptiste Estrade. It proved to be the most unusual film on the subject as the cast was made up totally of children and teenagers, including the nuns, guards, soldiers and even Our Lady. The idea wasn't to everyone's satisfaction but many were charmed by its novelty. It was a brave choice. If you see it, you can make up your own mind if you think it was advisable or not.

## Familiar

I'm sure we're all familiar with the haunting 'Song of Bernadette' co-written by Jennifer Warnes and Leonard Cohen and included on the album *Famous Blue Raincoat*. Warnes was actually christened Bernadette rather than Jennifer. She said she wrote the song in honour of "the great saint who held her ground so well and was not swayed from what she knew to be true".

Two years ago there was an opera written about Bernadette by a man called Trevor Jones and staged in Gloucestershire. In fact there's even been an animated version of the story, *Bernadette: Princess of Lourdes*. It's only 30 minutes long but won the Award of Excellence from the Film Advisory Board Inc.

Her story runs and runs in almost every genre you care to mention.



Bernadette Soubirous.



# Digicel Foundation opens 174th school in Haiti



Founder of the Digicel Foundation Denis O'Brien pictured with one of the students enjoying education in a new school.

**T**he Digicel Haiti Foundation has opened a new school in Northwest Haiti dedicated to the late communications guru PJ Mara.

Founded in July 2011 this school – which was operating in a make-shift shelter – is now lodged in new earthquake-resistant and hurricane-resistant premises.

The school has eleven classrooms that can accommodate more than 400 students, an administrative building, a computer lab, a library, a playing field, a kitchen, and a warehouse, as well as bathroom facilities. This institution, which cost over €400,000, is the 174th school built by the foundation since its inception.

The school – known as the PJ Mara de Jolivet National School – is located in the commune of Bassin Bleu in the Northwest department.

**“The number of students that attend schools built by the Foundation in Haiti now totals 60,000”**

Denis O'Brien, founder of the Digicel Foundation, was in attendance along with a delegation from Ireland and numerous local authorities including the Departmental Director of National Education, Mr Yves Félizaire.

This school is a special project dedicated to the memory of PJ Mara, member of Digicel Group's board of directors, who passed away in 2016. Mr Mara was a longtime communications specialist and came to prominence due to his work for former Taoiseach Charles Haughey.

The new school serves the community of Jolivet, which lacked a school structure that conformed to international building regulations. As a result of this latest addition, the number of students that attend schools built by the Foundation in Haiti now totals 60,000.



Commenting on the opening of the school, Denis O'Brien, Chairman and founder of Digicel Group and Patron of the Digicel Haiti Foundation, said: “Education provided in a safe, friendly and conducive learning environment is the bridge to a brighter future for Haiti's children and we are so happy to be doing what we can to help these children realise their enormous potential.

“Dedicated to the memory of my

great friend and colleague PJ Mara who had a particular fondness for and affinity to Haiti and its people, the PJ Mara de Jolivet National School holds a special place in all our hearts,” Mr O'Brien said.

## Collaboration

Believing passionately that agriculture also constitutes one of the pillars of the country's development, the foundation, in collaboration

with the school principal, Loutte Yvette, has started a ‘school garden’ programme to teach students about and involve them in national agricultural production.

Starting with preschool, students will learn to plant vegetables and fruit, to grow them and to harvest their own produce – some of which will be used for the school canteen. The remainder will be sold by the school, with the revenue contribut-

ing to the school's maintenance.

“We are happy to be able to offer this new school to the Northwest department, which already has 12 schools built by the Foundation. We are confident that it will train several future leaders and contribute to the development of Bassin Bleu,” according to Josefa Gauthier, Non-Executive President of the Digicel Haiti Foundation.



The tricolour is unveiled at the latest of the Digicel Foundation's contributions to children in Haiti, a new school in Jolivet.



# Letters

Post to: Letters to the Editor, The Irish Catholic,  
23 Merrion Square North, Dublin 2,  
or email: letters@irishcatholic.ie

## Letter of the week

### People can't have their cake and eat it

**Dear Editor,** I cannot be alone in thinking that Cardinal Kevin Farrell and the Vatican are perfectly within their rights to decide who can – and cannot – speak on Vatican territory.

The report that the organisers of an event at which former President Mary McAleese is due to speak next month have had to move the venue across the road from the Vatican due to the cardinal's objection has received an inordinate amount of media coverage.

Some commentators have

suggested that it is a sign that the Vatican is unwilling to hear the voices of women from within the Church. I would suggest, however, that the Vatican – as in previous incarnations of the conference in question – is more than willing to hear the voices of women.

On the other hand, the Church is clearly unwilling to hear from people who insist on their Catholicism while publicly opposing core tenets of the Church's teaching.

Mary McAleese is as entitled to her

views as everyone else. What she is not entitled to, however, is a platform to speak at the Vatican when she has so publicly set herself against the Holy See on key issues.

Mrs McAleese – as a former President – is hardly without platforms to express her views as is evidenced by the amount of media coverage the issue has received.

*Yours etc.,*

**Mary Cunningham,**  
Rialto, Dublin 8.

### The rights we claim must be extended to others

**Dear Editor,** Some of the more vociferous advocates of repeal, speaking in the Dáil debate on the Eighth Amendment, sought to paint the right-to-life provision of our Constitution as an archaic Catholic encumbrance on society. They conveniently ignored a letter sent to each Oireachtas member by two former moderators of the Presbyterian Church, outlining how the proposed legislation would allow abortion up to birth on the very same grounds as gave rise to abortion-on-demand in England.

It's important to recall that the Eighth was the

initiative of medical practitioners, wishing to see the continuation of scientific evidence-based, best medical healthcare, in our hospitals, free from the interference of ideologically driven politicians and the profit-hungry abortion industry.

That these views are in line with Catholic teachings is simply due to the fact that the Catholic faith relies upon reason and revelation; as both originate from God.

Thus, science tells us that our existence began with the membrane fusion of our parents' sperm and egg. It is self-evident that where

mothers deliberately kill their own young (foetus), in large numbers, that that species is doomed. This is already happening in all societies which have normalised abortion.

Natural law tells us that the rights we claim for ourselves (e.g. birth, life, etc.) must also be extended to others; otherwise we are claiming a privilege for ourselves and discriminating against others.

Common sense tells us that "to live and let live" is the basis of civilisation. Revelation tells us that we are made in God's image and likeness, with a contribution

to make which no one else can fulfil, and a destiny.

Morality demands that we accept each other as a gift. To reject the life of even the most insignificant and vulnerable goes against our innate moral awareness and we are never the same afterwards.

We pass through this life but once. Let us encourage and empower mothers to choose, to protect, cherish and celebrate the life of their babies.

*Yours etc.,*

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

### Eloquent speech

**Dear Editor,** No matter where you stand on the US presidency of Donald Trump, his address to the pro-life rally in Washington DC was both eloquent and touching in his defence of the unborn. CNN gave us the full speech; RTÉ mentioned it in passing.

*Yours, etc.,*

**Cecil Roberts,**  
Rathmines, Dublin 6.

### Optional after all!

**Dear Editor,** In relation to Fr Michael Toomey's letter (I.C. 25/01/18), headed, 'Sign of Peace at Mass in not an option', perhaps it would be useful to see Rubric No. 128 of the Roman Missal which shows it is not prescriptive, hence leaving the sign of peace optional.

*Yours, etc.,*

**James O'Brien,**  
Ballyhea, Co. Cork.

### Authority of the Most Holy Trinity at risk of being removed

**Dear Editor,** Mr Simon Harris, Minister of Health, said "he cannot close his eyes to the fact that 3,265 citizens travelled to the UK in 2016 from across Ireland". There are two sides to a coin: he closes his eyes to the fact that 3,265 potential Irish citizens were not allowed the right to see the light of day. I checked the statistics

and was surprised to see that whereas 6,522 citizens travelled to the UK in 2001 to procure abortions, this number dropped by 50% in 2016. Why legislate for abortion if it is on the decrease (not that I would ever vote for abortion if it was the other way round)? I admired Irish Governments who challenged negative smoking, drinking

and drink-driving cultures that had world-wide positive culture changes; why not with the abortion issue promoting among other things responsible sexual activity? Principles of life are never outdated and having no abortion in Ireland does not make it old-fashioned but a country where all are welcome and loved.

I fear that the "authority of the Most Holy Trinity" as written out in the preamble of the Constitution itself is now being superseded by the authority of some politicians who have assumed the right to legislate on the sacredness of life.

*Yours etc.,*

**Albert Galea,**  
Ballinasloe, Co. Galway.



### Conscience: 'internal witness'

**Dear Editor,** Mary Kenny praises Micheal Martin's statement in favour of abortion up to 12 weeks on the grounds that it was "thoughtful and sincere" (IC 25/01/18). She goes on to tell us that Blessed John Henry Newman enjoined us to follow our consciences.

Given that Ms Kenny has praised the speech by the leader of Fianna Fáil – a speech which conflicts with the Church's teaching on abortion – one fears that she has confused conscience with what Newman termed private judgment. Private judgment might be defined as the preference of one's own opinions to revealed truth or the natural law. Mr Martin's support for abortion is a good instance of the exercise of private judgment. Conscience is, according to Newman, an internal witness to both the existence and the law of God; it follows from this definition that no Catholic can support abortion in good conscience.

Newman treats of conscience in his 1875 open letter to the Duke of Norfolk. In the penultimate paragraph of that letter he writes that "I say there is only one Oracle of God, the Holy Catholic Church and the Pope as her Head. To her teaching I have ever conformed; to her judgment I submit what I have written, not only as regards to its truth, but as to its prudence, its suitableness, and its expedience."

One hopes that in any referendum on the Eighth Amendment all Catholics will follow conscience in Newman's sense rather than private judgment.

*Yours etc.,*

**C.D.C Armstrong,**  
Belfast, Co. Down.

### Not such a Good Friday

**Dear Editor,** Now that legislation allows pubs to open on Good Friday, will we see already hard-pressed accident and emergency units, etc., attending to more chronic alcoholics and people who over indulge, hence compromising the care of other patients who are genuinely sick? Will the publicans who choose to open on this holiest of days in the Christian calendar contribute some of the extra revenue made to the direct and indirect expense involved or will the taxpayer have to cough up? The pubs who will respect Good Friday are to be supported.

*Yours etc.,*

**Ann Campbell,**  
Scotstown, Co. Monaghan.

### Abortion 'belittles women'

**Dear Editor,** As we lament the passing of Dolores O'Riordan, singer and song-writer, not everyone might be aware that she spoke out against abortion in an interview in *Rolling Stone* magazine in March 1995. She said: "It's not good for women to go through the procedure and have something living sucked out of your bodies. It belittles women – even though some women say, 'Oh, I don't mind having one'. Every time a woman has an abortion, it just crushes her self-esteem, smaller and smaller and smaller." Pro-abortion feminists believe that abortion is empowering; however, Dolores O'Riordan's comment that abortion "belittles women" is spot on. Legal abortion tells women that they aren't capable of raising or loving their own child because of their current status in life. In reality, women are smart enough and strong enough to live alongside their children and still pursue dreams in a variety of ways – as O'Riordan herself proved. Women do not need abortion in order to lead successful lives.

*Yours etc.,*

**Fintan J. Power,** Waterford.

### 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.





# World Report

## Despite denial, Pope did receive sex abuse letter

Pope Francis received a victim's letter in 2015 that graphically detailed how a priest sexually abused him and how other Chilean clergy ignored it, contradicting the pope's recent insistence that no victims had come forward to denounce the cover-up, the letter's author and members of Francis's own sex-abuse commission have told the Associated Press (AP).

The fact that Francis received the eight-page letter, obtained by The Associated Press, challenges his insistence that he has 'zero tolerance' for sex abuse and cover-ups. It also calls into question his stated empathy with abuse survivors, compounding the most serious crisis of his five-year papacy.

### Protests

The scandal exploded last month when Francis's trip to South America was marred by protests over his vigorous defence of Bishop Juan Barros, who is accused by victims of covering up the abuse of Fr Fernando Karadima. During the trip, Francis callously dismissed accusations against Barros as "slander," seemingly unaware that victims had placed him at the scene of Karadima's crimes.

On the plane home, asked by an AP reporter, the Pope



A man reacts to the tear-gas during a protest when Pope Francis visited the La Moneda presidential palace in Santiago, Chile, last month. Photo: CNS

said: "You, in all good will, tell me that there are victims, but I haven't seen any, because they haven't come forward."

But former members of the Pope's Commission for the Protection of Minors say that in April 2015, they sent a delegation to Rome specifically to hand-deliver a letter to the Pope about Barros. The letter from Juan Carlos Cruz detailed the abuse, kissing and fondling he says he suffered at Karadima's hands, which he said Barros and others witnessed and ignored.

Four members of the commission met with Francis's top abuse adviser, Cardinal Sean O'Malley, explained their objections to Francis's recent appointment of Barros

as a bishop in southern Chile, and gave him the letter to deliver to Francis.

"When we gave him (Cardinal O'Malley) the letter for the Pope, he assured us he would give it to the Pope and speak of the concerns," then-commission member Marie Collins told the AP. "And at a later date, he assured us that that had been done."

### Requests

Mr Cruz, who now lives and works in Philadelphia, heard the same later that year.

"Cardinal O'Malley called me after the Pope's visit here in Philadelphia and he told me, among other things, that he had given the letter to the Pope - in his hands," he said.

Neither the Vatican nor Cardinal O'Malley responded to multiple requests for comment.

The Barros affair first caused shockwaves in January 2015 when Francis appointed him bishop of Osorno, Chile, over the objections of the leadership of Chile's bishops' conference and many local priests and laity.

They accepted as credible the testimony against Karadima, a prominent Chilean cleric who was sanctioned by the Vatican in 2011 for abusing minors. Barros was a Karadima protege, and according to Cruz and other victims, he witnessed the abuse and did nothing.

## German Cardinal foresees Church gay blessing but 'no general solutions'

The president of the German Bishops' Conference has said that he could foresee a situation where priests would bless same-sex couples.

Cardinal Reinhard Marx told the Bavarian State Broadcasting's radio service that "there can be no rules" about this question. Rather, the decision of whether a homosexual union should receive the Church's blessing should be up to "a priest or pastoral worker" and made in each individual case, the German prelate stated.

Cardinal Marx was asked by a journalist why "the Church does not always move forward when it comes to demands from some Catholics about, for instance, the ordination of female deacons, the blessing of homosexual couples, or the abolition of compulsory [priestly] celibacy."

The cardinal said that, for him, the important question to be asked regards how "the Church can meet the challenges posed by the new circumstances



of life today - but also by new insights, of course," particularly concerning pastoral care.

Describing this as a "fundamental ori-

entation" emphasised by Pope Francis, the cardinal called for the Church to take "the situation of the individual...their life-story, their biography...their relationships" more seriously and accompany them, as individuals accordingly.

Marx has recently called for an individualized approach to pastoral care, which, he has said, is neither subject to general regulations nor is it relativism.

Asked whether he was saying that he "could imagine a way to bless homosexual couples in the Catholic Church," Marx answered, "yes" - adding however, that there could be "no general solutions."

"It's about pastoral care for individual cases, and that applies in other areas as well, which we can not regulate, where we have no sets of rules."

The decision should be made by "the pastor on the ground, and the individual under pastoral care" said Marx, reiterating that, in his view, "there are things that can not be regulated".



Edited by Chai Brady  
chai@irishcatholic.ie

### IN BRIEF

#### Bishops urged to reach out to untouchables

● Bishops in India have been told the Church must "move away from being content with doling out some schemes and programs" for Dalits - those at the bottom of Hinduism's caste system formerly known as "untouchables" - and work to develop "a deeper understanding of the causes and manifestations of deprivation, discrimination and exclusion of Dalit Christians within the Church, by the larger society and by the State."

Jesuit Fr A. Maria Arul Raja, a professor of Religious Studies at the Jesuit Theology Centre in Chennai, spoke about the Church and Dalits at the biennial meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India taking place this week in Bangalore.

India has instituted several public programs - similar to affirmative action in the United States - to help the Dalit population, which makes up between 15 and 20% of the country's population, but widespread discrimination and marginalization continue.

#### Pope calls fast day

Pope Francis has announced that the first Friday of Lent will be a day of prayer and fasting for peace given the many ongoing conflicts throughout the world, particularly those in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan.

"Facing the tragic continuation of conflicts in different parts of the world, I invite all the faithful to a special day of prayer and fasting for peace on February 23, the Friday of the first week of Lent," the Pope said.

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# Faith and superstition



**Fr Rolheiser**

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

**T**he power of a subordinate clause, one nuance within a sentence and everything takes on a different meaning.

That's the case in a recent brilliant, but provocative, novel, *The Ninth Hour*, by Alice McDermott. She tells a story which, among other things, focuses on a group of nuns in Brooklyn who work with the poor.

Times are hard, people are needy and the nuns, who work mostly in home care for the poor, appear utterly selfless in their dedication. Nothing, it seems, can deflect them from their mission to give their all, their every ounce of energy, to help the poor. And on this score, McDermott gives them their due.

As well, for anyone familiar with what goes on inside of a religious community, McDermott's portrayal of these nuns is both nuanced and accurate.

## Unique history

Nuns aren't all of a kind. Each has her own unique history, temperament, and personality. Some are wonderfully warm and gracious, others nurse their own wounds and aren't always evident paradigms of God's love and mercy. And that's case with the nuns that McDermott describes here. But, quirks of individual personality aside, as a community, the nuns she describes serve the poor and

their overall witness is beyond reproach.

But then, after telling this story of faith and dedication and reflecting on how today there are few groups of nuns who still live so radical a commitment, McDermott, through the voice of her narrator, introduces the subversive subordinate clause: "The holy nuns who sailed through the house when we were young were a dying breed even then...the call to sanctity and self-sacrifice, the delusion and superstition it required, faded from the world even then."

Wow! The delusion and the superstition it required. As if this kind of radical self-sacrifice can only be the product of false fear. As if whole generations of Christian self-sacrifice, vowed celibacy, and single-minded dedication can be dismissed, *post-factum*, as ultimately predicated on delusion and superstition. How true is that?

I grew up in the world McDermott is describing, where nuns were like that, and where a powerful Catholic ethos supported them and declared what they were doing was anything but delusion and superstition. Admittedly that was another time and much of that ethos has not stood the test of time and has, indeed, to a large part succumbed to the raw power

of secularity. And so McDermott is right, partially. Some of that selflessness was based upon an unhealthy fear of hell fire and God's anger. To an extent too it was based on a notion of faith which believed that God does not really want us to flourish much here on earth but that our lives are meant to be mostly a sombre preparation for the next world.

**“I saw it too in the Ursuline nuns who taught me in school, women with full red blood flowing through their veins but who sacrificed these longings”**

Perhaps this isn't exactly delusion and superstition, but it is bad theology and it did help underwrite some of the religious life in the world McDermott describes and in the Catholic world of my youth.

But there was also something else undergirding this ethos, and I inhaled it deeply in my youth and in a way which branded my soul, for good, like nothing else I have ever breathed in in this



Alice McDermott.

**“I grew up in the world McDermott is describing, where nuns were like that, and where a powerful Catholic ethos supported them”**

world. Notwithstanding some false fears, there was inside of that a biblical faith, a raw mandate, that taught that your own comfort, your own desires and even your own legitimate longings for human flourishing, sexuality, marriage, children, freedom, and having what everyone else has, are subject to a higher purpose, and you may be asked to sacrifice them all, your legitimate longings, to serve God and others.

It was a faith that believed you were born with a God-given vocation and that your life was not your own.

I saw this first in my own parents who believed that faith made those demands upon them, who accepted that, and who consequently had the moral authority to ask this of others. I saw it too in the Ursuline nuns who taught me in school, women with full red blood flowing through their veins but who sacrificed these longings to

come into the public schools in our remote rural areas and teach us.

I saw it too in the little prairie community that nurtured me in my youth, a whole community who, by and large, lived out this selflessness.

Today, I live in a world that prizes sophistication above all else, but where as a whole society we're no longer sure what's 'fake news' as opposed to what we can believe in and trust. In this unsteady world the faith of my youth, of my parents, of the nuns who sacrificed their dreams to teach me, and of the nuns whom Alice McDermott describes in *The Ninth Hour*, can look very much like delusion and superstition.

Sometimes it is delusion, admittedly; but sometimes it isn't, and in my case the faith my parents gave me, with its belief that your life and your sexuality are not your own, is, I believe, the truest, most non-superstitious thing of all.



# Family & Lifestyle

The Irish Catholic, February 8, 2018

## Personal Profile

A godliness  
in their eyes

Page 30



# Listening: an elusive art



We are all guilty  
of poor listening  
at times, writes  
**Barbara Duff**

**D**o you ever feel that your partner does not really listen to you? Well, don't worry – you are not alone. And chances are that at times your partner feels the very same.

For most of us, the art of true listening is a real challenge. Yet, good, attentive listening is a vital ingredient in a healthy relationship.

That is why it's crucial to focus on this very important area. You may want to feel that your partner listens to you, but are you a good listener? If you can master the art of true listening, your partner can learn from you.

How do you become a good listener? Read on and find out. To truly listen to the

other person requires real concentration and focus. Your ability to listen attentively can depend on your perception of what is being said. Good listening also demands a receptive mind open to receive whatever message is being given.

### Feeling unheard

What is it like for you to feel unheard? The couples I have worked with report a wide range of experiences – I feel worthless,

as if I'm not even worth listening to; I feel really frustrated – no matter what I say, I can't get the message across; after a while I become withdrawn; I think my partner is not interested in me; eventually, I become really angry; what do you experience when you feel unheard?

### Getting the message across

"How can I get my partner to listen to me?" – this is a common plea. The frustration at being

ignored can build up into feelings of anger and rejection. For you to operate effectively as a couple, each needs to feel listened to. Each of you needs to feel that your message has been heard by the other.

Before you and your partner do the listening exercise here, assess yourself as a listener. Do you only half listen? Some of the pitfalls mentioned below ring true for most people. Which of them apply to you?

### Pitfalls of poor listening and how to avoid them

Switching off once, you think you are going to hear a complaint. "Here we go again" – maybe the message should not be dismissed. Give your partner a chance.

● **Interrupting your partner to**

**make a correction to the story** – hold it – your chance will come later.

● **Filtering out negative messages** – a common self-protection device – stay calm and listen.

● **Preparing your defence while your partner is speaking** – this shows that you are thinking of yourself. Try to think more of your partner.

● **Failing to pick up your partner's feelings of hurt, frustration or anger** – focus on the feelings behind your partner's words. Watch the body language.

● **Dismissing the message even before you have heard it** – try opening your mind before you close it.

» Continued on Page 29



## Family News

### AND EVENTS

### Céilí, comedy and lots of craic

For anyone in the family with a penchant for music or all things Irish, The Gathering Traditional Festival, which is one of the biggest traditional music festivals in the country, is an event worth your attention.

The festival has been running for 19 years and takes place in Killarney from February 21-25 in the Gleneagle Hotel, but there will be a huge range of concerts taking place in venues around the town, from large-scale performances at Ireland's National Event Centre (INEC) to fireside sessions in pubs.

There will also be céilís, comedy, Seán Ó Sé's set dancing puppets, and workshops and masterclasses for budding musicians to attend. The ticket price ranges from €10-€55.



### TIME TO HANG UP THE SHOES?

Irish dancing may be a cultural phenomenon across the island, but a new study has shown that the traditional activity can have a negative physical impact at elite level.

A study of 37 championship-level Irish dancers found most had suffered at least one injury in the previous 12 months, with many often continuing to dance despite being in pain.

According to a report in the *Irish Medical Times*, researchers at the University of Limerick found that "elite adolescent Irish dance is associated with a substantial risk of pain or injury, which appears to be greater than that incurred by young dancers from other genres".

84% of dancers said they incurred at least one injury during the previous 12 months, most often to their foot or ankle.

The report suggested that this could be due to "inappropriate technique progression, unique choreographic features and an overly arduous calendar of competitive events".

### Putting tears to rest

Parents are often left baggy-eyed from sleepless nights when rearing a new-born baby – and no matter how much you try – it seems almost impossible to soothe the restless cries. A quirky parenting gadget is providing the perfect solution to this dilemma by creating a calm sonic atmosphere for the child.

The Grow-Hush is a portable white noise speaker that gently pipes relaxing sounds directly into the baby's tiny earholes via a soft speaker, reminding them of the ambient times they spent in the womb. It's suitable for even the most exhausted parents, as you simply have to hold the spongy mitt to the small one's head, select the soundtrack which will lull them into a relaxed state. The noise is also directional so it doesn't disturb anyone else, leaving both parties with peace of mind.



### Science of life

Prof.  
William  
Reville

**W**e would all like to be productive, to use our time well and to get lots of things done. I know I would – I tend to have a problem with procrastination. But effective techniques to enhance productivity are well known, if only we would use them. Today I will outline four recommendations given on this matter by the Stoic philosophers, as explained by Eric Barker on his website *Barking Up the Wrong Tree* <https://www.bakadesuyo.com/2017/06/how-to-be-productive-3/>

This is a good site with lots of useful advice on various topics and Barker writes in a witty and entertaining style.

Stoicism is a school of Greek philosophy founded in the third century BC. It was famously practiced by people such as Epictetus (50 AD–135 AD), Seneca (45 BC–65 AD) and Marcus Aurelius (121 AD–180 AD). It is a very practical philosophy asserting that virtue is happiness, that judgement should be based on behaviour and not words, that we don't control external events so we must rely on ourselves and our responses. The ancient wisdom of the Stoics regarding productivity is endorsed by modern psychology.

#### Recommendation No. 1: Protect your time like your money

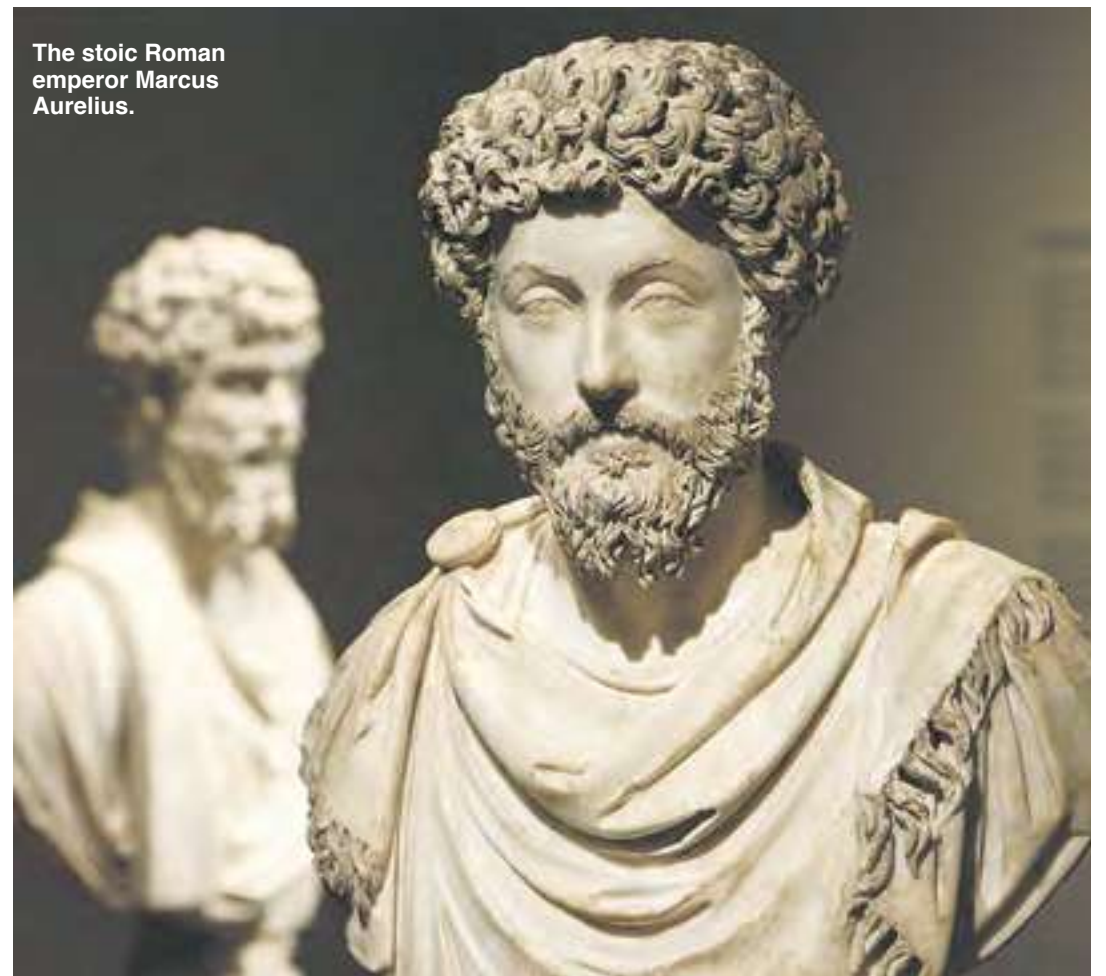
Most of us certainly don't do this. Imagine if someone approached you every 30 minutes asking for €20 – you would soon tell them to shove off. But how many of us check our emails and mobile phone texts every 30 minutes, reading and answering unimportant messages?

We don't appreciate that, valuable as money is, it is less valuable than time. We can always replenish our stock of money if we waste some, but time lost is lost forever. The Stoic philosopher Seneca said: "No person hands out money to passers-by, but to how many do each of us hand out our lives! We are tight-fisted with money and property, yet think too little of wasting time, the one thing about which we should all be the toughest misers".

#### Recommendation No. 2: Managing your emotions helps to manage your time

Our beliefs, not reality, underlie our feelings. If I wave a sword at you, you will be frightened but if you believe it is a toy cardboard sword you will not be scared. Epictetus said: "Men are disturbed, not by things, but by

The stoic Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius.



# Being productive the Stoic way

the principles and notions they have concerning things."

Many of us procrastinate when we are in a bad or a low mood. We decide that we need to improve our mood by doing something pleasant and distracting rather than tackling the job at hand. You should instead identify and examine what beliefs underpin your low feelings. Are you intimidated by the task in hand? Perhaps you think that you are not up to the job? Well, procrastination certainly won't help, it will only hinder you. You will do a worse job if you don't get started now. Changing your beliefs will



change your feelings, allowing you to get more done.

#### Recommendation No. 3: Spend most of your time doing the important things

We mostly know what the important things in life are but nevertheless we spend much time doing unimportant things – easy tasks like tidying your desk or files or other tasks that are urgent but not important.

Make a list of the things that are important for you to achieve and make sure you spend most of your time on them. As Marcus Aurelius said: "It is essential for you to remember that the attention you give to any action should be in due proportion to its worth, for then you won't tire and give up if you aren't busying yourself with things beyond what should be allowed."

#### Recommendation No. 4: Understand what you have control over and what you have no control over

Much of what worries most of us are things we have no control over but worrying about things we cannot control is a waste of time. Say you have booked and paid for a sun-holiday. You can look forward to the holiday with pleasant anticipation or you can fret over the possibility that bad weather will ruin things for you. But you have no control over the weather. Your worrying will not affect the weather outcome one little bit, but it will waste your time and energy.

You must distinguish between things you can change and things you cannot change. This will not only make you happier, but focusing your energy on things you can change will make you much more productive as well.

The Christian Serenity Prayer

offers the same advice – "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; Courage to change the things I can; And wisdom to know the difference."

Barker ends his piece on productivity with a comment from the Stoics on the often heard sentiment that 'life is short'. The Stoics do not agree with this sentiment. Barker quotes a powerful passage from Seneca: "It's not that we have too short a time to live but that we squander a great deal of it. Life is long enough and it's given in sufficient measure to do many great things if we spend it well. But when it's poured down the drain of luxury and neglect, when it's employed to no good end, we're finally driven to see that it has passed by before we even recognised it passing. And so it is – we don't receive a short life, we make it so".

Enthused by the subject matter of my topic today I strove to apply the four recommendations of the Stoics to the writing of this article. I am pleased to report that I wrote it in about half the time it usually takes me to write an article for *The Irish Catholic*.

So now that you know what to do to be productive, hop to it!

**i** William Reville is an Emeritus Professor of Biochemistry at UCC.



» Continued from Page 23



● **Watch out for these tell-tale statements** – they can become a habit.

● **“But wait a minute...”** This indicates that you are on the defensive. You are already prepared with a counter-attack.

● **“I can’t believe I’m hearing this...”** This response of outrage, mock outrage or anger indicates that you are refusing to listen.

● **“Oh for heaven’s sake! That’s what you always say.”** This dismissive response expresses contempt. It indicates that you have little respect for what your partner feels or thinks.

Each of these responses is a clear indication of poor listening and can only have a negative impact on your partner. As you become more aware of how you speak and listen to one another, you will no doubt avoid using such tactics.

We are all guilty of poor listening at times. Yet we all want to be heard.

#### To be a good listener

Clear your mind of distractions; put aside any negative thoughts such as irritation or anger; look at your partner when he/she is speaking; watch out for signs of distress or frustration; try to focus only on what is being said, not on your reply; keep an open mind even if you don’t like what you hear; try to empathise with what your partner is saying; what do you need to change to make you a better listener? Work on it.

#### Listening exercise

This exercise is designed to help you and your partner really listen to one another.

Whoever speaks first is Speaker A. Whoever listens first is Speaker B. Read the guidelines before starting the exercise.

#### Person A guidelines

Think of some issue or incident with your partner from the recent or distant past that upset you. As you talk, focus on how it made you feel.

For example: “When you didn’t arrive on time, I felt let down at first. As the time passed I became angry. But when I couldn’t contact you I began to feel anxious for your safety. Then finally you breezed in



with some feeble excuse for being late. I felt relieved to see you but really hurt and still angry. You dismissed my upset, telling me to cheer up – now that you had arrived we should enjoy our time together. I tried to move on but all evening I felt resentful, as if you did not understand me at all.”

#### Person B guidelines

As you listen, focus only on what your partner is saying. Take particular note of how this incident made your partner feel.

When giving your feedback, stick as closely as you can to what your partner has said.

**“Keep an open mind even if you don’t like what you hear; try to empathise with what your partner is saying”**

Avoid dismissing your partner’s feelings, e.g.: “You shouldn’t feel hurt.” What your partner feels is what your partner feels – it is real for him/her and must be acknowledged.

Avoid corrections, e.g.: “You said I was half an hour late. In fact, I was just 25 minutes late.” This indicates that while you were listening you were preparing your defence. This reinforces your partner’s sense of

not being heard and understood.

#### Listening exercise: part one

Person A speaks for five minutes without interruption on an issue that they have found annoying or troubling in the relationship. Person B keeps silent. You must listen without interrupting – even if you think A has got the story all wrong.

Person B then spends three minutes recounting as accurately as possible what they have heard A say. This is simply recording – no corrections or perceived inaccuracies to be addressed at this stage. You simply say: “What I have heard you say is...”

Person A gets one minute to correct any misinterpretations or omissions that B has made. “Yes, you got most of it right. But you left out that I said I felt hurt, sad...”

The object of the exercise here is that Person A feels that B has really heard what A has said and that B acknowledges how A feels. So, when you are the listener – B, it is vital that you simply acknowledge receipt of the information.

Avoid giving your response however well-meant, e.g.: “I know you say it makes you angry but really there is no need to feel that way.”

There will be time later to come to an agreement on how to handle such an issue in the future. For now, your role as listener is to do exactly that – LISTEN – not to comment, however helpful you may think that could be.

#### Listening exercise: part two

Next, the roles are reversed. Now B gets a chance to speak on an aspect of the relationship. It can be on the same issue or it might be something else. Person B decides.

Follow the steps as in part one.

❶ *Barbara Duff is a relationship and psychosexual counsellor with over 20 years’ experience. This is an edited extract from her new book Rekindle the Spark, published by Orpen Press (€12.00).*

## Faith — IN THE — family



Bairbre Cahill

There is a psalm that I have loved for many years and even more so since I became a mother. It is psalm 139: “It was you who created my inmost self, and put me together in my mother’s womb; for all these mysteries I thank you: for the wonder of myself, for the wonder of your works.” (Psalm 139:13,14).

The words of this psalm came back powerfully to me a few weeks ago when I attended a Learning and Consultation Workshop organised by the Alcohol Forum in Donegal on the subject of adolescents and alcohol.

A psychologist gave a fascinating presentation about what is happening in the adolescent brain. Did you know that from puberty until at least the age of 25 a large-scale reconstruction is going on in the brain? Many of the pathways that are no longer used are effectively pruned away to give room for new brain pathways to be developed.

#### Process

This whole process explains a lot about the behaviours we associate with the teenage years and young adulthood. Imagine walking into a hotel that had decided to revamp half its bedrooms and its dining room at the same time – wouldn’t you expect a certain amount of chaos?

Regular use of alcohol can impair the ability of the brain to set down the new pathways it needs and affect the quality of those pathways. Dopamine is a chemical released in the brain when we feel happy or excited.

The amount of dopamine released in a teenager’s brain is reduced. In a way this is a good thing because it urges the teenager out of the safe nest of the family to try new and exciting things in a search for that dopamine rush.

That is part of growing to adulthood but unfortunately for many young people that dopamine rush can come from alcohol.

Teenage drinking is a risky behaviour that gives young people a buzz beyond just the effects of the alcohol and so it can easily lead to more intensive and more frequent drinking. Current advice is for

young people to delay drinking alcohol until they are at least 18 but preferably into their 20s. When our adolescents face so many pressures to drink from advertising and their peers they need us to provide them with strong, clear boundaries as a counter-balance.

What has any of this to do with Faith in the Family? I believe it’s really important that we, as parents, help our children to have a real sense of the wonder of their being. That image, that not only did God create us in the womb but that God continues to create us through life is wonderful.

#### Development

God knits us together in our mother’s womb and that knitting continues with the amazing development of a child’s brain in the first years of life and then the incredible reshaping that happens from puberty into early adulthood.

I want my children to see themselves as God’s ‘work of art’ as Saint Paul says in his letter to the people of Ephesus (2:10). I hope that a deep respect for that ongoing work of creation will influence the choices they make about alcohol and other high risk behaviours.

**“Our children and young people need us to parent with confidence and with integrity”**

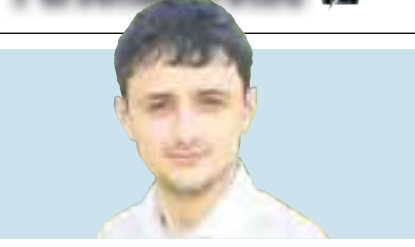
We were told very clearly at the workshop that strong, confident parenting is one of the most important protective factors for young people when it comes to alcohol.

In one of the Sunday gospels recently people are astounded at the authority with which Jesus speaks. That authority comes from deep within, from who Jesus is and from the fact that how Jesus lives and what Jesus says are two sides of the one coin. What you see is what you get.

Our children and young people need us to parent with confidence and with integrity. They need to know that we also strive to live out the values and vision which we offer them.



## Personal Profile



## The people of South Sudan need Ireland's help, writes Colm Fitzpatrick

**W**ith poverty, hunger and fear still rampant in war-torn South Sudan, a lay missionary is calling on all Irish people for support.

Noeleen Loughran, who originally hails from the small village of Emyvale, Co. Monaghan, now helps suffering children in Africa, having sold everything she owned to care for and protect them.

"I initially went to Kenya in 2013, to an orphanage of 52 children and teachers. Fr John Skinnader told me that I should go and that it would be great if I went," Noeleen explains. "I went to Kenya for three months to see what things would be like and how I felt about it. Afterwards, I knew this was the part of the world I wanted to come to."

Noeleen then travelled to Uganda to do agricultural work with the Franciscans, and at present lives about half a kilometre from South Sudan.

The Bidi Bidi Refugee Camp, where she now works, contains around 287,000 people, 80% of whom are teenagers and children. It is an isolated and arid desert stretching over 100 square miles, and reaches temperatures of up to 50 degrees.

Most the refugees are from South Sudan who have fled the country because of the ongoing

conflict present there.

"It is very rare to meet a child with both parents. One of the children I work with has no remaining family left except for one aunt – all were killed," Noeleen says.

"There are no real statistics of how many have died, there were so many, people just lost track."

### Border

When the refugees arrive at the border of Uganda with the limited supplies they have carried, such as cooking pots and plastic jars for carrying water, they are escorted to the refugee camp by the United Nations. They are given UN plastic sheeting with a few sticks which becomes their new home.

Despite the aid, the living conditions and accessibility of food is poor and limited meaning that starvation and diseases are prevalent.

"It's very, very low on resources. It's very sad. The

water is rationed. They only eat beans and maize. It has become so desperate people are running across the border to try and get food," she says.

"On a daily basis, she treats around 50 to 70 people although this is increasing. Malaria is a big killer and typhoid", she explained, adding that the ailment 'Elephantiasis', in which a person's body parts swell to massive proportions, is also common.

Noeleen undertakes a one-hour journey every second day and attends one of the 29 chapels within the camp where people gather in times of pain to pray. All of the refugees suffer from trauma and so she spends her day testing and treating them for various illnesses. Medicines are also extremely difficult to find, and most of the refugees can either not afford them or are too sick to look for them.

She also teaches approximately

80 children and youths how to protect and treat themselves using the herbal plants that grow wild. Most of the plants have medicinal purposes and when used correctly can prevent and treat sickness.

"All of the refugees are ill. Illnesses that are so unimaginable to even explain.

### “Prayer and their God is the only real thing they have left”

"The people don't complain that they are sick, in fact when you meet them, smiles gleam from their faces in appreciation that someone has come to visit them," she said.

In the face of this anguish, the refugees work together and help one another to settle in to this new and often frightening environment.

"They are the finest example of love of neighbour I have ever seen. They will cook for them until they

have regained strength to do it for themselves. They will carry them water from the borehole and collect firewood for them to cook. They will wash them, comfort them and pray," she explained.

Although the situation seems hopeless, Noeleen believes that the people's steadfast love of God provides the support they need to keep going.

"They have nobody, only God. They are a worshipping people, they pray and bless themselves," she says.

### Celebration

On Sunday, there are many catechists who will preach but most people are only able to attend mass once a year. Noeleen adds that "it's a huge celebration for them. It's absolutely amazing."

"Prayer and their God is the only real thing they have left and it is prayer and faith that has allowed them to survive their horrific ordeal."

In spite of the harrowing conditions within the camp, Noeleen is resolute in remaining so that she can continue her missionary work.

"You can't leave them. You just can't leave them – I can't turn my back on them. I do believe we are all God's children. I believe that within all of this chaos and pitilessness that there is a great sense of God here.

"There's a godliness here, you can see it in people's eyes", she says.

Her parting message before she attends to the sick once more will resonate with everybody, and reshape our understanding of how we are playing our part. "I would ask people to unite themselves and pray for our brothers and sisters on the other side of the world that we don't know."

**i** For more information about Noeleen's work, see: <http://www.emyvale.net/>

# A godliness in their eyes



Noeleen Loughran with one of the many people she has helped in South Sudan.

## Sweet Treats

Emma Louise Murphy



## A wonderful dessert that anyone can prepare

**S**trawberry cheesecake has always been one of my favourite dishes to make. Quick and easy, this no-bake cake would suit anyone looking to try their hand at desserts. This particular cheesecake is light and creamy in texture with bursts of sweetness from the strawberries mixed throughout.

Perfect for a Sunday evening dessert, or a Valentine's day treat, this cheesecake is sure to have the people in your life smiling from ear to ear.

### Ingredients:

#### Base:

275g digestive biscuits  
100g real butter

#### Strawberry filling:

400g cream cheese  
100g icing sugar  
1 tsp vanilla extract  
85ml double cream  
400g strawberries  
Keep a few strawberries aside for decoration

#### Method:

Place the digestive biscuits in a reusable bag and crush until you are left with fine biscuits crumbs.

Place the crumbs in a bowl and set aside. Melt the butter over a low heat until completely liquid and pour over crumbs. Mix through and pour into 8" pan. Push the crumb down, pressing it into the pan to create the base. I like to use the bottom of a glass to push the crumb base together as tightly as possible. I tend to add a bit more of the crumbly base than typical cheesecakes, so if a thinner base is what you prefer, reduce the quantity of digestive biscuits to 200g. Leave the base in the fridge to set while you are making the filling.

### “The more you stir the mixture through, the better the texture will become”

In a separate bowl, combine your cream cheese and icing sugar. You can use a hand held mixer here to whip it up, but a wooden spoon would be just as

good for this step. When the filling is creamy and smooth, add your vanilla extract and double cream. The double cream will loosen the mixture up, but have no fear, the more you stir it through, the better the texture will become. Chop the strawberries into quarters and mix through the filling.

Take your base from the fridge and pour in the velvety strawberry mix. Use a spatula to push the filling down into the pan and smooth the top. At this point, you could decorate with more strawberries but the choice is yours. Chill the cheesecake before serving. Overnight would be best for a firm filling, but if you really can't wait, 2 hours in the fridge is a good marker for time needed.

This particular recipe makes one cheesecake in an 8" springform pan. However, you can double the ingredients as needed or you can create individual cheesecakes by placing the base and filling into ramekins and leaving to chill overnight.





# TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



## Robust debate on the hot topic of the week

**I**t was a mixed week when it comes to issues surrounding the welfare of children.

There were so many welcome media debates alerting parents to the dangers of online grooming and abuse of children. I heard calls for the banning of smartphones in primary schools and I heard of the Government rightly supporting initiatives to keep children safe online even as they announced measures that will make them unsafe in the womb.

I heard the good news of our signing up to a convention (or parts of it) on the rights of people with disability, even as we saw the proposals to make some unborn children with disabilities (i.e. life-limiting conditions) an easier target for abortion. We heard proponents of human rights welcoming a measure that will have the effect of taking away human rights from a particularly vulnerable group – lots of confusion about our values, and on the most basic of rights.

The Eighth Amendment debate was particularly intense early in the week. On the Monday night we had that weirdly late and dour press conference, live on **RTÉ News Now** also interrupting **Clare Byrne Live** (RTÉ1) and saw that the Taoiseach, and ironically our Ministers for Health and Children, had bought into the pro-choice playbook,



Kate O'Connell TD featured on RTÉ1's *Prime Time*.

with their new mantra about abortion being "safe, legal and rare".

The naiveté was breathtaking. Minister Zappone was asked about the "inherent contradiction" of her position, as she was Minister for Children. It wasn't answered at first but she came back to it with the line that her position was okay because the unborn child, the foetus, only "holds the potential for human life that develops". Curiously, the medical doctor beside her did not demur.

The next day we got a variety of reactions. On **Today With Seán O'Rourke** (RTÉ Radio 1) Kate O'Connell TD,

one of the strongest supporters of repeal and the proposed abortion legislation said "I am viscerally opposed to abortion". What?

Mattie McGrath TD wasn't having any of it, and likewise, on that day's **Lunchtime Live** (Newstalk), Senator Rónán Mullen gave a robust challenge to the proposals. He said it was "not reasonable ... to have a vote that proposes taking away somebody else's human rights".

In relation to women travelling abroad for abortion he said it was "a tragedy for the baby who doesn't come back".

That night on **Prime Time** (RTÉ1) there was a rather un-

sual pairing of Kate O'Connell TD and Danny Healy Rae TD. O'Connell was on message with "safe, legal and rare", while Healy Rae gave a simple clear pro-life message, humanising the unborn child in a way that should resonate with rural Ireland.

### Debate

Later that night there was an interesting debate on the **Tonight** show on TV3. Former Senator Fidelma Healy Eames was for inclusiveness – "I stand for both lives" – while Minister Regina Doherty TD was pro-repeal though she did believe that what was in a mother's womb was, in fact, a baby.

On last Sunday's **The Week in Politics** it was good to hear some relatively new voices defending the Eighth Amendment. Mary Butler TD (FF) impressed with her grasp of danger of the issues as did Michael Fitzmaurice TD (Ind).



Seán O'Rourke.

### PICK OF THE WEEK

**VOX NOSTRA WITH VLAD SMISHKEWYCH**  
RTÉ Lyric FM, Sunday, February 11, 7am

Featuring the Requiem mass of Baroque throwback Juan García de Salazar, performed by Capilla Peñaflorida on this morning's Vox Nostra.

**FORGOTTEN HERITAGE: EUROPE AND THE EUCHARIST**

EWTN, Monday, February 12, 8.30am and 9.30pm

Fr Owen Gorman and Fr John Hogan explore the 1879 Marian apparition of Knock and what it tells us about the Eucharistic heritage of Europe.

**MAGICAL SITES**

RTÉ2, Tuesday, February 13, 8.30am

The children explore High Crosses, also the story of John baptising Jesus in the river.

Last Thursday the **Tonight** show turned to the question of child safety online. The always sensible and authoritative cyber psychologist Mary Aiken was seriously concerned about the matter and criticised the Irish Government for opting for such a low age of digital consent (e.g. able to make contracts with multi-national companies) at 13 years old when most other comparable countries favoured a 16-year-old limit. She outlined recent increases in anxiety, eating disorders and depression among young people as they went "crowd sourcing self-esteem online".

I was glad to see Senator Catherine Noone (she of the Oireachtas Committee on the Eighth Amendment) agreeing about the proposed age in Ireland being too low, and

as a member of the Children's Committee showing strong concern for their welfare and safety online, though I'd get more enthusiastic if she showed as much concern for in-womb safety.

David Quinn made an important point about how much the state is beholden to the multi-national tech companies, suggesting we'd be like Greece without the sun if it wasn't for them. That issue, and issue of voluntary bodies being beholden to the state, deserves further discussion... sometimes it's like autoharp syndrome – too many strings attached.

[boregan@hotmail.com](mailto:boregan@hotmail.com)



Pat O'Kelly

# Music

## 70 years of excellence celebrated by the RTÉSO

Next week the RTÉ NSO celebrates its 70th birthday with its concert at the NCH on Friday, February 16. Directed by former principal conductor Gerhard Markson, music by Wagner, Prokofiev and Deirdre Gribben brings soprano Orla Boylan and pianist Finghin Collins as soloists.

But there had been a Radio Éireann Orchestra prior to the formation of the Symphony Orchestra in 1948. Beginning life as the Station String Trio with the establishment of 2RN in 1926, it soon became a quartet when joined by formidable pianist Kitty O'Callaghan.

Numbers duly increased and, on November 26, 1927, 2RN's then director of music

Vincent O'Brien, with assistance from the army and Dublin's theatre and cinema orchestras, presented a concert in Abbey Street's Metropolitan Hall that included Beethoven's 1st Symphony.

By 1937, when 2RN became Radio Éireann, the RÉO's strength was 28 and, again augmented, gave a number of concerts at the Gaiety Theatre. The ensemble also ventured into the realm of opera, partnering the Dublin Operatic Society in *La bohème* and *Carmen*.

Head of the Army School of Music, Michael Bowles was appointed principal conductor in 1941. Then also RÉ's director of music, Bowles organised a series of concerts

later than year in the Round Room in Dublin's Mansion House. The first of these presented Cork-born pianist Charles Lynch in the Irish premiere of Rakhmaninov's Paganini Rhapsody while the main work was Beethoven's Eroica Symphony. These events played to 'packed houses'.

### Move

This encouraged a move to the larger Capitol Theatre with the programme for October 31, 1943 combining Beethoven's 5th Symphony and Rimsky-Korsakov's *Sheherazade*. Under Bowles, the Dublin Oratorio Society joined the RÉO on May 21, 1944 for Beethoven's 9th



Gerhard Markson.

Symphony with local soloists Renée Flynn, Kathleen Uhlmann, Robert McCullagh and Frank Cowle.

The end of the war meant continental European artists becoming available and Bowles lost no time in bringing a number to Dub-

lin. Among notable conductors came Jean Martinon. The young Frenchman was admired by the RÉO musicians for his 'efficiency and knowledge of his craft'. Martinon would later become principal conductor of the Chicago Symphony.

Emboldened, Bowles suggested to Minister for Posts and Telegraphs, PJ Little, whose remit incorporated Radio Éireann, that the RÉO be increased to symphonic strength (65) and that a Light Orchestra of 22 players be established.

Approval was given and, following another Bowles initiative, the Minister also agreed to place the musicians on a permanent footing.

In the meantime the Phoenix Hall in Dublin's Dame Court, already a P&T property, was given to the orchestra as its studio-cum-concert venue. Officially opened on January 30, 1948, Swiss conductor Edmund Appia took the rostrum with my own piano teacher, Patricia Herbert, playing the Grieg Concerto. This was the old RÉO's final appearance before the new RÉSO gave its first concert on February 14, 1948 under Jean Martinon's baton.

Telefís was added to the orchestra's title in 1964 and the RTÉSO became the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra on January 1, 1990. "If music be the food of love, play on." *Ad multos annos.*



# BookReviews

Peter Costello



## Lourdes and literature – the long and varied tradition

Peter Costello

Over the 160 years since the world first heard of Bernadette Soubirous's visionary experiences of the Blessed Virgin Mary in a grotto outside the town of Lourdes much has been written about the events of the summer of 1858 by both sceptics and believers.

These events have also, however, given rise to two widely read novels which are both, in their very different way, classics of their kind. These are Emile Zola's *Lourdes* (1894), one of a trilogy, and Franz Werfel's *Song of Bernadette* (1942).

Zola is one of the leading figures of 19th-Century French literature, a man who is read and written about constantly. He belonged, as he would have admitted himself, to the culture of Catholic France very clearly. The other novelist, Franz Werfel, creator of the *Song of Bernadette*, was a product of Greater Germany, and its Jewish culture.

Their differing views of

Lourdes, of Bernadette and of what occurred in 1858, and what has happened since, make for an interesting comparison of the ways in which the world in general sees Lourdes.

Lourdes is one of the most important sites of pilgrimage on earth. Every year millions go there, most merely to be where something extraordinary once happened, a few number go in search of solace or cure. As the turn of the century approached it was one of the most famous places in France.

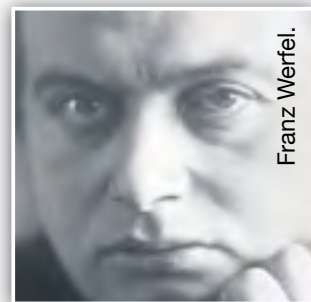
In the late September of 1891, Emile Zola was on holiday in the Pyrenees with his wife and took the opportunity to visit Lourdes. They spent 15 days in the town and he was so impressed with what he saw then and again in 1892 that it inspired his controversial novel *Lourdes*.

### Successful

This critically successful novel "did more than any other publication to bring the shrine, the cures and the debate over the nature of healing to the



wider public", according to Ruth Harris, writing a century later.



Franz Werfel.

Zola was, like so many today, a positivist with a naturalistic outlook. He did not believe in the possibility of miracles, but he was shaken

by Lourdes as a religious and social phenomenon.

Zola saw at once that there would always be controversy about the events surrounding the life of Bernadette – those events were beyond scrutiny, depending on human testimony.

But the alleged miracles were different. In the novel Zola is sceptical about their authenticity, but he centred on a point that is still valid.

Miracles were events, which unlike the apparitions, could be examined and carefully scrutinised. Zola accepted people were "cured", but like most sceptics

saw in this either error in diagnosis or the powers of the body to heal itself.

But in writing the novel Zola could not bring himself to admit that he had, as a matter of fact, witnessed a miracle at the shrine. Asked why he had not incorporated this experience he said he was an artist, not a journalist.

### Commonplace

What he meant by this, I think, was that his kind of naturalistic novel dealt with the commonplace and the everyday, what happened in life normally. Miracles were to him as an artist abnormal,

and hence could have no place in the normal experience of Lourdes which he wanted to describe.

The experience of Franz Werfel was very different. The Hollywood version of his novel made in 1943 made changes to Werfel's novel, which in any case was a novel but it arose out of Werfel's own experiences and personal response to what he saw and heard at Lourdes when he was in flight through Vichy France.

Werfel was born in Prague, the child of a wealthy manufacturing family. However he was greatly influenced

## Miracles at Lourdes: one Dubliner's experience

Peter Costello

Since 1858, when the first miracles were recorded, the Church has judged only a very small number of cures as truly miraculous – to date some 69. The Church can be as sceptical at times as any Zola.

The most recent recognition was in 2013 of the curing of Mrs Danila Castelli, suffering from a tumour on her bladder, who experienced the miracle in the baths on May 4, 1989.

The Medical Bureau holds records of many others, running up to more than nearly 7,000. Perhaps 1500 of these are seen as "inexplicable under natural laws", but are not yet judged to be miracles.

One of the most interesting



of the many accounts concerns a Dubliner, Charles McDonald, whose cure was first widely reported to the world by *The Irish Catholic* in an article in 1937.

McDonald later published a little book of his own. In *Miracle at Lourdes* (Dublin: Clonmore & Reynolds, 1954; out of print) he describes how, crippled by TB in his trunk, spine, kidneys, and lungs, he was taken to Lourdes by stretcher.

One night in the hospital the doctor told the nurse in charge, "Do not leave poor Charlie. He cannot possibly live till morning."

But "poor Charlie" did more than survive the night.

The next day he asked to be taken down to the baths and to be dipped in the cold spring water. On the first occasion he felt a severe shock, but the second time he was suffused with a feeling of peace.

In a mere seven seconds his condition had been cured. The bones stopped decaying, the fistulae dried up, his kidneys and lungs cleared, his skin healed. He could now get out of bed and dress himself. His book reproduces the testimony of his original doctors, images of x-rays taken just before publication, and a report by a

Dublin surgeon.

"I was a new man. I walked out of the water a complete cure, in perfect health and I have never looked back."

### “We know that there are other kinds of miracles, other kinds of solace at Lourdes”

Oddly McDonald's extraordinary cure is not among the recognised miracles. Yet to the normal person it seems very remarkable.

Charles McDonald's reaction to his cure was equally remarkable; to him it was not as it might be to a sceptic, a proof of God's existence. Far from it; for him it was a humbling feeling that through the

intercession of Bernadette's "Lady of Lourdes" he had been picked out for divine attention, the finger of his creator had reached out to touch him directly. He found that a mind-numbing thought

But there are miracles and miracles. The cure of an affliction is striking and very visible to us. But we know that there are other kinds of miracles, other kinds of solace at Lourdes: the alcoholic who reforms himself, the violent husband who learns mildness, the errant children who find a new way, the women who find renewed purpose in their often difficult lives.

Those kind of events are never registered, but they too are a part of the extraordinary influence of Lourdes.



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.

## Some essential books on Bernadette and Lourdes

### Peter Costello

Novels are but one way of exploring the dimension of a subject. Many still prefer non-fiction accounts of such a phenomenon as Lourdes. For this anniversary no distinctive new books have been published in either English or French.

But this seems scarcely to matter for some excellent books are still available, new, second hand or through the national public library system which serves all the county libraries and their branches.

The best biography which is at once sensitive to the religious issues involved and scholarly is Thérèse Taylor's biography *Bernadette of Lourdes: Her life death and visions* (Burns & Oates, £5.91pb). The author is an Australian academic, but the book, based on exhaustive research, is highly readable. Undoubtedly the first book for anyone to read.

One of the most interesting testimonies to the Lourdes experience remains Alexis Carrel's *Voyage to Lourdes* (London: Hamish Hamilton 1950; out of print), written in 1903 but not published until 1949, five years after the death of the pioneering yet controversial surgeon.



Alexis Carrel.

He witnessed at Lourdes the cure of Marie Bailly, which occurred after a flagon of the bath water was poured over her swollen abdomen – it occurred right before his eyes, and naturally proved controversial. (His text was later included in a book with accounts of Lourdes by the poet Francis Jammes and the novelist Françoise Mauriac, but this was never translated.)

A more sociological approach was taken by Oxford University historian Ruth Harris in



*Lourdes: Body and Soul in a Secular Age* (London: Allen Lane, 1999; also Penguin £14.99pb). She explores the large social and political dimension of late 19th-Century France, on which she is an authority.

### Overlooked

Though Bernadette was herself notably reticent about her experiences in later years, what he had to say will be found in *A Holy Life: The Writings of St Bernadette of Lourdes*, by Patricia A. McEachern (Ignatius Press, €16.99), professor of French at Drury University, published in 2005.

Not to be overlooked is an older book, *St Bernadette Soubirous* (Longman, Green & Co. 1957) by Mgr Francis Trochu, who died in 1967. This is still a very readable book by a French Catholic author who presents the

saint's life in the context of her time as seen by a French priest of the older school. Though dated it is still much admired in France.

For those anxious to develop their knowledge before undertaking the pilgrimage there is *Lourdes Diary: Six Days at the grotto of Massabielle* by John Martin SJ (Loyola University Press, £8.44), as well as a pilgrims' guide to present day Lourdes *A Pilgrimage to Mary's Grotto* by Kerry Crawford (Servant Books, \$15.99).

The local diocese has also facilitated The Wonders of *Lourdes: 150 Miraculous Stories of the Power of Prayer to Celebrate the 150th Anniversary of Our Lady's Apparitions*, edited by Gerald Korsan and John Pepino (Magnificat USA, \$24.95), which runs to some 636 pages of personal narratives.



“The book, based on exhaustive research, is highly readable ...the first book for anyone to read”



by his nurse who often took him to Mass. He was educated at a school run by the Piarist Fathers, as were many wealthy Bohemian Jews. He was a precocious writer, and a friend of Franz Kafka and Max Brod. He moved in the advanced intellectual circles of Central Europe.

In the early '30s he travelled widely, experiences from which emerged his novel of the Armenian massacres by the Turks, *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*, which was widely read causing great controversy, being especially attacked by the Nazis. With the annexation of Austria, where he then lived, he fled and made his way through France to the US.

“Werfel's novel is an interpretation by an essential brave and sensitive man”

His biographer, Peter Jungk, describes how he spent five weeks in Lourdes, where he was helped by some of the Catholic clergy working at the shrine. He was deeply moved by the stories he heard there of Bernadette, and promised himself “to sing as best he could her song”. He reached New York in October 1940, where he completed the novel his stay in Lourdes had inspired.

*The Song of Bernadette*



The Lourdes grotto in 1858.

was published in May 1942 and became an immense best seller, gaining also critical acclaim. One critic saw it then as “filled with faith in human goodness”. He died in Los Angeles in August 1945, but by that time the novel had become a best seller and had been filmed. It remains in print to this day (Ignatius Press, €19.95).

It has, I suspect, provided more people both Catholic and non-Catholic with their ideas about the story of Ber-

nadette than any other work of the imagination. Given Werfel's life and experiences, that in itself is some kind of miracle too.

Werfel stayed close to the actual facts, but his novel is an interpretation by an essential, brave and sensitive man, open to the deep movements of the spirit and of religion in its widest sense. To appreciate the fullness of the Lourdes experience it still deserves to be read.



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28th-2nd  
**MAY-JUN**

Fr Denis McBride, CSsR  
Where does the Jesus story begin? We will reflect on the different beginnings of the Jesus story alongside the question: given who you are today, where did that story begin?

31st-6th  
**AUG-SEPT**

Fr Nick Harman, MSC  
RECOVERING THE SACRED IN OUR EVERYDAY LIFE.

9th-15th  
**OCT**

Fr Daniel O'Leary  
"AN ASTONISHING SECRET: The Love-story of Creation - the Wonder of You" Reflections on the beauty, challenges and pain of all life, and of our own in particular.

### 6 DAYS DIRECTED RETREATS

AUG 31<sup>ST</sup> - SEPT 6<sup>TH</sup> @2PM

Elizabeth Dunne, SMR  
Des Corrigan, SMA

9<sup>TH</sup> - 15<sup>TH</sup> OCT @2PM

Frank Downes, OP  
Dermot Mansfield, SJ

### 4 DAYS DIRECTED RETREATS

31<sup>ST</sup> AUG - 4<sup>TH</sup> SEPT

Elizabeth Dunne, SMR  
Des Corrigan, SMA

### LENTEN DAYS

17<sup>TH</sup> FEB Fr. Aodhan McCrystal, SMA

10<sup>TH</sup> MARCH Fr. Des Corrigan, SMA

### EASTER TRIDUUM

28<sup>TH</sup> MAR @6 PM - 1<sup>ST</sup> APR @9 AM

### CARE OF THE EARTH IS CARE OF OUR FUTURE

12<sup>TH</sup> MAY  
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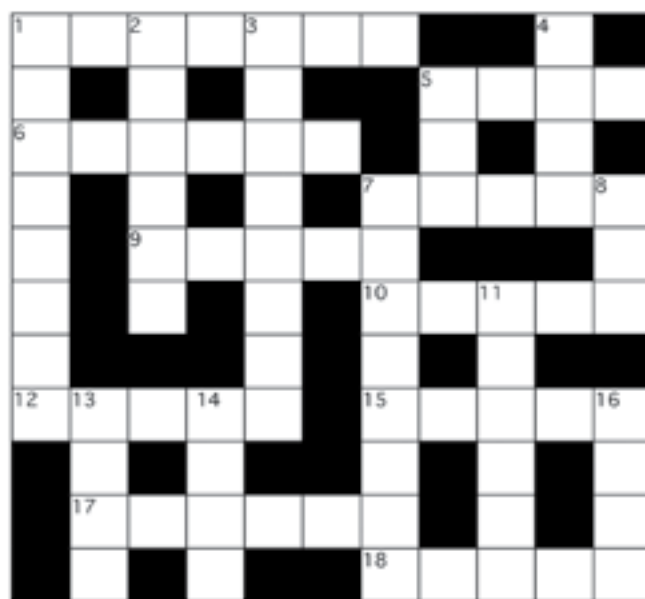
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# Leisure time

## Crossword Junior

Gordius 218



### ACROSS

- 1 '\_\_\_\_\_ and the Chocolate Factory' (7)  
 5 You might give one to dog to chew (4)  
 6 Having food (6)  
 7 Britain's only poisonous snake (5)  
 9 Exactly the same (5)  
 10 Put seed in the ground (5)  
 12 Clan; group of Native Americans (5)  
 15 Living (5)  
 17 You put one on your birthday cake for each year (6)  
 18 Has a chat (5)

### DOWN

- 1 'Conker' (8)  
 2 One of a deer's horns (6)  
 3 What is spoken in a particular country (8)  
 4 Joint halfway up the leg (4)  
 5 Evil (3)  
 7 The ABC (8)  
 8 Creature that followed the Pied Piper (3)  
 11 Creature (6)  
 13 You often serve it with a curry (4)  
 14 James \_\_\_\_\_ is 007 (4)  
 16 You see with these (4)

## LAST WEEK'S SOLUTIONS

### GORDIUS No.336

**Across** – 1 Force of habit 7 Ova 9 Writ 10 In-laws 11 Both 14 Ghana 15 Twain 16 Wall 18 Acrid 21 Rouse 22 On cue 23 Tunis 24 Ever 25 Earth 26 Spout 29 Gait 33 Endure 34 Pail 36 Toe 37 Michelangelo

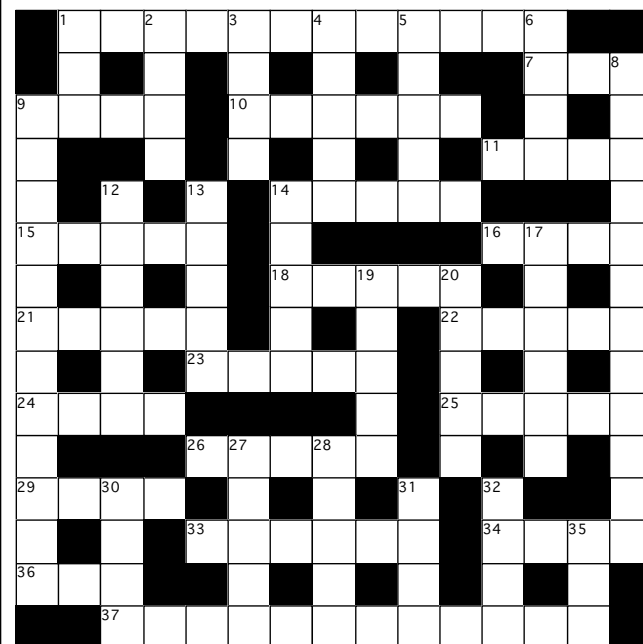
**Down** – 1 For 2 Ruth 3 Emit 4 Filth 5 Aswan 6 Togo 8 Achilles heel 9 Welterweight 12 Salute 13 Unlet 14 Grain 17 Accord 19 Resit 20 Dozen 27 Pinch 28 Usual 30 Item 31 Sewn 32 Apse 35 I do

### CHILDREN'S No.217

**Across** – 1 Superman 6 Amen 7 Idiots 8 Year 9 Iceberg 13 Grin 15 Bottle 17 Doll 18 Editor 19 Forge 20 Arms  
**Down** – 1 Sailing 2 Pride 3 Miserable 4 Navy 5 Began 10 Bandage 11 States 12 Nearer 14 Robot 16 Older

## Crossword

Gordius 337



### ACROSS

- 1 In sermons, Grace can find sources of unnecessary alarm (12)  
 7, 33a & 37a Location on the Mount of Olives where Jesus was betrayed (3,6,2,10)  
 9 Go in front (4)  
 10 A thousand different ladies are not as special as her! (6)  
 11 Impertinent youngster (4)  
 14 Dried plum (5)  
 15 Giant bird article (5)  
 16 Soft drink firm near Los Angeles (4)  
 18 The pub serves up 16 across to a novice (5)  
 21 Fit out with an eastern joke (5)  
 22 Board associated with the occult (5)  
 23 See 4 down  
 24 It's very black in Kentucky (4)  
 25 Type of dance or type of sauce (5)  
 26 Five-stringed instrument (5)  
 29 Donate (4)  
 33 See 7 across  
 34 Prima Donna (4)  
 36 Soak the flax in part of a stretcher (3)  
 37 See 7 across  
**DOWN**  
 1 Espy a diocese (3)  
 2 Finds the total (4)

- 3 Girl found amid Bethlehem maidens (4)  
 4 & 23a There are even more stars here than are in Hollywood! (5,5)  
 5 Environmentally aware part of a golf course (5)  
 6 Use a spoon (4)  
 8 Tax a van gazer thus to provide for a lavish event (12)  
 9 How can a gentile flirt, Pinkie? (6,6)  
 12 Hit a cardinal with a lorry (6)  
 13 Informal photographs (5)  
 14 You'll find a friend, Mother, here in Majorca (5)  
 17 O turbulent Loire, that provides for an American bird! (6)  
 19 Many perform again - in Latin, I believe (5)  
 20 Mature nit (5)  
 27 Heedful (5)  
 28 The fourth son of Jacob and Leah, founder of one of the twelve tribes of Israel (5)  
 30 Blocking vote (4)  
 31 Joint in the leg (4)  
 32 Would such a notion occur to an aide? (4)  
 35 Contend with life in France (3)



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## Sudoku Corner

218

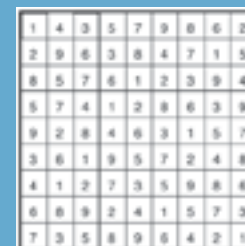
Easy



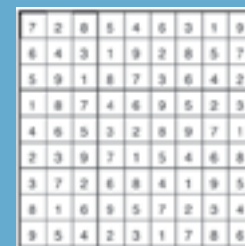
Hard



Last week's Easy 217



Last week's Hard 217





Notebook

Fr Bernard Healy



**EVERY JANUARY**, the clergy of my Diocese gather for our annual assembly. We spend three days away together for renewal and ongoing formation. Until recently this was a Priests' Assembly, but now we have been enriched by the presence of our Permanent Deacons. We take those three days to listen to speakers and to spend time with each other in prayer and conversation.

With most priests living alone in their parishes, the kind of learning and relaxation that comes from sharing a table with fellow clergy is no longer found daily in the presbyteries of the Diocese. Nowadays it is something to be intentionally cultivated.

This year we had an interesting mix of speakers. On the first day, Gerard Gallagher (Archdiocese of Dublin) spoke about the challenges and opportunities in sharing faith with the so-called 'millennial' generation, those young people born after about the year 1981 who entered adulthood at the beginning of the current millennium.

Sr Joan Roddy, who used to work with the Irish Bishops' Refugee and Migrant Project, was the second day's speaker dealing with issues of migration, both from the perspective of what Pope Francis says about this

# We all need time to recharge



global phenomenon as not just a challenge, but also an opportunity for the Church, and the reality on the ground in Ireland for those who come to this country seeking safety and a better future. Bro. Richard Hendrick, a Capuchin from Ards Friary in Co. Donegal closed our assembly with a fine

presentation on meditative and contemplative prayer.

**Striking point**

One of the striking points made by Gerard Gallagher was that the millennials who have contributed to the preparation for the 2018 Synod of Bishops consistently mention the pressure they experience from their contemporaries to either keep their faith purely private or to not practice their faith at all. That's not simply a problem for the young, of course.

The recent death of Peter Sutherland gave Declan Ganley the occasion to tweet the story of an occasion when Ganley and his wife were at a weekend gathering with Sutherland and others. When the Ganleys mentioned that

they wanted to get Sunday Mass, this was met with "immediate derision" from all present except Sutherland.

The unwillingness of our culture even to politely respect religious practice explains why pilgrimages are so appreciated by those millennials who have faith. The chance to unapologetically practice and discuss faith in a friendly and welcoming environment becomes a necessity.

I know that being in Rome for World Youth Day back in 2000 gave me the space and confidence to figure out my own calling to priesthood, and our International Eucharistic Congress in 2012 was appreciated by thousands of ordinary Catholics as being an occasion where one could just 'be Catholic' and try to deepen faith in the company of others who share that Catholic vision.

We all need an opportunity to recharge. Whatever else we do as parishes (or indeed for ourselves as individuals) we need to make space and time where we can be encouraged in our faith, develop friendships with our fellow Catholics and give prayerful attention to the challenges the world makes to us.

**Of a mind...**

Bro. Richard Hendrick made the point that those involved in parishes should not be flustered when approached by parishioners interested in mindfulness or other forms of meditation that have their origins outside the Christian tradition.

The desire for stillness and the techniques to achieve it are a necessary foundation for Christian prayer. We should be able to introduce people interested in this kind of stillness to the methods of prayer developed by centuries of Christian mystics and spiritual directors. Perhaps we should think about how parishes can respond to that most basic of requests" "Teach us how to pray." How many of us have been taught nothing about prayer since we left school?

**WE ALSO HAD** the chance to hear from Teresa Elumelu [pictured] who spoke about her experience of settling in Tralee having had to leave her native Nigeria. It was heartening to hear how, as a person of faith, her involvement in parish life helped her make a home in Tralee. She made the excellent point that many in her situation might be nervous about whom they can share their history or their circumstances with. Deal with the face in front of you, Teresa says, not their story. Compassion and a respect for human dignity should always be our priority.



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